



# Overcoming Violence

Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding



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Overcoming Violence  
Religion, Conflict and Peacebuilding

edited by  
Rodney L. Petersen & Marian Gh. Simion

foreword by  
Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, Sr.

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Rodney L. Petersen, Marian Gh. Simion, *editors*

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*this volume is dedicated to*

*Father Raymond G. Helmick, SJ  
of Boston College Department of Theology*

*for his service in mediating global conflicts,  
and for mentoring new peacemakers  
in the schools of the  
Boston Theological Institute*



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## Foreword

Let me start by acknowledging my good friend, Father Raymond Helmick, S.J., who has traveled with me often to points of pain. He stood beside me when we rescued three young soldiers in the former Yugoslavia. Together we promoted peace and nonviolence in the Middle East. When times are hard, your friends are a joy, and Father Helmick has been a joy to our work for a long time. I can think of no one more deserving of receiving the dedication of a scholarly book of serious theological thinking on peace and justice.

Let me also salute my friends Rodney L. Petersen and Marian Gh. Simion, two long-time peace builders in a troubled world. Thank you for asking me to share in your project, to offer a few comments on our mission, in a world ripped up by conflict, a world of inequality and too much suffering, a world in need of reconciliation.

When I try to decide how to act when confronted by a complex issue, when I try to decide what to struggle for, I often refer to my “Christian mission statement”:

Luke 4: 18: *“The spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.”*

We are tasked as religious leaders to bring the good news to the poor. To feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to shelter the stranger, to house the homeless, and to study war no more.

Aid to the poor makes Heaven happy. The Scriptures say it is a way of lending to the Lord. It’s a way to secure hope, to build bridges, to create allies, and to end the trauma of darkness and fear. It is the best way to fight terrorism.

I remember that Dr. King taught us to strive not for the political center, but for the *moral center*.

During slavery and colonialism, the liberals of the time said “Be kind to your slaves.” The conservatives said “They are property, be harsh if you need to.” Only the abolitionists called on America to “End slavery!”

The Moral Center rejected both political wings. It was another bird altogether. The abolitionists fought to *end slavery*, not reform it or defend it. They were not pursuing kindness or harshness, but dignity—the Moral Center.

Often, our great heroes are not heads of state or corporate executives, but instead are freedom fighters who fought for a seemingly unpopular and often dangerous moral center—Dr. King, Mahatma Gandhi, Elie Wiesel, Archbishop Tutu, Fannie Lou Hamer, Nelson Mandela, Rosa Parks.

They sought to pull down walls of division, walls of archaic power, and replace them with bridges of cooperation. They sought to reconcile opposing forces in a higher truth.

I often reflect on the life of Jesus, who spoke truth to earthly power at the cost of his life. Down through the corridors of history, our faith calls us to speak truth to power, which is risky. But if we do not speak up, who will stand up for the poor, the dispossessed, the voiceless?

We find Jesus born in a slum, a minority, without citizenship in Rome.

We find Jesus feeding the hungry fish and bread.

We find Jesus converting fishermen into advocates for the poor and the hungry.

We find Jesus declaring in summation that the most powerful weapon of hope and survival and faith is love.

We find Jesus chasing the money-lenders out of the Temple.

We find Jesus blessing the peacemakers.

We find Jesus celebrating the poor and the meek.

Jesus viewed the world, bottom-up, while Herod viewed the world, top-down.

Jesus saw life from the manger up, Herod from the mansion down.

Loving God is a big part of the criteria for ascending into God's Kingdom, but the whole test is even more difficult—to love your neighbor as yourself.

To say the Golden Rule is simple; to live by it, exceedingly difficult. Yet that is our charge.

Jesus died and sacrificed for the unknowing, uncaring, and ungrateful.

He loved because it was the right and fulfilling thing to do. He made clear his mission, to bring good news to the poor. We continue that work today, as we struggle to find ways to beat swords into plowshares, to convince lambs to lie down with lions, to turn co-annihilation into co-existence.

It is our mission to bring good news to the poor, to water the roots as well as the leaves. This is often tough and dangerous work, but we must do it. Without justice, there is no peace; without peace, there is no justice.

Dr. King marched across the segregated South to protest the lack of civil right and the lack of dignity. He then stood up in the face of fierce criticism and vilification, to make a stand against an unjust war. He died fighting for the dignity of union sanitation workers.

Nelson Mandela endured 27 years of jail to protest apartheid, the lack of human rights, and the lack of dignity.

Rosa Parks sat down, so that Dr. King could march, so that we could vote, and run, and win, and tear down the Cotton Curtain in the South.

Jesus bore the cross, even unto death.

Jesus taught us that we will be measured by how we treat “the least of these”. Our character is measured by how we treat the hungry, the dispossessed, the disenfranchised, the abandoned.

So that is our mission, to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to shelter the stranger, to house the homeless, to study war no more—to keep bringing the good news to the poor. So we will keep on marching, keep on speaking out, keep on struggling nonviolently for peace and justice.

And we will remember the proverb that Dr. King taught us:

Vanity asks: Is it popular?

Politics asks: Will it win?

Morality and conscience ask: Is it right? Is it just?

That still speaks to us today—because if an issue is morally right, then eventually it will be politically right, too.

If an issue fits in the moral center, then sooner or later it will be at the center of our politics, our issues, our work.

Thank you for all you do to bring our mission statement to life, and to keep hope alive for billions of people around the globe.

Keep Hope Alive,

Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, Sr.



## Editors' Introduction

By Rodney L. Petersen and Marian Gh. Simion

Overcoming Violence is central to formation for ministry. It is also central to the church and its engagement with the world.

The Biblical and theological grounding for conflict transformation and for restorative practices is explicit in the Good News of Jesus' preaching. Gospel guideposts toward this end are clear: In the Gospel according to Matthew we read of such preaching and precept (Matt. 5: 23-24; 22:37-39), teachings matched in the other Gospels. If one chooses to be Jesus' disciple, one's identity is shaped by overcoming violence with practices that lead to reconciliation (II Corinthians 5:17-19). And, we are given clear directions for how to proceed with conflict prone settings in Matthew 18 and through such instruction—as is found in early community teachings, whether by Paul in Ephesians (Eph. 4:3), by Peter (I Peter 2:9-12), or by James (James 4:1-3). As diverse early communities became the church we know from history, this teaching became more complex.

Conflict is perennial. Our opening texts recognize the enduring reality of conflict. The issue for us concerns the nature of our response, whether that of violence or the tactics of non-violence, as put so well by New Testament scholar Walter Wink. Four themes identified by the World Council of Churches' Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV) constitute areas of conflict for which we require non-violent skills, *Peace in the Community*, *Peace with the Earth*, *Peace in the Marketplace* and *Peace Among the Peoples*. In his opening chapter to this volume, Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz draws attention to an "unholy trinity" that deepens the relevance of prophetic witness in these four areas for our times—nuclear self-annihilation, the widening gap between a few who have much and the many who have little, and climate change. Each of these violences threatens to undo us. The implicit nihilism found in this "sorcerer's" stew is challenged by our confession of God as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Preparing for ministry in the twenty-first century in light of the violence of contemporary life draws us not only to our own religious roots but also to look more closely

at the roots and tenets of other faiths, particularly those that sociologically look back to Abraham as a common ancestor in faith.

Such nihilism is often met by skepticism.

Raymond Helmick, S.J., in “What is Church Responsible to do about Conflicts?” argues that theology really is important to the task and shapes how we deal with conflict. He sets out different images of God that cull forth an array of ethical responses—some punitive indeed—as we are drawn by Helmick to the task of reconciliation. Montville finds the work of reconciliation a part of the “core values” of Judaism and Islam—and Helmick carries this forward to an array of religious perspectives and traditions. There is something of Elizabeth Spellman’s sense of humanity’s innate desire to make things right, *homo reparans* she argues, difficult as it may be from Charleston’s perspective. But holding to this hope for religion, not oblivious to its dark side, is all the more necessary in light of Richard Falk’s advocacy towards a more humane global governance. According to Falk, secular imagination is locked into the confines of nationalism, whereas the religious vision carries us beyond these borders, moving us to a universalizing moral grounding and outlook. And the types of violence we see around us are those common to all humanity.

The four themes identified by the World Council of Churches’ Decade to Overcome Violence (DOV), *Peace in the Community*, *Peace with the Earth*, *Peace in the Marketplace* and *Peace Among the Peoples* are not only the private concerns of churches. They involve the entire human community—and its nonhuman parts, all sentient life and the earth itself. In terms of Eucharistic identity, ecclesial differences and spiritual representation in political life, the DOV and its International Ecumenical Peace Convocation pose challenges to how we understand individual human rights, corporate understanding and the nature of spiritual agency in the world. Dialogue among the Christian churches and world religions around these topics is important not only for DOV goals—that of reducing violence in the world—but also for the ongoing work of ecumenical witness.

*Peace in the Community* means living with embrace, rather than exclusion—as argued by theologian Miroslav Volf—but this embrace is not blind to concentric circles of agreement and disagreement. It certainly implies ecumenical inclusivity as to match the level of globalization encountered. These perspectives play themselves out in individual life, the relationalities implied in home, community and nation—as aptly articulated by our authors. *Peace in the Community* has faced particular challenges over the past half century, as issues of racism have coursed through many societies. Michael Haynes, in his interview with Christopher

Lyden, draws this out in reference to his work with Martin Luther King, Jr., and with political and religious leaders in the Boston area in the context of social transformation in the United States. This is an ongoing issue for restorative justice, Petersen argues, the expensive nature of which is well illustrated by the *Kairos* document in South Africa. It challenges the “cheap reconciliation” in analogy to Bonhoeffer’s “cheap grace.”

Helmick takes this reconciliation to the area of peace in the community with reference to religious difference and politics around the construction of a mosque in Boston. Natalie Pearl draws upon challenges to human rights in communities around the world. Thomas Massaro, S.J. carries the conversation about rights and peace in the community to debate in the United States around the *Patriot Act* legislation following the devastation of the World Trade Center and U.S. Pentagon. In “Conflict and Holy Communion” Tom Porter brings this conversation about restorative justice home to the church, a practice that comes alive through an understanding of *ubuntu*, a concept derivative of thought in southern Africa. The deep reconciliation called for here is taken by Don Shriver to the realm of statecraft, a forgiveness and reconciliation that is implicit to Abraham Lincoln’s *Second Inaugural Address* applicable to all communities: “judgment against socially enacted evil, forbearance from revenge, empathy for the victims of wrong and even enemies of one’s own right causes, all clothed in a hope for reconciliation between citizens, both the sinning and the sinned against.” This is part of a movement, Petersen writes, “from consciousness to righteousness” and as central to the thinking of Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. DuBois.

*Peace with the Earth* draws us to think consciously of what we mean by “earth.” In spite of terminological tensions “earth” is not something that we can easily objectify. We ourselves are made of the very stuff about which we are discussing. As theologian Jürgen Moltmann reminds us, “What we call the environmental crisis is not merely a crisis in the natural environment of human beings. It is nothing less than a crisis in human beings themselves.” To call that stuff about which we are talking “matter” or, to imply more, “creation,” is to say something about ourselves as much as about our world. H. Paul Santmire begins our discussion with a history of ecological reflection that takes us from an “anthropocentric and androcentric, patriarchal and hierarchical” theological modality to one that is “cosmocentric and biocentric”—as he highlights the work of James Nash, *Loving Nature*. These thoughts are matched by Calvin DeWitt’s parallelism in the theological task with “peoplekeeping and earthkeeping.” Added to DeWitt’s concerns, John Chryssavgis calls for a contemplative element out

of Orthodoxy which asks for us to listen to both the “cry of the heart,” but also to the “cry of the earth,” as we are drawn to the holiness and mystery of creation.

This mystery is cause not only for contemplation, but also for study. In the comprehensive article by Mary Evelyn Tucker she maps out the growing field of ecological study in a variety of disciplines, as it has emerged over the past quarter century or more. The final article in this section by Petersen draws connections between ecological devastation and the failure to find peace in the community—or peace among peoples—reminding us that every major feature of the earth’s surface has changed today from that viewed in “Earthrise,” the Apollo 8 photo by Cmdr. Frank Borman in December 1968, e.g., Arctic ice cap smaller, ships able to traverse the Arctic Sea free of ice, ice shelves collapsing in Antarctica, glaciers and snowcaps on mountain ranges and Greenland melting affecting sea levels and river flows. We no longer live on the same planet as we did just four decades ago. This reality poses challenges for religion and ecological studies as pointed out by James B. Miller, formerly of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, a distinct area of mission for the churches as formulated by Calvin DeWitt.

*Peace in the Marketplace* challenges prevailing perspectives on consumerism, individualism and competitiveness. As communities of faith, this reaches us most pointedly with respect to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as a fundamental challenge to the global divisions of wealth and access to resources—also paramount to a peaceful future as seen initially in this volume in Müller-Fahrenheit’s “unholy trinity.” In “Advancing the Beloved Community,” Richard Parker picks up a term central to philosopher Josiah Royce and as developed by the Fellowship of Reconciliation and by Martin Luther King, Jr. as constituting the embodiment of the Kingdom of God. Banner phrase for a Progressive political movement, Marshall Ganz makes this vision real in a history of labor organization over the past half century, a parable of David and Goliath in this own life work. In the article by Uri Avnery this disparity in hope between those with access and those without helps to give added definition to the destruction of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York.

Yet again, we are reminded of the MDGs. Petersen writes that in our schools of theology we might match each of the MDGs with theological reflection such as the questions of poverty and hunger that draw us to reconsider that we are all made in the image of God. In an Age of Globalization, as we are drawn to wonder with a new reverence for the miracle of earth—as in “Earthrise”—all paradigms for civilization and citizenship, and the way such

pose either barriers or means of implementation for global wealth, are raised up for new reflection. This is a point well made by the American “mother” of peace studies, Elise Boulding, and with particular import by Dumitru Popescu in reference to Orthodox cultures and subcultures. The realities of the marketplace are now a part of global culture as never before.

The last section of the second part, *Peace Among the Peoples*, elaborates on the role of religion in international relations and conflict. Boulding’s essay “The Other America: The Forgivers and the Peace Makers,” exhibits America’s non-violent face, by underscoring influential personalities who accomplished social change through non-violence, while also applauding the work conducted by various non-violent movements that advocate forgiveness. Marian Simion’s essay, “The Axis of Evil’: A Misrepresentation of Christianity,” highlights the strong impact of negative rhetoric on the way enemies are perceived, while also elaborating on the subversive use of religion in political speech, in clear contradiction with dogmatic standards. While Petersen’s essay, “Bringing the War Home: The Bloody Tenent, Washed and Made White in the Blood of the Lamb,” relates to contentious debates that intersected public and religious spheres inside the USA, David Steele’s essay “Engaging with Religion in Conflict Settings: A Field Perspective,” explores these intricacies in Iraq. First, Steele traces psychological commonalities in two religious mythologies of victimhood developed by the Shiites in Iraq and by the Orthodox Serbs in Kosovo, as repositories for modern doctrines which drive fundamentalist movements. In a masterful way, Steele also links these mythologies with the US policy in Iraq, in light of the Shiite traditional perception of violence, enemies and truth. A remarkable insight into the anthropological complexity of peacemaking is offered by Thomas Butler in his essay, “Blood Feuds And Traditional Forms of Peacebuilding in the Old Yugoslavia,” which elaborates upon the Slavic culture of violence and peacemaking—often operating under the guise of Orthodox Christianity.

The theme of *Peace Among the Peoples* continues with David Little’s “‘Response to Terrorism’ Statement on October 1, 2001 at a Harvard University Public Meeting Concerning the Attacks of September 11.” Stepping aside from the emotional shock created by September 11, Little calls attention to various unethical U.S. policies towards the Middle East, which generated resentments in the Muslim world. Later, Little added an afterthought to his initial Harvard statement, warning about the dangers of U.S. unilateralism. Petersen’s interview with Donna Hicks highlights the effects of various U.S. policies apparently designed to humiliate the Muslims, highlighting, at the same time, the danger

of retaliation. The interview with Bishop Thomas J. Gumbleton, on “Religion, Leadership, and International Justice”—an interview conducted prior to the U.S. invasion in Iraq—easily anticipates the colossal damaging of Iraq, and the undermining of what the United States of America has stood for since its foundations. Parallel with this, George Papademetriou surveys some of the “Recent Patriarchal Encyclicals on Religious Tolerance and Peaceful Coexistence,” highlighting another area of peacebuilding where “the Green Patriarch” (Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew) is deeply engaged. Furthermore, the essay “Schools of Forgiveness & Reconciliation—ESPERE: Teaching Compassion and Tenderness,” authored by Fr. Leonel Narváez Gomez of Bogotá, Colombia, points out that while peace work implies risks and hardship, it is also deeply appreciated by the international community. The section *Peace Among the Peoples* concludes with two book reviews offered by Simion on the Arab Israeli conflict: the first *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence and Peacemaking* authored by Rabbi Marc Gopin, and the second, *Sharon and My Mother-in-Law: Ramallah Diaries*, authored by Suad Amiry.

The last part of this volume, *The Public Square*, highlights some of the peacebuilding efforts made by members of civil society and policymakers, in witness to their religious faith. For instance, “Building Cultures of Reconciliation: An Interview with Elise Boulding,” conducted by Petersen, highlights grassroots work conducted by various NGOs, while deploring the U.S. refusal to sign various conventions on terrorism. The interview with the President Mikhail Gorbachev, conducted by Stavros H. Papagermanos of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of New York, brings forward Gorbachev’s personal religious convictions which led to the ending of the Cold War. In the same vein, the interview with the late President Kim Dae-Jung of the Republic of Korea, conducted by Simion, highlights President Kim’s Catholic faith which helped him survive political persecution, as well as his remarkable sense of forgiveness which he exhibited towards his political enemies who tried to assassinate him. Trelawney Grenfell-Muir’s article “Lebanon: Hope Amid the Storm,” written in the aftermath of a BTI seminar workshop in Lebanon and Syria, illustrates some aspects of the remarkable efforts made by various religious factions in Lebanon to overcome their differences, only to be ruined by outside interests.

In this sense, Helmick’s eyewitness account about the devastation created by Israeli bombing of Lebanon in 2006 is given in the article, “When Diplomacy Fails: Track II Visit to the Middle East,” where Helmick summarizes some of the findings of a peace mission led by Reverend Jesse L. Jackson, Sr. in the region, as soon as Israel’s bombing of Lebanon ceased. In addition to these

findings, Helmick brought his witness before prominent U.S. policymakers such as Senator John Kerry—illustrated in “Can Track-Two Diplomacy Help in the MidEast? Senator Kerry Meeting Father Ray Helmick, S.J. Track-Two Diplomat & Scholar”—with whom Helmick shared various policy memos. Raising the question of education on religion, peacemaking, and MidEast conflicts, Simion consults the Editor-at-large of Lebanon’s *The Daily Star*, in “What Do We Learn About Religion in the Middle Eastern Conflicts? Interview with Rami G. Khouri.” In a similar way, Simion also raises the question of awareness about the effects of protracted conflicts, such as in Sudan, in his “Slavery In Our Face: Do We Care to See it? A Talk with Liz Walker of CBS 4 TV.” Nevertheless, this section concludes in an optimistic tone, by highlighting the positive role of the Church in creating cohesive communities, as highlighted by the Jamaican journalist Devon Dick, in his “Rebellion To Riot: The Jamaican Church in Nation Building 1865-1999.” Petersen’s concluding essay “Overcoming Violence: Practical Theology and Conflict Resolution,” offers some key elements towards the development of a pragmatic use of theological speculation, in light of the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica.

Finally, as editors of this volume we wish to record our gratitude and admiration to all of the contributors to this volume for their remarkable vision of stewardship and care for humanity. In particular, we are grateful to *Father Raymond G. Helmick, S.J.*, of Boston College Department of Theology—to *whom this volume is dedicated*—for his service in mediating global conflicts, and for mentoring new peacemakers in the schools of the Boston Theological Institute, who already have, or soon will embark upon the noble task of overcoming violence.

