



**The Political God of Our Times:**  
**Civic Religion and  
Democratic Politics in Europe  
and the United States**

**March 31–April 1, 2006**

**104 Computer Science Building, Princeton University**

A public conference presented by

**The James Madison Program in American Ideals and Institutions**

**Conference Chairman: Maurizio Viroli**

*This conference provides a forum for American and European scholars to explore together the role of civic religion in democratic countries. It is a widely shared perception that the United States and most European countries are moving in different directions. In the former, religion displays a growing capacity to influence political and social life; in the latter, politics is more effective in keeping religion outside the public square, as the conclusion of the debate over the reference to God in the preamble of the European Constitution indicates. Despite these differences, the intellectual debate in Europe and the United States over the nature and proper role of civic religion shows important analogies. On both sides of the Atlantic, advocates of religion accuse secularists of having debilitated the foundations of moral life and duty, and as a result, weakened the basis of proper democratic life. Secularists argue that only public reasons ought to be used in democratic deliberations, if democracy is to remain faithful to its mission. At the same time, a growing concern over the erosion of civic culture has arisen both in America and in Europe. Many scholars indicate secularization as one of its causes. Whereas some scholars argue that the renaissance of civic culture can be the result of political and social measures, others maintain that religion can and must play a vital role in rejuvenating and sustaining civic culture.*