

WITTENBERG SUMMER SCHOOL

ZUSAS – Zentrum für USA-Studien
Stiftung Leucorea an der
Martin-Luther-Universität
Halle-Wittenberg

**Religion in American Politics and Culture**

◆ July 31 – August 5, 2006 ◆

From the start America's ideas about itself were dominated by religion. Many prominent Americans have described the nation with the help of Biblical language and religious imagery. The English Puritans thought of their journey across the Atlantic to America as the exodus of a New Israel into a promised land, and in the course of time it became a story which developed into the nation's most powerful and long-lasting myth. British writer G.K. Chesterton once called America "a nation with the soul of a church."

While some groups openly demonstrate their religious convictions, for most Americans religion is a personal matter not usually discussed in everyday conversation. The vast majority practices their faith quietly in whatever manner they choose – as members of one of the traditional religious denominations, as participants in nondenominational congregations, or as individuals who join no organized group. However Americans choose to exercise their faith, they are a spiritual people. Nine out of ten Americans express some religious preference, and approximately 70 percent are members of religious

congregations.

Early in their history, Americans rejected the concept of the established or government-favored religion that had dominated – and divided – so many European countries. Separation of church and state was ordained by the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which provides in part that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof . . ."

The First Amendment sounds straightforward, but at times it is difficult even for American constitutional scholars to draw a distinct line between government

and religion in the US. Students in public schools may not pray publicly as part of the school day, yet sessions of the U.S. Congress regularly begin with a prayer by a minister. Cities may not display a Christmas crèche on public property, but the slogan "In God We Trust" appears on U.S. currency, and money given to religious institutions can be deducted from one's income for tax purposes. It may never be possible to resolve these apparent inconsistencies. They derive, in fact, from a tension built into the First Amendment itself, which tells Congress neither to establish nor to interfere with religion.

[Partly adapted from <http://usinfo.state.gov/usa/infousa/facts/factover/ch8.htm>]

**The Summer School Program**

Through lectures and workshops, participants are introduced to the basic issues surrounding the role of religion in American politics and culture. The program is designed to provide students with a closer look at religious freedom, pluralism, religion and politics, specific denominations and their contribution to U.S. society as well as the role religion plays in popular culture. Participants will also have an opportunity to develop their own projects in a workshop setting. Close exchange with faculty and organizers is an essential part of the program.

**Faculty**

Senior faculty from U.S. and German universities will give keynote lectures:

- **Robert Jewett**, Heidelberg University
- **Ghada Qaisi**, Bonn University
- **Mark Rozell**, George Mason University
- **Stephen Whitfield**, Brandeis University

Junior faculty will run the workshops.

Participants

The organizers encourage students from all disciplines, especially the Social Sciences, American Studies and Cultural Studies, from all German Universities to apply to the Summer School. The confer-

ence language will be exclusively English. Attendance will be limited to 30 participants.

Conference Organizers

Professor Dr. Holger Kersten, Magdeburg University, and Dr. Martina Kohl, U.S. Embassy Berlin, jointly organize the Wittenberg Summer School in close cooperation with Carsten Hummel, Zentrum für USA Studien (ZUSAS) in Wittenberg.

Costs

The cultural office of the U.S. Embassy funds the program, room and board for participants and faculty. Participants will have to cover their travel costs.