

HDS 2184 Power, Violence and Resistance in World Christianity
Spring 2026, Monday 3pm–5:45pm
Swartz 118

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Office hours: Tuesday 11am–1pm, and by appointment via email. Any changes in office hours will be communicated via Canvas announcements.

Course Description

Across the globe, Christians are on both sides of social and political power: they hold authority, resist oppression, or, at times, perpetrate violence. Christianity is the largest religion in 159 of the world's 237 countries, where it often benefits from long-standing support and official or unofficial endorsement. In the remaining 78 countries, Christians live as minorities – sometimes peacefully, sometimes under duress. This course examines the complex interplay of Christianity, power, violence, and resistance in various case studies worldwide. We will explore the historical, cultural, religious, and political dimensions of Christian nationalism in Brazil, the Catholic Church and HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, climate change in the Pacific Islands, Muslim immigration to Europe, gun violence in the United States, Christianity and LGBTQ+ rights worldwide, Christian women peacebuilders, Christians under military rule in Myanmar, and Evangelicals responding to gang violence in Central America. Through these case studies, we will analyze Christianity's varied relationships with power, highlighting the vast diversity of Christian expression worldwide as they grapple with authority, violence, and resistance. Students will have the opportunity to write a final research paper.

Course Goals

- Develop a historical framework for the intersection of politics, history, and society in relationship to Christianity worldwide in the 20th and 21st centuries.
- Reflect on majority and minority religious status and its impact on daily life, religious expression, and fundamental freedoms.
- Articulate the various relationships Christians have with power structures worldwide, both socially and politically.
- Understand differences by country and region related to religious diversity and the relationship of religion and politics.
- Engage in academic research and writing on World Christianity, especially outside of Western contexts.
- Experiment with generative AI to produce popular materials based on scholarly research.
- Increase knowledge of major themes, debates, and conversations in World Christianity studies as they relate to power, violence, and resistance.

Required Texts

Every book is available as an eBook through Hollis except *The Tenth Parallel*. A physical copy is on reserve at the HDS library. There are physical copies at Mugar Library (Boston University) and Goddard Library (Gordon-Conwell). It is available for \$10 online. I'm also willing to lend out my personal copy.

- Fernando Brancoli, *Bolsonarismo: The Global Origins and Future of Brazil's Far Right*. Rutgers, 2024.
- Eliza Griswold, *The Tenth Parallel: Dispatches from the Fault Line Between Christianity and Islam*. Macmillan, 2010.
- Munther Isaac, *Christ in the Rubble: Faith, the Bible, and Genocide in Gaza*. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2025.
- Emmanuel Katongole, *Who Are My People? Love, Violence, and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa*. University of Notre Dame Press, 2022.
- Stephen Offutt, *Blood Entanglements: Evangelicals and Gangs in El Salvador*. Oxford University Press, 2023.
- Articles or chapters as assigned per class session, available on Canvas.

Assignments

All assignments are due the day and time indicated below and should be submitted on Canvas. Assignments will be graded on Canvas. SAT/UNSAT: all assignments must be fulfilled at a passing grade (C or higher). Assignments will be docked half a letter grade each day they are late. If you need an extension, email Dr. Zurlo at least five days before the due date.

- **Class attendance and one-on-one meeting (10%)**
 - Weekly attendance is crucial to get the most out of this course. Students are expected to complete the weekly readings on time and come to class prepared for discussion.
 - Set up a time to meet with Dr. Zurlo for 30 minutes in the first month of class, preferably in person, but Zoom can be an option. This is an informal meeting to answer any questions about the course and if applicable, discuss accommodations.
 - Meeting must be completed by **Friday, February 27**.
- **Christianity in the news (5%)**
 - Every student will be assigned a class session to find and present an article from that week's news related to Christianity somewhere in the world outside of North America. All the better if you can find an article related to that week's topic but not required. Articles from news sources outside the USA are acceptable and welcomed. Ensure your article is from a reputable news outlet.
- **Weekly reading responses (15%)**
 - Summarize your thoughts, reflections, and responses to the weekly readings in a 3-page double spaced paper. You will receive feedback on each paper every week. Students are allowed **two** "skip" weeks during the semester, which must be communicated via email. Do not use generative AI to write or assist in writing reading responses.
 - Papers are **due by midnight** the day before class.
- **Mid-term research paper (25%)**
 - Choose a country outside of North America and Western/Northern/Southern Europe where Christians are the **majority** (see list on Canvas) and write a research paper on the theme of power, violence, and resistance in the 20th or 21st centuries. Twentieth-century papers should be historical in focus. Twenty-first-century papers should be interdisciplinary, integrating history and social science. More details on this assignment are available on Canvas. Examples of topics:
 - Catholic Church-state relationships during Argentina's Dirty War

- Rise of Orthodox Christian nationalism in Russia since the fall of the Soviet Union
 - Influence of Pentecostalism on contemporary Ghanaian politics
 - Differences in church responses to the Rwandan Genocide
 - Christianity and apartheid in South Africa
 - Art and music as resistance during the Marcos regime in the Philippines
- Page length requirements are as follows:
 - Bachelors: 8–10pp
 - Masters: 10–12pp
 - PhD: 15–17pp
- Mid-term paper due **Friday, March 20 at midnight** on Canvas
- **Mid-term paper digital humanities project (20%)**
 - Students will produce digital content related to their mid-term paper subject. Examples of digital content include recording a podcast, series of TikToks, YouTube video, or animated slide deck to share information about your topic for a general audience. Be creative! You may use generative AI to assist with this assignment. More details are available on Canvas.
 - Digital project due **Friday, April 10 at midnight** on Canvas. Presentations on **April 27**, last day of class.
- **Final research paper (25%)**
 - Choose a country outside of North America and Western/Northern/Southern Europe where Christians are the **minority** (see list on Canvas) and write a research paper on the theme of power, violence, and resistance in the 20th or 21st centuries. Twentieth-century papers should be historical in focus. Twenty-first-century papers should be interdisciplinary, integrating history and social science. More details on this assignment are available on Canvas. Examples of topics:
 - Indigenous responses to the arrival of colonial Christianity to a particular region/ethnic group
 - Christianity and patriarchy in South Korean Protestantism
 - Christian suffering under ISIS-controlled Iraq and Syria
 - Christian women's resistance through theology and ministry in the Fijian coup d'états
 - Growth of Christianity in northeast India in light of Hindutva
 - Rise of the house church movement during the Chinese Cultural Revolution
 - Page length requirements are as follows:
 - Bachelors: 8–10pp
 - Masters: 10–12pp
 - PhD: 15–17pp
 - Final paper for graduating students due **Friday, May 8 at midnight** on Canvas.
 - Final paper for non-graduating students due **Friday, May 15 at midnight** on Canvas.

Schedule of Classes

This schedule is subject to change. Refer to the weekly pages on Canvas for the most up-to-date readings. Readings are due the day they are assigned. It is a good practice to take notes when you

read so you are ready to discuss the material during class. Read in the order the works appear on the syllabus.

January 26: Course introduction

- Introductions, review syllabus, course expectations
- Interdisciplinarity in the study of power, violence, and resistance
- World Christianity overview

No reading this week.

February 2: Asymmetrical dependency and World Christianity

- Mission, colonialism, and post-colonialism
- Guest speaker via Zoom: David Brandon Smith, Research Associate, Goethe University Frankfurt

Reading

- Griswold, prologue
- Katongole, introduction and chapter 1
- David Brandon Smith, "Concept Note: World Christianity Studies and Asymmetrical Dependency (WCSAD) Working Group," University of Bonn, Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies, February 2024.
- Raimundo C. Barreto, Jr., "Editorial: World Christianity and Asymmetrical Dependency in Dialogue," *The Journal of World Christianity* 15, no. 1 (2025): 1–5.
- Di Trolio, Stephen R., David Brandon Smith, and Julia Winnebeck, "Conceptualizing New Horizons for World Christianity and Asymmetrical Dependency Research," *The Journal of World Christianity* 15, no. 1 (2025): 43–66.
- Suggested reading
 - Julia Winnebeck, et al., "The Analytical Concept of Asymmetrical Dependency," *Journal of Global Slavery* 8 (2023): 1–59.
 - Katongole, chapter 2

February 9: Gender, Christianity, and Climate Change

- Eco activism and theology in the Pacific Islands and Bangladesh
- Climate change acceptance and denial by generation, sex, denomination

Reading

- Seforosa Carroll, "Climate Change, Faith and Theology in the Pacific (Oceania): The Role of Faith in Building Resilient Communities," *Practical Theology* 15, no. 5 (2022): 409–419.
- James Pender, "Pursuing Diplomacy Overseas, Fostering Adaptation at Home: The Church of Bangladesh's Proactive Responses to Climate Change," in *How the World's Religions are Responding to Climate Change: Social Scientific Investigations*, edited by Robin Globus Veldman, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-DeLay (Routledge, 2014), 62–74.

- Salil Benegal and Mirya R. Holman, “Understanding the Importance of Sexism in Shaping Climate Denial and Policy Opposition,” *Climate Change* 167, no. 48 (2021): 1–19.
- Benjamin S. Lowe, et al., “The Generational Divide Over Climate Change Among American Evangelicals,” *Environmental Research Letters* 17 (2022): 1–13.
- Suggested reading
 - Seforosa Carroll, “Speaking Up! Speaking Out! Naming the Silences: Women, Power, Authority and Love in the Pacific,” in *Contemporary Feminist Theologies: Power, Authority, Love*, edited by Kerrie Handasyde, Cathryn McKinney, and Rebekah Pryor (Routledge, 2021), 9–20.
 - Bernard Daley Zaleha and Andrew Szasz, “Keep Christianity Brown! Climate Denial on the Christian Right in the United States,” in *How the World’s Religions are Responding to Climate Change: Social Scientific Investigations*, edited by Robin Globus Veldman, Andrew Szasz, and Randolph Haluza-DeLay (Routledge, 2014), 209–228.
 - Katongole, chapter 5

No class February 16: President’s Day

Reading (no reflection due)

- Griswold, Nigeria (pp.17–73), Sudan (pp.75–124), Somalia (pp.125–156)
- Katongole, chapters 3 and 4

February 23: Christianity and sexuality in sub-Saharan Africa

- Attitudes toward LGBTQ+
- Guest lecturer (in person): Dr. Ludovic Lado, Yang Visiting Scholar in World Christianity, Harvard Divinity School

Reading

- Katongole, conclusion
- Amy Adamczyk, *Cross-National Public Opinion About Homosexuality: Examining Attitudes Across the Globe* (University of California Press, 2017), introduction and chapter 1
- Adriaan van Klinken and Ezra Chitando, “Introduction,” in *Christianity and Controversies over Homosexuality in Contemporary Africa*, ed. van Klinken and Chitando (Routledge, 2016), 1–14.
- Ludovic Lado, “Popular Homophobia in Cameroon,” *Cahiers d’études africaines*, 204 (2011): 921–944.
- Suggested reading
 - Katongole, afterword
 - Adamczyk, *Cross-National Public Opinion About Homosexuality*, chapters 2–3

February 27: One-on-one meeting due

March 2: Christianity and gun violence in the United States

- PBS townhall viewing: *Armed in America: Faith & Guns Townhall* (2016)
- Variation in Christian attitudes toward gun violence

Reading

- Offutt, introduction, methodology, and chapters 1–2
- Andrew Moore, “Sheep, Sheepdogs, and the Good Shepherd: Gun Rights and American Evangelicals in the Recent Past,” *Church History* 93 (2024): 587–606.

March 9: Christian-Muslim relations

- Inter-religious violence in Asia and Africa
- Christian militias in the Central African Republic
- Guest speaker (in person): Dr. Todd Johnson, Director, Center for the Study of Global Christianity, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

Reading

- Griswold, Indonesia (pp.159–213), Malaysia (pp.216–241), Philippines (pp.244–275), plus epilogue (pp.277–282)

No class March 16: HDS Spring Break

Reading (no reflection due)

- Offutt, chapters 3–5

March 20: Midterm paper due at midnight on Canvas

March 23: Christianity and gangs in Central America

- Case study: Evangelicals and gangs in El Salvador
- Church responses to dictatorships
- Guest speaker via Zoom: Dr. Stephen W. Offutt, Institute for the Studies of Religion, Baylor University

Reading

- Offutt, chapters 6–7, conclusion
- Suggested reading
 - Ondina E. González, “Christianity in Central America, 1910–2010,” in *Atlas of Global Christianity, 1910–2010*, edited by Kenneth R. Ross and Todd M. Johnson (Edinburgh University Press), 182–183.

March 30: Ethnic minority Christianity in Zomia

- Christian discrimination and persecution
- 2021 military coup d'état in Myanmar
- Guest speakers (in person): Dr. David Thang Moe, Postdoctoral Associate and Lecturer in Southeast Asian Studies, Yale University; Dr. Pum Za Mang, Associate Professor of World Christianity at Myanmar Institute of Theology

Reading

- Pum Za Mang, “Christianity and Ethnic Identity in Burma,” *Journal of Church and State* 61, no.1 (2018): 78–105.

- Elijah Young, “Christianity, Democracy, and Suffering in Burma,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 48, no. 2 (2024): 180–193.
- Excerpts from Xi Lian, David Bradley, and Ralph A. Litzinger, eds. *Highland Christianity: Modern Transformations of the China-Southeast Asia Borderlands* (Baylor University Press, 2026).
- Suggested reading
 - David Thang Moe, “A Burmese Public Theology of Religions and Reconciliation after the 2021 Coup,” *International Journal of Public Theology* 17 (2023): 262–286.

April 6: Women in World Christianity

- Gender gaps: membership, participation, leadership
- Theology as resistance
- Guest speaker via Zoom: Yenny Delgado, Ph.D. Candidate, University of Lausanne

Reading

- Gina A. Zurlo, *Women in World Christianity: Building and Sustaining a Global Movement* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2023), Introduction (pp.1–8), chapter 1 (pp.13– 34), and chapter 17 (pp.316–329)
- Munther Isaac, *Christ in the Rubble: Faith, the Bible, and Genocide in Gaza* (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2025), introduction, chapters 1 and 2

April 10: Digital humanities project due at midnight on Canvas

April 13: Christianity in the Middle East

- World Christianity and Israel/Palestine
- Christian minorities under ISIS in Iraq and Syria

Reading

- Munther Isaac, *Christ in the Rubble: Faith, the Bible, and Genocide in Gaza* (Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2025), chapters 3–5
- Mariz Tadros, “The Future of Christianity in North Africa and West Asia,” in *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, edited by Kenneth R. Ross, Mariz Tadros, and Todd M. Johnson (Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 441–452.
- Suggested reading
 - Mark Farha, “Social and Political Context,” in *Christianity in North Africa and West Asia*, edited by Kenneth R. Ross, Mariz Tadros, and Todd M. Johnson (Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 335–346.

April 20: Christian nationalism in Brazil

- *Evangélicos* and Jair Bolsonaro
- Transnational connections
- Guest speaker via Zoom: Dr. João B. Chaves, Assistant Professor of the History of Religion in the Américas, Baylor University

Reading

- Fernando Brancoli, *Bolsonarismo: The Global Origins and Future of Brazil's Far Right* (Rutgers, 2024), introduction, chapter 3, and conclusion

April 27: Class wrap-up

- Presentations of digital humanities projects

No reading this week.

May 8: Final paper due at midnight on Canvas (graduating students)

May 15: Final paper due at midnight on Canvas (non-graduating students)

Accessibility

Students requesting accommodations or with accessibility needs for this course should contact Assistant Director for Student Support as soon as possible. You will need to provide them with a request of the accommodations sought and documentation of the functional limitations due to medical circumstances or a disability that substantiates your request. Students who are registered in GSAS or FAS should contact the Accessible Education Office, AEO@fas.harvard.edu, 617-496-8707.

Policy on Collaboration

You are encouraged to consult with one another on papers, and you may also share library resources. You may find it useful to discuss your ideas with your peers, but you should ensure that the written papers you submit for evaluation are the result of your own research and reflect your own approach to the topic.

Religious Holy Days

Please speak with the instructor within the first two weeks of the semester if you must miss a class, examination, or course requirement due to a religious observance. Please know that Massachusetts state law specifies that all students who must miss a class, exam, or course requirement because of a religious observance shall be provided with an opportunity to make up the requirement on another day, so long as this does not create an unreasonable burden for the school.

Policy on Generative AI

HDS, and Harvard University as a whole, encourage responsible experimentation with generative AI (GAI) tools, but there are important considerations to keep in mind when using these tools, including (a) information security and data privacy, (b) copyright and intellectual property issues, (c) the trustworthiness of content they generate, (d) expectations of the specific instructors of courses for which you might use it, and (e) your own academic integrity. Using GAI can seriously undermine your ability to think and learn, but it can also be a helpful research tool and conversation partner. Any use of GAI in this course must be appropriately acknowledged and cited. It is each student's responsibility to assess the validity and applicability of any GAI output that is submitted; you bear the final responsibility for properly validating and citing the content of your work. Violations of this policy will be considered academic misconduct. I draw your attention to the fact that different classes at Harvard could implement

different AI policies, and it is the student's responsibility to conform to expectations for each course. It is not acceptable to use GAI to summarize assigned readings, write papers for you, or enhance your own writing.

Boston Theological Interreligious Consortium

This course has been pre-approved for the BTI Consortium International Mission and Ecumenism Certificate. If you would like to register for the certificate, or learn more, visit: <https://www.bostontheological.org/certificates>. Contact btioffice@bostontheological.org with any questions.