



## **Human Rights and Religion**

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KIR-2-200  
Do 10:15-12

### **Course Description:**

How did we come to conceive of the human subject as a bearer of inalienable rights? How might human rights be grounded? How do they relate to theological understandings of justice? What are the liabilities and limits of human rights thinking? This course examines varying conceptions of "human rights," "religion," and their relation, giving special attention to contested issues in contemporary scholarship.

### **Student Learning Outcomes:**

Students will:

- (1) be familiar with key problems in the field of human rights and religion.
- (2) be versed in and capable of engaging critically with scholarship in the field.
- (3) be able to articulate and defend positions of their own, with respect to contested issues and problems in the field.

Please note that the objective of this course is not simply to acquire new information; it is also (and more importantly) to think critically and reflexively; to interrogate received wisdom; and to bring into focus what might otherwise be invisible. As Jonathan Z. Smith has written, "The disciplined study of any subject is, among other things, an assault on self-evidence, on matters taken for granted, nowhere more so than in the study of religion." Don't be surprised if you finish this course with more questions than when you began; that is a sign that you are wrestling seriously with a complex set of problems.

### **Assessment:**

Students will:

- (1) participate in and take turns leading weekly small-group discussions
- (2) take a written exam at the end of the semester.

Your final grade will be determined as follows:

- (a) exam: 90 percent
- (b) participation: 10 percent.

**Texts:**

All readings will be made available electronically via OLAT.

**Participation:**

In-class participation is required.

Since much of our time together will be spent critically discussing the texts, it is essential for everyone to have read and thought carefully about the assigned material before coming to class. To that end, it will be important to create for yourself working conditions that are conducive to concentration and deep thought. Try to find a work space where you will not be distracted by friends and family, television, Facebook, etc. Map out the main arguments in the reading, and be prepared to criticize or defend them.

Once you arrive at class, make an effort to get involved in the conversation. Our goal is collaborative learning. Don't hesitate to ask questions if you need clarification or would like more information: if you are confused, it is likely that others are too!

Please turn off and store all cell phones and other electronic devices before entering the classroom. If you use a laptop to take notes, be sure to close all web browsers and other applications. Audio and/or video recording is not permitted in class.

Schedule		
20.2	Introduction: Human Rights and Religion	
27.2	What are “Human Rights”?	U.N. General Assembly, “Universal Declaration of Human Rights”
6.3	Toward a Genealogy of the Idea of H.R.	Hunt, “Bone of Their Bone”
13.3	No class meeting.	Asad, “Reflections on the Origins of Human Rights” (video available at: <a href="http://vimeo.com/15788132">http://vimeo.com/15788132</a> )
20.3	Philosophical Grounds?	Wolterstorff, “Is a Secular Grounding of Human Rights Possible?”
27.3	Theological Grounds?	Wolterstorff, “A Theistic Grounding of Human Rights”
3.4	Universality versus Cultural Relativism	An-Na’im (et al.), “Human Rights, Religion, and the Contingency of Universalist Projects”
10.4	Inter-Religious H.R. Declarations and the Construction of “Religion”	Sharma, “Towards a Declaration of Human Rights by the World’s Religions”; “Universal Declaration of H.R. by the World’s Religions”; Twiss, “Theology, Tolerance, and Two Declarations of Human Rights”
17.4	TBD	
24.4	Easter Break	
1.5	Labor Day	
8.5	H.R. Mobilization and the Problem of Moral Authority	Hopgood, “Moral Authority, Modernity and the Politics of the Sacred”
15.5	The Politics of Religious Freedom	Religious Freedom Selections from the <i>Immanent Frame</i> ( <a href="http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/">http://blogs.ssrc.org/tif/</a> )
22.5	The Limits of H.R.	Moyn, “The Burden of Morality”

Note: This syllabus is not a legal contract; the content of this course is subject to revision. Please consider this a working draft.