

Religion and Conflict: The Balkans' Explorations vs. Explorations of the Balkans

Dr. Dino Abazovic

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

This course will explore the processes of how political and ethnic conflict can become “religious”, on the one hand, and how religion can itself generate conflict, on the other. During the course, students will learn about the nature of conflict in general and specifically about religious conflict. The course inquires into various interactions between religious and ethno-national identity, with special attention paid to inter-relations among different religions in the Balkans. The relationship between religion and ethnicity, politicized aspects of religious conflicts, and the place of religion in relation to questions of nationalism and hegemony will also be explored during the course.

It will begin with an examination of the complexities of conflict and related academic theories of conflict and religion, as well as the nature of the violence which often follows conflict. Students will gain an understanding of the role of religious communities (Jewish and Islamic) and churches (Catholic and Orthodox) in Balkans at the end of 20th and beginning of 21st century, as well as during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1991-1995).

In addition, students will be able to “unpack” different religious interpretations of sacred texts, understanding how these texts can be the foundation for either violence or peace.

Finally, the course will offer some solutions – how religion and its spirituality, theologies, and methodologies can be used in the process of conflict transformation and peace-building. This will be observed from Jewish, Christian and Muslim perspectives.

COURSE OUTLINE

DAY 1

Morning Session

- Introductory session and Course Outline
- Introduction to Religion and Religious studies (case study Judaism, Christianity, Islam)

Afternoon Session

- Religion, Identity, Ethnicity

Required reading

- ✓ Srdjan Vrcan, “Faith and State: the exemplary case of former Yugoslavia”, 2003 *Transeuropeennes*. 23: 51-63.

DAY 2

Morning Session

- Holy Scripts and Conflict

Required reading

- ✓ Selected parts from *Hebrew Bible*, *New Testament* and *Qur'an*

Afternoon Session

- Religion and Conflict – Theoretical Concepts

Required reading

- ✓ R. Brubaker & D. Laitin, 'Ethnic and Nationalist Violence', 1998, *Annual Review of Sociology*, no. 24, pp. 423-452.
- ✓ W.F.S Miles, 'Political para-theology: rethinking religion, politics and democracy', 1996, *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 17, no 3, pp. 525-535.

DAY 3

Morning Session

- Religion and Violence

Required reading

- ✓ R. Scott Appleby. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred (Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation)*, 2000, New York, Carnegie Corporation of New York (selected parts).
- ✓ W. T. Cavanaugh, 'Does Religion Cause Violence?: Behind the common question lies a morass of unclear thinking ', 2007, *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, Spring/Summer 2007, vol. 35, nos. 2&3.

Afternoon Session

- Religion and War in former Yugoslavia

Required reading

- ✓ Mitja Velikonja, "In Hoc Signo Vincas: Religious Symbolism in the Balkan Wars 1991-1995", *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 21: Iss. 5, Article 2.
- ✓ Paul Mojzes, "The Role of the Religious Communities in the War in Former Yugoslavia", *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 13: Iss. 3, Article 4.
- ✓ Dino Abazović, "Religious Claims during the War and Post-War Bosnia and Herzegovina", *Borderlands e-Journal*, Special Issue Vol 14. No1., 2015.

Additional Reading

- ✓ Perica, Vjekoslav. *Balkan Idols: Religion and Nationalism in Yugoslav States*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

DAY 4

Morning Session

- Post-conflict developments in South-Eastern Europe

Required reading

- ✓ Dino Abazovic, 'Reconciliation, Ethnopolitics and Religion in Bosnia-Herzegovina' in Abazovic, D & Velikonja, M (eds.), *Post-Yugoslavia: New Cultural and Political Perspectives*, 2014, Palgrave MacMillan, Hampshire, New York.
- ✓ Maja Radovic, "Citizenship and Religion in the Post-Yugoslav States".

Additional Reading

- ✓ Branislav Radeljić and Martina Topić (eds.). *Religion in the Post-Yugoslav Context*, 2015, Rowman & Littlefield, Lexington Books.

Afternoon Session

- Post-conflict developments in South-Eastern Europe – continuation

Round table and discussion with representatives from Religious Communities (TBC)

DAY 5

Morning Session

- Holy Scripts and Peace

Required reading

- ✓ Selected parts from *Hebrew Bible, New Testament* and *Qur'an*

Afternoon Session

- ✓ Religion, Peace – building and conflict transformation

Required reading

- ✓ John Paul Lederach. *Building Peace (Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies)*, 1998, Washington, United States Institute of Peace (selected parts).

✓ Ina Merdjanova "Overhauling Interreligious Dialogue for Peacebuilding," 2016, *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe*: Vol. 36: Iss. 1, Article 3.

DAY 6

Morning Session

- Course conclusion – The Future of Religion

Required reading

- ✓ Santiago Zabala (ed.). *The Future of Religion Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo*, 2007, Columbia University Press, (selected parts).