

**RELS 101: INTRODUCTION TO RELIGION-RELIGION, CONFLICT, AND PEACE**

**Instructor:** Todd LeVasseur

Office: 4 Glebe Street, Room 206 (upstairs in the back), 3-3911

Office Hours: M/W, 11:45 to 1:45pm, or by appointment (email works best)

Email: [levasseurjt@cofc.edu](mailto:levasseurjt@cofc.edu) (I typically respond to emails within 24 hours, except on weekends)

Lectures: EDCT 103 TR 4:30-5:45pm

Credits: 3 Semester Hours (fulfills core requirement for Religion Major or Minor)

\*\*\*Any student may email me for a copy of my teaching philosophy.\*\*\*

In announcing the Office of Faith-Based Community Initiatives (part of the State Department) at the White House, Secretary of State John Kerry expressed the following: “In fact, if I went back to college today, I think I would probably major in comparative religion because that’s how integrated [religion] is in everything that we are working on and deciding and thinking about in life today.”

**Course Description and Instructional Format:** This course is designed to introduce College of Charleston students to the academic study of religion, as well as to some of the diverse religious traditions extant on our planet. The course is a mixture of lectures, videos, open class discussion, and small group discussion. The course is designed so that the student, by the end of the semester, has gained a basic appreciation and understanding of some of the world’s major religions, and why such an understanding is important for both a liberal arts education and also to being a world citizen.

**Course Goals and Objectives:** Specific goals of the course are as follows:

1. To introduce students to the academic study of religion, including brief exposure to key theorists and various methodologies for studying religion; the historical development of the field; and the influence of liberal Protestantism on both the field’s formation, and popular U.S. conceptions of “religion.”
2. To gain a basic level of understanding and knowledge about varieties of Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, respectively, including their historical development and current manifestations, as well as learning about key figures, sacred texts, important terms, and foundational concepts as these relate to the topics of peace and conflict.
3. To gain an appreciation for the complex, myriad, and often times contentious ways in which religion has shaped politics, from ancient to modern times and from local to global levels, with a special focus on the U.S.
4. To help students encounter religious traditions outside of those in which they were raised/are most familiar with, thus helping to build citizenship and religious literacy skills.
  - a. <http://www.cofc.edu/about/missionvisionvalues/index.php>
  - b. Daniel Deffenbaugh: “One of the fundamental objectives of any pedagogical strategy is to force students to step outside their received system of values and consider the validity of new ideas and novel approaches to understanding the world.”

Specific objectives of the course are as follows:

1. To facilitate the development of critical thinking skills regarding the study of world religions.
2. To develop comfort in working with small groups and participating in class discussions.
3. To systematically create a research paper that requires reflection on the writing and research process.
4. To attempt to critically empathize with leading authorities within Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism in regards to why they advocate for either peace or violence, and the impacts their teachings and/or living example may have on certain followers, past and present.
5. To introduce ways to consider how religion can become a source for conflict resolution.

This course satisfies the **General Education Student Learning Outcomes:**

1. Students demonstrate effective writing skills with the ability to craft an argument in defense of a coherent thesis statement using and analyzing supporting evidence from primary and secondary sources.
2. Students understand, interpret, and contextualize primary texts from one or more religious traditions.

3. Students recognize and explain the major theoretical perspectives and key issues of debate in the academic study of religion.
  1. These will be assessed on paper assignment #2, worth 20% of your grade.

### Required Texts:

There are required readings that will be made available on OAKS. You should bring all assigned readings (book or on-line) to class for the day they are assigned, as this is when you should raise questions about any content you did not understand. Readings listed for the day are to be read by the beginning of class for that day, and ideally printed out to be brought to class. I suggest downloading all pdfs ASAP so you have them on your computer.

- *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* by Mark Juergensmeyer (“TMG,” below)
- *Peace is Every Step* by Thich Nhat Hanh (“PES,” below)
- A variety of readings will be made available on OAKS. These are to be printed out and brought to class.
- For suggested movies: from CofC Library main page, go to Databases; then “F;” then choose “Films on Demand;” then type in the title of the movie provided below, in the “search” box. These are extra credit worthy.

### Requirements, Expectations, and Resources:

1) *Assignments:* Your grade will be determined based on the performance you exhibit for the following:

1. Class participation—This includes your attendance, how well you engage the assigned readings, and how often and how well you contribute to class discussions and small group discussions. There will also be a mix of summaries of readings and/or question prompts about the readings that count towards this aspect of your grade. Students should check email regularly for reading quiz questions, which will be emailed at least 24 hours in advance of the class for when they are due, although some questions will be made available on OAKS. Participation may also include possible reflection journals based on a prompt provided by the professor, which will become the basis of a discussion. Students who are exceptionally engaged and who exhibit mastery of course materials and a robust inquisitiveness about the course content may earn more than 100% for this part of the overall grade. 20% of grade.
2. Paper assignments—you are write two papers for the course:
  1. Biography of a Christian Peace Activist—the first 5-page paper is to be a biography of a peace activist (excluding Jesus) or peace advocacy group from Christianity with the focus being on any era. Details will be discussed in class. 15% of your total grade.
  2. Compare and Contrast Muslim views of peace and conflict using Lakoff—this paper is a comparison of Muslim legal scholars and religious leaders, one advocating peace, the other violence, where analysis of their position will be contextualized using George Lakoff. This 7-paper will also include a reflection on your researching and writing process. Details will be discussed in class. 20% of your grade; paper counts towards your SLO objectives.
  3. Movie reviews and reflections on the following movies—see OAKS for metrics. Each movie review is worth 5% for 15% of your grade:
    - i. *War Made Easy*. Due 1/27.
      1. <http://coc.kanopystreaming.com.nuncio.cofc.edu/node/41591>
    - ii. *Constantine’s Sword*. Due 2/13 by 4pm in my mailbox, 4 Glebe St.
      1. <http://constantinessword.com/>
      2. [http://dvd.netflix.com/Movie/Constantine\\_s\\_Sword/70073043](http://dvd.netflix.com/Movie/Constantine_s_Sword/70073043)
    - iii. *I Am*. Due 4/14.
      1. [http://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/i\\_am\\_2010/](http://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/i_am_2010/)

\*\*\*Hard copies of these assignments are due at the beginning of class; *late papers will be marked down 15 points for every successive 24 hours they are late from the start of class period.*

3. Quizzes—there will be an in-class quiz on Tuesday, February 3<sup>rd</sup>. 10% of grade.
4. Tests—These are not cumulative, and will consist of fill in the blank, listing of key concepts, multiple choice, matching, short answer, and essay questions. Study guides will be provided in advance for each test. 20% of your grade per test, for 40%.
5. Extra Credit—there will be options for extra credit as the course develops. Most likely these will include watching movies (especially those listed in the syllabus found in CofC’s Films on Demand) and/or analyzing a current source of conflict over religion that is garnering media attention. Extra credit summaries of these events must be 250 to 350 words and contain three things you have learned about religion and contain connections to what we have covered in class. Each activity is worth .5 points, and a student may earn a total of 3 possible extra

credit points that are added onto their final grade. The final day to turn in extra credit work is the last day of class. Any student who was present for the entirety of each class will automatically receive .5 points.

Grading Scale: A: 93-100; A-: 90-92; B+: 88-89; B: 83-87; B-: 80-82; C+: 78-79; C: 73-77; C-: 70-72; D+: 68-69; D: 63-67; D-: 61-62; F: 60.49 or below (all grades ending in .5 or higher are rounded up to the next point)

2) *Attendance*: Attendance is mandatory. Roll will be taken at the beginning of each lecture. If you are repeatedly more than 5 minutes late to class, you will begin to be counted as absent for that day, as tardiness harms your understanding of the material and disrupts the class. After 2 unexcused absences of any kind, your grade drops by 1/3 letter (i.e. A to A-, C- to D+, etc.) for each successive absence. After your 5th unexcused absence, you will receive a WA and be dropped from the course. An excused absence means that I receive an email from CofC saying your excuse was “documented,” if I receive an email (or no notice at all) saying your absence was “undocumented,” then it is unexcused. I will forward to you all emails I receive from Student Affairs in regards to an absence so you are aware if it is documented/undocumented.

Please note:

\*\*It is up to you to contact the Office of Student Affairs in order to find out what counts as a documented excuse.

\*\*It is up to you to receive class notes from your peers if you miss a class, as lecture notes will not be shared and/or repeated after the day they are presented. Students are more than welcome to come to the office to view .ppt lectures if they were present the day of the lecture and were not able to fully capture all of the material during a lecture, or if there are questions about content covered that day in class. .Ppt’s will not be made available online, so make sure you are taking good notes during class. Lastly, if I am going too fast during a lecture, ask me to slow down.

\*\*A valid, documented excuse must be received in order for a test to be made up; missed quizzes and reading summaries are not able to be made up or turned in late—you must be present to turn them in, or must clear *in advance* with me that you will *email your answers before class begins* if you are unable to be in class.

2) *Common Courtesy*: As stated by the Code of Conduct in the CofC Student Handbook, cell phones, personal computers, and other electronic devices must be turned off during the whole class period. The instructor also reserves the right to ask any student engaging in disruptive behavior (i.e. whispering, reading a newspaper, surfing the web, texting messages, etc.) to leave the class. Be aware that if the professor observes that a student is often, and more so, continuously texting or using their computer for activities not directly related to the course, then the student’s class participation component of the overall grade will automatically lose points. Please stay focused and on task if you have your computer open.

3) *Honor Code*: On all work submitted for credit by students at CofC, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The legal code of the College specifically prohibits plagiarism, cheating, bribing, conspiracy, misrepresentation, and fabrication. If evidence suggests that such actions have taken place, then I will send the work in question to the Office of Student Affairs/Dean of Students, where they will begin procedures to investigate possible infractions. If it is proven that any student has committed any of the above infractions of the honor code, then that student will automatically fail the course with an XF. In addition, violations of the Academic Honesty Guidelines shall result in judicial action. Students should be aware that unauthorized collaboration (working together without permission) is a form of cheating—*this is especially true on the take-home reading quizzes, whereas if strong evidence appears that students collaborated, then all parties involved will automatically receive a “0” for that assignment.*

**\* Inappropriate paraphrasing, especially of internet sources, is the most common type of plagiarism; please refer to the following tutorials for tips on how to avoid it:**

<http://libguides.library.cofc.edu/content.php?pid=47664&sid=351353>

\*Students can find the complete Honor Code and all related processes in the *Student Handbook* at <http://studentaffairs.cofc.edu/honor-system/studenthandbook/index.php>

4) *Accommodation for Disabilities*: To request classroom accommodation, you must first register with the Center for Disability Services at the beginning of the semester. This office will provide you with documentation that you will then provide to me when you request accommodation. For more information, please see <http://www.cof.cedu/~cgs/index.htm>

5) Counseling Resources, a writing lab, and a career resource center are all available to CofC students and are staffed with trained professionals.

\*Counseling and Substance Abuse Services: Suite 300 RSS building; 843-953-5640

\* **Center for Student Learning:** I encourage you to utilize the Center for Student Learning's (CSL) academic support services for assistance in study strategies, speaking & writing skills, and course content. They offer tutoring, Supplemental Instruction, study skills appointments, and workshops. Students of all abilities have become more successful using these programs throughout their academic career and the services are available to you at no additional cost. For more information regarding these services please visit the CSL website at <http://csl.cofc.edu> or call (843)953-5635.

\*really helpful links: <http://csl.cofc.edu/student-resources/index.php>

**Course Schedule (assigned readings are to be read by the beginning of class for the day they are assigned; OAKS readings should be printed and brought to class)**

\*\*\*It is the student's responsibility to approach me if a reading is not clear or if there are unanswered questions about the reading. The same is true for content covered in class. If you do not verbalize to me that you are having difficulty understanding course content (from class or readings), then I can only assume that everything is clear. If this is not the case, then you should approach me after class or during office hours. As much of what we read and discuss will be new material, there will most likely be difficulties; if this is your experience, then please see me. Remember, grades are not randomly assigned! When you do well (or not) on an assignment or test, reflect on the factors that made a difference—the time you committed, your awareness of the instructions, your understanding of the material, and the help you sought.\*\*\*

**Unit 1:** Key concepts, theories, and methods

\*note that throughout the course you will most likely encounter new words and concepts foreign to you. Many of these are new words in terms of language, and also religious concepts. Familiarize yourself the best you can, because you'll see them in lecture and on the tests. Pay attention to the ones that you encounter in class and in the readings. This holds true for all units/religions we will cover.

- Tuesday, 1/13: get syllabus; defining key terms
- Thrs, 1/15: begin working on Kripal, Intro through 2
- Tues, 1/20: OAKS—Kripal, Intro through Chapter 2
- Thrs 1/22: OAKS—Martin on “Authentic” religion
- Tues, 1/27: no reading; movie review #1 due
- Thrs, 1/29: TMG—preface and Introduction
- Tues, 2/3: quiz #1

**Unit 2: Christianities, Peace, and Conflict**

- Thrs, 2/5: meet in library to begin research
  - FD: The Birth of a New Religion: Christianity in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Centuries; In the Name of Christ
- Tues, 2/10: OAKS: Walter Wink *Jesus and Nonviolence*, chapters 1-3 (pg. 1-50)
- Thrs, 2/12: no reading
- FRIDAY 2/13: movie review 2 due on Constantine's Sword by 4pm in my mailbox at 4 Glebe Street
- Tues, 2/17: TMG, chp 2, pg. 19-36
- Thrs, 2/19: no reading
  - FRIDAY, 2/20, 3pm—paper 1 due in my mailbox, 4 Glebe Street
  - Complete on-line plagiarism “Post-Test Your Knowledge” and print results to turn in with your paper: <http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/plag/plagiarismtutorial.php>
- Tues, 2/24: Test 1

**Unit 3: Varieties of Islam, Peace, and Conflict**

- Thrs, 2/26: OAKS—selections from Edward Said; postcolonial theory; representation of Islam as the “Other” in the West; Islamaphobia
  - FD: The Arabs Make Their Entrance: Islam and Empire; Islam vs. Islam; 9/11 Through Saudi Eyes
- SPRING BREAK—be safe and have fun!
- Tues 3/10: OAKS: two Muslim views of the same Quranic passage
- Thrs 3/12: TMG, chapter 4
- Tues 3/17: OAKS: George Lakoff
- Thrs, 3/19: Sam Harris interview
- Tues, 3/24: TMG, chapter 7
- Thrs, 3/26: *Promises* documentary
  - FRIDAY, 3/26, 3pm—paper 2 due in my mailbox, 4 Glebe Street
- Tues 3/31: finish *Promises*

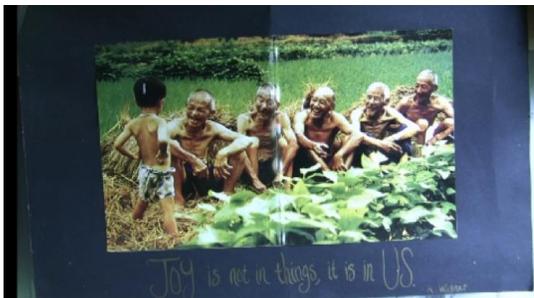
#### Unit 4: Varieties of Buddhism, Peace, and Conflict

- Thrs 4/2 : OAKS—basics on Buddhism; lecture
  - FD suggested movie: Walking with Buddha
- Tues, 4/7: PES, foreword through pg. 35
- Thrs, 4/9: PES, 36-83
- Tues, 4/14: PES, finish PES (84-134)
- Thrs, 4/16: no reading; *I Am* review is due
- Tues, 4/21: *The Dhamma Brothers* documentary
- Thrs, 4/23: finish documentary; OAKS: Martin Buber, selections

Final Exam on Units 3 and 4-- visit the Registrar's Office website for full final exam schedule  
<http://registrar.cofc.edu/pdf/exam-schedule-spring2015.pdf>

#### “The Laughing Oath”

I do solemnly swear from this day forward  
To grease my giggling gears each day  
And to wear a grin on my face for no reason at all  
I promise to tap my funny bone often,  
With children, family, friends, colleagues and clients,  
And to laugh at least fifteen times per day.  
I believe that frequent belly laughter  
Cures terminal tightness, cerebral stuffiness,  
And hardening of the attitudes,  
And that HA HA often leads to AHA!  
Therefore, I vow, from this day forth,  
To brighten the day of everyone I meet,  
And to laugh long and prosper.



“Joy is not in things, it is in Us.”