Course Description

This course will explore various aspects of violence and wars. It will explore the presence (origin?) of the myth of redemptive violence in ancient Mesopotamia/Babylon, which predates the biblical (Genesis) myth of the “very good” creation. It will further explore the myth of redemptive violence that surrounds the Christ Event – the passion and death of Jesus Christ, and will expose and critically analyse the prevalence and even dominance of this myth of redemptive violence in popular and/or military culture today. The course will then explore the associations in history of violence and wars with empires and economics, religion and religious fanaticism and/or fundamentalism, and will highlight the issues of just wars and pacifism, and Christian Zionism and Islamic jihad. The course will encourage students to seek and articulate non-violent relational ethics based on (re)appropriation of Jesus’ teachings and relevant feminist perspectives on non-violent ethics.

Objectives

At the end of the course the student will be able to:

- Distinguish between force and violence
- Understand the traditions of violence and non-violence in scripture
- Understand the shifts of understanding of violence in the early church
- Understand developments in just war theory
- Apply Christian understandings of violence to contemporary issues

Course Outline

This course is taught over 6 weeks with two sessions a week.

This is guided reading course where close readings of primary source texts and secondary sources will be the basis of class discussion.

**Week 1 - Introducing Violence (week beginning 15 September 2014)**

During the first week students will be introduced to the concept of violence and how this has been understood by philosophers and theologians. The readings will introduce the concepts to be considered throughout the course.
Session 1: Philosophical Perspectives

Required Reading/Watching
- Slavoj Zizek - 'Ideology of Violence' https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DIHpNX7IA0

Further Optional Reading

Session 2: Theological Perspectives

Required Reading/Watching
- Walter Wink - Nonviolence for the Violent Series
  1. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gC8pfvX1to
  2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUc3lAhJs8c
  3. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UejcCTSwJ6I
  4. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9buysvmtSGE
  5. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e_1jpwHsRus

Further Optional Reading

Task for the Week

Write one page on the readings and videos for this week discussing one point of interest and how it has expanded your understanding of violence.

Week 2 - War and Violence in the Bible (week beginning 22 September 2014)

This week we explore the biblical record on war and violence and strategies to read non-violently both the Old and New Testaments.

Session 1: Violence and the Old Testament

Required Reading
- Philip Jenkins - 'Dark passages', http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/ideas/articles/2009/03/08/dark_passages/
Further Optional Reading


**Session 2: Violence and the New Testament**

Required Reading


Further Optional Reading


**Task for the Week**

Pick one verse from either the Old or New Testament that is used to justify or condemn violence and write a one page reflection on this passage in relation to the topic of war or violence.

**Week 3 - Before and After Constantine (week beginning 29 September 2014)**

This week we examine the early church theologians on war and participation in the military. Then we consider what some theologians have described as the fall of the church with the conversion of Emperor Constantine in the 4th century.

**Session 1: Before Constantine**

Reading

- Selections from Albert Marrin's *War and the Christian Conscience: From Augustine to Martin Luther King, Jr.*, Chicago: Regnery, 1971. Chapter 1, 'Early Christianity and the Problem of War'
  - Tertullian, 'The Soldier's Chaplet'
  - Lactantius - *Divine Institutes*
  - Acts of Saint Maximilian the Martyr
Further Optional Reading


**Session 2: After Constantine**

Reading


Further Optional Reading


**Task for the Week**

Taking the work of one ancient theologian, describe their position on war or violence, and on what basis Christians may or may not participate in war or violence.

**Week 4 - Just War, Old and New (week beginning 6 October 2014)**

This week we look at the emergence of the Just War tradition and follow this tradition down to today.

**Session 1: The Development of Just War Thinking**

Reading

- Francisco Suárez - The Three Theological Virtues, Faith, Hope, and Charity: On Charity, Disputation 13, War' in Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan, eds. *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought, 100-1625*, Grand Rapids: William

Further Optional Reading

**Session 2: Modern Just War Thinking and its Critics**

Reading
- Leo Tolstoy - *What I Believe*, Chapters 2 and 3 https://archive.org/stream/whatibelievemyr00tolsgoog#page/n26/mode/2up

Further Optional Reading

**Task for the Week**

Does Jesus' nonviolent ethics in the Sermon on the Mount have any meaning beyond the individuals in our violent world?

**Week 5 - Religions and Violence (week beginning 13 October 2014)**

This week we look at other religions and violence and examine the common criticism of religion that religion causes violence and war.

**Session 1: Other Religions and Violence**

Reading
Further Optional Reading


Session 2: Does Religion Cause War?

Reading

- Sam Harris - 'No Ordinary Violence' http://www.samharris.org/blog/item/no-ordinary-violence

Further Optional Reading


Task for the Week

How would you answer someone who claimed that religion causes violence?

Week 6 - Gender Violence and Capital Punishment (week beginning 20 October 2014)

Session 1: Violence Against Women

Reading

Further Optional Reading


Session 2: The Death Penalty

Reading


Further Optional Reading


Task for the Week

Discuss one argument either for or against the death penalty.

Assessment

Minor Assessment

There are 6 pieces of minor assessment, being the weekly tasks I set. The first 2 are due on 30 September covering the first two weeks. And then each Thursday for that week's readings. So that is 2, 9, 16, and 23 October. I will grade these and hand them back with a grade and comments. You can, if you wish, correct and amend them for final submission at the end of assessment week on 31 October 2014. I have asked for one side of an A4 page (estimated to be 500 words, which should be considered a minimum guide for this work). The total of the 6 pieces is worth 50% of the overall grade for the course.

Final Essay Questions

The major piece of assessment is an essay of between 3000-4000 words on a topic of your choice. This is worth 50% of the course and is due for final submission at the end of assessment week on 31 October 2014. You must agree your topic with Dr Davis as soon as possible. The sooner you agree on your topic the sooner you can begin. Questions may be on any topic of violence and wars but must be related to the course material and lectures. In order to complete the essay satisfactorily you must clearly define your terms (for example, between 'violence' and 'power' and 'force') and use them consistently. You must also engage theologically and ethically with the topic of your choice.
By this I mean you should draw on theological resources (such as scripture, tradition, and the work of other theologians) in your discussion. The readings and optional readings are good places to start. Do not spend too long thinking about your topic, it is sometimes better to get writing earlier.

Sample questions could include:

- Does just war theory have any relevance in the Nuclear Age?
- Should the church provide chaplains to the military?

Or, you may like to engage with a particular author or a single work on violence more deeply. For example, you might to write a critical review of one of the articles or books on the reading list, or discuss the debate between two authors who disagree with each other.