

Syllabus

COURSE: Religion and Society

DATE: Spring, 2014

COURSE #: RELS 4160

INSTRUCTOR: Dr. Martie Reineke

TIME: T/H 3:30-4:45 p.m.

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BOOKS:

Bruce Chilton, *Abraham's Curse: The Roots of Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.*

ISBN-10: 0385520271

James Jones, *Blood the Cries Out from the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism*

ISBN-10: 019533597X , **ISBN-13:** 978-0195335972

Richard Beck, *Unclean: Meditations on Purity, Hospitality, and Mortality*

ISBN-10: 160899242X, **ISBN-13:** 978-1608992423

Essay Packet (from University Book and Supply):

1. "Reconstructing 'Evil:' A Critical Assessment of Post-September 11 Political Discourse," by Sina Ali Muscati. *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 23/2, October 2003, 249-269.
2. "Chapters 1-3." *The Scapegoat* by René Girard. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.
3. "Mimesis and Violence: Perspectives in Cultural Criticism" by René Girard. *The Berkshire Review*, Vol 14, 1979, pp. 9-19.

PURPOSE:

The theme of this year's Religion and Society course is "Violence and Religion in a Time of Terrorism." The tools that we will use to investigate this topic derive from the mimetic theory of René Girard.

Sketch of Mimetic Theory: “Mimesis” is a Greek word meaning “to imitate.” This imitation can be of words, actions, or behaviors of another individual or group. For Girard, imitation is associated with desire, the desire to be another. Humans are subject to this form of desire because we desire the fullness of being. We desire being because we feel insufficient, inadequate, and impoverished (materially, spiritually, psychologically). Specifically, because we lack being and others seem to possess being (i.e., they appear to be self-sufficient, adequate or superior to their peers, and either literally or metaphorically wealthy) we look to others to inform ourselves of what we should desire in order to acquire being. We do this because the other already seems superior to us in their being: whatever they desire (and apparently have a track record of acquiring) should enable us, if we access it, to also access being. As a consequence, looking to another to inform us of what we should desire in order to be, we find our attention drawn not toward the object that the other recommends but toward the other who we perceive is capable of conferring an even greater plenitude of being. But the closer we come to acquisition of the object of the model's desire and, through that acquisition, to the model, the greater is our rejection or refusal by the model. Finally, the model becomes a monstrous double by whom we are repulsed and from whom we seek distance. This mimetic conflict ends in a sacrifice that we experience as conferring the plenitude of being we previously have sought.

Girard describes this conflict as a kind of *contagion* and notes that it can involve more than two individuals, increasing so as to place an entire society at risk. When mimetic conflict reaches a crisis point, a *scapegoat mechanism* is triggered. One person is singled out as the cause of this great disorder in being and is expelled or killed by the group. This person is the scapegoat. Peace is restored because people believe that with the sacrifice of the scapegoat, a fullness of being (and its attendant feelings of peace and harmony) has been achieved. Unfortunately, because humans continue to lack being and because mimetic desire is endemic to the human condition, the cycle of desire regularly begins again.

Our Reflections on Mimetic Desire: In this course, we will look first at key texts in René Girard's theory of mimetic violence. Subsequently, we will turn to religion and explore the sacred narratives of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in order to understand the phenomenon of scapegoating and mimetic violence within the context of these major Western faith traditions. Our guide will be Bruce Chilton who employs Girard's theory in his study of *Abraham's Curse: The Roots of Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*. We will move on to examine religious terrorism, linking our reflections with our previous explorations of mimetic theory and scapegoating by reading the works of a psychologist of religion (James W. Jones). Finally, with Richard Beck, we will focus closely on one feature of a sacrificial worldview that regularly features in terrorism: purity and impurity.

Girard and his importance: An historian by training, Girard won international recognition initially as a literary theorist rather than as an historian when he developed a theory of mimetic desire and applied it to literature, particularly in *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel*. Girard consolidated his scholarly reputation with an anthropology of religion set forth in *Violence and the Sacred* and *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World*. Girard argues that mimetic processes he previously explored in literature are at the root of all violence. Cultures respond to violence and put an end to it through the sacrifice of a scapegoat (e.g., the persecution of Jews during the Inquisition, the witch hunts of early modern Europe). Establishing that society and religion are built on a mechanism of scapegoating and that collective rituals of sacrificial violence are recorded in cultural myths, Girard offers scholars a theory about the most basic roots of human behavior. Girard's mimetic theory, albeit controversial in its broad scope, has garnered increasing interest and recognition by scholars, confirming his standing as one of the most important thinkers of our time. Girard is a member of the prestigious *Académie française* in recognition of his outstanding contributions to philosophical anthropology, joining previous members that have included Victor Hugo, Louis Pasteur, Alexandre Dumas, and Voltaire. The

growing secondary literature on Girard spans the disciplines and includes theorists and empirical researchers. Seven journals have devoted special issues to Girard's work; he has been the subject of four *festschriften*; and his books have been translated into fifteen languages. My website contains a page "Violence and Religion" that highlights key organizations devoted to the study of Girard.

COURSE PHILOSOPHY:

In this course, students are encouraged to place critical thinking skills at the center of their course goals. When we place a priority on critical thinking, we do not mean that we want to become experts at "finding fault" with persons or ideas. In the context of a university, when we try to think critically, we mean that we make an effort to "illuminate a previously hidden topic or experience by means of careful judgment and evaluation." For example, as you begin the course, you may have very little awareness of how philosophers, scholars of religion and literature, and psychoanalytic theorists think about the origins of violence and the relation of religion to violence. You may not know anything about mimetic theory and how the scholars we will read this semester believe that mimesis offers significant clues concerning the causes of violence and its potential resolution. By the end of the course, major themes and issues in the course theme will have been illuminated: what was previously in the shadows will stand forth brightly in your thoughts and you will be able to offer thoughtful analyses and comments about how mimetic theory illuminates or does not illuminate violence and religion in the past and present. As we work on our critical thinking, we will express a commitment to the pedagogical values listed below:

Critical thinking is a learnable skill. A professor and her or his students collaborate as resources for each other in learning this skill. We are all learners.

Problems, questions, and issues serve as the source of motivation for learners in this class.

The goals, methods, and evaluative components of this course emphasize using content rather than simply acquiring it.

Learning is strengthened when students formulate and justify their ideas in writing and through oral communication.

Learning is strengthened when students exercise sophisticated skills in observing the environment around them.

Learning is strengthened when students exchange information and resources with each other rather than work in isolation from each other or sit passively listening to the professor talk.

Students who wish to learn more about my philosophy of teaching may wish to look at my statement on this subject under "Teaching and Learning" on my web site. Comments there explain how students across the spectrum of higher education—from first year to graduate students—can experience success in this course. I explain also why I select challenging texts for my courses. Students are invited on the web site to associate risk taking with positive learning experiences.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

Students in this course will:

- Develop intellectual skills of reading, comprehending, analyzing, and evaluating representative texts and major themes associated with mimetic theory. As we read representative texts and listen to leading scholars in the field, you will want to consider the content of each author and speaker's reflections. What is being said? Do various points fit together? What is still unclear about what the author or speaker has said? Jot down your questions as you read the texts and listen to a speaker. Be prepared to share them in the next class period.
- Explore a variety of learning processes that contribute to the development of the described intellectual skills and gain facility in using these processes. These will include:
 - engaging in effective oral and written communication
 - preparing descriptive and reflective accounts
 - problem-solving
 - implementing and sustaining critical analyses: what are the strengths and weaknesses of each author or speaker's argument? To what do you react positively? Why? To what do you react negatively? Why? What elements of their argument are insightful? What elements are problematic?
- Enhance your understanding of how scholars who engage in the academic study of religion think. Throughout the semester you will be introduced to "tools" of analysis of central importance to them. You will grow in awareness of these tools and take preliminary steps toward using these tools in your own reflections.

EVALUATION AND CLASS PROCEDURES:

The study of religion works best when it is pursued as a communal, conversational effort. Class discussions will comprise a major part of this course and evaluations will reflect this focus. Units of the course are as follows:

1. Homework and informal study questions (3-8 points each): If not already listed on the syllabus, these projects will be assigned in class. Some will be completed in class.
2. Take-home essay exams (35-50 points each): On the essay exams, students will have some choices for framing and organizing reflective and critical essays on the assigned readings. See my guide to Critical Writing Skills on my web site or more information about exam format.

NOTE: You will find it helpful to be extremely organized in collecting and maintaining a file of assignments in this course. Plan to have a loose-leaf notebook, with pockets. Save all handouts, written assignments, and class notes. Learning in this class is cumulative; you will want to use materials we explored early in the semester later in the semester.

OTHER POLICIES:

Late work: You are urged to remain current with assignments. If you have not completed a **daily homework assignment** or class project on the day I request that you submit it to me, you will be ineligible for points on that assignment. Students often have very good reasons for missing class (e.g., illness, car accidents, etc.). **Even so, late submissions will not be accepted for points because they are associated with group work in class.** Homework points are awarded not so much for the written material that a student brings to class as for the contributions the student is able to make in class because she/he has the written work on which to draw in discussion. If a student's very good reason for missing class leads her or him to miss more than two consecutive class sessions, the student should consult with me about compensating for the loss of worksheet points. I will work with the student to develop alternative opportunities for points so that his/her grade is not unduly impacted.

Late essay exams: exams may be accepted late; however, specific rules for late submissions will be issued with each exam and must be followed closely.

E-mail Accounts: It is ***required*** that you obtain and use your university e-mail account for this class. I will use e-mail to communicate with you about changes to the syllabus, assignments, etc. I also will regularly be e-mailing you worksheets. As a general rule, you should check your e-mail DAILY for class announcements that may be sent to you from any of your professors.

E-mail Etiquette: While I encourage you to communicate with me via e-mail, it is important that you consider this communication as a formal dialogue between professor and student. Employers regularly report that one of their primary issues with recent college graduates is that they do not know how to send professional e-mails. As you work on developing this skill in this class, here are some recommendations.

- 1) Begin your e-mail with a formal address: Dr. Reineke or Professor Reineke.
- 2) Conclude your e-mail with your complete name, course name, and small group number.
- 3) If you are making a request, word it appropriately. For example, if you are asking me to do something for you, please be sure the body of the e-mail includes, at a minimum, the word "please."
- 4) Symbols and abbreviations that you use to IM with your friends are a foreign language to most professors. I should not have to ask my daughter how to translate your e-mail.
- 5) If a professor writes you as an individual (not a class mailing), you always need to respond to that email, indicating that you have received it. Etiquette in the workplace for ending an exchange of e-mails is this: the lower-ranked person always responds to the e-mail of a higher-ranked person unless the higher-ranked person specifically releases the person from that obligation with a phrase such as "no need to reply."

E-mail submissions: Course work may be submitted by e-mail only with prior permission of the professor. A paper copy **MUST** always follow an e-mail submission for which you have received prior permission.

RECOMMENDATIONS ON ATTENDANCE:

In my years of teaching, students in my courses for the major have had virtually perfect attendance. Why do students regularly make this commitment to daily attendance?

First, students in the class experience disappointment when others in the class are missing. As the

semester progresses, each of you find the presence of all the others an aspect of the course experience that means a lot to you. Because we do small group work almost daily, the absence of a person from a group is really noticed. Because students value others' presence, you come to feel that you would be letting down your classmates were you to miss class.

Second, students realize that your degree of understanding plummets when you miss class. The working assumption in the class, for students and for the professor, is that when you enter class on a given day, the reading assignment will be fairly much a mystery to you. You will have only a glimmer of what you think the text is saying. By the end of a class session, everyone will have moved forward in your understanding to the point where you have a basic sense of what is being argued in a text. Because what we do in class does make a difference in your understanding, you make a commitment to daily class attendance.

Finally, there is a third, pragmatic reason for coming regularly to class. Because I accept homework only on the day it is due, and not later, if you don't keep up with the homework assignments, your grade is substantially impacted. For example, a person who has missed a significant number of the 3-point homework assignments but gets A's on all the exams will still get a B or C in the course.

Why are the homework points so important? More than the exams, a course is the learning community we create in conversation with each other. In my experience, our conversations are stronger when we go into them with a piece of written reflection in our hands. Because I think your written work gives such a wonderful focus for our conversations with each other (secondarily if helps me check in with you individually to confirm your progress in understanding), the written homework assignments are a key feature of the course.

A note on cell phone addictions: Your professor believes that her students have not ponied up their tuition dollars to watch their professor check her e-mail, surf the internet, and answer text messages during class; therefore, your professor summons her self-control and does not do these things while class is in session. Students in previous semesters have reported that they find their classmates' e-mailing, surfing, and texting during class to be annoying and distracting. Please respect your classmates' desire to get the most bang for their tuition bucks and don't distract them by doing such things as checking your e-mail, surfing, or texting during class. Phones should be off and out of view throughout the class hour.

CHEATING:

Any documented instance of cheating will be reported to the Office of Academic Affairs and will result in a grade of "F" for the course. In this course, UNI's Academic Ethics Policies are strictly enforced. These policies are posted here: <https://www.uni.edu/policies/301>. Students are responsible for knowing these policies. Students will submit all essay exams to Turnitin.

THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990 (ADA)

The ADA provides protection from illegal discrimination for qualified individuals with disabilities. Students requesting instructional accommodations due to disabilities will want to arrange for such accommodation through the Office of Disability Services. The ODS is located in 213 Student Services Center (273-2676). Assistive Testing Services are provided to enrolled students approved by the University of Northern Iowa Office of Disabilities Services for accommodations. Alternative testing formats, as well as auxiliary aids such as readers, scribes, or assistive technology, are available. Tests are to be scheduled in advance with the Department of Academic Services -- Examination Services office. The test service is provided for University course tests and final examinations (not

quizzes) to students enrolled in classes that are unable to provide the approved accommodations (i.e. extended time, large print options, reader/recorder, or computer testing). Course testing accommodations are based on disability documentation as determined by the University of Northern Iowa Disabilities Services.

Final Version COURSE CALENDAR FOR RELIGION AND SOCIETY

1-14	<p>Introduction to the class.</p> <p>Unit I: Mimesis, Violence and Scapegoating: Key Girard texts</p> <p>YouTube videos on mimetic theory</p>
1-16	Essay Packet: "Reconstructing Evil"
1-21	Essay Packet: <i>Scapegoat</i> , 1-30
1-23	Essay Packet: <i>Scapegoat</i> , 31-44
1-28	Essay Packet: "Mimesis and Violence"
1-30	Introduction to Gasset edition of Girard's work (to be e-mailed to class); essay exam on Unit I assigned
2-4	<p>Essay exam on Unit I due.</p> <p>Unit II: Mimesis, Violence, and the Scapegoat in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam</p> <p>Guest lecture by Professor Burnight as an introduction to Chilton, <i>Abraham's Curse: The Roots of Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam</i>.</p>
2-6	Chilton, 1-43
2-11	Chilton, 44-80
2-13	Chilton, 81-94; 130-140
2-18	Chilton, 143-170
2-20	Chilton, 171-195
2-25	Chilton, 196-224
2-27	Chilton wrap-up; essay exam on Unit III assigned.
3-4	<p>Chilton essay due.</p> <p>Unit III: Psychological Reflections on Strangers, Scapegoats, and Mimetic Theory</p> <p>Lecture on Jones, <i>Blood the Cries Out from the Earth: The Psychology of Religious Terrorism</i></p>
3-06	Jones, 1-28
3-11	Jones, 29-50
3-13	Jones, 51-70
3-25	Jones, 71-88
3-27	No class. Professor presenting paper at conference at Vanderbilt University.
4-01	Jones, 88-114
4-03	Jones, 115-142
4-08	Jones 142-171. Essay exam on Unit IV assigned.
4-10	<p>Essay exam on Unit III due.</p> <p>Unit IV: Psychoanalytic Reflections on Strangers, Scapegoats, and Mimetic Theory</p> <p>Lecture on Beck, <i>Unclean</i>.</p>
4-15	Beck, 13-30
4-17	Beck, 33--70
4-22	Beck, 73-119
4-24	Beck 120-153
4-29	Beck, 154-174

5-01	Beck 175-197; essay exam on Unit IV assigned.
Final	Exam consultations will be held on the following days. 9-9:50 am, Tuesday, May 6 in Lang 20 3-5 pm, Tuesday, May 6 in Lang 20 9-9:50 am, Wednesday, May 7 in Lang 20 Essay exam is due by 5 pm on Wednesday, May 7 in my mailbox or under my door.

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