

RELS 3043: Religion and Violence

Fall 2004

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Course Description: Most people consider religion to be the antithesis of violence and in many places and times religion has been a force for peace and social justice. And yet, there is an enduring tension between the peaceable garden cultures found in all religions and their holy warrior cultures which tells us that while it is ultimately right to love our neighbors, it may be our sacred duty to kill them. Indeed, the most cursory walk through history tells us that violence has always been at least one part of the religious experience. And, despite the belief that religion would become less relevant in the modern world, religion appears to have become strangely more relevant to explaining acts of violence. After the events of September 11, understanding religious violence has become imperative not just for scholars of religion, but for everyone.

This course examines the causes, characteristics and consequences of religious violence around the world. It also looks at religion's unique relationship to violence, as the only institution other than the state that can legitimate violent action and the particular ways in which it frames political violence in terms of a struggle between the sacred and the profane, between good and evil. The course begins by examining various theories of religious violence, focusing on three major sets of explanations: (1) scriptural explanations that locate the source of violence in the sacred texts and concepts themselves (2) social/psychological explanations that understand religious violence as performing the necessary function of channeling aggression and maintaining social cohesion (3) global processes explanations, which investigate contemporary global developments that have led to an upsurge of particular forms of religious violence. The second part of the course looks at various cases of religious violence within the world's major religions. When considering violence within these traditions we will examine a variety of cases at the individual level (assassinations and attacks), group level (cult suicides and attacks on others), national level (ethno-religious violence and violence between secular and religious nationalists within countries), and the global level (international terrorism). We seek to understand both the similarities and differences in the manifestations of violence within these religious traditions. In the final part of the course we consider the ways in which religion can offer a solution to the violence it has spawned. We conclude with a discussion of possible responses to religious violence by secular and non-secular institutions, groups, and individuals.

Course Requirements: Evaluation of student performance in this course will be based on the following criteria. First, students are expected to attend class and to be prepared for each class meeting by having read, in advance, the materials assigned for that day; this will serve as a preparation for class discussion. Informed class discussion and regular attendance account for 10% of the final grade. Students will be permitted three unexcused absences during the semester; each additional absence will result in a reduction of this portion of the grade. There will be five unannounced quizzes during the semester on the reading material for that week. These will be graded on a pass/fail basis and will be worth 5% of the final grade. Secondly, students will be asked to write a paper (approximately 10 pages in length) on a case of religious violence; this

paper, due November 15th, will be worth 20% of the final grade. Finally, the midterm exam is worth 30% and the final exam is worth 35% of the final grade.

Course Materials: Four books have been ordered for this course:

- 1.) Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).
- 2.) Charles Sleengut, *Sacred Fury, Understanding Religious Violence* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003).
- 3.) R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred, Religion, Violence and Reconciliation* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000).
- 4.) John Esposito, *Unholy War, Terror in the Name of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

Additional materials will be posted on Blackboard.

Course Policies:

Academic Misconduct: Plagiarism is a serious offense, which will be penalized to the fullest extent. Please make sure you understand what constitutes plagiarism and avoid it at all costs. I encourage you to come talk to me if you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism.

Disruptive Behavior: Any student engaging in disruptive behavior will be asked to leave the classroom for the remainder of the lecture or exam. Disruptive behavior includes receiving phone calls—please turn off your phones before entering the class or exam.

Withdrawals and Incompletes: You will only be allowed to withdraw from this course with a passing grade if you are in fact passing. If you are ill or have some personal situation that prevents you from attending class, your obligation is to contact me as soon as you start missing class in order to discuss your situation. Exception to this policy will be made only in cases of complete withdrawal from the University approved by Student Affairs and the Dean's Office. Incompletes will be given only upon request and only for good cause. Incompletes will not be given if a student has missed so much of the course that it is in a practical sense impossible to make up work.

Special Accommodations: The University of Oklahoma is committed to providing reasonable accommodation for all students with disabilities. Students with disabilities who require accommodations in this course are requested to see me as early in the semester as possible. Students with disabilities must be registered with the Office of Disability Services prior to receiving accommodations in this course. The Office of Disability Services is located in Goddard Health Center, Suite 166.

Changes: Please note that I may decide to change any course material contained in this syllabus. This includes reading materials, assignments, due dates and portions of the grade allotted to individual assignments.

COURSE OUTLINE

PART I: CAUSES OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

Week One (August 24): Introduction

The Ambivalence of the Sacred, introduction, pp.1-19

Terror in the Mind of God, chapter 1, pp.3-15

Sacred Fury, introduction, pp.1-14

Week Two (August 31): Religious Concepts, Scripture, and the Justification of Violence

Terror in the Mind of God, chapters 8 & 9, pp.148-189

Week Three (September 7): Religious Concepts, Scripture, and the Justification of Violence

Sacred Fury, chapter 1, pp.17-48

Unholy War, chapter 2, pp.26-70

Week Four (September 14): Psychological Perspectives on Religious Violence

Sacred Fury, chapter 2, pp.49-94

Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and Its Discontents," (excerpt), link posted on Blackboard

Terror in the Mind of God, chapter 7, pp.121-147

Week Five (September 21): Martyrs and the Apocalypse

Sacred Fury, chapters 3 & 5, pp.95-140, 183-221

"The Martyrdom of Saints Perpetua and Felicitas," link posted on Blackboard

Week Six (September 28): Political Ideologies (Religious Fundamentalism and Ethno-nationalism) and Religious Violence

The Ambivalence of the Sacred, chapters 2 & 3, pp.57-120

Week Seven (October 5): Civilizational Clashes, Culture Wars and Religious Violence

Sacred Fury, chapter 4, 141-182

Samuel Huntington, "Clash of Civilizations," *Foreign Affairs*, Summer 1993, link posted on Blackboard

Benjamin Barber, "Jihad vs. McWorld," *The Atlantic Monthly*, March 1992, link posted on Blackboard

Week Eight (October 12): Holy Warriors

Terror in the Mind of God, chapter 10, pp.190-218

Unholy War, chapter 1, pp.3-25

"Final Instructions to the Hijackers of September 11," Hand-out

MIDTERM EXAM

PART II: CASES OF RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

Week Nine (October 19): Christianity and Violence

Terror in the Mind of God, chapter 2, pp.19-44

Week Ten (October 26): Judaism and Violence

Terror in the Mind of God, chapter 3, pp.45-60

Week Eleven (November 2): Islam and Violence

Terror in the Mind of God, chapter 4; 61-84

Unholy War, chapter 3, pp.71-117

Week Twelve (November 9): Buddhism, Hinduism, and Violence

Terror in the Mind of God, chapters 5 & 6, pp.85-120

PART III: CURES FOR RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE

Week Thirteen (November 16): Religious Traditions and the Propensity toward Peace

The Ambivalence of the Sacred, chapter 4, pp.

Johan Galtung, "Religions, Hard and Soft," *Crosscurrents*, link posted on Blackboard

PAPERS DUE

Week Fourteen (November 23): Thanksgiving Break

Week Fifteen (November 30): Human Rights, Reconciliation and the Religious Mission

The Ambivalence of the Sacred, chapters 5 & 7, pp.167-206, 245-280

Week Sixteen (December 7): Where Do We Go From Here?

Unholy War, chapter 8;

Terror in the Mind of God, chapter 11; 219-250

Sacred Fury, conclusion, pp.223-242

The Ambivalence of the Sacred, chapter 8, pp.281-308

FINAL EXAM