

THE MESOCRATIC PARTY | PARTY WHITE PAPER

# Religion and the Open Society

*Four Principles for Governing in a Country Where Faith Is Real, Powerful,  
and Not Going Anywhere.*

The Mesocratic Party applies the same framework to all religious institutions and all religious ideologies — without exemptions, without favored faiths, and without the political cowardice that has made honest governance of this subject impossible for both major parties.

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## Executive Summary

Religion is the most politically dangerous subject in American public life — not because it is uniquely important, but because both political parties have decided, for different reasons and different constituencies, that it cannot be examined honestly.

The Republican Party has made itself the institutional defender of Christian religious institutions regardless of their conduct. The Democratic Party has made itself the institutional protector of certain minority religions — especially Islam — from any criticism whatsoever. Neither position is coherent. Neither serves the country.

The Mesocratic Party approaches religion the way it approaches every powerful institution: with clear eyes, consistent principles, and no special exemptions. This means applying the same analytical framework to political Islam as to Christian nationalism — the same scrutiny, the same directness, the same willingness to name documented harms. If that consistency makes certain constituencies uncomfortable, that discomfort is evidence of how badly the honest conversation is needed.

We recognize four distinct categories that are routinely conflated in American political debate: personal spiritual belief (absolutely protected), organized religious institutions (subject to the same accountability as all institutions), religious conduct affecting non-consenting third parties especially children (no exemptions under any circumstances), and the right to criticize religion (as fundamental as the right to practice it). These four categories require four different policy frameworks.

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## 1. The Problem With Every Existing Position

The American right treats religious institutions as categorically exempt from accountability. Churches that shield predatory clergy, religious organizations that lobby against civil rights, faith-based nonprofits that discriminate in hiring, religious schools that teach demonstrably false science — all receive institutional protection from the party that claims to believe in limited government, free markets, and equal application of the law. The inconsistency is enormous, consistent, and self-serving.

The American left has a different and in some ways more intellectually dishonest problem. In its effort to protect minority religious communities — an effort with legitimate historical roots in the genuine persecution of those communities — it has developed a framework that places certain

religions, and especially Islam, substantially beyond the criticism it freely applies to Christianity. This is not principle. It is inconsistency dressed up as cultural sensitivity.

The left that publishes editorials attacking Catholic doctrine on contraception describes equivalent analysis of Islamic doctrine on the legal status of women as 'Islamophobia.' The same standard cannot produce two different results. When it does, one of the results is wrong — and the resulting silence has had real consequences for real people, as Section 5 documents.

Both parties share a third failure: unwillingness to draw a clear line between religious belief and religious conduct when the conduct causes harm to non-consenting parties, particularly children. This is not ideological. It is political cowardice. The evidence is documented. The harm is real. The political will to act has been absent.

The Mesocratic Party is willing to be seen as hostile to institutional behavior that causes harm. We are not willing to pretend that behavior is acceptable because it happens under a steeple or a minaret.

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## 2. What Religion Is — and What We Refuse to Define

A natural starting point for a policy framework on religion would be to define what counts as a religion. We are explicitly declining to do so, and the reason is important.

A government empowered to define which belief systems qualify as religion is a government empowered to decide which belief systems deserve the protections that come with that designation. That power is historically one of the most dangerous instruments a state can wield. The Mesocratic Party declines to play that game.

We do not define religion. We define protections and their limits, and we apply those definitions consistently regardless of theological content. The questions we ask are: Is this a private belief held by an individual, or an institution operating in the public square? Does the conduct in question affect only consenting adults, or does it affect non-consenting parties? Is the institution receiving public benefits, and if so, is it meeting the accountability standards those benefits require?

These questions produce clean, principled answers that apply equally to a Baptist megachurch, a Buddhist monastery, a Scientology center, a Wiccan coven, and a mosque. No faith tradition receives special treatment in either direction.

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## 3. Four Categories, Four Rules

### 3.1 Personal Spiritual Belief: Absolute Protection

What a person believes in their heart about the nature of the universe, the existence of God or gods, the reality of the soul, the truth of a revealed text, or the content of spiritual experience is their own business. Full stop.

Government has no role in private spiritual belief. It may not tax it, regulate it, incentivize it, disincentivize it, comment on it, or require its disclosure. The Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment reflect this principle, and the Mesocratic Party endorses it without reservation.

The protection extends to all beliefs equally. An evangelical Christian, a practicing Muslim, a devout Jew, a committed Hindu, a Theravada Buddhist, a secular humanist, and a person with no religious beliefs at all are equally protected. The moment a belief becomes institutional — the moment it incorporates, hires employees, lobbies for legislation, operates schools or hospitals, or claims tax exemption — it has entered the public square, and the rules of the public square apply.

### **3.2 Organized Religious Institutions: The Corporate Standard**

The Catholic Church is the largest private landowner in the world. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints manages an investment portfolio estimated at over \$100 billion. Evangelical megachurches collect hundreds of millions in tax-exempt donations annually. These are not private spiritual convictions. They are financial institutions operating with extraordinary public subsidy and minimal accountability.

Religious institutions in the United States enjoy privileges unavailable to other incorporated entities: automatic tax exemption without the disclosure requirements imposed on secular nonprofits, exemptions from anti-discrimination laws in hiring, reduced scrutiny of financial practices, and a political deference that places them above the accountability standards applied to every other powerful institution.

The Mesocratic Party's position is straightforward: organized religious institutions should be treated as what they are. If they are charities, they meet the same standards as secular charities. If they are employers, they comply with the same employment laws. If they are political actors, they register and report as political actors. The theological character of an institution changes none of these obligations.

### **3.3 Religious Conduct Affecting Non-Consenting Parties: No Exemptions**

The free exercise of religion has never been absolute. The Supreme Court established in *Reynolds v. United States* (1879) that while government cannot control religious belief, it can regulate religiously motivated conduct when that conduct violates generally applicable laws. The principle is sound. Its application has been inconsistently and sometimes catastrophically wrong.

The Mesocratic Party's position is unambiguous: no religious exemption from generally applicable law exists when the conduct in question affects non-consenting third parties. No exceptions. No special cases. No faith tradition, however ancient, however sincere, however politically influential, can claim the right to impose religious practice on a person who has not consented.

For competent adults making decisions about their own bodies and spiritual practice, the freedom to live according to one's religious convictions is broad and robust. A child cannot consent. A child cannot assess risk. A child cannot leave. The religious conviction of a parent does not create a legal right to impose that conviction on a child's body. This is addressed in detail in Section 4.

### **3.4 The Right to Criticize, Satirize, and Reject Religion**

The right to criticize a religion — its history, its doctrines, its institutional practices, its political influence, its treatment of women, its record on child protection, its financial practices, its claims about the supernatural — is a fundamental right in a free society. There is no carve-out for deeply held beliefs. There is no threshold of sincerity or antiquity that places an idea beyond examination.

The fact that billions of people believe something does not make it immune from challenge. The fact that challenging it causes offense does not make the challenge illegitimate. The Mesocratic Party endorses this right without qualification. This is addressed further in the companion white paper on Free Expression and the Open Society.

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## 4. The Child Protection Principle

This section addresses what is, in the Mesocratic Party's view, the most serious and the most politically suppressed aspect of the religion policy debate in the United States: the documented pattern of religious exemptions from child welfare law, and the political cowardice that has allowed that pattern to persist for decades.

Child welfare law protects children from abuse and neglect regardless of the beliefs of the adults responsible for their care. Parents do not own their children. They are custodians with legal responsibilities. When those responsibilities are violated, the state has authority to intervene. In practice, this framework has been applied inconsistently when the harm occurs in a religious context. Courts have been reluctant to intervene. Prosecutors have declined to charge. Legislatures have granted explicit statutory exemptions. The result is a two-tiered system in which a child's protection from harm depends, in part, on the religious affiliation of the adults causing it.

The most precisely documented illustration involves metzitzah b'peh, the practice within certain ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in which a mohel performs oral suction following ritual circumcision. The New York City Department of Health has documented cases of neonatal herpes, some fatal, directly traced to this practice. Multiple mayoral administrations attempted to require informed parental consent — not a ban, merely disclosure — and backed down under political pressure from community leaders. The practice continues. Children have died. The government has flinched.

This is not an argument about Judaism. It is an argument about the child. The child on whom this procedure is performed has not consented to the medical risk. The child cannot consent. A secular parent who caused equivalent medical harm through negligent conduct would face prosecution. A religious parent who causes equivalent harm through sincere religious practice faces political protection.

***Your religious freedom ends where another person's body begins. A child's body is not your religious property.***

This principle applies with equal force across all faith traditions — to faith healing parents who deny children medicine for treatable conditions, to communities that practice male or female genital cutting, and to any religious practice that imposes physical risk or harm on a minor without consent or medical support. Equal protection of children is not persecution of religion. It is the consistent application of law to all.

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## 5. Political Islam in Western Democracies: The Evidence

### 5.1 The Essential Distinction

The Mesocratic Party makes a distinction that Western political discourse has largely refused to make clearly, to the detriment of both honest policy and the Muslim Americans who suffer when it is blurred in either direction.

Islam as a personal faith, practiced by the vast majority of the world's approximately 1.8 billion Muslims, is a religion. It is entitled to every protection the Mesocratic framework extends to personal spiritual belief: absolute protection for private conviction and practice, protection for religious institutions that operate within standard accountability frameworks, and the same right to scrutiny that every other major religion faces.

Islamism is not a religion. It is a political ideology. Its core claim is that sharia — Islamic law as understood in its most comprehensive, most literal form — should serve as the governing law of civil society, replacing constitutional government, democratic elections, and individual rights with theocratic authority. This is a political program, and it is analyzed on the same terms as any other political program that advocates replacing constitutional government with religious authority: with full scrutiny, and without the immunities that attach to personal religious belief.

The distinction matters in both directions. Conflating Islam with Islamism has been used to justify discrimination against Muslim Americans, surveillance of Muslim communities, and foreign policy decisions that caused enormous harm. That conflation is wrong. American Muslims deserve the same protections as every other religious community.

But the opposite conflation — the reflexive labeling of any criticism of Islamism as Islamophobia, the treatment of any scrutiny of theocratic political ideology as an attack on Muslim identity — is equally wrong, and it has served as a shield behind which specific, documented, serious harms in Western democracies have been allowed to continue unchallenged.

## 5.2 Documented Harms in Western Democracies

The following are not hypotheticals. They are documented events in Western democracies over the past three decades. The Mesocratic Party names them because the political left has largely refused to, and that refusal has had consequences.

### **The Suppression of Free Expression Through Violence and Credible Threat**

In 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini issued a fatwa calling for the death of British novelist Salman Rushdie for writing *The Satanic Verses*. Rushdie spent years in hiding under British government protection. His Japanese translator was stabbed to death. His Italian translator was stabbed and survived. His Norwegian publisher was shot and survived. In July 2022, Rushdie was stabbed on stage at a lecture in New York by an attacker with stated sympathy for the fatwa. He lost the use of one eye.

In 2004, Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh was murdered in Amsterdam by a Dutch-Moroccan Islamist for making a film critical of the treatment of women in Islam. His collaborator, Somali-born author and politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali, has lived under 24-hour security protection for over 20 years.

In January 2015, 12 people were murdered at the Paris offices of the satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo* for publishing cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad. Ten of the dead were editorial staff. In October 2020, French schoolteacher Samuel Paty was beheaded outside his school by an Islamist attacker after showing his class the *Charlie Hebdo* cartoons during a lesson on free expression.

In 2005 and 2006, the publication of cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad in a Danish newspaper triggered protests, riots, and embassy burnings across the Muslim world. Several European embassies were attacked. Over 200 people died in related violence globally. The cartoonists have lived with security details for nearly two decades. The self-censorship that followed in Western media was immediate and widely documented.

These are not isolated incidents. They represent a pattern: the use of violence and the credible threat of violence to suppress criticism of Islam in Western societies. The pattern has had a measurable chilling effect on Western free expression — editors who declined to publish, galleries that removed artwork, speakers who cancelled, and academics who softened conclusions — without most of this self-censorship ever being formally documented, because it happened in private.

## **Grooming Gang Scandals in the United Kingdom**

Between approximately 1997 and 2013, and continuing in some locations well beyond, organized networks of predominantly Pakistani-heritage Muslim men in multiple British cities — Rotherham, Rochdale, Oxford, Telford, Newcastle, Bristol, and others — systematically groomed, sexually exploited, and trafficked thousands of young white working-class girls, some as young as 11.

The Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), which concluded in 2022, documented the abuse and its cover-up. The Rotherham inquiry, led by Professor Alexis Jay, found that at least 1,400 children had been abused in Rotherham alone between 1997 and 2013 — and that South Yorkshire Police and Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council had been aware of the abuse for years and had systematically failed to act. The Jay Report documented explicitly that officials were concerned about being accused of racism if they pursued the perpetrators.

The failures were not accidental. Multiple police forces received intelligence reports identifying the networks and did not act on them. Social workers identified victims and returned them to their abusers. In some documented cases, the victims themselves were arrested and charged with offenses while their abusers went free. Journalists who attempted to report on the scandal were warned off by editors and police. A BBC producer was told the story was 'too sensitive.'

The ideological mechanism of this failure is directly relevant to free expression and to the Mesocratic Party's critique of the left's handling of political Islam. The perpetrators' ethnic and religious identity — Pakistani, Muslim — was treated by local authorities as a reason to not investigate, rather than as investigative information. The result was that thousands of predominantly white working-class girls, already among the most economically vulnerable people in Britain, were denied equal protection under the law because applying that protection would have been politically uncomfortable for the institutions responsible for it.

This is the real-world consequence of placing a religious or ethnic community beyond standard institutional scrutiny. The victims paid for that political choice with their childhoods.

## **Honor Violence and Parallel Legal Systems**

Honor killings — murders committed to restore family honor following perceived sexual or behavioral transgressions, almost exclusively targeting women and girls — are documented across multiple Western European countries. Estimates from the UN and European research institutions suggest that hundreds of honor-based killings occur in Europe annually, with the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, France, and Sweden among the most affected. The perpetrators are disproportionately from communities with roots in South Asia and the Middle East, predominantly Muslim-heritage.

Forced marriage — distinct from arranged marriage, involving coercion or deception — is documented extensively in the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, and Scandinavia. The UK's Forced Marriage Unit handled over 1,400 cases in 2021 alone, with the majority of cases involving victims from Pakistani, Bangladeshi, and Afghan backgrounds.

Female genital mutilation (FGM) is practiced in some Muslim-majority communities in Western Europe. The World Health Organization estimates that approximately 500,000 women and girls

living in Europe have been subjected to FGM, with an estimated 180,000 at risk annually. Prosecutions have been rare in all Western European countries, for reasons that include both genuine investigative difficulty and documented official reluctance to engage with religious and cultural community practices.

In the United Kingdom, there have been documented cases of de facto sharia courts — informal arbitration bodies applying Islamic law — issuing rulings on divorce, inheritance, and child custody that systematically disadvantage women. While these bodies are not legally binding in civil matters, research by Baroness Cox and others has documented women who believed themselves bound by sharia rulings and had no knowledge of their right to seek civil remedy. The government's position has been that these are voluntary private arbitrations. Critics, including Muslim women's rights advocates, have argued that 'voluntary' is a concept that requires scrutiny when applied to women in closed communities with significant family and social pressure.

### **The Rotherham Effect — Broader Institutional Failure**

What Rotherham illustrates at a local level has parallels at the national and international level. In multiple Western European countries, concern about being labeled Islamophobic has led institutions — police forces, social services, government ministries, mainstream media organizations — to apply a different and lower standard of scrutiny to conduct occurring in Muslim-heritage communities than they would apply to equivalent conduct in any other community.

This is not theoretical. It is documented in official inquiries, investigative journalism, and academic research. It represents a form of reverse discrimination — one that, paradoxically, harms the most vulnerable people within those communities (women, girls, LGBT individuals, religious minorities, apostates) while protecting the institutional power of community leadership.

The Mesocratic Party names this as a policy failure with a specific ideological cause: the left's decision to treat certain minority religious communities as categorically exempt from the scrutiny applied to every other institution. The people who have paid for that political decision most dearly are not the white progressives who made it. They are the women and girls in the communities the decision was purportedly designed to protect.

### **Demographics and Integration**

The demographic reality of Muslim immigration to Western Europe is relevant to policy in ways that Western political discourse has struggled to discuss honestly. Several points are supported by survey data and deserve honest acknowledgment:

- Pew Research Center surveys conducted across Western European Muslim communities have documented that significant minorities — in some countries majorities — of younger European Muslims hold views on gender equality, homosexuality, apostasy, and the relationship between religion and law that are substantially more conservative than the Western European median, and in some cases in significant tension with constitutional norms.
- A 2016 Channel 4 / ICM survey of British Muslims found that 52% believed homosexuality should be illegal, 39% agreed that wives should always obey their husbands, and 23% supported the introduction of sharia law in areas of Britain with large Muslim populations. These are not fringe views. They are majority or near-majority views within a specific community at a specific point in time.
- Integration trajectories differ significantly by country of origin and generation. Turkish-heritage Muslims in Germany and Pakistani-heritage Muslims in Britain have shown slower integration across economic, linguistic, and civic metrics than South Asian Hindu

or Sikh communities entering similar host societies at similar times. The reasons are contested and complex, and include failures of host country policy. But the data exists and deserves honest engagement rather than denial.

- The growth of Salafist and Wahhabi influence in European mosques, substantially funded by Saudi Arabia over the past four decades, has been documented by security services in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Belgium, and the Netherlands. This is not incidental. It represents a deliberate ideological project to shift the theological center of European Islam in a more conservative, more literalist direction.

The Mesocratic Party does not present these data points as evidence that Muslim immigration to Western democracies has been or will be net negative. The evidence on that broader question is genuinely complex, contested, and country-specific. We present them because an honest immigration policy, an honest integration policy, and an honest civil liberties policy require engaging with the actual empirical record rather than a sanitized version of it.

### 5.3 Why the Left's Silence on This Is Itself a Problem

The political left's reluctance to engage honestly with the documented harms described in Section 5.2 is not merely an intellectual failure. It has material consequences.

When credible, evidence-based criticism of specific practices associated with political Islam is reflexively labeled Islamophobia and shut down, the result is not that the practices stop. The result is that the people harmed by those practices — women, girls, LGBT individuals, apostates — lose the institutional advocates who should be most likely to defend them, because those advocates have disqualified themselves from the conversation.

The women of Rotherham did not need their abusers' religious identity protected. They needed the police and social services to do their jobs. The Muslim women trapped in de facto forced marriages in Western Europe do not need progressive politicians to decline to discuss parallel legal systems. They need those politicians to insist that every woman in a democracy is entitled to equal protection under its laws.

The left's silence on these questions has also had a specific electoral consequence: it has ceded the issue of Islamist extremism entirely to the right, where it is routinely handled in bad faith, with the kind of broad-brush Muslim-as-such targeting that is both morally wrong and strategically counterproductive. Honest engagement with the distinction between Islam and Islamism is the only framework that protects Muslim civil liberties while honestly addressing documented harms. The left's abdication of that framework has made the conversation worse, not better.

### 5.4 The Mesocratic Position

The Mesocratic Party's position on political Islam flows directly from the general principles established in this paper and applied consistently across all faith traditions:

- The personal faith of Muslim Americans is absolutely protected, fully respected, and entitled to no less and no more governmental deference than the faith of any other American.
- Islamic institutions — mosques, Islamic schools, charitable foundations, community organizations — are subject to the same accountability standards as all other religious institutions. No more, no less.
- Political movements, including Islamist movements, that advocate replacing constitutional government with religious law are political movements. They are analyzed

as political movements, with full scrutiny of their program and their institutional networks, and without the immunities that attach to personal religious belief.

- The documented harms described in Section 5.2 — the suppression of free expression through violence and threat, the grooming gang failures, honor violence, forced marriage, FGM, and parallel legal structures — represent genuine policy failures that demand genuine policy responses. Naming them is not Islamophobia. Declining to name them, out of cultural sensitivity to community leadership, is a failure of the duty to protect the most vulnerable.
- Every person in the United States, regardless of their religious community, is entitled to equal protection under the law. This is not negotiable and does not yield to cultural or religious exemptions.

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## 6. Christian Nationalism: The Same Standard Applied

The Mesocratic Party applies the same analytical framework to Christian nationalism that it applies to political Islam. The structure of the argument is identical because the principle is identical: a political movement that advocates replacing constitutional government with religious authority is a political movement, not a personal faith, and it receives no special immunity on the basis of its theological content.

Christian nationalism — the political ideology that holds that the United States was founded as a Christian nation, that Christian law should inform or govern American civil law, and that government should privilege Christian religious expression over other traditions — is a political ideology. Its core program conflicts directly with the First Amendment's prohibition on government establishment of religion. It is analyzed accordingly.

Specific documented harms and institutional failures associated with Christian nationalism in America include:

- The systematic cover-up of child sexual abuse by clergy in the Catholic Church, documented across dozens of dioceses by state attorney general investigations, the Pennsylvania grand jury report, and the John Jay College study. Over 6,700 priests were credibly accused of abuse in the United States. The institutional response across decades was concealment and reassignment, not accountability.
- The Southern Baptist Convention's own internal investigation, released in 2022, documented that SBC leadership had for years concealed abuse allegations, stonewalled abuse survivors, and resisted creating a database of accused ministers that would have prevented known abusers from moving between congregations.
- Legislative campaigns to embed religious doctrine in civil law — on abortion, on marriage, on healthcare — that impose religious moral frameworks on individuals who do not share those frameworks.
- The use of religious exemption claims to deny services to LGBT individuals and to claim exemptions from anti-discrimination law in ways that would not be available to secular actors with equivalent discriminatory practices.
- Faith-based adoption and foster care agencies that receive public funding while refusing to serve same-sex couples, effectively using public money to subsidize religiously motivated discrimination.

The Mesocratic Party opposes all of these practices with the same clarity and on the same grounds it opposes the harms documented in Section 5. Institutional accountability does not yield to religious character. Child protection does not yield to institutional reputation. Equal protection under law does not yield to theological conviction. These principles apply to every institution, every faith, every community — without exception and without favoritism.

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## 7. The Tax Exemption Problem

Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code exempts organizations from federal income tax for charitable, religious, educational, or other specified purposes. Religious organizations qualify automatically, without the application process required of secular nonprofits and without equivalent disclosure requirements.

The Johnson Amendment, enacted in 1954, prohibits all 501(c)(3) organizations, including religious ones, from endorsing or opposing candidates for elected office. In practice, the IRS has rarely enforced this against religious institutions, and significant political pressure exists to repeal it entirely.

The result is a system in which religious institutions enjoy the financial benefits of tax exemption while exercising the political influence of advocacy organizations — without the disclosure requirements, accountability standards, or enforcement mechanisms that apply to secular organizations doing equivalent things. This is indefensible on conservative principles (equal application of law, limited special privileges) or progressive ones (democratic accountability, transparency in political influence).

The Mesocratic Party's position: religious institutions that function as charities should be treated as charities. Religious institutions that function as political organizations should register and report as political organizations. The automatic, unreviewed, undisclosed tax exemption currently available to religious institutions regardless of their actual activities requires serious legislative attention. The tax-exempt subsidy is real — exemption from taxation is a transfer of value from the public treasury — and the public is entitled to know what it is funding.

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## 8. The Mesocratic Position: Five Governing Principles

### **Principle 1: Personal spiritual belief is absolutely protected.**

Government has no role in what a person believes privately or practices personally. This protection applies equally to all faiths and to no-faith. It is not contingent on the beliefs being mainstream, ancient, widely held, or theologically coherent.

### **Principle 2: Organized religious institutions are subject to the same accountability standards as equivalent secular institutions.**

A religious charity meets the same disclosure and operational standards as a secular charity. A religious university that receives public funding operates under the same anti-discrimination obligations as a secular university. A religious hospital that receives Medicare and Medicaid

reimbursement provides the same scope of care or discloses its limitations clearly. Theological character removes none of these obligations.

**Principle 3: No religious exemption from child welfare law, under any circumstances.**

The consistent application of child welfare law across all religious communities is equal protection of children. When religious practice imposes physical risk or harm on a minor who cannot consent, the child's interest in safety takes precedence. This principle admits no exceptions and will not be negotiated down for any faith tradition.

**Principle 4: The right to criticize, satirize, and reject religion is as fundamental as the right to practice it.**

Blasphemy has no legal standing. No belief system, however ancient, however widely held, however sincerely maintained, is above challenge. The same framework that protects religious expression protects criticism of religion.

**Principle 5: Political movements that advocate theocratic governance are analyzed as political movements.**

A movement whose core program is to replace constitutional government with religious law is a political movement. It is entitled to no special immunity from political scrutiny on the basis of its theological content. This principle applies with equal force to Christian nationalism, to political Islam, and to any other theocratic program regardless of its religious source.

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## 9. The Permanent Panel on Religion

The Mesocratic Party has established a Permanent Panel on Religion as a standing committee of the Constitutional Convention X (CCX), the party's 5,000-delegate governing body.

The panel convenes annually. Its mandate is to examine the intersection of religion, law, governance, and civil society; to review the party's five governing principles in light of current events, legal developments, and emerging issues; and to recommend policy positions to the full CCX for consideration.

The panel is intentionally inclusive of dissenting voices. Its invited participants include theologians, constitutional scholars, civil liberties lawyers, public health officials, child welfare advocates, Muslim women's rights advocates, ex-Muslim voices, and religious leaders representing the full range of American faith traditions. The goal is not consensus. The goal is rigorous, informed argument.

Religious leaders who engage with the Permanent Panel should understand what they are engaging with. The panel does not begin with the premise that religious institutions are uniquely trustworthy. It begins with the premise that every institution's record and conduct should be examined honestly. Leaders who accept that premise and engage with it honestly are welcome participants. Those who insist on special exemption from scrutiny as a condition of participation will find that the panel proceeds without them.

## 10. What We Are Not Saying

- We are not saying that religion is false. The Mesocratic Party takes no position on theological questions.
- We are not saying that Muslim Americans are uniquely dangerous or uniquely suspect. They are not, and the evidence does not support that claim. The Islamist extremism documented in Section 5 represents a fraction of the Muslim population of Western democracies. The vast majority of Muslim Americans are exactly what they are: Americans, with the same rights, the same protections, and the same obligations as every other citizen.
- We are not saying that Islam is uniquely violent or uniquely incompatible with liberal democracy. The history of religious violence is not the exclusive property of any single faith tradition. Christianity has its own centuries-long record of religiously motivated violence, conquest, and institutional abuse, documented in equal detail in the companion sections of this paper.
- We are not saying that all criticism of Muslim communities is legitimate. Some of it is not. It slides from institutional criticism into ethnic and religious bigotry. The Mesocratic Party opposes that conflation with equal clarity.
- We are not hostile to religious Americans of any tradition. Our framework is designed to protect personal religious belief absolutely while applying consistent accountability to institutional conduct. These are not inconsistent positions.

What we are saying is this: consistent principles, honestly applied, produce uncomfortable conclusions about every major religious institution. The discomfort is the point. A framework that only applies scrutiny to religions one dislikes is not a framework. It is favoritism. We apply the same standard to everyone.

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## 11. Conclusion: Governing with Eyes Open

The American political tradition has treated religion as a special case for so long that the special treatment has become nearly invisible. The exemptions are assumed. The deference is automatic. The institutional behavior that would provoke outrage in any other context is tolerated, and often protected, because it occurs under religious auspices.

The Mesocratic Party is asking for something simple: apply the same standards to the same things. A charity is a charity. An employer is an employer. A lobbyist is a lobbyist. A child is a child. The religious character of an institution changes none of these facts and removes none of these obligations.

We recognize this position will cost us support. Constituencies that have grown accustomed to special treatment do not voluntarily surrender it, and political parties that challenge that treatment face organized opposition from communities with significant resources. We are simply unwilling to let that determine our positions.

We govern in a country where faith is real, powerful, and not going anywhere. We would not have it otherwise. The depth of Americans' spiritual lives is a genuine asset — a source of community, meaning, moral seriousness, and charitable generosity that no secular institution has replicated. We take that seriously.

What we will not do is pretend that the institutional abuses documented in this paper did not happen, that the political ideologies dressed in religious clothing are beyond scrutiny, or that the most vulnerable people in religious communities deserve less protection because naming their situation is politically inconvenient.

***The open society is not a destination. It is a practice. Governing with eyes open is the price of maintaining it.***

The Permanent Panel on Religion will meet every year. The principles established in this document will be examined, argued, and revised. Some of them will be wrong in ways we have not yet identified. We expect to be shown where. That is the whole point.

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