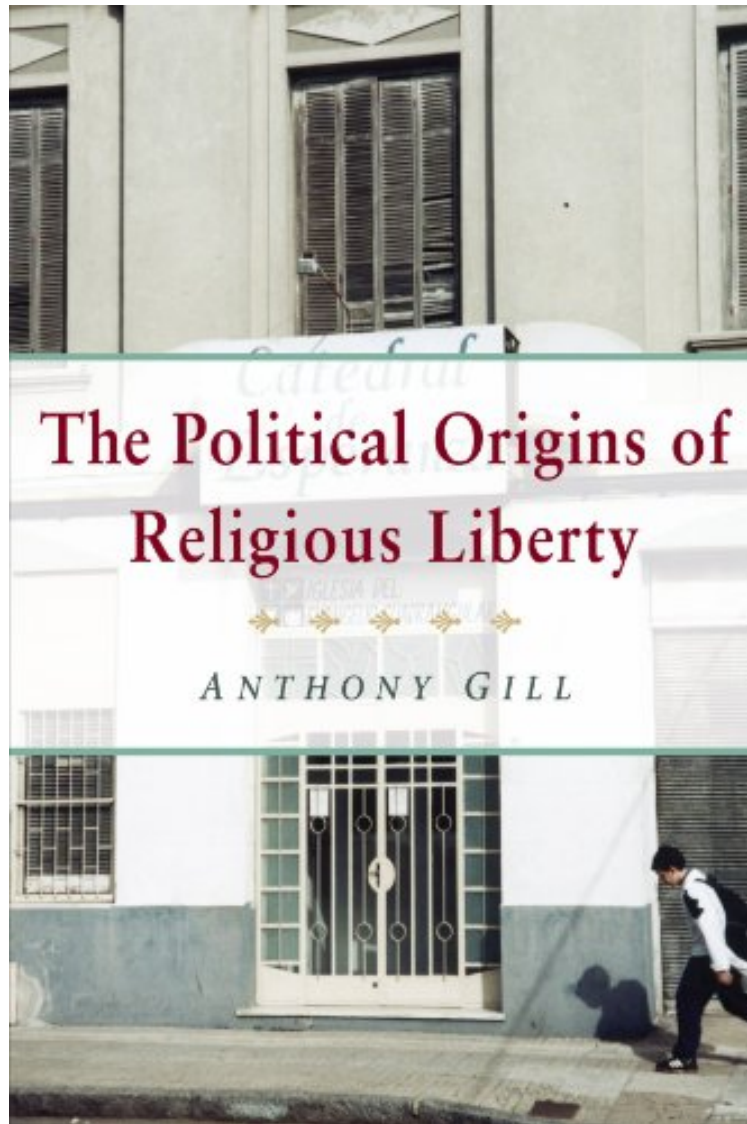


(Free) The Political Origins of Religious Liberty (Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion and Politics)

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Anthony Gill

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Anthony Gill : The Political Origins of Religious Liberty (Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion and Politics) before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Political Origins of Religious Liberty (Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion and Politics):

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Religious Liberty, What is it? and How can we learn from it? By Justin Clements When referring to the concept of liberty many are accustomed to one in which the focus is upon

economic and social institutions. Gill expands upon this through his work with religious institutions and the resulting theory of religious liberty. In a world where so many issues are driven by religious conflict such a theory should be at the forefront of academic research. Gill expels the traditional belief that "when people behave under the influence of religion or religious institutions...they are not calculating the self-interested costs and benefits of their actions" (p. 28). Rather, by taking individuals preferences as a given we can apply the framework of rational choice which dictates that under such a set of preferences individuals will seek to achieve their goals in the least costly means subject to the constraints they face. What prior to had been considered a chaotic arrangement of religious institutions now may more appropriately be described as a functioning marketplace for religious salvation, each church attempting to offer products and services to their parishioners who may require varying degrees of religious participation. Let us not forget the role of the state in either hampering or supporting these religious institutions. Gill demonstrates that "when competing ideas exist in society, it is often political interests that tip the balance of the debate in one direction or another" (p. 8). To the extent that both institutions are seeking to achieve their goals the Catholic Church is no less likely to engage in rent-seeking behavior than Boeing. While Gill enumerates the varying reasons why political leaders may be inclined to establish one religion above another or even engage in militant atheism no one can deny the resounding consequences these decisions have on society at large. Perhaps one of my favorite aspects of this text was its focus on the relationship between religious tolerance and economic growth. If you are looking for something that fundamentally alters the way you view religion or liberty in general this book is it. Speaking as a former student of Gill's I can say without a doubt that not only is he an extraordinary teacher but a pioneer in his field. I can not recommend him enough. If you are student at the UW, TAKE HIS CLASS! You won't regret it. 1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Unique book on religious liberty. By James Squanderlast Professor Gill approaches The Political Origins of Religious Liberty from a paradigm which would at first glance seem to clash: Rational choice and economic theory. Whether you are a spiritual person or not everyone "knows" religion is just one of those things that will always be around and for some historical and/or cultural reasons people believe it, right? Anthony approaches the idea of religious participation and liberty from what economists would call a "supply-side" perspective. Basically what this means is he largely holds "desire for religious consumption" constant and instead examines how politicians and governments create laws involving religions. This framework is unique and extremely effective at explaining varying religious participation levels. No longer is the argument that "Europeans are just different than us" going to hold water. Gill is not afraid to delve into the historical reasoning and current political discourse that sheds light on the underlying economic algorithms which can predict these trends. Yet what is perhaps the best part of this book is he is able to convey complex ideas in a writing style that is both easy to read and extremely entertaining. Gill's humor blends wonderfully with his deeper argument in a style far too often passed over in an attempt to come across as an 'intellectual' (which ironically backfires the vast majority of the time). Gill's focus on simple mechanisms to explain religious phenomenon also gives the reader the tool-set he needs to analyze religious liberty and participation in scenarios not explained in his book. To provide a brief summary (or for those too lazy to read this whole passage): Gill's book provides an entertaining, humorous and profoundly insightful look into how politicians and governments might have more power than you think in determining how many people are sitting next to you on Sunday. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Fascinating background on the development of religious liberty By Jeri The last few decades have seen the growth of those who argue that "a strong wall that excludes religion from the public square can have the effect of privileging secularism" (p 21). How did we get to this point? Gill provides a thorough background on the development of religious liberty in colonial British America. Those who fled to America for religious liberty knew all too well that "dominant churches tend to desire government imposed restrictions on upstart sects" (p 62). It wasn't only the Catholics in England who underwent persecution, although Catholic priests were tortured and killed in public. But also other Protestant sects suffered under the dominant Anglican church. Their members lived with "mandatory church assessments and limitations on civic participation (p 68). However, once in America, many sects wanted to impose restrictions on others. Mary Dyer, for example, a follower of Anne Hutchinson, was banished from Massachusetts, and when she returned, she was hung for her faith. The flood of immigrants of many different backgrounds fostered religious pluralism, as did the need for trade between areas. And the "New England oppression of dissenters embarrassed Congregationalists before their brethren in England, who were themselves oppressed by the established Church of England" (p 107). Gill compares these experiences with South America, where one faith stood in place of the many competing faiths in North America. Both Spain and Portugal discouraged trade with other areas, further isolating the countries. During the early part of the 20th century, Mexico had a revolutionary government that opposed the Catholic church. Catholic priests were hunted and killed, "The Cristero Rebellion, which contained elements of an agrarian land revolt as much as a defense of Catholicism" (p 153) resulted. Gill then compares these developments with the Soviet experience. "The Soviet empire attempted...to abolish all forms of religious life" (p 170). The notorious League of Militant Atheists was only one form of persecution. Churches were closed and turned into meeting halls. Orthodox clergy, and Catholic and Protestant clergy were frequently sent to the gulag, imprisoned, or simply murdered. Even in the later half of the 20th century laws "made it illegal for parents to teach the catechism to their children and prevented baptism for anyone younger than thirty" (p

188). This is an eye opening and well reasoned book on a subject we should all know more about.

Throughout history, governments have attempted to control religious organizations and limit religious freedom. However, over the past two hundred years the world has witnessed an expansion of religious liberty. What explains this rise in religious freedom? Anthony Gill argues that political leaders are more likely to allow religious freedom when such laws affect their ability to stay in power, and/or when religious freedoms are seen to enhance the economic well-being of their country.

"Using engaging historical accounts and compelling theoretical arguments, Anthony Gill reveals that religious liberty is neither a mishap of history nor the inevitable consequence of secular states. Instead, he uncovers the motives and self-interests of politicians, religionists, and many others supporting religious freedoms around the globe and over time. A must read for anyone interested in the origins of civil liberties." Roger Finke, Penn State University "Anthony Gill has done us all an enormous service in this beautifully written and intricately theorized book. Building on past research which identifies religious regulation as the key to understanding secularization, Gill takes a giant step forward to tell us why and how religious regulation occurs. He turns popular conceptions about the nature of religious liberty on their head to reveal the fascinating political mechanisms which determine church-state relationships. This monumental contribution to our understanding of the politics of religion absolutely invigorates current thinking on the topic and opens up multiple paths to future research discoveries. I am already pondering which of Gill's many insights I could rob." Paul Froese, Baylor University "The most important book ever written on religious liberty is also a delight to read." Rodney Stark, Baylor University About the Author Anthony Gill is a Professor of Political Science at the University of Washington. He earned his Ph.D. at the University of California, Los Angeles and holds an Honors BA degree from Marquette University.