

DM – HE606-0-2019W
Public Engagement Track:
Witness of Faith in the Public Square

January 2019

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Course Syllabus

Welcome to our encounter together in Cambridge UK this January

Goals of the course: In this week-long immersion, we want to examine the ways faith and religion impact public policy, both in the context of U.S. domestic politics but also globally. There are growing indicators that nationalism and “economic populism” are driving political dynamics in most of the western democracies, in Europe and the USA. What is the response of the church to this dynamic? How do pastors and leaders of local ministries address these issues in the context of their own ministries? How do our elected leaders respond to questions about their faith and how they demonstrate it in the public square?

Our course materials and readings will be available on Blackboard. There is no need to purchase the books below, but they will be useful to you if you want to add to your personal collection in the discipline we call “public theology.”

Robert Audi and Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Religion in the Public Square: The Place of Religious Convictions in Political Debate*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997. ISBN: 0-8476-8341-9.

James H. Cone, *God of the Oppressed*. Maryknoll/Orbis Books, 1997. ISBN: 1-57075-158-7.

John Danforth, *The Relevance of Religion: How Faithful People Can Change Politics*. Random House, 2015. ISBN: 978-0-8129-9790-3.

Michael Gerson and Peter Wehner, *City of Man: Religion and Politics in a New Era*. Moody Publishers, 2010. ISBN: 9780802458575.

Adam Hamilton, *Seeing Gray in a World of Black and White: Thoughts on Religion, Morality, and Politics*. Abingdon Press, 2008. ISBN: 978-1426766626.

John Kerry, *Every Day is Extra*. Simon & Schuster, 2018. ISBN: 978-1-5011-7895-5

Martin E. Marty, *The Public Church: Mainline-Evangelical-Catholic*. Wipf & Stock, 1981. ISBN 13: 978-1-62032-521-6.

Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*. Simon & Schuster, 2010. ISBN: 978-1-4165-6671-7

Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith: How Followers of Christ Should Serve the Public Good*. Brazos Press, 2011. ISBN: 9781587433436.

Pre-course writing assignment: For a pre-class meeting assignment, please write an essay in response to one of the questions below. I am looking for an essay that provides thoughtful and faithful responses to these questions, as well as indicate your own perspective on how people of faith engage in what we call “the public square.” If you have done some of the readings in advance, please be sure to engage the authors’ arguments in your essays. That will surely get you “extra credit.” I would like to share these essays with the entire class as a way to get to know each other but if you prefer to keep your reflections private, I will honor that. However, you will be expected in our time in Cambridge to reflect honestly and openly about the subjects we will examine. Class participation is necessary and mandatory.

Each of your essays should be roughly three pages (about 750-1000 words). Please submit your essay to me via email (mmccurry@psw-inc.com) by January 3, 2019.

1. Public opinion data confirms that the American political culture is growing in its polarization and that the American people largely disapprove of most institutions in civic life: banks, colleges, businesses, political parties, Congress, and the courts. “The church” – broadly defined – does not fare much better with less than half registering approval. What role can the church play to arrest this decline in support of vital public institutions? Is that the place of the church? What does “separation of church and state” mean to you and is in the same as “separation of faith and politics?”
2. Measures of quality of life in the United States continue to show significant disparities between races. Measures on economic attainment (income, wealth, savings); health and well-being (expected life span, disease morbidity rates, access to health care); educational attainment; employment and unemployment; homeownership; political power; and equal treatment in the criminal justice system all show substantial unequal life chances with African Americans faring more poorly than whites in our society. What do you believe is the role of the church, if any, in addressing these disparities? In your response, feel free to reference, as you deem fit, differences in approaches that should or could be taken by African American churches, predominantly white churches, and multicultural churches. Be sure to cite some of the theological and practical bases for your response.
3. Ever since Lyndon Johnson as president of the US was challenged for misleading the American public about the war in Vietnam and Richard Nixon for obfuscating his role in the Watergate scandal, the issue of “character” has become a test for suitability of those who serve at the highest levels of government. The issue of character emerged most plainly when Jimmy Carter was elected president in part on a pledge to “never lie to the American people.” What is character when it comes to those elected to serve the public? How much should we/do we care about the integrity and moral values of those who lead us? Does it matter or do we just care about them doing a good job in office? What is the role of clergy people and church leaders in holding our political leaders accountable for “character”?

Please submit to me by email (mmccurry@psw-inc.com) by Jan 3, 2019...although the sooner the better.

COURSE SYLLABUS

Monday, January 7

Introductions, Roundtable on where we are, where we come from, the current state of our ministries.

Foundations of Christian Political Engagement:

Holy Bible, Daniel 7, Matthew 5-7, Luke 20:19-26, Romans 13, Revelation 13

Martin Luther, *On Temporal Authority*

John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, IV.20

Religious Reasons in Public Discourse:

John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, "The Idea of Public Reason"

Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, "Religious Reasons in a Political Argument"

Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (excerpt)

Martin Luther King Jr. *Letter from a Birmingham Jail*"

Tuesday, January 8

Public Theology: What is It and Does it Matter?

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, "The Structure of Responsible Life," from *Ethics* (pp.257-289)

Martin Marty, *The Public Church*, Chapters 1 & 6

Charles Mathewes, *The Republic of Grace*, Chapters 6&7

Miroslav Volf, *A Public Faith*, Chapter 7

Afternoon work session:

How do you currently express your faith in the public square? Do you?

Do we do "public theology" or not? If so, why yes. If not why no?

What are the greatest challenges in raising public/contemporary issues from the pulpit or in the context of your own ministry?

Wednesday, January 9

Practical Public Theology and Our Current Debates

Robert Jones, excerpts from *The End of White Christian America*

Michael Gerson and Peter Wehner, excerpts from *City of Man* and Gerson essay, "Trump and The Evangelical Temptation"

Robert Putnam and David Campbell, *American Grace*, Chapters 11 & 12

David Beckman, "Join the Exodus from Hunger"

Rev. William Barber, *The Third Reconstruction*"

Jim Wallis, *God's Parish*

Gustavo Guitierrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, Introduction and Chapter 13 "Poverty"

Emily Townes, *Public Policy*

Afternoon work session:

What are issues that you believe the church needs to address?

How would you speak to them in the context of your ministry?

Are there some subjects "out of bounds" for engagement by the church and clergy?

Thursday, January 10

EXCURSION TO LONDON

Meetings at John Wesley House and Tour of Parliament with Lord Leslie Griffiths

The Public Witness of Politicians

John Danforth, excerpts from *The Relevance of Religion*

John Kerry, *Every Day is Extra*, pp. 168-175, 294-298

Tony Blair, *A Journey: My Political Life* (excerpts)

Dinner and conversation around models of grace in public life.

We will also have time en route to reflect on the current political dynamic in the UK which is even more turbulent than here in the US. And to continue dialogue on the issues explored on Wednesday.

Friday, January 11

Models of Dialogue in the Public Square

Victoria Barnett, "For the Soul of the People"

Hauerwas and Willimon, "Dialogue" in *Resident Aliens*

U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops, *The Challenge of Peace*

Here are three websites with good data on current voter attitudes about politics, religion and the intersection of faith and citizenship.

Pew Research Center (website with current data: (<http://www.pewresearch.org>))

Pew Research Center: Faith and Public Life (<http://www.pewforum.org>)

Public Religion Research Institute (<https://www.ppri.org>)

Afternoon work session:

Building an active "public theology" in your ministry that engages issues in the public square.

