

Religion and Political Power in Western Tradition
RLST 304

Fall 2014
Time: Tuesdays 1:30-3:20
Location: CO493 Rm 102
Yale University

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Office hours:
Tues 3:30-4:30PM

Description:

This course provides an introduction to the relationship between religion and politics as it has been conceived in Western tradition. It is intended to provide students with a basic historical and theoretical framework for thinking about the tensions and possibilities that emerge in the encounter between religious and political thought, institutions, and communities in contemporary society. This course challenges the popular assumption (in much of the West, at least) that religion and politics are self-evident and clearly distinct spheres with their own logics and aims. Instead, we examine the ways that the boundaries between religion and politics have been continually blurred in Western thought, and consider how the categories “religion” and “politics” are interdependent and mutually reinforcing.

We will need to approach this vast topic selectively, looking primarily at the Christian tradition and its eventual influence on (or development into) so-called secular political thought. We will consider the early church in its Greco-Roman setting and the ensuing tension between church and state. We move into the medieval period where, although a unity of church and empire appears to exist, distinctions remain between papal and imperial authority, and limits are imposed upon church and state reach. We consider the innovations in thought during the Reformation, the emerging secular sphere, and early modern attempts at political thought separated from religious justification. We also consider to what extent politics and religion remain intertwined and what this means for thinking about the relationship today. Is a purely secular politics possible or even desirable? To what extent should politically motivated religious movements be permitted to engage in the public sphere, and how should religiously grounded claims and arguments be evaluated? Should the distinction between religion and politics be maintained, adjusted, or discarded?

This semester we will also have a special section considering the question of race and racialization in the US, in terms of religion and politics, as a way to approach and reflect upon the shooting death of Michael Brown and the current events in Ferguson, MO. This will also need to be a selective snapshot of a much broader and complex set of issues. But it is important to begin a conversation about this significant set of contemporary concerns. From questions of racism, to police brutality, to militarization of domestic security, to forms of protest in the public sphere, to the ongoing struggle for civil rights, religious, ethical, and political questions are here deeply intertwined. How is religion being invoked in this situation? How does the question of race factor into the relationship between religion and politics, particularly in the American context? In what ways, if at all, can our study of the relation between religion and politics aid us in understanding the sources of unrest and various responses to it?

Learning Objectives:

Through participation in this course, students should:

- be able to articulate and critically assess a number of ways the relationship between religious and political spheres has been conceived in Western thought;
- explain secularization theory and recent challenges to it;
- develop and defend their own position on more or less productive models of the religion and politics relation;
- extend their understanding of the relation between religion and politics to a current situation, in this case the questions raised by events in Ferguson, MO.
- and improve in critical and analytical reading skills, as well as in clarity, coherence, and persuasiveness of oral and written expression and argument.

Class format:

This course is a seminar and is focused on attentive reading of key texts and in-depth discussion in a group setting. Students should come prepared to engage one another thoughtfully and respectfully. An effort has been made to keep weekly readings to a very manageable length to ensure that you are able to read the selections with care in their entirety. We will analyze these texts closely in class, so thorough reading beforehand is essential. The instructor will provide periodic mini-lectures where background information is helpful in assessing the readings. Otherwise, the discussion will be driven by student presentations, responses, and questions that emerge from the reading and during class.

Assignments and evaluation:

Participation and discussion leadership (25%):

Students should complete the assigned readings prior to class and come prepared to engage actively with one another. This means bringing your questions, comments, and concerns and sharing them in class. Please arrive on time. Repeated tardiness as well as unexcused absences will adversely affect your grade.

Students will also sign up for two (2) separate class sessions where they will *initiate discussion* of a particular reading due that day. This means you will provide a short summary of the reading and pose 3-4 questions and/or themes for discussion. This should take approximately 10 minutes.

Reading responses (40%):

Students will submit a total of eight (8) reading responses over the semester, due in class. Responses should be $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 page in length, single-spaced, 12pt Times New Roman, with 1" margins (400-600 words). The first half of the response should provide a succinct summary of one of the readings due that day. In one paragraph, what is the author's main argument and how does he or she go about developing it? The second half/second paragraph is your critical assessment. Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not? Is the presentation persuasive or not, and why? What concerns does this reading raise for you? What insights does this work provide about the concerns of its era? How might this piece be relevant to contemporary society? Etc. These responses are intended to help you process the readings more deeply and be primed for active discussion. You may use your responses as a springboard for your discussion leadership and/or comments in class.

Paper (35%):

Students will complete a 10-12 page position paper, arguing and developing a claim in relation to the topic of religion and politics. This is a three-stage project: 1) you will submit one paragraph explaining the topic and the position you will take, 2) you will submit an outline showing the development of your argument, consideration of objections, and response to objections, and 3) you will submit the completed paper. Each stage is designed to allow feedback from the instructor on the direction of your project. Students should also schedule a meeting with the instructor to discuss their paper plans, after stage one and before stage three. Stages 1 and 2 due in class. Stage 3, i.e., final paper, due Friday, Dec 12th, electronically.

Readings:

To purchase:

- James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*. New York: Vintage, 1993.
- James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 2011.

Recommended:

- Craig Calhoun, Mark Juergensmeyer, and Jonathan VanAntwerpen, eds., *Rethinking Secularism*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.
- *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Rev Ed. (2007)

Excerpts from all readings besides the Baldwin and Cone texts will be made available as PDFs on Classes*v2.

Schedule:

Week 1: Tuesday, Sept 2

Introduction: Thinking about religion, thinking about politics.

In class reading and discussion: Romans 13 (on obedience to government)

Sign-ups for discussion leadership.

Week 2: Tues, Sept 9

A secular political prehistory? Religion and politics in Greco-Roman context.

Readings:

- Zaidman and Pantel, *Religion in the Ancient Greek City*, ch. 9, “Religion and political life,” pp. 92-101.
- Plato, *Laws*, Book X, in *Complete Works*, pp. 1542-66.
- Lilly Ross Taylor, *The Divinity of the Roman Emperor*, Ch. 1, “The Divinity of Kings in the Hellenistic East,” pp. 1-34. (Skim)

Sign-ups for discussion leadership.

Week 3: Tues, Sept 16

Contested allegiances. Greco-Roman context and the early church.

Readings:

- The Bible: Genesis 22:1-18 (binding of Isaac), 1 Samuel 8 (Israel opts for monarchy), Mark 10:35-45 (two types of authority), Mark 12:13-17 (God vs. Caesar), John 18:28-88 (Jesus before Pilate).
- Governor Pliny's letter on Christians to the Emperor Trajan (Pliny, *Letters* 10.96-97), in Bettenson, ed., *Documents of the Christian Church*, 3-5.
- Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, chs. 1-14, 17.

Suggested: Dale Martin, *New Testament History and Literature*, Ch. 3 "The Greco-Roman World," pp. 34-54.

Week 4: Tues, Sept 23

Church and Empire: From a Marginal Voice to the Voice of Power

Readings:

- Tertullian, *Letter to Scapula* 1-2, in Maurice Wiles, ed., *Documents in Early Christian Thought*, 226-228
- Origen, *Against Celsus* VII, 73-5, in Wiles, *Documents*, 228-230
- Eusebius: *In Praise of Constantine*, Chs. I-X.

Week 5: Tues, Sept 30

A tale of two cities: Augustine.

Readings:

- Augustine, *City of God*, bks XIV and XIX, selections.
- Augustine, "Correction of the Donatists"

Suggested: Rosemary Radford Ruether, "Augustine and Christian Political Theology," *Interpretation* 29 (1975) 252-65.

Due: Final paper, stage one.

Week 6: Tues, Oct 7

Medieval Political Theology: "Two Swords" and "Two Bodies"

Readings:

- Gelasius, "Letter to Emperor Anastasius," in O'Donovan and O'Donovan, *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought*, pp. 177-79
- Boniface, *Unam Sanctam*

- The Norman Anonymous, excerpts, in O'Donovan and O'Donovan, pp. 250-59
- Ernst Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*, "The Norman Anonymous," pp. 42-60; "Corpus ecclesiae mysticum," and "Corpus republicae mysticum," pp. 193-231.

Week 7: Tues, Oct 14

The Reformation: "Two Kingdoms."

Readings:

- Martin Luther, "Letter to Christian Nobility" and *On Secular Authority*, selections.
- Karl Barth, "Christian Community and Civil Community"

*Oct 21: instructor away for conference. No class.

--Fall Recess--

Week 8: Tues, Oct 28

The Great Separation? A Secular Sphere.

Readings:

- Charles Taylor, "Western Secularity,"
- José Casanova, "The Secular, Secularization, Secularisms," and
- Craig Calhoun, "Secularism, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere," in *Rethinking Secularism*, Calhoun, Juergensmeyer, and Vanantwerpen, eds., pp. 31-91.

Week 9: Tues, Nov 4

Early Modern Political Philosophy

Readings:

- Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*: Introduction, Chaps XII, XIII, XIV
- John Locke, "A Letter Concerning Toleration," selections
- Immanuel Kant, "Answer to the Question, 'What is Enlightenment?'"

Due: Final paper, stage two.

Week 10: Tues, Nov 11

The American Experiment and the Question of Race

Readings:

- Thomas Jefferson, "A Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom"
- James Madison, "Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments"

- Fredrick Douglass, *The Narrative of the Life of Fredrick Douglass*, excerpts.
- Howard Thurman, “What me may learn from India”
- Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham City Jail”

Week 11: Tues, Nov 18

Religion, Politics, and Race in America: Approaching Ferguson

Readings:

- James Cone, *The Cross and the Lynching Tree*

--Thanksgiving Break--

Week 12: Tues, Dec 2

Religion, Politics, and Race in America: Approaching Ferguson (cont)

Readings:

- James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*
- Selected contemporary reflections on Ferguson

Due: Friday, Dec 12

Final paper, stage three.

Due electronically in the Dropbox on Classes*v2 by 5PM.