

Christianity and Politics (Undergraduate 2007)

Professor: Matthew Scherer

I. Course Description

Religion has reasserted itself with striking force in contemporary politics: the appearance of evangelical Christians in American politics and the emergence of political Islam on the global stage are but two prominent examples of a more wide-spread return of religion. In many ways this is an unexpected development, as the leading discourses of modernity have left little room for religion. A clear majority of enlightenment and post-enlightenment social theorists, for example, expected religion to play an ever-diminishing role in public affairs. The political experience of recent decades, however, poses a stark challenge to their prediction. This course will interrogate the specific historical, rhetorical, and theoretical entanglements between Christianity and Euro/ American states in order to prepare students to address the topic of religion in contemporary political discourses. What has been meant, historically, by secularism and the process of secularization? How has “the political” been distinguished from “the religious”? Is it in fact the case that religion has always been seen to underpin, or otherwise support, secular political institutions? Answering these questions will help lay the groundwork for addressing the difficult questions about religion and politics that vex us today.

Schedule of Assignments

W Jan. 17

Introduction

- (1) John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity"
- (2) Thomas Jefferson, "Letter to the Danbury Baptists" (Handout)

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO CALL SOMETHING CHRISTIAN?

Jan. 22, 24, 26

Karl Löwith (1897-1973)

Reading: *Meaning in History: The Theological Implications of the Philosophy of History* (Course Reader, pages 1-19 and 191-203)

Recommended: "Augustine" and "Voltaire," in *Meaning and History* (Web Site)

Jan. 29, 31, Feb. 2

Carl Schmitt (1888-1985)

Reading: *Political Theology: Four Chapters on the Concept of Sovereignty*

Pages: All.

Feb. 5, 7, 9

Hans Blumenberg (1920-1996)

Reading: *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age* (Course Reader)

1) Start with Martin Jay's review of "The Legitimacy of the Modern Age" (download from bspace) [Martin Jay, "Review: The Legitimacy of the Modern Age," *History and Theory*, vol. 24 no. 2, May, 1985, 183-196. (Web Site)]

2) then read chapters 1, 6, 8, 9 of Blumenberg's text (in your reader, pages 1-11, 63-75, 89-121).

EARLY MODERN / LATE CHRISTIAN POLITICAL POLEMICS

Feb. 12, 14, 16

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)

Reading: *Leviathan* (1651/1668)

Chapters: intro-2, 5-7, 10-18, 21 and 29.

the first part: of man:

introduction, 1. of sense, 2. of imagination, 5. of reason and science 6. of the interiour beginnings of voluntary motions, commonly called the passions; and the speeches by which they are expressed, 7. of the ends or resolutions of discourse, 10. of power, worth, dignity, honour, and worthinesse, 11. of the difference of manners, 12. of religion, 13. of the naturall condition of mankind as concerning their felicity and misery, 14. of the first and second naturall lawes, and of contract, 15. of other lawes of nature, 16. of persons, authors, and things personated

the second part: of common-wealth

17. of the causes, generation, and definition of a common-wealth, 18. of the rights of soveraignes by institution, 21. of the liberty of subjects 29. of those things that weaken, or tend to the dissolution of a common-wealth

Recommended: Reinhart Koselleck, *Critique and Crisis: Enlightenment and the Pathogenesis of Modern Society* (MIT, 1998), 23-53. (Web Site)

Feb. 21, 23, 25

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)

Reading: *Leviathan* (1651/1668) selections from Parts III and IV
chaps 31, 32, 35, 37, 39, 41, 43, 44.1-13, 46.1-13

Feb. 16, 28, March 2

John Locke (1632-1704)

Reading: (1) "A Discourse of Miracles" (Course Reader)

(2) *A Letter Concerning Toleration*

Recommended: Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*.

March 5, 7, 9

John Locke (1632-1704)

Reading: *A Letter Concerning Toleration* continued

Note: Midterm Paper Due in Class on Monday, March 12!

OF CHRISTIAN COMMONWEALTHS

March 12, 14, 16

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-59)

Reading: *Democracy in America* (1835), Volume One

Pages: Volume One: "Author's Introduction, Part I: 1. Physical configuration of North America, 2. Concerning their Point of Departure and its Importance for the Future of the Anglo-Americans, 3. Social State of the Anglo-Americans, 4. The Principle of the Sovereignty of the People in America (skipping New England Township to Political Effects of Administrative Decentralization)" 9-70, 87-98 in the Lawrence translation.

Volume Two: "Part II: 9. The Main Causes Tending to Maintain a Democratic Republic in the United States, 10. Some Considerations Concerning the Present State and Probable Future of the Three Races That Inhabit the Territory of the United States" 277-400 in the Lawrence translation.

Recommended: William E. Connolly, "Tocqueville, Religiosity, and Pluralization," in his *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 162-199. (Web Site)

March 19, 21, 23

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-59)

Reading: *Democracy in America*, Volumes One and Two

Pages: Volume Two: "Part IV: On the Influence of Democratic Ideas and Feelings on Political Society" 667-709 in the Lawrence translation.

March 26, 28, 30

Spring Break

April 2, 4, 6

Karl Marx (1818-1883)

Reading: "On the Jewish Question" 1843 (Course Reader)

Recommended: Wendy Brown, "Rights and Losses," in her *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, 1995), 96-135. (Web Site)

April 9, 11, 13

Karl Marx (1818-1883)

Reading: (1) "On the Jewish Question" Continued
(2) "Introduction to Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right" (Course Reader)

Recommended: Ludwig Feuerbach, *The Essence of Christianity*, Preface, parts 1 and 2. (Web Site)

April 16, 18, 20

Max Weber (1864-1920)

Reading: *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*

Pages: "Part I: The Problem, I. Religious Affiliation and Social Stratification, II. The Spirit of Capitalism, III. Luther's Conception of the Calling. Task of the Investigation" 35-95 in the Routledge edition.

Recommended: (1) Anthony Giddens, Introduction, *The Protestant Ethic*.
(2) ----. "Part 3, Max Weber," in his *Capitalism and Modern Social Theory: An Analysis of the Writings of Marx, Durkheim and Max Weber* (Cambridge, 1971), 119-84.

April 23, 25, 27

Max Weber (1864-1920)

Reading: (1) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* continued

Pages: "Part II: The Practical Ethics of the Ascetic Branches of Protestantism, IV. The Religious Foundations of Worldly Asceticism, V. Asceticism and the Spirit of Capitalism" 95-185 in the Routledge edition.

(2) "Science as a Vocation" (Course Reader)

Recommended: Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, "13. 7000 B.C. Apparatus of Capture," in their *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Brian Massumi Translator (Minnesota, 1987), 424-74. (Web Site)

April 30, May 2, 4

Return to the contemporary debate

Reading: (1) Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, "The Spiritual Roots of Europe: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" in his *Without Roots: The West, Relativism, , Christianity, Islam* (New York: Basic Books, 2007).

(2) Jane Kramer, "The Pope and Islam; Is there anything that Benedict XVI would like to discuss?" *The New Yorker* vol. 83 no. 6, April 2, 2007.

(3) Russell Shorto, "Keeping the Faith" *The New York Times*, April 8, 2007.
Jesus Camp

Film: