COURSE DESCRIPTION

“Crusade,” “Jihad,” “religious war”—these terms are still used to “explain” contemporary conflicts in which religion is invoked as a source of legitimacy. Most modes of justifying violence, however, are not modern inventions. Numerous contemporary justifications for the use of violence have their roots in premodern discourses and conflicts. The course examines the (ab)use of religious arguments for the justification of (political) violence in premodern Christian and Islamic political thought. During the course of the semester, we examine theoretical justifications for the use of violence against the religious “other.” We investigate how similar arguments were used to justify the oppression of the people and how (occasionally, the same) arguments have been used for the development of theories of resistance.

The course analyzes the interplay of religion, politics, and violence in three thematic sections: 1.) Jihad and Crusade; 2.) (Religious) dissent and violent oppression; 3.) (Religious) dissent and resistance. We read texts of different genres from the premodern Christian and Islamic traditions.

The course is geared towards students with an interest in political theory/history of political thought in general, students in Religious Studies (graduate certificate), and all students with an interest in Western and non-Western political thought, in particular those with research and teaching interests outside the Western tradition.

FORMAT

The course is designed as a seminar. There will be no formal lectures, but rather the primary classroom work will be discussion of the assigned reading for the week. The professor will facilitate and direct discussion, and occasionally offer relevant background or conceptual information. Each student will be expected to contribute on a weekly basis to the debate and interchange within the class.

REQUIREMENTS

Students are expected to be current with the reading assignments. They will be expected to make at least one presentation during the course of the semester (10%). These presentations will be critical engagements (NOT summaries) with at least one of the core readings. Each student is expected to hand in two shorter essays (approximately 2000-2500 words) reflecting on the previous readings (30%) and to be actively engaged in class discussion (20%).

Students who are enrolled in the seminar for credit will also write a 6000-7000 words research paper on some aspects of the seminar’s themes (40%). Possible topics will be discussed with the instructor on an individual basis. All written assignments have to be delivered through the Scholar drop box and have to follow Chicago Style. Please keep in mind, "No shows are anathema in academics. The entire enterprise depends on people showing up" (Dennis Moran).

ACADEMIC DISHONESTY

It is a sign of the times that the professor feels the need to warn students regarding plagiarism. Plagiarism is understood to be the representation of the words or ideas of another person as one’s own in any academic writing, essay, thesis, research report, project or assignment submitted in a course or program of study, or the representation as one’s own of an entire essay or work of another, whether the material so represented constitutes a
part or the entirety of the work submitted. In short, plagiarism is copying from any source whatsoever without proper acknowledgment or reference. Penalties for plagiarism are severe, so if you have any doubt whatsoever whether you have (even inadvertently) plagiarized, consult the professor prior to submitting your assignment.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) is a federal anti-discrimination statute that provides comprehensive civil rights protection for persons with disabilities. Among other things, this legislation requires that all students with disabilities must be guaranteed a learning environment that provides for reasonable accommodation of their disabilities. If you need adaptation or accommodations because of a disability, if you have emergency medical information to share with me, or if you need special arrangements in the case the building must be evacuated, please make an appointment with me as soon as possible.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1: Introduction to the course

Week 2: Methods in Comparative Political Theory

I. Jihad and Crusade

Week 3: Background I

Week 4: Ibn Taymiyya and Ibn Rushd on Jihad
Week 5: Background II

Week 6: Campaigning for Crusades

Week 7: Why Crusading?

II. (Religious) Dissent and Violent Oppression
Week 8: The Saljuq Empire & the Nizari Isma’ils

Week 9: Al-Mawardi and al-Ghazali

Oct 10: Christian Heresies
**Week 11: A Manual Against Heretics**  

**III. Oppression and Resistance**  
**Week 12: John of Salisbury**  

**Week 13: William of Ockham**  

**Week 14: An Underrepresented Muslim Perspective**  

**Week 15: Summary**