

Theology 351.01 -- Spring Term, 2012 -- Wednesdays, 3:00-5:20, Carney 206

FAITH ELEMENTS IN CONFLICTS

Raymond G. Helmick, S.J.

Office Hours: I will regularly be in my office, room 312V in the new Campanella Way building, or in St. Mary's Hall mornings from 9:00 to 12:00 any class day. You will find me there a lot of other times as well and are welcome whenever you find me.

You can check with me by phone, 552-8215, which rings both in the office and in my room at St. Mary's Hall. When you don't find me there, you will often find me at 617-325-1300 (St. Theresa's Rectory in West Roxbury), and we can set a time for an appointment. Always, please, leave me a number to get back to you.

Course Description:

Religion is commonly seen, in relation to conflicts, as poison in the system, promoting the dehumanization of enemies and the rationalization of the violence and brutality that marks the most bitter conflicts. Those of us more committed to religious faith expect something other from the various faith communities, elements of healing that should humanize conflicts. We incline to be shocked when we find that the record of churches and faith communities turns out to be more of a rap sheet.

Having taught various courses about specific conflicts, many of them fought on grounds that involved religion, I would like to make this course as explicitly theological as possible. It will first look at the way key concepts such as revelation, election and universality in various religions, especially in sectarian guise, affect the origins and progress of violent conflicts, and will ask to what extent such employment of these concepts betrays the religions themselves. It will also examine how far institutional interests of religious bodies make them vulnerable to manipulation by other parties engaged in any given conflict, and how the religious elements and loyalties relate to other interests that figure in such conflicts. And since religious fundamentalism, a phenomenon that needs careful definition, in a variety of faith groups has become so threatening in many parts of the world, we will give it special attention.

Not to make the course a merely negative study of offenses committed in the name of religion, we will look also at the themes of reconciliation, healing and forgiveness that figure so largely in the teaching of the various faiths, ask how central they are in the teaching of different religions, and try to understand why they have had so little resonance in the actual history and practice of the religious bodies. The question whether we can expect faith communities to offer resources for healing or restoration in conflict situations is largely about who, within these communities, has real interest in these basic but neglected characteristics of the faith and wisdom traditions.

Requirements:

Rather than the mid-term exam I call for in most of my courses, a **critical review of a pertinent book** will be required, due by February 22nd; also a **term paper** (2,000 words approx.) and a **final exam** (in class). The paper will count for 40% of the grade, the book review and the final exam each 30%.

I will post a question on the Blackboard Vista after each class, and will look for each student to post a response to it, to which I can then post a reply.

I will also enforce an attendance requirement. Unexcused absences will be reflected in the grade, and any consistent pattern of non-attendance will be reason to require that you drop the course.

Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence and Reconciliation*, New York, Rowman and Littlefield, 2000.

Rona Fields, *Martyrdom: The Psychology, Theology and Politics of Self-Sacrifice*, 2004

Raymond G. Helmick, S.J., and Rodney L. Petersen, eds., *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, Templeton Foundation Press, 2001.

John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Peace Building*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1996.

Recommended but not Required:

Kevin Avruch, *Culture and Conflict Resolution*, U. S. Institute of Peace, 1998

Alan D. Falconer and Joseph Liechty, eds., *Reconciling Memories*, Dublin, The Columba Press, 1998

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

Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2001.

Donald W. Shriver, *An Ethic for Enemies: Forgiveness in Politics*, Oxford University Press, 1995.

Almost all of these books are also available as e-books from the B.C. Bookstore.

Another favorite book that I have used in this course in other years has gone out of print at least temporarily but will be in the library: Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture?*, Fortress Press (Minneapolis), 1993.

In addition, a fairly extensive bibliography will be provided, as recommendations for the required book review (you will be free to suggest other books as well, but only if I give them *advance* approval as substantial enough), or for further reading on the subject.

Class Calendar:

Wed., Jan. 18

Some thoughts on the origin and course of conflicts. Religion as an identity element in these conflicts and its uses as a motivating force for violence. Cooptation as the mechanism here: using religious faith for the promotion of agendas that are not its own.

Useful reading for this class: the opening chapters of Scott Appleby's *Ambivalence of the Sacred*, pp. 25-56, and of Kevin Avruch's *Culture and Conflict Resolution*, pp. 6-21. Since you won't have gotten into books until after this class, I'll ask you to read these subsequently. I recommend that you get right into Appleby's book and read it right through. Avruch's recommended book, of which there are a few copies in the bookstore which you can share around among you, is useful.

Wed., Jan. 25

Religion and Destructive Conflict in the Contemporary World. Instances: Northern Ireland, Cyprus, Israelis and Palestinians, Iraq, the "War on Terror." The Huntington thesis on the "Clash of Civilizations." (I don't recommend the book.)

Reading for this class: in Appleby's *Ambivalence of the Sacred*, pp.281-308. In *Forgiveness and Reconciliation* by myself and Rodney Petersen, pp. 229-253, the John Dawson chapter, "Hatred's End: A Christian Proposal to Peacemaking in the New Century." Recommended, in Marc Gopin's *Between Eden and Armageddon*, pp. 3-64.

To give you some parameters for the critical book review that will be called for in the course, a suggested bibliography will be given out at this stage. This will not be a list to exclude other books, but simply some help in locating suitable books for the review. The otherwise required course books will not suffice for this assignment. Due date for the book review is February 22nd, but I would be grateful to have a good number of them earlier, so that I can distribute the reading and grading of them over a longer time.

- Wed., Feb. 1 **Building a Theology of Reconciliation.** New Testament Scriptural record, and its insistence on forgiveness and reconciliation as constitutive of Christian life. Personhood: the “Image of God” (B’tselem Elohim) and its place in the Hebrew tradition. Islamic openness to democratic pluralism in faith.
- Reading for this class: Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, pp. 13-165 (a big dose, but you need it). I’d also recommend, in Abdulaziz Sachedina’s *The Islamic Roots of Democratic Pluralism*, Ch. 1, “The Search for Democratic Pluralism in Islam,” pp. 3-21; Ch. 4, “Forgiveness Toward Humankind,” pp. 102-131, but I expect you’ll want to distribute that much reading over a longer time.
- Wed., Feb. 8 **A Taxonomy of Religions.** A critique of the Rudolf Otto thesis (as embraced by Scott Appleby in his first chapter) on the ambivalence of the holy. Monotheistic, polytheistic and dualist faiths and their character as outlooks on life and the world. The dangers of exclusivism.
- Readings: two articles of my own, which will be put up on the Blackboard Vista: “Do Not Fear...Because I Am With You,” (typescript manuscript, 46 pp.) and “How Can a Catholic Respond in Faith to the Faith of Muslims?” (4 pp.)
- Wed., Feb. 15 **Sectarianism and Fundamentalism.** The Falconer/Liechty (*Reconciling Memories*) book is especially helpful here (on the recommended: not required list above). More essential is to read, in Scott Appleby’s *Ambivalence of the Sacred*, ch. 3, “Violence as a Sacred Duty: Patterns of Religious Extremism” (pp. 81-120). Appleby, along with Martin Marty, has published a whole library of books on fundamentalism, and is one of the primary authorities on its character. Also of interest here is my own chapter in the Helmick/Petersen *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, “Does Religion Fuel or Heal in Conflicts?” (pp. 81-96).
- Wed., Feb. 22 **Book Reviews due.**
- Christian Efforts at Peacemaking.** Variants on the “Grand Narrative” of Christianity: the Church divided by theological diversity, historic animosity and social alienation. Christian ecumenism, the fragmented contemporary state of world Christianity and the damage done to unity in peacemaking. Examples of successful Christian efforts at reconciliation.

Useful reading on this subject: Douglas M. Johnston, Jr. and Cynthia Sampson, eds., *Religion, the Missing Dimension of Statecraft* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1994), *passim*. This book, required reading now for American diplomats, had the effect of bringing discussion of religion back into official American diplomatic thinking. Johnston has a helpful chapter in the Helmick-Petersen *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, “Religion and Foreign Policy” (pp. 117-128), but the book concentrates more on private efforts (Track-II diplomacy) at reconciliation by non-official groups. Also very helpful in this regard is the chapter, in the *Forgiveness and Reconciliation* book, by Olga Botcharova, “Implementation of Track Two Diplomacy: Developing a Model of Forgiveness” (pp. 279-304).

Wed., Feb. 29

Doctrines of Revelation and Election. The understanding of these two doctrines, which appear in some form in all religions, determines the exclusive or inclusive character of any particular church or religion. We need to see how this relates both to fundamentalism and to the phenomenon of the cooptation of religion for agendas that are not its own.

Reading: the Donna Hicks chapter in the Helmick/Petersen *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, “The Role of Identity Reconstruction in Promoting Reconciliation” (pp. 129-150); ch. 5 in Miroslav Volf’s *Exclusion and Embrace*, “Oppression and Justice” (pp. 193-232).

[Wed., March 7]

Spring Vacation. No classes March 5-9

Wed., March 14

Religious Peace-building: Identity, Ethnic Conflict and Nationalism. Experience of Northern Ireland, Lebanon, the Balkans, the Al-Aqsa Intifada. The role of Hamas.

Reading: Andrea Bartoli’s chapter in the Helmick/Petersen book, “Forgiveness and Reconciliation in the Mozambique Peace Process” (pp. 361-382). Anthony da Silva’s chapter in the same book, “Through Nonviolence to Truth: Ghandi’s Vision of Reconciliation” (pp. 305-328). An unpublished paper of my own (to be distributed): “The Context of Group Identifications and their Conflicts: A Four Factor Theory of the Dynamic of Conflict.”

Wed., March 21

Religious Peace-building and Race. South Africa, Rwanda, the Sudan.

Reading: certainly the Donald Shriver chapter in *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, “Forgiveness: A Bridge Across Abysses of Revenge” (pp. 151-167). Useful also is Nigel Biggar’s edited book, *Burying the Past*, for its chapters by various authors on post-conflict processes of overcoming grievances, especially the several chapters on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa.

Wed., March 28 **The Nature of God.** Violent and retributive concepts of God as a factor in the genesis of conflict. (I’m going very light on reading assignments by this stage of the course, knowing that you are all at work on a variety of term papers. Do put some of the time you save into mine!)

Wed., April 4 **Holy Week.** With the anticipation that some of you will be gone home at this point, I will use this class to screen some documentary film on conflict situations that we have made here at B.C.

Wed., April 11 **9/11: The character of the American Response. Terrorism and “The War On....”** Matters of definition, matters of anxiety. I’ll mention here, with strong recommendation but more likely for your reading after you’ve finished the term, Rona Fields’ excellent book on *Martydom*.

Wed., April 18 I’m going to miss this class myself, as I go to Assisi for this week to an ecumenical conference on peace-building. **Jerome Maryon** will give the class, on **Building Cultures of Non-violence**.

Wed., April 25 **Restorative Justice.**

Wed. May 2 **Term Papers Due.**

Final roundup of what we’ve done in the course.

Study Days, Friday, May 4 to Monday, May 7 –

Final Exam, Monday, May 14, 12:30-2:00.