

Sociology 593
Religion in a global context
Mondays 2:30-5:00
415 McGuinn

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Religion in a Global Context

This course will address current topics and problems related to religious pluralism in contemporary global society. Students will begin by exploring taken for granted concepts of religious freedom as they are understood in the American context through analyses of how these concepts become problematic when applied outside mainstream religious traditions. We will then see how these problems become amplified when applied in the global setting. The course will begin with exploring concepts of “Freedom of Religion” as they have been defined through constitutional case law in the United States and deconstruct its meaning in theory and in practice. We will discuss the association of religious freedom with the post-colonial project of creating a democratic world system as codified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the extension of that principle into practice by the United States “International Religious Freedom Act”. This historical context will provide a conceptual backdrop for discussing some of the contemporary struggles between religion, political development and the global community i.e. the relationship between religion and nationalism, the relationship between religion and political violence in various global regions, and the role of religion in American foreign policy. The readings and lectures will touch upon religious-political issues in the United States, India, Iraq, Israel and Palestine, among others.

The course is designed as a discussion oriented seminar based on readings and materials presented in class and through the web-ct interface. Class participation is part of the overall grade and requires that the readings and other materials be prepared before class. Absence from class or on-line participation will also have a negative effect on your participation grade. The main written assignment in the class is a final paper. The student will choose a country (other than the US), describe its religious characteristics and discuss the relationship between religion and society with particular emphasis on how religious pluralism and religious rights are handled and what challenges this poses for just and peaceful governance. Suggested countries include China, Nigeria, Iraq, India, Israel or Palestine.

The first part of the assignment is due on February 27 when you will be expected to make a 5-10 minute oral presentation to the class identifying the country you have chosen to investigate, giving the history and background of that country with regard to religious issues. What is their formal stance towards religion. Identify the religious minorities and how they are treated. You will also

hand in a 3-5 page memo of the presentation. The class will provide questions and feedback that you will be expected to address in your final paper.

The final paper and presentation is due on May 1. In this presentation you will hand out a one page memo and, with regard to your chosen nation, discuss the ways that its religious culture impacts the global community. The final paper will be 10-12 pages.

The final exam will be held on May 15 in class.

Deadlines

Participation (which includes attendance)	20%
Mid-term memo and presentation	15%
Final paper and presentation	40%
Final Exam	25%

Texts:

*Flowers, Ronald B. 1994. That Godless Court? Supreme Court Decisions on Church-State Relationships John Knox/Westminster Press.

*Juergensmeyer, Mark. 2000. Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence. University of California Press.

*Juergensmeyer, Mark. 1994. The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State University of California Press

Oliver, Anne Marie and Paul Steinberg. 2005. The Road to Martyrs Square: A Journey Into the World of the Suicide Bomber.

Esposito, John L. 2002. What Everyone Needs to Know About Islam. Oxford University Press.

Texts cited in the syllabus will be available on course reserve at the library.

* Required.

Part I: American religious values

January 23: Introduction to course, requirements, readings and assignments. Brief lecture on the history of religion in America.

January 30: The American context: The American religious landscape and how this has shaped assumptions about the relationship between church and state. Is the United States and Christian country? How does its religious background and culture influence its perspective? Exploration of the First Amendment. Readings:

Flowers: Introduction, Chapter 1-3, Appendix A and B. Look up the first amendment and identify the religion clauses.

February 6: The first amendment: What are definitions of “freedom of religion” in theory? How has this been exercised in practice? Have the definitions and applications remained constant or have they varied in different contexts? Can we legislate and enforce religious freedom? Readings: Flowers: chapters 4, pp 63-67, 110-125, chapter 9.

February 13: Encounters with religious minorities. Case Study: The Waco conflict. View video Waco: Rules of Engagement prior to class (2 hours). Readings: Directed internet search. How can we explain the government’s reaction to the Branch Davidians? What “rules of engagement” came into play?

Part II: Religious freedom in international contexts.

February 20: The UN Declaration of Human Rights : Readings: The UN Declaration of Human Rights www.un.org/Overview/rights.html. The Influence of Faith ed. by Elliot Abrams. Chapter 1, 2 . What does the UN Declaration of Human Rights say about religion? Do you agree that religion should be a **universal** human right? What problems might arise if people have multiple religious groups competing for power? Should nations have the right to intervene in the politics of another state if human/religious rights are being violated? How shall various rights, including the rights of sovereignty be balanced against religious rights?

February 27: Midterm Presentations

Spring Break

March 13 : Religion and nationalism. Jurgensmeyer, The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State. Introduction, chapters 1-3. What is religious nationalism? What is its appeal? Why is it effective? What are its costs? What are alternative nationalist strategies? What is the situation with regard to your particular case study (see midterm presentation).

March 20: Religion and the rights of minorities. Juergensmeyer The New Cold War? Ch 4, 6,7 and conclusion. Chapter in Abrams “Political Islam and the Roots of Violence” What are some of the difficulties involved with the governance of religiously plural countries? How are they solved in India, the US or under Islamic law?

March 27: Religion and terrorism. Readings: Jurgensmeyer, Terror in the Mind of God Introduction, ch 1-3 Selections from “The Road to Martyrs Square: A Journey Into the World of the Suicide Bomber” by Anne Marie Oliver and Paul

Steinberg. What are the perspectives held by so called “religious terrorists” or “martyrs”. What helps them construct this world view? What are their goals and strategies? What powers can be exercised by the state to influence them?

April 3: Religion and terrorism. Readings: Jurgensmeyer, Terror in the Mind of God ch 7-11. Compare Jurgensmeyer with Oliver and Steinberg: What, do they argue, leads to religious terrorism?

April 10: American Foreign Policy and Religious Freedom. Readings The International Religious Freedom Act <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/irf/>. Religious Persecution as a US Foreign Policy Issue. http://www.trincoll.edu/depts/csrpl/rel_pers_links.htm? This Act builds upon definitions of religious freedom defined in the American Constitution and in the UN Declaration of Human Rights. What are some of the problems and issues raised by its implementation as an American policy directed at foreign governments?

Easter Break

April 24: Final Papers Due and Part I of presentations .

May 1: Final Presentations and Review

May 15: Final Exam. 24 Quincy Rd.

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