

HONS: 175-01: Religion and Protest
Spring 2024

Instructor: Jeremy Fisher, PhD

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Time/Location: MWF 1pm-1:50pm: Education Center 103

Office: 206 Religious Studies Department, 4 Glebe St

Office Hours: MWF 2pm-4pm; and by appointment (best option)

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 two important ways: 1) By examining ideas and 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) 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 disputes 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.

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 (some of) 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.

Honors Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs): In addition to our general course objectives, this course is designed to promote several student learning outcomes focused specifically on exploring complexity and diversity. Those outcomes are as follows: 1) Demonstrate the ability to create and communicate analytic arguments supported by evidence; 2) Evaluate complex issues using an interdisciplinary perspective; and 3) Analyze and synthesize information within and/or across

disciplines. The first of these outcomes will be assessed on the first writing assignment, and the second and third will be assessed on the sixth writing assignment.

Course Expectations and Technology Policy: Now that Covid restrictions are behind us, we will meet weekly, face-to-face, in the classroom. Students are expected to attend each class prepared for critical discussion. The readings listed on the schedule below are to be completed for that day's class meeting. Whether by actively listening or by actively contributing to discussion, students are expected *to be present*. For this reason, cell phones and laptop computers are not permitted unless otherwise approved.

Classroom Etiquette and Protocols: The Covid-19 pandemic required students (and faculty alike) to adjust on the fly. Fortunately, university planning and easing restrictions have made it possible for us to get refamiliarized with face-to-face instruction and classroom protocols.

As we begin this semester, then, let's try to keep a few important things in mind. Firstly, flexibility is key. The purpose of this class is to introduce students to new ideas and cultural critiques—most of which may be quite foreign. Developing a clear understanding of these ideas and practices requires time and effort and may require that we amend the schedule as listed below. Your continual attendance and participation are key to keeping you up to date and informed on any changes that are made.

Secondly, a university education requires that we inquire and engage course material with an inquisitive and open mind, and moreover, that we do this *critically*—that is, that we take the time and care to analyze these ideas/themes/traditions (as well as our thoughts and/or beliefs about them) in ways that may run counter to what we've previously accepted. Be that as it may, you will be expected to be *ethical*—treating each other with dignity and respect. Racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic, and/or any language or behavior that dehumanizes or degrades others will not be tolerated. **Period.** My classroom is a safe place to explore ideas and ask questions, so if you have them, fire away! However, your words and actions matter. The simple truth is that we are all surrounded by individuals whose experiences and beliefs are not identical to our own, so be sure to think carefully and thoughtfully before you engage.

Finally, you will be expected to be professional—attending class, actively participating, and completing assignments on time and without excuse. Accommodation can be provided, if possible, but it cannot be guaranteed. If you foresee any problems fulfilling the requirements listed below, please speak to me ahead of time. Do not simply assume that you can make up a missed assignment. Proper justification, documentation, and verification will be required for all missed assignments and/or exams.

Course Requirements: This course is graded on a 305pt scale. In addition to completing assigned readings, attending, and participating in class, students will be required to complete 8 writing assignments/take-home exams throughout the semester—one on each major topic discussed. Each paper will be 4-5 pages in length and worth 35pts each for a total of 280pts. Papers will be prompted and give students the opportunity to critically assess the material discussed. Late papers will NOT be accepted without proper documentation. Each student will be also responsible for “taking the lead” of class discussion for one of the topics assigned below. Students will be expected to guide us through a brief synopsis of the material, offer critical questions for discussion, and field responses to those questions. Presentations will be worth 25 pts.

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 (including the use of AI/ChatGPT programs) 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

(The following is NOT set in stone. Instructor reserves the right to make any changes as necessary.)

I. Situational Awareness

Weds, Jan 10: Introductions and Expectations

Friday, Jan 12: Orientation: Selection from *Religion Matters* by Stephen Prothero: “Why Religion Matters” pp. 3-21

Mon, Jan 15: Martin Luther King Jr. Day. NO CLASS

Weds, Jan 17: Continued Discussion: Orientation

Fri, Jan 19: Guiding Question: What is Protest?

Mon, Jan 22: Guiding Question: Is All Protest Political?

Weds, Jan 24: Guiding Question: Is Violent Protest Defensible?

Fri, Jan 26: Guiding Question: Is Nonviolent Protest Defensible?

Writing Assignment One Assigned—SLO # 1

II. Religious Protest

Mon, Jan 29: ***Engaged Buddhism***

Selection from *Being Benevolence: The Social Ethics of Engaged Buddhism (BB)*

by Sallie B. King: “Building from Tradition” pp. 12-27; “Nonviolence,” p. 41;

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

Weds, Jan 31: Continued Discussion

Fri, Feb 2: “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

Mon, Feb 5: Continued Discussion

Writing Assignment One Due at Beginning of Class

Weds, Feb 7: “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, Feb 9: Continued Discussion

Writing Assignment Two Assigned

Mon, Feb 12: ***The Judeo-Christian Traditions***

Selections from Emil Fackenheim’s *God’s Presence in History: Jewish Affirmations and Philosophical Reflections*: pp. 3-8; 25-30; 84-98.

Weds, Feb 14: Continued Discussion

Fri, Feb 16: Emil Fackenheim: “The Commanding Voice of Auschwitz”

Mon, Feb 19: Continued Discussion

Writing Assignment Two Due at Beginning of Class

Writing Assignment Three Assigned

Weds, Feb 21: Martin Luther King Jr.: “We Must Love Our White Brothers.” Selections from James Cone’s *Martin & Malcom & America: A Dream or a Nightmare*: pp. 125-135.

Fri, Feb 23: Continued Discussion

Mon, Feb 26: 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)

Weds, Feb 28: Continued Discussion

Fri, Mar 1: Continued Discussion

Writing Assignment Three Due at Beginning of Class

Writing Assignment Four Assigned

Mon, Mar 4: Spring Break

Weds, Mar 6: Spring Break

Fri, Mar 8: Spring Break

III. Protesting Religion

Mon, Mar 11: Malcolm X: “White Man’s Heaven is a Black Man’s Hell”

Selections from James Cone’s *Martin & Malcom & America*: pp. 93-110

Weds, Mar 13: Continued Discussion

Fri, Mar 15: Malcolm X: Justice, Separation, and the Nation of Islam

Mon, Mar 18: Continued Discussion

Writing Assignment Four Due at Beginning of Class—SLO # 2

Weds, Mar 20: Malcolm X: “Message to the Grass Roots,” in George Brietman (ed.), *Malcom X Speaks*: pp. 3-17. (Audio of X’s speech available on YouTube)

Fri, Mar 22: Continued Discussion

Writing Assignment Five Assigned

Mon, Mar 25: **A Feminist Critique**

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

Weds, Mar 27: Continued Discussion

Fri, Mar 29: 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

Mon, Apr 1: Continued Discussion

Writing Assignment Five Due at the Beginning of Class

Weds, Apr 3: "After the Death of God the Father" Part II: Does Jesus Fare Any Better?

Fri, Apr 5: Continued Discussion

Writing Assignment Six Assigned

Mon, Apr 8: **A "New" Atheist Critique**

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

Weds, Apr 10: Selection from Christopher Hitchens' *God is not Great: How Religion Poison's Everything*: "Is Religion Child Abuse?" pp. 217-228.

Fri, Apr 12: Selection from Richard Dawkins' *The God Delusion*: "The Roots of Morality: Why are we good?" pp. 211-214; 226-233.

Writing Assignment Seven Assigned—SLO's # 2 and 3

Mon, Apr 15: **ALGBTQ+ Critique**

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"

Writing Assignment Six Due at Beginning of Class

Weds, Apr 17: Continued Discussion

Fri, Apr 19: Continued Discussion

Writing Assignment Eight Assigned

Mon, Apr 22: Course Overflow and Wrap Up

Writing Assignment Seven Due at Beginning of Class

Weds, Apr 24: Course Overflow and Wrap Up

Writing Assignment Eight due Weds, May 1 at 12pm (noon)

There is no Final Exam.