Violence and Nonviolence in Religion

(MW 2:00-3:15PM, PSFA 325) Spring 2014
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Office hours: MW 12:30-1:45 @ AL #665

Description of the Course:

Many religious practitioners believe that sacrality lies at the heart of their religion. In the contemporary world, nevertheless, we observe that religion is deeply intertwined with political conflicts. There are many historical examples of this as well. In recent years, the relation between religion and violence has arisen as an intriguing subject in the field of religious studies. In this course, we will inquire into the role religion plays in the fostering of violence and peace. Is violence inherent in the nature of religion as the other side of sacrality? Are there any particular aspects in religion that serve as powerful tools for the inciting of violence? What are the social elements that encourage violence by utilizing religious beliefs and sentiments? What are the processes by which religious discourses are transformed into violent actions? Finally, we will examine how some religious peacemakers work to reduce the world of violence.

The course will draw on social theories and various thematic studies of religion relevant to the subject.

The course consists of four major parts. The first part will introduce some social theories on religion, violence, and the relationship between the two. It will lay the groundwork for the comparative study of the subject, from both historical and sociological perspectives.

In part II, we will examine how various religions have employed or rejected violence over the course of their historical development. We will look at how their views of violence have been derived from particular interpretations of religious doctrines, and how such perspectives and actions have generated impacts within religious communities or society at large. In the Part III and IV, we will take up several case studies of terrorism inspired by certain religions and religious peacemakers in the contemporary world.

Student Learning Outcomes:

1) To increase the breadth of knowledge by learning about major religions in history and in current global conflicts.
2) Acquire a general understanding of the theoretical issues that confront the subject of violence and religion.
3) To get familiarized with the approaches of academic study of religions
4) To think critically about the relationship between religion and violence.
5) To develop oral presentation skills, teamwork skills, and critical thinking skills by presenting a case along with other students.
HANDOUT: TAKE-HOME EXAM ESSAY QUESTIONS (Due 2/17 12 PM. Submit to Blackboard)

PART II: VIOLENCE AND SACRALITY IN THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

Aztec Sacrifice and Social Control

Judaism: Conquest for the Promised Land
Week 5 B (2/19): *Secrets of Jerusalem's Holiest Sites* (film view)
*Joshua* 1-6

Week 6 A (2/24): Dan Cohn-Sherbok, “War and Peace in Judaism”

Christianity: Martyrdom and Crusades
Week 6 B (2/26): *The Passion of Saints Perpetua and Felicity*
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/perpetua.html

Week 7 A (3/3): The *Crusades* (film view)

Islam: Concept of Jihad

Confucianism: Ritual for Resolving Social Violence
*Confucius* (film view)
Week 8 AB (3/10, 12): *Analects* (excerpts)

Hinduism: Fulfilling Duty (dharma)

Buddhism: (Self-) Sacrifice for Spiritual Fulfillment

Week 10 A (3/24): IN-CLASS EXAM

PART III: RELIGION AND VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETIES
(* Student Presentations of Case Studies)

**Week 11  **Spring Break

* Week 12 A (4/7): “A Buddhological Critique of “Soldier-Zen” in Wartime Japan”

Week 12 B (4/9): Timothy McVeigh Biography Documentary (film view)


**PART IV: RELIGIOUS PEACEMAKERS**

* Week 15 A Thich Nhat Hanh

“Ahimsa, the Path of Harmlessness”
http://www.maaber.org/issue_december08/non_violence1_e.htm

Recommended: *Peace Is Every Step: The Path of Mindfulness in Everyday Life*

Week 15 B  **Martin Luther King, Jr.** : *The Man and the Dream* (film view)

“Pilgrimage to Nonviolence”

* Week 16 A: Peace Movement: Buddhism and Sant’Egidio (Roman Catholicism)
  “Militants for Peace”

* Week 16 B: Peace and Multireligious Co-operation
  “Peace and Multireligious Co-operation”