

# RSOC 188 : Religion and Violence

William J. Dohar – Spring, 2009, TR 3:40 – 5:25

**Course Description:** Most of the wars being fought in the world today have at some place in their complex ideologies religious incentives. Religion and religious attitudes are powerful sources of transformation but also destruction. War is a major theme in this course, but in a sense war is only one result of enthusiasms, memories, and ideas that can give a violent edge to religion. Other themes include images of God and their tendency to violence, radical dualism, sexual ethics and violence, religious exclusion, and apocalyptic terror.

**Course Readings:** Two books are used in this course, Charles Kimball's *When Religion Becomes Evil* and Sam Harris' *The End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*. All other readings are in Angel. All students should have an Angel account—for course readings, picking up discussion questions and being involved in online discussions. The pass code for Angel is **Jerusalem**. There will be regular brief reading assignments from the Christian Scriptures (the Bible); students may consult a printed copy or find pertinent passages online at: <http://www.usccb.org/nab/bible/>

**Course Requirements:** Since this is a third-level course in Religious Studies, there are reasonable but higher expectations in learning and performance, especially where writing and class participation are concerned. One fundamental expectation (mine and, I hope, yours) is an **intellectual commitment** to the subject. This shows up in regular attendance—a physical and intellectual presence—along with a careful, critical and timely reading of all assigned texts. **Participation** is crucial; please bring every assigned text to class on the day due so that participation can be all the more meaningful; failure to do so will affect your participation score. Three short **quizzes** and a final **exam** (essay) chart factual and conceptual understanding of course themes. You have choices in written work: two brief **essays** (3-4 pp) chosen out of four possible topics or, in lieu of one of those papers, an in-class presentation from a list of topics to be announced early in the course. This presentation may be individual or by a self-selected group.

## Course Credit:

Writing:	30%
Participation:	25%
Quizzes:	30%
Final Exam:	15%

**Due dates, late submissions, plagiarism, etc.:** All assignments—reading and writing—are due the day assigned. Extensions are rare but possible, depending on justifiable circumstances and consultation with me. For the sake of fairness, some **grade reduction results with later submissions**. The key here is to plan ahead and meet the deadlines as best you can. Avoid reaching a crisis situation; if in doubt (about this or any other requirement), **see me** and we can work things out. Any student with a learning disability should see me immediately with paperwork from the Drahmann Center so that we can work out necessary accommodations. **Plagiarism in any form** will result in certain failure of the project in question and may result in a failing grade for the entire course according to University policies and procedures (please see: <http://www.scu.edu/studentlife/resources/academicintegrity/>).

## Class Meetings

T 3/31 Introduction to the Course

### Religion and Violence in the Judeo-Christian Tradition

- R 4/2 The Nature and Types of Violence  
\*Paper and Presentation Topics for RSOC 188  
\*Shirley Jackson, "The Lottery"
- T 4/7 Violent God, Violent People? (Or is that the other way around?)  
\*J. Galtung, "Religions, Hard and Soft"  
\*"Eve's Various Children" (The Brothers Grimm)  
Psalm 33; Genesis 3: 1-24; 18:16-33; 22:1-19; Exodus 14:19-31; 15:1-21
- R 4/9 Passover / Holy Thursday (no class)  
\**Jesus Camp*
- T 4/14 The Bigger Picture Paper Option 1  
\*Raine Eisler, *The Chalice and The Blade* (excerpts)  
\**Dies irae* ("Day of Wrath")  
\*"The Battle Hymn of the Republic"
- R 4/16 Patriarchy and Power Quiz 1  
C. Kimball, chs. 1-4

### Religion, Violence and the Body

- T 4/21 Why God Must Die: Atonement Theology Paper Option 2  
\*J. Dennis Weaver, "Violence in Christian Theology"
- R 4/23 Sexuality and Violence  
\*Peter Lewis Allen, "The Heinous Sin of Self-Pollution"  
Leviticus 19, 20
- T 4/28 Violence and Homosexuality Paper Option 3  
\*Countries Which Permit or Outlaw Homosexual Behavior  
\*The Churches and (Anti)Discrimination of Homosexuality
- R 4/30 Religion, Violence and Sexuality: **Online Discussion**
- T 5/5 Martyrs and Heroes Quiz 2  
\*Lacey Baldwin Smith, "The Debate over Definition"  
\*Martyrdom of a Young Christian Woman (the death of St. Perpetua)

### Sam Harris and 'The End of Faith'

- R 5/7 *The End of Faith* (Reading Day)
- T 5/12 Harris, Right or Wrong? Class Discussion  
Sam Harris, *The End of Faith*

R 5/14 Terror, Religion and Solutions: **Online Discussion**  
Sam Harris, *The End of Faith*

**Religion and Waging War (and Peace)**

T 5/19 Can War be Holy? Paper Option 4  
C. Kimball, chs 5-6  
\*G. Weigel, "Moral Clarity in a Time of War"

R 5/21 The Ultimate Religious War: Apocalypse  
\*C. Berlet, "Dances With Devils"  
Ezekiel, 38, 39

T 5/26 Why Does Heaven Have Gates? Quiz 3  
\*\*"Left Behind" and its Critics  
\*C. Berlet (continued)

R 5/28 Spirituality and Alternatives to Violence I  
Luke 6: 27-35  
\*John Neafsey, *A Sacred Voice is Calling* (excerpts)

T 6/2 Spirituality and Alternatives to Violence II  
C. Kimball, ch 7

R 6/4 Religion and Violence in Retrospect

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**Grading Scale:**

A	100 – 95	exceptional
A-	94-90	excellent
B+	89-87	very good
B	86-83	good
B-	82-80	solid performance
C+	79-76	average
C	75-72	
C-	71-69	
D	68-64	
D-	63-60	
F	< 59	

**Contact Info:**

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and by appt  
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