

1-2014

RLST 391.01: Religion and Violence in the Bible and the Ancient World

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Tu 8:15–9:15 am,
Th 11:30 am–1:30 pm,
& by appointment

RLST 391: Religion and Violence in the Bible and the Ancient World

Spring Semester 2014

Tues 2:10 – 5:00 pm GBB 205 3 credits

“Violence is the heart and secret soul of the sacred.”

- René Girard

Course Description:

This course investigates modern, multidisciplinary perspectives on a series of topics that lie at the nexus between religion and violence in biblical antiquity. Topics for discussion include: prehistoric violence and Neolithic religion; conflict myths; the divine warrior; holy war; iconoclasm; sacrifice; curses and magic spells; witchcraft accusations; sectarianism; apocalypticism; martyrdom.

Required Textbooks:

The following books are available for purchase in the UM Bookstore:

1. *The HarperCollins Study Bible* (HarperCollins: 2006)
2. Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (Chicago: 2006)
3. All other assigned readings noted in the syllabus will be available on *electronic reserve* on the Mansfield Library Website (<http://eres.lib.umt.edu/eres/>). Because these readings will be the basis of our discussion, please print these them out and bring them to class with you.

The *e-reserve* password for this course is: **RLST391**

Recommended purchase: Richard E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (HarperCollins: 1997)

Course Requirements:

1. *Attendance and participation:* Regular attendance is required for this course. Preparation for and participation in class meetings is expected and essential.
2. *Readings:* Plan to complete all readings before the class session for which they are assigned. Take notes on the readings to facilitate your discussion in class, and bring the assigned readings with you to class. Students must type out one discussion question on each assigned reading for every class.
3. *Class presentations:* Students will have several opportunities to present assigned materials and their own research in class.
4. *Research paper,* on a topic chosen in consultation with the instructor: 10-15 pages (typed, double-spaced, 12-point font). A *preliminary research topic statement* (1 page, typed) is due by week 7. An *outline* of the research paper (typed) is due by week 11. Student research *presentations* will be given in weeks 14 and 15. The research paper itself is due Friday May 9.

Grading:

- 1) Regular attendance, preparation, and participation in seminar: 20%**
- 2) Preparation of typed discussion questions on class readings: 15%**
- 3) Presentations of class materials: 10%**
- 4) Presentation of research topic: 15%**
- 5) Research paper: 40%**

Course Policies:

- 1) There will be no make-up exams or extensions unless the student has made arrangements at least a week ahead of time. Except in the case of a documented emergency, late assignments will result in a decrease of one letter grade per day.
- 2) Attendance: This course meets once a week for a total of 14 class sessions. Students are allowed one cut; each additional absence will result in a decrease of 15% of the attendance and participation grade (that is, 3% of the final grade). But *more than three cuts will result in failure for the course*. It is the student's responsibility to obtain from a classmate any class notes and other assignment and scheduling information discussed during an absence.
- 3) This is a course about religion as an academic subject and the development of the Bible in historical context. This is not a class that teaches religion or religious doctrine from a religious and/or devotional perspective. In this class, we will be examining biblical literature in an academic and secular setting, and treating the biblical text as an ancient document open to questioning, examination, criticism, and interpretation. An interest in exploring new ideas and new methods of examining the biblical text are essential. This class is not a forum for expressions of personal theology.
- 4) Students may not use any electronic communication devices in the classroom. Tablets and laptops may be used only for note taking, only if necessary, and must remain offline. Students using cell phones, smartphones, or computers to text or go online during class will be asked to leave the classroom.
- 5) Plagiarism – the presentation of others' work as your own – is an offense punishable by course failure and/or expulsion. All work submitted in this class must be your own, and all references to ideas from books, articles, or other sources must be cited correctly. If you do not know how to properly reference your work, or you are in doubt whether or not you should cite material, refer to the University guidelines, or make an appointment to see the instructor to discuss the problem. Anyone found guilty of plagiarism, cheating, forgery, falsification or any other form of academic dishonesty will fail this course and the incident will be reported to the Dean.
- 6) Disability accommodations: Students with disabilities may develop a course accommodation plan with the assistance of Disability Services. The instructor will assist in facilitating all disability accommodations.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Note: Our schedule may change as our course develops. Regular attendance will ensure that you are informed of any changes.

Week 1 (Jan. 28): Introduction to the course

There are no prerequisites for this course, but students without prior background in the academic study of the Bible in the university will find it very helpful to read Richard E. Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* during the first weeks of the semester.

Week 2 (Feb. 4): Thinking about Religion and Violence

Readings:

Bruce Lincoln, *Holy Terrors: Thinking about Religion after September 11* (2006), pp. 1-95 and appendices A-D.

Week 3 (Feb. 11): Religion and Violence in Prehistory and Earliest History

Readings:

Jean Guilaine and Jean Zammit, "Introduction," in *Origins of War: Violence in Prehistory* (2005), pp. 1-39.

David Riches, "The Phenomenon of Violence," in *The Anthropology of Violence* (1986), pp. 1-27.

The HarperCollins Study Bible, pp. xli – xlii, xliv – lvi (the lists of books and abbreviations, the timeline, and especially the short essay sections ("Critical Reading," "Israelite Religion," "Greco-Roman Context") here will provide brief introductions to biblical literature, its ancient contexts, and its modern study. Students are encouraged to also read Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?*)

Genesis 4:1-16

The Stele of the Vultures

Week 4 (Feb. 18): Conflict Myths: Creation and the Divine Warrior

Readings:

Enuma Elish (Babylonian creation account)

Baal (Canaanite myths from Ugarit)

Genesis 1:1-2:4; Psalms 104:3-9; 74:12-19; 89:9-10; Isaiah 27:1; 51:9-10; Job 38:1-11; 40:15-41:34

Hesiod, *Theogony*, lines 116-53, 453-506, 617-731, 820-68

Scott Noegel, "Dismemberment, Creation, and Ritual: Images of Divine Violence in the Ancient Near East," in *Belief and Bloodshed: Religion and Violence across Time and Tradition* (2007), pp. 13-27.

Reza Aslan, "Cosmic War in Religious Traditions" in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence* (2013), pp. 260-67.

Weeks 5 – 6 (Feb. 25, Mar. 4): Holy War

Readings:

Exodus 17:8-14; Leviticus 27:20-21, 28-29; Deuteronomy 7:1-11; 13:12-18; 20; 21:10-14; 23:9-14; 24:5; 25:17-19; Joshua 1-8; Judges 3:1-4; 1 Samuel 15

The Mesha Inscription

Assyrian Royal Monumental Victory Inscriptions

John Renard, “Exegesis and Violence: Texts, Contexts, and Hermeneutical Concerns,” in *Fighting Words: Religion, Violence, and the Interpretation of Sacred Texts* (2012), pp. 1-10 and 20-26.

Reuven Firestone, “A Brief History of War in the Hebrew Bible and the Jewish Interpretive Tradition,” in *Fighting Words: Religion, Violence, and the Interpretation of Sacred Texts* (2012), pp. 29-54

Bernhard Asen, “Annihilate Amalek: Christian Perspectives on 1 Samuel 15,” in *Fighting Words: Religion, Violence, and the Interpretation of Sacred Texts* (2012), pp. 55-74

John Collins, “The Zeal of Phinehas: The Bible and the Legitimation of Violence,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 122.1 (2003): 3-21

Stephen Geller, “The Prophetic Roots of Religious Violence in Western Religions,” in *Religion and Violence: The Biblical Heritage* (2007), pp. 47-56

Hector Avalos, “Religion and Scarcity” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence* (2013), pp. 554-70.

Week 7 (Mar. 11): Iconoclasm

Readings:

Biblical texts:

Law: Exodus 20:4; 20: 23; 34:17; Leviticus 19:4; 26:1; Deuteronomy 4:15-28; 5:8; 12:1-5; 27:15

Narrative: Genesis 35:1-4; Exodus 32; 1 Samuel 4-6; 2 Samuel 6; 1 Kings 12: 25-32; 2 Kings 19:15-19;

Poetry: Jeremiah 10:1-16; Isaiah 40:19-20; 41:6-7; 42:17; 44:9-20; 45:16-17, 20; 46:1-7; 48:5; Habakkuk 2:18-19; Psalms 115:3-8; 135:15-18.

Apocrypha: *Bel and the Dragon*; *Letter of Jeremiah*

Joel Black, “‘Obliterating an Idol of the Modern Age’: The New Iconoclasm from the Twin Buddhas to the Twin Towers,” in *Belief and Bloodshed: Religion and Violence across Time and Tradition* (2007): 179-94.

Harvey Whitehouse and Brian McQuinn, “Divergent Modes of Religiosity and Armed Struggle,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence* (2013), pp. 597-619.

Weeks 8 – 9 (Mar. 18, Mar. 25): Sacrifice

Readings:

Genesis 22:1-19; Exodus 13:1-2; 22:29-30; 34:19-20; Leviticus 1-7, 16; Jeremiah 19:4-9; Ezekiel 20:25-26; Judges 11; 2 Kings 3:24-27.

Mark 1:11; 8:34-37; 9:2-8; 14:1-15:47; John 1:29-34; 3:16-21; 6:1-59; 1 Corinthians 8:1-13; 10:14-33; 11:23-32; Hebrews 5:1-10; 7:11-28; 9:1-10:31; Revelation 4:1-6:17.

Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 3, lines 451-520.

The following readings and page numbers are excerpted from *Princeton Readings in Religion and Violence* (eds. Mark Juergensmeyer and Margo Kitts, Princeton 2011):

Émile Durkheim, “Elementary Forms of Religious Life,” pp. 100-07.

Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, “Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function,” pp. 108-114.

Sigmund Freud, “Totem and Taboo,” pp. 115-126.

René Girard, “Sacrifice, Violence and the Sacred,” pp. 127-40

Nancy Jay, “Sacrifice and Decent,” pp. 178-89.

Walter Burkert, “Sacrificial Violence: A Problem in Ancient Religions,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence* (2013), pp. 437-454.

David Carrasco, “Sacrifice/Human Sacrifice in Religious Traditions,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence* (2013), pp. 209-225.

Stanley Stowers, “The Religion of Plant and Animal Offerings Versus the Religion of Meanings, Essences, and Textual Mysteries,” in *Ancient Mediterranean Sacrifice* (2011), pp. 35-56.

Week 10 (Apr. 1): Spring Break ➔

Week 11 (Apr. 8): Curses, “Magic,” and Witchcraft Accusations

Readings:

Genesis 3:1-19; 4:10-12; 9:18-27; 27:1-40; Numbers 22-24; Deut 27-28; Jeremiah 36

Mesopotamian, Egyptian, and Greco-Roman curses and magic spells:

- including selections from Hans Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation* [1992]; and Robert K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* [1993]

Anne Marie Kitz, *Cursed Are You! The Phenomenology of Cursing in Cuneiform and Hebrew Texts* (2014), “Introduction.”

Rüdiger Schmitt, “Theories Regarding Witchcraft Accusations and the Hebrew Bible,” in *Social Theory and the Study of Israelite Religion* (2012), 181-94.

Week 12 (Apr. 15): Apocalypticism and Sectarianism

Readings:

Hebrew Bible: Daniel 2, 7-12;

Dead Sea Scrolls: *Damascus Document*, *Habakkuk Interpretation*, *War Scroll* (selections);

New Testament: Mark 1:34; 1:43; 5:43; 8:31-9:1; 13:1-8; Matthew 24:1-25:46; Luke 21:5-36;
Galatians 1:6-2:21; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 4:13- 5:11; 1 Corinthians 15; Revelation

Alex Jassen, "The Dead Sea Scrolls and Violence: Sectarian Formation and Eschatological Imagination," *Biblical Interpretation* 17 (2009): pp. 12-44.

John Gager and Leigh Gibson, "Violent Acts and Violent Language in the Apostle Paul," in *Violence in the New Testament* (2005), pp. 13-21.

David Frankfurter, "The Legacy of Sectarian Rage: Vengeance Fantasies in the New Testament," in *Religion and Violence: The Biblical Heritage* (2005), pp. 114-28.

James Velji, "Apocalyptic Religion and Violence," in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence* (2013), pp. 250-59.

Week 13 (Apr. 22): Martyrdom

Readings:

1 Maccabees 1:1-2:38; 2 Maccabees 5:18-20; 6:1-7:42; 14:37-46

Acts 8:1; 9:1-2.

Letter of Ignatius to the Romans; Martyrdom of Polycarp; Martyrdom of Perpetua & Felicitas

Candida Moss, *The Myth of Persecution* (2013), pp. 1-21, 94-104, 127-62, 247-83

Bruce Lincoln, "Violence," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Mediterranean Religions* (2013), pp. 199-219

Weeks 14 – 15 (Apr. 29, May 6): Student Presentations