Martyrdom & Meaning
Georgetown University
Summer 2024

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

Course Description
How does tragedy become a catalyst for change?
How does suffering become an occasion for truth-telling?
How does an underdog become a hero?

The term “martyrdom” appears widely in contemporary religious and political cultures. While the martyr feels like such a recognizable figure, 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 to generate meaning out of suffering and to establish a relationship between violence, belonging, and truth. We begin with classical and early Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sources, and then end with other self-sacrificial phenomena in Chinese Buddhism and Japanese samurai culture, considering along the way the felt effects of this history on the present.

Course Requirements

Regular Attendance & Active Participation 10%: Students are permitted 2 absences. Exceeding 2 absences will result in a failing participation grade. If you are having trouble attending our 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 Canvas Discussion Posts (200 words each) 15%
2 Secondary Source Abstracts (1 page each) 15%
1 Primary Source Analysis (4-5 pages) 25%
1 Final Essay (6-8 pages) 35%

Course Books
Plato, Apology, Crito, and Phaedo (available online through The Internet Classics Archive)
Bible with Apocrypha (NRSV) (available online)
+ Margaret Cormack, *Sacrificing the Self: Perspectives on Martyrdom and Religion* (available online through Georgetown University Library)
* Other Readings found on Canvas

**Reading & Discussion Schedule**

**Week 1: Sacrifice & Noble Death**
Monday 7/8: + Introduction of *Sacrificing the Self*

Tuesday 7/9: + Sophocles, *Antigone*

Wednesday 7/10: Hebrew Bible Readings: Genesis 22, Daniel 1-6
    + Marc Brettler, “Is There Martyrdom in the Hebrew Bible?” “The Sacrifice of Isaac” in Art Discussion

Thursday 7/11: Plato, *Apology, Crito, and Phaedo*

**Week 2: The Graeco-Roman World**
Monday 7/15: 1 Maccabees 1-6, 2 Maccabees 6 and 7, 4 Maccabees 5-7 &16, Daniel 7-12 (Bible & Apocrypha)
    * Jan Willem Van Henten, Friedrich Averamie, *Martyrdom and Noble Death: Selected Texts from Graeco-Roman, Jewish and Christian Antiquity*, 76-87

Tuesday 7/16: Christian New Testament Readings:
    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

Wednesday 7/17: *Ignatius of Antioch, Letter to the Romans*

Thursday 7/18: *The Martyrdom of Polycarp*
    + Carlin Barton: “Honor and Sacredness in the Roman and Christian Worlds”
    + Carole Straw, “‘A Very Special Death’: Christian Martyrdom in Its Classical Context”

**Week 3: Early Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism**
Monday 7/22: *The Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicitas*
    * Martyrs of Lyons, Eusebius, Eccles. Hist. 5:1ff
Tuesday 7/23: *Acts of Paul and Thekla (NTA 239-246)

Wednesday 7/24: *Jan Willem Van Henten, Friedrich Avemarie, Martyrdom and Noble Death, 132-76

   +Lawrence Fine, “Contemplative Death in Jewish Mystical Tradition”

Week 4: Islam
Monday 7/29: *The Qur’an (translated by M. Fakhry) Suras 3, 9, & 22
   +Keith Lewinstein, “The Revaluation of Martyrdom in Early Islam”

   +Daniel Brown, “Martyrdom in Sunni Revivalist Thought”

Wednesday 7/31: Presentations

Thursday 8/1: Presentations

***Primary Source Analysis Due Friday 6/30 (11:59pm ET)

Week 5: Comparative Perspective
Monday 8/5: *Lindsey Harlan, “Truth and Sacrifice: Sati Immolations in India”
   +S. Dennis Hudson, “Self-Sacrifice as Truth in India”


Thursday 8/8: Last Day of Class

**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  
Oration of Zaynab and Umm Kulthum – 680 CE  
Solomon Bar Simson Crusade Chronicle – ca. 1140 CE  
“Ghetto Preachers” – 1943 CE

**Course Policies**

- Any instance of cheating or plagiarism will be referred to the honor council.  
  [https://honorcouncil.georgetown.edu/](https://honorcouncil.georgetown.edu/)  
  - All work submitted for this course must be your own.  
  - I understand that AI programs can be useful tools for brainstorming and enhancing your own critical thinking, but you may not submit any work generated by an AI program.  
  - Because programs like ChatGPT generate text by drawing from many publicly available, previously published sources without citing those specific sources and giving proper credit to their creators, you cannot include (or even paraphrase) AI generated writing since there’s no way to properly cite its sources.

- Any work found to have been plagiarized will receive a failing grade.  
- Late work will receive a 5-point deduction if submitted within the first 48 hours after the deadline, and a 10-point deduction if submitted any time after that.  
- Please speak with respect and care for those who might disagree with you.  
- Please respect the class process and your peers by coming to class on time.  
- Please refrain from leaving in the middle of class except in case of emergency.  
- Please silence your phones.
Sexual Misconduct

Georgetown University and its faculty and staff are committed to supporting survivors and those impacted by sexual misconduct, which includes sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, and stalking. Georgetown requires faculty members, unless otherwise designated as confidential, to report all disclosures of sexual misconduct to the University Title IX Coordinator or a Deputy Title IX Coordinator. If you disclose an incident of sexual misconduct to a professor or staff member in or outside of the classroom (with the exception of disclosures in papers), that faculty or staff member must report the incident to the Title IX Coordinator, or Deputy Title IX Coordinator. The coordinator will, in turn, reach out to the student to provide support, resources, and the option to meet. Please note that the student is not required to meet with the Title IX coordinator and no action will be taken without the student's awareness. More information about reporting options and resources can be found on the Sexual Misconduct Website: https://sexualassault.georgetown.edu/resourcecenter.

If you would prefer to speak to someone confidentially, Georgetown has a number of fully confidential professional resources that can provide support and assistance. These resources include:

- Health Education Services: Sexual Assault Response and Prevention: sarp@georgetown.edu
- Counseling and Psychiatric Services (CAPS): 202.687.6985

Additional resources are included below:

- Georgetown Wellness Wheel: https://studenthealth.georgetown.edu/hoya-wellness-wheel/
- Georgetown Guide to Recognizing Students in Distress: https://studentaffairs.georgetown.edu/studentoutreach/facultystaffresources/

Pregnancy Modifications and Adjustments

Georgetown University is committed to creating an accessible and inclusive environment for pregnant students. At any point throughout their pregnancy students may request adjustments/modifications based on general pregnancy needs or accommodations based on a pregnancy-related complication or medical need. Students may also request accommodations following labor and delivery based on a complication or medical need.

To request pregnancy modifications, please complete the SCS Pregnancy Modification Request Form: https://forms.gle/ZBfASxui7u13A8TU6

More information about pregnancy modifications can be found on the Title IX Georgetown University Website: https://titleix.georgetown.edu/title-ix-pregnancy/student-pregnancy/