

Martyrdom & Meaning
Georgetown University
Summer 2021

Instructor: Rosanne Morici
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Office hours: TBD

**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 clearly recognizable, 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 religio-political discourse for generating meaning out of suffering. We begin with classical and early Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sources, and then end with consideration of martyrdom's relationship to other phenomena defined by some self-sacrificial act.

Requirements

Regular Attendance & Active Participation 10%: Students are permitted 2 **unexcused** absences. Exceeding 2 **unexcused** absences will result in a failing participation grade. If you are having trouble attending our Zoom meetings for any reason, please let me know. Students are expected to complete assigned readings for the beginning of the class period listed on the course syllabus. In addition, students should have the assigned readings available during class discussions for reference and note-taking.

2 Secondary Source Abstracts (1 page) **20%**

1 Primary Source Analysis (4-5 pages) **30%**

1 Final Essay (6-8pages) and Presentation **40%**

Books

Plato, *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo* (available online through The Internet Classics Archive)

Bible with Apocrypha (RSV or NRSV) (available online)

+ Margaret Cormack, *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion* (available online through Georgetown University Library)

* Other Readings found on Canvas

Schedule

Week 1: Ancient World

Monday 6/7: + Introduction of *Sacrificing the Self*

*Justin Watson, *The Martyrs of Columbine: Faith and the Politics of Tragedy* Introduction and Chapter 2 (2002)

Tuesday 6/8: *Sophocles, *Antigone*

*Stephen Palmer, "Martyrdom and Conflict: The Fate of Antigone in Tragic Drama," *Mortality* (2014): 206-223

Wednesday 6/9: Genesis 22, Daniel 1-6

+Marc Brettler, "Is There Martyrdom in the Hebrew Bible?"

Thursday 6/10: "The Sacrifice of Isaac" in Art Discussion

Group A (10:45am – 11:40am)

Group B (11:50am – 12:45pm)

Week 2: Graeco-Roman World

Monday 6/14: Plato, *Apology*, *Crito*, and *Phaedo*

Tuesday 6/15: 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 6/16: The Gospel of Mark 8:31-9:10; 14:32-16:20

The Gospel of Matthew 5:1-12; 10:16-33

1 Corinthians 1:26 – 2:6

2 Corinthians 4:7-18; 12:1-10

Galatians 3:28

Philippians 2:5-11

Hebrews 9:24-28

*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

+Carlin Barton: "Honor and Sacredness in the Roman and Christian Worlds"

+Carole Straw, "'A Very Special Death': Christian Martyrdom in Its Classical Context"

Thursday 6/17: *Ignatius of Antioch, *Letter to the Romans*

*The Martyrdom of Polycarp

Group A (10:45am – 11:40am)

Group B (11:50am – 12:45pm)

Week 3: Early Christianity and Judaism

Monday 6/21: *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

Tuesday 6/22: *Acts of Paul and Thekla (NTA 239-246)

*Stavroula Constantinou, "Thekla the Virgin: Women's Sacrifice and the Generic Martyr," in *The 'Other' Martyrs: Women and the Poetics of Sexuality, Sacrifice, and Death in World Literatures*, ed. Alireza Korangy and Leyla Rouhi (2019), 73-86

Wednesday 6/23: *Jan Willem Van Henten, Friedrich Avemarie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death*, 132-76

*David G. Roskies, ed., "The Ten Harugei Malkhut" 60-69, *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe*

+Lawrence Fine, "Contemplative Death in Jewish Mystical Tradition"

Thursday 6/24: *David G. Roskies, ed., "History as Liturgy in Ashkenaz" 71-88, and "Ghetto Preachers" 503-509, *The Literature of Destruction: Jewish Responses to Catastrophe*

Group A (10:45am – 11:40am)

Group B (11:50am – 12:45pm)

Week 4: Islam

Monday 6/28: *The Qur'an (translated by M. Fakhry) Suras 3, 9, & 22

*David Cook, "Martyrdom in the Genesis of Islam," *Martyrdom in Islam* (2007), 12-30

+Keith Lewinsein, "The Revaluation of Martyrdom in Early Islam"

Tuesday 6/29: *David Cook, "Sectarian Islam: Sunni, Shi'ite and Sufi Martyrdom," *Martyrdom in Islam* (2007), 45-73

*Tahera Qutbuddin, "Orations of Zaynab and Umm Kulthum in the Aftermath of Husayn's Martyrdom at Karbala: Speaking Truth to Power," in *The 'Other' Martyrs: Women and the Poetics of Sexuality, Sacrifice, and Death in World Literatures*, ed. Alireza Korangy and Leyla Rouhi (2019), 103-132

+Daniel Brown, "Martyrdom in Sunni Revivalist Thought"

Wednesday 6/30: Presentations

Group A (10:45am – 11:40am)

Group B (11:50am – 12:45pm)

Thursday 7/1: Presentations

Group A (10:45am – 11:40am)

Group B (11:50am – 12:45pm)

Week 5: Comparative Perspective

Monday 7/5: Presentations

Group A (10:45am – 11:40am)

Group B (11:50am – 12:45pm)

Tuesday 7/6: +Lindsey Harlan, "Truth and Sacrifice: Sati Immolations in India"

+S. Dennis Hudson, "Self-Sacrifice as Truth in India"

Wednesday 7/7: *Tammy Castle, “Self-Immolation” in *Religion and Violence: An Encyclopedia of Faith and Conflict from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Jeffrey Ian Ross (2010)

*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* (2007), 234-265

Thursday 7/8: *Patricia Power, “Seppuku” in *Religion and Violence: An Encyclopedia of Faith and Conflict from Antiquity to the Present*, ed. Jeffrey Ian Ross (2010)

*Doris Borgen, “Sacrifice and Self-Sacrifice,” “The Japanese Custom of Junshi,” and “The Sword and the Brush,” *Suicidal Honor: General Nogi and the Writings of Mori Ogai and Natsume Soseki* (2006), 11-30; 64-82

Primary Source Dates:

Genesis – ca. 1000 – 600 BCE

Daniel – ca. 500 – 200 BCE

Antigone – ca. 441 BCE

Plato – ca. 399 – 360 BCE

Maccabees – ca. 100 – 63 BCE

Post-biblical Rabbinic accounts – ca. 25 BCE – 200 CE

Pauline Letters – ca. 50 CE

Mark – ca. 70 CE

Matthew – ca. 100 CE

Ignatius – ca. 105 CE

Polycarp – ca. 150 CE

Acts of Paul and Thekla – ca. 200 CE

Perpetua & Felicitas – ca. 203 CE

Martyrs of Lyons – ca. 326 CE

Qur’an Suras 3, 9, 22 – compiled 651 CE

Solomon Bar Simson Crusade Chronicle – ca. 1140 CE

“Ghetto Preachers” – 1943 CE