

Christian Political Thought

Vanguard University of Southern California

Class

Semester: Spring 2018

Room: NMC 201A

Time: Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:30-3:45

Instructor

Kevin Walker, Ph.D.

Office Hours: Mondays, 11-2:15; Tuesdays, 10:30-1:25

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Course Description

Christian faith and political power are hopelessly at odds. On one hand, Jesus Christ was not a lawgiver or statesman, nor does the New Testament offer any mandates on how to order society, nor have even the wisest of Christ's followers given any final teaching on the relationship between "church" and "state." On the other hand, emperors, kings and governments through the ages have always found faithful Christians troublesome: though believers fill Western society, neither popes nor reformers nor common believers have ever fully subordinated their faith to political power, nor have they ever been quite at home on earth, nor have they found their highest end anywhere but in heaven. The more Christian we are, the less we find a place in the world; the more we try to fit Christ into the world, the less true is our faith. Christ is indeed "a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles" (I Cor. 1:23) – a whole new complexity, a bewilderment, a puzzle. But, as Christian philosophers have often pointed out, following Christ is also an intellectual opportunity more wonderful than anything non-Christian philosophers experience. This course is devoted to the great adventures in trying to solve that puzzle, and the approaches taken by thoughtful Christians through the ages. We will begin by examining Augustine's "two cities" teaching in the early Church, and what the Gospel means for the pagan world, followed by Thomas Aquinas' understanding of what grace means for law. We will then consider the new difficulties of the Reformation in the writings of Martin Luther and John Calvin, and the role of Protestantism in the rise of the modern state; the idea of Christian republicanism in America; the progressive political theology of the Social Gospel movement, and the struggle to protect Christian truth against cultural power, and address the new challenges and opportunities for the Christian life in the context of twentieth century liberal democracy; and the possibility of recovering the accumulated wisdom of the Catholic Church. Throughout the course, we will approach each question from the *inside*, as believers who share the core tenants of the Gospel in our thought and follow Christ in our lives, as we examine the assumptions behind citizenship, war, the rule of law, the importance of love, and our duty to the common good. We will always keep in mind that while this world is not our home, the time we spend here is still an important means to that end – never more so than in the way we practice the art of living together through politics.

Required Texts

Students are required to have hard copies (not digital versions) of the following texts, in order of reading:

Augustine. *Political Writings*. Translated by Michael W. Tkacz and Douglas Kries. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1994.

Aquinas, Thomas. *Treatise on Law*. Translated by Richard J. Regan. Hackett Publishing Company, 2000.

Luther, Martin, and Calvin, John. *On Secular Authority*. Translated by Harro Höpfl. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Rauschenbusch, Walter. *A Theology for the Social Gospel*. Martino Fine Books, 2010.

Hauerwas, Stanley, and Willimon, William. *Resident Aliens*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989.

Reading Packet.

Course Requirements and Grading

- **Participation and Reading Questions (20%).** Be prepared to answer reading questions in class, and answer minor research questions on politics and Church history. Inability to answer will result in the loss of a participation point. Since the class is focused entirely on the texts and questions, you will not need a laptop.
- **Essay I (30%).** This is an essay on the first part of the course, particularly the writings of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas.
- **Essay II (30%).** This is an essay on the second part of the course, on Christianity and modernity.
- **Final Exam (20%).** This is a comprehensive exam on the texts and general themes of the class. There will be a study guide.

Academic Integrity

Plagiarism, or the use of someone else's text without quotes and proper citation, is considered a violation of the university's standards of academic integrity and will be grounds for serious disciplinary action. A first offense will be an F on the assignment; a second offense will be an F in the class and a referral to the Dean.

Disabilities

The Office of Disability and Learning Services provides reasonable accommodations for students who need assistance with learning, and for students with disabilities. Reasonable accommodations are established through an interactive process between you, your professor(s) and Disability and Learning Services. If you have a temporary or permanent disability that requires accommodations (this can include but not limited to; attention-related, learning, mental health, vision, hearing, physical or other health conditions), please contact The Office of Disability and Learning Services at 714-619-6550 or disabilityservices@vanguard.edu.

Course Outline

I. The Politics of Revelation and Reason

Week 1 – Jews, Romans and Christians

January 8

The Bible (in class): Exodus 19-20; Deuteronomy 4:1-14; Proverbs 9; 21:1; Isaiah 10; Matthew 5:17-20; Matthew 22:15-22; John 18:28-40; Romans 13:1-8; Galatians 5:1; I Peter 2:13-25; Titus 3; Revelation 21

January 10

Augustine, *City of God* Books I-IV, in *Political Writings*

Week 2 – Christians and Greek Philosophers

January 15

Martin Luther King Day

January 17

Augustine, *City of God* Books V-X, in *Political Writings*

Week 3 – The Two Cities

January 22

Augustine, *City of God* Books XI-XIV, in *Political Writings*

January 24

Augustine, *City of God* Books XV-XVII, in *Political Writings*

Week 4 – Hell, Earth and Heaven

January 29

Augustine, *City of God* Books XVIII-XIX, in *Political Writings*

January 31

Augustine, *City of God* Books XX-XXII, in *Political Writings*

Week 5 – Law and Grace

February 5

Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on Law*, Q. 90-91

February 7

Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on Law*, Q. 92-93

Week 6 – Nature and Revelation

February 12

Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on Law*, Q. 94-95

February 14

Thomas Aquinas, *Treatise on Law*, Q. 96-97

II. Christianity and Modernity

Week 7 – Advice for Christian Tyrants

February 19

President's Day

February 21

Martin Luther, *On Secular Authority*

Week 8 – Protestant Politics

February 26

Martin Luther, *On Secular Authority*

February 28

John Calvin, *On Civil Government*, in *On Secular Authority*

Essay I Due Friday, March 2

Week 9 – Christian Faith and the American Regime

March 5

John Winthrop, *A Model of Christian Charity* (1630); Samuel West, *The Right to Rebel Against Governors* (1776)

March 7

Lucretia Mott, *Discourse on Woman* (1850); Martin Luther King, *Letter from a Birmingham Jail* (1963)

Week 10 – “Relevant” Christianity

March 19

Walter Rauschenbusch, *Theology for the Social Gospel*, Chapter I-V

March 21

Walter Rauschenbusch, *Theology for the Social Gospel*, Chapters VI-X

Week 11 – Social Problems and Gospel Solutions

March 26

Walter Rauschenbusch, *Theology for the Social Gospel*, Chapter XI-XV

March 28

Walter Rauschenbusch, *Theology for the Social Gospel*, Chapter XVI-XIX; Richard Ely, “The State” from *The Social Law of Service* (1896)

Week 12 – Christ Against Politics

April 2

Stanley Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens*, Chapter One

April 4

Stanley Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens*, Chapters Two-Four

Week 13 – The Church and the World

April 9

Stanley Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens*, Chapter Five

April 11

Stanley Hauerwas, *Resident Aliens*, Chapter Seven

Week 14 – Catholic Wisdom

April 16

Pope Leo XIII, *Sapientiae Christianae* (On Christian Citizenship) (1890); Pope John XXIII, *Pacem in Terris* (Peace on Earth) (1963)

April 18

Pope John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* (Faith and Reason) (1998); Pope Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est* (God is Love) (2005)

Essay II Due Friday, April 20

Week 15 – Concluding Debates

April 23

Debates

April 25

Debates

Final Exam: on Wednesday, May 2, 3:30-5:30