

Political Theology – Ancient and Modern

Winter 2013, History / Medieval Studies

MA course, 2 credits

Time: tba

Location: tba

Instructors: György Geréby/Matthias Riedl

Course description:

Carl Schmitt's "Political Theology" is one of the most influential works of the 20th century. Its basic claim is: "All significant concept of the modern theory of the state are secularized theological concepts," implying a concealed theological link to legitimacy even in the modern period. On a truly global scale, Schmitt influenced theory, terminology and methodology of the social sciences and historiography. The course will evaluate the concept, its explanatory value, its validity and applicability, together with its historical forms.

Schmitt was by no means the first theorist to apply the term political theology (although he gave a new meaning to it). Already in antiquity it formed part of the Hellenist tripartite theology (besides natural theology and mythical theology). Polybius and Panaitios defined it as a type of theology that serves the interest of the polity. More generally, it could be understood as a theology which is constitutive for a given political order, the basis of which was the city-state. In the Hellenistic realm, especially with the expansion of Rome, and the development of the Roman Principate theories of legitimacy increasingly turned to the cosmic structure for the justification of the monarchy of the emperor.

Judaism, and emergent Christianity, however, looked at the Old Testament for ideas of political legitimacy, which differed significantly from the surrounding Hellenistic theories. These latter, however, suggested a Christian version of political theology to some of the Church Fathers, but not without opposition. While Roman thinkers such as Varro, Cicero, and Seneca insisted on the necessity of political theology to maintain public order, Tertullian, Lactantius, and Augustine refuted political theology and contrasted it with their new concept of a Christian polity, the Church based on "true religion" and "true theology", ultimately founded on revelation. This radical opposition of politics and truth, however, was not shared by all Christian theologians of the time, especially not after the Constantinian turn. The idea of the Christian Empire as a form of political theology became prevalent especially in the East of the Empire (though not in the non-Chalcedonian realm). The struggle or "symphony" between Empire and Church, the secular and the religious became one of the pivotal issues both in the Byzantine Empire and in the West, leading to very different and historically powerful developments.

In other words, the basic question is if a political theology can legitimately be based on the Christian creed (and in a Biblical context in general). This question has remained with Christianity in East and West ever since. It is a key question in Machiavelli's *Discourses* just as much as in Rousseau's *Social Contract*. And it underlies the radical negation of all theological support for the existing powers in Thomas Müntzer and Michael Bakunin. Finally, it initiated

the famous debate between Erik Peterson and Carl Schmitt, who in their turn, refer back to the theological debates of late antiquity. This recurring question of the compatibility (or the opposition) of Christian theology and political legitimacy will be one of the guiding questions of the course.

Goals:

This survey course aims to confront and familiarize students with ancient Hellenistic, medieval and modern traditions and discussions of the role of theology in theories of political legitimacy.

Learning outcomes:

The students will be familiarized foundational texts as well as with the political and politically relevant theological vocabulary of the Christian tradition, and its secularised consequences. They will acquire an ability to understand modern political terminologies by acquainting themselves with their historical origins. They are expected to gain historical knowledge that is relevant to understand present-day church-state relations, and more widely, strategies of legitimacy in different intellectual traditions of Europe.

Attendance

Attendance at all lectures is mandatory and will be kept record of. Students taking the class for grade must not miss more than two sessions. Students taking the class for audit must not miss more than three sessions.

Course requirements and grading:

1. A final paper of 3000 words to be submitted by April 10. The paper should refer to the whole reader but focus on certain time periods or topics according to individual interest. (50 %)
2. Class journals: weekly one-page-protocols of the class discussion to be submitted 48 hours before the next class. (30 %)
3. Participation: contribution to class discussion and voluntary presentations of readings. (20 %)

Introductory readings/Source collections:

Scott, Peter and William T. Cavanaugh, *The Blackwell Companion to Political Theology*, Wiley: Blackwell, 2006.

Hoelzl, Michael and Graham Ward (eds.), *Religion and Political Thought*, London and New York: Continuum, 2006.

Schedule

Week 1: **Political theology: the Hellenistic perspective on monarchy. The “tripartite theology.” The “Pythagorean” treatises.** (Geréby)

- Readings:
- a) Ps-Aristotle, *De mundo* (selections)
 - b) Dio Chrysostom, *On kingship*
 - c) Varro (fragments from Augustine, *City of God*)

Week 2: **Monarchy: Jewish and Early Christian Perspectives. Terminology in the Bible: theocracy, lawgiving. The Biblical account of kingship, city, and nations. The empires in the history of salvation. Theocracy. The critique of Celsus.** (Geréby)

- Readings:
- a) *Selections from the Old and New Testament*
 - b) Josephus, *Against Apion* 2:17-18
 - c) Philo, *On the creation of the world* 1-31.
 - d) *The Book of Daniel*, ch.2.
 - e) *Revelations* 4-22

Week 3: **Anti-imperial theology. The Book of Revelations: Rome as the apocalyptic Babylon. Rome as the *katechon*.** (Riedl)

- Readings:
- a) *The Passion of the Scillitan Martyrs*
 - b) Tertullian: *Selections from Apologeticum*
 - c) Minucius Felix: *Selections from the Octavius*
 - d) Riedl, Matthias, „Truth versus utility: The debate on civil religion in the Roman Empire of the 3rd and 4th century,“ in: John von Heyking/Ronald Weed: *Civil Religion in Political Thought*. Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2010, pp.47-65.

Week 4: **Imperial Theology in Christianity. Origen and Eusebius against Hippolytus. The vocation of the nations. The ecumenical empire in the history of salvation. The trinitarian reaction.** (Geréby)

- Readings:
- a) Paul of Tarsus, *Letters* (Hebrews, Romans & Galatians - selections)
 - b) Origen, *Against Celsus* (selections)
 - c) Eusebius of Caesarea, *Ecclesiastical History*, bk. 10
 - d) Eusebius of Caesarea, *Oration in Praise of Constantine*
 - e) Gregory of Nazianzus, *Third Theological Oration*

Week 5: Civic religion versus religious truth (Riedl)

- Readings:
- a) Polybius, *Histories* (selection from book 6)
 - b) *Epistle to Diognetus*
 - c) Augustine, *The City of God*, Book VI & VII
 - d) Machiavelli, *Discourses* I,11-14 and III,1

Week 6: Augustine: The church and the Kingdom of God. Eschatology. (Riedl)

- Readings:
- a) Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XV
 - b) Augustine, *The City of God*, Book XIX

Week 7: Medieval theories of the conflict between kingship and church: the Latin tradition. (Geréby)

- Readings:
- a) Pope Galasius, *Letter to Emperor Anastasius* Duo sunt ...
 - b) Anonymous, *Norman Tracts* (Tractatus Eboracensis)
 - c) Anonymous, *Before there were clerics*
 - d) Kantorowicz: *The King's Two Bodies. A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997, pp. 3-23 and 42-61.

Week 8: Byzantine theories of the symphony between church and empire. The shadow of Constantine and Justinian. Emperor and orthodoxy. (Geréby)

- Readings:
- a) Dagron, G. *Emperor and priest. The imperial office in Byzantium*. Tr. J. Birrell. Cambridge, 2003. Introduction (1-12), 'Caesaropapism' and the theory of the 'two powers' and Epilogue (282-313).
 - b) Anastos, Milton, *Aspects of the Mind of Byzantium*, Ashgate, 2001. (Selections) http://www.myriobiblos.gr/texts/english/milton1_21.html

Week 9: Papal Government versus Universal Monarchy. Secular and spiritual power. (Riedl)

- Readings:
- a) Giles of Rome, *On ecclesiastical power* (selections)
 - b) Pope Boniface VIII., *The Bull "Unam Sanctam"*
 - c) Dante: *Divine Comedy* (selections); *Monarchy* (selections)

Week 10: Theology and Revolution: From Radical Reformation to Mystical Anarchism (Riedl)

- Readings:
- a) Müntzer, Thomas, "Sermon to the Princes," in Michael G. Baylor, trans., *The Radical Reformation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp.11-32.
 - b) Bakunin, Michael, *God and the State*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1970), 9-86.

- c) Riedl, Matthias, “Apocalyptic Violence and Revolutionary Action: Thomas Müntzer’s Sermon to the Princes” in Michael A. Ryan, ed., *A Companion to Medieval and Early Modern Apocalyptic* (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming)
- d) Kolakowski, Leszek “Bakunin” in *Main Currents of Marxism* (New York: Norton, 2005), pp. ???.

Week 11: The early modern period: sovereignty (Riedl)

- Readings:
- a) Bodin, *Six Books on the Republic* (selections)
 - b) Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, (selections)
 - c) Carl Schmitt, *Political Theology. Four chapters on the concept of sovereignty*

Week 12: A Christian Political Theology? The Schmitt-Peterson Debate. The recurrent problem of political theology. (Geréby)

- Readings:
- a) Erik Peterson, “Monotheism as a political problem: a contribution to the history of political theology in the Roman Empire,” in *Theological Tractates*, trans. Michael J. Hollerich, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2011.
 - b) Carl Schmitt: *Political Theology II: The myth of the closure of any political theology*, trans. Michael Hoelzl and Graham Ward, Cambridge: Polity, 2008.
 - c) Geréby, György, “Carl Schmitt and Erik Peterson on the Problem of Political Theology. A footnote to Kantorowicz,” in: János M. Bak, Aziz al-Azmeh, eds., *Monotheistic Kingship. The Medieval Variant*, Budapest: CEU Press, 2005, pp. 31-61.