

The Kingdom of God in America
Religion C2559
Spring Semester, 2017
T/Th 2-3:15

Charles Marsh
Office Hours:
Thursday 3:30 - 4:30
(Other times by appointment)

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Teaching Assistants:

William Boyce, PhD candidate, Theology, Ethics and Culture
Caleb Hendrickson, PhD candidate, Theology, Ethics and Culture

Course Description

The course explores the influence of theological ideas on social movements in America and such questions as: How do our ideas about God shape the way we engage the social order? What role do nineteenth century European and American Protestant theologies play in informing the American search for “beloved community”, which was the term Martin Luther King Jr. sometimes used interchangeably with the Kingdom of God? What are the social consequences of theological commitments? Although our main historical focus is the American Civil Rights Movement from 1954-1968, we will also revel in counter-cultural movements of the late 1960’s, and attend to the faith-based community-development movement and recent community organizing initiatives, asking about their origins and limitations.

Requirements

The final grade for the course will be determined according to each student’s fulfillment of the following requirements:

1. Reading of weekly assignments and completion of weekly written reading summaries of 250 words posted on Collab (for Mr. Boyce) or Collab (for Mr. Hendrickson) before class on Thursdays. These assignments constitute 10% of your final grade.
2. **Two** exams; one covering the first third of the course; and another (the final) covering the final two thirds. The date for the first exam is Thursday, February 16. The second exam will be given during the week of final examinations. Each exam counts 25% of the final class grade.
3. Two papers, 4-6 pages in length (1200-1500 words); the first is due Tuesday 3/28; the second on Thursday 4/28. Each paper counts 20% of the final class grade.

Important Information. Students who miss more than three class periods will be penalized one half grade on the final grade. Students who miss more than five classes will be penalized one full grade on the final grade.

Semester Schedule

(Thursday, 1/19) Logistical matters and lay of the land

Part One

Three Views of the Kingdom: Setting the Stage

The Kingdom of God as the Coming of the Social Gospel: The Social Theology of Walter Rauschenbusch

(Tuesday, 1/24) Reading: Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (first half)

(Thursday, 1/26) Reading: Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (second half)

The Kingdom of God as the Strange New World of the Bible: Karl Barth and the Theology of Crisis

(Tuesday, 1/31) Reading, Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, pp. 9-49 (Brillig)

(Thursday, 2/2) Reading: Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, pp. 9-49 (reread) (Brillig) and “Barth Against Hegemony” by Timothy Gorringer (Brillig)

(Tuesday, 2/7) Reading: *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, pp. 51-96 (Brillig)

The Kingdom of God as the Transcendent Ideal of History: Reinhold Niebuhr and Christian Realism:

(Thursday, 2/9) Reading: Reinhold Niebuhr readings from *Moral Man and Immoral Society* (red book)

(Tuesday, 2/14) Reading, Reinhold Niebuhr, continued (red book)

(Thursday, 2/16) EXAM # 1

Part Two
The Beloved Community: American Search, Christian Hope

The “Spiritual Movement” in Montgomery

(Tuesday, 2/21) Reading: Martin Luther King, Jr, student papers and early speeches (Brillig); Marsh, *The Beloved Community* Introduction, and Chapter 1

(Thursday, 2/23) King, Montgomery writings (Brillig); from Protest to Reconciliation; King sermons and speeches, from Collab

The "God Movement" in South Georgia: Clarence Jordan and Koinonia Farm

(Tuesday, 2/28) Reading: Clarence Jordan, *Essential Writings*, pp. 15-84; Reading: Marsh, BC, Chapter 2 [visiting lecturer TBA]

(Thursday, 3/2) Clarence Jordan, *Essential Writings*; Reading, Jordan, *Essential Writings*, 84-175; and sermons on the “God Movement” (collab)

[Tuesday, 3/6 - 3/12: SPRING RECESS. YAAY!]

Being a “Kingdom People” [Jordan]: Do Guns Make Us Free?

(Tuesday, 3/14) A symposium on Christianity and gun violence, with visiting lecturer, Firmin DeBrabander, Associate Professor of Philosophy, Maryland Institute of Art at our regular class time and place.

“The gun rights movement is at a high point: there are as many guns as citizens in the US today; the gun lobby has persuaded states to expand the number of public places people can carry guns; and in recent years, gun rights advocates have pushed Open Carry, Campus Carry, Stand your Ground, and Permitless Carry. Gun rights advocates like to argue they are merely following through with our founders’ intentions. But that is hardly the case; we are engaged in a radical and reckless gun rights experiment, unlike we have ever seen before—and with public health and social costs still unknown.

“The political terrain of the gun debate is treacherous and vexing. Gun control advocates find it impossible to achieve the most basic, minimal regulations—like universal background checks. Polls indicate that Americans overwhelmingly favor gun control, but they do not prioritize the issue in the ballot box. Why is this? Voters are not sufficiently alarmed by our gun violence problem, it seems; or they are not persuaded to take action; or they deem the issue beyond hope.

“The usual avenues of support for gun control have struggled of late—to put it mildly. This presentation will explain alternate approaches to galvanizing such support. In particular, there are powerful political arguments to be made against the radical gun rights movement. What’s more, faith based communities can be crucial in calling people to action, and prioritizing the gun debate. In particular, powerful Christian arguments line up against the radical gun rights movement—and they must be deployed widely and intensely.

(Tuesday, 3/14) reading excerpt from Firmin DeBrabander, *Do Guns Make Us Free? Democracy and the Armed Society*

Kingdoms of White Supremacy: Massive Resistance and the Rise of Christian Terrorism

(Thursday, 3/16) Reading: Charles Marsh, *God's Long Summer*, Chapters 2, and selected papers of the White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, on collab

The Kingdom of God as a “free-floating monastic community: The Theology of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

(Tuesday, 3/21) Marsh, *The Beloved Community*, Chapter 3; Papers of the Student Non Violent Coordinating Committee (collab)

(Thursday, 3/23) Papers of the Student Nonviolent Committee, continued (collab)

Beloved Community or Chaos?

(Tuesday, 3/23) Reading: Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community*, Chapter 4
Papers of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, John Lewis Interview, November 19, 1993 (collab)

[FIRST ESSAY DUE BEFORE CLASS PERIOD, Tuesday, March 28, No Class Meeting]

Part Three: Where Do We Go from Here?

To LaLa Land: The dream as hallucination

(Thursday, March 3/30) Reading: Joan Didion, *Slouching Toward Bethlehem* (first half)

(Tuesday, 4/4) Reading: Didion, *STB* (second half)

In Search of One Real Thing: Michelangelo Antonioni's “Zabriskie Point”

(Thursday, 4/6) Reading: from William Arrowsmith, *Antonioni: The Poet of Images* on Collab; and *The Architecture of Vision*, Collab

(Tuesday, 4/11) “Zabriskie Point” (the film)

(Thursday, 4/13) Reading: Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community*, Chapter 5

Part Four Getting Saved from the Sixties

Remembering the Peculiar People: The Promise of the Old Reformist Left

(Tuesday, 4/18) Reading; Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*, pp. 1-158

The Radical Roots of the Faith-Based Community Development and Organizing Movement

(Thursday, 4/20) Reading: Marsh, *BC*, chapter 6; John Perkins, *Let Justice Roll Down*, (first half)

(Tuesday, 4/25) Reading, *Let Justice Roll Down*, second half, and excerpts from *A Quiet Revolution* (on collab)

[SECOND ESSAY DUE, Thursday, 4/27, open discussion on final exam]

Taking Stock of this “Worldwide Struggle”

(Tuesday, May 2) Reading, Sarah Azaransky, excerpts from *This Worldwide Struggle*, and Susan Holman, *Beholden: Religion, Global Health and Human Rights* (on collab)

Guest Lecturer, Sarah Azaransky, Reinhold Niebuhr Associate Profesesor of Christian Ethics, Union Theological Seminary, New York (UVa, PhD, '08)

Required Books

Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man* [If you can find the Horton translation]

Walter Rauschenbusch, *Theology for the Social Gospel*

Joan Didion, *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*

Clarence Jordan, *Essential Writings*

Charles Marsh, *The Beloved Community*

John Perkins, *Let Justice Roll Down*

Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country*

Photocopy package, aka “The Red Book” (available at Brillig Books)

Other materials available on Collab

Film

Michelangelo Antonioni, “Zabriskie Point”