

Religion and Politics

790:472:01

Rutgers University
M/W 2:50-4:10 pm
Meeting via ZOOM
<https://canvas.rutgers.edu>

Fall 2020
Dr. William Field
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Office hours: Wednesday 4:10-5:00

The last 40 years have seen an extensive religious revival that challenged the Enlightenment assumption that religion is destined to fade in the face of reason and rising modernity. Observers often note the revival in the United States (note the influence of the “Religious Right” in the Republican Party, or in the Arab world (note political Islam and radical Islamist terrorism), but the evidence suggests more that the revival is worldwide. Buddhism and Hinduism – both inherently peaceful religions – inspire political violence in Burma and India, for example. The Enlightenment promised to strip the world of belief and superstition and put in its place rationality and common humanity, but this promise has come close to fruition only in western Europe. Europe – Western Europe at least, has seen the rise of a vibrant secular society with only vestigial religious influence in public life. Rather than the wave of the future, however, this has could be seen as more of an aberration than the likely trajectory for the American continents, Africa, and Asia. Even in Europe, religion is again rearing its head. In the words of a recent book, “God is Back.”

This course offers a hybrid approach between political theory and comparative politics. We will examine the role of religious influence in politics using writings from classical times through to the modern era and focusing on the three Western monotheistic faiths. We examine the core beliefs of these faiths to determine what they see as the appropriate interaction between faith and politics. We then look at religious influence in Europe, the US, and the Islamic world with an eye to seeing the historical, philosophical, and religious developments of these influences.

I find all of this inherently interesting: who wouldn’t wonder what religion is and whether it should have an influence in our public/political space, after all? This course does not just satisfy my specific and perhaps idiosyncratic curiosity, though; these topics help enlighten many of the great questions of political theory. This is fundamentally a course in political theory.

I have built the course around several core questions:

What is the source of justice? Is it human made or divine (whatever that means)?
What is the historical and contemporary relationship between religion and politics in America?
Is the United States exceptional in our religiosity? If so, why?
Why has it been so hard for Americans to move beyond the “original sin” of slavery?

“Religion” and “politics” are contested concepts. We do not have universal agreement on what constitutes politics or what constitutes religion, religious belief, or religious practice. The

question of what actions constitute political action is also contested, across time, place, and government organizational structure. Studying the interplay of these concepts creates a space for considerable confusion: deciding what constitutes religious politics or political religion is messy and open to debate. Combining religion and politics creates the possibility for incredible good or incredible evil, but “good” and “evil” are as contested as any other terms we will use in this class. Because of this much of the beginning of class will focus on defining terminology.

This course is designed to expose students to the philosophical and practical problems of political action and governance. This takes two forms: the philosophical origins of the law (divine vs. human law) and the practical consequences of the potential for conflict between these two origins. This is the conflict of antinomianism. Given that, the course has several main goals. By the end of this course students should be able to

- Explain the implications for justice that results from the logic that the law is human made vs. the law is divinely made. Be able to use the concept of “antinomianism” in that explanation.
- Apply the above debate to fundamental questions of society in general and American society in particular, including questions of equality, slavery, and democracy.
- Understand the religious impulses that have shaped American society over the centuries.
- Analyze the religious dimensions of their home town and nation.

READING MATERIAL

I have assigned one book for this course. Additional reading will be drawn from a variety of sources that will be linked from or posted on Canvas. I will list to the best of my ability source information so you may track down and purchase relevant material should you wish

Wald, Kenneth D., and Allison Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States* 8th edition. 2018. ISBN 9781538105139. This paperback is available in the Rutgers bookstore. You can also order an electronic copy of the text directly from the publisher: use this website:

<https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781538105139>

Students must also have access to the Hebrew and Christian scriptures (Old and New Testaments of the Bible). I personally use the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translation, but any of the generally accepted translations will work for this course. These texts are available in your choice of translation at www.bible.com, www.biblegateway.com, or <http://bible.oremus.org/>. Assigned readings that are not from the purchased texts are on Canvas.

COURSE FORMAT REQUIREMENTS and EXPECTATIONS

This class shall be taught in the “synchronous remote” format. Here’s what it means:

- Class is set to meet Mondays and Wednesdays from 2:50-4:10 pm. We will convene for class on most, but not all, days that we are scheduled to meet. When we convene it will

be using the Zoom platform. Zoom allows small discussion groups and group work through breakout rooms.

- You are expected to come to class having completed the reading. To help you do this I will have regular “reading quizzes” offered through Canvas; answering these questions will help you pick out the important concepts in the reading and make class time more meaningful. These quizzes will not be hard but they will demand that you read and review the assigned readings.
- Class time will involve some short lecture bursts (called “chunks”) from me, including at times Powerpoints. I will record some of these in advance and will ask that you have reviewed them before class. This will allow us to focus our time on discussions, questions, and further thought beyond the reading.
- The actual time we will spend together will be about an hour twice a week. With some content delivered via recording we don’t need to spend the full 160 minutes working face to face. I’ll be available for office hours in the unused portion of class time as well as by request at other times.
- I will assign an ongoing semester-long project asking you to explore the religious and political nature of your home town, if you are a resident of the United States, or a town near New Brunswick if you are not a US resident, to find out how religion and politics interact at the local level.

Assignments are mapped against course learning objectives and count toward the final grade as follows:

Reading quizzes: weekly short multiple choice or fill in the blank quizzes to be completed before class. The purpose of these is to help you engage with the readings and come prepared for discussion about them **(10%)**

Class-time group discussion output: Occasional (see schedule below) submitted work resulting from small group discussions during class time. **(20%)**

Paper 1: Two page essay on justice as seen through the eyes of Socrates, the question developed from the first group discussion, on Socrates *Apology*. **(15%)**

Paper 2: Two page essay on the question developed from the second group discussion, on the tension between a secular United States and a religiously-grounded “American creed” (Lacorne reading). **(15%)**

Project: exploration of your [adopted] home town’s politico-religious constitution. **(15%)**

Final paper: Explore the appropriateness of an antinomian approach to influencing the political process somewhere in the contemporary world. **(25%)**

There will also be a variety of ungraded quizzes and tiny projects due at various times that are designed to help you connect our readings with contemporary issues, introduce yourself to the class, and otherwise bring the class to life. While these will not be graded your participation in them is expected, and will help you move through the class.

READINGS and LECTURE SCHEDULE

Wednesday 9/2

Course introduction

What is Religion? What is politics?

Tuesday 9/8 Rutgers holds Monday classes

Religion as a contested reality

Talal Asad, "The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category" (1982) (pdf)

Bruce Lincoln, "The Study of Religion in the Current Political Moment," (2006) (pdf)

Clouser, "What is Religion?" from The Myth of Religious Neutrality, ch. 2. (pdf)

Wednesday 9/9

Politics as a contested reality

Adrian Leftwich, "Thinking Politically: On the Politics of Politics" (pdf)

Judith Squires, "Politics Beyond Boundaries: A Feminist Perspective (pdf)

RELIGION AND JUSTICE

Monday 9/14

Antigone

Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RDNGSDz3KYE>

Script: <https://www.owleyes.org/text/antigone/read/antigone#root-76180-3>

Or <http://classics.mit.edu/Sophocles/antigone.html>

Wednesday 9/16

Socrates

Plato, Euthyphro, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/euthyphro.html>

Plato, Apology, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/apology.html>

Plato, Crito, <http://classics.mit.edu/Plato/crito.html>

Plato, Phaedo, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1658/1658-h/1658-h.htm>

Monday 9/21

The Israelite Foundation

Genesis, chapters 1-4, chapter 11:1-9, chapters 12-50

Exodus, chapters 1-23 & 32

I Samuel, chapters 8-11 & 15

Ezekiel 16

Wednesday 9/23

The Christian Foundation

Matthew, chapters 1, 2, 5; chapter 6:1-25; chapter 22:15-22.

Mark, chapters 1, 3, 4.
Luke, chapters 1, 2, 14:16-23.
John, chapter 1; chapter 18
The epistle of Romans

Monday 9/28

Augustine and the Christian Republic

St. Augustine, *selections* (pdf)

THE DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD

Wednesday 9/30

Foundations of Islam

Smith, *The World's Religions*, pp. 221-268 (pdf)
Feldman, *Fall and Rise*, Introduction and Part I (pdf)
Aslan, *No God But God*, chapter 4 (pp. 75-106) (pdf)

Monday 10/5

Protestantism

Martin Luther, *Concerning Christian Liberty*, found online at
<http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=LutLibe.xml&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=1&division=div1>

John Calvin, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book II, ch. 2 sections 10-27 AND Book II ch. 21 section 1 found online at
<http://www.ntslibrary.com/PDF%20Books/Calvin%20Institutes%20of%20Christian%20Religion.pdf> pp. 175-186 and 573-74 (note: these are the pdf pages. The pages of the text are 167-78 and 565-66.

Wednesday 10/7

The Enlightenment

Locke, "Letter Concerning Toleration," found online at
<https://www.thefederalistpapers.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/John-Locke-A-Letter-Concerning-Toleration.pdf>

Locke "Second Treatise of Government", chapter II, found online at
<http://www.earlymoderntexts.com/assets/pdfs/locke1689a.pdf>

Voltaire, *Philosophical Dictionary*, selections on Reason, Religion, Theist, and Why
<http://www.online-literature.com/voltaire/philosophical-dictionary/83/>
<http://www.online-literature.com/voltaire/philosophical-dictionary/84/>
<http://www.online-literature.com/voltaire/philosophical-dictionary/91/>
<http://www.online-literature.com/voltaire/philosophical-dictionary/96/>

Was the United States founded on Christian Principles?

Monday 10/12

Dunbar, *One Nation Under God*, ch. 1-5 (pdf)

Murphy, *Prodigal Nation*, ch. 1 (pdf)

Wald & Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics in the United States*, ch. 1

Wednesday 10/14

The Religious Dimension today

Wald and Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics*, ch 2

Monday 10/19

The European Arrivals

Vowell, *The Wordy Shipmates* excerpts (pdf)

Lacorne, *Religion in America*, ch. 1 (pdf)

Wald and Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics*, ch 3

Wednesday 10/21

Independence

Reichley, *Faith in Politics*, ch. 3 (pdf)

Huntington, *Who Are We?*, excerpts (pdf)

Monday 10/26

Reichley, *Faith in Politics*, ch. 4 (pdf)

Wednesday 10/8

Post Independence I

Murphy, *Prodigal Nation*, ch. 3 (pdf)

Monday 11/2

Emancipation Proclamation

Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address

13th, 14th, 15th Amendments to the US Constitution

Gates, *Stony the Road*, ch.

Wednesday 11/4

Religion and the State

Wald and Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics*, chapter 4

Robert Jones, *The End of White Christian America*, ch 1 (pdf)

Monday 11/9

Mobilizing Religious Interests

Wald and Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics*, chapter 5

Fox, *Religion, Politics, and Society*, ch 6 (pdf)

Wednesday 11/11

Political Action

Wald and Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics*, chapter 6

Fowler, ch 5 (pdf)

Monday 11/16

Religion and Public Opinion

Wald and Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics*, chapter 7

Tuesday 11/18

The Catholic Church

Wald and Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics*, chapter 9

Dionne, Souled Out, chapters 5 & 6

Lacorne, *Religion in America*, ch.4 (pdf)

Banchoff, "Human Rights, the Catholic Church, and the Death Penalty in the United States." In

Banchoff & Wuthnow, *Religion and the Global Politics of Human Rights* (pdf)

Monday 11/23

Evangelical Protestants

Wald and Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics*, chapter 8

<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2018/04/the-last-temptation/554066/>

Wednesday 11/25 – no class; Rutgers holds Friday schedule

Monday 11/30

The Christian Left

Reichley, *Faith in Politics*, ch. 6, excerpts (pdf)

From the Bible: The epistle of James

Wednesday 12/2

Minorities in America

Wald and Calhoun-Brown, *Religion and Politics*, chapter 10 & 11

Jones, *The End of White Christian America*, ch 4 (pdf)

Monday 12/7

White Supremacy in the Christian Church today

Jones, *White Too Long*, ch. 1 (pdf)

Wednesday 12/9

Course conclusion