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In the mid-1990s I designed an undergraduate course that brought together two very different academic disciplines, the study of world religions and conflict analysis theory. It was the first course of its kind. I intended it as a follow-up to an introduction to world religions, but with a specific focus on texts, rituals, and traditions regarding war and peace, and relationships between ethics and conflict analysis, prevention, management, and resolution. The traditional approach to studying texts of war and peace turned out to be sterile. Justifications of peace and war in religious texts tend to be self-justifying, self-righteous, and rather irrelevant to the complex questions of how to prevent conflict or defuse it once underway. On the other hand, looking at the larger intellectual worlds of religious rituals and ethics through the lens of what causes conflict, what prevents it, how to manage it, and how to promote reconciliation, turns out to have opened up a treasure trove of religious insights from every civilization. The work is just beginning.

These insights turned out to enrich not only secular analysis of conflict. They strongly implied that a variety of religious traditions across the world possessed insights into the nature of human conflict, its prevention, or its resolution that rivaled secular analysis and offered new and innovative approaches to conflict resolution on an individual level and to diplomacy on a global level.

As this course transformed into a graduate course for experts in conflict resolution, I problematized the application of religious ritual and values to complex international conflicts. Highlighting the dual legacy of these religious traditions, and their capacity to promote unequaled levels of barbarity such as in holy wars, crusades, jihads, and exterminations, the course simultaneously explored the way in which religious peacemakers have played a pioneering role in global diplomacy and paths of nonviolent social change, in full hermeneutic engagement with their respective traditions. I also problematized the question of universal religious or interfaith values that have emerged in the last one hundred years as a kind of growing subculture of global religion.

Since the mid-1990s, I have used the course as a rough blueprint to train experts in conflict, students of diplomacy, and peace activists. The multidisciplinary nature of the course has always led to challenges. Some students are prepared well for religion and utterly unprepared for political science, diplomacy, and conflict theory. Other students are skilled in social sciences and politics and utterly ignorant of religion, or more often, utterly biased against it. Both sets of students (and scholars) tend to lack a general pragmatism about complex problem solving in the social, economic, and military realm that leaves them unprepared for the true moral complexity of political and military decision making. But the results have been almost universal praise for the course, with several courses now mirroring its style. The following course description outlines the goals of the course:

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?

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.

I organized the course by categories of THEORY and APPLICATIONS. A sample from one year is as follows:

Theory
1. Religion and Conflict Resolution: Mapping a New Field
2. The Psychological and Social Foundations of Conflict
3. Hermeneutics, Religion, and the Psycho-Social Dynamics of Religious Conflict and Violence

Applications
4. Buddhist Liberation Movements: Introduction, Sri Lanka, Thailand
5. Buddhist Liberation Movements: Vietnam, Tibet, Conclusions
6. Christian Peacemaking: Introduction, France/Germany, East Germany
7. Christian Peacemaking: Nicaragua, Nigeria, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Philippines
8. The Arab/Israeli Conflict: Religious/Secular and Inter-Monotheistic Conflict
9. The Arab/Israeli Conflict: Abrahamic Pathways toward Transforming Relationship

10. The Arab/Israeli Conflict: Practical Steps
11. The Question of Interfaith Dialogue

I have consistently assigned large papers to the course, asking students to choose a region in which there is a conflict, violent or nonviolent, and then examine the way in which religion is contributing to its resolution, perpetuating, or exacerbating the conflict, or all three. Their job is to understand and explain the hermeneutic range of lived religious belief, practice, and ritual and mythic engagement, and see its role in both war making and peace making. They then are asked to make policy recommendations. The course continues to be an amazing treasure trove of insights from the students and their research. The top third, or at least 10 percent of the graduate classes, and sometimes undergraduate as well, create papers of such significance that they could easily serve as excellent briefs for policy makers or NGO's.

I assign my own books, in addition to those of friends who have pioneered this kind of analysis. (For a select bibliography, see below.) Unfortunately, there has not been enough to choose from, especially in the non-Christian religions, for many reasons. There are few authors who are sympathetic to and critical of religion at the same time. Secular constructs of political science theory, sociology, psychology, tend to be utterly threatened by religious constructs of reality, and allowing them the space to be an independent variable in analyzing complex conflict. In point of fact, the whole field of conflict studies suffers from the insularity of many unipolar disciplines. There are only a few of us who have seen fit to defy the unstated prohibition against multidisciplinary work, especially before tenure.

In any case, the field is growing, and there is new literature all the time on religion, diplomacy, and conflict resolution. It will require great discipline in mastering many bodies of knowledge, but also the humility necessary to know that the knowledge gaps of multidisciplinary work are inescapable. In addition, our work is deeply informed by the empirical study of lived religious experience today, on the ground, in the hands of these extraordinary, anonymous, religious peacemakers around the world, as well as study of their infamous counterparts who are warriors for God or the gods. Such a broad grasp generally requires tenure and sympathetic colleagues.

New insights into world religions will be discovered by applying new disciplines to the raw data of religious texts, ethics, and rituals, and the world of conflict theory and political policy making will be enriched as well. There may come a day when religion experts as a class of people will be taken very seriously in the global halls of power, if we take seriously the interface between the power of religion, negatively and positively, and the power of human social and political constructs.

Resources

Appleby, Scott. *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1999.

Gopin, Marc. *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence, and Peacemaking*. New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Kakar, Sudhir. *The Colors of Violence*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Kraft, Kenneth. *Inner Peace, World Peace: Essays on Buddhism*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992. (on reserve)

Johnston, Douglas, and Sampson, Cynthia, eds. *Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1994. (on reserve)

Smock, David. *Religious Perspectives on War: Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Attitudes to Force after the Gulf War*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace, 1992.