

Martyrdom & Meaning
Georgetown University
Summer 2020

Instructor: Rosanne Morici
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**Students are encouraged to meet with the instructor throughout the course of the semester if they experience difficulties of any kind.*

"It's really important to get somehow into the mind and make it move somewhere it has never moved before. That happens partly because the material is mysterious or unknown but mostly because of the way you push the material around from word to word in a sentence.... Given whatever material we're going to talk about, and we all know what it is, how can we move within it in a way we've never moved before, mentally? That seems like the most exciting thing to do with your head."

- Anne Carson

Description

The term "martyrdom" appears widely in contemporary religious and political cultures. While it is such a recognizable facet of Western discourse, it is also a concept whose precise definition and appropriate deployment feel impossible to pin down. Martyrdom is never simply a single act, but a cultural system forming and being formed by an audience or community of interpreters. This course traces the development and use of martyrdom as a theological discourse for generating meaning out of suffering. We begin with classical and early Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sources, and then end with modern uses of the concept in various phenomena.

Requirements

Regular Attendance & Active Participation 10%: This class is interactive and collaborative. We need each other to show up physically and intellectually. Students are permitted 2 absences. Only in view of serious emergency or serious documented illness will a student be allowed more than 2 absences. Exceeding 2 absences will result in a failing participation grade. Students are expected to complete assigned readings for the beginning of the class period listed on the course syllabus. In addition, students should bring the assigned readings to class for each class period.

2 Secondary Source Abstracts (1-page) 20%

2 Primary Source Analyses (3-page) 30%

1 Final Essay (8-10 pages) 40%

Books

Plato, *The Last Days of Socrates*

Bible with Apocrypha (RSV or NRSV)

+ Margaret Cormack, *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion*

* Canvas Readings

Schedule of Readings

Week 1: Martyrdom in the Ancient World

Monday 6/1: +Introduction of *Sacrificing the Self*

Tuesday 6/2: *Sophocles, *Antigone*

Wednesday 6/3: Genesis 22, Leviticus 16, Joshua 6-10, Daniel 1-6
+Marc Brettler, "Is There Martyrdom in the Hebrew Bible?"

Thursday 6/4: Plato, *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo* (in *The Last Days of Socrates*)

Week 2: Martyrdom in the Roman World

Monday 6/8: *Excerpts from the histories of Thucydides and Herodotus, and Tacitus's
Death of Seneca

Tuesday 6/9: I Maccabees 1-6, 2 Maccabees 6 and 7, Daniel 7-12
*Jan Willem Van Henten, Friedrich Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity*, 76-87

Wednesday 6/10: The Gospel of Mark; The Gospel of Matthew 5, 10:16-33
*Vincent Wimbush, "'...Not of This World...': Early Christianities as Rhetorical and Social Formation," in *Reimagining Christian Origins: A Colloquium Honoring Burton L. Mack*, ed. Elizabeth Castelli and Hal Taussig (1996), 23-36

Thursday 6/11: 1 Corinthians 1:18-4:21, 6:11-13, 15; 2 Corinthians 1:1-6:13, 10:10-12:10
Philippians 2:5-11
+Carlin Barton: "Honor and Sacredness in the Roman and Christian Worlds"

Week 3: Martyrdom in Early Christianity

Monday 6/15: Revelation 6:1-17

*Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Romans*
+Carole Straw, "'A Very Special Death': Christian Martyrdom in Its Classical Context"

Tuesday 6/16: *The Martyrdom of Polycarp
*The Passion of the Scillitan Martyrs
*Tertullian, *To the Martyrs*

Wednesday 6/17: *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas
*Martyrs of Lyons, Eusebius, Eccles. Hist. 5:1ff
*Brent D. Shaw, "Body/Power/Identity: Passions of the Martyrs," *J ECS* 4 (1996): 296-312

Thursday 6/18: *Acts of Paul and Thekla (NTA 239-246)
*The Passion of Sergius and Bacchus
*Origen, *Exhortation to Martyrdom*

Week 4: Martyrdom in Judaism and Islam

Monday 6/22: *Jan Willem Van Henten, Friedrich Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death*, 132-76
*David G. Roskies, ed., "The Ten Harugei Malkhut," *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe*, 60-69
+Lawrence Fine, "Contemplative Death in Jewish Mystical Tradition"

Tuesday 6/23: *Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam, A Reader* (Excerpts 1-45)
*Meir Hatina, "Defying the Oppressor: Martyrdom in Judaism and Christianity" and
"Dying for God in Islam," *Martyrdom in Modern Islam: Piety, Power, and Politics*, 19-57

Wednesday 6/24: *David Cook, "Sectarian Islam: Sunni, Shi'ite and Sufi Martyrdom,"
Martyrdom in Islam, 45-73
+Keith Lewinstein, "The Revaluation of Martyrdom in Early Islam"

Thursday 6/25: *David G. Roskies, ed., "History as Liturgy in Ashkenaz," *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe*, 71-88
*H.E.J. Cowdrey, "The Genesis of the Crusades: The Springs of Western Ideas of Holy War," *The Holy War*, ed. Thomas Patrick Murphy, 9-32

Week 5: Martyrdom in the Modern World

Monday 6/29: *Martin Luther King, Jr., *Letter from Birmingham Jail* and other selections
*Henry David Thoreau, *On Civil Disobedience*

Tuesday 6/30: *Philip Berrigan, *Fighting the Lamb's War: Skirmishes with the American Empire*, 79-113, 183-205
*John Dear, *Peace Behind Bar: A Peacemaking Priest's Journal from Jail*, 141-151
*David Roskies, ed., "Ghetto Preachers," *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe*, 503-509

Wednesday 7/1: +Daniel Brown, "Martyrdom in Sunni Revivalist Thought"
*Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam, A Reader* (Excerpts)
*Quintan Wiktorowicz and John Kaltner, "Killing in the Name of Islam: Al-Qaeda's Justification for September 11," *Middle East Policy* X.2 (Summer 2003): 76-92

Thursday 7/2: +Lindsey Harlan, "Truth and Sacrifice: Sati Immolations in India"
+S. Dennis Hudson, "Self-Sacrifice as Truth in India"
*James Benn, "Fire and the Sword: Some Connections between Self-Immolation and Religious Persecution in the History of Chinese Buddhism," *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations*, 234-265

Course Policies

- Any instance of cheating or plagiarism will be referred to the honor council.
<http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/>
- Any work found to have been plagiarized will receive a failing grade.
- Please speak with respect and care for those who might disagree with you.
- Please respect the class process and your peers by coming to class on time.
- Please turn off your phones.