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PSC 395.01: Separation of State and Religion- Is it Possible? Is it Desirable?

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Separation of State and Religion – Is it possible? Is it desirable? 
- Relation between State and Religion in Germany, Japan, and the United States -

Course description

This course examines the varied relations between state and religion, including the rationale behind these different relationships, and, above all, the reasons why there is a connection between state and religion at all. In other words, what are the functions of religion in the state and for the state? In dealing with these kinds of questions it will become apparent that there does exist a dilemma (i.e. a problem that cannot be solved): Modern states are secular institutions and cannot be anything but secular institutions. On the other hand, religion is connected with the state in many different ways, as the supplier of the basic values without which no community and no state can exist, and as societal groupings which cannot help but come into contact with the state, to name only the two most obvious ones. The result of these connections is, of course, that there cannot be any real separation of state and religion, that this is a goal, which is as necessary to pursue as it is impossible to realize.

Using Germany, pre-war and present-day Japan, and, of course, the United States as examples, this course offers an opportunity to think about the question, what the relation between state and religion really is like, and what it should be. Participants are expected to have a general understanding of the problems as well as a general knowledge concerning the situation in the USA. The basic facts concerning Japan and Germany will be provided by the instructor. At the center of the course, however, there will be discussions of the problems involved, an opportunity to think and to talk together about the public aspects of religion as well as about the spiritual side of the state.

Course objectives

Upon completion of this course, participants should have a basic understanding of the various public aspects of religion, of the different kinds of relationships between state and religion, of the functions religion fulfills for the state, and of the mutual need for both state and religion to uphold a relationship, as well as the limitations of said relationships.
Class format

After talking about the assigned readings and/or the report, the instructor will give the necessary factual explanations, after which there should be time left for discussion.

Assignments (and grading)

Participants are expected to actively participate in class discussions (20%), which in turn is not possible without prior completion of the reading assignments which will be provided as faculty packets. Every participant has to write one report (40%), taken from the attached list on a first come first take basis. The reports are to be about 10 pages in length and must be submitted no later than the class period before it becomes due. A summary of the report has to be presented orally in about 10–15 minutes within the relevant class period. Participants must select their themes in consultation with the instructor. Every participant has to write one report (40%) on the final subject of the course “Separation between State and Religion – Is it possible? Is it desirable?” Three to five pages, due at latest in the class before the last.

Class schedule

1. Orientation/Introduction

I. The Basics

2. What is religion?
   Text: Kirkpatrick, Clifford: Religion in Human Affairs, pp. 12–21, and 256–285

3. The religious situation in Japan
   Report: Folk beliefs (minkan-shinkō) in Japan

4. Shinto
   Report: Shintō-Mythology

5. The religious situation in Germany
   Report: Landesherrliches Kirchenregiment (Princely Supremacy in Church Matters)

6. The religious situation in the USA
   Text: Internet: Largest Religious Groups in the United States of America, pp. 1–7
   Report: The Puritans in New England
II. State AND Religion

7. The original form of Government: Theocracy
Report: Emperor and Pope in the Middle Ages

8. The secular state – unavoidable
Report: The Thirty Years’ War and its results

9. The secular state – its historical and ideological beginnings
Text: The Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen
Report: The Enlightenment

10. The secular state – nowhere perfect
Text: Reynolds vs. United States (1879)
Report: The family in Christian theology and in law

11. The constitutional situation in Germany
Text: Basic Law Art. 4, 7, 140
Report: Treatment of the Church of Scientology in Germany

12. The Japanese Tennō (incl. State Shintō)
excerpts from: „Cardinal Principles of the National Entity of Japan“, pp. 206 – 208,
speech by Itō Hirobumi in the Privy Council June 1888
Ono, Sokyō: Shintō – The Kami Way, pp. 72 – 75, and
Imperial Rescript on Education

13. The constitutional situation in Meiji-Japan
Text: Itō, Hirobumi: Commentaries on the Constitution of the Empire of Japan, pp. 151 –
152, IX – XI, 2 – 9, 53

14. The constitutional situation in present-day Japan
Texts: Constitution Art. 1, 4, 20, 89, and
Imperial Rescript on the Reconstruction of New Japan
Reports: The Tsu Grounds Purification Case
Daijōsei

15. The constitutional situation in the USA
Text: Constitution Article VI, Amendment I
Reports: The First Amendment: Limits of the Establishment Clause, and
The First Amendment: Establishment Clause vs. Free Exercise Clause

III. Religions IN Democratic States

16. Formative power of religions without religious knowledge? – The mechanics of tradition
17. The relation between state and religion in a democracy: In general and in Germany (CDU)
   Text: Hiscocks, Richard: Democracy in Western Germany, pp. 73 – 81
   Report: The Social Teaching of the Catholic Church

18. The relation between state and religion in a democracy: Japan (Kômeitô)
   Report: The Sôka Gakkai

19. The relation between state and religion in a democracy: USA (Christian Right)
   Text: Liberty Alliance, in: Internet, homepage Jerry Falwell
   Report: The Christian Coalition

20. Usefulness and necessity of religion for the state: Germany
   Text: Cochrane, Arthur: The Church’s Confession under Hitler, pp. 129 – 139, 237 – 242
   Report: The Natural Law

21. Usefulness and necessity of religion for the state: Japan
   Report: The communal aspects of Shintô

22. Usefulness and necessity of religion for the state: USA
   Report: Humanitarian Activities of the Churches

IV. Different Weaknesses

23. Weaknesses of the German religious system: decreasing church-membership, inability to integrate Islam
   Text: Internet: statistic data on the two Churches in Germany

24. Weaknesses of the Japanese religious system: lack of religious education, cults

25. Weaknesses of the American religious system: lack of religious education, TV preachers
   Text: 2 articles from Weekly World News

V. Different Solutions

26. Between the poles of state religion and pluralism of values (incl. two case studies: The community of the Amish, and the „Kulturkampf“ (Fight for Culture: Struggle between Church and State under Bismarck 1872 – 1887))
   Raff, Diether: A History of Germany, pp. 150 – 154
   Reports: The Amish as a „perfect society“
The First Vatican Council

27. „Öffentlichkeitsauftrag“ (Duty to Public Service) of the Church in Germany
   Report: The „Öffentlichkeitsauftrag“ of the Church in Germany

28. „Civil Religion“ in the USA
   Texts: Rousseau: pp. 138 – 141, and
           Bellah, Robert: Civil Religion in America, in: Bellah: Beyond Belief. Essays on Religion in a
           Post-Traditionalist World, pp. 168 – 189
   Report: Civil Religion

29. Neither „state religion“ nor „civil religion“ – State Shintô as a prop of the structures
   Report: Contrasting „state religion“ and „civil religion“

30. Separation between State and Religion – Is it possible? Is it desirable?