

One Nation Under God?  
Religion and Politics in America<sup>1</sup>  
University of Maryland, College Park, Summer 2007

Instructor: John McTague

E-mail: [jmctague@gvpt.umd.edu](mailto:jmctague@gvpt.umd.edu)

Office: 2126 Tydings Hall (Don't knock. Just open the door, make a left, and poke your head into the cubicle).

Office Hours: 10-11:30, Tuesdays and Thursdays, and by appointment.

Course Meets: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:30-3:50, Jimenez Hall, Room 2206.

Course Description:

The separation of church and state is a hallmark of the American constitutional design. In his letter to the Danbury Baptist Association in 1802, Thomas Jefferson wrote:

Believing with you that religion is a matter which lies solely between man & his god, that he owes account to none other for his faith or his worship, that the legitimate powers of government reach actions only, and not opinions, I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, thus building a wall of separation between church and state.

Despite the formal separation of the institutions of church and the institutions of state, religion has played a prominent role in American politics since its Puritan beginnings prior to the nation's founding. Today, the American people are remarkably distinct in their high levels of religiosity compared to their counterparts in other industrialized democratic nations.

This course traces the relationship between religion and politics from the founding to present day. As a group, we will think critically about the following questions that have puzzled scholars of American religion and politics: What makes the American context in which religion and politics coexist so unique? To what extent does religion shape American political culture and institutions, and how do religious beliefs and practices come to be connected to political behavior and public policy? Is religion good for democracy? Is politics good for religion?

---

<sup>1</sup> I reserve the right to alter this syllabus as necessary.

### Course Requirements:

Students are expected to think critically about assigned readings prior to class and participate actively in our collective discussion of each topic. Attendance and active participation are essential to successfully completing the course requirements. In addition to active, quality participation, students are expected to produce critical analysis of the course's subject matter in the form of two written assignments.

Due on June 28th, the first paper will assess theoretical orientations towards the relationship between religion and politics as presented during the first five to six sessions of the course (further instruction forthcoming). This paper will be approximately five to seven pages in length. The best papers will make an argument structured around one coherent thesis, rather than a laundry list of thoughts and reactions. Students are encouraged to research outside of the assigned readings, and I will provide guidance for additional readings based on each student's interests.

The second paper, due on July 12th, will revisit the argument developed in the first paper, with the additional task of bringing that argument to bear on the current state of the relationship between religion and politics in the U.S. This paper will be approximately ten to fourteen pages in length. The best papers will situate contemporary understandings of the relationship between religion and politics within the theoretical orientations and early American history considered in the first assignment. Students should be prepared to critically address the following questions: Is the contemporary relationship between religion and politics similar to (or different from) the relationship evident at previous times in American history? What does your evaluation of the contemporary landscape as compared with earlier observations articulated in Assignment 1 tell you about how religion and politics operate in the United States? What does this mean for the future of religion and politics in America? Again, one coherent thesis that is well argued will be superior to a laundry list of thoughts and reactions.

Assignments are due at the beginning of class. Absence from class and late arrival to class will result in loss of participation points. No excuses.

Late submissions will absolutely not be tolerated. No excuses. If your assignment is turned in late, it will be marked down two full letter grades. *Arriving late to class on the day an assignment is due will be considered a late submission of your assignment.* An A becomes a C, B becomes D, C becomes F, D becomes a really, really low F. You are better off handing in something imperfect and on time than you are handing in something late.

Grading:

Short paper: 20%

Final paper: 50%

Presentation: 10%

Participation/Attendance: 20%

Recommended for Purchase\*

We will read most or all of the following five books:

Finke, Roger and Rodney Stark. 2005. *The Churching of America, 1776-2005*. Second Edition. Rutgers University Press: New Brunswick, NJ.

Fiorina, Morris P., Samuel J. Abrams, and Jeremy C. Pope. 2005. *Culture Wars? The Myth of a Polarized America*. Second Edition. Pearson Longman: New York.

Layman, Geoffrey C. 2001. *The Great Divide: Religious and Cultural Conflict in American Party Politics*. Columbia University Press: New York.

Wald, Kenneth D. and Allison Calhoun-Brown. 2007. *Religion and Politics in the United States*. Fifth Edition. Rowman and Littlefield: New York.

Wilcox, Clyde and Carin Larson. 2006. *Onward Christian Soldiers?* Third Edition. Westview Press: Boulder, CO.

\* All books appearing on the syllabus will be made available through the Reserve desk at McKeldin Library.

Other Assigned Readings:

In addition to the titles recommended for purchase, I will make additional readings identified on the syllabus available through the course website (or eReserve) and/or the Reserve desk at McKeldin Library.

Finally, I may supplement/substitute readings identified on the syllabus with handouts distributed in class.

Course Outline:

**Week One – Conceptualizing Religion and Politics in America**

**Session One** : Tuesday, 6/5

Course Introduction.

“Dynamics of the Church-State Relationship in Comparative Perspective.”

No assigned readings.

**Session Two**: Thursday, 6/7

“The Distinctiveness of the Relationship between Religion and Politics in America.”

Readings:

Wald and Calhoun-Brown, 2007, Ch 1-2.

Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*: Volume 1, Part 2, Ch.9; Volume 2, Part 1, Ch. 2-8; Volume 2, Part 2, Ch. 8-9.

**Week Two – Religion in America, Founding through the Twentieth Century**

**Session Three**: Tuesday 6/12

“A Market-Based Explanation”

Finke and Stark, 2005, entire volume.

**Session Four**: Thursday 6/14

Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2007, Ch. 3-6

**Week Three – Religion and Political Activism: Mass Movements in America**

**Session Five**: Tuesday 6/19

“A Survey of Religion and Political Movements in Historical Perspective: Populism, Civil Rights (and more).”

Williams, Rhys H. and Susan M. Alexander. 1994. "Religious Rhetoric in American Populism: Civil Religion as Movement Ideology." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* Vol. 33, No. 1. (Mar.), pp. 1-15.

Harris, Fredrick C. 1999. *Something Within: Religion in African-American Political Activism*. Oxford University Press: New York. Read Introduction, Chs. 4-5, and Epilogue.

Chappell, David L. 2002. "Religious Revivalism in the Civil Rights Movement." *African American Review* 36: 581-595.

**Session Six:** Thursday 6/21

"The Contemporary Christian Right... and the Religious Left?"

Wilcox and Larson, 2006, entire volume.

**Week Four – The Changing Nature of the Religious Composition of the Parties and the Culture Wars**

**Session Seven:** Tuesday 6/26

"A New Party System? Religion and Party Realignment."

Layman, 2001, pp. 1-68; 168-201; 229-237; 290-341.

**Session Eight:** Thursday 6/28 (Paper 1 is due!)

"Red State Versus Blue State: Is There a Culture War?"

Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, 2005, entire volume.

**Week Five – Religious Minorities, Civic Engagement, and Policy Consequences**

**Session Nine:** Tuesday 7/3

Guest lecture on religion and civic engagement by GVPT doctoral candidate, Shanna Pearson-Merkowitz.

"Clergy, Churches, Congregations, and Socialization into Politics."

Skocpol, Theda and Morris P. Fiorina. 1999. "Making Sense of the Civic Engagement Debate." In *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*. Ch. 1.  
Edited by Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina. Washington DC: Brookings

Institution Press.

Wuthnow, Robert. 1999. "Mobilizing Civic Engagement: The Changing Impact of Religious Involvement." In *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*. Ch. 9. Edited by Theda Skocpol and Morris P. Fiorina. Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press.

Djupe, Paul A. and Christopher P. Gilbert. 2002. "The Political Voice of Clergy." *The Journal of Politics* Vol. 64, No. 2 (May), pp. 596-609.

Kohut, Andrew, John C. Green, Scott Keeter, and Robert C. Toth. 2000. *The Diminishing Divide: Religion's Changing Role in American Politics* Brookings Institution Press: Washington, DC. Read Ch. 6.

**Session Ten:** Thursday 7/5

"Morality Legislation in American Policymaking Institutions."

Mooney, Christopher Z. 2000. "The Decline of Federalism and the Rise of Morality-Policy Conflict in the United States." *Publius* 30: 171-188.

"Religious Minorities"

Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2007, Ch. 10-11.

**Week Six – Conclusions and Looking to the Future**

Work on your papers!

**Session Eleven:** Tuesday 7/10

"Religion and presidential campaigns"

Leege, David C., Kenneth D. Wald, Brian S. Krueger, and Paul D. Mueller. 2002. *The Politics of Cultural Differences*. Princeton University Press. Read Part One, Chs. 1-2.

"Normative conclusions on the nature of the relationship between religion and politics."

Wald and Calhoun-Brown 2007, Ch. 12.

**Session Twelve, Conclusions:** Thursday 7/12 (Final paper is due)

Based on the final papers, students will be expected to participate in a discussion of the relationship between religion and politics in the United States. Each student should prepare a presentation of 8-10 minutes in length.