The Separation of Church and State

* **Religious beliefs are just another school of thought that deserves to be represented in politics**

1. There is no fundamental difference between religious beliefs like Christianity and political ideologies like Republicanism – they both exclude other schools of thought (one cannot be both Republican and Democratic), and they both can inspire fundamentalism and irrational actions.

* **Excluding religion from politics means that one cannot get the full spectrum of viewpoints represented in society**

1. Democratic politics is fundamentally about creating a government that represents the views of as wide a spectrum of society as possible.
2. Considering the large amount of people who are religious in our society today and who define themselves by their religion, excluding their views from being represented in the state is tantamount to excluding them from true political representation.
3. If people wish their leaders to make decisions along religious lines, what is wrong about that?

* **Excluding religion from participation in the state leads to a rise in religious violence**

1. Religious groups that are excluded from the political process may turn to other, more extreme and violent means to get their views across.
2. For example, in Syria the Muslim Brotherhood was not allowed to take part in the political process. This saw them eventually radicalize, becoming the terrorist organization we know as Al-Qaeda today.

Making Insulting Religion a Crime

* **Upholds our right to freedom from fear**

1. People join society for the purpose of seeking protection and respect for their freedom of conscience
2. Religion is core to their personal identity, because unlike other beliefs they hold, it is a life philosophy which explains for them the meaning of the existence and the moral codes that govern it
3. Thus, respecting a person’s religion is central to respecting personhood and dignity.
4. When religion is insulted, what is attacked is not simply an idea; it is an assault on the purpose in existence of not just one person, but of an entire group, which subscribes to that religion.
5. Hence, to insult a religion is to challenge the right of an entire section of society connected by its values to existence.
6. Since this engenders a climate of fear in society, which runs contrary to the very reason why we joined society in the first place, insults against religion should be criminalized.
7. By criminalizing insults against religion, we liberate people from this fear by demonstrating that society will crack down on those who would assault our identity.

* **Undermines the spread of extremism**

1. Much extremist sentiment today among groups like al-Qaeda is fanned by the idea that the West is intolerant and is attempting to wage war against non-Christians.
2. Allowing insults to religion in the public domain confirms such sentiments, because it shows that our society takes a trivial attitude to the publicizing of such views.
3. This fans terrorist sentiment further, endangering our society and contradicting governmental campaigns advocating religious tolerance and interfaith harmony.
4. Indeed, this endangers our fight against extremist ideology in the world.
5. This was most recently highlighted in the planned burning of Korans by the Dove World Outreach Centre in Florida which sparked threats of attacks on US soldiers from Shia insurgent factions in Iraq.
6. Since this is dangerous, criminalizing insults to religion is an essential step forward.
7. By doing this, we demonstrate to the radicals that our respect for the freedom and dignity of religion is sincere and we are willing to defend it from xenophobic zealots.
8. This reduces the effectiveness of terrorist rhetoric and hence undermines their ability to recruit impressionable young minds into their fold.
9. Even if some argue that situations like the planned Koran burning could be resolved without resorting to criminalizing insults against religion, this measures remains necessary to guarantee our society’s safety.
10. In the status quo, it was fortunate that Terry Jones decided to call off the burning because the US government could not censure him for engaging in free expression.
11. With our measure in place, he would have been arrested even before he could propose implementing such an inflammatory action.
12. Hence, criminalizing insults to religion is justified because it undermines the spread of extremism.

* **Fosters an inclusive and accommodating society**

1. When insults against religion are criminalized, we create a firm basis for interfaith dialogue and reconciliation.
2. This is because all parties legally agree that society grants protection to all who profess a belief in their purpose for existence, regardless of what this may be, and prevents others from interfering with that purpose by creating fear through their insults.
3. In an age of mass migration prompted by the forces of globalization, fostering an inclusive society is essential to attracting talent and creating a liveable environment for talents to come in, regardless of their faith.
4. By criminalizing insults to religion, as Singapore has in its 2005 hauling of 2 local bloggers for making anti-Muslim comments online under the Sedition Act, foreign talents will be attracted to a particular place because they realize that they can live and work without the fear of others hounding them for their faith.
5. Hence, criminalizing insults to religion is essential not only to encourage members currently within our society to relate to each other with respect, but also to widen our society’s appeal to those who fear religious xenophobia and persecution.