Sanctifying Violence and the Biblical Tradition  
Spring 2014

Religion 840:549 graduate seminar  
Religion 840:401 senior seminar  
Thursdays, 12:35-3:35  
Loree room 131

We will explore the relationship between biblical traditions and justifying violence, through critical analysis of how violent acts may be legitimated by appeal to notions of the divine. We will begin with theoretical questions such as: What is violence? What are possible relationships between religion and violence? The bulk of the seminar will involve in-depth readings of particular biblical stories that feature violence, from mutilating corpses of enemies to slaughtering children. When and how are such acts portrayed as legitimate? When are such acts deemed unacceptable? We will also examine broader ancient Near Eastern themes of ritual violence and sanctified combat in order to better understand biblical descriptions of violence. We will conclude with the use of biblical “scripture” to frame violence within Jewish and Christian traditions.

Our primary objective is to examine the relationship between biblical traditions and the rhetorical act of sanctifying violence. In order to do so, we examine instances of ritual violence and sanctified combat from ancient Mesopotamian literature, iconography, and the Bible. A second objective is for students to develop understanding of scholarly methodologies used within religious studies and biblical studies. This is accomplished through critical analysis of primary texts, and discussion of current scholarship. More broadly, we emphasize recent developments in the theorization of religious violence.

Requirements and assessment:
10% preparation for class  
10% participation in class discussion  
30% three brief presentations of reading materials  
20% presentation of research project  
30% final research paper: 10-15pg undergrads; 20-25pg grad students

We will adhere to the University’s policy on academic integrity.

Books:
*The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha*, college edition, 4th edition. You need a copy of the Hebrew Bible and New Testament, preferably the NRSV or the NJPS for the Hebrew Bible. We will discuss various translations in class as well as suitable online versions.

All articles and book chapters are available on Sakai.
**Topics and Reading Schedule**

The course will be divided into three main units: (1) comparative study and theories of religious violence; (2) sanctified violence in ancient texts and art; and (3) the use of biblical tradition in subsequent justifications of violence.

**Week 1** - Background for our study: the academic study of religion; scholarly approaches to the Hebrew Bible; overview of ancient West Asian and Greco-Roman history
Read: Lincoln, “Theses on Method”; Collins, “Israel”; Oxford Study Bible essays

**Unit 1: What is the relationship between religion and violence?**

**Week 2** – an exemplary treatment of our topic; how does ideology work?

**Week 3** - What is violence?

**Week 4** - Comparative study of religious violence; religious justifications for violence
Read: *Princeton Readings in Religion and Violence*, edited by Juergensmeyer and Kitts (Princeton University Press, 2011), intro and part 1 (each student presents 1 section)

**Week 5** - Roles of religion in violence
Read: *Princeton Readings in Religion and Violence*, part 2 (each student presents 1 section)

**Unit 2: Sanctified violence in ancient West Asian texts and art**

**Week 6** - Violence in Israelite/Judean culture and the bible
Read: Klawans and Bernat, “Religion, Violence, and the Bible”; Zevit, “The Search for Violence in Israelite Culture and the Bible”; all biblical citations in these essays

**Week 7** - Ancient West Asian texts and monumental art: divine combat, mutilation of defeated gods, war-related violence as glory
Read: Lincoln, “Sanctified Violence”; Noegel, “Dismemberment, Creation, and Ritual”; Zainab Bahrani, intro and ch. 8; selections from the Mesopotamian Enuma Elish; Ugaritic Baal Cycle; Egyptian story of Isis and Osiris; ANE royal inscriptions; and Hebrew Bible

**Week 8** - Violence in biblical prophecy
Read: Kamionkowski, “The ‘Problem’ of Violence in Prophetic Literature”; Geller, “The Prophetic Roots of Religious Violence in Western Religions”; all biblical citations in essays
Week 9 – Violence in biblical legal traditions  
Read: Wright, “Homicide, Talion, Vengeance, and Psycho-Economic”; all biblical citations

Week 10 – Ritualized violence in the bible  

**Unit 3: Sanctifying violence using the biblical tradition**  
Week 11 – Sanctified violence in antiquity  
Read: Religion and Violence: The Biblical Heritage, 79-134; all biblical citations in essays

Week 12 – into modernity  
Read: Oxford Handbook of Religion and Violence, ch. 4, 5, 14, 15; Review: Princeton Readings in Religion and Violence

Weeks 13-15 – Student Presentations of Research Projects

Final papers due Monday, May 12