

CANADIAN SCHOOL OF PEACEBUILDING  
CANADIAN MENNONITE UNIVERSITY  
Session II: 15-19 June 2020  
BTS/PCD-5700C Does Religion Cause Violence?  
Graduate Course Syllabus

Instructor: Dr. Bill Cavanaugh  
Email: [wcavana1@depaul.edu](mailto:wcavana1@depaul.edu)  
Lecture times: 8:30am-5pm, Monday to Friday  
Office hours: After class

Last date for voluntary withdrawal without academic penalty: July 15

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### COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines the common notion that religion has a peculiar tendency to promote violence. We will analyze secularist treatments of religion and violence and narratives of the European “Wars of Religion,” questioning what is meant by “religion,” whether secular ideologies are more peaceful, and how and why the distinction between “religious” and “secular” is constructed in the first place. We will then examine René Girard’s theory of violence and his argument that Christianity is the “religion” that ends religious violence.

### OBJECTIVES

**After successful completion of this course students should have:**

- an understanding of critiques of religion as inherently violent
- an understanding of what is meant by the terms “religion” and “violence”
- an understanding of the “Wars of Religion” in Europe
- an understanding of the relationships of Christianity and Islam to violence
- an understanding of René Girard’s theory of mimetic violence

### REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS

**It is the participant’s responsibility to order texts ahead of time, whether online, as e-books, or from local book-sellers.**

- Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, **fourth edition**
- Matthew Curtis Fleischer, *The Old Testament Case for Nonviolence*
- René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*

Other required readings are supplied via electronic coursepack. **Students must print the readings and bring them to class.**

### TEACHING APPROACH

Emphasis in this class will be on the active engagement of all students. There will be some lecturing by the professor, but the class will be structured around discussion and debate, both in small groups and in the class as a whole. Students will be responsible for presenting material and asking questions for discussion. Students will be expected to keep up with all readings and actively engage in class activities.

### COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND DEADLINES (for credit)

The following are the requirements for those taking the class for credit. Others are encouraged to read as much as possible in order to receive maximum benefit from the course.

Assignments are due as scheduled. Marks will be deducted for lateness (5% per day), unless previous arrangements have been made with the instructor. Assignments should be submitted to the instructor via email.

### ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

ASSIGNMENT	DUE DATE	VALUE
1. Analysis of terms	Monday, June 15	20%
2. Analysis of argument	Monday, June 22	15%
3. Book review	Monday, June 29	20%
4. Research paper	Monday, August 10	40%
5. General discussion participation	Throughout the class	5%

### ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES

#### 1. Analysis of terms

Due: Monday, June 15

Length: 3-4 pages

Value: 20%

Description: Analyze the terms “religion” and “violence” as used by **any two** of the following authors: Kimball, Marty, Juergensmeyer, and Avalos. What do they mean by “religion” and what do they mean by “violence”?

#### 2. Analysis of argument

Due: Monday, June 22

Length: 4 pages

Value: 15%

Description: Omer and Springs ask the question “Nationalism: A Religion?” How do they answer that question? Do they think that nationalism is a religion? Would Hitchens or Fitzgerald agree?

#### 3. Book review

Due: Monday, June 29

Length: 3-4 pages

Value: 20%

Description: Fleischer argues that the Old Testament makes a case for nonviolence. What do you think of his arguments? Do they make a convincing case? Concentrate on the portions of the book that we read in class.

4. Research paper

Due: Monday, August 10

Length: 12-15 pages

Value: 40%

Description: Describe and critique René Girard's theory of how violence comes about and how Christianity is the antidote to violence. This assignment requires you to find and engage with any critique of Girard other than the ones we read for class. After laying out Girard's theory, describe the critique, and then make your own argument. What parts of Girard's theory and the critique of it do you find convincing, and what parts unconvincing? Why?

### **STYLISTIC REQUIREMENTS**

CMU has adopted the following as its standard guide for all academic writing:

Hacker, Diana. *A Pocket Style Manual*. Sixth edition. Boston and New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2012.

The final paper should follow an accepted academic format for citations, bibliography, etc. (e.g. APA, Chicago, MLA). You may choose the format but whichever you use, be sure to use it properly and consistently.

### **OTHER REQUIRMENTS**

*Academic Integrity*—All material referred to in any assignment MUST be appropriately referenced.

Plagiarism is a serious matter. Students should be aware of CMU Academic Policies, particularly those regarding academic misconduct (plagiarism and cheating), which apply to all University courses. These are detailed on CMU's website (<http://www.cmu.ca/students.php?s=registrar&p=policies>) and in the CMU Calendar. If you still have questions about appropriate referencing and what plagiarism is, a useful tutorial can be found here: <http://www.indiana.edu/~istd/>.

*Attendance*—In order to maximize the potential of the educational process, and given the intensive nature of CSOP courses, it is necessary that each student attend all classes. On occasion, a student may need to miss some class time. A half-day of class (4 total hours) is the maximum allowable absence, and any student missing more than this may be barred from further class attendance. In such cases the student is responsible to advise the instructor before the class occurs. It is the responsibility of the student to become familiar with all academic policies, including those pertaining to attendance, academic misconduct, and grading.

## ACCESSIBILITY

CMU strives to provide a fair and supportive learning environment for academically qualified students with disabilities. If you are eligible for these services or have questions about becoming eligible, please contact Sandra Loeppky, Coordinator of Accessibility Programs at [sloepky@cmu.ca](mailto:sloepky@cmu.ca) or 204.487.3300 x.340.

In recognition of individuals with asthma, allergies and severe environmental/chemical sensitivities, CMU is striving to become a scent-free campus. Students, staff and guests are asked to refrain from wearing fragrances and scented personal care products at CMU. This includes perfumes, colognes, aftershave and scented hair products. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated by those affected.

## EVALUATION

Good communication skills are essential for justice and peacebuilding work. The instructor looks for quality writing that adheres to the assignment guidelines, expresses ideas clearly, concisely, and persuasively, and demonstrates engagement with readings and class sessions. All written work should be well informed, well organized and well documented.

Students should take up any concerns or questions regarding grades first with the instructor. If this does not produce a satisfactory result, the student should submit a written appeal to the Registrar ([spenner@cmu.ca](mailto:spenner@cmu.ca)).

For more information on CMU policies regarding grades, academic misconduct, appeals, and other matters, please see the *CMU Student Handbook*.

## LETTER GRADE/PERCENTAGE SCALE

<b>Letter Grade</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Grade Points</b>	<b>Descriptor</b>
A+	95-100	4.5	Exceptional
A	88-94	4	Excellent
B+	81-87	3.5	Very Good
B	74-80	3	Good
C+	67-73	2.5	Satisfactory
C	60-66	2	Adequate
D	50-59	1	Marginal
F	0-49	0	Failure

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>A - Excellent</b>	<b>B - Competent</b>	<b>C - Below Expectations</b>
<b>CONTENT</b> (quality of the information/ideas and sources/details used to support them)	- has clarity of purpose - has depth of content - displays insight or originality of thought -demonstrates quality and breadth of resources	- has clarity of purpose - has substantial information and sufficient support - contains some originality of thought -uses quality resources	- has clarity of purpose -lacks depth of content and may depend on generalities or the commonplace - has little originality of thought -uses mostly quality resources
<b>STRUCTURE</b> (logical order or sequence of the writing)	- is coherent and logically developed -uses very effective transitions	- is coherent and logically developed -uses smooth transitions	- is coherent and logically (but not fully) developed -has some awkward transitions
<b>CONVENTIONS</b> (appearance of the writing: sentence structure, usage, mechanics, documentation)	- has virtually no errors of conventions	- has minimal errors of conventions	- is understandable <u>but</u> has noticeable problems of sentence structure, usage, mechanics or documentation
<b>STYLE</b> (personality of the writing: word choice, sentence variety, voice, attention to audience)	- is concise, eloquent and rhetorically effective -has nicely varied sentence structure -is engaging throughout and enjoyable to read	- displays concern for careful expression -has some variation in sentence structure -is generally enjoyable to read	- has some personality <u>but</u> lacks imagination and may be stilted and may rely on clichés -has little variation in sentence structure -is not very interesting to read

## EXTENSIONS

The last date within the semester an instructor can grant as an extension is **August 15**. If a student is unable to complete the requirements of a course by this date, the student must submit a written appeal for an “incomplete” to the Registrar’s office ([spenner@cmu.ca](mailto:spenner@cmu.ca)). The student should seek the instructor’s support for the appeal and must submit it by August 16.

If the student’s appeal is granted, the instructor will enter a grade of I (for incomplete) accompanied by a temporary grade (which is based on completed work and assigns a value of zero for uncompleted work). Instructor grades are due by August 21. If the student completes the remaining work within the extension

period, the grade will be recalculated and the incomplete status will be removed. If the student does not complete the work within the extension period, the incomplete status will be removed and the provisional grade entered alongside the “incomplete” will become the final grade. The maximum extension for courses ending in August is December 1.

### **SCHEDULE, TOPICS & READINGS**

This schedule, along with assigned readings, may be adjusted slightly in response to pace of discussion, availability of guests, and other scheduling issues. The instructor will provide advance notice of any changes.

#### Monday, June 15

CSOP Opening 9:00-10:00

Morning: class 10:00-12:30

Afternoon: class 1:30-5:00 (coffee break 3:30-4:00)

Readings:

Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, intro and chapter 1

Martin Marty, *Politics, Religion, and the Common Good*, intro and chapter 1

Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God*, fourth edition, chapters 1, 2, 4, 7-9, 11

Hector Avalos, “Religion and Scarcity”

Excerpts from US Supreme Court cases

#### Tuesday, June 16

Morning: class 8:30-12:30 (coffee break 10:30-11:00)

Afternoon: class 1:30-5:00 (coffee break 3:30-4:00)

Readings:

World Health Organization, “Definition and Typology of Violence”

Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, pp. 15-60

Brent Nongbri, *Before Religion*, chapters 5-6

John Locke, *Letter Concerning Toleration*, pp. 13-31

Peter Beyer, “Defining Religion in Cross-National Perspective”

Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, chapter 1

Keven Schilbrack, “The Social Construction of ‘Religion’ and its Limits” and Timothy Fitzgerald, “A Response to Kevin Schilbrack”

William Arnal, “Definition”

#### Wednesday, June 17

Morning: class 8:30-12:30 (coffee break 10:30-11:00)

Afternoon: class 1:30-5:00 (coffee break 3:30-4:00)

Readings:

William T. Cavanaugh, “The Creation Myth of the Wars of Religion”

Philip Benedict, "Were the French Wars of Religion Really Wars of Religion?"  
Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America"  
Carolyn Marvin and David Ingle, "Blood Sacrifice and the Nation"  
Christopher Hitchens, "An Objection Anticipated"  
Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies*, chapter 5  
Atalia Omer and Jason Springs, "Nationalism: A Religion?"

#### Thursday, June 18

Morning: class 8:30-12:30 (coffee break 10:30-11:00)

Afternoon: class 1:30-5:00 (coffee break 3:30-4:00)

#### Readings:

Jonathan Ebel, "Christianity and Violence"

Matthew Fleischer, *The Old Testament Case for Nonviolence*, chapters 1-7, 9-10, 12

John Howard Yoder, *Nonviolence: A Brief History*, chapters 6-7

Bernard Lewis, "The Roots of Muslim Rage"

Sam Harris, "The Problem with Islam"

Beverly Milton-Edwards, "Islam and Violence"

Pieter Nanninga, "The Role of Religion in al-Qaeda's Violence"

Asma Afsaruddin, "Islam and Violence: Debunking the Myths"

#### Friday, June 19

Morning: class 8:30-12:30 (coffee break 10:30-11:00)

Afternoon: class 1:30-3:00

CSOP closing @ 3:00 p.m.

#### Readings:

René Girard, *I See Satan Fall Like Lightning*

Gil Bailie, "Violence and the Sacred"

Wolfgang Palaver, "Mimetic Theories of Religion and Violence"

Espen Dahl, "Girard on Apocalypse and Terrorism"

Critiques of Girard by Pierre Manent and Richard Landes

#### **SCHEDULE NOTES**

Coffee Breaks are normally 10:30-11:00 am and 3:30-4 pm.

Class photos will be taken on Monday or Tuesday: plan for 15 minutes for the photo taking.

July 15	The final date to withdraw from the course without academic penalty.
Aug 15	Instructors cannot grant extensions past this date.
Aug 16	The last day for students to appeal in writing to the Registrar's office for extensions past Aug 15.
Aug 21	Last day for instructors to submit grades.