Religion and Politics After the Enlightenment
GOVT-788-01 Spring 2008
Georgetown University
Wednesday 12:15PM - 02:45PM
Berkley Center Conference Room, 3307 M Street, Suite 200

Instructor
Michael Kessler, mjk62@georgetown.edu

Course Description
Recent generations have witnessed a reawakening of potent, even vehement, forms of political theologies. Across the globe, vigorous political expression of impassioned belief has emerged within contemporary political orders. Even when political theologies do not turn to physical violence, recent advocates have espoused taking control of the political order for religiously-motivated goals, using a vast arsenal of legal, cultural, and electoral means.

This surge of political religion comes at a time when forces of urbanization, globalization, and advances in knowledge and technology have spread, forces that were supposed to quell religious piety and make faith increasingly benign, according to many academics and secular theorists. Religion has not become a domesticated sphere, separated from politics and other sectors of human society. Countering the so-called secularization thesis, God’s followers have not receded quietly and they increasingly assert their role in the political order.

This persistence of political theologies poses many important issues:

- How do religions legitimate their political activity?
- How do religions, newly conscious of history, time, and material reality, shape their political activity?
- How do they grapple with modern demands of reason and the principles of liberal democracy in formulating their political agenda?
- How can liberal democratic political communities, shaped by enlightenment ideals, accommodate—or cabin—political theologies?

As religious thinkers in the West grappled with the meaning of modernity and how religious belief and practice could properly, if at all, enter into the public sphere, they came to a new understanding of the limits of power politics and the role of religion in shaping the collective order.

This seminar will examine—through close readings and discussion—key texts in the modern development of Christian and Jewish political theology. Among the topics to be discussed:

- The secularization of political and legal authority
- The rise of liberalism (political and theological)
- The role and limits of revelation and tradition as a source of meaning and authority
• The impact of historical consciousness on the claims of religious authority, particularly for
• Political messianism
• The enduring religious sources—if any—of legitimating liberal democratic politics

Office Hours, etc.
I am available by appointment in my office at the Berkley Center, 3307 M Street, Suite 200. Email me for an appointment. I can also be reached by email anytime.

Requirements of participants
• A substantial research paper is to be prepared and submitted by the end of the semester. Topics should be discussed with the instructor.
• Each student will be responsible for guiding discussion of a text during class sessions.
• Involved, prepared participation in seminar meetings.

Readings
Many readings are in PDF form on the course’s blackboard website. I have also ordered the following books for purchase at the GU bookstore:

• John Rawls, Political Liberalism
• Mark Lilla, The Stillborn God

N.B. A few classes, like the first one, have a larger reading list than others. I’ll try to give you pointers about the sections to concentrate on.

Class Schedule

INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF MODERNITY IN POLITICAL THEOLOGY

January 16
• Remind yourself of and bring
  o Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, chaps 6 (on passions); 11 (on manners); 12 (on religion); 13 (natural condition of humankind); 14 (1st/2nd laws of nature); 17 (commonwealth) (preferably Hackett ed.)
  o John Locke, 2nd Treatise of Government, Books 1-9 (selections) (preferably Cambridge ed.)
• Immanuel Kant, “What is Enlightenment?” (Hackett ed.)
• Robert Pippin, Modernism as a Philosophical Problem, pp. 1-29
• Louis Dupre, Passage to Modernity, 29-41, 65-102, 112-144
• Jurgen Habermas, A Theory of Communicative Action, vol. 1, pp. 43-53

CLASSIC LIBERAL POLITICAL THEOLOGY

January 23
• Ernst Troeltsch, Christian Thought: Its History and Application, F. von Hügel, ed., (Eugene OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1999), pp. 3-33
  o “Faith and History” pp. 134 ff.
  o “Eschatology” pp. 146 ff.
  o “Christian Natural Law” pp. 159 ff.
  o “Political Ethics and Christianity” pp. 173 ff.
  o “On the Possibility of a Liberal Christianity” pp. 343 ff.

January 30
• Hermann Cohen, Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism, 1919, chaps. 5, 8, 16
• Cohen, selection of essays from Reason and Hope, ed. by Eva Jospe, (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College, 1993).
  o “Religion and Contemporary Culture” 44-61
  o “Classical Idealism and the Hebrew Prophets” 66-101
  o “Reason and Moral Awareness” 132-160
  o “Religion and Zionism” 164-171

THE PROTESTANT BREAK

February 6
• Karl Barth, The Epistle to the Romans, selections
• Barth, “The Christian Community and The Civil Community” and “The Christian Community in the Midst of Political Change” in Against the Stream (New York: Philosophical Library)
• Barth, The Humanity of God, selections
February 13
- Karl Barth, continued

CHRISTIAN REALISM

February 20
  - Intro, Chapters 1-4, 7-10

MODERN POLITICAL THEOLOGY

February 27

March 5 No class, Spring Break

March 12
- Tillich, continued

March 19
- Metz, *A Passion for God*, selections from chaps 1, 2, and 9
- Metz, “The Church’s Social Function in the Light of a “Political Theology,” *Concilium*, 1968:6

March 26
• Jürgen Moltmann, “Political Theology,” *Theology Today*, 28:1, April 1971
• Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*, pp. 1-9, 16-20, 129-139, 191-202, 209-222
• Hans Schmidt, “Politics and Christology: Historical Background,” *Concilium*, 1968:6

MODERN CATHOLIC SOCIAL AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

April 2
• Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (1893)
• Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno* (1931)
• John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus* (1991)

POST-MODERN JEWISH POLITICAL THEOLOGY

April 9
• Levinas, “Is Ontology Fundamental?” *Basic Philosophical Writings*, (Bloomington: Indiana, 1996)

CONTEMPORARY CRITIQUES OF POLITICAL THEOLOGY

April 16
• Mark Lilla, *The Stillborn God*
• Readings from SSRC’s *Immanent Frame* online reviews of Lilla

April 23
• John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*