



## **TERROR IN THE NAME OF GOD: RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE**

Fall 2014  
Global Topics GT-UF 201-003  
Silver 620

Dr. Martin F. Reichert  
mr39@nyu.edu

### **DESCRIPTION**

Religion, proclaimed dead not too long ago by many pundits and thinkers, has made a remarkable comeback in our time, all too often in connection with violence. From 9/11 to the Boston bombers, from angry Muslims and Jews in the Middle East to quarreling Hindus and Muslims in India, from right-wing Christians bombing abortion clinics around the US to the gas attacks in the Tokyo subway, religion presents intellectuals and politicians with problems they are unable to solve. What is the connection between religion and violence? And why are so many religious attacks on public order occurring now? Can religion be a source of peace? We will study critical thinkers who seek to understand the contemporary cultural, political, and religious crisis, and we will test them on recent incidents. We will also examine the lives and work of people who have tried to find a nonviolent way out, only to trigger more violence: Gandhi, King.

### **OBJECTIVES**

By the end of the term, students should be able to

- express informed views on and make coherent arguments about the complex relationship between religion and violence;
- debate the merits of and employ different theoretical approaches to the study of religious violence;
- explain the historical background of several global and domestic religious conflicts;
- complicate the relationship between religion (and its association with violence and backwardness) and secularism (and its association with peace and progress).

In accordance with GLS learning goals, students in this course will also

- ask critical questions, find unstated assumptions, assess arguments, and offer creative interpretations of texts relevant to this field;
- understand and analyze a variety of works by identifying and integrating the knowledge, methods, and conventions of different fields of study, using digital technology when appropriate;
- attend to correct language usage and the conventions of academic writing and reference, including the use of appropriate discipline-specific terms and concepts;
- synthesize material and articulate ideas clearly, in essays of increasing depth and complexity;
- use writing as a means to develop critical thinking and frame problems in comparative and historical contexts in the personal essay, analytical essays, and longer research papers;

- communicate and defend their ideas in class discussions, oral presentations, or other collaborative exercises;
- connect the global cultural heritage with the issues and questions they face in their own lives as the foundation for active citizenship and lifelong learning;
- become more critical and self-aware members of a multicultural community by learning about other cultures.

## TEXTS

The following texts are available at the NYU bookstore, 726 Broadway:

1. Mark Juergensmeyer and Margo Kitts, *Princeton Readings in Religion and Violence* (Princeton UP; ISBN: 978-0691129143) [marked PR below]
2. Jean-Michel Oughourlian, *Psychopolitics* (Michigan State UP; ISBN: 978-1611860535)

Supplementary readings (marked \* below) will be posted on NYUHome. Gandhi's short book is in the public domain: <http://www.soilandhealth.org/03sov/0303critic/hind%2oswaraj.pdf>

## ASSIGNMENTS

My office hours are Mondays and Wednesdays, 2:00-3:00pm, at 726 Broadway, Rm. 644. Talk to me about assignments or any questions and concerns you might have — before any problems arise. I'll gladly discuss paper ideas or drafts with you, **before** the respective deadlines.

### Evaluation

Your final grade, totaling 100 points, will be computed as follows:

Participation	20 points
Blogs	10 points
Portfolio	40 points
Presentation	10 points
Research Paper	15 points
Final	5 points

### 1. Participation (every class; 20 points)

**Attend classes regularly, arrive on time, turn off all electronic devices (including PHONES and LAPTOPS) while in class, and stay until the end of the class.** If your phone goes off during class, you must bring GOOD cookies for the entire class at the next period. Don't even think about texting.

*Laptop Policy:* This course relies on your active engagement in our class discussion. Therefore, **I do not allow laptops** except on special occasions. Students with special needs (writing difficulties, etc.) should send the professor an email requesting permission for the duration of the course. Any permission will be revoked if you're using the device to surf the Internet, email, play games, or other inappropriate matters during class time. For students with permission, use of laptops will be limited to the first row of class.

*Absence Policy:* More than four **absences** will lower your grade one mark (B to C); more than six absences will result in a failing grade (F) for the course. Generally, there are **no "excused" absences except religious holidays**. (You don't need to show me doctors' notes: sick days are not "excused.")

Please alert me by email at the beginning of the term if you anticipate being absent due to religious reasons.

*Read, raise questions.* Come to class prepared and **participate in all discussions**. Make it a point to raise your hand every time to contribute to our discussions. Dissent is welcome. One skeptic enlivens the class more than a dozen passive yea-sayers.

## 2. Blogs (10 points)

Cognitive scientists found that questions are crucial to the construction of knowledge; in fact, some think that we cannot learn until we haven't asked the right one(s). The more questions we ask, the more ways we can index a thought in memory. So what are the big issues here that concern you? Which aspects would you like to discuss with everyone? We will use the Forums function on NYU Classes to exchange questions and ideas. For simplicity's sake, I'll refer to this as blogs.

You can choose between two forms of blog postings. You may respond 1. by framing a critical question that is raised by the reading; or 2. by answering a question posed either by me or by one of your classmates. Either posting—question or answer—should be about a paragraph in length. Your comment needs to be submitted **prior** to the class. There are ten blogs; each counts for two points, provided your contribution is substantial.

The purpose of this assignment is a. to recognize possible implications of the text for contexts, perspectives, or issues within and beyond the aspects we'll focus on in the classroom; b. to evaluate texts for significance within and across various disciplines and for relevance to our culture; c. to engage you in reading as part of a continuing dialogue within and beyond the classroom community.

## 3. Research Portfolio/Presentation/Paper/Final (70 points)

In this class you will build a portfolio for the research paper that includes a series of eight steps. These steps are intended to help you remain organized and on track in the course of your research. Late submissions will be docked points. All written submissions are due **in electronic form (email) by midnight** on the due date. Note: this is a cumulative project; there is no need to carry over the same points (such as a narrative of the sequence of events) from one essay to the next.

1. Write a short statement on **your assumptions** about, and experiences with (if any), the relation of religion and violence (roughly one page; due 9/8).
2. **Choose a case study** about religious (sectarian) violence not covered in the course. After a bit of preliminary (Wikipedia-type) research, provide a brief summary of the case (main actors, outline of events): write a short reflection on three things you know; three you do not know; three you want to know (500 words; 5 points; due 9/15). (Tip: I would base my initial choice of a case on whether or not I can easily find some strong primary material; see #4.)
3. Discuss a solid **secondary source** about the event (presumably this will come from a reputable scholar/journalist, not from a blogger or a simple news item you stumbled across on the internet: establish the writer's credentials and purpose); lay out the writer's argument re: factors/agents/variables and agenda in light of our topic, religion and violence; assess the argument: where can you go beyond what was already said? (500 words; 5 points; due 9/22).
4. Investigate a **primary source** on the subject: something the perpetrator said about his or her intentions regarding the incident, or else someone whose writings inspired him/her; make your initial interpretation (900 words; 10 points; due 9/29).
5. Research another reliable secondary sources on the incident and **compare and contrast** it with the first (or, if you prefer, a third) (900 words; 10 points; due 10/6).
6. Provide an **annotated bibliography**, a list of sources that should be useful for your topic. Include a summary of the main argument each author is making. You may also add your

assessment: Is the source biased? What is the author's agenda? Is the source useful to your argument? Has it changed your thinking about the topic? (Five items; 10 points; due 10/20)

7. On the day for which you sign up, **present your research** to the rest of the class. What will be the thesis of your paper? What are the main facts of your case? What have the critics you consulted said about it, and how do you plan to go beyond them? Use *no more than 10 minutes* to present your case, and leave 5 minutes for comments, questions, and input from class member. The presentation may not exceed 15 minutes, so you should rehearse this, as we will cut you off. You may use visuals (PPT, Prezi, poster board) or handouts, but you don't have to. You will be evaluated by the rest of the class; bring enough copies of the **peer evaluation** (see below) (10 points; 10/29–11/12).
8. Pull everything together: Based on your study of the primary document, create your own hypothesis concerning the incident; adjudicate and make your own judgments in light of the secondary interpretations. This is your **research paper** (minimum of 1,500 words; 15 points; due 11/17).
9. Based on your initial understanding of the relation of religion, violence, and peace, submit a **final** statement on how your mind has changed based on your original research and the course readings (5 points; due 12/17 noon).

Some suggestions for the portfolio project:

1. A historical instance (Crusades, the witch craze, a martyr)
2. Anders Breivik (Norway)
3. Eric Robert Rudolph (the Olympic Park bomber)
4. the Oklahoma City bombing (Timothy McVeigh)
5. David Koresh and the Branch Davidians
6. Army of God (Paul Hill); Aryan Nations, Christian Identity, etc. (or a specific incident, such as the Los Angeles Jewish Community Center shooting)
7. Heaven's Gate
8. Jim Jones and Jonestown
9. the 1993 World Trade Center bombing; Khaled Sheikh Mohammed
10. the Boston Marathon bombings (potential problem: primary sources?)
11. the UFF; the IRA (Northern Ireland)
12. Abu Sayyaf (Philippines)
13. Baruch Goldstein (Israel)
14. Gush Emunim (or other forms of violent Zionism: Irgun; Lehi)
15. Yigal Amir (assassin of Yitzhak Rabin)
16. the shoe bomber (Richard Reid)
17. the Fort Hood shooting (Nidal Malik Hasan)
18. Hamas (or a specific incident of Palestinian-perpetrated violence such as the Sbarro restaurant suicide bombing, the Passover massacre, the 1972 Olympics in Munich)

## ACADEMIC HONESTY

Claiming the work of another person as your own is called plagiarism. Whenever you use outside help, document your sources. Follow one of the standard style sheets (e.g. MLA, Chicago).— Plagiarism is a crime. This applies to cutting and pasting from the internet and to unattributed quotations or paraphrase of any source, but also to "borrowing" work (ideas, answers, papers) from fellow students, and buying papers. Not only will you fail the course, you will also endanger your

continued registration at the university. All suspected cases of academic dishonesty will be addressed on an individual basis with the student and then reported to the Dean's Office for review. If you are confused or have any questions, talk to me. Do not guess, as this may have severe consequences. For additional details, consult the LSP [Academic Policies and Procedures](#) and the [EWP website](#).

## DIFFERENTLY ABLED STUDENTS

Students who believe that they may need special accommodations in this class are encouraged to contact the Moses Center for Students with Disabilities at (212) 998-4980 as soon as possible to ensure that such accommodations are implemented in a timely fashion. For more information, see the [CSD website](#).

## SCHEDULE OF CLASSES

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### Religious Justifications of Violence

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|-------|---------------|--|
| 1.    | <b>W 9/3</b>  | <i>Introductions: The New Atheists:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sam Harris, "Reason in Exile" *</li> </ul>  |
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| 2.    | <b>M 9/8</b>  | <i>Holy War:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kautilya, Sun Tzu, <i>The Bhagavad Gita</i>, The Hebrew Bible, The Qur'an [PR, pp. 7-24, 30-40]</li> <li>• <b>Assumptions essay due</b></li> </ul> |
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| 3.    | <b>W 9/10</b> | <i>Global Rebellion:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mark Juergensmeyer, "Is Religion the Problem?" *</li> <li>• Slavoj Žižek, "The Tyrant's Bloody Mantle" *</li> </ul>                        |
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| 4.    | <b>M 9/15</b> | <i>Saint or Sinner:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Machine Gun Preacher</i> (film, 2011; streaming on Netflix)</li> <li>• <b>Case study due</b></li> </ul>                                  |
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### Understanding the Role of Religion in Violence

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| 5.    | <b>W 9/17</b> | <i>Collective Emotions:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emile Durkheim, <i>Elementary Forms of the Religious Life</i> (excerpt) [PR, pp. 100-7]</li> <li>• William McNeill, "Muscular Bonding" *</li> </ul> |
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| 6.    | <b>M 9/22</b> | <i>Killing (In the Name of) the Father:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sigmund Freud, <i>Totem and Taboo</i> (excerpt) [PR, pp. 115-26]</li> <li>• <b>First secondary source due</b></li> </ul>            |
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7.	<b>W 9/24</b>	<p><i>Charismatic Leadership:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rachel MacNair, "Psychological Causes of Violence" *</li> <li>• Ariel Glucklich, "Spiritual Devotion and Self-Annihilation: An Evolutionary Perspective" *</li> </ul>
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8.	<b>M 9/29</b>	<p><i>The Scapegoat Mechanism:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• René Girard, "Violence and Religion: Cause or Effect" *</li> <li>• <b>Primary source due</b></li> </ul>
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9.	<b>W 10/1</b>	<p><i>The Need for an Enemy:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jean-Michel Oughourlian, <i>Psychopolitics</i>, chs. 1-4</li> </ul>
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10.	<b>M 10/6</b>	<p><i>The Enemy Within:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oughourlian, <i>Psychopolitics</i>, chs. 5-8</li> <li>• <b>Comparison due</b></li> </ul>

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### Perpetrators of Religious Violence

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11.	<b>W 10/8</b>	<p><i>Suicide Bomber:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>To Die in Jerusalem</i> (film, 2007; watch at Bobst)</li> </ul>
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	<b>M 10/13</b>	No class
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12.	<b>W 10/15</b>	<p><i>Islamist Violence:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Usāmah bin Lādin, "Letter to America" (2002) *</li> <li>• 9/11 Conspirator, "Last Instructions of 9/11" [PR, pp. 82-89]</li> </ul>
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13.	<b>M 10/20</b>	<p><i>Buddhist Violence:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shoko Asahara, "Declaring Myself the Christ" and "Disaster Comes to the Land of the Rising Sun" [PR, pp. 75-81]</li> <li>• <b>Annotated bibliography due</b></li> </ul>
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14.	<b>W 10/22</b>	<p><i>Christian Violence:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Michael Bray, "A Time for Revolution?" [PR, pp. 55-61]</li> </ul>
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15.	<b>M 10/27</b>	<p><i>Jewish Violence:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meir Kahane, "War and Peace" [PR, pp. 69-74]</li> <li>• Roger Fisher and William Ury, "Negotiate with Terrorists?" *</li> </ul>

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### Further Case Studies (Presentations)

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16.	<b>W 10/29</b>	<i>Portfolio Presentations</i>
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17.	<b>M 11/3</b>	<i>Portfolio Presentations</i>
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18.	<b>W 11/5</b>	<i>Portfolio Presentations</i>
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19.	<b>M 11/10</b>	<i>Portfolio Presentations</i>

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## Secular Religion

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20. **W 11/12** *State Violence:*
- George W. Bush, Jr., "Prayer Service Remarks, September 14, 2001" \*
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21. **M 11/17** *The Civic Religion:*
- Carolyn Marvin and David W. Ingle, "Blood Sacrifice and the Nation" \*
  - **Research paper due**
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22. **W 11/19** *Sovereignty:*
- Paul W. Kahn, "Torture and Democratic Violence" \*
  - Alan Dershowitz, "The Case for Torture Warrants" \*
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## Religion Against Violence

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23. **M 11/24** *A Critique of Modern Civilization:*
- Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, chs. 1-12  
<http://www.soilandhealth.org/03sov/0303critic/hind%20swaraj.pdf>
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24. **W 11/26** *Experiments with Truth:*
- Gandhi, *Hind Swaraj*, chs. 13-20
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25. **M 12/1** *God's Strange Ways:*
- Martin Luther King, Jr., "A Time to Break Silence" \*
  - King, <http://vimeo.com/3816635> (a 23-minute excerpt from his last sermon)
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26. **W 12/3** *God's Kingdom on Earth:*
- Malcolm X, "The Ballot and the Bullet" (excerpt)
  - Malcolm X, Interview with Louis Lomax \*
  - Malcolm X, Interview with Gordon Parks \*
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## Outlook

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27. **M 12/8** *Secular Strategies:*
- Jessica Stern, "Policy Recommendations" \*
  - Robert Pape, "A New Strategy for Victory" \*
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28. **W 12/10** *The Future of Religious Violence:*
- Jonathan Raban, "What Do a Vicar's Son and a Suicide Bomber Have in Common?" \*
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29. **W 12/17** **12:00pm Final**
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## PRESENTATION

Speaker: \_\_\_\_\_

Topic: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Evaluate on a scale from “0 — Atrocious” to “20 — Outstanding” (no fractions, please):

**Delivery** (eye contact, audibility, command of voice, nervous ticks): \_\_\_\_\_

**Content** (depth of information; organization of material; competency): \_\_\_\_\_

2. Name one thing that worked for you.

3. Name one thing that could be improved/tips for the research paper.