

THEO 3253
Spring 2024
Thursdays 3 -5:25
Massa, S.J.

Religion and American Public Life

This is an interdisciplinary undergraduate seminar (required for all RAPL concentrators) focused on the intersection of religion and American culture. It operates on the Socratic method (much more of this in time).

Reading:

Everyone will be expected to have read the assigned texts before our meetings together (usually the texts to open our discussions.

Requirements:

1) Attendance at all class meetings (not an elective) at which you will show your brilliance and wit during our discussion of the texts. Near-death experiences, of course, constitute a valid excuse for not having prepared for class; but precious few other excuses will suffice.

exercises will be passed out the week before they are due, and everyone is most welcome to send me drafts of their work before submission (anxiety free). Further, everyone will be allowed one

and the three highest exercise grades will be averaged together for the final grade.

3) A final historiographic essay of 20 pages (due by 5 pm on Wednesday May 15) on one of five topics to be provided by me (e.g., the conflict between civil religion and Christian nationalism; therapeutic religion over against biblical faith; the role of gender/race/ethnicity in defining religious practice, etc.).

Evaluation:

final grade; the historiographic essay will count for 40% of the final grade. Class participation is not voluntary, and will thus not be graded.

Office Hours:

Mondays 2-5pm. But I am usually in my office (Boisi Center, 24 Quincy) most days, so just let me know ahead of time when you are planning to drop by. On any given day, the best person to contact is my admin, Suzie Richard (susan.richard@bc.edu), who is probably the only one who knows where I am.

Schedule of Class Meetings and Readings

I.

MODELS AND CRITIQUE

January 18: Models of Religion and Culture

Texts: H.R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (selections); Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (selections)

January 25

Texts:

Tuveson, *Redeemer Nation*

February 1:

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March 14:

Texts: Massa, *Anti-Catholicism in America* (selections); Maria Monk, *Awful Disclosures* (selections)

**Exercise No. 3 due on recovering women's voices*

III. THEORIES OF SUCCESS AND FAILURE IN AMERICAN RELIGION

March 21: High Tension/Low Tension: What is a Successful American Religion?

Texts: Finke and Stark, *Churching of America* (selections);

(March 28-31: Easter Break)

**First Discussion of Historiographic Essay*

April 4: Fundamentalism: Both Protestant and Catholic

Texts: George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (selections); Massa,

April 11: Christian Realism as Judgement (Herberg) and Political Strategy (Reinhold Niebuhr)

Texts: Will Herberg, *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (selections); Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (selections).

**Exercise No. 4 due on high tension/low tension*

April 18: Individual Meetings with Massa

April 25: Four Theological Views of American Capitalism

Texts: Novak, Neuhaus, the USCCB, and..?

May 2: Brunch with Massa

****Historiographic Essay Due on May 15*