

Steven G. Smith [home.millsaps.edu/smithsg](http://home.millsaps.edu/smithsg)  
Christian Center 11—office hours posted  
Home phone 601-354-2290

Religious Studies 3900/4900 [Core 10]  
RELIGIOUS STUDIES SEMINAR: SACRIFICE  
Spring 2009

**Diane Sawyer:** On this morning of 3,218 U.S. military fatalities and 24,042 U.S. wounded—not to mention the some 60,000 Iraqis who have been killed—on this morning, would you say to Americans that if it takes four more years and another 3,000 fatalities that you’ll stay the course; that that must be done too?

**Condoleezza Rice:** Well, Diane, first we have to recognize the tremendous sacrifice, and nothing that we can say is ever going to lessen the hurt for those families that have lost loved ones or for those whose lives have been irrevocably changed. But I would say . . . that nothing of value is ever won unless there is sacrifice.

—“Good Morning America,” 3/19/07

“Have you forgotten the Deep Magic?” asked the Witch.

“Let us say I have forgotten it,” answered Aslan gravely. “Tell us of this Deep Magic.”

“”Tell you?” said the Witch, her voice growing suddenly shriller. “Tell you what is written on that very Table of Stone which stands beside us? Tell you what is written in letters deep as a spear is long on the trunk of the World Ash Tree? Tell you what is engraved on the scepter of the Emperor-Beyond-the-Sea? You at least know the magic which the Emperor put into Narnia at the very beginning. You know that every traitor belongs to me as my lawful prey and that for every treachery I have a right to a kill . . . unless I have blood as the Law says all Narnia will be overturned and perish in fire and water.”

—*The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (C. S. Lewis)

**Sacrifice** is a deceptive topic. People often use the word as though they know exactly what it means, and even in religious studies or theology conversations it seems easy to give just one or two paradigmatic examples of sacrifice. But any good look at the literature on sacrifice will reveal a great diversity of important phenomena and issues. If we are studying sacrifice we are probably studying **ritual** (with an associated **mythic** understanding of the constitution of the world), and perhaps a supreme **action** of **giving**; but we are also studying an act and interpretation of **violence** and **death** in many cases, of **eating** in many cases, of an enforcement of **power relations** amongst humans and other beings, and perhaps of ultimate **respect** or **love** or **self-transformation**, and even (according to some ideologies) of an ultimate **rectification** of human affairs or of the whole world. It is not easy to see how just one of these meanings of sacrifice could be said to be the dominant one—not even in one tradition, in view of the fact that sacrificial practices and ideals have changed significantly over time in most traditions. Moreover, there are difficulties lurking within the various possible key meanings. For example, if sacrifice is supposed to be a gift, does the giver really give anything up if something greater is accomplished by the giving? Or: if a world can only be set right by sacrifice, was such a world worth sacrificing for?

In this course we will examine a range of significant evidences of sacrifice and theories of religion and sacrifice. We will sift this material together, considering not only the subject matter but what makes for effective argument in religious studies and theology. Each of us will develop his or her own perspective on sacrifice, both descriptively—accounting adequately for the phenomena of sacrifice in human life—and evaluatively, judging the appeals and meaningful coherence of sacrifice.

Our readings will be drawn from various sources including these required texts:

Daniel L. Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*  
Jeffrey Carter, ed. *Understanding Religious Sacrifice*  
S. Mark Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice*

The ingredients of the seminar, and of the course grade, are daily participation and serving several times as a recorder of class minutes (10%), weekly writing (35%), designing and conducting a course unit in partnership with another student (15%), and making a course book (40%). Assignments and grading are explained below.

#### SCHEDULE

subject to revision by announcement in class and/or e-mail

Jan. 13 Introduction to course.

Jan. 15 Theories of religion.

READ Pals, Introduction & Chap. 1 on Tylor & Frazer

Jan. 20 Theories of religion cont.

READ Pals, Chaps. 2-3 on Freud & Durkheim

Jan. 22 Theories of religion cont.

READ Pals, Chap. 4 on Marx

Jan. 27 Theories of religion cont.

READ Pals, Chaps. 6-7 on Eliade & Evans-Pritchard

Jan. 29 Sacrifice: evidence.

READ Carter, *Understanding Religious Sacrifice* [URS] Introduction, 1-9

Feb. 3 Sacrifice: evidence, cont.

READ McClymond and Indian scripture TBA

Feb. 5 Sacrifice: evidence, cont.

READ Levenson, *URS* Chap. 25; Hebrew Bible TBA

Feb. 10 SUMMERS LECTURE [required attendance]

**Luke Timothy Johnson (Emory U.), “How the Bible is True”**

Recital Hall, 11:30; lunch & response, 12:45-2:00

READ New Testament TBA

Feb. 12 Discussion of Johnson and New Testament.

Feb. 17 Theories of sacrifice: the original importance of the communion meal.  
READ Robertson Smith, *URS* Chap. 3

Feb. 19 The function of mediation.  
READ Hubert & Mauss, *URS* Chap. 5

Feb. 24 The function of mapping the world.  
READ J. Z. Smith, *URS* Chap. 19

Feb. 26 The importance of excess.  
READ Bataille, *URS* Chap. 10

Mar. 3 The importance of gender.  
READ Jay, *URS* Chap. 22; Beers, *URS* Chap. 23

Mar. 5 The role of hunting.  
READ Jensen and Burkert, *URS* Chaps. 11, 13

Mar. 10 Scapegoating.  
READ Girard, *URS* Chap.

Mar. 12 Shift to theology.  
READ Heim, *Saved by Sacrifice*, Introduction

Mar. 17, 19 SPRING BREAK

Mar. 24 Heim cont.  
READ Chaps. 1-3

Mar. 26 Heim cont.  
READ Chaps. 4-5

Mar. 31 NO CLASS DUE TO COMPS

Apr. 2 Heim cont.  
READ Chaps. 6-7

Apr. 7 Heim cont.  
READ Chaps. 8-9

Apr. 9 Heim cont.  
READ Chap. 10

Apr. 14, 16, 21, 23 TBA (student-led)

Course book due by end of finals week.

## GUIDELINES: PREPARING CLASS MINUTES

1. For the benefit of everyone in the class, make a concise record of the main points and questions of a class session. On average, something like five or six points, all fitting onto one page (with single-space typing), would be best. Do not aim for *complete* minutes—aim for *useful* ones. Do not submit a transcript as opposed to your own synthesis of what took place.
2. This is your own portrait of the class and you should exercise your own judgment about what to include and what to leave out. But you should also feel free to check your notes and recollections with fellow class members and/or the instructor.
3. Give printed copies to all class members as they arrive at the next class meeting. There may be some discussion of the minutes. Don't be offended if changes or additions are suggested.

## PREPARING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Identify several issues in the assigned reading (and/or other experience) that you think would be worthwhile for the class to explore. Give a brief explanation of each issue, leading up to a question or two. Keep this on one sheet of paper. Thus, your question sheet will typically contain two or three short paragraphs.
2. Avoid posing *factual* questions. (Factual questions may be quite important, but if you want an answer to a factual question you should find it for it yourself right away!) Try to pose at least one good *interpretive* question and at least one good *evaluative* question.

Example of an interpretive question: What does Eliade mean by “sacred”? (What does *he* think?)

Example of an evaluative question: Is there a main core meaning of the term “sacred”? (What do *we* think?)

3. Give copies of your question sheet to all class members at the beginning of class (after we've approved the minutes). Present the issue that you would like to be discussed first.

## WEEKLY JOURNAL WRITING

1. By the end of each class week you should turn in a written reflection of at least 250 words (that would be one page typed) on any subject relating to the course. You may use any strategy you like to *get at something*. Try not to toss out a question without working toward an answer; working toward answers is what your journal is for.
2. You may skip one week's journal writing without penalty.

## THE COURSE BOOK

You will create the most wonderful compact package on sacrifice that could possibly fall into the hands of a curious reader. Your goal will be to identify the main *issues* pertaining to sacrifice, marshal a powerful array of relevant *evidence*, and put to work the most promising *approaches* to understanding sacrifice—all according to your personal vision of this topic and its relevance to your audience.

Here is a general design for your course book (**you may, however, do it differently, if you offer an acceptable rationale**). The book should include the following parts:

1. An introductory essay. This 8-10 pp. essay will lay out, for readers who are coming to the general question of sacrifice for the first time, a program of thinking about it. It will explain the question and why it matters. It will provide some sort of map of the issues that are to be confronted. Most importantly, it will indicate *how* these issues can be addressed—what sorts of analysis will be helpful, what sorts of evidence will be needed, and what sorts of answer will be helpful.

2. An anthology combining primary material with focused critical reflections.

(a) Primary material: a usefully limited selection from documents (religious, political, imaginative etc.) and perhaps other visual or aural material to stimulate the reader's reflection as strongly as possible, to represent the range of material that the student of sacrifice ought to take into account, and to serve as points of reference for arguments made in the critical reflections.

You will want to compile some sort of index or scrapbook through the semester from which you can make a final selection of primary materials for your anthology. These primary materials should probably add up to at least 10 pp. of written text and no more than 25 pp. altogether.

AND EITHER:

(b<sup>1</sup>) Focused critical reflections in the form of four to six short essays (300-600 words each—around 2,000 words total) on specific issues. Most should refer to primary materials that are included in the anthology.

Every week you'll have written journal reflections on the course. These will be relatively spontaneous and "artless." You can turn some of these into more "artful" pieces of writing. You can create entirely new pieces, too, if you wish, but *at least two* of the short essays for your anthology ought to be rooted somehow in your weekly journal writings.

OR:

(b<sup>2</sup>) SATISFYING THE CORE 10 REQUIREMENT: A 6-8 pp. reflection on your intellectual growth during your time at Millsaps, taking account of (a) the larger experience of liberal learning and the goals set for all Millsaps students, e.g. in the liberal arts abilities targeted by your previous Core courses, and (b) the more

specialized experience of the religious studies major. How, in particular, does our investigation of sacrifice affect your understanding of the possibilities of enlightenment and empowerment you now see in oral and written communication?

[See specifications for the Frank and Rachel Ann Laney Award on p. 8]

3. An epilogue of 3-4 pp. on how study of sacrifice relates to one or more of the theories of religion reviewed by Daniel Pals in *Eight Theories of Religion*. How helpful is the theory in interpreting the phenomena and issues of sacrifice? How might phenomena and issues of sacrifice imply refinement, major revision, or rejection of the theory?
4. You may turn in a draft of all of your course book, or some portion of it, to the instructor at any time to get a preliminary evaluation and suggestions.

## GRADES

The course book will be letter-graded. Weekly writings will receive a - (unsatisfactory), √ (satisfactory), or + (very good), depending on the thoughtfulness they show and, as appropriate, clarity of communication. Your record as of midterm will be interpreted by a midterm letter grade for which you will receive a rationale. In general, “A” means doing all assigned work carefully, thoughtfully, and successfully; “B” means a good overall record; “C” reflects a mixture of good work, unsuccessful work fairly attempted, and unsatisfactory work; “D” reflects a significant portion of work undone or a dominant portion done unsatisfactorily; and “F” is worse.

## SOME COURSE RULES

1. **Class attendance.** Being in class, being engaged with the work of the class, and behaving courteously are all expected. One discourtesy to avoid is coming into class late. Better late than never, definitely; but lateness counts as half an absence—that is, the assignment of sharing in the class’s work that day will be counted as only half done. Overall, a course point is lost for every absence after the second; thus someone who was absent a total of five times would lose three points, i.e. a third of a letter grade.

2. **Late papers.** Written assignments turned in late will lose a letter grade or equivalent. Homework may not be turned in more than one week after its due date. No work of any kind will be accepted after the last day of final examinations. Exceptions to this policy will only be granted to the victims of unforeseeable and uncontrollable circumstances.

3. **As a general rule, no e-mail submissions.** Unless the instructor allows it under specified circumstances, e-mail submissions of assigned writing are not accepted.

4. **Incompletes.** An “Incomplete” grade for the course will only be given to students who, due to unforeseen and uncontrollable circumstances, find themselves unable to complete course requirements during the term and can reasonably be expected to complete them within a few weeks after the term’s end. The “Incomplete” must be requested and appropriately justified *before* the end of final examinations.

5. **Disabilities.** Students with documented disabilities should discuss their needs with the instructor at the beginning of the semester.

## ACADEMIC HONOR CODE of MILLSAPS COLLEGE

Millsaps College is an academic community dedicated to the pursuit of scholarly inquiry and intellectual growth. The foundation of this community is a spirit of personal honesty and mutual trust. Through their Honor Code, the students of Millsaps College affirm their adherence to these basic ethical principles.

An Honor Code is not simply a set of rules and procedures governing students' academic conduct. It is an opportunity to put personal responsibility and integrity into action. When students agree to abide by an Honor Code, they liberate themselves to pursue their academic goals in an atmosphere of mutual confidence and respect.

The success of the Code depends on the support of each member of the community. Students and faculty alike commit themselves in their work to the principles of academic honesty. When they become aware of infractions, both students and faculty are obligated to report them to the Honor Council, which is responsible for enforcement.

The pledge signed by all students upon entering the College is as follows:

**As a Millsaps College student, I hereby affirm that I understand the Honor Code and am aware of its implications and of my responsibility to the Code. In the interests of expanding the atmosphere of respect and trust in the College, I promise to uphold the Honor Code and I will not tolerate dishonest behavior in myself or in others.**

Each examination, quiz, or other assignment that is to be graded will carry the written pledge: **“I hereby certify that I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment. (Signature)”** The abbreviation “Pledged” followed by the student’s signature has the same meaning and may be acceptable on assignments other than final examinations.

It is the responsibility of students and faculty to report offenses to the Honor Code Council in the form of a written report. This account must be signed, the accusation explained in as much detail as possible, and submitted to the Dean of the College.

### The Honor Council, 2008-2009

#### Students:

David Butler, Chair  
Joey Quillin, Vice-Chair  
Brooke Furrh, Sergeant-at-Arms  
Stephen Butler  
Mark Herndon  
Amanda Smith

#### Faculty:

Mr. Harvey Fiser, Senior Faculty Secretary  
Dr. Rachel Heard  
Ms. Ashleigh Powers

### *The Frank and Rachel Ann Laney Award*

The Frank and Rachel Ann Laney Award will be given each spring for the best reflective paper written to satisfy the Core 10 requirement during the academic year. The Award is intended to encourage students to reflect on the value of their education in the liberal arts.

The Laney Award will be presented at Commencement and will carry a substantial cash prize. Submitted papers will be reviewed by a faculty panel to determine the best paper. The best paper along with other selected papers from those submitted will be published annually. These papers will be given to every incoming freshman the following fall, and the best paper (and perhaps other selections) will be required reading.

**Deadline:** The deadline for submission of the paper so that it can be considered for the Laney Award will be announced.

**Length:** For the purposes of this award, papers may not exceed 8 typed, double-spaced pages.

**Disposition of Papers:** In addition to the winning paper, the top ten or twelve papers will be printed and collected each year for the next freshman class to read. The papers will also be published on the College Web site so that everyone has access to them.

**Criteria:** In judging papers, the committee will consider the quality of thought and expression, as well as the writer's ability to relate the Core experience to the major and to the wider context of the liberal arts.

**Format:** All papers must be neatly typed (word-processed) on standard white paper with a cover sheet including the student's name and the title of the paper. The student's name should appear nowhere else in the manuscript. [The Core office will detach the cover sheet and assign each paper a number for the purposes of anonymity.]