

RS 2H03: Theory and Practice of Non-Violence

Department: Religious Studies at McMaster University

Dates: Lectures: Tuesdays and Thursdays 6:30 – 9:30

Instructor: Dr. David Penner

Website and Email: Avenue

Office Hours: By appointment in KTH 208

Course Description

This course explores the theory and practice of non-violence as an element in the study of religion. The practice of non-violence originated as a response to social and political oppression. How does a person or a people not take on the characteristics of their oppressors in seeking liberation? How can you defeat violence without becoming violent?

There have been examples in the last one hundred years of revolutions successfully accomplished without the spilling of blood. The emancipation of India from England, the civil rights movement in the United States, and the worldwide success of the feminist revolution of the late 1960s are instances where radical political change for the oppressed was achieved without a call to violent arms.

Christopher Hitchens famously argued that religion has acted as a perpetual source of strife and hatred in the world. Religion, he claimed, has been used as the main justification for much of the world's violence at both a national and personal level. However, the majority of the voices that have been devoted to the practice of non-violence found their theoretical basis in the teachings of the world's religions. Principles of *ahimsa* and *satyagraha* find their point of origin in Hindu and Jain religious belief. Christian recommendations of "turning the other cheek" and care for the oppressed have motivated many practitioners of non-violence.

Tolstoy, in his consideration of *ahimsa*, equated non-violence with a religious view of love arguing that its merits were moral before they were practically effective. In this way the theory and practice of non-violence as related to religion are about personal change before they are about political utility. Following this distinction between the religious and the political the question that guides this course is: what is meant and what might be unique about the religious account of non-violence? This question has ramifications at all levels of human and ecological life. It is a question about the globe, the nation, about principles of justice, about communities and the agency of the self. In this sense non-violence is at the essence of much that is requested of the human self by all the scriptures of the world's major religions. The implication is that non-violence is a theory and belief that cannot be separated from its practice. Accordingly, the study of non-violence in the context of religion has us ask many pertinent questions. What are our responsibilities in the face of outrage? What are we to do with terror?

With anger? How are we to conceive of other life on our planet? How are we to think of ourselves and our own temptations to violence?

This course has three sections of unequal length. The first section is a discussion of some of the foundational principles on the theories and practice of non-violence. The second section considers the histories and thinking of three figures (Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Thich Nhat Hanh) who have made major contributions to the practice of non-violence. Each figure represents a different strand of thought and belief under the umbrella of non-violent practice ranging from political revolution, civil disobedience, to environmental responsibility. Each of these figures have also been the source of controversy and have been accused of hypocrisy. The third section of the course explains and explores the role of both violence and non-violence in the scriptures and traditions of the major world religions. Given the recommendations of violence found in the theories and the practice of many world religions how are we to understand their calls to non-violence? What is at the essence in these traditions?

This course promises the student an interesting consideration of the connection between the practice of non-violence and religion. At the same time it also offers an opportunity to investigate our relationship to the potential allure of violence in the face of oppression and the constitution of our own moral imagination when confronted by both.

Method of Evaluation

30%: Take Home Test on the Foundations and Principles of Practice and Theories of Non-Violence. This assignment is due on July 6th.

30%: Take Home Test on Figures in the History of Non-Violence. This assignment is due on July 25th.

40% Take Home Final Exam on Violence and Non-Violence in World Religions. This assignment is due on August 5th.

Please note: Staff in the office of the Department of Religious Studies will not date-stamp or receive papers and other assignments.

Course Texts

All readings are online. Optional readings will be on reserve at Mills Library. Links for sources will be provided on Avenue to Learn.

Class By Class Outline

The instructor reserves the right to alter this schedule.

June 20th: Introduction: Theories of Non-Violence in the Context of a World of Violence

Part One: Foundations and Principles

June 22nd: The Politics of Non-Violence: Theory is Practice

Readings:

G. Sharp, *How Non Violent Struggle Works* (pp 1-43).

S. Welch, "The Fundamental Crisis in Christian Theology" in *Communities of Resistance and Solidarity*.

June 27th: The Principle of *Ahimsa* in Hinduism and Jainism

Readings:

Sivananda, Sri Swami, *Ahimsa*.

D. M. Mayton, "Gandhi as Peacebuilder: The Social Psychology of *Satyagraha*" in *Peace, Conflict, and Violence: Peace Psychology for the 21st Century*. Edited by D. Christie and R. Wagner. Available online.

Bhaneja, Balwant, "Understanding Gandhi's *Ahimsa*". *Asterikos*, 2007. 3/4.

June 29th: Love as Liberation

Readings:

L. Tolstoy, "Chapters 1 and 2" in *Kingdom of God is Within You*.

J.M. Bonino, "Love, Reconciliation and Class Struggle" in *Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation*. Optional. On Reserve.

July 4th: The Allure of Violence: Why are we drawn to violence?

Readings:

R. Ford, "In the Face" September 16, 1996 *New Yorker*.

Malcom X., "Speech at the Founding Rally of the Organization of Afro-American Unity".

M. Foucault, "The Body of the Condemned" in *Discipline and Punish*.

Part Two: Figures

Individual Voices on the Practice of Non-Violence

July 6th: Gandhi: The Example of Non-Violent Practice

Readings:

M. Gandhi, *Non Violence in Peace and War Vol. 1*, pp 4-64.

M. Gandhi, "Satyagraha: Congress Report on the Punjab Disorders"

C. Geertz, "Gandhi: Non-violence as Therapy" in *The New York Review of Books*. November 20, 1969.

July 11th: Martin Luther King Jr.: The Moral Necessity of Non-Violent Practice

Readings:

M.L. King Jr., "Letter from a Birmingham Jail".

M.L. King Jr., "Loving Your Enemies".

J.A. Colaiaco, "Martin Luther King and the Paradox of Non Violent Direct Action" in *Phylon* 47.1 pp 16-28.

Optional Reading:

A. Morris, "Birmingham: A Planned Exercise in Mass Disruption" in *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement*. Optional. On Reserve.

July 13th: Thich Nhat Hanh: The Environment of Non Violence

Readings:

T.N. Hanh, "Living Together in Harmony".

T.N. Hanh, "Overcoming the Fear of Death".

S. Dodge, "Thich Nhat Hanh's Imaginary Soul".

Part Three: Traditions

Representations of Non-Violence in World Religions

Note: Compilations of relevant scriptures for each tradition will be posted on Avenue to Learn.

July 18th: Hinduism: "Kill Those Whom I Have Killed"

Readings:

D. Vidal, "On the Concepts of Violence and Non-Violence in Hinduism and Indian Society" in *South Asia Research*. 14.2.

A. Rambachan, "The Co-Existence of Violence and Non-Violence in Hinduism" in *The Ecumenical Review*. 55.2.

July 20th: Buddhism "Enmity has never ended Enmity"

Readings:

T.D. Yeh, "The Way to Peace: A Buddhist Perspective".

M. Jerryman, "Monks with Guns". Available Online.

July 25th: Judaism: “I am a jealous God”

Readings:

R. Eisen, “The Bible” in *The Peace and Violence of Judaism*.

C. Hitchens, “Revelation – The Nightmare of the Old Testament” in *God is Not Great*.

July 27th: Christianity: “I Come with a Sword”

Readings:

Biblical Selections: Jesus on Violence

W. Wink, “Jesus’ Third Way”

C. Hitchens, “The New Testament Exceeds the Evil of the Old One” in *God Is Not Great*.

August 1st: Islam: “And kill them wherever you find them.”

Readings:

M.W. Khan, “The True Jihad” in *The True Jihad*.

A. Musa, “Islam and Violence” in *The Encyclopedia of Religion and Violence*, edited by J.I. Ross.

August 3rd: Sikhism: The Hand on the Sword

Readings:

M. Juergensmeyer, “The Logic of Religious Violence” in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*. 22.1. Available online.

P. Wallace, “Sikh Militancy and Non-Violence” in *Sikhism in Global Context*.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY POLICY

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

AVENUE TO LEARN

In this course we will be using Avenue to Learn. Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of this course, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in this course will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students who require academic accommodation must contact Student Accessibility Services (SAS) to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. Academic accommodations must be arranged for each term of study. Student Accessibility Services can be contacted by phone 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or e-mail sas@mcmaster.ca. For further information, consult McMaster University's Policy for Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities.

POLICY FOR MODIFYING A COURSE

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check her/his McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

E-MAIL COMMUNICATION POLICY

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

MCMASTER STUDENT ABSENCE FORM

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar "Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work". Please note these regulations have changed beginning Spring/Summer 2015. The timeframe within which the MSAF is valid has been reduced from 5 days to 3 days. The upper limit for which an MSAF can be submitted has been reduced from 'less than 30%' to 'less than 25%' of the course weight. As per the policy, students must immediately follow up with their instructors to request accommodation for any missed academic work. Failure to do so may negate their relief. If you have any questions about the MSAF, please contact your Associate Dean's office.