

The Sacred and the Profane in the Middle Ages
Instructor: John Eldevik, Ph.D
History Department, Pomona College

Catalogue Description

This course will attempt to understand and unravel the complex relationship between secular and sacred ideals of political and social order that characterized much of medieval intellectual discourse. We will examine the ways in which medieval jurists, theologians and religious dissenters reconciled notions of authority and order received from tradition and classical antiquity with the demands of divine revelation and the claims of the Church from the time of Augustine through the age of Conciliarism (ca. 300-1450).

Offered

Spring 2008

Course Overview

Strictly speaking, “secularism” was an term coined in the nineteenth century. Yet the idea of defining a distinction between claims about life and society grounded in humanistic philosophies versus knowledge attained through divinely revealed texts or traditions is one that goes back to the Middle Ages. The Enlightenment was not an inevitability, but neither could it have taken place without the intellectual framework erected by medieval jurists and philosophers who grappled with the relationship between church and state, or, as they put it, *regnum et sacerdotum* – between priestly and royal authority in society. Out of this debate emerged the strains of thought – religious, historical and philosophical – that would eventually form the foundation of a modern idea of the political, that is, a sphere of thought and action based on empirical perceptions of the world and society and not beholden to revealed authority. The course will not attempt to locate the “origins” of secularism in any particular medieval discourse, but emphasize instead the enduring problem of authority and order and the ways in which those same questions resonate with us today in the form of debates over things like individual liberty versus the security of the state. Instead, medieval thinkers conceived of the universe and humanity as a single, divinely-ordered system, or body, but distinguished within it sacred and profane (rather than “secular”) spheres of authority, life and knowledge, and within those sacred and profane spheres, many nested orders of hierarchy. How those realms and their hierarchies related to each other within the body politic formed the crux of medieval political philosophy.

The three great monotheistic faiths that have shaped the Western tradition have all faced the same fundamental problem when it came to the question of civil governance and social order: is all government ordained by God, and thus to be structured according to Scriptural and hierocratic principles, or did God envision a dual system of governance for the world and his followers, namely a sacred and a profane? If so, were they equal, or did one have preeminence over the other? Is political organization, and by extension, civil government, a product of nature (Aristotle), or does it arise from divine providence, or merely the need to control evil in a fallen world? These questions were first articulated

and debated in Christian antiquity, which inherited a complex metaphysical and tradition on one side from Hellenistic and Roman philosophy, and on the other from the Bible and patristic theology. Proceeding from the theopolitical synthesis presented in St. Augustine's masterpiece, *De civitate Dei*, this course will trace the dialectic between hierocratic and royal/secular conceptions of political power and social authority across the medieval West, examining issues such as theories of kingship and divine rulership, ideologies of reform, social justice and political dissent in their historical contexts. The struggle to define the relationship between royal and papal authority will certainly occupy a central place in the syllabus, but we will also explore issues such as biblical exegesis and political theory, the Crusades, the formation of the *ius commune* (which blended canon and Roman legal traditions), as well as alternate systems of thought and dissent, particularly mysticism and popular theologies. An important part of the course will also consist of understanding the key contributions of Jewish and Islamic philosophy to Christian political philosophy in the Middle Ages.

Some of the key texts this course will utilize include the writings of St. Augustine, particularly *The City of God*, the *Ten Books of History* by Gregory of Tours, texts from the eleventh century reform movement and the Crusades, Peter Abelard, John of Salisbury, selected works by Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina, Thomas Aquinas, Marsilius of Padua, Dante, Bartolus of Sassoferrato, William of Ockham and Lorenzo Valla.

Reading Schedule (by week) with possible texts

1. The Greco-Roman Tradition of Statecraft

Plato, *Timaeus*

Aristotle, *Politics*, Bks 1-4

Cicero, *On Laws*, Bk. 2

2. Religion & Politics in the Bible

I Samuel 8-31; II Chronicles 1-9; Romans 13

3. The Constantinian Revolution

Eusebius of Caesarea, *Life of Constantine*

Roman Martyrology (selections)

Peter Brown, "The Rise of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity"

4. The Augustinian Synthesis

Augustine, *Political Writings* (selections)

Ibn Sina (Avicenna), *Metaphysics*, ch. 10

Al-Farabi, *The Political Regime*

5. The Politics of Holiness in the Dark Ages

Gildas, *On the Ruin of the Britains*

Gregory of Tours, *Ten Books of History* (selections)

Jonas of Bobbio, *Life of St. Columbanus*

6. Carolingian Thought

Readings from Agobard of Lyon, Einhard, Hrabanus Maurus and Hincmar of Rheims (ed. Dutton)

Mayke de Jong, "The Empire as Ecclesia: Hrabanus Maurus and Biblical Commentary for Rulers," in *Using the Past in the Early Middle Ages*

7. Religion, War and Violence in the Age of Crusades

Adalbero of Laon, *Poem for King Robert*

Documents on the Peace of God (selections)

Gesta Francorum (selections)

Odo of Deuil, *The Journey of Louis VII to the East* (selections)

Bernard of Clairvaux, *Letter to Pope Eugenius*

8. Reform and Politics in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries

Texts on the Reform Movement & Investiture Controversy (ed. Miller)

Maureen Miller, "Religion Makes a Difference"

9. The New Schools of the Twelfth Century and Political Theology

Peter Abelard, *Christian Theology*, Bk. II

John of Salisbury, *Policraticus* (selections)

10. The Iberian Masters

Avicenna, *The Decisive Treatise* (selections)

Maimonides, *Guide for the Perplexed* (selections)

Isaac Abravanel, *Biblical Commentaries* (selections)

11. Aquinas and the Parisian Controversies

Thomas Aquinas, Selected readings

12. The Avignon Papacy and the Crisis of Church and State

Part I: The Case for the Church

John of Paris

Giles of Rome

Bulls of Boniface VIII and John XXII

Donation of Constantine

13. The Crisis of Church and State

Part II. The Case for the State

Marsilius of Padua

William of Ockham

Lorenzo Valla

Bartolus of Sassoferrato

14. The Politics of Faith and Popular Dissent

Arnold of Brescia (select texts)

John Wyclif
Piers Plowman (selections, esp. Book VII)

15. Research Paper Presentations