

POLS 219/311, Fall 2015  
SPIRITED AWAY  
Questions of God in Politics  
LIE-01, MW 10:35am-noon

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Office hours: W, 12-3:15 pm; alt T/Th, 8:30-9:30 am; by appt.

The course is designed as a set of provocations to thought on various issues where “religion” is deemed a problem for politics, and politics as a “problem” for religion--acknowledging that this designation of “problems” is possible only in the context of the supposed secularization in the West and through its actions in the rest of the world that proceeded as if cleansing the political and the religious of each other. The course approaches religion politically, asking: Is politics always religious, and in what ways? Is religion ever apolitical, and in what ways?

Often we complain about how so many contemporary political conflicts emerge from an unhealthy attachment to histories of religious identity, war, and conflict, but at the same time many proposed ways forward use concepts deeply indebted to those histories. How, and to what end, might we construct genealogies of contemporary debates over the relation between politics and religion? In this course, we try to come to a deeper understanding of some of these patterns and interactions between the religious and the political, and how the porous boundaries between the sacred and the secular make it possible for beliefs and practices in one area to affect the other. This is not a class on theology or belief systems; I am no theologian and do not pretend to be an expert on any of the faiths that we consider in this class. Instead, we will first (in Part I) survey how we theorize about the role of religion in politics and how this effort can, in turn, in Part II, help us better understand a range of concrete cases and challenges in contemporary politics, both at home and abroad.

In Part I, we consider intellectual and philosophical debates, the effect of religious laws and traditions on the practice of politics, and the influence of politics on religious and theological discourse and practice. In order to understand a spate of contemporary social ills around the world, we first clarify some issues of method and history around the concept of religion and the frames, within which it has been seen to relate to politics and other concepts that surround the two, including but not limited to the popular frame of political theology. We visit some key intellectual and philosophical debates, the effect of religious laws and traditions on the practice of politics, and the influence of politics on religious and theological discourse and practice. We turn to the Crusades, medieval political thought, the invention of race, Renaissance attempts at secularism, eventually entering the modern era as one obsessed with creating and administering walls between the political and the theological, the church and the state, among others, overseeing a supposed exit of religion from politics. We also consider modern and postmodern engagements with liberal secularism, and the subsequent attempts to re-enchant our political existences.

In Part II, we turn to key religio-political problems as presented in various modes of writing from the historical to the journalistic to the philosophical, to spur some inventive inquiries of our own. The approach is not theological, and it will not make a claim or even a gesture to any exhaustive understanding of any faith being discussed. Ours is an era of religious fundamentalism and fanaticism, and also of atheists joining with orthodox theologians to think past capitalism and other terrors. This course goes past the seeming contradiction to ask what sponsors this coincidence, and what kinds of thought and action are demanded of us in this moment.

## TEXTS

### *Required*

De Vries, Hent. *Political Theologies* (available entirely online, in pdf form)

Asad, Talal. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford, 2003 (excerpts available online)

Butler, Asad, West, et al. *Power of Religion in the Public Sphere* (this is available entirely online, in pdf form)

Connolly, William. *Why I am not a Secularist*. Minnesota, 2000

Devji, Faisal. *Landscapes of the Jihad*.

### *Recommended*

Armstrong, Karen. *Fields of Blood*

De Vries, Hent. *Religion: Beyond a Concept*.

### *Other Helpful Resources*

Derrida, Jacques. *Acts of Religion*. Routledge, 2001

Gauchet, Marcel. *The Disenchantment of the World*. Princeton, 1999

Zizek, Slavoj. *The Neighbor: Three Inquiries in Political Theology*. Chicago, 2006

Aquinas, Thomas. *On Faith and Reason*. Hackett, 1999

Bennett, Jane. *The Enchantment of Modern Life*. Princeton, 2001

Casanova, Jose. *Public Religions in the Modern World*. Chicago, 1994

Chadwick, Owen. *The Secularization of the European Mind in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge, 1990

Lupton, Julia. *Citizen-Saints: Shakespeare and Political Theology*. Chicago, 2005

Manent, Pierre. *An Intellectual History of Liberalism*. Princeton, 1996

Zizek & Davis. *Theology and the Political: The New Debates*. Duke, 2005

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Ability to see the relation of key political, social, and cultural concepts to a history of religion.
2. Ability to assess the differences between various approaches to “religion in politics” and to articulate one for oneself (even if it changes depending on which problem is being approached).
3. Ability to identify and recall the key turns in the history of political thought pertaining to religion and its political and cultural manifestations.
4. Exposure to the debates around secularism, and an ability to develop one’s own position on them.
5. Ability to find the continuities and discontinuities between the major political theological positions, especially those derived from major monotheistic religions (Christianity, Judaism, Islam).
6. Ability to distinguish in what ways these major monotheistic religions are distinct from other religions in terms of a claim to any discrete political theology at all.
7. Ability to address key contemporary world problems associated with religion in some depth, at least by drawing on the tools provided in the early part of the course.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

**Class participation and presentation.** Required by everyone. You will be asked to make short presentations on readings over the course of the semester. The week after Fall break, we will hold a roundtable on the volume *Power of Religion in the Public Sphere*, where every student will represent one of the thinkers. (15%)

**Writing:** Please see insertions in the class schedule that detail the writing prompts and requirements. Summarised as follows:

	200-level	300-level
Assignment 1 (Sep 3, pertaining to Weeks I and II, 10%)	2 pages	2 pages
Assignment 2 (Sep 17, pertaining to Weeks III and IV, 12%)	3-5 pages	3-5 pages
Assignment 3 (Oct 8, pertaining to Weeks V-VII, 13%)	3-5 pages	5-7 pages
Assignments 4-6 (Case studies, due Thu of relevant week, 30% )	2-3 pages	3-5 pages
Final (Exam week, 20%)	Research proposal (5-7 pages)	Research paper (12-15 pages)

**Please Note: Late submissions will NOT be graded.**

## CLASS SCHEDULE

In the course schedule below, all references are to required and recommended texts, unless otherwise stated. Readings marked with an asterisk are on electronic reserve. On days where the reading load is a little heavy (esp. weeks 3, 6, and 7), we will divide up the readings among ourselves. Students taking the course at the advanced level will be responsible for **one** supplementary reading every week, either from those listed on the syllabus or the *Political Theologies* volume.

### PART ONE

#### Week I

- M, Aug 24 Introduction  
\*“Three Approaches to the Study of Religion,” *The Immanent Frame?*
- W, Aug 26 \*Talal Asad, “The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category”  
“Craig Martin, “Interview with Talal Asad: Genealogies of Religion: 20 Years On”  
\*Jose Casanova, “Public Religions Revisited”

#### Week II

- M, Aug 31 \*Hent De Vries, “Introduction” to *Political Theologies*
- W, Sep 2 \*Hent De Vries, “Introduction” to *Political Theologies*
- R, Sep 3 *Writing prompt 1: What is one contemporary challenge to thinking about politics and religion that De Vries identifies that resonates with you? How does he connect it to the history of*

political philosophy? What is one topic or problem that you are drawn to investigating in this course in a comparable way? (2 pages double-spaced)

**Week III**

**Symposium on the History of Political Thought—Kingdom and Sovereignty, Then and Now**

M, Sep 7

\*St. Paul, *Letter to the Romans*  
Giorgio Agamben, *Pilate and Jesus*

Supplementary:

\*Goodchild, Philip. The Exceptional Political Theology of Saint Paul”

\*Gignac, Alain. “Taubes, Badiou, Agamben: Reception of Paul by Non-Christian Philosophers Today

W, Sep 9

\*Victoria Kahn, “Political Theology and Fiction in *The King’s Two Bodies*”

\*Santner, *The Royal Remains* (selection)

Supplementary:

\*Ernst Kantorowicz, “The Kings Two Bodies” (excerpt)

**Week IV**

**Symposium on the History of Political Thought**

*(please pair the Wolin and the De Vries chapters where possible)*

M, Sep 14

\*Sheldon Wolin, *Politics and Vision*, Chs 4-6

W, Sep 16

\*Hent De Vries, ed., *Political Theologies*, pp. 91-136

R, Sep 17

**Writing prompt 2: Pick one thinker you encounter in the readings for Weeks III and IV, find a short original work or excerpt by them, provide an exegesis and the historical and geopolitical context. (3-5 pages double-spaced)**

**Week V**

**Secularism and After: Complications, Qualifications, and Reassessments**

M, Sep 21

\*Hent De Vries, ed., *Political Theologies*, pp. 148-183  
“The Poison and the Cure”: On Critchley’s *Faith of the Faithless*

W, Sep 23

\*Karl Marx, “On the Jewish Question”

\*Artemy Magun, “Karl Marx and Hannah Arendt on the Jewish Question: Political Theology as a Critique”

**Week VI**

**Secularism and After: Complications, Qualifications, and Reassessments**

M, Sep 28

\*Joseph Massad, Interview

\*Jerrold Frakes, ed., *Contextualizing the Muslim Other in Medieval Christian Discourse*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011. (selection TBD)

W, Sep 30

\*Andrew March, “Genealogies of Sovereignty in Islamic Political Theology”

\*Ebrahim Moosa, “Muslim Political Theology”

\*Ernst & Martin, on postorientalist Islamic Religious Studies

<u>Week VII</u>	<b>Secularism and After: Complications, Qualifications, and Reassessments</b>
M, Oct 5	*Lynn Ramey, <i>Black Legacies</i> (selection) *Jared Hickman, "Globalization and the Gods, or the Political Theology of 'Race'" *Corey Walker, "The Empire and the Garden"
W, Oct 7	*Rosie Braidotti, on post-secular feminism *Kathleen Biddick, TBD
R, Oct 8	<i>Writing Prompt 3: Short analytical essay on Weeks V-VII in conversation with your own personal history with religion, developing a thesis that might inform your analysis of contemporary issues.</i> 200-level: 3-5 pages, 2-3 thinkers 300-level: 5-7 pages, 5 thinkers
M, Oct 12	BREAK
W, Oct 14	BREAK
<b>PART TWO</b>	Depending on the interests in contemporary topics, Part II readings and foci might change, in consultation with everyone
200-level	Case studies (see template) for 3 out of 7 weeks (2-3 pages), handed in on the Thursday of the relevant week. Final: Research proposal, 5 pages, on one of the topics.
300-level	Case studies (see template) for 3 out of 7 weeks (2-3 pages), handed in on the Thursday of the relevant week. Final: In-depth research paper on one of those topics (12-15 pages), submitted at the end of the semester. I have placed a number of readings on Moodle to help out with this research.
<u>Week VIII</u>	<b>The State, Religion, and the Public</b>
M, Oct 19	Roundtable Discussion on Butler, et al., <i>Power of Religion in the Public Sphere</i>
W, Oct 21	Talal Asad, Chapter 6 from <i>Formations of the Secular</i> *Mahmood, Saba. "Interview with Talal Asad: Modern Power and the Reconfiguration of Religions Traditions"  Supplementary: *Gil Anidjar, "Secularism" *Matthew Scherer, "Landmarks in the Critical Study of Secularism" *Akeel Bilgrami, "Secularism: Its Content and Context" *Charles Hirschkind, "Is there a Secular Body?"
<u>Week IX</u>	<b>Focus: Immanence or the State? From Jihad to ISIS</b>
Oct 26-28	Faisal Devji, <i>Landscapes of the Jihad</i> ISIS (See folder on Moodle)
<u>Week X</u>	<b>Europa, Europa</b>
M, Nov 2	*Pope Benedict XVI, "Prepolitical Moral Foundations of a Free Republic" in De Vries' <i>Political Theologies</i> , pp. 261-8 and any one of the following:

\*“Political Theologies in Europe” in *Religion: Beyond a Concept*  
\*Jose Casanova, “Religion, European Secular Identities, and European Integration”  
\*Schuh, et al. “Contested Secularities: Religious Minorities and Secular Progressivism in the Netherlands”

W, Nov 4      *\*Is Critique Secular?*  
**Focus: Charlie Hebdo, Blasphemy in Pakistan (See folder on Moodle)**

Week XI  
M, Nov 9      **States—The Metropolises and the Colony**  
\*Gauri Viswanathan, “Literacy and Conversion in the Discourse of Hindu Nationalism”  
or selection from *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief*  
Christianity and American Imperial Formations (selection TBD)  
\*Rogers Brubaker, “Religion and Nationalism: Four Approaches”

W, Nov 11      **Focus: Right-wing Hinduism in India, Evangelicism in the US (See folder on Moodle)**  
Jennifer Coleman, “Authoring (In)Authenticity, Regulating Religious Tolerance: the Legal and Political Implications of Anti-Conversion Legislation for Indian Secularism”

Week XII  
M, Nov 16      **Gender, Race, Nation**  
\*J. Kameron Cooper, “In the Shadow of Charleston” or “Christian Atheism: The Only Response Worth Its Salt To The Zimmerman Verdict”  
\*Kiese Laymon, “Black Churches Taught Us To...”  
**Focus: The Black Church**

W, Nov 18      \*Veena Das, “The Figure of the Abducted Woman: The Citizen as Sexed,” in *Political Theologies*, pp. 427-43  
\*Symposium on “Religion, Gender, and the Muslimwoman” in *Feminist Studies in Religion*,  
**Focus: The Muslimwoman/Abortion/Gay Marriage/the Women of ISIS**

M, Nov 23      BREAK  
W, Nov 25      BREAK

Week XIII  
M, Nov 30      **Focus: continued from Week XII**

W, Dec 2      **Violence: Redemptive? Revolutionary? Transcendent?**  
\*Benjamin, “Critique of Violence”  
\*Schmitt, from “Political Theology: Four Essays” (selection TBD)  
\*Butler and de Wilde on Benjamin in *Political Theologies*, pp. 188-219

Week XIV  
M, Dec 7      **Liberation? Redemption? Revolution? Transcendence? What are you talking about?**  
Selections from *The Neighbour* and *Theology and the Political*, placed on Moodle. Everyone signs up to read one essay of their choice and presents on it in class.

W, Dec      Presentations

## COLLEGE POLICIES

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### ACCESSIBILITY STATEMENT

The College aims to make learning experiences as accessible as possible to all students, and I am fully committed to this as well. If you anticipate or experience physical or other barriers in the course based on a disability, please contact Jeannie Altshuler, Director of Accessibility and Academic Support, in the Win Commons ([jaltshuler@simons-rock.edu](mailto:jaltshuler@simons-rock.edu) ; 413-528-7383) to arrange for reasonable accommodations.

### CREDIT HOUR POLICY (from 2015-16 *Catalogue*)

Simon's Rock assumes that students in full-semester introductory (100-level) or intermediate (200-level) classes will spend an average of 2.25 hours preparing for each contact hour, for a total of just over 140 hours of study per semester for a three-credit class. Classes with a laboratory component are worth four credits because of the extra 3 hours of lab each week and the related work outside of class. Advanced classes are worth four credits because the work outside of class is more extensive; students are expected to spend 3.25 hours in preparation for each contact hour. Modular (half semester) classes are assigned two credits as they move at a slightly faster pace than full semester classes, and students are expected to spend 3.25 hours in preparation for each contact hour. Students taking a normal full-time course load of 15 credits should be prepared to spend no fewer than 48 hours engaged in academic study (including in-class time and preparation for classes) each week. Students taking more credits should be prepared to spend more time engaged in academic study; e.g., taking 18 credits requires no fewer than 60 hours each week for academic study.

### ATTENDANCE POLICY (from 2015-16 *Catalogue & Student Handbook*)

Students are expected to attend all classes for which they are scheduled. Generally, an instructor's evaluation of a student's work depends in part on class participation; therefore, absence from class is viewed as an irrevocably lost opportunity for both the individual student and the class collectively. Classes immediately before and after vacations are as important as any other classes during a term; students are expected to attend them and to limit their vacations to the days prescribed in the College's academic calendar. Final exam days are part of the academic semester and students should plan on being on campus through the end of the exam period. Students who miss more than one week of a class may be suspended from the class.

### ACADEMIC HONESTY STATEMENT

All students are expected to know and uphold the college's policies on academic honesty as described in the Simon's Rock *Catalogue*.

### RESPECT CLAUSE

Meaningful and constructive dialogue is encouraged in this class and requires a degree of mutual respect, willingness to listen, and open-mindedness of opposing points of view. Respect for individual differences and alternative viewpoints will be maintained at all times in this class. One's words and use of language should be temperate and within acceptable bounds of civility and decency.