

**TOPICS IN MODERN POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY:  
POLITICAL THEOLOGY**

POLS 651  
Northern Illinois University  
Dr. Sarah Beth V. Kitch

Spring 2018  
Tu 3:30-6:10pm  
DuSable Hall 464

**INTRODUCTION**

“An immutable facet of human existence seems to be the desire for metaphysical solace, or a sense of being beyond oneself, in short, of transcendence. We call it by many names, construct myths about it, tell stories of its power and presence, and construct symbols that evoke it. Equally inevitable, it appears, is that this desire includes a sense of the good, the ethical, which beckons us to a standard of conduct, both individual and social. As we construct our social institutions, we are motivated to shape them in a fashion that respects and resembles those ethical codes. Thus, our politics is shaped by a sense of transcendence, (a God, the Gods, the Good, or Justice are just some of the names we give it), and we are in this fashion the creators and possessors of a political theology.”

**THE GOOD IN THE GREEK POETS**

“A man thought the gods deigned not to punish mortals who trampled down the delicacy of things inviolable. That man was wicked. The curse on great daring shines clear; it wrings atonement from those high hearts that drive to evil, from houses blossoming to pride and peril.”

Aeschylus

Aeschylus, *The Oresteia* \*  
Plato, *Republic*, Books V, VI, VII, and X \*\*

**PROMISE AND THE PROPHETIC VOICE**

“The LORD enters into judgement with the elders and princes of his people: ‘It is you who have devoured the vineyard, the spoil of the poor is in your houses. What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?’ says the LORD GOD of hosts.”

Isaiah

Exodus \*\*  
Abraham Joshua Heschel, “What Manner of Man is the Prophet,” *The Prophets* \*\*  
Abraham Joshua Heschel, “Justice,” *The Prophets* \*\*  
Walter Brueggemann, *Prophetic Imagination* \*  
Background: Isaiah

### A KIND OF PEACE: AUGUSTINE

“There is nothing so social by nature, so unsocial by its corruption, as this [human] race.”

Augustine

Augustine, *City of God*, selections \*\*

Reinhold Niebuhr, “The Children of Light and the Children of Darkness” \*\*

### REASON, FAITH, AND THE COMMON GOOD: AQUINAS

“Felicity and happiness are the ultimate end of human life.”

Aquinas

Aquinas, *Political Writings*, selections \*\*

UN Declaration of Human Rights \*\*

### PRESENCE AND POLITICS: CATHOLIC SOCIAL TEACHING (1 WK)

“The church sometimes has locked itself up in small things, in small-minded rules. The most important thing is the first proclamation: Jesus Christ has saved you. And the ministers of the church must be ministers of mercy above all.”

Francis

Pope Leo XIII, “On Capital and Labor,” (*Rerum Novarum*) (1891) \*\*

Pope Paul VI, “Of Human Life,” (*Humanae Vitae*) (1968) \*\*

Pope John Paul II, “Faith and Reason,” (*Fides et Ratio*) (1998) \*\*

Pope Francis, *Laudato Si* (2015) \*

### GUEST LECTURER ON: BONHOEFFER

“It is a kingdom stronger than war and danger, a kingdom of power and authority, signifying eternal terror and judgment to some, and eternal joy and righteousness to others, not a kingdom of the heart, but one as wide as the earth, not transitory but eternal, a kingdom that makes a way for itself and summons men to itself to prepare its way, a kingdom for which it is worth while risking our lives.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* \*

Barmen Declaration \*\*

*Readings subject to change.*

## EXILE AND HOMECOMING

“The brother moved away a little from the cook and, half turning toward d’Arrast, without looking at him, motioned him to an empty place: ‘Sit down with us.’”

Albert Camus

Albert Camus, *The Fall* \*  
*Exile and the Kingdom* \*

## THE DISINHERITED AND THE PROMISED LAND

“And God, sitting high up in his heaven, laughed at poor Old Pharaoh.”

James Weldon Johnson

Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* \*  
James Weldon Johnson, *God’s Trombones* \*

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Race and Religion* \*\*  
Thomas Merton, *Letters to a White Liberal* \*\*  
Fannie Lou Hamer, *Testimony at the DNC* \*\*  
Albert J. Raboteau, “‘Is This America?’ Fannie Lou Hamer and the Voices of Local People” \*\*

Martin Luther King, Jr., *selected speeches* \*\*  
Barack Obama, “*Charleston Eulogy*” \*\*  
Helen Prejean, *The Death of Innocents*, chapters 1, 3 \*\*

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Dr. Sarah Beth V. Kitch  
Email: sbkitch@niu.edu

Office: 416 Zulauf Hall  
Office hours: By appointment

## COURSE OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

Political theology is the analysis and critique of political practices and institutions based on an ethic informed by an interpretation of transcendence. The objective of this course is to achieve an understanding of political theologies in practice.

The essential themes of political theology include responsibility, action, exile, and home. In this course, we will survey some significant examples of this thought in Greek, Hebrew, Christian, and contemporary works. In our endeavor, we draw on works of political philosophy, scripture, literature, film, and song.

Our course is a study of political theology, as distinct from a study of religion and politics. The study of religion and politics addresses, for example, First Amendment issues or the role of religion in shaping political opinions. To examine political theology, by contrast, is to survey various visions of political life which are based on an interpretation of the role of transcendence in the world.

Finally, this course participates in the tradition of liberal education. Throughout the semester, I will invite you to consider the nature and meaning of work in the context of liberal education.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

In each seminar, we will give attention to a set of readings. You can expect that, in my evaluation, I will place emphasis on careful reading, imaginative analysis, and thoughtful interpretation of these texts. Each week, students will be responsible for preparing an interrogative essay. This 1- or 2-page essay establishes and articulates a question about the text. You will submit this essay to me via Blackboard by 3pm each Monday before seminar. Then, you will present your question in class the next day. Your interrogative essays will provide starting points for our discussions.

In addition, you have a choice between a final examination or a final research project. The final exam will ask a broad analytical question on the texts and themes of the course. The final research project will address a topic relating to the course, pending my approval. The exam or research project is due 5pm, Tuesday, May 8.

These assignments will be factored into my evaluation of your class performance along these lines:

Weekly interrogative essays	70 %
Final Exam or Research	30 %

### Grading Scale

A+ = 97-100  
A = 93-96  
A- = 90-92  
B+ = 87-89  
B = 83-86  
B- = 80-82  
C+ = 77-79  
C = 73-76  
C- = 70-72  
D+ = 67-69  
D = 63-66  
D- = 60-62  
F = <60

NIU has a plus/minus grading scale for final course grades. Your course grade is based on a weekly question essay (70%) and a final exam *or* analytical essay (30%). *All* late material will be penalized.

**Auditors:** Auditors will present three 1- or 2-page interrogative essays during the semester. The dates of these presentations are your choice and responsibility.

**Note:** The use of laptops, tablets, and smart phones is not allowed in class, except when approved.

## BLACKBOARD

Login to Blackboard through your myNIU account to access readings and other course materials (posted as PDF files or Internet links) as well as your grades.

## REQUIRED TEXTS

\*\* Students should print the selections marked on syllabus with a double asterisk from Blackboard.

\* Students should purchase the following books (available at the NIU bookstore and through online retailer such as Amazon, AbeBooks, etc.).

Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*, University of Chicago Press  
ISBN 978-0226307787

Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination*  
ISBN 978-0800619251

Francis, *Praise Be to You: Laudato Si'*, Ignatius Press  
ISBN 978-1621640813

Camus, *The Fall*, Vintage Press  
ISBN 978-0679720225

Camus, *Exile and the Kingdom*, Vintage Press  
ISBN 978-0307278586

Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*, Beacon Press  
ISBN 978-0807010297

James Weldon Johnson, *God's Trombones*, Penguin  
ISBN 978-0143105411