When religion and law are in conflict, which takes precedent? This question has plagued nations since the dawn of democracy, but not necessarily the dawn of time, as Dan Murphy explained in his recent article on the topic.

Murphy noted that unlike ancient monarchies or dictatorships, most modern democracies vow to separate church and state. This separation of religion and democracy has fostered disagreement and tension between people's beliefs across a wide variety of issues. One such issue is animal sacrifice.

Forms of animal sacrifice have been recorded dating back to the Neolithic Revolution. Today, animal sacrifice is defined as "the ritual killing and offering of an animal (or part of an animal), usually as part of a religious ritual or to appease or maintain favor with a deity." Sects of all major religions have performed some form of animal sacrifice at some point in history.

Recently, several countries in the European Union have taken a firm stance against animal sacrifice. Denmark, Germany, Norway, Sweden, Estonia, and Lithuania already have regulations limiting or banning ritual slaughter. In addition, Belgium and Denmark have banned kosher and halal slaughter outright. Other countries, like the Netherlands, have passed strict constraints on religious slaughter, essentially forcing Jewish and Islamic groups to develop practices considered more humane.
“Although such authorities as Temple Grandin have declared that ritual slaughter, done speedily and properly by well-trained personnel, is as humane as conventional captive bolt stunning, nevertheless, animal rights activists have consistently portrayed the procedure as cruel and outdated.”

As Murphy also notes, one particular challenge is that “in the European countries with a legacy of anti-Semitism, as well as the current influx of Muslim immigrants, demanding an end to ritual slaughter, even if the intention is to advance animal welfare, heightens tensions in those communities.”

Regardless of which side you stand on in this animal sacrifice-animal rights debate, there are countless authorities that both sides have cited to back their beliefs. Ultimately, the conflict between animal sacrifice and animal rights does not seem to be nearing a compromise anytime soon. It will be interesting to see how the European Union handles it. After all, it may only be a matter of time until North America is faced with addressing this same tension.


[2] Id.

[3] Id.


[6] Id.


[8] See id.


[10] Id.


[13] Id.
[xiv] Id.


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