

SEPTEMBER 19

**IMPOLITE COMPANY?:
RELIGION AND AMERICAN DEMOCRACY**

DR. PAUL A. DJUPE

*Associate Professor of Political Science
Denison University*

SEPTEMBER 26

**RELIGION AND NONVIOLENT
SOCIAL CHANGE**

DR. EMILY WELTY

*Faculty Lecturer, Political Science and
Peace and Justice Studies
Pace University*

OCTOBER 3

**THE POLITICS OF 'SPIRITUAL
BUT NOT RELIGIOUS' AMERICA**

DR. LAURA O. OLSON

*Professor of Political Science
Clemson University*

OCTOBER 10

**SERVING GOD AND MAMMON?:
ECONOMICS AND CHRISTIANITY**

DR. BRADLEY BATEMAN

*Provost and Executive Vice President
Professor of Economics
Denison University*

OCTOBER 17

**POLITICS AND COMMUNITIES OF FAITH:
AFRICAN-AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY,
MORMONISM AND THE 2012 ELECTION**

DR. JEREMY RAPPORT

*Visiting Assistant Professor of Religious Studies
The College of Wooster*

OCTOBER 24

**HOPE IN HARD TIMES:
DREAMING AND DEMANDING
A BETTER WORLD**

DR. CHARLES KAMMER

*The James F. Lincoln Professor of Religious Studies
The College of Wooster*

Location

All sessions of the Academy are held in the
Lean Lecture Room on the lower level of
Wishart Hall, at Bever and University Streets
on The College of Wooster campus.



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It is a noble land that God has given us; a land set like a sentinel between the two imperial oceans of the world, a greater England with a nobler destiny.

We can not fly from our world duties; it is ours to execute the purpose of a fate that has driven us to be greater than our small intentions.

Albert Beveridge (U. S. Senator,
"The March of the Flag" (1898))

The relationship between religion and politics is complex. Both deal with realities that are deeply important to all persons and both are charged and highly contested. Religion and politics both deal with values, prescribe guidelines for behavior and present visions and programs for our shared social life.

Throughout most of history, societies made no distinction between the realms of politics and religion. The natural and social worlds were seen as direct reflections of a transcendent order. Chinese Emperors were expected to rule according to the laws of the universe. The Roman Emperors were understood as "gods" who ruled the social realm according to the law of the gods. In modified form, this understanding continued into the age of European monarchy and the concept of the "divine right of kings".

Embedded in this close relationship between religion and politics is the recognition that all social orders require sacrifices from its citizens. The sacrifices might entail taxes, military service or following rules that impose restrictions on individuals in order to maintain social order. Such sacrifices were legitimated as being God's will and not just as arbitrary human demands.

The relationship shifts during the Age of Enlightenment culminating with the English, French and American revolutions. Confronted with centuries of "holy wars", civil wars and religious persecutions, modern nation states searched for ways to lessen the power of religion in the political realm. The French sought to create a fully secular state. The United States adopted the notion of "separation of Church and State". This concept meant there would be no state supported Church but also included a notion of freedom of religious practice.

This meant that the modern nation confronted the problem of legitimacy. The United States took an

unusual path. As the Puritans settled America, they understood themselves to be God's chosen people in the Promised Land. The nation would be a model for the world, "a city built on a hill, a light to guide the nations".

The United States, then, developed as both a secular society with legitimacy resting in the "will of the majority", and a highly religious nation where ultimately legitimation is found in God. So, our currency reads, "In God We Trust"; our Pledge of Allegiance declares that we are, "one nation under God"; and our Presidents routinely end their major speeches with the appeal, "God Bless America". Religion, then, has continued to exert a deep influence on politics in the United States. No non-Christian has ever been elected President and all have been Protestants with the exception of John Kennedy, a Catholic.

However, for several decades, beginning in the 1960's, social theorists documented the declining importance of religion. Secularization theory predicted a continuing decline with religion being reduced to its personal dimensions. The process was viewed as inevitable and irreversible.

To the surprise of most, religion has remained remarkably influential and, in many parts of the world, has undergone a resurgence. As many have noted, much of the political conflict in the world today has a significant religious component. Inside the United States, many of the most divisive issues (abortion, gay marriage, stem cell research, capital punishment, teaching of evolution, global warming) are grounded in religious disagreement.

Consequently more attention is being paid to the impact of religion on politics. This impact has many components. The beliefs of individuals shape their political views and activity. Among elected officials, religious belief is a major influence on voting patterns. Religious denominations exert influence through formal resolutions on policy issues. Religious lobbying organizations and social outreach programs also impact social values and policy. And independent religious voices, which control media outlets, work hard to shape social and political values.

While we generally think of religious influences as being conservative and often related to violent conflict, religious influences are significant across the entire political and values spectrum.

Nevertheless, in some respects religion has certainly declined. Much government policy is now legitimated by economic outcomes. Ronald Reagan, during his 1980 campaign, asked voters: "Are you better off than you were four years ago?" This has become the critical political legitimator, not whether our government policies conform to God's will.

But the relationship runs in both directions. Religion continues to fulfill its "priestly" function by blessing the state through prayer and by displaying the national flag in sanctuaries. But religion has been dramatically altered by politics. Religion now, too, increasingly appeals to worldly success and happiness as primary reasons for active engagement in religious life. And religion, whether fundamentalist Christianity or Buddhism, consistently markets itself as a way "to have peace of mind". In other words, religion has become increasingly "priestly," focused on helping persons cope with the rigors and stresses of everyday life.

Robert Bellah, however, has noted that religion has a second role, which he identifies as the prophetic. In this role, religion does, indeed, represent transcendent, universal moral requirements to which the nation state and religious traditions themselves are held accountable. This "prophetic" side stands in judgment of the actual policies and values of the nation state. It is this side of religion which is responsible for the expansion of civil rights to formerly excluded groups. It is the prophetic side that allows religion to function as a force for peacemaking, economic justice and ecological sustainability.

In this Academy we will be exploring the deep and complex relationships between religion and politics, largely within the context of the United States, but recognizing that these dynamics exist in all political and religious interactions.

One day we will have to stand before the God of history. It seems to me that I can hear that God of history saying, "That was not enough! But I was hungry and ye fed me not. I was naked and ye clothed me not. Consequently you cannot enter the kingdom of greatness.

Martin Luther King, Jr.

"Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution"