

Right, Left, and Sometimes Together: Varieties of Religious Engagement in American Political Life (1960-2020)

Political commentators today often refer to U.S. politics as polarized, and we commonly see those on both the Left and the Right cheering their own political team and reflexively distrusting the other. In this course, we will discuss the role of religion in politics since the 1960s and consider whether polarization reflects the whole story of American political life today. As we explore the engagement of religious individuals and organizations in a variety of issues, from Civil Rights and abortion to state and local policies, we will see that the story of Left and Right in American politics is one of both growing apart and, occasionally and sometimes surprisingly, coming together.

WHEN: Mondays, October 12, 19, 26, and Nov. 2; 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

WHERE: Zoom; link will be sent when registration is received

WHO: Anyone who wants to explore these topics. All are welcome!

COST: \$35/person (registration deadline: October 8, 2020)

SESSIONS/SPEAKERS

October 12, “A Changing Religious and Political Landscape.” Dr. Sarah Ruble

In 1960, Jackie Robinson campaigned for Richard Nixon and most white Southerners were Democrats. By 1980, the white South was solidly behind Ronald Reagan and black Protestants were consistent Democratic voters. In this session, we will look at shifts in the U.S. religious and political landscape in the last half of the 20th century and consider what that has meant for how religious people engage American political life.

October 19, “Religious Group Behavior in Recent U.S. Politics.” Dr. Chris Gilbert

Building on major themes of the October 12 session, this session will examine political patterns (including voting behavior and efforts to influence Supreme Court rulings about church-state relations) among the most significant religious groupings in the U.S., including Black Protestants, white Evangelical Protestants, Catholics, and more. This session will also include consideration of the growing political significance of nonreligious Americans.

October 26, “Red and Blue State Christians: Finding Hope in a Divided Country.” Rev. Angela Denker

Author, journalist, and ELCA Lutheran pastor, Angela Denker, spent 2018 interviewing Christian voters in red states and counties across America, publishing her findings in *Red State Christians: Understanding the Voters who elected Donald Trump* (2019). Since then she has continued to uncover how the 2016 election reflected trends in American Christianity, including the encroachment of Christian nationalism, racism, and sexism, and to discover hopeful stories of Christians coming together to work for justice and love, especially in historically oppressed and impoverished communities. In this session, she will present highlights from her work and reflect on current political trends and the upcoming Presidential election.

November 2, “Where Are We and Where Might We Go?” Dr. Sarah Ruble

In the last decades, religious people have continued to engage political issues from immigration to abortion to environmental justice. During this session, we will consider some of these issues; reasons religious people have engaged them, and what trends we see on the horizon.

SPEAKERS

Chris Gilbert, Ph.D. is Professor of Political Science at Gustavus Adolphus College. He received his B.A. from Moravian College and his Ph.D. from Washington University in St. Louis. His teaching and research interests focus on religion and politics in the United States, political parties, and Minnesota politics. He has authored or co-authored numerous articles and book chapters as well as four books. His latest book, *The Political Influence of American Churches* (Cambridge University Press, 2009), is based on a two-year study of political activity among ELCA and Episcopal clergy and congregation members; this study was jointly conducted with Dr. Paul Djupe (Gustavus class of 1993), Denison University.

Sarah Ruble, Ph.D. is Associate Professor of Religion at Gustavus Adolphus College and a scholar of American religious history. She earned her B.A. from Seattle Pacific University, her M.T.S. from Duke Divinity School, and her Ph.D. in American Religious History from Duke University, 2007. She began teaching at Gustavus in 2007, has served as the Chair of the Religion Department (2015-2018), and is currently the College's Director of Assessment. Ruble is the author of *The Gospel of Freedom and Power: Protestant Missionaries in American Culture Since 1945* (University of North Carolina Press, 2012) and numerous articles on religion in America. She teaches courses and pursues research on various topics in American religious history, including race relations and politics.

The Rev. Angela Denker is a former sportswriter turned ELCA Lutheran pastor, writer, speaker. She is a graduate of the University of Missouri School of Journalism and received her M.Div. from Luther Seminary. Denker is a contributor to various publications, including The Washington Post, Sports Illustrated, Christian Century, and Living Lutheran. Her first book is *Red State Christians: Meet the Voters who elected Donald Trump* (Fortress, 2019). She blogs at *A Good Christian Woman ... Not that One*, where she tries to share Jesus' love and refute the rumors about women, Christians, motherhood, and Jesus. Denker currently serves as the pastor of Grace Lutheran Church in Brownton, MN and lives with her husband and two little boys in Minneapolis.

This is a not-for-credit course organized and co-sponsored by the Office of Church Relations and the Bernhardson Distinguished Chair for Lutheran Studies. For more information or to register, contact Church Relations at 507-933-7001 or e-mail church-relations@gustavus.edu.

TO REGISTER: Please complete the form below. Registration deadline Oct. 8th. Return form and payment to:
Gustavus Adolphus College, Church Relations, 800 West College Ave., St. Peter, MN 56082

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Registration Form: Fall 2020 - Exploring Religious Questions Series

Name(s): _____

Home Address: _____

Phone Number: _____ Email: _____

Home Church (and City): _____

Payment enclosed (\$35/person). Check payable to Gustavus Adolphus College.

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