

## Religion and Politics/Rel 245/ Fall 2008

Section A: TR: 12:50 – 2:00; Section B: TR 2:20 – 3:30

Instructor: Dr. Kelly Denton-Borhaug; Comen 214; [kdenton@moravian.edu](mailto:kdenton@moravian.edu); x7104

Office Hours: M/W: 12:00 – 2:00; please also feel free to make an appointment with me outside of these hours (call or email), or pop by my office to see if I'm in and available.

**Course Description:** In this course we focus on two of the three topics your parents told you never to bring up in polite company – politics and religion! ☺ We shall dig into the complex relationship of religion and politics in the U.S., focusing along the way on the history of this relationship from the colonial period forward, understandings of “civil religion,” “chosenness,” “American exceptionalism,” “Manifest Destiny,” salvation/success, and more. We will ask and debate whether and how there may be an ethically viable role for religion in the political public square, given the American value (and law) of separation of church and state. Finally, we will spend a good deal of time in the course examining the role of religion in contemporary politics in the U.S., especially examining the Bush administration in the aftermath of 9/11 and the current presidential election cycle.

### Course Objectives

- 1) Students will enhance their understanding of the complexity of the relationship between religion and politics especially in the contemporary American scene.
- 2) Critical thinking, speaking, reading, research and writing skills (as well as listening and collaborative skills) will be enhanced and challenged in this course, through in depth reading, class discussion of readings, small and large research assignments, short and longer papers and oral presentation.
- 3) Students' ethical awareness and deliberation will be engaged through grappling with the ethical question, “Is it possible to find an ethically viable role for religion in the political public square, and if so, how?”

### Required Course Texts

Mark A. Noll and Luke E. Harlow, *Religion and American Politics*, Second Edition, Oxford University, 2007

Rosemary Radford Ruether, *America, Amerikkka: Elect Nation and Imperial Violence*, Equinox, 2007

In addition to these texts, students are required to make their own copies of articles and chapters on reserve in Reeve's library as listed in the syllabus.

Please subscribe asap to the website, <http://www.faithinpubliclife.org/> “Faith in Public Life,” a good source of articles from a wide variety of resources. Scanning this a few times a week will help you to have a better sense of the specific issues at play currently in the relationship between religion and politics. In addition, your regular scanning of this website will give you ideas and resources for research projects in this course.

Students also should read a reputable newspaper daily, such as the NY Times (the Morning Call is a regional newspaper and is not sufficient for the purposes of this course).

### Required Extra-Class Events

### Course Requirements

- Prepared class participation (with readings thoughtfully prepared prior to each class period). Please be in class on time and ready to go. **Bring whatever text we are reading with you to class!** Read with a pen in hand, underlining key passages and writing your own shorthand in the margin with questions,

notations, etc. Unexcused absences will mean a serious detraction in your grade. Your participation also includes your active, engaged presence in class. This includes:

- participating in discussion, asking questions, taking lead and letting others provide the direction;
- listening actively and showing understanding by paraphrasing or by acknowledging and building on others' ideas;
- volunteering willingly in small group work and carrying your own share of the small group responsibilities, helping the group to stay on track.
- demonstrating that you are building on your reading and thinking skills through your chapter outlines;
- taking the time with short research projects you are assigned to report on in class and demonstrating clear and engaging oral presentation.

If you feel uncertain about speaking up in classroom settings, come and see me in the first week or two of our semester – I can help! The only excused absences are for serious illness, family emergency or religious observance and must be cleared with me in advance of the class you miss. Please make plans now to attend the various experiences I've planned for our semester together; speak with your employer and/or coaches if you need to be excused from other responsibilities in order to attend. 25% of grade.

- Three short papers (approximately 5 to 7-page, double-spaced papers. Your papers will not require any additional research outside course materials, but demonstrate your own thoughtful and critical grappling with this material. Please plan on coming into my office at least once to talk about one of your papers with me (and/or anything else you wish to discuss). 25% of grade. **Unless you have made prior arrangements with me (and have an acceptable excuse related to those for excused class absence), NO LATE PAPERS ACCEPTED.**
- Your participation in preparing for and executing public discussion of your research project both in class and in your final paper. Important dates to keep you on schedule:
  - **Sept. 30:** paragraph outlining the theme you intend to explore. This should be related to a topic you have discovered by reading the newspaper and/or perusing the website "Faith in Public Life." Your topic will in some way explore a contemporary issue intersecting politics and religion – other than this you are free to investigate in any direction you choose.
  - **Oct. 21:** Your annotated bibliography is due at the beginning of class for your research project. This bibliography should include at least six different resources helping you to explore your theme. At least three of these resources will come from religious study/theological resources. Three others may come from newspapers, journals, book chapters based in other disciplines. Use the template for an annotated bibliography found on the Cornell University website: <http://www.library.cornell.edu/olinuris/ref/research/skill28.htm>
  - **Two weeks before your class presentation:** make an appt. with me to discuss the 10 pages you wish for your classmates to read in preparation for your presentation/discussion with the class
  - **One week before your class presentation:** make available to all class members (whether by posting online or by making copies available) the 10 pages we have agreed on for the class. Work toward and including your class presentation/discussion: 25% of grade.
  - **Your takehome final** will be to write about your research theme with respect to the overarching question we will raise from Jeffrey Stout: Is there an ethically viable role for religion in the political public square, and if so, how may we describe that role? More details to come. Your takehome final will be approximately 12 pages, and include a bibliography with all the materials you have studied, proper footnotes through which you demonstrate your mastery of this material, and intelligent exploration of the ethical question posed by Stout. 25% of grade.

Students are advised to review the Academic Honesty Policy in the Student Handbook (available online) and required to follow the guidelines therein.

**Important Note:** Various course resources will be posted on Blackboard. Students are advised to become familiar with this Moravian online course resource. Let me know if you need assistance.

**Additional Note:** This syllabus will be posted on Blackboard, and updated with any changes we find we need to make as we progress through the semester. You may also find your course grades posted in the Blackboard gradebook.

## Schedule of Classes

### Unit One: Understanding the History of the Complex Relationship between U.S. Religion and Politics

#### Week 1

--August 26: Introduction to our course

--August 28: Research Workshop led by Information/Reference Librarian Dorothy Glew

#### Week 2

--Sept 2: Noll and Harlow, Introduction and Chapter 1

**After you carefully read this chapter with your pen in hand, write up an outline of the main points and argument of this chapter. Use no more than one page. Bring this with you to class on Sept. 2.**

*First Great Awakening* 1

*Second Great Awakening* 2

*Evangelical piety* 3

Examine, compare and contrast Declaration of Independence and Constitution on religious language, issues  
4/5

--Sept 4: Noll and Harlow, Chapters 2 and 3 Bring your outline to class

*Covenant and elect community* 6

*1792 sermon by David Tappan (p 72)* 10

*Manicheanism* 7

*1790 Daniel Foster election sermon (p 73)* 11

*Millennialism* 8

*1812 address by John Fiske (p 75)* 12

*Jeremiad (find sermon example from this period)* 9

#### Week 3

--Sept 9: Noll and Harlow, 4 and 5 Bring your outline to class

*Henry Alline's religious experience (97)* 13

*Francis Asbury – who was he, what did he do, how is he emblematic of this period?* (99) 14

*Nathan Bangs – who was he, what did he do, how is he emblematic of this period?* (105ff) 15

*John Leland – find a typical sermon representing his style and message and share some of it with the class*  
(109ff) 16

--Sept 11: Ruether, Introduction and Chapter 1 Bring your outline to class

*John Cotton's Sermon, "God's Promise to his Plantations," (p.28)* 17

*Find out more about Alexander Whitaker from Jamestown in 1611 in Conrad Cherry's book (p 31)* 18

#### Week 4

--Sept 16: Ruether, Chapter 2 Bring your outline to class

Find Ezara Stiles' sermon from 1783 in Conrad Cherry's book (p 37) 19

Find out more about the laws to make Indians convert in Segal and Stineback's book (p 44) 20

--Sept 18: Prepare for First Assignment/Short Paper

## Week 5

\*\*\*\*--Sept 23: Assignment due, hard copy at beginning of class\*\*\*\*

--Sept 25: Noll and Harlow, 5 Bring your outline to class

## Week 6

--Sept 30: Noll and Harlow, 6 and 8 Bring your outline to class

***Due at the beginning of class: your short paragraph outlining the theme you intend to explore for your research project***

--Oct 2: Ruether, Chapter 3 Bring your outline to class

## Week 7

--Oct 7 (no class; fall recess) Read: Noll and Harlow, 9 Bring your outline to class

\*\*\*\*--Oct 9 Assignment Due\*\*\*\*

## Week 8

--Oct 14 Ruether, Chapter 4 Bring your outline to class

--Oct 16 Noll and Harlow, 14 and 16 Bring your outline to class

## Week 9

--Oct 21 Ruether, Chapter 5 Bring your outline to class

***Due at beginning of class: Your annotated bibliography for your research project***

--Oct 23 Ruether, Chapter 6 Bring your outline to class

## **Unit Two: Modeling Exploration of a Contemporary Theme: Obama, Wright, and the Dynamic of Black Theology in the Current Presidential Election**

### Week 10

\*\*\*\*--Oct 28 Assignment Due/ Introduction to Unit Two\*\*\*\*

--Oct 30

### Week 11

--Nov 4

--Nov 6

## **Unit Three: Student-Led Exploration/Research of Themes in Contemporary Religion and Politics**

## Week 12

--Nov 11

--Nov 13

## Week 13

--Nov 18

--Nov 20

## Week 14

--Nov 25

(Thanksgiving Recess: Nov. 26-30)

## Week 15

--Dec. 2

--Dec. 4

## Week 16

--Dec. 9 Discussion of final paper, wrap up of our course, course evals.