

**WORLD RELIGIONS, VIOLENCE, AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION**  
**ICAR CONF 399/749**  
**Spring 2007**  
**George Mason University**

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Monday 4:30-7:10  
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This course is designed to analyze the ways in which world religions play a role in conflict, war, peace making and conflict resolution. Every religion has a broad range of cultural resources and values that have formed the basis of personal and communal values that prevent or successfully manage conflict. On the other hand, war, violence and repression have been justified at one time or another by important representatives of every major religion. Understanding each religion's values, world view, and, especially, the hermeneutics through which the religion changes and evolves, are the keys to discovering conflict resolution methodologies that may be effective in global and domestic violent contexts in which religion is playing some role.

Analyzing the role of religion in these phenomena is particularly challenging due to the fact that human beings come to be engaged in war or peace making out of a host of complex motivating factors, only one of which may be their religious beliefs and practices. Furthermore, religious language is often used as a mask by political leaders and perpetrators of violence that hides other motivating factors that may be less noble or persuasive to their cause.

Key questions that should be kept in mind as we explore these issues include: What are the warrants for making war and making peace in a given religious tradition? Are they at odds with each other or do they complement each other? Do they emanate historically from competing visions within the same religion? How do these varying traditions affect current practice and belief? What is the role of change and evolution in the religion's practices and beliefs, and how does change occur? How would you attempt to disentangle multiple motivations for war or peace among religious people? Is religious motivation a mask for economic, ethnic, or psychological needs? Always? Sometimes? For political leaders but not for followers? What would you do in a given region of the world where religion played a major role in violence? Would you attempt to secularize the public, redirect the religious motivations, or repress the violent representatives of religion? Would you attempt to employ a variety of conflict resolution strategies? If so, which ones, problem-solving workshops, mediation strategies, or psychodynamic approaches to interpersonal reconciliation? What is religious violence? Is it a more authentic or less authentic expression of a religion? How do you go about answering this question, by taking a poll of co-religionists, studying the primary sources of that tradition, or imposing a value that you and many others are convinced is universal, e.g., that killing of innocents by terror, for whatever reason, cannot be sanctioned by decent religion? Can you know what a religion has truly meant to its adherents if you only speak to or study male representatives of that faith? Is self-described religious peace making that advocates for and relates to one side only to be considered peacemaking or conflict resolution, or is it something else? These are but a fraction of the questions that are raised by our subject matter. Some questions will be addressed in class. Other questions I would like you to ponder as you prepare innovative research.

### **REQUIRED BOOKS:**

Gopin, Marc. 2002. *Holy War, Holy Peace: How Religion Can Bring Peace to the Middle East*. Oxford University Press, ISBN No. 0-19-514650-6

Gopin, Marc. 2000. *Between Eden and Armageddon*. Oxford University Press, ISBN No. 0-19-513432-X

Appleby, R Scott. 1999. *Ambivalence of the Sacred*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, ISBN No. 0-8476-8555-1. (Also available online at <http://wwics.si.edu/subsites/ccpdc/pubs/apple/toc.htm>)

Johnston, Douglas. 2003. *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik*. Oxford University Press, ISBN No. 0-19-516089-4

Johnston, Douglas et al. (Eds). 1995. *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*. Oxford University Press, ISBN No. 0-19-510280-0

Abu-Nimer, Mohammed. 2003. *Nonviolence And Peace Building In Islam: Theory And Practice*. University Press of Florida, ISBN No. 0813027411

### **RECOMMENDED BOOKS:**

Thompson, Henry. 1988. *World Religions in War and Peace*. Jefferson, NC: Mcfarland [This is out of print. See what you can find and share.]

Queen, Christopher S. & Sallie B. King. 1996. *Engaged Buddhism: Buddhist Liberation Movements in Asia*. State University of New York Press, ISBN No. 0-7914-2844-3

Said, Abdul Aziz, Nathan C. Funk & Ayse S. Kadayifci (Eds.). 2001. *Peace and conflict resolution in Islam: Precept and practice*. University Press of America, ISBN No. 0761820078

Smock, David (Ed.). 2002. *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding* United States Institute of Peace Press (USIP Press), ISBN No. 1-929223-35-8, Available Through: Baker & Taylor Books; Blackwell North America

### **REQUIRED EXCERPTS FROM BOOKS OR ARTICLES:**

Mitchell, C.R. "Psychological Dimensions of Conflict," in idem, *The Structure of International Conflict*. St. Martin's Press, Inc., 1981, pp. 71-98.

Stenger, Mary Ann. "Gadamer's Hermeneutics as a Model for Cross-Cultural Understanding and Truth in Religion," in *Religious Pluralism and Truth: Essays on Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion*, ed. Thomas Dean. Albany: State University Press of New York, 1995. pp. 151-168.

Montville, Joseph V. "Psychoanalytic Enlightenment and the Greening of Diplomacy" in Volkan, Vamik D., Montville, Joseph V., Julius, Demetrios A., *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships*. Lexington: Lexington Books, 1991. vol. II, pp. 177-192.

Volkan, Vamik. "Psychological Processes in Unofficial Diplomacy Meetings" in Volkan, Vamik D., Montville, Joseph V., Julius, Demetrios A., *The Psychodynamics of International Relationships*. Lexington: Lexington Books, 1991. vol. II, pp. 207-222.

Sandole, Dennis J.D. "Paradigm, Theories, and Metaphors in Conflict and Conflict Resolution: Coherence or Confusion?" in *Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice*. Ed. Dennis Sandole. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1993. pp. 3-24.

## **REQUIREMENTS:**

399: Two essays in response to readings and class(90%)  
Participation and Preparation(10%)

749: one paper on the readings of 10 pages or more, and an independent research paper, topics approved by the professor. Must give in by mid-semester a topic, outline and bibliography.

Class participation will depend upon familiarity with the readings.

## ASSIGNMENT

(assignments listed according to the author of the selection)

**NOTE: UNDERGRADS ARE NOT REQUIRED TO READ WHAT FOLLOWS THE "749" HEADING BELOW. GRADUATE STUDENTS MUST READ ALL ASSIGNMENTS FOR BOTH 399 AND 749**

### **I. THEORY**

#### 1. Religion and Conflict Resolution: Mapping a New Field

399: Gopin, *Eden*, 3-86, 199-228

749: Appleby, 1-56

Johnston, *Faith-Based*, 231-258

#### 2. The Psychological and Social Foundations of Conflict

399: Montville, all

749: Volkan, all

Sandole, all

#### 3. Hermeneutics, Religion and the Psycho-Social Dynamics of Religious Conflict and Violence

399: Mitchell, all

749: Stenger, all  
Appleby, 57-120

## II. APPLICATIONS

### 4. Peacebuilding in Islam I

399: Abu-Nimer:  
Introduction  
Chapter 1, The Study of Islam, Nonviolence and Peace

749: Chapter 2, Islamic Principles of Nonviolence and Peacebuilding: a Framework

### 5. Peacebuilding in Islam II

Abu-Nimer:  
399: Chapter 3, Peace building and Nonviolence in a Sociocultural context: Traditional Arab-Muslim Mechanisms for Dispute Resolution (24 pgs)

749: Chapter 4, Nonviolent Peace-Building Initiatives in Arab-Muslim Communities: Myths and Obstacles in a Training Framework (17 pages)  
Conclusion (6 pages)

### 6. Christian Peacemaking: Introduction, France/Germany, East Germany

399: Appleby, 121-167  
Johnston, *Religion*, 37-63, 119-152

749: Appleby, 168-308  
Gopin, *Eden*, 139-166

### 7. Christian Peacemaking: Bosnia, Nicaragua, Nigeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe

399: Johnston, *Religion*, 64-118, 177-257

749: Johnston, *Faith-Based* 124-177

### 8 and 9. The Arab/Israeli Conflict: Religious/Secular and Inter-Monotheistic Conflict

399: Gopin, *Holy War*, 3-37, 92-102  
Johnston, *Faith-Based*, 91-123

749: Gopin, *Eden*, 115-138  
Gopin, *Holy War*, 38-92

### 10. The Arab/Israeli Conflict: Abrahamic Pathways Toward Relationship Transformation

399: Gopin, *Holy War*, 103-143, 160-228

749: Gopin, *Eden*, 167-198

11. Hindu and Buddhist Contexts

Johnston, *Faith-Based*, 33-75, 76-90

12. The Question of Interfaith Dialogue

399: Gopin, *Holy War*, 144-159

749: recommended, Smock, all