Sacred Texts and Violence

CORE 2556, Section 1
Spring Quarter 2006; TR 11:00-12:50; Sturm Hall 333
Teacher/Facilitator: Dan Clanton
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Description: This course is an analysis of narratives and injunctions in sacred texts, specifically the Bible and the Qur’an, dealing with violence, which will serve as the basis for an examination of how modern terrorists use these sacred texts and images found therein to ground or justify their actions.

Objectives:

(1) To familiarize ourselves with primary sacred texts that deal with violence.

(2) To awaken ourselves to the various ways in which violence is viewed in these texts, e.g., holy violence, apocalyptic violence, and violence against bodies.

(3) To engender critical reflection on and academic study of sacred texts, as well as challenge students to reflect upon the ways in which this literature has impacted modern understandings of religion, sacred texts, and violence.

(4) To develop your own view(s) of the subject matter through reading primary and secondary sources, in-class discussion, and independent research.

Requirements: This course has four basic requirements and a total of three hundred and seventy five (375) possible points:

(1) Attendance & Behavior:

(a) Regular class attendance and participation are a must, and thus will account for 50 possible points toward your grade. By class participation, I mean both answering questions and making relevant comments in the context of our in-class discussion.

(b) Roll will be taken every class session; if you are not present during the taking of attendance, you will be counted absent unless you speak with me that Session. If you are absent 3 (three) or more classes your grade will be lowered by one letter grade; if you are absent 5 (five) or more classes you will fail the course. Please note that (a) excessive tardiness will result in a loss of participation points; and (b) if you are absent the first session, or if you incur absences because you had not yet registered for the class, these absences will be counted for the purposes of calculating the attendance penalties listed above.
(c) When we watch videos in class, I expect you to behave as if you were in a theater, i.e., be polite to those around you by turning off cell phones, don’t converse with each other, and try to be as quiet as possible.

(2) **Readings:** Completion of the primary and secondary readings **prior to class** goes hand in hand with class participation, and thus is as important. I also expect you to bring any and all readings to class with you on the days we’re scheduled to discuss it. I will post handouts on Blackboard, and it is your responsibility to print out, read, and bring these handouts to class with you on the appropriate days.

(3) **Reading Quizzes:** There will be 12 (twelve) short quizzes that will consist of 5 (five) brief questions that will assess your knowledge of and familiarity with the topics and/or readings assigned for that day. Each quiz will be worth 10 (ten) points. The two quizzes with the lowest grades will be dropped, leaving a total of 100 (one hundred) possible points toward your final grade. Quizzes missed due to absences, either excused or unexcused, cannot be made up.

(4) **Essay:** You will write an essay that will be 7-9 (2100-2700 words) pages long. First, you will submit a paper proposal containing a thesis, argumentative plan, and proposed sources, which will be due by the end of class on **April 25th (Session 9).** The form for this proposal can be found online at Blackboard, and you will submit it to me electronically as an email attachment. Each student will be required to discuss these proposals with me prior to approval. Following approval, you will write a rough draft based on your proposal that will be due as a hard copy in class on **May 16th (Session 15).** You must include your proposal with my comments along with your rough draft. I will evaluate these drafts and return them to you with comments and suggestions for improvements. You will then write a final draft of the essay based on my feedback. The final draft will be due as a hard copy by noon in my office on **Tuesday, June 6th.** You must include your proposal with my comments and your rough draft with my comments along with your final draft. Formal instructions and sample topics for this paper can be found online at Blackboard. The essay proposal will be worth 25 possible points toward your final grade, and both versions of the essay will be worth 100 possible points toward your final grade. Note: A good guide on how to write academic papers can be found at http://www.mdx.ac.uk/www/study/Gloess.htm.

**Additional Course Information**

(1) No incompletes will be given unless the student contacts me well in advance of the end of the quarter. The circumstances must include serious medical problems or other extreme difficulties beyond the volitional control of the student, and must be in accordance with the following policy set forward by the Registrar’s Office, “The assignment of an incomplete grade is appropriate when circumstances beyond the student’s control, such as illness or necessary absence, have prevented the student from completing your course requirements by the end of the academic
term. Only students who have attended your class through more than 60% of the term are eligible to receive a temporary incomplete grade.”

(2) All requests for special accommodations, e.g., medical, athletic, or learning-related, must be presented to me the first day of class. All such requests must be accompanied by the appropriate paperwork to be considered.

(3) No absences will be excused except in the cases of (a) an emergent medical situation or severe illness, which must be accompanied by a doctor’s note; or (b) a death in the student’s immediate family. In-class quizzes missed due to excused absences may not be made up, since the two lowest quiz grades are dropped.

(4) Upon matriculation, all students implicitly agree to abide by the University’s Academic Honor Code. Any violations of that code in our class will be taken very seriously. If I find evidence that you’ve violated the Honor Code, either intentionally or unintentionally, you will either (a) receive no credit for the assignment in question; or (b) be expelled from the class and assigned a failing grade for the course. In extreme cases, you may also be reported to the Office of Citizenship and Community Standards for further review.

(5) No grade-related information will be released to any student via non-secure means of communication, e.g., email or telephone, without the student in question presenting me with a signed and dated release allowing me to do so. Students may request this information in person, but I must have the aforementioned document to release information via any other channels.

Texts: (All Required; other assigned readings can be found on e-reserve at the Penrose Library’s website)


(10) The New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) of the Bible, preferably with the Apocrypha. I recommend and have ordered the HarperCollins Annotated Study Bible for our class. If you wish to use any other translation besides the NRSV, please make sure you talk to me. Some versions are unacceptable for our purposes.


**Schedule**

I. Introduction(s)

March 28th (Session 1): Introduction to Course (Syllabus, Readings, Assignments, Responsibilities)


March 30th (Session 2): Introduction to the Bible and the Qur’an

Reading:


II. Violence within the Bible and the Qur’ān

April 4th (Session 3): Covenant and Exodus

Primary Reading: Genesis 12-22; Exodus 7.9-24.18


April 6th (Session 4): Occupation of the (Their) Land

Primary Reading: Joshua 1-11, 23-24; Judges 19-21

Secondary Reading:


April 11th (Session 5): (Holy) War

Primary Reading: Deuteronomy 13.12-18; Deuteronomy 20; Numbers 31; 1 Samuel 15; 2 Kings 9-10


April 13th (Session 6): Apocalyptic (Violence) in the New Testament

Primary Reading: 1 Thessalonians 4.13-5.11; Revelation


April 18th (Session 7): Allah and Eschatology in the Qur’ān

Primary Reading: Surahs 22, 24, 27, 59, 81, 84, 98, 112

April 20th (Session 8): War and Jihad in the Qur’an

Primary Reading: Surahs 2, 4, 8-9


April 25th (Session 9): Conclusion(s), Part One

Reading:

(1) Collins


*** Paper Proposal Due ***

April 27th (Session 10): Conclusion(s), Part Two

Reading: Nelson-Pallmeyer, Ch. 6, “Violence-of-God Traditions in the Quran,” pp. 73-94.

III. Violence Outside the Bible and the Qur’ān

May 2nd (Session 11): Scriptural Violence


Video: Excerpt from In the Name of God: Scenes from the Extreme

May 4th (Session 12): Apocalyptic Violence

Reading:

(1) Selengut, Ch. 3, “Apocalyptic Violence,” pp. 95-139.

(2) Juergensmeyer, Ch. 8, “Cosmic War,” pp. 148-166.
Video: Excerpt from Frontline: *Apocalypse!*

May 9th (Session 13): Violence, Gender, and the Body

Reading:


Video: Excerpt from *Avoiding Armageddon*, Episode 3: “The New Face of Terror: Upping the Ante”

May 11th (Session 14): Jewish and Christian Case Studies

Reading:


May 16th (Session 15): Christian Domestic Terrorism: A Deeper Look

Reading:


Online Resources:

(1) Paul Hill Memorial Tour: http://www.christiangallery.com/PaulHillTour.html.

(2) Official Paul Hill Website: http://www.armyofgod.com/Paulhillindex.html.

*** Rough Draft of Essay Due in Class ***

May 18th (Session 16): Islamic Case Studies


Secondary Reading:

(1) Juergensmeyer, Ch. 4, “Islam’s ‘Neglected Duty’,” pp. 61-84.


IV. Implications and Conclusions

May 23rd (Session 17): Implications for the Study of Religion


May 25th (Session 18): Where Do We Go From Here? Part One

Reading: Nelson-Pallmeyer, Chs. 7-9, “Room for Doubt?” “Saved by Enemies,” and “Saved by Doubt,” pp. 95-149.

May 30th (Session 19): Where Do We Go From Here? Part Two
Reading:

(1) Juergensmeyer, Ch. 11, “The Mind of God,” pp. 219-249.


June 1st (Session 20): Conclusion to Course

*** Final Draft due by noon in my office on Tuesday, June 6th ***