

Modern Language Center (MLC)

(AM/RELS 372) Ideology vs. Faith: Roots of Religious Conflict

Total Hours: 45

Recommended Credits: 3

Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross Listings: Religious Studies / Middle East Studies / Peace Studies

Language of Instruction: English

Prerequisites: None

Course Description

This course provides an in-depth academic exploration of the historical, theological, and political foundations of religious conflict in the Middle East. Students examine the complex relationship between faith, ideology, violence, and identity across the three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

The course investigates how sacred texts, religious traditions, and the actions of religious communities have been interpreted—and misinterpreted—over centuries, shaping narratives of conflict, coexistence, persecution, and power. Students analyze violent episodes in scripture, key historical turning points, and modern geopolitical transformations that have influenced relations among the region's religious groups.

Learners also evaluate the extent to which conflict is driven by ideological frameworks rather than core theological principles, exploring how power, land, politics, colonial legacies, and nationalism impact religious identity.

Using Amman as a living classroom, students visit historical sites, religious institutions, and communities affected by religion-related conflict, developing critical thinking and respectful engagement rooted in evidence-based academic inquiry.

Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Analyze connections between scripture, theology, and contemporary geopolitical conflicts.
- Evaluate contested interpretations of religious texts that appear to condone violence.
- Compare political, cultural, and theological explanations of conflict across Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.
- Understand identity formation and majority/minority dynamics through the lens of religious power.
- Conduct research and field-based inquiry using academically appropriate, respectful methodologies.
- Debate complex themes using analytical vocabulary related to religion, violence, peace, and ideology.
- Develop precise academic writing and presentation skills grounded in multi-perspective analysis.

Course Requirements

Active attendance and participation are required. Students must complete all readings before class and prepare for discussions, debates, and guest lectures.

Assignments include:

- **Textual Analysis:** Written responses to four religiously influenced political texts and two scriptural chapters (Surah 9 and Deuteronomy 20).
- **Research Paper:** An 8–10 page analytical paper using academic and primary sources, incorporating perspectives from conversations with local community members.
- **Oral Presentation:** A 30-minute presentation with Q&A.;
- **Homework & Quizzes:** Regular assignments and short assessments evaluating comprehension and critical engagement.
- **Final Exam:** A comprehensive evaluation of theological, historical, and political themes discussed in class.
- Students must demonstrate academic integrity and respectful engagement with sensitive material

Grading

Participation: 20%

Textual Analysis: 20%

Homework & Readings:

10% **Quizzes:** 10%

Research Paper: 15%

Presentation: 10%

Final Exam: 15%

Readings

Representative readings include key works in religious history, political theology, conflict studies, and scriptural interpretation. Assigned materials are provided as curated excerpts without external URLs.

Authors include:

- Karen Armstrong
- Naim Ateek
- David Ben-Gurion
- Gary Burge
- Judith Butler
- William Cavanaugh
- Noam Chomsky
- Paul Copman

- John Esposito
- René Girard
- Chris Hedges
- Theodor Herzl
- Izzeldin Abuelaish
- Mark Juergensmeyer
- S. Munayer & L. Loden
- Ami Maalouf
- Shiraz Maher
- Bernard Pennington
- Miroslav Volf
- Elie Wiesel

These readings support comparative theological study and multi-perspective understanding of religious conflict.

Additional Resources

Supplementary materials may include:

- Historical and political analyses of conflict zones
- Scholarly commentary on religious violence and scriptural interpretation
- Case studies from Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria
- Academic essays on fundamentalism, nationalism, and peacebuilding

These resources deepen student understanding of the intersection between ideology, faith, and conflict.

Outline of Course Content

Course topics are covered in approximately one week each.

Judaism

Topic 1 – Conflict in Scripture

- Violent verses and the concept of Herem
- The Conquest of Canaan
- Treatment of Gentiles and slavery

Topic 2 – Conflict in History

- Persecution and exile
- Origins of Zionism and the 1948 war

Topic 3 – Conflict in Modern Middle Eastern Politics

- The Palestinian Nakba

- Settler movements and Biblical land narratives
- Judaism and the State of Israel

Christianity

Topic 4 – Conflict in Scripture

- Violence in the New Testament
- Pacifism and the teachings of Jesus

Topic 5 – Conflict in History

- Christian colonialism
- The Crusades and their lasting legacies

Topic 6 – Conflict in Contemporary Politics

- The Lebanese Civil War (Sabra & Shatila)
- Christian Zionism
- Liberation theology and Palestinian Christian resistance
- The “War on Terror” from Arab perspectives

Islam

Topic 7 – Conflict in Scripture

- Meanings and misconceptions of Jihad
- People of the Book and interpretations of kufr

Topic 8 – Conflict in History

- Spread of early Islam
- Sunni–Shi’a divide
- Oxford debate: Is Islam a religion of peace?

Topic 9 – Conflict in Contemporary Politics

- Gaza wars (2008/9, 2012, 2014)
- Hamas as a case study
- Religious dimensions of Syria’s civil war
- ISIS: origins, theology, and governance
- The Amman Message

Topic 10 – Conclusion

- Religion and violence: Ten central questions
- Interfaith dialogue and constructive engagement
- Paths toward reconciliation, coexistence, and peace

Modern Language Center (MLC) Email: mlc@mlc.edu.jo

Tel/WhatsApp: +962777890587

Jabal Al-Luweibdeh, Amman – Jordan

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