



**REL 3148: RELIGION AND VIOLENCE, Fall 2015**

Tues. 5th-6th periods and Thurs. 6<sup>th</sup> period

Matherly 108

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Office Hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 1:45-3 pm and by appointment

**DESCRIPTION**

The relations between religion and violence have long posed a challenge for the academic study of religion. Religions sometimes contribute to violence or justify it, but they can also help achieve peaceful solutions to violent conflicts. Religious rituals themselves can be extremely violent, and some scholars argue that violence lies at the heart of religion itself. This class explores violence within religion, religiously motivated violence, religious justifications of political violence, and religious rejections and resolutions of violence. Throughout the course, readings will address a variety of religious traditions in different regions and historical periods. We will also explore a variety of approaches to religious studies and to comparative ethics, including both descriptive and normative studies.

## **COURSE OBJECTIVES**

1. To become familiar with diverse approaches to the comparative study of religion;
2. To learn about and discuss the problem of violence in relation to the broader disciplines of comparative religious studies and comparative ethics;
3. To improve students' ability to discuss and analyze theoretical claims and supporting arguments; and
4. To improve students' ability to express, in writing and orally, their own analytical arguments.

## **REQUIRED BOOKS**

The following required books are available at area bookstores and on reserve at Library West.

1. Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood: Religion and the History of Violence* (Knopf, 2014)  
This book provides a historical perspective on the relation between religion and violence in a variety of traditions and places. It emphasizes that every world religion has, over the centuries of its existence, both encouraged violence and valued peace. It starts the class with a broad historical and geographical sweep and coverage of many different religions.
2. Caroline Dodds Pennock, *Bonds of Blood: Gender, Life Cycle, and Sacrifice in Aztec Culture* (Palgrave, 2011)  
This book examines pre-conquest Aztec (Mexica) culture, emphasizing the values and practices of everyday life. It emphasizes that even though religious violence was central to Aztec society, it also contained many humane and ordinary elements. This book is helpful for de-mystifying Aztec sacrifice and showing how ritual violence can coexist with many admirable values and institutions.
3. Lisa Cahill, *Love your Enemies: Discipleship, Pacifism, and Just War Theory* (Augsburg, 1994)  
This book covers the historical development of Christian thinking about war and peace. It describes biblical and theological sources for both just war theory and pacifism. This book shows the diversity of values found within a single religious tradition, including some arguments that use similar concepts (such as the reign of God or discipleship) to justify very different positions.
4. John Kelsay, *Arguing the Just War in Islam* (Harvard 2009)  
This book examines the origins and doctrines of Islamic beliefs about justified violence, focusing on the notion of *jihad* or holy war. It provides an invaluable context for understanding contemporary developments both within the Muslim world and in interpretations of Islam from the outside.
5. Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God* (California, 2003)  
Our final book explores contemporary religious terrorism. Like our first book (by Armstrong), Juergensmeyer shows that many – perhaps all – religious traditions contain seeds

for justifying violence. He also argues that religious values and communities can help resolve such violence.

## **FILMS**

We will see two films in class. Attendance is mandatory.

“The Five Suns: A Sacred History of Mexico” (Oct. 1): This animated film by award-winning producer Patrica Amlin presents Aztec creation stories about the five eras, or suns. It provides a context for understanding the place of human sacrifice in Aztec culture.

“Soldiers of Conscience” (Nov. 3): This documentary profiles eight American soldiers, including four who decide not to kill and become conscientious objectors and four who explain their belief that they are justified and even obligated to kill if necessary.

## **POLICIES, RULES, AND RESOURCES**

1. *Handing in Assignments*: Place all papers in my mailbox in the Religion Department, 107 Anderson Hall. DO NOT slip them under the door or leave them on the door of my office, the main department office, or the teaching assistant’s office. Please also keep a dated electronic copy of all your papers.
2. *Late or Make-Up Assignments*: You may take an exam early or receive an extension on an exam or essay assignment *only* in extraordinary circumstances *and* with prior approval from the instructor. If an extension is not granted, the assignment will be marked down ½ grade (e.g., from B+ to B) for each day late.
3. *Completion of All Assignments*: You must complete all written and oral assignments and fulfill the requirement for class participation in order to pass the course. I will not average a grade that is missing any assignment or requirement.
4. *Attendance and Participation*: Class attendance is required. Do not register for this class if you cannot arrive on time. Students should arrive on time and prepared to discuss the day’s readings. Tardiness harms your understanding of the material and disrupts the class. After the first late arrival, the instructor reserves the right to mark you absent. The instructor will *not* provide notes or discuss material that has already been covered for students who arrive late, barring extraordinary circumstances (which do not include failing to find a parking place or sleeping in).
5. *Common Courtesy*: Cell phones and other electronic devices must be turned off during class. Students who receive or make calls during class will be asked to leave. You may take notes on a laptop computer, although the instructor reserves the right to ask you to turn off the computer if circumstances warrant. The instructor also reserves the right to ask any student engaging in disruptive behavior (e.g., whispering, reading a newspaper) to leave the class. If that occurs, the student will be marked absent for the day.

6. *Honor Code*: On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The university specifically prohibits cheating, plagiarism, misrepresentation, bribery, conspiracy, and fabrication. For more information about the definition of these terms and other aspects of the Honesty Guidelines, see <http://www.chem.ufl.edu/~itl/honor.html>. Any student(s) demonstrated to have cheated, plagiarized, or otherwise violated the Honor Code in *any assignment* for this course will fail the course. In addition, violations of the Academic Honesty Guidelines shall result in judicial action and the sanctions listed in paragraph XI of the Student Conduct Code.

7. *Accommodation for Disabilities*: Students requesting classroom accommodation must first register with the Dean of Students Office. The Dean of Students Office will provide documentation to the student, who must then provide this documentation to the Instructor when requesting accommodation.

8. *Counseling Resources*: Resources available on-campus for students include the following:

- University Counseling Center, 301 Peabody Hall, 392-1575, personal and career counseling;
- Student Mental Health, Student Health Care Center, 392-1171, personal counseling;
- Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS), Student Health Care Center, 392-1161, sexual counseling;
- Career Resource Center, Reitz Union, 392-1601, career development assistance and counseling.

9. *Software Use*: All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate.

## **REQUIREMENTS AND WRITING ASSIGNMENTS**

This class fulfills the **Gordon Rule** writing requirement (GR2) for undergraduates. You must complete at least 2000 words of writing during the semester. Please ensure that your written work fulfills the minimum word requirement.

Important: All written assignments should be handed in during class or left in my mailbox in 107 Anderson Hall. Under *no* circumstances should papers be left in my office (taped to the door, slid under the door, etc.).

1. Active participation in class discussions, based on timely and close reading of all assigned texts (10% of final grade)
2. Religion and violence in the news: Students must bring in a news article or editorial on religion and violence, due Sept. 17, along with a one-page paper explaining the major issues involved, and why this is important and relevant for our class. I will copy and distribute some of these articles for discussion in class on Sept. 29 (10% of final grade)

3. First essay, on comparative religion and violence (1200 words minimum), due by 4:00 on October 16 (30%)
5. Second essay, on just war theory (1200 words minimum) due by 4 pm November 18 (30%).
6. In-class essay exam, on Juergensmeyer, on Dec. 8 (20%)

## **SCHEDULE**

| <b><u>DATE</u></b> | <b><u>ASSIGNMENTS</u></b> |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| Tues 8/25          | Introduction to the class |

### **I. COMPARATIVE RELIGION AND VIOLENCE**

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| Thurs 8/27 | Armstrong, <i>Fields of Blood</i> , Introduction  |
| Tues 9/1   | Armstrong, <i>Fields of Blood</i> , Ch. 1-2   |
| Thurs. 9/3 | Armstrong, <i>Fields of Blood</i> , Ch. 3   |
| Tues. 9/8  | Armstrong, <i>Fields of Blood</i> , Ch. 4-5   |
| Th 9/10    | Armstrong, <i>Fields of Blood</i> , Ch. 6   |
| Tu 9/15    | Armstrong, <i>Fields of Blood</i> , Ch. 7-8   |
| Th 9/17    | Armstrong, <i>Fields of Blood</i> , Ch. 9<br>* News article and one-page paper due in class * |
| Tu 9/22    | Armstrong, <i>Fields of Blood</i> , Ch. 10-11   |
| Th 9/24    | Armstrong, <i>Fields of Blood</i> , Ch. 12-13   |
| Tu 9/29    | * News article discussion *   |

### **II. RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN MESOAMERICA**

|            |   |
|------------|---|
| Thurs 10/1 | Film: "The Five Suns" (Patricia Amlin)                    |
| Tu 10/6    | Pennock, <i>Bonds of Blood</i> , Introduction and Ch. 1-2 |
| Th 10/8    | Pennock, <i>Bonds of Blood</i> , Ch. 3                    |
| Tu 10/13   | Pennock, <i>Bonds of Blood</i> , Ch. 4-5                  |

Th 10/15 Pennock, *Bonds of Blood*, Ch. 6-7 and Conclusion

Friday 10/16 \* First essay Due by 4 pm in my mailbox in 107 Anderson \*

### **III. THE ETHICS OF WAR AND PEACE**

Tu 10/20 Cahill, *Love your Enemies*, Ch. 1-3

Th 10/22 Cahill, *Love your Enemies*, ch. 4-5

Tu 10/27 Cahill, *Love your Enemies*, Ch. 6-9

Th 10/29 Cahill, *Love your Enemies*, Ch. 10-11

Tu 11/3 Film: "Soldiers of Conscience"

Th 11/5 Kelsay, *Arguing the Just War in Islam*, Ch. 1-2

Tu 11/10 Kelsay, *Arguing the Just War in Islam*, Ch. 3-4

Th 11/12 Kelsay, *Arguing the Just War in Islam*, Ch. 5

Tu 11/17 Kelsay, *Arguing the Just War in Islam*, Ch. 6

Wed. 11/18 \* Second essay due at 4 pm in my mailbox \*

### **IV. RELIGIOUS TERRORISM**

Th 11/19 Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, Ch. 1-3

Tu 11/24 Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, Ch. 4-6

Thurs. 11/26 Thanksgiving break – no class

Tu 12/1 Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, Ch. 7-9

Thurs. 12/3 Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, Ch. 10-11

Tu 12/8 \* In-class exam \*