

# Religion, Peace, and Justice



**RLST 2790 (arguments course)**

**Fall 2009**

**T TH 10:00-11:15**

**CC 5**

**Instructor:** Dr. Lola Williamson

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## Course Objectives

In 2000 the United Nations declared the decade of 2001-2010 to be the “International Decade for the Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World.” A UN manifesto with over 75 million signatures requested world citizens to “transform altogether the culture of war and violence into a culture of peace and nonviolence.”

We approach the end of the decade sadly aware that we have not created a culture of peace. Instead we have experienced a violent era in which wars have brought untold suffering to soldiers and civilians, including many children. How lamentable that religion, a tremendous force for peace, has also been a source of oppression and violence this decade and throughout history! In this course, we’ll examine why this is the case and consider ways that religion can be used as a positive force for cultivating peace instead. Among the questions we will consider are:

- How do different religious traditions define peace?
- In what ways do religions foster aggression and defensiveness?
- How do ethnicity and/or nationalism relate to religion?
- How do religious people use scriptures and other elements of their faith to build an understanding of peace?
- What specific methods have religious people developed for realizing peace?
- What part does community play in building a peace ethic?
- What role does education play in building a peace ethic?
- How can interfaith understanding aid the process of universal peacebuilding?
- What is the relationship between personal peace and political peace?
- What is the relationship between justice and peacebuilding?
- What role or roles do I envision for myself in contributing to peacebuilding?

## **Required Texts:** (listed in the order in which we will read them)

*Religion and Peacebuilding* edited by Harold G. Coward and Gordon S. Smith

*The Essential Gandhi: An Anthology of His Writings on His Life, Work, and Ideas* edited by Louis Fischer

*Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr.* edited by James M. Washington.

*Creating True Peace: Ending Violence in Yourself, Your Family, Your Community and the World* by Thich Nhat Hanh.

*Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Nation* by Eboo Patel

## **Course Evaluation**

Communication is an important liberal arts ability that will be honed within the classroom through discussions, presentations, and writing in a variety of styles. Outside the classroom you will have the opportunity to develop your skills by *actively* participating in a faith event on campus (i.e. helping with planning or execution of event) and by formulating a group service project that utilizes presentation skills and serves the Jackson community.

15% Journal and interfaith activity

15% Participation in discussions

20% Service learning project and reflection

50% Essays

- 15% 4-5 page in-class essay
- 10% Methods for cultivating peace essay (4 pages)
- 10% Autobiographical essay (4 pages)
- 15% Argument essay (6 pages)

## **Requirement Descriptions**

### **15% Journal and interfaith activity**

You'll have the opportunity to participate in at least one religious or cultural event in a faith tradition other than your own. This might be a chapel service, Gandhi's birthday celebration, Iftar (Muslim fast-breaking during Ramadan), Diwali, or some other event. If your participation involves a presentation, you'll have the opportunity to practice in class and receive feedback from your peers. Write about your experience in your journal. What did you learn about yourself and others through your participation? The **purpose** of this activity is to engage with people who may have interests and beliefs different than your own. My premise is that the more people are able to do this, the more understanding will be fostered in the world.

Journal entries that address responses to the reading should be made *and dated before each class session*. I will often give you a specific question to consider. If we view a film or listen to a guest lecturer, you are to write a response *after class*. Please *date each journal entry*. As a rough estimate, write about a page and a half typed or two pages hand-written each week. Some weeks you may write more and other weeks less. There are no exams in this class, so I'm looking for quality responses in your journals. Your writing can be informal, but it should be thoughtful. You may want to include questions the reading, film, or lecture raises for you. You can also agree or argue with points that have been made.

The journals are **meant to help you think, help you prepare for class discussion, and serve as an aid as you write essays**. My premise is that we learn best when we actively engage with the material.

### **15% Participation**

We will collaboratively write a list of communication skills that will help us have fruitful class discussions. At midterm and the end of the semester, you'll rate yourself and each other using the criteria we develop. The **purpose** of this exercise is to increase your awareness of the communication process and enhance your ability to communicate in ways that not only engender learning but that also build a sense of community. My premise is that by consciously drawing attention to specific discussion communication skills, our sensitivity to group dynamics will increase. Appropriate communication dynamics help groups to stay focused while also building peaceful communities.

### **20% Service Learning Project**

In these community projects you will share your knowledge of peacebuilding with others. Our main focus site will be the Boys and Girls Club, which has age groups of 6-8, 9-12, and teens. Other possibilities include public schools, Sunday school classes, or church youth programs. Ms. Brunini, an associate of the Faith and Work Initiative, will help us make contacts with teachers and directors of classes or programs. The project should take a minimum of fifteen hours, which includes time spent establishing goals, preparing your presentation, teaching or working with students, and once completed, writing about and discussing your experience with the class. You will hand in a preliminary group proposal stating who is in the group, what type of site and/or age group you want to work with, and several ideas of what you might do by Sept. 15. The final group proposal stating what you plan to do and your rationale for the plan is due by Oct. 1. After the project is completed, you'll write an evaluation and reflection that addresses what you learned, what the people you worked with learned, how your stated goals were or were not met, and how the project enhanced the learning objectives for this course. This two-page, individual reflection is due on Dec. 3.

Following are ideas only. The sky is the limit. Use your creativity.

- 1) You could teach several classes on an issue or a person we have studied in class or that you research. The classes can be geared toward any age group.

- 2) You could develop a storytelling repertoire using the book *Spinning Tales, Weaving Hope: Stories of Peace, Justice, and the Environment* (2002) to perform in schools or churches. Alternately, you could work with students to develop their own performances.
- 3) You could produce an oral video history that documents people's memories of the civil rights era (late 1950s and early 1960s) in the South. This would involve supervising teenagers' interviews with Jackson citizens (perhaps their own families), and then editing and producing a final product. (In 2006 a group chose this and had the students turn the interview into a monologue.)
- 4) Join "Throw What You Know" organized by Lamees El-Sadek. This involves teaching about a world religion with particular emphasis on dispelling untruths that can cause prejudice.
- 5) You may have your own ideas. I would love to hear them and help you work through the details.

You will be graded on the quality of your end product (i.e., the film, class, etc.), your cooperation with others while planning and executing the project, and your reflections following the project. The **purpose** of the project is to help others to realize the value of peaceful solutions to problems and to help you realize that you can contribute to society by using your public voice.

If you are interested in pursuing further service learning in courses and exploring the relationship between service and learning and perhaps your vocation, contact Raymond Clothier or Darby Ray, faculty of the Faith and Work Initiative.

### Essays (50%)

- 15% In-class essay:** You will choose three religions to write about from Unit One. One must be from an Abrahamic tradition and one from an Asian tradition. For each religion you are to discuss (1) how the religion defines peace; (2) traditions, scriptures, or attitudes that stand in the way of developing peace; and (3) traditions, scriptures, or attitudes that might be (or have been) used to develop peace. For each religion, you must incorporate at least four of the terms listed on the study guide, demonstrating that you understand their meaning. For a well-rounded essay, you will want to create a thoughtful introduction and conclusion. You will be graded on your knowledge as well as your ability to express yourself in an engaging manner. The **purpose** of writing in class is to increase your knowledge base about world religions and peace, build memory skills, and practice writing with a time constraint. My premise is that you cannot be an advocate for peace without knowledge of how religions use their traditions to support both peace and violence.
- 10% Methods essay:** This essay (4 pages) will address the methods that Gandhi and King developed for realizing justice in non-combative ways. Include in your essay a discussion of the processes by which they came to their conclusions. This assignment is **meant to help you understand specific methods for confronting injustice in nonviolent**

ways. It should also help you understand that these men were fallible human beings who learned as they went, making mistakes like we all do. My premise is that exploring not only the end result of great thinkers' work, but also the process they went through will inspire you to keep trying when you make mistakes or are uncertain about how to proceed.

**10% Autobiographical essay:** (4 pages) Using Eboo Patel's book as a model, recount some of the people, incidents, and ideas that have helped to shape who you are today. Patel wrote of his "conversion" to both Islam and to interfaith dialogue and how these give his life meaning and purpose. What gives your life meaning and purpose? How does *who you are* translate into *what you do*? This essay is **intended to help you realize the interconnectedness of people and events and to contemplate your life's direction.** My premise is that exploring who you are and how you have been shaped will help you develop conviction about your life's purpose.

**15% Argument essay:**

This 6-page paper, due during final exam week, will provide an opportunity to take a stance on an issue we have covered during the semester. Your thesis should be strong and clear and supported by evidence from material you've read, lectures you've heard, or films you've seen during the semester, supplemented by at least two outside sources from experts on the topic you have chosen. These sources may be books or academic journal articles.

A good argument will acknowledge competing viewpoints, showing that you understand them even if they contain flaws in reasoning. This must be accomplished in a way that does not close the door to communication. It is important that people who disagree with you hear your argument. The **purpose** of this assignment is to exercise the skill of persuasion. My premise is that the ability to convince others can only be developed by exercising the "muscle" of persuasion, using solid, well-supported argumentation.

As I grade these essays, I will be looking for:

- 1) **Clarity:** Make sure your main thesis and your sub-points are clear and supported by sufficient evidence. Plan your overall organizational structure carefully so that the reader can easily follow your train of thought. Provide transitions between ideas.
- 2) **Complexity:** Instead of coming up with pat answers for complex questions, approach the problem/topic from different angles, exploring ambiguities and subtle nuances. Compare and contrast your own conclusions with the views of others.
- 3) **Style and creativity:** Work at giving compelling expression to your ideas through precise, vivid, and creative use of language. Think of your paper as a work of art, and craft it lovingly. Pay particular attention to the apt placement of adjectives and adverbs, and witness a dull sentence come to life! Provide a creative title that provides your paper with even more vitality. A good way to do this is to make the title both creative and descriptive. The main title should catch the reader's attention. After a colon, the subtitle should tell your reader very specifically what your topic is. Our text by Eboo Patel serves as a good example—*Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Nation*.

- 4) **Correct form:** Correct grammar usage and proper citation of sources are important. Use 12 pt. New Times Roman font. Insert page numbers in the bottom right corner. Use in-text citations of author and page numbers. Staple hard copy; do not email.

## Grading Scale

A (93-100) A- (90-92) B+ (87-89) B (83-86) B- (80-82) C+ (77-79) C (73-76) C- (70-72) D+ (67-69) D (63-66) D- (60-62) F (0-59)

## Attendance

You are allowed two absences during the semester without consequence. Each absence after this will result in two points being deducted from your final grade. Absences are intended to cover cases of illness, family crisis, religious holiday, or school-sponsored trips. Please inform me of the reasons for your absences. If you need to miss more than two classes for any of the above reasons, you may hand in a two-page paper on the reading material for the class missed due within one week of the absence. The essay must be evaluated at a minimum of B for it to count. If you miss ten or more classes (about a third of the semester) for any reason, you should withdraw from the course to avoid receiving an F. If the absences occur after the final day to withdraw without a grade, you should make arrangements for a medical withdrawal in order to avoid receiving an F.

## Class Schedule

Note that the schedule may need to be adjusted during the course of the semester. Always bring the text we will be discussing to class along with your journal responses.

## UNIT ONE: Religion in the Service of Peace

T, Aug. 25: Overview of course

R Aug. 27: Religion, Myth, and Metaphor; readings emailed

T Aug. 1: Chapter 8, “Christianity and Peacebuilding” in *Religion and Peacebuilding*

R Sept. 3: Chapter 6, “Judaism and Peacebuilding” in *Religion and Peacebuilding*

T Sept. 8: Chapter 7, “Islam and Peacebuilding” in *Religion and Peacebuilding*

R Sept. 10: Chapter 3, “Hinduism and Peacebuilding” in *Religion and Peacebuilding*

T Sept. 15: Chapter 4, “Missed Opportunities” (Buddhism) in *Religion and Peacebuilding*  
**Preliminary service learning proposal due; state members of group (no more than 3), type of site and age group desired; one proposal per group.**

R Sept. 17: Chapter 5, “Confucianism and Peacebuilding” in *Religion and Peacebuilding*

T Sept. 22: **In-class essay on *Religion and Peacebuilding***

## Unit Two: Methods for Creating Peace

R Sept. 24: Gandhi, 3-57

T Sept. 29: Gandhi, 58-98

Film segment: *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict*

R Oct. 1: King, 5-20; 35-63

**Final Service Learning Project proposal due**

T Oct. 6: King, *Stride Toward Freedom*, 417-67.

Guest speakers: Civil rights activists, Ed King and T.W. Lewis

R Oct. 8: King, finish *Stride*, 467-490; and 221-3; 227-30; 491-7; 509-17; 62-72

Film segment: *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict*

**Hand in journal; oral communication evaluations in class.**

TBA: Dinner and Film: *Cry Freedom* (Michael Biko and South African apartheid)

T Oct. 13: Chapter 12, “Truth and Reconciliation” in *Religion and Peacebuilding*

Guest speaker: Jed Oppenheim, Mississippi Youth Justice Project and member of Mississippi Truth and Reconciliation Commission

**Methods essay due by Wednesday, 12:00**

R Oct. 15: Thich Nhat Hanh, Chapters 1 and 2

(Midterm grades: Oct. 16)

T Oct. 20 No Class – Fall break;

R Oct. 22: Thich Nhat Hanh, Chapters 3 and 4

T Oct. 27: Thich Nhat Hanh, Chapters 5 and 8

## Unit Three: Subverting Religious Conflict

R Oct. 29: Israel and Palestine; readings emailed

Guest speaker: Dr. Davis

T Nov. 3: Religion, Peace, and Conflict in the Balkans Guest speaker: Dr. Galaty

“Blood of Our Ancestors: Cultural Heritage Management in the Balkans” by Michael Galaty. For *Contested Cultural Heritage: Religion and Nationalism in a Global World*, edited by H. Silverman. (emailed)

R Nov. 5: Peace in Mauritius Guest speaker: Dr. Storey (We’ll join Dr. Storey’s class.)

Begin *Acts of Faith*, Introduction to 36

T Nov. 10: **No class** (I'll be at a conference); Reading Day: *Acts of Faith*, 37-123

R Nov. 12: *Acts of Faith*, 125-182

T Nov. 17: **Autobiographical essay due** (no reading)  
Continue discussion of *Acts of Faith*

R Nov. 19: "Creating Spaces: Interreligious Initiatives for Peace"  
Chapter 9 in *Religion and Peacebuilding*

T Nov. 24: Religious Peacebuilding: From Potential to Action  
Chapter 14 in *Religion and Peacebuilding*  
Dr. Omo-Bare (11:00-11:15)

R Nov. 26 No Class. Happy Thanksgiving!

T Dec. 1: Documentary: *Promises* (Israeli/Palestinian relations through the eyes of children)

R Dec. 3: **Two-page evaluation and reflection on Service Learning Project due**  
(no reading) Discuss service learning projects; oral communication evaluations

F Dec. 11: **Argument essay and Journal due** by 12:00 noon (or any time before).

Religious Holidays and Millsaps events: (See Katie Sorey regarding chapel services.)

Aug. 21-22 Ramadan begins (month long fast – Muslim)

Sept. 14 **Millsaps Iftar** (fast-breaking dinner – Muslim; includes talks about Islam) 6:00,  
Leggett Center

Sept. 19-20 Eid al Fitr (Ramadan ends – Muslim)

Sept. 19-27 Navaratri (nine nights of celebration of the goddess – Hindu)

Sept. 20 Rosh Hashanah (Jewish New Year; time of introspection)

Oct. 1 **Celebration of Gandhi's birthday** by the statue, 5:00

Oct. 2 Gandhi's birthday (Gandhi Jayanti) and U.N. International Day of Nonviolence

Oct. 15 **Millsaps Diwali celebration**; 7:00, Recital Hall

Oct. 17 Diwali (Festival of Lights – Hindu)

Nov. 16 **Lecture/performance of Indian music** by Dr. Guy Beck; 7:00; Recital Hall

Nov. 26 Thanksgiving (interfaith)

Nov. 27 Eid Al Addha (3-day festival at end of Hajj; celebrates Abraham's willingness to  
sacrifice his son – Muslim)

Sept. 28 Yom Kippur (Day of Atonement; fasting and repentance – Jewish)

Nov. 29 First Sunday of Advent (preparation for Christ's birth – Christian)

Dec. 8 Bodhi Day (when Buddha first sat under Bodhi tree – Buddhist)

Dec. 12 Advent feast begins (Orthodox Christian)

Dec. 18 Hijra (Muhammad to Medina in 614; Muslim New Year)