

Program: Baylor in St Andrews  
Semester: Spring 2018  
Director: Professor John Haldane

Course: Religion and Society

The main aims of this course are to develop an understanding of the nature of society and of religion, as that may be drawn from the ideas of major thinkers, and an appreciation of the place of society and religion within the lives of individual human beings, and of the various ways in which society and religion interact, sometimes reinforcing, sometimes undermining one or other.

It will begin by looking at different theoretical approaches to defining society and religion, contrasting essentialist and functionalist accounts. These differ in that the former looks to intrinsic features as constituting the social and the religious, such as shared meanings and identities, while the latter to extrinsic factors particularly causes and effects of social organization and religious belief and practice. Among the approaches to be considered are sociological, anthropological, psychological, philosophical and theological ones, represented by figures such as Rudolf Otto, Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Sigmund Freud, Mircea Eliade, and Clifford Geertz, as well as Plato, Augustine, Aquinas, David Hume, and Charles Taylor.

It will also look at some classic sources of religious and social thought including scripture, principally the Hebrew and Christian bibles, and pre-modern applications of Judaeo-Christian ideas to social contexts, followed by reformation and post-reformation writings in Protestant and Catholic traditions. Attention will also be given to 'modern' philosophical accounts of political society as presented by John Locke and John Stuart Mill.

The course will then explore certain broad themes in which religion and society are first connected, and then disconnected: religion and art, religion and science, religion and politics, and religion and law. Finally, it will turn to consider a number of contemporary debates and challenges, such as religion and secularism, religion and sexuality, and religious liberty.

In exploring historical and contemporary issues special attention will be given to the situation of Scotland, from the spread of Christianity in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, through the middle ages (when its main centre was St Andrews) into and through 16<sup>th</sup> century reformation, the 19<sup>th</sup> century disruption within the Church of Scotland, and the current situation. We will also draw examples from situation of religion in the United States both in terms of the thinking of the framers of the Constitution and in contemporary debates.

The course will give students an opportunity to pursue topics of study, within the syllabus, which relate students' own background, experience and interests. It will develop multidisciplinary research and study skills through an emphasis on engaging with different kinds of texts and ways of thinking. It will also involve engagements beyond the classroom, and facilitate engagement with public debate about such topics as multiculturalism, reasonable disagreement, toleration and liberty of thought and practice.