

Political Studies Program, Summer 2014
REASON, FAITH, AND POLITICS
Instructor: Robert Kraynak
Washington, D.C.

This seminar will explore the relation between the two highest kinds of knowledge—reason (in the form of philosophy and science) and faith (in the form of divine revelation and theology). We will examine some thinkers who claim that reason and faith are incompatible, requiring an either-or choice because they cannot be synthesized, and other thinkers who claim that the two are compatible and can be reconciled in a harmonious whole in which reason is perfected by faith.

After exploring the relation of reason and faith, we will examine the political teachings of divine law, natural law, and practical reason as they are found in several writings—including the Bible as well as selections from St. Thomas Aquinas, Emil Fackenheim, Reinhold Niebuhr, Martin Luther King, Jr., and papal encyclicals. We will consider what form of government and what kind of social and economic institutions are required by divine and natural law, and also which regime—kingship, theocracy, or liberal democracy—is most compatible with the teachings of divine and natural law.

Monday, July 28, 2014, 9:00 am – Noon

Reason and Faith in Conflict

Reading:

- Leo Strauss, “On the Interpretation of Genesis”
- Leo Strauss, “The Mutual Influence of Philosophy and Theology”
- Soren Kierkegaard, “The Knight of Faith”
- Soren Kierkegaard, “Concluding Unscientific Postscript”
- Soren Kierkegaard, “The Present Age”

Discussion Questions:

1. Why does Strauss think that two roots of Western civilization—classical philosophy (Athens) and Biblical faith (Jerusalem)—are in conflict with each other and cannot be synthesized? What advice does Strauss give for living with this unresolvable conflict?
2. Why does Kierkegaard believe that religion is a “leap of faith” into the “absurd”? How is this view of faith reflected in his interpretation of Abraham and Christianity?
3. Why is Christian faith so difficult in the “present age” of democratic mass society?

Tuesday, July 29, 2014, 9:00 am – Noon

Reason and Faith in Harmony

Reading:

- Francis S. Collins, *The Language of God*, Chs. 1–5, 8–10
- OPTIONAL: CS Lewis, *Miracles*, Chs. 1–4

Discussion Questions:

1. How does a modern scientist like Francis Collins reconcile his Christian faith with the doctrines of Big Bang cosmology and Darwinian evolution?
2. What does Collins mean by “theistic evolution”? Is his reconciliation convincing or unconvincing?

Wednesday, July 30, 2014, 9:00 am – Noon

The Jewish State from Moses to Modern Israel

Reading:

- Exodus 19–25
- 1 Samuel 8
- Amos
- Jeremiah 23, 29–31
- Emil Fackenheim, *What is Judaism?*, Chs. 1, 11, 13, 14

Discussion Questions:

1. What does the Hebrew Bible teach about the Jewish state in the period of the original Mosaic law? In the period of kingship under Saul, David, and Solomon? In the period of the later Jewish prophets such as Jeremiah and Amos?
2. Why does Fackenheim think that modern philosophy, the Holocaust, and the founding of the State of Israel require a new interpretation of Judaism for the modern age?

Thursday, July 31, 2014, 9:00 am – Noon

Christianity and Political Realism—Seeking Justice in a Fallen World

Reading:

- Matthew 5–6, 22
- Romans 1–5, 13
- Galatians 1–3
- Colossians 1–4
- Reinhold Niebuhr, “Augustine’s Political Realism”

- Reinhold Niebuhr, “Why the Christian Church is Not Pacifist”
- Reinhold Niebuhr, “The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness”

Discussion Questions:

1. What do the Gospels teach about politics?
2. What is the meaning of Jesus’ distinction between the duties to God and the duties to Caesar?
3. How do the doctrines of original sin and salvation affect the Christian view of justice in the fallen world?
4. How does Niebuhr derive a teaching about “Christian Realism” from the Gospels and from St. Augustine?
5. Is Niebuhr an optimist or a pessimist about democracy, justice, and war or peace?

Friday, August 1, 2014, 9:00 am – Noon

Christianity and Political Idealism: Natural Law Justice

Reading:

- Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, Questions 90.1–4; 91.1–4; 94.2
- Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum*
- Martin Luther King, Jr., Letter from Birmingham Jail

Discussion Questions:

1. Why did Christian theologians develop a teaching about natural law in addition to divine law?
2. How did they learn from the classical and modern philosophers about the nature of man as a rational and social animal?
3. What is justice according to the natural law—does it point to monarchy or democracy? Capitalism or socialism? Just war or strict pacifism? A world of nation states or international law and one world government?
4. How does practical reason apply the principles of natural law to the concrete circumstances of politics?