

RELS 101: Religion and Protest

Fall, 2020

Sections 02, 03

Instructor: Jeremy Fisher, PhD.

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Time/Location: MWF 11am-11:50am; 12pm-12:50pm: Zoom/ECTR 219

Office: Religious Studies Department, 2nd Floor, 4 Glebe St.

Office Hours: By appointment only (via Zoom or face-to-face)

Course Description: This course is designed to introduce students to the academic study of religion by exploring the complex relation between Religion and Protest. It will do so in three ways: 1) by examining events in which religious commitments and/or communities have inspired individuals and groups to challenge perceived social wrongs (i.e. “Religious Protest”); 2) by considering a number of intersectional critiques regarding the nature of religion and/or faith in social justice efforts (i.e. “Protesting Religion”); and 3) by examining the role that “religious freedom” plays in contemporary American socio-political discussions (i.e. “Religious Protest in the United States”). Through thoughtful analysis and lively discussion, we will examine the extent to which religion can be considered both an aid and an obstacle to social justice. In so doing, students will begin to develop the critical skills necessary to assess the quality of current disputations concerning the appropriate role and social impact of religion in the public sphere.

Required Text: There is no textbook for this class. All required readings will be uploaded to Oaks. Documentary films and clips can be found on YouTube, with the exception of “Hail Satan” which students will be required to rent/purchase online. (Available free on Hulu.)

Course Objectives: The primary goal of this course is the development of a critical approach to the academic study of religion. I find that this development is best achieved through a combination of lecture and active discussion and so this course is designed primarily to facilitate and encourage open dialogue. Through comparative, historical, and dialogical analysis, students will 1) learn how various religious adherents articulate the central features of their respective religious systems (i.e. values, concepts, narratives, texts, etc.); 2) identify how those features influence their conceptions of social justice and reform; 3) recognize the “identity-specific” markers that motivate social action; and 4) give critical voice to their own religious or non-religious views.

This course satisfies the General Education requirements for a course in the Humanities, which address these two additional Student Learning Outcomes: 1) students analyze how ideas are represented, interpreted or valued in various expressions of human culture, and 2) students examine relevant primary source materials as understood by the discipline and interpret the

material in writing assignments. The first learning outcome will be assessed on the third paper, and the second will be assessed on the second paper. Assessment of student work will NOT be determined on the basis of religious affiliation or lack thereof.

Course Expectations: Due to social distancing requirements, this class will include a variety of online and technology enhanced components aimed at reinforcing continuity of learning for all enrolled students. Before the drop/add deadline, students should decide whether the course plan outlined below matches their own circumstances. Accommodations can be made if possible, however, they cannot be guaranteed.

Logistically, this class is designed as a hybrid of synchronous Zoom sessions with in-class meetings. However, given the unpredictable nature of present circumstances, your professor reserves the right to hold ALL class meetings online and students should prepare for that eventuality. That said, students are expected to attend each Zoom session *at the regularly scheduled time*, just as if we were meeting on campus. In-class meetings (if possible) will be scheduled in advance and in accordance with the college's policy regarding room capacity and social distancing requirements. More information will be provided as necessary.

Pedagogically, students are expected to attend each class prepared for critical discussion. Such preparation can be particularly challenging given the myriad of distractions that accompany distance education. However, while an online format may present us with some different communication challenges, it need not prevent us from fostering an active and interactive “in-class” experience. Assigned readings are to be completed prior to class meeting, and all questions and comments should be raised during class time. Whether in Zoom meetings or in person, students are expected *to be present*—a presence which may require a bit more concentrated discipline on the student's part.

“Netiquette” and Protocols: Because online communication often lacks the body language and nonverbal cues we're used to in a normal face-to-face courses, it is important that we abide by the following practices:

- Be professional. Even if we're online, this is a class and we should all act like it. When you attend a Zoom session, please try to join from a quiet place where you are less likely to be disturbed. Be sure to dress appropriately and be aware of your surroundings. Remember, whatever your webcam sees, EVERYONE sees! If you foresee any difficulties accessing our Zoom meetings, please let me know ASAP!
- Be patient. This is my first (nearly-fully) online course. It may be yours too. I have had training and read research on online education, but inevitably, there will be some hiccups. Together, we must be flexible and forgiving and stay focused!
- Be ethical. Should we return to the classroom, mask requirements and social distancing protocols will be enforced according to college policy. Whether face-to-face or online, racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and/or any language or behavior that dehumanizes or degrades others will not be tolerated. **Period.** Students are expected to be respectful to one another and open to new ideas, critiques, and/or challenges.

Course Requirements: This class is assessed on a 150pt grading scale. In addition to attending class meetings and completing assigned readings, students will be required to complete 10 (out of a total of 13) discussion posts throughout the semester. (One per week, 5pts/ea.) The combined score on these posts will constitute 50pts of your final grade. Late posts will NOT be accepted.

There will also be four graded papers. The first is a minimum of 3-pages and worth 10pts; the second, third, and fourth will be a minimum of 6-pages and worth 30pts each. (100pts total) Each will be prompted and offer a number of questions from which to answer. Late papers will be accepted, with a 5pt/day penalty. I strongly encourage each of you to take advantage of the Writing Lab in the Center for Student Learning. Trained writing consultants can help with writing for all courses, and they offer one-to-one consultations that address everything from brainstorming and developing ideas to crafting strong sentences and documenting sources. To work with a consultant, visit <http://csl.cofc.edu>.

Lying, cheating, attempting cheating and/or plagiarism are violations of the student Honor Code (complete version and all related processes can be found in the online Student Handbook) which, when identified, will be investigated. Any student found responsible by the Honor Board will receive a XXF in the course, indicating failure for academic dishonesty.

Numerical and letter grades will be based upon the following scale: A = 100-92; A- = 91-89
B+ = 88-86; B = 85-82; B- = 81-79; C+ = 78-76; C = 75-72; C- = 71-69; D+ = 68-66;
D = 65-62; D- = 61-59; F = 58 and below

The College of Charleston abides by section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act. If you have a documented disability that may have some impact on your work in this class and for which you may require accommodations, please see an administrator at the Center of Disability Services/SNAP, 843.953.1431 and contact me ASAP so that such accommodation may be arranged.

Course Schedule, Readings, and Assignments:
(Instructor reserves the right to amend as necessary.)

Weds, Aug 26: Introduction and Expectations

Fri, Aug 28: Guiding Questions: What is Religion? Why do we study it?

See CofC's Department of Religious Studies website: "Why study Religion?"

Mon, Aug 31: Situational Awareness: Selection from *Religion Matters* by Stephen Prothero:
"Why Religion Matters" pp. 3-14

Weds, Sept 2: Religion and Protest: Continued discussion of "Why Religion Matters" pp. 14-21

Fri, Sept 4: Summary and Outline of Paper One

--Discussion Post One due 5pm.

I. Religious Protest

Mon, Sept 7: **Engaged Buddhism**

Selections from *Being Benevolence: The Social Ethics of Engaged Buddhism (BB)* by Sallie B. King: “Building from Tradition” pp. 12-27.

Weds, Sept 9: Continued Discussion: Selections from *BB*: “Nonviolence,” p. 41;

“Nonadversarial Stance,” pp. 72-80; “Pragmatism,” pp. 80-82; “The Imperative to Act,” pp. 82-86.

Fri, Sept 11: **No Zoom Meeting**

Film Clips: “Buddhist Masters Explain the Power of Peaceful Protest” from HuffPost—available on YouTube

--Interview with Oprah and Thich Nhat Hanh (available on YouTube: search Oprah and Thich Nhat Hanh) (BurcuBasan: 37:27)

Paper One Due

--Discussion Post Two due 5pm.

Mon, Sept 14: “Thich Nhat Hanh and the Vietnamese Struggle Movement” in *BB*, pp. 172-176;

“Please Call me By My Real Names,” a poem by Thich Nhat Hanh

Weds, Sept 16: “The Dalai Lama” in *BB*, pp. 176-185

Selection from *Ethics for the New Millennium* by the Dalai Lama: “Peace and Disarmament” pp. 201-217.

Fri, Sept 18: Thich Quang Duc: “Self-Immolation” in *BB*, pp. 192-195.

--Discussion Post Three due 5pm.

Mon, Sept 21: **Judeo-Christian Tradition**

Selections from Emil Fackenheim’s *God’s Presence in History:*

Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections: pp. 3-8; 25-30; 84-98.

Weds, Sept 23: Continued Discussion

Fri, Sept 25: **No Zoom Meeting**

Film: Presentation by Prof. Martin Kavka: “Emil Fackenheim’s Argument for the 614th Commandment” available on YouTube (44:06)

--Discussion Post Four due 5pm.

Mon, Sept 28: Selections from James Cone’s *Martin & Malcom & America: A Dream or a Nightmare:* pp. 125-135.

Weds, Sept 30: Martin Luther King Jr.: “Letter from a Birmingham Jail,” in *Why We Can’t Wait:* pp. 64-84. King’s audio available on YouTube (clip by Justin Ashurst, 48:39)

Fri, Oct 2 : Continued Discussion

--Discussion Post Five due 5pm.

II. Protesting Religion

Mon, Oct 5: Selections from James Cone's *Martin & Malcom & America*: pp. 93-110

Weds, Oct 7: Continued Discussion

Fri, Oct 9: Malcom X: "Message to the Grass Roots," in George Brietman (ed.), *Malcom X Speaks*: pp. 3-17. Audio of X's speech available on YouTube

--Discussion Post Six due 5pm.

Mon, Oct 12: *Paper Two Due—Religious Protest*

Allen Mohl: "Monotheism: It's Influence on Patriarchy and Misogyny"

Weds, Oct 14: Selection from Mary Daly in *Womenspirit Rising*: "After the Death of God the Father: Women's Liberation and the Transformation of Christian Consciousness" pp. 52-62

Fri, Oct, 16: Continued Discussion

--Discussion Post Seven due 5pm.

Mon, Oct 19: Selection from Anthony Petro's *After the*

Wrath of God: AIDS, Sexuality, and American Religion: "Protest Religion! ACT UP, Religious Freedom, and the Ethics of Sex"

Weds, Oct 21: **No Zoom Meeting**

Film: "United in Anger" available on YouTube (1:33:55)

Fri, Oct 23: Continued Discussion

--Discussion Post Eight due 5pm.

Mon, Oct 26: Selection from Sam Harris' *End of Faith: Religion, Terror, and the Future of Reason*: "Reason in Exile," pp. 11-25; 44-49.

Weds, Oct 28: Selection from Christopher Hitchens' *God is not Great: How Religion Poison's Everything*: "Is Religion Child Abuse?" pp. 217-228.

Fri, Oct 30: Selection from Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*: "The Roots of Morality: Why are we good?" pp. 211-214; 226-233.

--Discussion Post Nine due 5pm.

III. Religious Protest in the United States

Mon, Nov 2: Religious Freedom: Amendment 1 of the Constitution (Available online)

Weds, Nov 4: **No Zoom Meeting**

Film: “Hail Satan” available to stream/rent through Hulu, YouTube, Amazon

Fri, Nov 6: Continued Discussion

--Discussion Post Ten due 5pm.

Mon, Nov 9: Religion and Ecology

Lynn White: “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis”

Paper Three Due—Protesting Religion

Weds, Nov 11: Willis Jenkins: “After Lynn White”

Fri, Nov 13: Continued Discussion

--Discussion Post Eleven due 5pm.

Mon, Nov 16-Fri, Nov 20: Religion and Health Care (*Readings and films TBD)

Potential topics include: Forgoing and Demanding Life-Prolonging Treatment, Active Euthanasia/Assisted Suicide, Organ Transplantation, Abortion/Maternal-Fetal Relations, Reproductive Technologies/Stem Cell Research, Human Genetics/Genomics, Research Involving Human Subjects, Justice/Access to Health Care, Public Health

(Fri, Nov 20--**Discussion Post Twelve due 5pm.**)

Mon, Nov 23-Fri, Nov 27: NO CLASS—Thanksgiving Break

Mon, Nov 30: Religion in the Public Sphere: Religious Education

Selection from *Religious Literacy* by Stephen Prothero: “Religion Matters” pp. 49-70

Weds, Dec 2: Continued Discussion

Fri, Dec 4: Course Wrap Up

--Discussion Post Thirteen due 5pm.

Final Paper Due Friday, Dec 11 at 12 noon. Please, no late submissions.