

Religion & Genocide
MAHG 5028 (Genocide Special Topics)

Fall 2013

Tuesdays, 6:00 – 9:00 PM

HRC (Library 2nd Floor)

Instructor

Dr. Carol Rittner, RSM

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“As the increasing religious violence of our time is making very clear, the unitary and coherent character of religious worldviews can easily lead to absolute claims to truth and divine approval and even to a sense of mission to exterminate those who hold other views.”

– Dr. Sandra Schneiders, Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley, CA

Despite the widespread trends of secularization in the 20th century, religion has played an important role in several outbreaks of genocide since the early part of the 20th century and now into the 21st century. MAHG 5028, ***Religion & Genocide*** will examine the intersection between religion and state-organized murder in the cases of the Armenian, Jewish, Rwandan, and Bosnian genocides. What is religion? In terms of genocide, what was religion's importance as institution, theology, even as personal experience? Were specific theological ideas particularly important to the perpetrators of genocide, or to those who tried to come to terms with their own or other people's destruction? What about to those who tried to stop genocide? Did religion help to normalize genocide by providing myths of ultimate redemption or rationales for annihilation? How can we construct a humane social order that honors human dignity and difference, one in which we can be true to ourselves and what we believe and also respectful of others? These are some of the questions we will explore, examine, and discuss in ***Religion & Genocide***.

Course Goals

1. To examine several examples of genocide, and
2. To determine whether or not there exists a relationship of significance between religion (Judaism, Christianity, Islam) – in its institutional form(s) and/or its theology – and genocide, as defined by the 1948 UN Convention on Genocide.

Student Learning Outcomes

At the completion of MAHG 5028, ***Religion & Genocide***, students who are diligent about their readings, assignments, and participation in the seminar, should be able to:

- Think critically;
- Reason ethically;
- Recognize that “genocides are not ‘accidents’ in history but that genocides occur because individuals, organizations (secular and religious), and governments make choices that legalize discrimination, allow prejudice, and encourage hatred that

- eventually allows mass murder to occur;
- Examine the relationship of religion (Judaism, Christianity, and/or Islam) to genocide.
- Be familiar with the scholarly work of key genocide scholars relative to religion and genocide; and,
- Express their ideas about the relationship between religion and genocide, orally and in writing, in an intelligent and clear manner.

Required Texts

Peter Balakian, *Black Dog of Fate: A Memoir*. Revised Edition. NY: Basic Books, 2009.

David Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: Genocide and Moral Obligation*. Newest edition. Paragon House, 2003.

Timothy Longman, *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Anthony Loyd, *My War Gone By, I Miss It So*. Penguin Books, 2001.

Hugh McCullum, *The Angels Have Left Us*. World Council of Churches, 2004

(Note: This book is available on Blackboard, as it is out-of-print)

Richard L. Rubenstein and John K. Roth. *Approaches to Auschwitz: The Holocaust and Its Legacy*. 2nd edition. Westminster John Knox Press, 2003.

Michael A. Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia*. University of California Press, 1998.

Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness* (Rev. Expanded Ed.). Schocken, 1998.

NOTE: Other Required Readings for MAHG 5028, Religion & Genocide are and will be posted on Blackboard.

Expectations

As a graduate student in MAHG 5028, *you are expected to:*

- Know and abide by the **Academic Honesty Policy** of The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. The plagiarism policy on the college's website: <http://intraweb.stockton.edu/eyos/page.cfm?siteID=14&pageID=62>.
- Be prepared each week for the seminar, which means, showing up having read the material for the day, having completed the assignment for the day, and being ready to actively participate in class discussion.
- Participate actively in class discussion, contributing in informed ways every week.
- Exercise rhetorical sensitivity during class discussion and debate. Treat one another respectfully, even when disagreeing.
- Check your email daily and respond promptly to messages from Professor Rittner.

Seminar Structure:

MAHG 5028 is a graduate seminar. It requires honest dialogue, regular attendance which is the social basis for a continuing dialogue. The reality of a graduate seminar is that you will get out of it what you put into it. If you put little in, the chances are good that you will get little out of it.

Every seminar meeting builds on the week's reading, so it is crucial that you complete the reading in advance of our weekly seminar. You may not master all the intricacies of the week's reading, but you should aim to have some thoughts about main ideas and questions for discussion. To that end, each week I shall require you to prepare a *Conversation Starter* grounded in the week's reading, but that "goes beyond the reading" so as to reveal your own thinking about what you/we are reading and studying.

If you miss a class, or come unprepared, you will not be able to participate in a constructive fashion. ***Absence inevitably detracts from your understanding of the course as a whole and will affect your grade.*** Your participation in the seminar discussion offers you a chance to present your ideas and your questions to the seminar so that we can come to a deeper understanding of the material. ***Do not be afraid to ask questions about what puzzles you. Discussion is a collaborative endeavor, in which we pool our knowledge and exchange our ideas.***

Seminar Requirements:

- A. Weekly Attendance and Active Participation in the Seminar;**
- B. Research Paper:** Each student will complete a 12 – 15 double-spaced pages long Research Paper – that is, 12-15 pages of text, with Endnotes and Bibliography additional.

Your Research Paper will be a Case Study of a specific genocide that sheds light on one (1) of three (3) aspects of ***Genocide, Religion and Modernity***:

- The use of religion to legitimize and motivate genocide; or,
- The potential of religious faith to encourage physical and spiritual resistance to mass murder; or,
- The role of religion in coming to terms with the legacy of atrocity.

The Case Study you select must be approved by Professor Rittner, be based in solid research, and show evidence of such research.

*Research papers are to follow the Modern Language Association (MLA) Style sheet. It is the Style sheet faculty in the MAHG Program have agreed is to be used for all research papers written to fulfill requirements in the MAHG program. I have posted the MLA Style sheet on the MAHG 5028, **Religion & Genocide Blackboard** site, so you can find it there.*

- C. One (1) seven (7) – ten (10) minute oral presentation in the seminar of an assigned essay, with the main points highlighted in a Power Point presentation.** Your task is to critique the assigned essay. By *critique*, I mean you are to analysis the essay, either finding fault with it or pointing out its merits (or both). ***Critique is based upon an informed opinion, never merely upon personal***

opinion (saying, for example, “Well, I just like it/dislike it and that’s my opinion!”). In other words, I am asking you to make an informed judgment about the merits or demerits of your assigned reading and clearly presenting your informed opinion to the seminar.

D. Weekly Conversation Starters: Before **each** class session, you are to complete the assigned reading; then, prepare a **Conversation Starter that is at least one (1) complete BUT no more than two (2) complete single-spaced pages long – NOT shorter and NOT longer**. Each Conversation Starter must include three (3) parts:

- a. **What I learned from the reading(s)** – In one (1) or two (2) good, thoughtful, solid paragraphs tell me **WHAT you got out of the reading** (e.g., an insight, idea, or perspective you may not have thought about before completing the reading);
- b. **Three (3) – Five (5) Quotations** – Identify and write out three (3) to five (5) short quotations from the reading that caught your attention, that spoke to you, that made you think, **and** that you would like to share with the seminar. Please give page numbers.
- c. **Three (3) – Five (5) Questions for Discussion** — Identify three (3) to five (5) questions that the week’s reading raised for you and that you can contribute to the class discussion. ***For each question, be prepared to justify/explain why your questions are important and why I (Professor Rittner) and the class should take them seriously.*** Why is each of your questions important? How might each question help us to gain insight into a particular topic/subject/issue? Be prepared, because I shall probe, push, even “harass” you to try to elicit an intelligent response from you about why we should give time to your question/questions.

WHAT YOU ARE TO DO WITH YOUR CONVERSATION STARTER: Each week, you are to e-mail me a copy by Monday evening by 8 PM at the latest (Carol.Rittner@Stockton.Edu) so I can see where your thinking and questions are headed, have an opportunity to comment on your paper, and, if necessary, assign a grade to your Weekly Conversation Starter (if I do not think you are taking this assignment seriously, I shall grade it each week).

All Written Assignments must be prepared in standard academic format: typed and checked for typos, misspellings, grammatical irregularities and/or errors.

Grades (Please Note: No “I’s” will be given for MAHG 5028)

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| • Conversation Starters & Participation in Seminar Discussion | 45% |
| • Oral Presentation | 10% |
| • Research Project/Paper | 45% |

Total 100%

Grades for the Course will be: A, A-, B+, B, B-, C+, C, C-, D+, D, D-, or, F

Schedule

As you read, keep these questions in mind: What is religion? In terms of genocide, what was religion's importance as institution, theology, even as personal experience? Were specific theological ideas particularly important to the perpetrators of genocide, or to those who tried to come to terms with their own or other people's destruction? What about to those who tried to stop genocide? Did religion help to normalize genocide by providing myths of ultimate redemption or rationales for annihilation? How can we construct a humane social order that honors human dignity and difference, one in which we can be true to ourselves and what we believe and also respectful of others?

DATE	ASSIGNMENT
September 10	<p>Wisenthal, <i>The Sunflower</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does <i>The Sunflower</i> have to do with religion and genocide? <p>Cavanaugh, "The Root of Evil" (<i>America</i>, 7/29-8/5, 2013, pp. 11-14)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What is religion? What is genocide? What does religion have to do with genocide?
12 -	MAHG Lecture, David Pinto, "Graphic Novels & Genocide" CC, 4:30 – 5:45 PM)
17	<p>On Blackboard (Be sure to read all essays) – Dr. S. Jacobs (Skype)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Jacobs, "Genocidal Religion" (S. Stout) Kuper, "Theological Warrants for Genocide: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity" (L. Hussong) Suny, "Religion, Ethnicity, and Nationalism: Armenians, Turks, and the End of the Ottoman Empire" (L. Garcia) Rubenstein, "Jihad and Genocide: The Case of the Armenians" (R. Lewis) Kershaw, "Afterthought: Some Reflections on Genocide, Religion and Modernity" (E. Thrall)
24	<p>Balakian, <i>Black Dog of Fate</i>, pp. viii – 150</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guest (6:15 PM): Dr. Debbi Dagavarian Guest via Skype (8 PM): Dr. Richard Rubenstein
October 1	<p>Balakian, <i>Black Dog of Fate</i>, pp. 153-348</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guest: Dr. Mary Johnson Guest via Skype: Dr. Peter Balakian

- 8 Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, pp. ix-213
- **Guests via ooVoo:** Drs. Richard Rubenstein and John Roth
- 15 Rubenstein and Roth, *Approaches to Auschwitz*, pp. 217-377; and **On Blackboard** - Bergen, “Religion and the Holocaust: Some Reflections” (**K. Tabasso**)
- **Guest:** TBA
- MAHG Lecture, Dr. Robert Skloot, “Theater of Genocide” (4:30 PM – 5:45 CC)**
- 22 Gushee, *Righteous Gentiles of the Holocaust: Genocide and Moral Obligation* (**entire**); and **On Blackboard** - Locke, “Religion and the Rwandan Genocide: Some Preliminary Considerations” (**J. Gensert**)
- 29 Loyd, *My War Gone By, I Miss It So* (**entire**)
Dr. Patrick Henry, Annual Kristallnacht Lecture, “Jewish Resistance”
- November**
- 5 Sells, *The Bridge Betrayed: Religion and Genocide in Bosnia* (**entire**)
- **Guest:** Dr. Paul Mojzes
- 12 Rwanda I: **On Blackboard**, McCullum, *The Angels Have Left Us* (**entire**); and Bjornlund, et al, “The Christian Churches and the Construction of a Genocidal Mentality in Rwanda” (**T. Thomas**)
- 19 Rwanda II: Longman, *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda*, pp. 3-197
- 26 Rwanda III: Longman, *Christianity and Genocide in Rwanda*, pp. 199-322.
- December**
- 3 Häring, “Overcoming Violence in the Name of Religion (Christianity and Islam)” (**C. Sands**); and Häring, “Working Hard to Overcome Violence in the Name of Religion” (**J. Scherren**)

Thursday, December 5: Your Research Paper is due by 5:00 PM. Two printed copies are to be given to Professor Rittner who will be in her office (J-107) from 10:00 AM – 5:00 PM. **Tuesday, Dec 10 – No Class (because of Sept 9th)**

