

Law and Christian Political Thought in Africa

A Course of Study
Uganda Christian University
Faculty of Law

by

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Original Course Developed by
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Syllabus

Short Description:

Students of this twelve week, three credit course will be introduced to the development of Christian political thought over the two millennia since the Incarnation, with a particular emphasis on the use of the premises, language and method of Christian political thought in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa. During the first half of the semester, the students will be introduced to Christian political thought. During the second half of the semester, the students will be encouraged to apply the heritage of Christian political thought to a variety of public policy issues relevant to the life of Church and state in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa. Throughout the course, students are encouraged to integrate their understanding of Christian Political Thought and the context of contemporary sub-Saharan Africa in their reading, discussion and writing.

This is a seminar course in which each student is expected to complete the assigned readings in a timely fashion and to contribute actively and productively in the classroom discussions. Most class sections will begin with a lecture, to be followed by a discussion of the specific readings assigned.

The class will meet twice per week for twelve weeks.

Students will be evaluated based upon class participation (20%), two short papers (15% each) and a term paper (50%).

Texts:

The Holy Bible.

Chazan, Naomi, Robert Mortimer, John Ravenhill, and Donald Rothchild, eds., *Politics and Society in Contemporary Africa, 2d. ed.*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1992.

O'Donovan, Oliver and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, eds., *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought*, Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans and Sons, 1999.

Okoth, Godfrey P., ed., *Africa at the Beginning of the Twenty-First Century*, Nairobi: Nairobi University Press, 2000.

Okullu, Henry, *Church and Politics in East Africa*, Kampala, Uganda, Centenary Publishing House, 1982.

Young, Tom, ed., *Readings in African Politics*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2003.

Schedule

Topic One – Introduction to Christian Political Thought.

Session 1 – Introduction to the Course.

Reading Assignment: Matthew 5-7; Romans 13; I Peter.

Writing Assignment: none.

Session Description: Describe the course syllabus and the professor's expectations. Introduce and explore the concept of "world view." Discuss the proper role, if any, of the Christian and the Church in the political life of the nation, especially in light of the compromise and corruption that seems so characteristic of politics as they are currently understood and practiced.

Topic Two – Ancient Christian Political Thought.

Session 2 – Christian Political Thought Before Constantine – Irenaeus of Lyons.

Reading Assignment: O'Donovan and O'Donovan, 1-7 and 15-22.

Writing Assignment: none.

Session Description: According to Irenaeus, what role(s) do empires play in God's economy of salvation? How is Irenaeus' understanding of the matter influenced by his historical context? Discuss Irenaeus' understanding as to the source of power, authority and judgment on earth. How is his thought relevant to the context of sub-Saharan Africa?

Session 3 – The Birth of Christian Political Thought in Africa – St. Augustine of Hippo.

Reading Assignment: O'Donovan and O'Donovan, 104-113, 119-130 and 138-140).

Writing Assignment: none.

Session Description: Discuss Augustine's view of justice in the proper administration of civil order. What is the source of justice? Who is called to dispense it? How is Augustine's view shaped by his particular historical context? How well or poorly does Augustine's view translate to the context of contemporary sub-Saharan Africa?

Session 4 – Augustine continued.

Reading Assignment: O'Donovan and O'Donovan, 140-163.

Writing Assignment: none.

Session Description: Discuss the relationship between the City of God and the City of Man in Augustine's political and theological thought. How does this relate to the relationship between the Church and state in contemporary sub-Saharan Africa?

Session 5 – The Collapse of Empire and the Papacy of Gregory the Great.

Reading Assignment: O'Donovan and O'Donovan, 195-203.

***Writing Assignment Due:* Write a short (4 pages or less) paper sketching the key themes of Augustine's political thought. Reflect on the relevance or lack of relevance of Augustine to the political context of contemporary sub-Saharan Africa.**

Session Description: In light of the life and thought of Gregory the Great, discuss the role of the Church in public life, especially in times of crisis when civil authority has broken down.

Topic Three – Medieval Christian Political Thought.

Session 6 – The Monk Instructs the Pope – Bernard of Clairvaux.

Reading Assignment: O'Donovan and O'Donovan, 268-276.

Writing Assignment: none.

Session Description: Discuss the Bernard's understanding of all authority – including papal authority – as delegated authority. How does Bernard's understanding of the fiduciary nature of authority serve as a check on abusive and excessive exercise of authority? How is Bernard's understanding of authority shaped by his monastic rule of life?

Session 7 – The Angelic Doctor.

Reading Assignment: O'Donovan and O'Donovan, 320-330.

Writing Assignment: none.

Session Description: Lecture on Aquinas and his political thought. Short discussion of the implications of Aquinas' understanding, drawn from Aristotle, that man is a social and political animal whose nature demands the existence of a polity.

Session 8 – Aquinas continued.

Reading Assignment: O'Donovan and O'Donovan, 330-361.

Writing Assignment: none.

Session Description: Discuss the role of virtue and vice in the political thought of Thomas, especially with regard to the Christian king. Discuss the implications of this for the concept of the modern secular state. Is the modern secular state, in Thomas' thought, inherently vicious? Why or why not? Discuss the renewal of Thomist ideology in modern jurisprudence.

Session 9 – John Wyclif.

Reading Assignment: O'Donovan and O'Donovan, 482-513.

Writing Assignment: none.

Session Description: Discuss Wyclif's view of divine and civil lordship. In particular, discuss the view of Wyclif that civil lordship entails venial if not mortal sin and that civil lordship and therefore cannot be assumed by Christ. Contrast this view with that of Aquinas, and discuss the implications of Wyclif's understanding of the spiritually compromising nature of civil authority.

Topic Four – Renaissance and Reformation.

Session 10 – Erasmus and Catholic Humanism.

Reading Assignment: O'Donovan and O'Donovan, 570-580.

Writing Assignment: none.

Session Description: Discuss the political thought of Erasmus and his condemnation of war in particular. Discuss his statement that "The people in their turn should defer to [the prince] only so far as in the public interest." How does this Christian-humanist statement inform later movements toward representative government?

Session 11 – Luther and the Protestant Reformation.

Reading Assignment: O'Donovan and O'Donovan, 581-608.

Writing Assignment: none.

Session Description: Discuss the political implications of Martin Luther's theological claim that all Christians participate equally in the kingship and priesthood of Christ.

Session 12 – The English Reformation; Sir Thomas More and Steven Gardiner.

Reading Assignment: O'Donovan and O'Donovan, 558-569, 647-649.

Writing Assignment: none.

Session Description: Discuss the supremacy controversy, in which Catholic statesman Sir Thomas More and Catholic churchman Steven Gardiner found themselves in disagreement.

Session 13 – The Reformed Commonwealth; Calvin and Knox.

Reading Assignment: O'Donovan and O'Donovan, 662-694.

Writing Assignment: none.

Session Description: Discuss the political thought of Calvin and Knox, especially with regard to the integration of political order and spiritual communion and the freedom of the informed conscience.

Session 14 – Review and Brief Survey of Religion and Politics in the Post-Modern West.

Reading Assignment: none.

***Writing Assignment Due:* Compare and contrast the Christian political thought of two Christian political thinkers other than Augustine. Discuss the implications of the distinctive emphases of each thinker, particular in light some issue or situation in contemporary Africa.**

Session Description: Review of Christian political thought through the ages and discussion of implication of a variety of theological questions on political thought. A survey on the role of the Christian Church in the politics of the West with an emphasis on the impact of the evangelical movement in the United States.

Topic Five -- Christian Political Thought and Contemporary Africa.

Session 15 – Contemporary Africa – the Legacy of Colonialism

Reading Assignment: Peter S.O. Amuka, “The Fiction of Colony and Post-Colony in Africa” in Okoth, 3-22.

Writing Assignment: none.

Session Description: Discuss the ongoing legacy of colonialism in Africa.

Session 16 – Contemporary Africa – the Post-Colonial Period.

Reading Assignment: Chazan, et. al., 133-152.

Writing Assignment: Written proposal for term paper.

Session Description: Discuss the political and economic history of Africa in the post-colonial era, with a special emphasis on the continuities and discontinuities with the colonial period.

Session 17 – Human Rights.

Reading Assignment: Genesis 1 and 2; The United Nations “Universal Declaration of Human Rights.”

Writing Assignment: None.

Session Description: Discuss the theological foundations of human rights, particularly as grounded in the doctrines of creation and redemption.

Session 18 – Peace, War and Humanitarian Intervention.

Reading Assignment: Toyin Falola, “Violence and Conflict in the 1990s” in Young, 68-79.

Writing Assignment: none.

Session Description: Discuss humanitarian interventions in African conflict in the wake of the Rwandan genocide. Apply just war theory to a variety of conflicts, past and present, including those in Rwanda, Sudan, and Biafra.

Session 19 – Representative Governance.

Reading Assignment: O’Donovan and O’Donovan, 92-95(John Chrysostom); Fredrick O. Wanyama, “Democratization in Africa: Advances and Setbacks” in Okoth, 109-134; Okullu, 69-75.

Writing Assignment: None.

Session Description: Discuss the state of representative government in Africa. Discuss the theological underpinnings of representative government.

Session 20 – Property Rights and Economic Development.

Reading Assignment: O’Donovan and O’Donovan, 46-49(Lactantius); Chazan, et. al., 261-291; Hernando Desoto excerpt from “The Mystery of Capital”

Writing Assignment: None.

Session Description: Discuss Biblical treatment of private property. Discuss economic development in Africa, with a particular emphasis on the role of the Church in Africa and worldwide. Discuss emerging theories, methods and recommendations regarding the use and maximization of private property in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Session 21 – Tribalism.

Reading Assignment: Chazan, 105-132; Okullu, 43-51.

Writing Assignment: none.

Session Description: Discuss tribalism, particularly in light of a theological understanding of humanity grounded in creation and in the shared adoption of all believers in Christ. How does our understanding of our common humanity and shared adoption in Christ relativize our other allegiances, including our allegiance to tribe?

Session 22 – Corruption.

Reading Assignment: Okullu, 34-42.

Writing Assignment: none.

Session Description: Discuss corruption, particularly in light of Aquinas' understanding of the role of virtue and vice in public life. Discuss the impact of corruption of economic development and relations with international investors and corporations.

Topic 6 -- Micro and Macro: Application and Analysis

Session 23 – Equity, Ethics and the Role of the Lawyer

Reading Assignment: O'Donovan and O'Donovan, 23-29 (Tertullian).

Writing Assignment:

Session Description: Discuss Tertullian's vision for the role of judicial equity. Discuss the ethical implications for a lawyer who chooses to adopt the philosophy of Tertullian. Discuss "hard cases" and attempts to justify sin within the context of the Christian world view of Tertullian and modern day natural law scholars. Discuss the role of forgiveness in politics and the practice of law.

Session 24 – The Future of Christian Political Praxis in Africa.

Reading Assignment: Ecclesiastes 1

Writing Assignment Due: Term paper due.

Session Description: Discuss the relevance of Christian political thought to the morally ambiguous and practically challenging problems facing contemporary Africa.