

Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding
PhD Concentration
Description

I. The Emerging Subfield of Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding

The past decade and a half has seen a flowering of interest in the intersection between religious ideologies and the role of violent conflict throughout the globe. Are religious practices and theologies at the heart of the problem, or can they be a resource for peacebuilding? The interest emerges from several different disciplines concerned with the study of religion: ethnography, theology, history, sociology, and ethics, just to name a few.

Several recent works, such as those of Jurgensmeyer (2003), Wilkinson (2005), Crockett (2006), tend to focus on the first dynamic: religion as a source of violence, and even violent mysticism in a postmodern globalized interconnected world. But others, such as those of Gopin (2000, 2002), Smock (2002), Appleby (2000, 2003), Kraybill (2002), Lederach (2002), Seiple (2004) and Mahmoud, *also* focus on religion as a resource for peacebuilding, and the ways in which each religious traditions can "correct" its own potential for violence with an equal potential for non-violent negotiation, management, and even at times resolution of conflict.

In addition, a new literature is emerging on the question of religious tolerance, both from the perspective of the United Nation and the public ethic of tolerance (Little, 2001) but also the philosophical and social theoretical approach to tolerance (Seligman, 2004). Particularly relevant in this literature are the new ways in which we might build bridges between the academy and the world of NGO's which are attempting to create new practices around religious tolerance in nations, cities, and neighborhoods (Abu-Nimer, 2001, 2003).

Some Central Questions and Places

Among those for whom it is not a lived-category, religion is colloquially described as a cause of conflict or legitimating justification of violence. One response to the blaming of religion is the advocacy of it as a source of tolerance and resource for peacebuilding. How might scholars make sense of this dynamic? Central to the emerging subfield of religion, conflict and peacebuilding are questions focused on the active role of religion, and religiously-committed individuals, in communities in conflict. Such questions are both descriptive and normative in nature, and we assume no single scholarly perspective will be able to provide the best framework for the answers. For example, some scholars might inquire how the environmental, economic, political and socio-cultural conditions of war and conflict are transformed by religious understandings of cosmic order. Other scholars might ask how these understandings can aid in transitioning communities beyond violent conflict. How do we create shared experiences amidst nonnegotiable religious differences to (re)establish opportunities for engagement, trust and peaceful coexistence? How do we avoid thin comparisons of sameness and acknowledge the nonnegotiable differences between religious communities and locally facilitate a setting that respects religious diversity and approaches conflict from a position that is sympathetic to the worldviews of religiously adherent individuals?

While the field is still small, it has great potential for expansion and has attracted a great deal of interest from a variety of new young scholars in the larger study of religion. We

have seen a variety of Institutes emerging, from the larger size of the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame; the Kroc School of Peace Studies at the University of San Diego; and the longstanding Center for Justice and Peacebuilding at Eastern Mennonite University, to the smaller-size centers which focus particularly on religion and conflict, such as the Center for Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding at George Mason University; the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University; the Center for the Study of Democracy, Toleration, and Religion at Columbia University; and Arizona State University's Center for the Study of Religion and Conflict. A recent conference (2006) at Arizona State University as to the state of the emerging sub-field attests to its growing importance.

Our research this year has indicated that these centers are attracting a large number of young graduate students, both from American and abroad, who are interested in both scholarship and social change, and who will have the future capacity to effect local and national policy decisions in their own countries.

II. The Emerging Sub-field at Emory: The History and Scope of the Initiative

Our faculty resources in Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding are considerable. Our initiative in this area has been alive since 2001, when the Department made it the theme for its events and speakers. From 2001, 2002, and 2003, the Faculty Working Group in Religion and Conflict hosted a university-wide seminar in this area, bringing scholars such as Mark Jurgensmeyer, David Little, Bruce Lawrence, Marc Gopin and others to lead the seminar. It attracted a wide variety of faculty from across the university, including the Department of Political Science, Philosophy, Economics, Anthropology, the ILA, the law school, and many others. In addition to yearly colloquia for faculty and graduate students, we also hosted the first GDR graduate student conference at Emory on the topic in 2002.

Because of the strength of this initiative, faculty members in the GDR have integrated courses and syllabi into undergraduate and graduate curricula in both formal way and informal ways. Some of us have developed courses for Candler, the College, as well as the Graduate Division of Religion with an explicit view toward this concentration (see below). In the College, the Department of Religion has a regularly taught undergraduate course in Religion and Conflict (357R). Others have incorporated the ideas into their courses as a section in a course on a larger topic, such as Introduction to Religion (REL 100), Religion and Public Policy (REL 370R), Religion and Human Rights (REL 370R), or the Internship in Religion (REL 380).

Many of us have also presented on our research in the Atlanta community as well as at Emory, and have sponsored adult education *fora* on the topic in a wide variety of venues. Members of the Department of Religion have sponsored adult education courses featuring this topic through the "Evening at Emory" auspices. The Candler School of Theology also sponsored a mini-theology school on this topic in 2006.

In 2006, the Emory RCP Initiative was granted funds from the University's Strategic Plan to solidify its activities into a permanent curricular and research presence at Emory. We have been given funds to continue our speaker series, and to hire a director, an associate director, as well as sponsor a series of visiting fellows. In addition, our initiative has focused on both theoretical and practical dimensions of this sub-field. The Initiative has already worked in conjunction with: the Department of Religion, Middle Eastern and South Asian Studies Department, the Tam Institute for Jewish Studies, the Candler School of Theology, the Law School, the proposed Initiatives for the (Inter-religious) Institute for the Study and

Practice of Religion, the Initiative in Contemplative Studies that involves the Medical School, the Drepung Loseling Institute for Tibetan Buddhism, the Carter Center, the Centers for Disease Control.

ERCP engages the study of religion and conflict from a uniquely inter-religious, interdisciplinary perspective. We sponsored a highly successful speaker series in AY 06-07, and a currently launching a second speaker series in Religion, Conflict and the Arts for AY 2007-08. We have hired a postdoctoral fellow, Tom Flores, to teach and organize with us for AY 06-08. We are developing an outreach curriculum for use in the community in churches, synagogues, mosques, and temples. We have funded the Southern Truth and Reconciliation Center for two years, to do educational outreach from Emory. Most recently, we have launched an unusually successful collaboration with the Carter Center—a joint project between RCP, the Carter Center, and the Liberian Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Commission to help with statement taking in the TRC process amongst members of the Liberian Diaspora Community in Atlanta. We have started the "Atlanta Initiatives," a series of projects of peacebuilding within the city of Atlanta involving faculty research with refugee communities, interfaith women's communities, the Southern Truth and Reconciliation group, children affected by violence, and local faith communities affected by public policy decisions. Finally, we will launch with first Summit in Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding, with His Holiness the Dalai Lama, as the keynote speaker, and four major world leaders in interfaith dialogue as respondents, in October of 2007.

III. The Need for a Concentration in Religion, Conflict, and Peace-building

The success of our work together has taught us one important lesson: all of the events in the world cannot substitute for building curriculum and training students in this area. Integration of this initiative into our current curricular offerings within the Graduate Division of Religion is crucial for this training to happen. While we might think about a center, or a series of further Summits, we all feel that our highest priority is creating a “RCP Concentration” that can feature our faculty strengths and match student interests in this area.

Indeed, our graduate student interest is quite high; to date we have had three graduate students within the GDR and one from outside that are interested in and actively writing about this area. Faculty regularly offer courses in this area, and our advisory board includes the eight faculty who are currently engaged in the RCP initiative at any number of levels (Bounds, L. Smith [Candler only], Patton, T. Smith, Queen, Cornell, Moore, Jenkins). In addition to the members of the Advisory Board, GDR faculty members Seeman, Berger, and Love have written extensively in this area as well.

A. Intellectual focus of the RCP Concentration and its Home within the GDR

First, the RCP Concentration will value and promote the spectrum of historical/archival, to theoretical, to practice-oriented research on the intersection between religion, conflict, and peacebuilding. Thus, we imagine any Course of Study within the GDR, from Ethics, to Historical Studies, to Hebrew Bible, supporting an RCP "Minor." Examples of intellectual interests, and even dissertation projects could range from “New Readings of Augustinian Just War Theory” in Theological Studies; “Conflicting Models of Gandhian Hinduism” in West and South Asian Religions; and “A Study of Howard

Thurman's Peacebuilding Practices," in American Religious Cultures, just to name a few hypothetical possibilities.

Second, the RCP Concentration would focus on this same idea through its dual global and local (some use the term "glocal") emphasis. In working in both Atlanta communities as well as international ones, concentrators will emphasize the simultaneous engagement of both local and global versions of difficult issues related to religion, violence, conflict, and peacebuilding. Our work with the Liberian TRC commission is one such example of exactly this kind of work already in place within the current RCP Initiative.

Third, the RCP Concentration will embody a model of "engaged scholarship" that places value on marshalling the resources of a cosmopolitan university for the betterment of society. RCP is committed to the idea that, to be truly cosmopolitan, we must not only study the community, but interact with it. This commitment would involve understanding how international conflicts involving religion get translated into Atlanta communities, as well as engage in programs that would include training in the following areas: mediators with a specialization in inter-religious conflict, educators within the community that can speak to religious issues, and community educators who will help develop a vocabulary for civil debate on controversial religious issues, particularly within the media. The current "Atlanta Initiatives" group, mentioned above, represents examples of this engaged focus.

In sum, the RCP Concentration aims to combine its foci both upon broad historical, theological, and social issues, as well as "on the ground" practices. Moreover, rather than focus primarily on political or civic conflicts, the Concentration aims toward a more encompassing focus, realizing that conflicts that divide people both within and between religious traditions are much broader. Thus, the Concentration will draw from Emory's unique resources to address a wide range of ways in which religion is related to conflict and peace-building. What is more, it will facilitate the creative interaction among experts who are committed to analyzing and implementing "best practices" from a wide variety of fields.

IV. Staffing of Courses

We have 11 faculty who have taught or have offered to teach or co-teach courses in this area within the GDR (Bounds, L. Smith, T. Smith, Patton, Seeman, Jenkins, Berger, Queen, Martin, Moore, and Cornell). These courses are focused on the theory of religious conflict; theories of violence; particular cases studies of religious conflict throughout the globe; resources for peacebuilding within particular religious traditions; theologies of reconciliation. Below please find a list of courses that already constitute our current "practice."

Courses Already Taught within the past Six Years within the GDR that could constitute the "Core Seminar" as they are currently constituted:

RLPC 710G After Violence: Futuring the End of Victimization (same as ILA 790U)
 RLPC 710W Interfaith Reconciliation: Theory and Practice In America
 RLPC 710 Religion, Conflict Resolution and Human Rights
 RLE 700R: Seminar in Ethics: Religious Practices of Peace and Violence

Courses with Heavy Content on Conflict, Violence, and Reconciliation which could be changed to specific focus on Religion and Conflict as “Core Seminar”:

RLE 701G: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Human Rights

RLSR 767/SOC 720: Morality and Society

RLE 701G Contemporary Virtue Ethics (cross-listed with PHIL 789)

Courses With Related Content to Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding:

We count 22 as conservative estimate, ranging from: Levinas; Religious Transformation in Colonial India; Christian Theology; Social Ethics, Buddhist Metaphysics; Religion and Literature in Early India; and so on.

V. Requirements of the RCP Concentration

Thus, as part of fulfilling the ordinary requirements of their doctoral program, concentrators will:

1. take the seminar “Introduction to Religion Conflict and Peacebuilding” during the first two years of coursework, preferably the first three semesters.
2. take a related seminar on the topic of Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding during the first two years of coursework. This related course could be defined broadly, including such topics as representations of violence in literature, theologies of reconciliation, ethics of intercultural communication, and so on.
3. undertake, at some point in the program, an internship or field work experience suitable to the concentrator’s plan of research (this may be part of a course assignment or dissertation research or a summer experience)
4. include specific questions on religion and conflict and peacebuilding practices as part of the Preliminary Examinations
5. plan a dissertation topic involving research in religion and conflict and peacebuilding