Religion and Violence
RELI 3800
Religious Studies Program

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Office hours: Monday 1:00-3:00 and Wednesday 10:00-11:00 and 1:00-3:00

Course Description:
As far back in the past as one can credibly determine, human beings have had identities, narratives, and aspirations that can be described as religious. Likewise, throughout this time, issues of violence and non-violence have marked human civilizations. Religions have always struggled to grapple with both violence and non-violence. At times, religions have raised non-violence up on their central altar, as is the case with, for example, Christian pacifism or the Jain values of non-harmfulness. At other times, religions have embraced violent practices or ideologies, such as human sacrifice, sacred warfare, or martyrdom. In recent years, millennialism, apocalyptic cults, religiously inspired terrorism, and other forces in society have made us ever more aware that violence has long been a major part of religion.

In this seminar, we will explore various theoretical approaches to the connection between violence and religion, including those articulated by Sigmund Freud, Rene Girard, Hannah Arendt, and Georges Bataille. We will then turn to a variety of case studies of how violence is expressed in different religious contexts. These include religious terrorism, pain rituals, blood sacrifices, martyrdom, and magical control of enemies.

The course will require that students engage the material and actively participate in class. Please plan on being a full participant in the class.

By way of these inquiries, the student should be able to:
• Identify and employ several basic theoretical approaches to the study of violence in religion and
• Critically analyze religious practices, ideologies, and imagery that deploy violence and non-violence.

Students in this course will also:
• Cultivate critical thinking and reading comprehension skills and
• Enhance their ability to communicate more effectively, verbally and in writing.

These objectives will be attained through readings, writing, writing critiques, and classroom discussions. Challenging readings from a variety of disciplines will supplement these strategies.

Course Reading:

Additional readings are available on the course Blackboard website. http://ecu.blackboard.com/

Students are responsible for checking their email address linked to Blackboard system so that they are assured of remaining up-to-date with reading assignments, exam dates, and any other information relating to the course.

Grading: (500 possible points)
• Classroom participation (10% = 50 points)
• 14 page paper with preliminary proposal and two drafts (30% = 150 points)
• Reading Quiz on Theories of Religious Violence (10% = 50 points)
• Two reading quizzes during the semester (10% each = 50 points each)
• Two 3-4 page reaction papers (5% each = 25 points each)
• Final examination with essays and short answers (20% = 100 points)

A (100-93%) 500-465; A- (down to 90%) 464-450; B+ (down to 87%) 449-435; B (down to 83%) 434-415; B- (down to 80%) 414-400; C+ (down to 77%) 399-385; C (down to 73%) 384-365; C- (down to 70%) 364-350; D+ (down to 67%) 349-335; D (down to 63%) 334-315; D- (down to 60%) 314-300; F (below 60%) 299-0.

Classroom Participation:
Students who attend all classes, read all assignments on time, and demonstrate that they are capable of being fully involved in all class discussions will earn full marks for participation.

Research Paper Standards:
A research paper must clearly set forth a thesis, assemble evidence from authoritative sources, and argue for a conclusion. The paper, which should be 14 pages, should concern a theme covered in this course. A standardized style for footnotes and bibliography, such as the MLA style, must be employed. A paradigm, along with other helpful information relevant to writing papers is available on-line at: http://www.ecu.edu/cs-lib/Reference/refdesk/style.cfm

One of the most powerful resources available for the study of religion is the ATLA (American Theological Library Association) Religion Database. This valuable tool provides information from 1949 on many topics in religious studies and includes: more than one million bibliographic records covering the research literature of religion in 35 languages, more than 350,000 article citations from 600 journals, more than 200,000 essay citations from 15,500 multi-author works, and over 360,000 book review citations. In order to foster research skills, each student is required to use two resources found through the ATLA system. Please mark those resources in your bibliography by placing the acronym “ATLA” beside those sources. Access it at http://www.lib.ecu.edu/erdb/atla.htm

Students may employ web page resources, but they should be used sparingly. In no case should they constitute more than 25% of the sources employed.

Both the ideas and the quoted words of others must be footnoted properly. Failure to do so could constitute plagiarism. While it is fine for to share resources and references with peers, each person must do their own work. If you are uncertain as to whether you might be crossing the line between helpfulness and cheating, please consult with me. On-line resources, such as web pages, can be extremely unreliable when it comes to religion. If you have doubts as to the authenticity of your sources, please ask for my advice. If you use material from the web, the particular URL of a referenced idea or passage must be footnoted just like any other source. Further specifications for research papers will be available in a handout.

The steps to writing your research paper are as follows:
• Students will write a proposal for their paper. They should include their thesis, a general statement of how they will proceed in writing the paper, and resources they expect to use.
• Each student will read, carefully reflect upon, and respectfully critique the proposals of two of their peers. I will also write a critique of each proposal.
• Students will write the first draft of their paper in reliance upon the helpful comments they have received.
Each student will read, carefully reflect upon, and respectfully critique the first drafts of two of their peers (different people from those who previously critiqued the paper proposal).

- Students will revise their papers in light of the comments from their peers.
- Students will submit the final draft of their paper on time.

Reading quizzes:
There will be three reading quizzes during the semester. One of these will be on the theories of religious violence that we discuss. The others will be on other material throughout the semester. For this reason, each student will need to come to class prepared each week. You must read the assigned material prior to class each time.

Voice writings:
Each student will write two 3-4 page papers throughout the semester. These will be reactions to classroom discussions, mock editorials, short stories, or other particular forms of writing. Each student will revise one of these papers in light of my comments. More information will be provided in class and below.

Exam:
The final exam will consist of essays and short questions. I will provide several (perhaps three) essay questions from which the student may select a smaller number (perhaps two) to answer. Short questions may be multiple choice, true and false, or simple identification. I will solicit your assistance in writing the exam.

Academic Integrity:
All students are expected to comply with the principles of Academic Integrity embodied in the ECU Honor Code. Since violations can result in expulsion from the University, suspension, or a grade of “F” for the course, students should become familiar with what constitutes plagiarism, cheating, falsification, and other violations. Note also that according to ECU policy mere attempts to plagiarize, cheat, or falsify qualify as violations. Consult the ECU Clue Book for details. [http://www.ecu.edu/studentlife/cluebook/III.htm](http://www.ecu.edu/studentlife/cluebook/III.htm)

University Resources:
The Writing Center offers students in-person and on-line assistance in learning writing skills. Contact the Writing Center for hours and locations at Bate 2026 (328-2820).

In addition to providing students with personal counseling, the Counseling and Student Development Center in Wright Building 316 (328-6661) offers various resources to assist students in their academic development. These resources include training in time management, test taking, overcoming test anxiety, and academic motivation.

East Carolina University works to accommodate students with disabilities. Students who feel they may need such support should contact the Department of Disability Support Services located in Brewster A-114. (328-6799)

East Carolina University seeks to comply fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students requesting accommodations based on a disability must be registered with the Department for Disability Support Services located in Slay 138 (252) 737-1016 (Voice/TTY).

Meeting with me:
I am available in my office 5 hours each week. If the times I have indicated are not practical for you, please see me before or after class. If you need to meet with me another time, please let me know, and I am sure I can accommodate your needs. I encourage all students to come and see me as you work to formulate your research paper. This will insure that your selected paper topic is appropriate and relevant. I will likely be able to direct you to resources that can help you in your quest.

Library:
All students at ECU should become proficient in using library resources. The Joyner Library at ECU (accessible on-line at http://www.lib.ecu.edu/) has many valuable resources on the material we will be covering. There are thousands of books on religion in the stacks of Joyner Library. Books on Philosophy, Psychology, and Religion have call numbers beginning with the letter B. Navigate your way around the library with the following source: See the following website for help in navigating your way around the Library.
http://geography.miningco.com/library/congress/blb.htm

Additionally, you can find information on religious traditions in books in other sections of the library, including anthropology, art, geography, history, literature, philosophy, and psychology. You may also explore the film and music resources the library collects. One of the best resources available is the library’s collection of journals. Not only does the library have numerous religion journals in paper and bound forms, but it is also possible to access a very large number of journals on-line. (http://www.lib.ecu.edu/locator/main.cfm) The library staff can be extremely helpful in learning to use all of these resources. Don’t be shy about asking for their help.

As a student of East Carolina University, you also have free use of the Library system at University of North Carolina — Chapel Hill (www.lib.unc.edu). Moreover, you can access just about any book, journal or other resource in the world through the Inter-Library Loan. Many resources can be obtained within a matter of days. Often, journal articles can be delivered electronically within a day or two. The Joyner Library has a special office for Inter-Library Loan services, located to the left of the front desk. You can access these resources on-line at: http://jill.lib.ecu.edu/illiad/logon.html

Weekly Readings:

Week 1
Syllabus and course expectations
Charles Selengut, Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence, Introduction

Week 2
Jeramy Townsley, “Rene Girard’s Theory of Violence, Religion and the Scapegoat”

Week 3
Sigmund Freud, Civilization and Its Discontents
Hannah Arendt, On Violence
Charles Selengut, Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence, Chapter 2

Week 4
Jonathan Z. Smith, “Domestication of Sacrifice”
Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson, “Demonic Males: Apes and the origins of Human Violence”
Week 5
David M. Buss and Todd K. Shackelford, “Human Aggression in Evolutionary Psychological Perspective”

Week 6
Cristiano Grottanelli, “Fruitful Death: Mircea Eliade and Ernst Jünger on Human Sacrifice, 1937-1945”

Week 7
Nigel Davies, “Human Sacrifice in History and Today”

Week 8
Grant R. Shafer, “Hell, Martyrdom, and War: Violence in Early Christianity”
Mark Jurgenmsayer, “Martyrs and Demons”
Charles Selengut, Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence, Chapter 1 and 5

Week 9
Paper Proposals Review

Week 10
James W. Jones, Blood that Cries out from the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism
Mark Jurgenmsayer, “Cosmic War”
Charles Selengut, Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence, Chapter 4

Week 11
Aaron T. Beck, Prisoners of Hate: The Cognitive Basis of Anger, Hostility, and Violence
Christian Identity and Neo-Nazi Party:
http://www.americannaziparty.com/
http://www.religioustolerance.org/cr_ident.htm

Week 12
Stuart A. Wright, “Revisiting the Branch Davidian Mass Suicide Debate”
Martin Repp, “Religion and Violence in Japan: The Case of Aum Shinrikyo”
Rebecca Moore, “Narratives of Persecution, Suffering, and Martyrdom: Violence in Peoples Temple and Jonestown”
Charles Selengut, Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence, Chapter 3

Week 13
James T. Cone, “Martin and Malcolm on Nonviolence and Violence”

Week 14
Georges Bataille, Erotism: Death & Sensuality

Week 15
Benjamin Noys, *George Bataille: A Critical Introduction*

Georges Bataille, *Dark Star: The Satanic Rites of Gilles de Rais*