

**GCM 525 RELIGIOUS CONFLICT AND MUSLIM-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE**  
**Virginia Theological Seminary and the Washington Theological Consortium**  
**Spring/4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2011**

**Dr. Joyce Ann Mercer**  
**Office: Meade 203/ 703-461-1720**  
**Email [jmercer@vts.edu](mailto:jmercer@vts.edu)**

**Office Hours by Appt.**

This quarter long (1.5 credit) course meets Wednesdays 7:00-9:45 pm in Addison 109 beginning on 3/30/11.

Course Description

One of the most urgent issues of the present moment both locally and globally concerns the role religions play in situations of conflict and violence. This course explores religious conflict between Muslims and Christians, and the possibilities for peace building through interfaith dialogue and other approaches to conflict transformation. We will consider various theoretical perspectives for understanding and analyzing identity-based conflict. How might intersecting cultural, ethnic, and religious differences between Muslims and Christians shape assumptions about the nature of conflict, the processes by which it is addressed, and the meanings and modes of forgiveness and reconciliation? What resources exist within these two Abrahamic faith traditions that can help Muslims and Christians become allies across differences? Participants will learn and practice skills for working with interreligious/ intercultural/inter-ethnic identity-based conflict through role-plays, case studies, and other interactive methods. This course fulfills one of the course requirements for the WTC's certificate program in Muslim-Christian Studies.

Course Goals// This course aims to:

1. provide a brief introduction to theory and practice of conflict transformation in situations of religious- and other identity-based conflict, specifically concerning Christians and Muslims in North America;
2. equip participants with knowledge and skills for work within their own faith communities as leaders of inter-religious understanding, and as allies/good neighbors of persons of other faiths and their leaders;
3. offer a context within theological education for inter-religious learning

Learning Outcomes// The intended outcomes for participants as a result of engaging in the course include:

1. Gaining knowledge and skills for analyzing and understanding religious conflicts;
2. Demonstrate an introductory awareness of multiple models for working with religious conflict;

3. Exploring faith resources for peace building and conflict transformation in Muslim and Christian traditions, including the power of ritual and symbol in religious peacemaking;
4. Practicing several basic/primary skills of interfaith peace- and conflict transformation- work, including listening, facilitating storytelling/dialogue, and engaging controversial topics within one's own religious community and in interfaith contexts;
5. Developing a framework for understanding trauma, its relationship to conflict, and the complex role of trauma healing in forgiveness and reconciliation;
6. The recognition and articulation of key areas of commonality and of difference that frequently appear in Muslim-Christian dialogue;
7. Demonstrate understanding of the processes by which identities, including religious identities, may be manipulated to fuel and foster conflict;
8. Grow in self-knowledge of one's own identity and world view, and of the identities and world views of others, as significantly shaping approaches to religious conflict, forgiveness and reconciliation;

Required Texts:

Abu-Nimer, Mohammed and David Augsburg (2009). *Peace-Building By, Between, and Beyond Muslims and Evangelical Christians*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books. [BP172 P3548 2009]

Huda, Qamar-Al, ed. (2010). *Crescent and Dove: Peace and Conflict Resolution in Islam*. Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace. [BP190.5 P34 C74 2010]

Kraybill, Ronald S., with Alice Frazier Evans and Robert A. Evans (2001). *Peace Skills: A Manual for Community Mediators*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass. [BF637 ,N4 J73 2001].

Schirch, Lisa and David Camp (2007). *The Little Book of Dialogue for Difficult Subjects: A Practical Hands-On Guide*. In "The Little Books of Justice and Peacebuilding" Series, Howard Zehr, general series editor. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.

Additional articles as assigned (on reserve or made available through the course website)

Recommended/Suggested Additional Reading:

Ayoub, Mahmoud / Irfan A. Omar (2007). *A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. [BP 172 A983 2007]

Michel, Thomas F. /Irfan A. Omar (2010). *A Christian View of Islam: Essays on Dialogue*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books. [BP 172 M6227].

Smock, David R. (2002). *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding*. Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace. [BL 410. I6 2002]

### Course Requirements:

#### **A) Attendance and Active Participation (30%)**

Because this class meets only one time per week, it is imperative that participants are present for all sessions. The course has been designed to promote active, engaged learning. Participants are expected to be present and participating in all sessions of the class and in various activities such as group work, discussions, simulations/role plays, video viewing, etc. Participants are expected to come to class having completed readings and/or assignments for the day.

In addition, students are expected to follow VTS academic standards regarding integrity of their work. Plagiarism is not tolerated and will result in a failing grade for the course. Please make sure that you cite sources properly and consistently. If you have questions concerning citations, please consult a style manual such as the Chicago Manual of Style or Turabian's, or contact the writing center for assistance.

Course participants with a documented learning difference should talk with the professor early in the quarter so that appropriate measures may be taken to insure full participation and learning of all.

*And please: no internet use that is unrelated to course work!*

#### **B) Reflective Journal (30%)**

Please keep a journal of your engagement with texts, discussions, films, role plays, and other class activities. This journal is a place for you to explore in writing how you are "making sense" out of the various components of the course in an integrated way. In this journal, you might for instance write about what you understand a particular author to be talking about in her/his chapter, and how that main point relates (affirmatively or not) to your experience in a particular role play or other activity. You might reflect on questions that arise for you as you read or participate in the class; on what evokes feelings of resistance, defensiveness, openness, or cooperation within you in the course of a discussion. Or you might reflect on a new insight you have from comments of a classmate, a film, or a text.

The journal should be typed, single spaced, with each 'entry' clearly reflecting the date on which it is written, and the class sessions/materials upon which you are reflecting. While there is no page minimum or maximum, a good rule of thumb would be two such pages per week of class work/readings. You will turn the journal in two times: the first installment will be due on the Monday after our third class meeting (April 18) by email to Dr. Mercer ([jmercerc@vts.edu](mailto:jmercerc@vts.edu)). For the second 'installment,' you will turn in the entire journal with your final paper (see below for information and due dates).

### **C. Final Case Study Paper and Class Presentation (40%)**

The culminating assignment of the class is a 12-15 page (double spaced) paper that offers a case study of a particular religious conflict of your choosing, involving some matter of conflict between Christians and Muslims. In your paper, you will need to choose and briefly describe an actual incident of religious conflict (e.g., you may select a public, national example such as the Park 51 controversy; a local conflict of which you are aware; or an international situation). The main concern of the paper is to develop an analysis of that conflict situation toward articulating your understanding of it and its outcome, and to argue for steps that might invite conflict transformation through healing and reconciliation based on your integration of course materials about dealing with religious conflict. **Please turn in a paragraph-length proposal of your final paper by email by Thursday, April 21.**

Key questions to address include: (a) What is the role of religion in the conflict; how is religion mobilized by actors for escalating conflict and/or for peacemaking? (b) What other areas of identity overlap with religion and are salient for this conflict? (c) What, if anything, is the role of trauma in the conflict and its healing? (d) What contributes to, and/or prevents, healing, forgiveness, reconciliation in this case?

In the final class session, each participant will offer a 5 minute presentation of her/his case study for the class emphasizing what you learn about religious conflict and Muslim-Christian dialogue/conflict transformation through your study of this case.

### **Schedule of Work and Assigned Readings:**

**Session 1    Wednesday, March 30    Introduction to the Course and Each Other**  
 Themes: Conflict, Religion, Identity: Orienting Concepts and Frameworks  
 [Background reading:  
 1. Ibrahim Kalin, pp. 3-38 and Abu-Nimer pp. 73-92, both in Huda, Crescent and Dove

2. Kraybill, Evans and Evans, Peace Skills pp. 1-21 "Assumptions about Conflict and the Role of Peace Builders"]

## **Session 2 Wednesday, April 6**

Themes: Understanding and Analyzing Identity-Based Conflict

Readings:

1. \*Rothman, pp. 5-20
2. Abu-Nimer and Augsburg, Chapters 7, 8, and 9 (pp. 91-131)
3. Michel, Chapter 5 "Social and Religious Factors Affecting Muslim-Christian Relationships," pp. 53-68

Additional Suggested Reading:

1. \*Donna Hicks, "The Role of Identity Reconstruction in Promoting Reconciliation" Chapter 7 pp. 129-149 in Helmick and Petersen
2. \*"Tools for Conflict Analysis" Chapter 2 pp. 17-36 in Fisher et al, Working with Conflict: Skills and Strategies

## **Session 3 Wednesday, April 13**

Themes: Trauma and Conflict

Readings:

1. \*Evelin G. Lindner, "Humiliation, Trauma, and Trauma Recovery in a Globalizing World," pp. 49-64 in Hart, Peacebuilding in Traumatized Societies
2. Kraybill, Evans and Evans, pp. 38-104
3. \*Daniel Druckerman, Explaining National Identity: From Group Attachments to Collective Action
4. David Steele, "Contributions of Interfaith Dialogue to Peacebuilding in the Former Yugoslavia," pp. 73-88, in Smock, *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding*

## **Session 4 Wednesday, April 20**

Themes: Dialogue Processes

Readings:

1. Schirch and Camp, 1-84
2. Abu-Nimer and Augsburg, pp. 135-211
3. Kraybill, Evans and Evans, pp. 107-118

Additional suggested reading:

1. \*Michael Ipgrave, "Anglican Approaches to Christian-Muslim Dialogue"
2. Mahmoud Ayoub, Part I The Need for Dialogue (various chapters), A Muslim View of Christianity: Essays on Dialogue

3. \*Mitchell R. Hammer, "The Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory: A Conceptual Framework and Measure of Intercultural Conflict Resolution Approaches"
4. Marc Gopin, "The Use of the Word and Its Limits: A Critical Evaluation of Religious Dialogue as Peacemaking," pp. 33-46 in Smock, *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding*

**Session 5      Wednesday, April 27**

Themes: Conversations and Controversies Across/Amid Difference

Readings:

1. Abu-Nimer and Augsburg, pp. 215-280
2. Huda, pp. 39-57; 179-204

Guest: Sheikha Farhanahz Ellis, Interfaith and Outreach Director, All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS) Center, and Chaplain, Muslim Campus Ministry, George Mason University

**Session 6      Wednesday, May 4**

Themes: Forgiveness, Reconciliation, and Inter-religious Peacemaking

Readings:

1. Abu-Nimer and Augsburg, pp. xi-89
2. Huda, "Enhancing Skills and Capacity Building in Islamic Peacebuilding," and "Conclusion," in Huda pp. 205-235
3. \*Abdul Azir Said and Nathan C. Funk, "The Role of Faith in Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution"

Additional suggested readings:

Thomas Michel, Ch. 2-4 in [A Christian View of Islam: Essays on Dialogue](#)