For God and Country?
Religion and Citizenship
Theology 486
Boston College, Spring 2007

Professor Erik Owens
Class meets: Tuesdays 2:00-4:30pm
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Course description:
This course explores the religious-ethical dimensions of citizenship, with particular attention to the points at which religious and political allegiances conflict (or appear to conflict). Drawing upon diverse faith traditions, historical periods and geographic regions, we will consider the nature of this conflict, attempts to resolve it (in theory and practice), and contemporary issues that exemplify it. In the process we will ask such questions as: Are patriotism and faith compatible? What is the difference between a good person and a good citizen? (And can we be one but not the other?) What are the limits of religious tolerance in a diverse society? When, if ever, is civil disobedience required?

In Part 1 of the course we will examine the development of citizenship as a legal, political and civic concept. From the homogeneous city-states of ancient Greece to the vast multi-ethnic states of the 21st century, the dominant form of political community has changed dramatically, and with it the meaning of citizenship. We will see how this change occurs over time, and how citizenship is defined today in Europe, Asia and North America. In Part 2 we will consider citizenship and civic obligation from a theological perspective, drawing upon the work of important Jewish, Muslim and Christian writers. Turning to the contemporary United States, in Part 3 we will explore in depth a series of issues that exemplify the tension between and religious and political allegiances, including patriotism, civic education, tolerance and civil disobedience.

Course Outline

Part 1: Citizenship as a legal, political and civic concept
Jan 16: Introduction; What is citizenship?
Jan 23: Citizenship in ancient and modern Europe
Jan 30: Citizenship in the United States
Feb 6: Citizenship in the contemporary global context

Part 2: Religious reflection on civic obligation
Feb 13: Scriptural resources
Feb 20: Augustine and Aquinas
Feb 27: Reformation views on the religious citizen
Mar 13: Selected contemporary theological arguments
Mar 20: Midterm exam [in-class]

Part 3: Religion and citizenship in conflict
Mar 27: Civic engagement
Apr 3: Public education
Apr 10: Patriotism [Paper proposals due]
Apr 17: Tolerance
Apr 24: Incivility and civil disobedience
May 1: Conclusion and Review
May 11: Final papers due
Required Texts:
Most of the course readings will be articles or chapters placed on online reserve. Where possible, the entire books or journals from which these articles were taken have been placed on reserve as well. The following texts have been ordered at the BC bookstore, and are also on reserve at the library:

Suggested readings are also provided for many topics we will discuss. (When we read part of a book, the rest of the book is also recommended, although I do not state so in the syllabus.) These are intended primarily to serve as additional bibliographical support for your research papers; you will not be expected to read them, and you will not be tested on them.

Course requirements:

1. **Participation:** 10% of your grade will be based on your participation in class discussions. Diverse points of view will be presented in the course readings, and they are likewise welcomed in the ensuing discussion. In the interest of maintaining an ongoing, constructive dialogue about topics that can be rather contentious, you are expected to demonstrate mutual respect and civility in the classroom.

2. **Midterm exam:** A midterm examination, worth 25% of your grade, will be taken during class on March 20. You will be required to answer essay questions by reflecting upon (and referring to) the texts from parts 1 and 2 of the course.

3. **Student presentations:** Each student will lead discussion of an article or book in Part 3 of the course. You will be graded on your knowledge of the text, ability to summarize it for the class, and the questions you pose for discussion. This assignment is worth 15% of your final grade. You will select the topic of your presentation in early February to give you ample time to prepare.

4. **Final paper:** You are required to construct a well-written scholarly argument (12-15pp for undergrads, 15-20pp for grad students) about an aspect of religion and citizenship that you find challenging, compelling, or curious. Your paper must draw upon the course readings; although additional research is welcomed when appropriate, it is neither required nor expected. This assignment is worth 50% of your final course grade.

5. **Extra credit opportunity:** Many of the events we sponsor at the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life directly address the questions we will take up in this class. You can receive a 5-point bonus on your final paper grade if you attend a Boisi Center event this semester and write a 400-500 word reflection on that event, with special attention to its implications for religion and citizenship.
Course Schedule

Part 1: Citizenship as a legal, political and civic concept

Jan 16: What is citizenship?

Jan 23: Citizenship in ancient and modern Europe

Required reading:

Suggested reading:

Jan 30: Citizenship in the United States

Required reading:

Feb 6: Citizenship in the contemporary global context

Required reading:

Suggested reading:
- Martha Nussbaum, “Religion and Women's Equality: The Case of India” [in *Obligations of Citizenship*]

Part 2: Religious reflection on civic obligation

Feb 13: Scriptural resources

Required reading:
- Selections from the Torah and Prophets: Exodus 20-23 (Decalogue and Covenant Code); Amos (entire); Jeremiah 31.31-34 (new covenant).
- Selections from the Qur’an (suras on the political values of a Muslim polity).
Feb 20:  **Augustine and Aquinas**

**Required reading:**

- Thomas Aquinas, intro and selections from *Summa Theologica* in From Irenaeus to Grotius, p. 320-27, 342-61.

Feb 27:  **Reformation views on the religious citizen**

**Required reading:**

- Martin Luther, “On Temporal Authority,” in From Irenaeus to Grotius, pp. 581-95
- Michael Sattler, “The Schleitheim Confession” (aka Schleitheim Articles), in From Irenaeus to Grotius, pp. 631-37.

[Feb 28]  Optional:  Boisi Center panel discussion: “The ‘Theocons’ in American Public Life”

Gasson 305, 4:30 PM, with Damon Linker, Jorge Garcia and Alan Wolfe

Mar 13:  **Selected contemporary theological arguments**

**Required reading:**


**Suggested reading:**

- Abdulaziz Sachedina, “The Role of Islam in the Public Square: Guidance or Governance?” ISIM Papers vol. 5 (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006).

Mar 20:  **Midterm exam**

**Required reading:**


Higgins 300, 9am - 3:30pm
Part 3: Religion and citizenship in conflict

Mar 27: Civic engagement

Required reading:
- Major speeches on religion and public life by George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Bill Clinton, Mario Cuomo and John F. Kennedy. [Handouts]

Apr 3: Public education

Required reading:

Suggested reading:

Apr 10: Patriotism

*** Paper proposals due ***

Required reading:
- Watch “Religious Freedom and the Pledge of Allegiance” online at Boston College Front Row, http://frontrow.bc.edu/program/newdow/

Suggested reading:

Apr 17: Tolerance

Required reading:
Suggested reading:
• Alan Wolfe, “Civil Religion Revisited: Quiet Faith in Middle-Class America,” in Obligations of Citizenship...

Apr 24:  Incivility and civil disobedience

Required reading:
• Thomas Jefferson, Declaration of Independence (1776)
• Martin Luther King, Jr., “Letter from Birmingham Jail [1963],” from Why We Can’t Wait , p. 77-100.

Suggested reading:
• Henry David Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience”

May 1:  Conclusion and Review
• No reading assignment.

May 11:  Final papers due.