
practical matters

Teaching Overcoming Violence

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The Decline of Violence?

By the recent account of Harvard psychologist and linguist Steven Pinker, a course on “Overcoming Violence” may be unnecessary—or at best purely historical. In his latest book, [*The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined*](#),² Pinker argues that violence has been on the decline for several millennia and that we are living today in the least violent époque of

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human existence. In a recent opinion article in the *The New York Times*, provocatively titled “[Why War Is Going Out of Style](#),”³ Pinker and co-author Joshua S. Goldstein, an emeritus professor of international relations at American University, argue that “war no longer pays” and that there is a “growing repugnance toward institutional violence.” They cite statistical analyses over time that have indicated a decline in the numbers of both full-scale wars (defined as resulting in a thousand or more deaths) and of smaller civil wars and conflicts that result in a lower death toll. “True,” Pinker and Goldstein concede, “we still harbor demons like greed, dominance, revenge and self-deception. But we also have faculties that inhibit them, like self-control, empathy, reason and a sense of fairness. We will always have the capacity to kill one another in large numbers, but with effort we can safeguard the norms and institutions that have made war increasingly repugnant.”

Against the panoply of violent acts that humans commit, Pinker [suggests](#) that the better question is not why we do these things, but rather “What is it in our nature that allows us to refrain from all of these things?”⁴ Pinker’s proposal has been controversial. A Harvard colleague, psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton, a longtime researcher of violence and mass atrocity, has [rebutted](#) Pinker’s “decline of violence” argument, arguing that such violent events as Auschwitz and Hiroshima have been “defining events” in the twentieth and into the twenty-first centuries. Lifton finds in Pinker’s thesis a “terrible paradox,” in that while “for most people alive today, life is less violent than it has been in previous centuries, it is also the case that never have human beings been in as much danger of destroying ourselves collectively, of endangering the future of our species.”⁵

Lifton shares something of Pinker’s optimism about our capacity to refrain from violence—but not without an active effort toward nonviolence. In this regard, Lifton observes, “We are not helpless about our fate. There could not be a more crucial moment to draw upon our gradual taming of individual violence, along with our growing awareness of the grotesque consequences of numbed technological violence, to achieve lasting forms of what can be called peace.” In the current context of ongoing violence, however much reduced from past eras, Lifton’s suggestion is that the reduction of violence requires us to seek diligently and deliberately those “better angels of our nature” in an immediate and ongoing way—and, importantly, to pay attention to violence in its individual and interpersonal, as well as institutional and structural forms. In that sense, the need to overcome violence—and the rationale for teaching about violence, nonviolence, war, and peace—could not be more necessary, or more relevant.⁶

Practical Theology and Conflict Transformation

It was out of this set of concerns that we devised and taught the course “Overcoming Violence: Practical Theology and Conflict Resolution” at Harvard Divinity School in the sSpring of 2007. We are honored that the syllabus has been selected for publication in this issue of *Practical*

Matters. The course was an initiative of the [Boston Theological Institute](#) (BTI) and conceived and team-taught by the authors along with [Ed Rodman](#) of the Episcopal Divinity School, [Samuel Johnson](#) of the Boston University School of Theology, and [Ann Riggs](#) of the National Council of Churches. The immediate rationale for the course was to instantiate into the curriculum of the BTI consortium schools a course that would provide ways for students in the BTI to engage practically theologically the aims of the World Council of Churches’ “[Decade to Overcome Violence: Churches Seeking Reconciliation and Peace, 2000-2010.](#)”

If we were to do it again, we would likely substitute the phrase “conflict transformation” for “conflict resolution” in the course’s subtitle. “Conflict transformation” has more recently become the preferred term of art and practice for its humble acknowledgment that not all conflicts can always be resolved—or be resolved definitively and to the satisfaction of all parties. The Boston Theological Institute now offers a [certificate program](#) in Religion and Conflict Transformation for students in its consortium seminaries. The notion of transformation suggests a sense of the process—and, hopefully, the progress—towards peace, while also gesturing toward the transformation of hearts and conversion at the level of the spirit and soul that must take place for lasting peace to take hold. This insight is captured in Tom Massaro’s key summary of what he learned in teaching the course—namely, that “peace is more than the mere absence of war.”⁷ As Massaro further observes, “The call to Christians, and to all people of good will, is to disarm our hearts and to contribute to the establishment of peace through all aspects of our lives, including our spirituality and our ordinary habitual practices.”⁸

Subtitle aside, many of the themes and contours of our course would likely remain the same, with updates to reflect current events and concerns. The first set of concerns that we addressed in the course had to do with the *biological, psychological, and sociological* sources of violence. This interdisciplinary background material exposed themes that we returned to time and time again with our students in the course, and the literature in the area has continued to evolve.⁹ The biopsychosocial materials provided a necessary background for our inquiry into the roots of violence, for as Massaro aptly observes, “Nobody simply wakes up one morning and decides spontaneously to use deadly force. Hitlers, Pol Pots and bin Ladens are long in the making. Those who embark on violent courses of action most often reflect complex webs of influences, including warped patterns of gender relations, racial and ethnic subtexts, ideologies of hatred and histories of the tragic demonization of ‘othered’ groups.”¹⁰

From the science and social science of violence, the subject matter moved quickly into *theological and philosophical perspectives*, with particular attention to the ongoing relevance of Rene Girard’s concepts of desire, mimesis, and scapegoating in a splendid guest lecture by Robert Daly, S.J., of Boston College, another BTI consortium school. If Girard’s *Violence and the Sacred* stands as a stark analysis of the violence at the heart of the Christian tradition, and certainly other religions as well, then Robert Cover’s essay “Violence and the Word” is an equally seminal, though less well-known, testimony to the capacity for violence at the heart of law. Law and religion are

institutions that have historically done violence, but have also promoted peace and reconciliation. At their intersection, the course also examined new theories and practices of [restorative justice](#) in law and religion, as an evolution away from retributive forms of justice that have characterized both law and religion in eras past. The notion of restorative justice has also recently transformed the fields of international relations and conflict resolution, where [truth and reconciliation commissions](#), local customs of mediation and dispute resolution (both cultural and religious), and other forms of transformative mediation and conflict transformation have sprung up to achieve the *jus post bellum* about which Massaro has written.¹¹ Restorative justice, reconciliation, and forgiveness have become important requisites of the “Age of Apology”¹² that began to emerge in the twilight of the twentieth century.

From these institutional manifestations of violence and nonviolence, the course shifted toward particular individuals as models of nonviolence. Mahatma Gandhi and Howard Thurman emerged as key early twentieth-century avatars of nonviolence, mostly through the powerful resources assembled by authors Peter Ackerman and Jack Du Vall in their chronicle of the rise of the twentieth-century nonviolence movement in the book and accompanying documentary film [A Force More Powerful](#)—the latter of which was the catalyst for the multimedia component of our course. Ackerman and Du Vall begin their account with the rise of Gandhi’s nonviolence movement. [Howard Thurman](#), the noted theologian, civil rights leader, and first black dean of Marsh Chapel at Boston University, a BTI consortium member school, was an obvious addition. Thurman paid a visit to Gandhi during which Gandhi asked him to bring practices of nonviolence back to America. Thurman was also a teacher and mentor to [Martin Luther King, Jr.](#), another distinguished graduate of Boston University, who paid a visit to Gandhi’s birthplace in 1959, in a trip that was deeply influential in King’s own development of the theology and practice of nonviolence. Borrowing a theme from the acclaimed Spike Lee film, [Do the Right Thing](#), which was part of the course’s accompanying film series, we put King in dialogue with Malcolm X in their contrasting views of nonviolence.

From the neat line from Gandhi to Thurman and King, we moved to examine the lives and work of recent Nobel Peace Prize recipients for what they reveal about the new terrain of peace and nonviolence. In this connection, we read from the autobiographies of the Muslim Bangladeshi economist [Muhammad Yunus](#), who won the Nobel Peace Prize (notably the Peace Prize, not the Economics Prize) in 2006, along with the Grameen banks that he established for their development of microcredit practices that enabled many Bangladeshis—particularly women—to rise from poverty in the decades after civil war, famine, and floods. The late [Wangari Maathai](#), a Kenyan environmental activist, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004, for her “contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace,” in the words of the Nobel Committee, becoming the first environmentalist to win the prize. Even earlier, in 1992, indigenous rights activist [Rigoberta Menchu](#) of Guatemala won the Nobel Peace Prize for her promotion of the cultural rights of indigenous peoples in the context of Guatemala’s nearly four decade-long civil war, thereby bringing

indigenous and cultural rights into the list of requisites for peace. The autobiographies of these Nobel Peace laureates raised important connections between gender and peace, (and the legacy of Mathaai and Menchu was felt in the awarding of the prize to [three women](#) in 2011 “for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women’s rights to full participation in peace-building work”). Further, the autobiographies highlighted the evolving and broadening definition of peace as entailing freedom from economic, environmental, and cultural violence.

From considering various models of peace and nonviolence, the course moved to consideration of various issues and types of violence. These included *personal and domestic violence*, including [suicide](#) and various forms of [sexual violence](#); *health and environment*, including violence as a [global health issue](#) and the violence of [environmental degradation](#) and [economic injustice](#); *ethnic and racial violence*, including the connections between [race, ethnicity, and identity](#); and *war and terrorism*, including related issues of [just peacemaking](#) and [humanitarian relief](#). In the final unit of the course, we focused particularly on connections between religion, identity, and violence at the personal, interpersonal, and intergroup levels. At the course’s end, we framed the problem of *identity and violence* as located in the gap between the option for an identity based on retributive [memory](#) of the past, on the one hand, or a reconciliatory, hopeful, and future-oriented option of [forgiveness](#), on the other.

Intrusions of Art and Life: *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* and the Virginia Tech Massacre

These problems of identity and violence—personal, interpersonal, and communal—had been contemplated from the outset as the likely culmination of the course’s inquiry into violence, but our hunch in this regard was borne out by two events that occurred midway through the course. The first was the premier of the film *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib*, which documented a then still recent episode of the United States’ occupation of Iraq as part of the “War on Terror,” involving torture and prisoner abuse by members of the U.S. military, an event that was a turning point in public opinion on the part of many Americans, the majority of whom had supported the initial invasion of Iraq in 2003.¹³ The second was the shooting incident at Virginia Tech in which a mentally disturbed student of Korean American background, Cho Seung-Hui, murdered thirty-two members of the university community and injured twenty-five others before turning the gun on himself.

[Ghosts of Abu Ghraib](#), directed by Rory Kennedy, premiered at the Sundance Film Festival in January 2007 and was seen by a wider audience on the HBO cable network the following month. The documentary film begins with footage of the famous experiments conducted by Yale psychologist Stanley Milgram, beginning in 1961, into research subjects’ willingness to act against their own consciences in obeying apparently authoritative orders to inflict painful shocks to actors who convincingly expressed escalating levels of agony with each elevation in voltage.¹⁴ The

Milgram experiment footage prefaces infamous 2003 footage of the abuse of prisoners at the facility of Abu Ghraib by American military police guards during the Iraq War. The film contains extensive interviews with both the Iraqi prisoners who endured the abuse and the military police guards who enacted and documented it in graphic detail. It explores a range of theories accounting for the abuse, including the “bad apples” theory that the incidents were perpetrated by just a few individual soldiers gone wrong; the “*Animal House* on the night shift” theory, suggestive of a broader pattern of interaction between the MPs and their prisoners; and the Milgram “obedience to authority” theory, with its implication that the incidents of torture at Abu Ghraib were the result of military policies and government directives that condoned and perhaps even specifically commanded that torture take place.

The interviews with the individual military police guards locate culpability at both the individual and institutional levels. The individual guards admit a certain amount of guilt, but not always full responsibility. In an opening comment, one of the military personnel at Abu Ghraib states, “That place turned me into a monster. I was angry. . . . This being Abu Ghraib, you knew it could change your whole mind frame. If you go to Abu Ghraib for a few . . . if you’ve been in Iraq for a while, you become a robot.” The sense that place and the context made them into someone else is an overarching theme in many of the accounts. However, later on in the film, another military guard observes, “It just blew my mind how it was *normal*, you know, that it was just no big deal. It was just like another day at work. . . . And I am just sitting there saying to myself, ‘My God, what is happening to this place?’” As one of the guards puts it toward the film’s end, “That animalistic, that dark element in each of us is just brought out. It’s just a matter of, you know, are the elements right?” The question of whether the incident was normal or aberrational is never really resolved, but it haunts the film and occupied quite a bit of time in our class discussions.

Those discussions probed the relationship between individual and collective responsibility for Abu Ghraib, eventually turning to the questions of whether the Abu Ghraib incident reflected larger cultural patterns of violence in America and how the incidents have affected the United States’ standing in the world. Toward the end of the documentary, an international law expert observes, “These photographs from Abu Ghraib have come to define the United States. The U.S., which was viewed as, certainly, one of the principal advocates of human rights and the view of the dignity of human beings in the world, suddenly, is viewed as a principle expositor of torture.” In a similar vein, a naval general counsel laments, “The United States used to be the model, but it is no longer. If you adopt cruel treatment . . . if we embrace torture . . . we blur the distinction between ourselves and the terrorists.” In addition to this problem of distinctions, there is also the problem of popular disengagement. In a time of war on two fronts from which the American public has been largely disengaged, retired army colonel and military historian Andrew Bacevich has been a vocal proponent of the idea that the military both represents and is a reflection of America.¹⁵ This sort of “violence by proxy”—or “representative violence”—must also be taken into account when it comes to understanding collective responsibility for violence. The incidents so carefully documented in

Ghosts of Abu Ghraib offered the class the opportunity to think not only of direct violence, but also of the “representative violence” that is done in our name at the national and international levels.

The Virginia Tech shootings were another opportunity to reflect on violence and representation. Midway through our course, on April 16, 2007, university student Cho Seung-Hui¹⁶ embarked on a shooting rampage on the Virginia Tech campus that remains the deadliest shooting by a single gunman in U.S. history and the largest mass killing to ever take place on a university campus. As with the events of Abu Ghraib, there was a visual dimension to the crime. After shooting two students on campus in the early morning of April 16, Cho took a break, stopping by a local post office to mail a videotaped manifesto to the New York headquarters of the NBC news network, before returning to campus to continue the shooting. While the sheer number of complaints in Cho’s manifesto and the variety of ways in which his mental state had displayed itself in the years, weeks, and days leading up to the shooting make it difficult to attribute his state of mind to any one set of factors, it has been argued that there was a significant religious component to his anger.¹⁷ The videotaped manifesto was mailed under the name “A. Ishmael,” which some interpreted as reference (through the opening line of Herman Melville’s novel *Moby-Dick*, in which the narrator invites readers to “Call me Ishmael”) to the biblical story of Ishmael as the cast-out and abandoned son of Abraham. The manifesto also included rants against Christians that Cho may have intended as a rebellion against the Christian faith in which he was raised by his reportedly devout parents. At the same time, at one point Cho appropriated the Christian narrative of sacrifice in asserting, “Thanks to you I died like Jesus Christ, to inspire generations of the weak and defenseless people.” The fact that Cho was born in South Korea and moved to America with his parents at the age of eight also raised questions about whether Cho had suffered hostility or discrimination as a result of his status as a member of an immigrant, ethnic minority.¹⁸

In addition to these possible religious and ethnic motivations for Cho’s violence, attention also centered, largely retrospectively, on what were apparently fairly early signs of mental illness in Cho, beginning in his childhood in Korea. These manifestations included extreme shyness, selective mutism, social anxiety, and other behaviors which some psychological experts later identified as possible precursors of schizophrenia. At Virginia Tech, he had been removed by one professor from a class for “menacing” behavior. Having switched his major from business information technology to English by the time of his senior year, when he executed the attack, Cho had alarmed his English professors with violent writings and threatening behavior in class, which resulted in his being removed from one class and urged by several professors to seek counseling, including one professor who agreed to tutor Cho one-on-one before becoming too concerned about her safety to continue.¹⁹ Roommates and several classmates reported additional disturbing behavior, and Cho came to the attention of campus authorities for stalking three women on campus. Though Cho was deemed a danger to himself by a community health service and a judge, he received little mental health treatment and was never given an official diagnosis.

In scheduled class discussion sections in the days after the shooting, students in our course

opted to preempt previously scheduled topics with discussion of the connections between the Virginia Tech shootings and the subject matter of the course. For students who had experienced violence of various sorts, the Virginia Tech shooting raised painful memories and emotions. There is a presumption of safety that still attends many campuses of educational institutions, even in the aftermath of the high school shootings—of which Columbine is the most notorious²⁰—that raised concerns about campus safety for nearly a decade prior to Virginia Tech shootings. For many of our students, the idea of such a violent event taking place within the boundaries of a university community was itself a shock. For many, the Virginia Tech shooting seemed to represent a traumatic capstone to a decade that began with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and had at its midpoint the chaos after Hurricane Katrina that devolved into violence and disorder, in addition to such international incidents as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq and the ongoing conflicts in Sudan, the Congo, and other locales. The Virginia Tech shootings, set within the context of these other forms and manifestations of violence, suggested an order of magnitude and loss described most aptly in the words of then-Mayor of New York, Rudolph Giuliani, who, when asked to quantify the loss on 9/11, in a way that seem emblematic of the decade as a whole, replied that it was “More than we can bear.”

The premier of *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* and the Virginia Tech shootings were unanticipated interludes in our “Overcoming Violence” course, but they were nonetheless important testaments to the relevance of the subject matter, as well as opportunities for reflection. They illustrated the important connections between individual and institutional violence. They illustrated how violence is universal in its reach, but also deeply personal and cultural in its manifestation. The [National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States](#) (the “9/11 Commission”) described the inability of the United States government to anticipate the events of September 11 as a “failure of imagination.”²¹ Events such as Abu Ghraib and Virginia Tech, in their power to shock, also prompt us to “imagine better” both our own capacity for violence and the variety of forms that violence can take.

A Thousand Words: A Multimedia Pedagogy of Nonviolence

From the pictures that exposed the incidents at Abu Ghraib, to the chilling images contained in the videotaped manifesto of the Virginia Tech shooter, from the Internet feeds of masked terrorists beheading their captives, to social disorder in the aftermaths of natural disaster broadcast over the evening news, the visual dimension of violence and devastation has already come to dominate these early decades of the twenty-first century. If, as the saying goes, “a picture is worth a thousand words,” the pictures must be part of pedagogy, as well. With this in mind, we designed the course with a multimedia component in the form of a Thursday night film series to accompany the course.

A number of the film selections were documentaries that directly complemented material on

the syllabus. Among these were [A Force More Powerful](#), a documentary of the twentieth-century nonviolence movement which was our lead-in to material on Gandhi and other models of nonviolence and peace. [Bonhoeffer](#), director Martin Doblmeier's powerful documentary of the life and thought of the German Protestant theologian and Nazi resister, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, was also on our list, and the film's website is exemplary in its range of resources and as a model of multimedia pedagogy. Another biographical film that was produced but not yet widely available at the time that we planned the course, or it would surely have been included, is director Claudia Larson's documentary of the life and work of Catholic peace and social activist Dorothy Day. The film, titled [Dorothy Day: Don't Call Me a Saint](#), takes its subtitle from one of Day's wry remarks about the public reception of her work, to wit, "Don't call me a saint, I don't want to be dismissed so easily."

Three more films addressed topics of restorative justice, racial reconciliation, and environmental violence. The first of these, [A Justice that Heals](#), featured the story of a remarkable process of reconciliation initiated by a local Catholic priest and members of his congregation. A young Latino man, whose parents attended the church, murdered another young man, who was from a white family who had drifted away from the Church. Through a remarkable program of prison visitation, the congregation, later joined by the victim's mother, was able to achieve a reconciliation—across language, culture, and grief—between the families of the murderer and his victim. At the film's climax, illustrating the paradoxical way in which violence both divides and connects, the victim's mother says to her son's murderer, "You're a member of this family, whether you wanted to be or not, you are. You're like my own son."

On the cusp of its twentieth anniversary, Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* addressed the ongoing need for racial reconciliation in its depiction of a hot day that culminates in inflammatory remarks and an explosion of pent-up hostility in New York's Bedford Stuyvesant neighborhood. The character Radio Raheem's brass knuckle rings forming the words "Love" and "Hate" illustrate the starkness of the choices. A lesser known documentary film, [Green](#), filmed by director Laura Dunn in and around the chemical processing plants located in Louisiana's notorious "Cancer Alley" along the Mississippi River, depicted problems of environmental racism and economic injustice. The lush greenery of the swampland contrasts with more unnatural greens of the chemicals in the chemical plants' waste ponds, and the title is also suggestive of the green color of money involved in the selling out of poor neighborhoods to big industry.

Some of our film selections were still in production and could only be shown in fragments. These included director Katrina Browne's important and largely autobiographical film detailing the complicity of her colonial ancestors, the de Wolf family of Rhode Island, in the slave trade. [Traces of the Trade](#) features an important "family reunion" in which Browne and other family members visit slave trading sites in Africa and the Caribbean that were the basis of the family business. The deep connections between the de Wolf family and the Episcopal Church also suggest the institutional complicity of the church in the trade. Harvard Divinity School student Valarie Kaur's

documentary of the Sikh American experience of 9/11, [*Divided We Fall*](#), was also in the final stages of production. The film chronicles the rapidity by which Americans, fearful and shocked in the aftermath of the attacks, began to equate difference with danger and “turbans with terror” and explores the common values that can unite us as a religiously and culturally pluralistic society.

Nonviolence as a Continuing Challenge for Practical Theology

The course concluded with reflections on memory, identity, and forgiveness as central themes for understanding and coping with violence. In truth, it was difficult to know how, precisely, to end a course as wide-ranging and comprehensive as “Overcoming Violence.” As Petersen observed at the course’s end,

There is a need to move beyond a survey of violence to models for reconciliation and peace building. This necessitates analysis of what a just peace is and what this means in terms of human rights and a “restorative” or “transformative” justice. There is a need for an articulated spirituality of non-violence appropriate to our times, perhaps even an order of persons committed to non-violence such as in the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Peace building cannot happen apart from a climate of truth-telling as a means toward forgiveness and reconciliation. In all of this, churches, as well as individuals, must be more proactive in finding ways to serve as ‘ambassadors’ of peace (II Cor 5:19-20).²²

In that connection, it is worth highlighting an initiative that a group of students in the course took up as a special initiative and final project. This was the drafting of a “JustPeace Declaration” to be submitted to the World Council of Churches as an outcome document of the course. The product of meetings that took place throughout the course, the students stated their goal in the following manner: “We advocate the *imagining and subsequent creation of a deep peace*, a peace wherein the mind, body, and spirit are recognized as inextricably linked in terms of the individual, community, and nation. The *transformative catalyst* towards this imagined pacific landscape is located within the *space between the victim and victimizer*.”²³ Drawing on central course themes of memory, identity, and truth, they maintained:

Central to our conceptualization of *transformative space* is an awareness of the way in which we envision and define our community in relation to our own *past, present, and future*. Deep peace requires constant, truthful, transparent, and public reflection upon the victim/victimizer cycle and the ways in which our community has both failed and succeeded in breaking this pattern. . . . To become fully human is to live in the present with a *truthful knowledge of the past*, to be aware of the ways in which the *present is itself a process*, and to understand that in every process there is opportunity for *justice, redemption, and progress*. In this capacity, we recognize that our ‘future’ is defined by our courage to become fully human in the present and our willingness to act with *courage and humility*.

With a central focus on North Korea, then as now a place desperately in need of peace and reconciliation,²⁴ the students advocated a community approach to peace at both the local and global levels, calling for greater participation by faith communities in Track Two diplomacy alongside national governments and international bodies.²⁵ The “JustPeace Declaration” makes a number of more specific recommendations for achieving peace at the local and international levels with respect to the continuing isolation of North Korea from the community of nations and communities of faith. The concluding recommendation gets to the heart of the continuing need to construct and enact practical theologies of nonviolence and peace, namely through the creation and promotion of institutions “to train people of faith for grassroots activism and place them in situations to help mediate conflict.”

In the end, to return to the argument with which these reflections began, the students in the “Overcoming Violence” course seemed more inclined to side with Lifton than with Pinker. Even if violence can be documented to be on the historical decline, the manifestations of violence in our deeply connected world are often more vivid and more widely known. Our knowledge of violence and its many causes and effects presents us with choices and options for nonviolent agency. Today “ambassadors of peace” require both an understanding of the nature of violence and a practical theology of peace to overcome it. It is to this end that we hope our course will be an ongoing contribution and an aid in the development of additional practical pedagogies of peace.

(Endnotes)

* M. Christian Green would like to express her gratitude to the outgoing dean of Harvard Divinity School, William A. Graham (2002-2012), for his support of this course and other practical theological endeavors at HDS.

2 Steven Pinker, *The Better Angels of Our Nature: Why Violence Has Declined* (New York: Viking, 2011).

3 Joshua S. Goldstein and Steven Pinker, “War Is Really Going Out of Style,” *The New York Times*, December 17, 2011.

4 Carl Zimmer, “Profiles in Science—Steven Pinker—Human Nature’s Pathologist,” video interview, *The New York Times*, November 29, 2011, <http://video.nytimes.com/video/2011/11/28/science/100000001194711/steven-pinker.html?emc=eta1> (accessed April 9, 2012).

5 Robert Jay Lifton, “Invitation to Dialogue: Are We Less Violent?,” letter to the editor, *The New York Times*, January 3, 2012.

6 The literature on religion and violence, in particular, has continued to proliferate. For recent titles published since the conclusion of our course, see e.g. John D. Carlson and Jonathan H. Ebel, eds., *From Jeremiad to Jihad : Religion, Violence, and America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming 2012); James R. Lewis, *Violence and New Religious Movements* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Andrew R. Murphy, ed., *The Blackwell Companion to Religion and Violence* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); Ulrich Beck, *A God of One’s Own: Religion’s Capacity for Peace and the Potential for Violence* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2010); Jack David Eller, *Cruel Creeds, Virtuous Violence: Religious Violence Across Culture and History* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2010); John Teehan, *In the Name of God: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Ethics and Violence* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Jennifer L. Jefferis, *Religion and Political Violence: Sacred Protest in the Modern World* (London: Routledge, 2009); Kathryn McClymond, *Beyond Sacred Violence: A Comparative Study of Sacrifice* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins, 2008); Lisa Isherwood and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Weep Not for Your Children: Essays on Religion and Violence* (London: Equinox, 2008); Bryan Rennie and Philip L. Tite, *Religion, Terror, and Violence: Religious Studies Perspectives* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religion and Violence*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008); and James K. Wellman, Jr., *Belief and Bloodshed: Religion and Violence Across Time and Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007).

7 Thomas Massaro, S.J., “A Catholic Perspective on Overcoming Violence,” September 9, 2007, paper on file with the authors.

8 Ibid.

9 Were we to update this area of the syllabus we might well include Pinker’s *The Better Angels of Our Nature*, along with such recent studies as Frans de Waal, *The Age of Empathy: Nature’s Lessons for a Kinder Society* (New York: Crown, 2009); Jeremy Rifkin, *The Empathetic Civilization: The Race to Global Consciousness in a World in Crisis* (New York: Tarcher, 2009); and Michael E. McCoullough, *Beyond Revenge: The Evolution of the Forgiveness Instinct* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2008).

10 Massaro, “A Catholic Perspective.”

11 See Thomas Massaro, S.J., and Thomas Shannon, *Catholic Perspectives on Peace and War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

12 See especially R. L. Brooks, “The Age of Apology,” in *When Sorry Isn’t Enough: The Controversy Over Apologies and Reparations for Human Injustice*, ed. Roy L. Brooks (New York: NYU Press, 1999), 3-11. See also Mark Gibney, Rhoda E. Howard-Hassmann, Jean-Marc Coicaux, and Niklaus Steiner, eds., *The Age of Apology: Facing Up to the Past* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007) and Daniel Philpott, ed., *The Politics of Past Evil: Religion, Reconciliation, and Dilemmas of Transitional Justice* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006).

13 Nearly 60% of the United States’ population supported the invasion of Iraq, with the approval of the United Nations, in March 2003, and nearly half supported the invasion even without U.N. support. Richard Benedetto, “Poll: Most Back War but Want U.N. Support,” *USA Today*, March 16, 2003.

14 The results are described in Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (1974; repr., New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2009).

15 See Andrew Bacevich, *The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) and *Washington Rules: America’s Path to Permanent War* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2010). The moral and political connection between Americans and military that represent them—against the many forces that have tended to isolate the current all-volunteer army from American society since the Vietnam War—is a pervasive theme in Bacevich’s writing.

16 It is interesting to consider whether the media’s vacillation between Korean convention of placing the surname first and a more Americanized version in which the order is reversed—and there was a preference in many media outlets for the former—served to make Cho seem more “foreign” and less a product of American culture than perhaps was the case.

17 For an important discussion of the religious significance of the Virginia Tech shootings, see Grace Kao, “Of Tragedy and Its Aftermath: The Search for Religious Meaning in the Shootings at Virginia Tech,” in *From Jeremiad to Jihad: Religion, Violence, and America*, ed. John D. Carlson and Jonathan H. Ebel (Berkeley: University of California Press, forthcoming 2012).

18 It should also be noted that Cho’s Korean background was of particular interest to students in the course. Several students were themselves of Korean or Korean-American background, and, as indicated below, North Korea was selected as a case study for students who opted to participate in the group discussions that produced the “JustPeace Declaration” that was an outcome of the course.

19 For the tutor’s account of her interactions with Cho and the larger response to and lessons of the Virginia

Tech shootings, see Lucinda Roy, *No Right to Remain Silent: The Tragedy at Virginia Tech* (New York: Harmony, 2009).

20 For an insightful analysis of the Columbine shooting, see Dave Cullen, *Columbine* (New York: Twelve, 2010).

21 National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, (July 22, 2004), 356.

22 See Deenabandhu Manchala, ed., *Nurturing Peace: Theological Reflections on Overcoming Violence* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005).

23 “JustPeace Declaration—May 2007,” draft declaration written by students in the “Overcoming Violence” course and on file with the authors (emphases added here and below).

24 Two of the participating students were Korean and had served in the South Korean army—thus bringing valuable knowledge and experience to this component of the course.

25 A similar approach has recently been recommended by group of prominent scholars and religious leaders through the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. See R. Scott Appleby, Richard Cizik, and Thomas Winwright, eds. *Engaging Faith Communities Abroad: A New Imperative for U.S. Foreign Policy* (Chicago: Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 2010).

OVERCOMING VIOLENCE: PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

HDS 2829, Spring 2007

Mondays and Wednesdays, 10:00-11:30 (plus film series & hour to be arranged)

Harvard Divinity School, Andover Hall, Room 102

Professors: M. Christian Green (HDS), Rodney Petersen (BTI), Thomas Massaro (WJST), Ed Rodman (EDS), Samuel Johnson (BUSTh), and Ann Riggs (NCCC)

COURSE SYLLABUS

OFFICE HOURS AND CONTACT INFORMATION

M. CHRISTIAN GREEN, HDS Faculty: Generally on campus and in office (Andover 308) Monday through Wednesday. Official office hour time slots will be available Monday and Tuesday afternoons from 1:00 to 5:00 P. M. Generally, meetings should be arranged by e-mailing me directly to arrange a time within those hours for you to stop by. Meetings outside of those times may be scheduled on a case-by-case basis, as necessary. You may reach me by e-mail at cgreen@hds.harvard.edu or by phone at 617-384-7872. In the event that you need to reach me and do not find me in my office, you may contact my faculty assistant, Katherine Lou, by phone at 617-495-4265 or by e-mail at: klou@hds.harvard.edu for further assistance. Her office and my mailbox are in Andover 302. And in general, should you walk by and find my office door open, feel free to drop in.

RODNEY L. PETERSEN, BTI Director: Available by appointment through the BTI Office (617-527-4880 x2) and through email: petersen@bostontheological.org.

THOMAS MASSARO, SJ, WJST Faculty: email: tmassaro@wjst.edu; Office phone: 617-492-1960, ext 182; Home phone: 617-876-1233; Office hours: Mondays, 1:30- 4:00, Thursdays, 10:15-11:45. Please consult appointment book at Weston reception desk to make appointments.

ED RODMAN, EDS Faculty: By appointment: 617-8683450; email: erodman@eds.edu.

SAMUEL JOHNSON, BUSTh Field Education Director: By appointment: 617-353-9699; email: sjohnsn@bu.edu.

ANN RIGGS, Director, Faith and Order, NCCCUSA: Available by appointment through the National Council of Churches Faith and Order Office (202-544-2350 x203) and through email: ariggs@ncccusa.org.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND OBJECTIVES

The twentieth century has been described as the most violent century in history. The problem of violence has recurred anew in this century with the “War on Terror” and genocide in Darfur. Two international bodies, the World Council of Churches and the World Health Organization, began the new millennium by calling for renewed attention to violence and for theological and political solutions. Yet despite recent calls for apology, forgiveness, and reconciliation, our policies and theologies continue to waver between retributive and restorative approaches. This course will survey classic understandings of violence and its effects, along with contemporary writings in theology, law, politics, and public policy. In exploring various movements in political theology, restorative justice, and conflict resolution, we will examine violence as a problem of deep religious and spiritual significance for Christian churches and other religious traditions, and for the health of the human community in the 21st century.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

In addition to regular participation in class, students have three options for fulfilling course requirements. One of the following three options (or a combination thereof) should be chosen in consultation with and with the approval of a course instructor. There will be no final examination in this course.

Option #1 Three Short Papers:

(1) Paper of 3-5 pp. on your approach to violence as guided by Units I and II of this syllabus due on *Monday, March 5*.

(2) Paper of 5-10 pp. framed by Unit III. This paper may be a sermon, essay, or analysis of the relationship between individual effort and work to overcome violence. This may also be a case study of a specific encounter with violence and the effort to overcome it. This paper is due on *Wednesday, March 21*.

(3) Paper of 10-15 pp. applying your approach to issues suggested by Unit IV of this syllabus. This paper is due by the end of Reading Period, *Wednesday, May 16*.

Option #2 Final Paper:

A paper of 20-25 pages is due by the end of Reading Period. The topic of the paper is to be negotiated with one of the course instructors and initial bibliography submitted before the HDS Spring Break (March 25–31). This project may take a variety of print, audio, and visual forms.

Option #3 International Ecumenical Peace Convocation & Statement

Students may join together in groups of three (or more) to strategize and develop materials for an International Ecumenical Peace Convocation. This should provide for a 2 hour mock assembly at which other students will be welcome to attend. A Statement

to be defended should be developed, oral case made with appropriate précis developed for submission. (In 2011, the WCC will hold an International Ecumenical Peace Convocation. All statements drawn up in theology schools and submitted for use will be used in the development of such a Statement in the summer of 2008 for consideration by the churches.) Students electing this option should consult with faculty and prepare a proposal prior to Spring Break.

SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN WORK VIA E-MAIL IS STRONGLY ENCOURAGED.

Electronic instead of hard-copy submission prevents you from having to decipher your professor's love it-or-hate it handwriting and allows you to receive extensive written comments in an attractive red font in an electronic version that will be returned to you. Most students find this to be of great value, though there have been some debates over the appropriate font color. Normally the process works smoothly, and you will receive e-mail confirmation that your paper has been received. In the rare case in which there is a software incompatibility, you may be asked to submit your document in another electronic format or to make alternative arrangements for its delivery.

OTHER PROCEDURAL ISSUES

(1) Attendance—If you are registered as a full-time student, it is expected that you have arranged your work, family, and other responsibilities in such a way that you can attend class sessions and scheduled discussion sections. Regular attendance and participation at all classes, discussion sections, and required film events is thus essential. We will not be taking attendance, as I believe this should not be necessary at the graduate stages of education where regular attendance is presumed. Infrequent attendance does not go unnoticed and should, ideally, be accounted for in an *e-mail message to one of the course faculty* accounting for your absence. While no particular percentage of your course grade is being specified for classroom participation, students who participate fully as citizens of the classroom may, at the instructors' discretion, expect to receive an *additional third to half grade* for their final course grade. Further, *written work for the class should reflect your thoughtful engagement with and analysis of course themes*, which is difficult to achieve if you have not been a regular participant in the class.

(2) Auditing—The HDS regulations are very flexible with respect to auditors. We are prepared to be similarly flexible with the following provisos. First, *informal auditors* (who will not be listing this course on their study cards) are welcome, but should clarify their status with me at the beginning of the course. Second, *formal auditors* (who will be listing the course on their study cards) should plan to *attend the vast majority of the classes*. (Attendance of less than 50% of the classes should, for example, be deemed insufficient.) The thinking here is that someone who audits the course formally should not have to make up an answer out of whole cloth if a hypothetical job interviewer looking at that student's transcript posed the question: What did you learn in the course "Overcoming Violence"? Small discussion sections, if course enrollment justifies their existence, are open to but optional for both kinds of auditors.

(3) Papers in Fulfillment of the Requirements of This Class and Another—Occasionally, students will take classes whose subject matter overlaps to such a degree that they would like to write a final paper that fulfills the requirements of both. I am not opposed to this, but the Student Handbook indicates that the formal guideline at HDS is that students should *clear this with the professors in both classes*. My own guideline here is that the paper submitted for my class should *clearly address themes of this class*. In some cases, extra length may be advisable for a paper submitted for two classes, so as to adequately address the themes of both classes.

(4) Plagiarism—Instances of plagiarism in written work for this course will be taken very seriously. Students who plagiarize the thoughts of others without sufficient acknowledgment or citation can expect penalties up to and including a *failing grade for the course* and a *report to the relevant administrators and disciplinary bodies* in their home institutions in the BTI.

SCHEDULE OF CLASSES AND READINGS

General Note on Readings:

R = reading available at Andover-Harvard Library reserve desk

W = reading available on course website on “Course” page, filed in folders by Week

Highlighted Author/Title = Required or recommended book available at the Harvard Divinity School Bookstore (first floor of Divinity Hall) and on reserve at the Andover-Harvard Library (first floor of Andover Hall)

Week 1—Introduction

January 31— Introduction (Green, Petersen, Massaro, Rodman, Johnson, Riggs)

- Opening statements and introduction by the faculty members.
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Suggestions for Practical Theology:

A class folder is available on line for resources and suggestions in practical theology. Initial suggestions are noted in this syllabus.

Ron Kraybill, *Transforming the Peacebuilder*, 2006 Version (See course instructors for copies). Professor, Conflict Transformation Program, Eastern Mennonite University

UNIT I – PHILOSOPHICAL AND THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO VIOLENCE

Week 2—The Phenomenon of Violence: Philosophy, Sociology, and Psychology

February 5 – Evolutionary Biological and Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives (Green)

Readings:

- **R** Konrad Lorenz, *On Aggression* (1963), chs 3-5 (What Aggression Is Good For; The Spontaneity of Aggression; Habit, Ritual, and Magic)
- **R** Martin Daly and Margo Wilson, *Homicide*, chs. 1 (Homicide and Human Nature), 10 (Retaliation and Revenge), and 12 (On Cultural Variation)
- **R** Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, pp. 25-43 (Dialogue with Jürgen Habermas) and 85-136 (Dialogue with Jacques Derrida)
- **R** Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, chs. 2 (Violence, Mourning, and Politics) and 5 (Precarious Life).

February 7 – Twentieth Century Classics (Petersen)

Readings:

- **R** Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, chs. 5-8 (selections on aggressiveness, death instinct, civilization, guilt, instincts, repetition compulsion, religion, unconsciousness).
- **R** Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence* (1908), chs. III (Prejudices Against Violence), VI (Ethics of Violence), and Appendix II (Apology for Violence)
- **R** Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, pp. 35-106 (Concerning Violence).
- **Hannah Arendt**, *On Violence*, ch.1.
- **R** Jacques Ellul, *Violence*, ch. 1.

Week 3 – The Phenomenon of Violence: Theological Considerations

February 12 – Violence Portrayed in Religious Traditions (Petersen)

Readings:

- **W** George Huntston Williams, “Four Modalities of Violence,” 16:1-2 *Journal of Church and State* (1974) Pt. 1 and Pts. 2-3, 1:14-30, 2:237-61.
- **R** Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, II, 5 (The Beatitudes).
- **Marjorie Suchocki**, *The Fall to Violence*, Chs. 2 (Rebellion Against Creation) and 5 (Sin Through Violence)
- **Miroslav Volf**, *Exclusion and Embrace*, pp. 13-98, 99-165.
- **W** Rodney Petersen, “Branding Identity: Church as Neighborhood Center for Forgiveness and Reconciliation and for Restorative Justice,” in Emmanuel Clapsis, ed., *Violence and Christian Spirituality*

February 14 – Rene Girard, Violence, and the Sacred (Guest: Prof. Robert Daly, BC)

Readings:

- **Rene Girard**, *Violence and the Sacred*, chs. 1 (The Sacrifice), 2 (The Sacrificial Crisis), 4 (The Origins of Myth and Ritual), 10 (The Gods, the

Dead, the Sacred, and Sacrificial Substitution), and 11 (The Unity of All Rites).

- **R** Mark Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice. A Theology of the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006): 1-36.
- **R** Fred Smith, "A Prophetic Religious Education for Y2K and Beyond: And Black Boys Shall See Visions," in Rodney Petersen, ed., *Theological Literacy for the Twenty-first Century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002): 292-310.

Suggestions for Practical Theology

Why Violence? Why Not Peace? A Study Guide to help individuals and groups in the churches to reflect and act in the Decade to overcome Violence (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2002): 24 pp.

UNIT II – LEGAL AND STRUCTURAL REMEDIES TO VIOLENCE

Week 4 – Violence Viewed Within Broader Christian Theological Frameworks

February 19—NO CLASS—PRESIDENTS' DAY

February 21 – The Functions of Law and Grace (Massaro, Riggs)

Readings:

- **R** J. Denny Weaver, "Atonement and the Gospel of Peace," in Enns, Holland and Riggs, eds., *Seeking Cultures of Peace*, pp.109-123.
- **Deenabandhu Manchala, ed., *Nurturing Peace***
- **R** John D. Rempel and Jeffrey Gros, eds., *The Fragmentation of the Church and Its Unity in Peacemaking*, chs. by Eric W. Gritsch, "Church Unity and Peacemaking: A Lutheran Perspective," and John D. Rempel, "The Unity of the Church and the Christian Peace Witness: A Mennonite Perspective."

Korean Christianity is one of the most dynamic forms of Christianity alive in the world today. Korean Christians see themselves as “mediators” between the first and third worlds. Issues of relationship between North and South Korea are also shaping global politics. Our interest in violence needs to take into account a Korean perspective for religious and political reasons.

2006-2007 Costas Consultation in Global Mission “Mission and Reconciliation in the Korean Church”

Dates: 23 – 24 February (22 February advance KIATS Session)

Location: Schools of the Boston Theological Institute, including HDS (Thursday) and Andover Newton Theological School (Friday afternoon and Saturday morning).

Note: In association with the Korean Institute for Advanced Theological Studies the BTI is planning a workshop in Korea from May 27 – June 10. Watch the BTI Newsletter and website for updates on this possible venture for late May 2007.

Week 5 –Law, Religion, and Restorative Justice

February 26—Violence and the Law (Green)

Readings:

- **R** Robert Cover, “Violence and the Word,” in *Narrative, Violence, and the Law*, pp. 203-38.
- **R** Patricia Williams, *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*, chs. 4 (Teleology on the Rocks) and 12 (On Being the Object of Property)
- **Martha Minow**, *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness*, esp. chs. 2 (Vengeance and Forgiveness) and 6 (Facing History)
- **R** Austin Sarat, ed., *Law, Violence, and the Possibility of Justice*, chs. 1 (Situating Law Between the Realities of Violence and the Claims of Justice), 2 (The Vicissitudes of Law’s Violence), and 6 (Why the Law is Also Nonviolent)

February 28—From Retributive to Restorative Justice (Petersen)

Readings:

- **R** Michael Hadley, ed., *The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice*, pp.1-30, 119-142.
- **R** Christopher Marshall, *Beyond Retribution*, pp. 1-144.
- **R** Daniel Van Ness and Karen Strong, *Restoring Justice*, pp. 1-30.
- **R** Walter Wink, *The Powers That Be*, pp. 1-62.

Suggestions for Practical Theology

Restorative justice exercises: Begin with Howard Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2002). Additional exercises for use among small groups will be handed out in class.

UNIT III – MODELS, MOVEMENTS, AND MEANS

Week 6 – Models, Movements and Means to Overcoming Violence

March 5 – Mahatma Gandhi, Howard Thurman, and the Centennial of Nonviolence (Petersen and Rodman)

Readings:

- **R** Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, *A Force More Powerful*, pp. 61-112, 305-334.
- **R** Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited*.
- **R** Anthony da Silva, SJ, “Through Nonviolence to Truth: Gandhi’s Vision of Reconciliation,” in Helmick and Petersen, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, pp. 305-327.

March 7 – Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and the American Civil Rights Movement (Rodman and Riggs)

Readings:

- **Susan E. Davies and Sister Paul Teresa Hennessee, SA, eds., *Ending Racism in the Church***

R Martin Luther King, James M. Washington, ed., *Testament of Hope*, (readings to be announced)

R Malcolm X, George Breitman, ed., *Malcolm X Speaks* (readings TBA)

W Michael Haynes, *Models for Ministry Series, Ministry in the 21st Century Series*, BTI, 2004.

Week 7 – Models, Movements and Means to Overcoming Violence

March 12 – The Democratic Tide and the Age of Apology (Petersen and Green)

Readings:

- **R** Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, *A Force More Powerful*, pp. 457-506.
- **R** R.L. Brooks “The Age of Apology,” in R. L. Brooks, ed., *When Sorry Isn’t Enough*, pp. 3-11.
- **R** Daniel Philpott, “Beyond Politics as Usual,” and Nicholas Wolterstorff, “The Place of Forgiveness in the Actions of the State,” in Philpott, ed., *The Politics of Past Evil*, pp. 11-44, 87-112.

- **R** Tina Rosenberg, *The Haunted Land: Facing Europe's Ghosts After Communism*, "Introduction" and "Haunted Lands."

March 14 – No Justice, No Peace: Economic and Environmental Rights as Nonviolence (Green, Rodman and Riggs)

Readings:

- **R** Mohammad Yunus, *Banker to the Poor*, pp. 33-83, 191-212.
- **R** Wangari Maathai, *Unbowed* (Knopf, 2006): 154-229, 277-295.
- **R** Rigoberta Menchu, *I, Rigoberta Menchu*, ch. 7, 13, 17-19, 24, 27, 30, 33-34.
- **R** Nicholas Hildyard, "Blood, Babies and the Social Roots of Conflict," in Mohammed Suliman, ed., *Ecology, Politics and Violent Conflict*, pp. 3-24.
- **W** Wangari Maathai, "Planting the Future," (interview with Wangari Maathai) *Speaking of Faith*, December 21, 2006.
- **W** Mohammad Yunus, "Nobel Lecture," December 10, 2006.

Suggestions for Practical Theology

A Mennonite Statement and Study on Violence (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1998); see also Dale W. Brown, *Biblical Pacifism* (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 2003).

UNIT IV – ISSUES

Week 8 – Personal and Domestic Violence

March 19—Suicide, Martyrdom and Self-Destruction (Petersen)

Readings:

- **R** Emil Durkheim, *Suicide*, pp. 57-144.
- **James Gilligan**, *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic*.

March 21—Sexual and Domestic Violence (Green)

Readings:

- **R** Andrea Dworkin, *Intercourse*, Pt. III (Power, Status, and Hate).
- **R** John Stoltenberg, *Refusing to Be a Man*, Part I (The Ethics of Male Sexual Identity).
- **R** Catharine MacKinnon, *Are Women Human?*, 18 (Rape, Genocide, and Women's Human Rights) and 22 (Genocide's Sexuality).
- **Marie Fortune**, *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited*, Chs. 1-4 (can skim biblical material in first half of Ch. 3).

NO CLASS MARCH 26 & 28—HDS SPRING BREAK

Week 9 – Health and the Environment

April 2 – Violence and Health (Green)

Readings:

- **W** World Health Organization, *World Report on Violence and Health*, executive summary.
- **R** Sandra Bloom, *Creating Sanctuary*, esp. ch. 1 (Trauma Theory: Deconstructing the Social) and 4 (Creating Sanctuary: Reconstructing the Social).
- **R** Gary Gunderson, *Deeply Woven Roots*, Ch. 1.

April 4 – Spoiling the “Tent”: Brown Fields in Urban Boston (Rodman and Massaro)

Readings:

- **R** David Hollenbach, *Common Good and Christian Ethics*, pp. 32-61, 173-211.

R Chuck Collins and Felice Yeskel, with United for a Fair Economy, ed., *Economic Apartheid In America* (readings TBA)

Suggestions for Practical Theology

National Religious Partnership on the Environment website has links to accessible theological, faith-rooted practical resources, information on conferences and congregational/parish programs from the partners: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Evangelical Environmental Network, National Council of Churches and Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life <http://nrpe.org/> and <http://www.usccb.org/sdwp/ejp/> (for some reason the link to the USCCB from nrep.org doesn't work correctly).

Holy Week for Orthodox, Latin & Protestant Christians**Week 10 — Issues of Ethnicity and Race**

April 9 – Destruction of Neighbor: Ethnicity and Identity (*Guest: Keelan Downton, NCC*)

Readings:

- **R** Theo Tschuy, “Focal Points for Further Reflection,” in *Ethnic Conflict and Religion: Challenge to the Churches*, pp.135-156.
- **R** Raymond Helmick, SJ, “Does Religion Fuel or Heal in Conflicts?” and Geraldine Smyth, OP, “Brokenness, Forgiveness, Healing and Peace in Ireland,” in Helmick and Petersen, eds., *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, pp. 81-96, 329-360.

April 11 – Destruction of Neighbor: Race and Identity (Rodman)

Readings:

R Alvin F. Poussaint and Amy Alexander, *Lay My Burden Down* (readings TBA).

W Rodney Petersen, “Mission in the Context of Racism, Restorative Justice and Reconciliation,” in Jeyaraj, Pazmino and Petersen, *The Antioch Agenda*.

Week 11 – Just War, Terrorism and Peace

April 16 – Just War Theory in Evolution and Context (Massaro, Riggs and Simion)

Readings:

- **R** Lisa Cahill, *Love Your Enemies*, pp. 55-118.
- **R** John H. Erickson, “An Orthodox Peace Witness?” in Rempel and Gros, eds., *The Fragmentation of the Church and its Unity in Peacemaking*, pp. 48-58.
- **Tom Massaro**, *Catholic Perspectives on War and Peace*, 87-106, 107-121.
- **W** H.H. Pope Shenouda III, “Diabolic Wars,” pp. 1-189 (skim).
- **W** H.H. Pope Shenouda III, “Contemplations on the Ten Commandments: Vol 3. The Sixth Commandment.”

April 18 – Terrorism and Humanitarian Relief (Guest Lecturers)

Readings:

- **Mark Juergensmayer**. *Terror in the Mind of God*, Ch. 1 (Terror and God) and 7-11 (The Logic of Religious Violence).
- **R** David Little, ed., *Peacemakers in Action* (reading TBA).
- **R** Jessica Stern, *Terror in the Name of God*, Pt. I, esp. chs. 1 (Alienation) and 2 (Humiliation).
- **R** Samantha Power, *A Problem from Hell* (optional reading).

Suggestions for Practical Theology

Receive One Another. Hospitality in Ecumenical Perspective, Diane Kessler, ed. (Geneva: WCC, 2005); see also: Richard Lischer, *The End of Words: The Language of Reconciliation in a Culture of Violence (The Lyman Beecher Lectures on Preaching)* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

UNIT V – CONSTRUCTING A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

Week 12 – Religion, Identity and Violence

April 23—Self/Other Conflict and Personal Identity (Petersen)

Readings:

- **Marjorie Suchocki**, *The Fall to Violence*, ch. 8 (Guilt and Freedom) and 9 (Forgiveness and Transformation).
- **R** Donna Hicks, "The Role of Identity Reconstruction in Promoting Reconciliation," in Helmick and Petersen, *Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, pp.129-150.
- **Geiko Muller-Fahrenholz**, *The Art of Forgiveness*.

April 25—Memory, Forgiveness, and Social Identity (Green)

Readings:

- Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Pt. III, ch. 3 and Epilogue.
- **Miroslav Volf**, *The End of Memory* (chapters of interest TBA).
- **Flora Keshgegian**, *Redeeming Memories*, chs. 3 ("I Remember, It Happened": Retrieving Voices and Reconstructing Histories), 4 (The Call to Remembrance and Witness in Contemporary Theology), and 5 (The Church as a Community of Remembrance and Witness).
- **Flora Keshgegian**, *Time for Hope*, chs. 2 (Outside the Lines: Contemporary Threats and Challenges) and 4 (Black Holes and Fractured Fairy Tales).

Suggestions for Practical Theology

Antonios Kireopoulos, ed. *FOR THE PEACE OF THE WORLD: A CHRISTIAN CURRICULUM ON INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS* (NY: National Council of Churches' Friendship Press, 2005).

Essays, Bible studies, prayers, litanies and other worship resources.

NO CLASSES AFTER THIS TIME

TEXTS AND RESOURCES***Books Available at the Bookstore for Purchase ("REQUIRED")***

Davies, Susan, and Paul Teresa Hennessee, eds. *Ending Racism in the Church* (Cleveland: United Church Press, 1998).

Keshgegian, Flora. *Redeeming Memories: A Theology of Healing and Transformation*

(Nashville: Abingdon, 2000).

Gilligan, James. *Violence: Reflections on a National Epidemic* (New York: Vintage, 1996).

Juergensmayer, Mark. *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003).

Manchala, Deenabandhu, ed. *Nurturing Peace: Theological Reflections on Overcoming Violence* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005).

Minow, Martha. *Between Vengeance and Forgiveness: Facing History After Genocide and Mass Murder* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1999).

Volf, Miroslav. *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006).

Books Available at the Bookstore for Purchase (“RECOMMENDED”)

Arendt, Hannah. *On Violence* (Harvest Books, 1970).

Girard, Rene. *Violence and the Sacred*, Patrick Gregory, trans. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979).

Jeffrey Gros and John D. Rempel, eds., *The Fragmentation of the Church and Its Unity in Peacemaking* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001).

Fortune, Marie M. *Sexual Violence: The Sin Revisited* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2005).

Keshgegian, Flora. *Time for Hope: Practices for Living in Today’s World* (New York: Continuum, 2006).

Massaro, Thomas and Shannon, ThomasA. *Catholic Perspectives on War and Peace* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

Muller-Fahrenholz, Geiko. *Art of Forgiveness: Theological Reflections on Healing and Reconciliation* (WCC Publications, 1997).

Suchocki, Marjorie Hewitt. *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1995).

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

OPTIONAL THURSDAY FILM SERIES

Andover 102 at 6:00 PM (unless otherwise indicated)

Week 1—Introduction

No film this week.

Week 2— Philosophical, Sociological, and Psychological Perspectives(February 5)

No film this week.

Week 3— Decade of Violence, Century of Nonviolence, Part 1 (Mon., February 12, Sperry)

Part 1: “A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict” PBS (2000)

Website: <http://www.aforcemorepowerful.org/>

Week 4— Decade of Violence, Century of Nonviolence, Part 2 (Wed., February 21, Sperry)

Part 2: “A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict” PBS (2000)

Website: <http://www.aforcemorepowerful.org/>

Week 5—Violence: The Theological Challenge (Thurs., March 1, Andover 102)

“Bonhoeffer” Dir. Martin Doblmeier (2003)

Website: <http://www.bonhoeffer.com/thefilm.htm>

Week 6—Restorative Justice (Thurs., March 8, Andover 102)

“A Justice that Heals” Dir. Jay Shefsky (2000)

Website: http://www.reentrymediaoutreach.org/jth_pn.htm

Week 7—Models, Movements and Means: Malcolm and Martin (Thurs., March 15, And. 102)

“Do the Right Thing” Dir. Spike Lee (1989)

Week 8—Models, Movements and Means: Enviro, Ecol, & Econ (Thurs., March 22, And.102)

“Green” Dir. Laura Dunn (2000)

Website: <http://www.newenglandfilm.com/news/archives/03january/dunn.htm>

News/interview clips of Menchu, Maathai, and Yunus (60 Minutes?)

Week 9—The Legacy of Slavery (Thurs., April 5, Andover 102)

“Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North” Dir. Katrina Browne (2006)

Website: <http://www.tracesofthetrade.org/>

Week 10—War (*Thurs, April 12, Andover 102*)

“Iraq in Fragments” Dir. James Longley (2006)

Website: <http://www.iraqinfragments.com/>

Week 11—Terrorism (*Thurs., April 19, Andover 102*)

“Paradise Now” Dir. Hany Abu-Assad (2005)

Website: <http://wip.warnerbros.com/paradisenow/>

Week 12—Religion, Identity and Violence (*Thurs., April 26, Andover 102*)

“Divided We Fall” Prod. Valarie Kaur and Sharat Raju (2006)

Website: <http://www.dwf-film.com/>

OVERCOMING VIOLENCE: PRACTICAL THEOLOGY AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Week 3—Discussion Questions

(1) Aggressive by Nature or Culture—What do you make of the evolutionary psychological and psychoanalytic arguments that we have seen in Lorenz, Wilson and Daly, Freud, and to a lesser extent in the brief evolutionary psychology discussion in Suchocki, to the effect that there exists a kernel of aggression that is fundamental to our animal/human nature? What does it mean to make universal claims about human nature at all? How does the “aggressive by nature” argument connect to theological notions of original sin, total human depravity, and the like, such as can be found in the Christian tradition? What is the relationship between nature and culture when it comes to aggression and violence?

(2) Vulnerability and Precarious Lives—Even as she eschews universals, Judith Butler invites us to consider vulnerability and our precariousness in the “face” of the other as issues of common and normative concern for all of us. This is a major challenge to ethics built on honor, shame, and respect or its lack. What do you see as the key sources or causes of our vulnerability to violence today at this pinnacle of progress and evolution known as the 21st century?

(3) Events and Effective History—In Giovanna Borradori’s questions to Derrida and Habermas and in the classic 20th century treatments of violence that we have begun to consider, some events and some dates seem to correspond to violence more than others in our minds. Which dates/events do you take to be “major” in our thinking about violence, either historically or in the present day? Why do these dates/events loom so powerfully in our minds? What are the lessons we take from them?

(4) Tolerance and Hospitality—The notion of tolerance has often been well-received in classical liberal political and even religious theory. Think of Locke and Voltaire. Yet considerable questions have been raised about tolerance and toleration today. What do you think of the question of toleration as it was asked of Derrida and Habermas, particularly as contrasted with the notion of “hospitality”? What concepts seem especially valuable in mediating our relationships to others who are different from us, or who are our “others,” today?

(5) Economics, Environment, and Expanding the Definition of Violence—This course from the get-go, in some of the topics and readings included, and particularly as suggested in the Sorel and Fanon readings positing capitalist economics and colonialism as types or sources of vio-

lence, invites you to think about violence in broad terms. What are the major types or sources of violence that you see in the world today? (And ones on which you think we might profitably focus our attention in this course!) How do you define violence?

Week 5—Discussion Questions

(1) Modalities of Violence—In his two-part article on modalities of violence in the Christian tradition, church historian George Hunston Williams outlines four modalities of violence: (1) violence eschatologically postponed, (2) religiously sanctioned violence actualized in martyrdom, (3) violence sublimated into spiritual warfare, and (4) the reconciliation of religious and other forms of latent or overt violence. Which of these forms of violence seem especially relevant today, within or beyond Christianity?

(2) Mimetic Violence—Robert Daly summarized Rene Girard’s theory of mimetic violence as involving a human desire for the good that seeks to imitate, but which experiences conflict with others seeking to imitate the same model, such that violence comes to seem more natural than peace, leading us to scapegoat others in ways that create sacred victims, who are then ritually sacrificed. What is the import or what are some manifestations of this model of violence in the world today?

(3) Atonement and the Cross—In his article on atonement, J. Denny Weaver sets forth the three classic models of atonement on the cross: (1) Christus Victor atonement (in both ransom and cosmic battle versions), (2) substitution or satisfaction atonement, and (3) imitative or moral model atonement. What are some of the strengths or defects of these models of atonement for religious attempts to understand and, hopefully, to overcome violence? If approaching this from a religion other than Christianity, what are some examples of problematic sacrifice, atonement, or legitimization of violence in the tradition that you practice or study?

(4) Violent and Sacrificial Images—Following from the last comparative religion sub-question in the question above, what does it mean that images of violence permeate so many traditions? Are there symbols and support for nonviolence in religion? How do they address or reconcile the more violent symbols?

(5) Law and Violence—In what ways is the law violent? In what ways does law restrain violence or support violence? Can words, laws, and/or interpretations do violence through normalizing and legitimizing certain (power) relations? In our postmodern era that some would deem morally relativistic, have we lost an appreciation for the universals and norms that law seeks to express?

(6) **“A Force More Powerful”**—Those in the class who were able to view the optional film last week saw six examples of nonviolent movements. Some questions emerged. Is nonviolence exclusively a tool of the (weak and) oppressed? What do we take from the fact that so many of the nonviolent movements use economic means to pursue political goals? Is economic nonviolence (boycotts, etc.) a form of violence? In what ways does nonviolence have a power or force that may amount to its own sort of violence in the end, albeit to better ends?

Week 7—Discussion Questions

1) Consider the reading that we did by Robert Cover and discuss the concept of the “violence” of the law in relation to various purposes of the law. Does the idea of the “violence” of the law go too far in assessing negatively the role of law in society and in the maintenance of social order? Draw into your reflection Austin Sarat’s situating law between the realities of violence and the claims of justice.

2) To what extent does social location play a role in shaping law? Consider the two articles by Patricia Williams as you discuss this question. Consider Williams’ argument about “being and property” in relation to other authors we have read in this course. How does her conception of race and rights relate to the narrative told by Professor Rodman and the emergence and evolution of the American Civil Rights movement?

3) Describe the various intermediary points between Minow’s concept of “between vengeance and forgiveness.” As you consider this question, relate her various positions to real political settings with which you are familiar.

4) Who or what are the three essential parties that make up the restorative justice relationship, and what are the remedies envisioned for each? Compare and contrast your understanding of restorative justice with other conceptions of justice— distributive, retributive, etc. (See materials by Van Ness and Strong and by Zehr as you reflect on this question.)

5) Discuss the relationship between different perspectives on justice and their possible grounding in various spiritual worldviews. Describe what, in your opinion, is the contribution of different religions to restorative justice. What does Christianity offer to restorative justice with respect to its conception(s) of the atonement, ideas about forgiveness, reconciliation, and justice?

6) One of the most powerful voices in the Christian community for non-violence is that of Walter Wink. How does he discuss the conflict between violence and non-violence in the book *The Powers That Be*? Do you see any analogies with the ways in which other authors we have read in

the course understand this conflict (e.g., Arendt, Ellul, Bonhoeffer, etc.)?

7) The centennial of the global non-violent movement, paralleling a global human rights movement, has developed in relation to what observable spiritual, psychological and sociological changes in 20th century intellectual thought and social organization? Who are some of the players and what are some of the institutions that reflect this development?

8) Relate the discussion of an “Age of Apology” with all that it implies and portends with respect to the emergence of global terrorism in the early years of the 21st century. Does the quest for human security trump global humanitarianism? Defend your answer.

9) Discuss the meaningfulness of social forgiveness in relation to political realism. Who are the players, and what is the reality? The book *No Future Without Forgiveness* (Desmond Tutu) is one that has influenced many people. Is this wishful thinking, or does it have voice in public policy?

Week 10—Discussion Questions

Picking up and spinning off some of Rodney Petersen’s Week 7 questions in light of recent class topics (those questions are reproduced in the box on the other side of this page):

(1) Restorative Justice—What is the contemporary appeal of restorative justice across a number of disciplines and professions? What are the benefits? What are the risks?

(2) Age of Apology—Much of the contemporary interest in restorative justice, arguably, stems from the rise of the Age of Apology in the 1980s, which is situated between the human rights/civil rights movements of the 1940s-1960s and the genocide and terrorism of the 1980s-2000s. Was the Age of Apology a definitive period in our thinking about violence and nonviolence, or is it just one point in the historical cycle? How do we situate the Age of Apology between humanitarianism and terrorism?

(3) Violence and Social and Spiritual (and maybe also Sexual) Health—In what ways is violence a health issue? In particular, in what ways is it a matter of social and spiritual health? For how do we define social and spiritual health, and how does violence fit into or disrupt that definition?

(4) Environment—In what ways and toward whom is environmental degradation a form of violence? What ideas or concepts from the environmental movement lend themselves to project and movements of nonviolence? Does environment or ecology represent another language alongside criminal justice, public health, restorative justice, etc. for considering violence?

(5) Race, Reparations, and Forgiveness—Themes from the last two films on environmental racism and slavery raise questions of forgiveness and reparations that get to the heart of current discussions of trauma, memory, and forgiveness. Where do we stand initially, as we move into this material, on the validity or necessity of forgiveness as a tool of nonviolence?