

REL 355
**The Rhetoric of Religious Conviction: Dorothy Day, Malcolm X,
and Martin Luther King, Jr.**

Fall Semester 2018
Wednesdays 3:30-5:50
Manly Hall Room 210

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Course Description

"You used to be so amused
With Napoleon in Rags and the language that he used"
—Bob Dylan "Like a Rolling Stone" (1965)

Can one person's "talk" change the course of history, or do great cultural forces simply allow for moments when certain individuals are able to be heard? Does an individual's appeal to common—or even "religious"—values challenge accepted societal norms and lead to social change? How does the use of religious rhetoric function to unite disparate groups in causes as diverse as social reform at home or "regime change" abroad? These kinds of questions will guide our study of three significant public figures whose political activism was shaped by their religious convictions and clothed in the rhetoric of religion.

This advanced seminar examines the resort to religion in the rhetoric and public actions of selected public figures. Appeals to "religious values" will be critically analyzed in relation to the writings and works of Dorothy Day, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Course Requirements

Students should be aware that all papers will be evaluated according to the standards of excellence established during the first year English Composition sequence at the University of Alabama. Each participant is expected to contribute actively to the on-going, in-class conversation. Written work will include two 5-page, TYPED, papers: one will offer a response to three short writings by Dorothy Day, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King; the other will focus on issues that arise in the retelling of Malcolm X's story in the Spike Lee film, *Malcolm X* (1992). These shorter papers will constitute 50% of the final grade. A term essay of no fewer than seven pages (demonstrating a familiarity with one or more of the primary texts) will make up 35% of the grade. Class participation, including a final research presentation, will count for the remaining 15% of the grade.

Attendance at all class meetings is required. That said, all students are entitled to (but are certainly not required to) miss up to two class meetings without penalty. After two absences, the student's final grade will be reduced one increment for each additional absence.

For example, a student with an A- average at the end of the semester plus three absences in addition to the three absence allotment would have her grade reduced three increments to B- (i.e., A-, B+, and B are subtracted and the result is B-). Attendance will be taken at every session, so: **if you know—or even suspect—that you cannot honor the attendance commitment, do not take this class.**

Punctuality is a matter of courtesy toward your classroom colleagues (including but not limited to your humble instructor). Those arriving after 3:30 will be deemed late for class. For the purposes of calculating class attendance and participation, two late arrivals will count as one absence. Generally speaking it is better to have been late for class than not to have attended class at all; in case of an emergency, please remember: presence takes precedence over courtesy.

Class discussions are central to how this course will proceed. Please come to class **on time** with written comments and questions that you would like us all to pursue together. Good class discussion is a sustained, wide-ranging-yet-focused, fun and exhilarating inquiry. It increases in quality and intensity as the semester progresses. Participation involves attentive listening as well as talking. We have a great deal to learn from each other. Listen respectfully to your colleagues; respond to their questions; build on their comments.

Please visit me during my office hours with any concerns you may have. I welcome your suggestions toward improving this class. Among other things, I am here to help you develop your writing and speaking skills. In addition, I recommend to you the resources of the University's Writing Center (125 Morgan Hall).

Academic honesty is expected of all students. All acts of dishonesty (plagiarism, cheating) in any work constitute academic misconduct. The Academic Misconduct Disciplinary Policy will be followed in the event of academic misconduct.

To request disability accommodations, please contact Disability Services (348-4285). After initial arrangements are made with that office, please see me.

Books

- 1] Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness* (New York: Harper, 1952).
- 2] Dorothy Day, *Writings from Commonweal*, ed. Patrick Jordan (New York: Liturgical 2002).
- 3] Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* (New York: Ballantine, 1965).
- 4] Malcolm X, *Malcolm X Speaks* (New York: Grove, 1965).
- 5] Martin Luther King, Jr., *Why We Can't Wait* (New York: Harper, 1963).
- 6] James H. Cone, *Martin and Malcolm and America: A Dream or a Nightmare* (New York: Orbis, 1991).

Web Resources

Dorothy Day: <https://www.catholicworker.org/dorothyday/themes/index.html>

King: <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/>

The Rhetoric of Religious Conviction (REL 355) Course Schedule

Week 1 August 22	Introduction to the Seminar and the Syllabus Handout: Three Transcripts
Week 2 August 29	Discussion: King, Day, X
Week 3 September 5	Dorothy Day <i>The Long Loneliness</i>
Week 4 September 12	<i>The Long Loneliness</i> FIRST WRITING DUE
Week 5 September 19	selected writings from <i>Writings from Commonweal</i>
Week 6 September 26	Malcolm X <i>Autobiography</i>
Week 7 October 3	<i>Autobiography</i>
Week 8 October 10	Film: <i>Malcolm X</i> , dir. Spike Lee
Week 9 October 17	selected writings from <i>Malcolm X Speaks</i>
Week 10 October 24	NO CLASS: Research & Read SECOND WRITING DUE
Week 11 October 31	Martin Luther King, Jr. <i>Why We Can't Wait</i>
Week 12 November 7	James Cone, <i>Dream or Nightmare</i>

Week 13
November 14 James Cone, *Dream or Nightmare*

Thanksgiving Break: No Class

Week 14
November 28 Film: *Eyes on the Prize, 1965*

Week 15
December 5 Review and Evaluation
TERM PAPER DUE

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ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES

A. Written Assignments

There are three writing assignments for this class.

1] Response to Introductory Readings

The first assignment is to compose a response to three short writings by Dorothy Day, Malcolm X, and Martin Luther King. You may pursue any tangent you wish, using the in-class exercise as a starting point for further reflection. This paper should be at least five pages long.

2] Response to Malcolm X film

The second assignment will consider how biography is constructed in the film Malcolm X, conceivably (though not necessarily) in relation to the way Malcolm discusses his life in the Autobiography, or in relation to other evaluations of Malcolm X's life and work. This critical essay is not a book report or the film's plot summary. You should find some aspect of the film or the writings that matter deeply to you, tell why this is significant to you, and try to convince your readers that it should be significant to them. Consider this distinction from John R. Trimble:

The difference between a plot summary and a critical analysis is analogous to the difference between (a) an account of the highlights of the Vietnam War and (b) an explanation of how the United States happened to get into it, why we stayed in it, and what its effects have been on us. A plot summary begins with no thesis or point of view; it merely recapitulates the facts. A critical analysis, on the other hand, takes a viewpoint and attempts to prove its validity; its object is to help the reader make better sense of something he [or she] is already familiar with (Trimble, 25-26).

The first paper is due at the start of class on September 12; the second paper is due at the start of class on October 24. If you are confronted with the choice between coming to class and "finishing" a paper, come to class your essay. The prospectus is due at the start of class on November 9.

3] The Final Research Paper

This 7-10 page paper is your response to issues, ideas, problems, solutions, etc. that the course materials present to you. The essay should develop out of your individual research and focus on the life and writings of King, Malcolm X, or Dorothy Day. The final essay is due at the beginning of class on the last day of class.

B. Brief Research Presentation

On the last day of the semester and as a tangible manifestation of class participation, each student will present orally a brief description of the final research paper. Further information about the subject and form of this presentation will be discussed by mid-semester.

C. General Notes on Written Work

- All writing should be TYPED and double spaced.
- Recommended fonts include Garamond, Courier, Palatino, Times, Bookman, and Century Schoolbook.
- Type size should be 11, or 12.
- Margins on the paper should be 1 inch on the sides and 1 inch at the top and bottom.
- Papers longer than one page in length should have page numbers.
- Your paper should include a cover sheet containing the following information:
 - 1) title of paper
 - 2) your name
 - 3) the date
 - 4) the course name and number
 - 5) the professor

For example, *in the middle of the page*:

"Cancel My Subscription to *The Resurrection*":
Day's Life and King's Death with particular reference to
the Songs of Jim Morrison

and *in the lower right corner of the page*:

Thaddaeus Quince
December 5, 2018
REL 355: Rhetoric of Religion
Professor Trost

Papers with more than six spelling or grammar errors will be returned for revision prior to evaluation. Please use the spellcheck function on the computer and review your work to make certain that properly spelled words are in fact the words you intend to use (for example: be careful about the difference between "there" and "their," "its" and "it's," "led" and "lead").

Papers with major construction problems will be returned for revision prior to evaluation. At the very least, make certain that your sentences are complete sentences (they have a subject and a verb) and that they express one (but not more than one) complete thought. There should be no run-on sentences.

Please consult the MLA Handbook to ensure the proper style for footnotes and bibliography.

If you have writing composition problems, you should consult one of the specialists at the Writing Center on the third floor of Lloyd Hall. Your tuition pays for this kind of expert assistance.

Please feel free to raise questions about these assignments at any time. You may do this in class—so that others might benefit from your inquiry; or come see me during my office hours.

Have fun!