

Violence in Religion
RELI 4500
Religion Program

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Office hours: Tuesday 1:00-3:00 and Thursday 1:00-4:00

Course Description:

As far back in the past as one can credibly determine, human beings have had something corresponding to religious identities and aspirations. Likewise, throughout this time, issues of violence and non-violence have marked human civilizations. More often than not, religions have endeavored to grapple with both violence and non-violence. At times, they have embraced violent practices or ideologies, such as human sacrifice, the Crusades, or martyrdom. At other times, religions have raised non-violence up on their central altar, as is the case with, for example, Christian pacifism or the Buddhist values of non-harmfulness.

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 Freud, Girard, and Arendt. We will then investigate some of the primary expressions of religiously based non-violence – New Testament pacifism, Gandhi's ahimsa, and the religious foundations of the non-violent civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr. We will then turn to a variety of case studies of how violence is expressed in different religious contexts. These include Just War Theory, religious terrorism, pain rituals, blood sacrifices, martyrdom, and magical control of enemies.

The course is primarily intended as a capstone seminar for Religion Majors. A high level of engagement and involvement is expected and required. Successful students will spend a significant amount of time reading and writing each week, and they will actively participate in the classroom discussions.

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:

- M. K. Gandhi, Gandhi on Non-Violence
- Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way*
- Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence*

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

- 12-14 page paper with preliminary proposal and two drafts (30%)
- Five 3-4 page reaction papers (30%)
- classroom participation (20%)
- Reading Quiz on Theories of Religious Violence (5%)
- final examination with essays and short answers (15%)

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 12-14 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 three 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 rewrite their papers in light of the comments from their peers.
- Students will write their final draft and submit it on time.

Additional resources for research and writing papers in the field of Religious Studies can be found at www.ecu.edu/religionprogram under “Resources for the Academic Study of Religion”.

Other writings

Each student will write five 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.

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.

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. According to the University schedule, this exercise will be held on December 15, 8:00-10:30.

Students who maintain an A average throughout the semester will be exempt from the final.

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>

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>

Course outline

We will have 14 class meetings this semester. We will not meet in class on September 1, 2005, although there is a reading assignment for that week. The following readings are to be found either in the Blackboard listing of Course Documents, the Blackboard listing of External Links, or the required course texts.

August 25 – #1 Intro and methodology

Course Overview

Discussion of Course Methodology

- Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury*, 1-15 **Text**
- J Harold Ellens, "The Destructive Power of Religion" [DPR1]
- Charles Lemert, "The Analytic Foundations of Social Violence"

September 1 – #2

Theories of Violence

- David M. Buss, "Human Aggression in Evolutionary Psychological Perspective" [MY FILE]

- Richard Wrangham and Dale Peterson, *Demonic Males: Apes and the Origins of Human Violence*, chapter 1
- Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, 37-82

September 8 – #3

Theories of Violence

- Jonathan Z. Smith, “The Domestication of Sacrifice” in *Violent Origins*
- Mack Stirling, “Violent Religion: René Girard’s Theory of Culture”
- René Girard, “Sacrifice” in *Violence and the Sacred*

(Please choose one of the last two items to read. You may read both, but you must read one.)

September 15 – #4

Reading Quiz on Theories of Violence

Jesus, Pacifism, and Christian Violence

- Walter Wink, *Jesus and Nonviolence: A Third Way Text*

Use your own Bible or go to <http://bible.com/bibles.html>

- Matthew 5.-7.27
- Luke 6.17-49
- John 2: 13 - 22
- Matthew 21: 12 - 13
- Mark 11: 15 - 17
- Luke 19: 45 - 46
- J. Harold Ellens, “The Violent Jesus” [DPR3] 22

September 22 – #5

Gandhi and Non-Violence

- *Gandhi on Non-Violence Text*
- Gandhi, “Ahimsa or the Way of Non-Violence”

Indian Critiques of Gandhi

- Robert N. Minor, “Sri Aurobindo’s Dismissal of Gandhi and His Nonviolence”
- Rolland E. Miller, “Indian Muslim Critiques of Gandhi”

For further information on Gandhi, see

<http://www.la.utexas.edu/course-materials/sociology/soc352m/su97/extra.html>
<http://www.gandhiinstitute.org/>

September 29 – #6

Religious Basis of the Civil Rights Movement

- Henry David Thoreau, “Civil Disobedience”
- MLK Jr., “Letter from a Birmingham Jail”
- Walter Lippmann, “How The *New York Times* Distorted Malcolm X’s Views on Self-Defense” WORD file
- C. Eric Lincoln and Lawrence H. Mamiya, *The Black Church in the African American Experience*
- James H. Cone, “Martin and Malcolm on Nonviolence and Violence”

- Robert F. Williams, “The Black man and Self-Defense: 1962, The Case for Answering Violence with Violence”

October 6 – #7

Religious Justifications for Terrorism

- Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury*, 17-48 **Text**
- Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 19-43
- Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God: Why Religious Militants Kill*

October 13 – #8

Violent Religious Groups

- Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury*, 95-139 **Text**
- **Aum Shinrikyo**

Robert Jay Lifton, *Destroying the World to Save it: Aum Shinrikyo, Apocalyptic Violence, and the New Global Terrorism*. 3-58, 274-302, 326-340

- **Aryan Nations** Spend half an hour reading material on this website

<http://www.aryan-nations.org/>

Note: Their motto is “Never Forget – Violence Solves Everything”

- Each person will be assigned to research a particular apocalyptic group and identify a reading for their peers.

October 20 – #9

Martyrdom and Sacrifice

- Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury*, 183-221 **Text**
- Grant R. Shafer, “Hell, Martyrdom, and War: Violence in Early Christianity” [DPR3]
- Human Rights Watch, *Erased in A Moment: Suicide Bombing Attacks Against Israeli Civilians*, 11-42
- Sean Freyna, “Jesus the Martyr”
- Felix Wilfred, “Martyrdom in Religious Tradition” in *Rethinking Martyrdom*
- Howsare, “The Eucharist as Sacrifice: a Marian dimension”

October 27 – #10

Pain rituals

- James A. Benn, “Where Text Meets Flesh: Burning the Body as an Apocryphal Practice in Chinese Buddhism”
- Herdt, *Rituals of Manhood: Male Initiation in Papua New Guinea*, pp. 44-98 and 321-355

November 3 – #11

Black Magic and Shamanic Violence

- Neil L. Whitehead, “Introduction” and “Ritual Violence, Magical Death” in *Dark Shamans*, 1-9, 88-97, 108-127, 187-201
- *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*, 481-502
- Michael J. Harner, “The Hidden World,” *The Jivaro: People of the Sacred Waterfalls*

November 10 – #12

Blood Sacrifice

- Urban, “The Remnants of Desire: Sacrificial Violence and Sexual Transgression in the Cult of the Kapalikas”
- “Sacrifice and Eid al-Adha”
- Simon John De Vries, “Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament: In Ritual and Warfare” [DPR1] 23

November 17 – #13

Georges Bataille and Transgressive Behavior

- Boldt-Irons, *On Bataille*
- Bataille, *Tears of Eros*
- Bataille, *Theory of Religion*

November 24 – no class

December 1 – #14

- Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury*, 223-241 **Text**

December 5

Draft of Papers Due

December 7

Peer Review of Papers Due

December 8 – Reading Day

December 9

Final Papers Due

December 15, 7:30-10:00 p.m. EXAM