Secularism relies on two important assumptions regarding religion. One is that religion has been relegated to the private realm and as an entirely private affair has nothing to do with politics. The other is that religion consists of a set of beliefs and opinions and not of rituals or forms of communal experience. Recent developments in the modern world, such as the increasing multicultural character of contemporary societies, the global role of religion, and the rise of radical Islam, challenge these assumptions. Far from being relegated to the private realm, as the classic liberal idea assumes, religion seems to be alive and well in contemporary societies, infusing the motivations and reasons that individuals (as well as states) have for their political choices and actions. The increasing sense is that secularism needs to be redefined and the role of religion in the public sphere reconsidered.

In this class we will explore the capacity religion has either to incite to violence in politics or to favor dialogue in the public sphere. One focus of our class will be Islam, but we will also consider Christianity and Buddhism. When addressing the issue of religion and violence one main topic will be the Islamic idea of jihad and the way this idea has been radicalized by contemporary terrorism and suicide bombers. When addressing the issue of religion as conducive to communication we will immerse ourselves in the study of comparative political thought and intercultural dialogue and will try to understand how religious, secular, and political ideas can speak to each other across cultures.

**Course objectives**

1. To get a sense of the different associations that existed throughout history between religion and violence, on the one hand, and religion and peace, on the other hand;
2. To understand how the radicalization of Islam became a reality of the contemporary world;
3. To understand why today a redefinition of secularism is required and how this would affect both domestic and international politics;
4. To understand how religion can contribute to intercultural understanding and to dialogue in the public sphere, both domestically and internationally.
Achieving the Course Objectives:

We will learn about the relationship between religion and politics by reading the following books:


Course Requirements:

Two essays:

(i) One short essay (6 double-spaced pages): Reconstruct Asad Talal’s argument about the motivations, the meaning, and the desired results of those who engage themselves in acts of suicide bombing. Then, pick up two contemporary events where suicide bombers are involved and, against this background, assess Talal’s argument, by providing one reason for which you agree with him and one reason for which you think he might be wrong. (25%)

The essay is due on January 28.

(ii) One long essay (15-16 double-spaced pages): Topic to be chosen by the students. Students need to consult with me on the topic they want to choose. (35%)

The essay is due on March 14.

(iii) Two Class presentations (15% each)

(iv) Active and informed general class participation (10%)

What is Expected from the Students?

Students will be expected to read, think, form arguments and counter-arguments, understand the fundamental concepts, and participate (in a critical and creative manner) in class discussion. This means that students must keep up with their reading assignments and attend class regularly.
Students must be fully prepared at all times to discuss the arguments and concepts from the previous readings. The best students will be knowledgeable, critical, but balanced in their critical assessments, and will develop coherent and sound arguments that they can defend in their essays, in their exams, and in class discussion.

**Academic dishonesty:**

"All assignments, quizzes, and exams must be done on your own. Note that academic dishonesty includes not only cheating, fabrication, and plagiarism, but also includes helping other students commit acts of academic dishonesty by allowing them to obtain copies of your work. You are allowed to use the Web for reference purposes, but you may not copy material from any website or any other source without proper citations. In short, all submitted work must be your own.

Cases of academic dishonesty will be dealt with strictly. Each such case will be referred to the Academic Standing Committee via the Associate Dean of Students or the Associate Dean of the College. A formal finding of responsibility can result in disciplinary sanctions ranging from a censure and a warning to permanent dismissal in the case of repeated and serious offenses.

The academic penalty for a finding of responsibility can range from a grade of zero in the specific assignment to an F in this course."

**SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS:**

**Religion and Politics: Potentials and Dilemmas**

**January 4:** Introduction: Why Religion and Politics?

**January 6:** Civilization between Violence and Religion: Sumer and India
Reading: Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood*, Introduction and Part One, Chapters 1 and 2

**January 8:** Civilization between Violence and Religion: China and Israel
Reading: Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood*, Part One, Chapters 3 and 4

**January 11:** Civilization between Violence and Religion: Christianity
Reading: Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood*, Part Two, Chapters 5 and 6

**January 13:** Civilization between Violence and Religion: Islam
Reading: Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood*, Part Two, Chapters 7 and 8

**January 15:** Religion and the Secular
Reading: Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood*, Part Three, Chapter 9 and 10

**January 18:** Religion Fights Back: Terror and Global Jihad
Reading: Karen Armstrong, *Fields of Blood*, Part Three, Chapters 11-13 and Afterword
Islam in Focus

January 20: Suicide Bombing: Meaning and Motivation?
Reading: Talal Asad, On Suicide Bombing, Introduction, Chapters One and Two

January 22: The Expected Result: Horror
Reading: Talal Asad, On Suicide Bombing, Chapter Three and Epilogue

January 25: Engaging Islam and Understanding Fundamentalism
Reading: Roxanne Euben, Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Western Rationalism, Chapters One and Two

January 27: At the Sources of Muslim Brotherhood: Sayyid Qutb
Reading: Roxanne Euben, Enemy in the Mirror, Chapter Three

January 29: Islam as the Religion of Reason
Reading: Roxanne Euben, Enemy in the Mirror, Chapter Four

February 1: Critical of Modernity: Views from within the West
Reading: Roxanne Euben, Enemy in the Mirror, Chapters Five and Six

Rethinking Secularism

February 3: The Secular, Secularization, Secularisms
Reading: Rethinking Secularism, Introduction and Chapter Two (e-reserve)

February 5: Secularism, Citizenship and the Public Sphere
Reading: Rethinking Secularism, Chapter Three (e-reserve)

February 10: Why We Need a Radical Redefinition of Secularism
Reading: The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere, pages 15-70 and Rethinking Secularism, Chapter One (e-reserve)

February 12: Religion’s Many Powers
Reading: The Power of Religion in the Public Sphere, pages 70-135

Student Presentations 1
Religion and International Relations

February 15: Towards a Postsecular International Politics and Theory
Reading: Mavelli and Petito, Towards a Postsecular International Politics: New Forms of Community, Identity, and Power, Chapters One and Two (photocopies will be provided)
February 17: How to construct a Postsecular Politics: Cases
Reading: Mavelli and Petito, Towards a Postsecular International Politics: New Forms of Community, Identity, and Power, Chapters Four and Six (photocopies will be provided)

February 19: How to construct a Postsecular Politics: Cases
Reading: Mavelli and Petito, Towards a Postsecular International Politics: New Forms of Community, Identity, and Power, Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine (photocopies will be provided)

Religion and the Dialogue of Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices

February 22: Reason and Faith
Reading: An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age, Chapters Two, Four, and Five

February 24: A Dialogue in Which There Can Only Be Winners
Reading: An Awareness of What is Missing: Faith and Reason in a Post-Secular Age, Chapters Six and Seven

February 26: West-Eastern Dialogue
Reading: Fred Dallmayr, Dialogue Among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices, Chapters Seven and Eight

February 29: Cosmos, Politics, and Religion
Reading: Fred Dallmayr, Dialogue Among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices, Chapters Nine and Ten

March 2: Freedom and Self-Rule
Reading: Fred Dallmayr, Dialogue Among Civilizations: Some Exemplary Voices, Chapters Eleven and Twelve

Student Presentations 2

March 4: Student presentations of the second essay

March 7: Student presentations of the second essay

March 9: Final Review