

**Violence and Religion**  
**RELI 3800**  
**Religious Studies Program**

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Office hours: Tuesday 10:00-11:00 and Wednesday 11:00-3:00

**Course Description:**

As far back in the past as one can credibly determine, human beings have had something corresponding to religious identities and aspirations. Likewise, throughout this time, issues of violence and non-violence have marked human civilizations. Religions have endeavored to grapple with the limits of aggressive conduct towards other people, and at times, they have embraced violent practices or ideologies, such as human sacrifice, holy war, or martyrdom. At other times, religions have raised non-violence up on their central altar, as is the case with, for example, Christian pacifism or the Indian value of non-harmfulness. Millennialism, apocalyptic cults, religiously inspired terrorism, and other forces in society have made us ever more aware that violence has long been a major part of religious traditions.

This course explores various theoretical approaches to the connections between violence and religion, including those articulated by Sigmund Freud, Rene Girard, Hannah Arendt, and others. We will investigate some of the primary expressions of religiously based non-violence—New Testament pacifism, the non-violence that underlies the religiously based social action of Mahatma Gandhi, the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., and others, and the extreme non-violence of Jainism. We will also examine a variety of case studies demonstrating how violence is expressed in different religious contexts, including Just War Theory, religious terrorism, pain rituals, blood sacrifices, martyrdom, shamanic magic, and transgression. One of the key orienting questions of the course will concern the existence of what some consider to be *good* religious violence.

The course involves the consideration of deeply challenging and often disturbing issues. A high level of engagement and involvement is expected and required. Successful students will spend a significant amount of time reading and writing each week, and they will actively participate in the classroom discussions.

By way of these inquiries, the student should be able to:

- Identify and employ several basic theoretical approaches to the study of violence in religion,
  - Critically analyze religious practices, ideologies, and imagery that motivate both violence and non-violence.
  - Cultivate critical thinking and reading comprehension skills, and
  - Enhance their ability to communicate more effectively, verbally and in writing.
- These objectives will be attained through readings, writing, and classroom presentations and discussions. Challenging readings from a variety of academic disciplines will supplement these strategies.

## Writing Intensive (WI)

RELI 3800 is a writing intensive course in the Writing Across the Curriculum Program at East Carolina University. This course will focus on the development of writing skills. Upon completion of the course students will:

1. Use writing to investigate complex, relevant topics and address significant questions through engagement with and effective use of credible sources.
2. Produce writing that reflects an awareness of context, purpose, and audience, particularly within the written genres (Including genres that integrate writing with visuals, audio or other multimodal components) of their major disciplines and/or career fields.
3. Demonstrate that they understand writing as a process that can be made more effective through drafting revision.
4. Proofread and edit their own writing, avoiding grammatical and mechanical errors.
5. Assess and explain the major choices that they make in their writing.

This course contributes to the twelve-hour WI requirement for students at ECU. Additional information is available at the following site: <http://www.ecu.edu/writing/wac/>.

## University Writing Portfolio Requirement

As part of campus writing assessments, you will submit one major writing project, along with a description of the assignment for that project and brief responses to four questions about your writing, near the end of this course. These materials will be uploaded to your "University Writing Portfolio," which you will access and create (if you have not already done so in a previous WI course) through the "student portfolio" link in Pirate Port (<https://pirateport.ecu.edu/portal/>).

Instructions for creating your University Writing Portfolio and uploading your materials are available online ([www.ecu.edu/QEP](http://www.ecu.edu/QEP)) and in person at the University Writing Center ([www.ecu.edu/writing/uwc](http://www.ecu.edu/writing/uwc)), located in Joyner Library.

## Course Reading:

- Mark Juergensmeyer, *Princeton Readings in Religion and Violence*
- Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence* (any edition)

Readings are available on the course Blackboard website. <http://ecu.blackboard.com/> Students are responsible for checking their email address linked to Blackboard system so that they are assured of remaining up-to-date with reading assignments, exam dates, and other course information.

## Grading (total = 500 points)

- **Research paper:** 15-page paper with preliminary proposal and two drafts (40% = 200 points)  
Proposal (20 points) February 7; First 5 pages (40 points) March 12;  
Meeting preparation (20 points) March 19; Final Paper (120 points) April 23

- **Engagement:** Classroom presentation (30 points), peer review (30 points), and participation (40 points) = (20% = 100 points)
- **Reaction papers:** Five 2-page reaction papers (5% each = 25 points; 25% total (125 points))
- **Reading Quiz:** quiz on Theories of Religious Violence (5% = 25 points) – January 29
- **Final examination:** with essays and short answers (10% = 50 points) May 2

### **Research Paper Standards**

A research paper must clearly set forth a thesis, assemble evidence from authoritative sources, and argue for a conclusion. The paper, which should be 15 pages, should concern a theme covered in this course. A standardized style for footnotes and bibliography, such as the Chicago style, must be employed. A paradigm, along with other helpful information relevant to writing papers is available on-line at: <http://libguides.ecu.edu/c.php?g=17467&p=98353>

One of the most powerful resources available for the study of religion is the ATLA (American Theological Library Association) Religion Database. This valuable tool permits searches on authoritative scholarly work published since 1949 on many topics in religious studies and includes: more than one million bibliographic records covering the research literature of religion in 35 languages, more than 650,000 article citations from 1800 journals, and much more. In order to foster research skills, each student is required to use three resources found through the ATLA system. Please mark those resources in your bibliography by placing the acronym “ATLA” beside those sources. Access it at <https://www.lib.ecu.edu/databases/sort/A>.

Students may employ web page resources, but they should be used sparingly. In no case should they constitute more than 25% of the sources employed. Peer-reviewed journal articles and books should be preferred.

Both the ideas and the quoted words of others must be footnoted properly. Failure to do so could constitute plagiarism. While it is fine for to share resources and references with peers, each person must do their own work. If you are uncertain as to whether you might be crossing the line between helpfulness and cheating, please consult with me. On-line resources, such as web pages, can be extremely unreliable when it comes to religion. If you have doubts as to the authenticity of your sources, please ask for my advice. If you use material from the web, the particular URL of a referenced idea or passage must be footnoted just like any other source. Further specifications for research papers will be available in a handout. The steps to writing your research paper are outlined in detail in the supplement to this syllabus, “How to Write a Good Research Paper in Religious Studies 2019” posted on Blackboard.

### **Engagement**

Each student will be charged with leading a class discussion; a schedule will be developed. Students will also perform peer reviews of other students' writing. Students are also expected to attend classes, read all assignments on time, and demonstrate that they are capable of being fully involved in all class discussions.

### **Reaction Papers**

Each student will write five 2-page reaction papers throughout the semester. These will be reactions to readings or classroom discussions. A handout describing the parameters of this assignment will be provided, and a schedule will be established to stagger students' contributions.

### **Reading Quiz**

There will be a reading quiz on the various theories of religion we discuss in the course.

### **Exam**

The final exam will consist of essays and short questions. I will provide several (perhaps three) essay questions from which the student may select a smaller number (perhaps two) to answer. Short questions may be multiple choice, true and false, or simple identification. I will solicit your assistance in writing the exam. According to the University schedule, this exercise will be held on May 2, 11:00-1:30.

### **Academic Integrity**

All students are expected to comply with the principles of Academic Integrity embodied in the ECU Honor Code. Since violations can result in expulsion from the University, suspension, or a grade of "F" for the course, students should become familiar with what constitutes plagiarism, cheating, falsification, and other violations. Note also that according to ECU policy mere attempts to plagiarize, cheat, or falsify qualify as violations of the Honor Code. Consult the ECU Clue Book for details.

<http://core.ecu.edu/econ/zinng/Academic%20Integrity.htm>

### **University Resources**

The Writing Center offers students in-person and on-line assistance in learning writing skills. Contact the Writing Center for hours and locations at Bate 2026 (328-2820).

In addition to providing students with personal counseling, the Counseling and Student Development Center in Wright Building 316 (328-6661) offers various resources to assist students in their academic development. These resources include training in time management, test taking, overcoming test anxiety, and academic motivation.

East Carolina University works to accommodate students with disabilities. Students who feel they may need such support should contact the Department of Disability Support Services located in Brewster A-114 (328-6799). East Carolina University seeks to comply fully with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Students requesting accommodations based on a disability must be registered with the Department for Disability Support Services located in Slay 138 (252) 737-1016 (Voice/TTY).

### **Meeting with me**

I am available in my office 5 hours each week. If the times I have indicated are not practical for you, please see me before or after class. If you need to meet with me another time, please let me know, and I am sure I can accommodate your needs. I encourage all students to speak with me during office hours as you work to formulate your research paper. This will ensure that your selected paper topic is appropriate and relevant. I will likely be able to direct you to resources that can help you in your quest.

### **Library**

All students at ECU should become proficient in using library resources. The Joyner Library at ECU (accessible on-line at <http://www.lib.ecu.edu/>) has many valuable resources on the material we will be covering. There are thousands of books on religion in the stacks of Joyner Library. Books on Philosophy, Psychology, and Religion have call numbers beginning with the letter B. Navigate your way around the library with the following source: See the following website for help in navigating your way around the Library. (<http://geography.miningco.com/library/congress/blb.htm>)

Additionally, you can find information on religious traditions in books in other sections of the library, including anthropology, art, geography, history, literature, philosophy, and psychology. You may also explore the film and music resources the library collects. One of the best resources available is the library's collection of journals. Not only does the library have numerous religion journals in paper and bound forms, but it is also possible to access a very large number of journals on-line. (<http://www.lib.ecu.edu/locator/main.cfm>) The library staff can be extremely helpful in learning to use all of these resources. Don't be shy about asking for their help.

As a student of East Carolina University, you also have free use of the Library system at University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill ([www.lib.unc.edu](http://www.lib.unc.edu)). Moreover, you can access just about any book, journal or other resource in the world through the Inter-Library Loan. Many resources can be obtained within a matter of days. Often, journal articles can be delivered electronically within a day or two. The Joyner Library has a special office for Inter-Library Loan services, located to the left of the front desk. You can access these resources on-line at: <http://jill.lib.ecu.edu/illiad/logon.html>