



SPECIAL REPORT

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ABOUT THE REPORT

The United States Institute of Peace held a two-day workshop titled "Teaching about the Religious Other" on March 3-4, 2005. The sixteen workshop participants were professors experienced in teaching those of one Abrahamic faith about another Abrahamic faith either in U.S. classrooms or abroad.

The purpose of the workshop was to enable these educators to share their experiences and curricular materials, to plan collaborative projects to improve the quality of such education, and to increase the number of such programs. In a world experiencing violent conflict among the three Abrahamic faith communities, it is vitally important that adherents of one faith learn about the other two faiths. Such educational exposure helps increase tolerance and advance peaceful coexistence.

This report summarizes the presentations of the participants, introduces some promising new programs for teaching about the religious other, and offers lessons drawn from the discussion. It was written by David Smock, director of the Institute's Religion and Peacemaking Initiative.

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect those of the United States Institute of Peace, which does not advocate specific policy positions.

David Smock

Teaching about the Religious Other

Summary

- Prejudice and ignorance about the beliefs and practices of the religious "other" often exacerbate conflicts. Religious stereotypes contribute to misunderstanding and foment animosity.
- One antidote to hatred between religious communities is to teach communities about the beliefs and practices of the religious other.
- Some countries, such as Indonesia, recognize that the country's future depends on a celebration of its religious pluralism.
- It is particularly important that teaching about the religious other be introduced in schools, universities, and seminaries in countries where religious conflict is a significant problem.
- In instructing about the religious other, instructors need to act as though they are in the presence of the other and to teach the religion as seen from the perspective of the believer.
- Beyond studying scriptures, religious history, and theology, it is essential that students be exposed to rituals, worship, and music of the other faith. This helps convey how believers of another faith actually live out their faith.
- It is important to foster interreligious dialogue at the academic level, at the grassroots level, and at the level of lived spiritualities.
- Fears that studying about the religious other will undermine the religious convictions of students have generally proven to be unfounded.
- Students are often better at studying other religions than at studying their own, because they usually approach the other faith with fewer preconceptions.
- Some programs, particularly those geared toward younger students of one faith, have found it particularly effective to combine learning about another religion with a shared service project that brings together adherents to both religions.

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ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

The United States Institute of Peace is an independent, nonpartisan federal institution created by Congress to promote the prevention, management, and peaceful resolution of international conflicts. Established in 1984, the Institute meets its congressional mandate through an array of programs, including research grants, fellowships, professional training, education programs from high school through graduate school, conferences and workshops, library services, and publications. The Institute's Board of Directors is appointed by the President of the United States and confirmed by the Senate.

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Introduction

Religion is a factor in many of the world's most intractable and violent conflicts. As Martin Marty points out in *Religion, Ethnicity and Self-Identity*, most of the time religion—as a way to find “communion, consolation, and integration into systems of meaning and belonging”—is not “an instrument for killing.” But it has revealed itself many times as a suitable weapon for disruption and killing. This is true in places such as Kashmir, Sudan, and Israel/Palestine. While religion is a factor in these conflicts, it is rarely the most potent factor. Conflict identified as religious usually does not stem from disagreements over theological issues. Its impact usually results from the association of religious identity with ethnic divisions and economic factors. Nevertheless, prejudice and ignorance about the beliefs and practices of the religious “other” often exacerbate conflicts. Religious stereotypes contribute to misunderstanding and foment animosity.

One antidote to hatred among religious communities is to teach communities about the beliefs and practices of the religious other. Most of what Christians believe about Islam comes from popular stereotypes. Similarly, few Muslims have opportunities to learn about Christianity or Judaism from a knowledgeable and dispassionate instructor. There is a desperate need to expand such opportunities in zones of intense religious conflict. Fortunately, many members of the Abrahamic faiths recognize how inadequate their knowledge of the beliefs and practices of the other communities is; they want to learn more. While demand for this kind of instruction is increasing, secondary schools, universities, and theological schools have been slow to respond to this rise in interest.

To address this need, the Religion and Peacemaking Initiative of the United States Institute of Peace convened a two-day workshop. With sixteen specialists participating, the purpose of this workshop was to share experiences and curricular materials and to jointly plan projects to advance this field. While some of the participants had only worked in the United States, many had experience in such places as Israel/Palestine, Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Italy, the Netherlands, and Indonesia. All had experience teaching about at least one of the Abrahamic faiths to members of another faith.

The purpose of this report is to summarize the presentations of the participants, introduce some promising new programs for teaching about the religious other, and offer key lessons from the discussion.

Teaching at Seminaries and Religious Universities

The Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome

At Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome, Daniel Madigan, S.J., tries both to reduce the sense of distance among the three Abrahamic communities and to maintain a sense of otherness among them. When Catholic priests learn about Islam and Muslims, he says, they also learn more about themselves. After all, people are in part defined by who they are not. Formation of one's identity comes not by isolated reinforcement but through conversation and interaction, particularly with the religious other. People cannot be secure in their own religious identity unless that identity is somehow dialogical and they are able to engage confidently with the religious other.

Madigan considers teaching about the religious other to be a matter of trust. He recognizes that a long study of another tradition can put one in a position of power with respect to the believers of that tradition. As a consequence, he always tries to teach about the other as though he were in the presence of that other. If there are Muslim students or a Muslim instructor in one of his classes, so much the better. But he also knows the difficulties this creates and the sensitivities it engenders. He wants to ensure that the way he teaches about Islam makes the subject recognizable to a believer. At the same time, he hopes that Muslims in the class will be stretched by the experience,

particularly by learning about plurality, both historical and actual, within the worldwide Muslim community.

Madigan also believes that teaching about a religion cannot be confined to teaching scriptures. The instructor cannot simply equate Islam as it is presented in the religion's high literary works with Islam as practiced every day by Muslims. Moreover, teaching about Islam cannot be reduced to simple formulae that do not reflect the variety of Islamic traditions. Teaching about Islam, as with teaching about any other religion, requires pluralizing otherness; Muslims are not an undifferentiated bloc.

Teaching a class at a Catholic university in Rome composed mostly of priests creates a confessional context that makes for a special kind of learning experience, Madigan believes. The Muslim students who come to study Christianity appreciate the chance to study in such an atmosphere, because they get a sense of the faith as it is lived. Madigan has his students keep a journal to record the impact the interfaith dynamics and exchanges within the classroom and beyond have on them.

The Catholic Theological Union in Chicago

At the Catholic Theological Union in Chicago, the course titled "Abraham's Children: Jews, Christians and Muslims" is taught by Scott Alexander, a Christian professor, along with a Jewish professor and a Muslim professor. The course has two main goals. The first goal is to give students an opportunity to develop basic comparative literacy in each tradition so that students can talk about the basic contours of each tradition with an awareness of how these contours compare and contrast with one another. The second goal is to give students an opportunity to reflect on and think critically about the future of Abrahamic dialogue, particularly within the context of the students' own individual ministries. That is, the course seeks to encourage awareness that to be an effective and compassionate religious leader, one must be prepared to *intentionally* cross cultural boundaries out of respect and love for the religious other; the course also seeks to cultivate a genuine openness among students toward the personal transformation and growth they may experience from boundary-crossing experiences. Thus, the emphasis is on learning about the other from the other.

In the structure of the course, the teaching styles of the instructors, and the quality and mode of their interaction, Alexander and his two colleagues attempt to create an environment for dialogue in which radical mutuality is always the ideal context—though this is seldom the reality, especially in a predominantly Christian school. This allows for mutual personal transformations through encounters with the other. In Alexander's words, a student is successful if she or he reaches the point where she or he can honestly say to the other, "I am not you, but I am incomplete without you. My dignity as a human being and as a person of faith is never fully realized unless I can assert your dignity as a human being and person of faith."

The course places a major emphasis on rigorous comparative analysis, not only by identifying similarities and differences among the three religions in relation to particular themes, but also by moving beyond superficial comparisons and highlighting the differences in the similarities and the similarities in the differences. A second emphasis is to identify obstacles to, and avenues for, dialogue among the three faiths, while remaining sensitive to topics or activities that are best avoided in dialogue. The professors also encourage e-mail discussion groups among the students outside of class to share insights and the personal impact of interfaith encounters. They also arrange field visits to expose students to the religious events and rites of the other traditions.

Among the resources that Alexander uses in his teaching of the Abrahamic traditions is a film he produced in which he interviews people of the three faiths in a local community. The video is structured around six themes: "Worship" deals with the meaning and relevance of worship practices for those interviewed; "Memories" focuses on times in the lives of the interviewees during which their various religious identities took on memorable

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importance; "Sacred Seasons" explores the interviewees' understanding and experience of the special calendrical observances of their traditions; "Role Models" features interviewees talking about the people in their lives who have been most influential in shaping their religious identities; "Religion and Society" takes up the question of the role the interviewees' religious communities play in the context of the larger society in which they live; and "What It Means to Be a Jew, Christian, or Muslim" examines issues of religious identity in the words of the interviewees.

The course utilizes three methodological approaches to interreligious learning and dialogue, employing history of religions as a means of developing a sound analytical and context-based understanding of all religious phenomena; ethnography as a means of emphasizing the central importance and distinctiveness of personal story and experience in any attempt to understand the religious other; and practical theology as a means of determining what role interreligious dialogue plays, fails to play, and/or must play in one's own ministerial vocation. This last approach, in particular, requires reflection on one's own tradition, culture, and experience, especially with respect to interreligious dialogue.

Hartford Seminary

Every January and June, the Hartford Seminary offers an eight-day intensive program titled "Building Abrahamic Partnerships," headed by Yehezkel Landau, in which Christian, Muslim, and Jewish attendees are instructed by Christian, Muslim, and Jewish instructors. The program is meant to prepare the participants for interfaith ministry and is based on the premise that American society needs a new kind of religious leadership, one that is grounded in a particular tradition but is also able to interact effectively with other faith communities. This is especially important because of the prevailing fear and mutual suspicion among the communities that have been exacerbated by acts of violence by religious extremists. Landau says, "We need to develop educational strategies to overcome the ignorance that leads to prejudice, which in turn leads to dehumanizing contempt, which in turn breeds violence."

The goals of the course are fourfold:

- Educating participants about the beliefs and practices of the three Abrahamic traditions
- Creating a supportive learning community in which clergy, lay ministers, religious educators, and chaplains can forge mutually beneficial relationships across communal boundaries
- Helping participants acquire pastoral skills useful in interfaith ministry
- Developing leadership strategies for promoting interfaith relations in a pluralistic society

Part of each day's program is devoted to prayers and music from each of the three traditions. Participants also attend worship events of the three faith traditions, followed by discussions to reflect on their experiences. In the comparative study of religious texts, some of the texts focus on violence, which requires serious exegetical struggle, while other texts are selected for their inspiring and uplifting nature.

In February 2005, Professor Landau and Imam Yahya Hendi from the teaching staff co-facilitated a similar course for twenty-three Canadian military chaplains in Edmonton, Alberta.

Teaching Internationally

Educating about the Religious Other in Serbia and Bosnia

What separate an Orthodox Serb from a Catholic Croat from a Muslim Bosnian are cultures that have evolved from religious differences. Professor Milica Bakic-Hayden of the Univer-

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sity of Pittsburgh points out that understanding these differences and finding constructive ways to negotiate them through education are of vital importance for the Balkans' future generations. The promotion and dissemination of knowledge and a better understanding of the region's religious traditions have an important role to play in the overall process of reconciliation. The assumption guiding this proposition is that linking religion with education and divorcing it from recent politicization will foster an environment in which these faiths can be approached in academic settings and in a spirit of understanding and acceptance of religious differences. While knowledge about the religious other may not immediately bridge the rift caused by the recent Balkan wars, it may mitigate at least some antagonisms created by it.

Education in this context has to begin with recognizing the students' sense of vulnerability and even victimization. Effort must also be made to "rehumanize" the other, the group seen as the cause of one's suffering. A 2002 summer program in Palic, Serbia, demonstrated the benefit of recognizing and empathizing with the grief of the other, overcoming the sense of uniqueness of one's own suffering, and sharing the pain of the other. This program created a learning environment in which an open nonsectarian framework for appreciating the legacies of the region's religions engendered a change in perspective of not only the other's religion but also one's own. At the same time, the myth based on the fear that being exposed to the religious ideas of another faith will cause one to lose one's own religious identity was successfully deconstructed and exposed as being unfounded.

Bakic-Hayden is currently organizing a USIP-supported project that will promote programs in religious studies at major universities in the region. She is introducing the project in Serbia-Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina. It is based on her conviction that the attitudes of Orthodox and Catholic Christians toward Muslims and of Muslims toward Christians must change for life to be rebuilt in the former Yugoslavia. Since the postcommunist trend toward religious liberalization has resulted in a great revival of formerly suppressed religious education, there is an inherent danger that each faith will be studied within its narrowly defined ethno-confessional boundaries. The purpose of this project is to encourage education about Christianity and Islam without preaching the religions and to teach why the beliefs of each confessional community make sense to those who hold them. Only by knowing and understanding the religious and cultural ways of other peoples will students be able to both enrich their own identity and extend their humanity.

Teaching Muslims and Christians about the Religious Other in Indonesia

Indonesians increasingly recognize the need for improving religious education in the country's schools and universities, including the Islamic universities. John Raines of Temple University points out the key role played by the five-year-old Center for Religious and Cultural Studies at Gadjah Mada University in developing improved relations among the country's sectarian communities. Sixty students each year receive master's degrees in a program that requires study of the religious other. Most of the students are Muslims, but there are also significant numbers of Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists. Many of those who graduate from the program become teachers of religion in Islamic universities that are engaged in major curricular reform aimed at promoting religious tolerance.

At Gadjah Mada, each faith tradition is taught by an adherent of that faith. The professors use a critical-historical approach in their instruction. This helps the students become comfortable with critical analysis of their own religion and open to hearing alternative interpretations of religious texts. It also helps them discover how much they can learn from other faiths without abandoning their own faith convictions. This program reflects a widely shared conviction in Indonesia that the country's future depends on a celebration of its religious pluralism.

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Promoting Religious Tolerance in Bulgaria's Schools

During the 1990s, Bulgaria experienced an awakening of religious identity and a resurgence of religious activity, among both Christians and Muslims. This religious revival has been accompanied by an upsurge of intercommunal mistrust, stemming largely from Christian suspicion and fear of Muslims, who constitute 12 percent of Bulgaria's population. Prejudice and the isolation of Bulgaria's Islamic schools from mainstream society also contribute to suspicions that Muslim leaders are being trained as agents of neighboring or more distant Muslim countries. There are also fears that Bulgarian Muslim students in countries such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan will return as militant fundamentalists.

To address these fears, Simeon Evstatiev, reader in Islamic history at the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sophia, and his colleagues at the Center for Intercultural Studies and Partnership (CISP) propose greater collaboration between Islamic training institutions and Bulgaria's secular universities.

CISP has also developed a project, supported by USIP, titled "Religion and Education: Enhancing Christian-Muslim Understanding in Bulgaria." Given the strong correlation between having regular interreligious dialogue and maintaining peaceful relations among religions, it is extremely important that knowledge about different religions in Bulgaria be conveyed in ways that maximize mutual understanding and minimize stereotyping. This project is meant to address the need for sound interreligious relations in Bulgaria and offer a new model for religious education in the country's schools. Religious education, which was reintroduced into Bulgarian schools in 1997, is generally conservative, ethnocentric, and dogmatic. Rather than being a tool for building bridges between communities and creating tolerance, religious instruction there tends to perpetuate and even exacerbate divisions between Christians and Muslims.

To contribute to religious understanding in Bulgaria, project members are developing a teachers' handbook for primary-school religion teachers that promotes religious tolerance. Project personnel are also working with the Ministry of Education and Science to prepare standards, curricula, and syllabi to guide the teaching of religion in public schools. The purpose is both to cultivate attitudes of mutual respect among religions and to provide basic knowledge about the three Abrahamic faiths.

Teaching in Liberal Arts Programs

University of Southern California and Hebrew Union College

A course titled "Reading Scripture as Skeptic and Believer: The Hebrew Bible, the New Testament, and the Qur'an," taught by Reuven Firestone, is offered for freshmen at the University of Southern California and at Hebrew Union College. The course explores the ways that Jewish, Christian, and Islamic scriptures establish paradigms of interpretation. Students read sections of each scriptural tradition from the "inside," that is, as if the students were believers of the religion that the scripture represents, and also from the "outside," as if the students were critical nonbelieving observers. The class focuses on two principal topics: the Garden of Eden and Abraham. Questions the students explore include: How does the interpretation of the Garden of Eden differ in the three traditions and how is it similar? Is the Abraham of Islamic scripture the same person as the Abraham of Christian scripture or of Jewish scripture? How is the person of Abraham used to support the authenticity of one tradition in opposition to another? It becomes clear to the students that Abraham is not the same person in the three traditions and that he is portrayed in a particular manner to make various religious points.

Invariably students project their own narratives onto the scriptures. The instructor and other students in turn point out when a particular interpretation is not supported by the text. Toward the end of the semester the class attends religious services of each of the

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three traditions. By doing so, they learn how each worshipping community reads scripture as an act of religious piety.

The College of William and Mary

At the College of William and Mary, Tamara Sonn teaches Islam to a diverse group of students, the majority from Christian backgrounds. Most of her students come to the classroom with little direct experience with Islam. However, they have been affected by negative stereotypes gleaned from sensationalist media and Hollywood representations of Islam. Sonn considers it important, therefore, to prepare the students for what is to come in the course. She warns them that much of what they will learn will conflict with their preconceived ideas about Islam. Recognizing the great sensitivity that surrounds religious belief and practice, she also makes it known that Islamic scripture contains criticisms of some Jewish and Christian interpretations of the Abrahamic tradition.

Sonn stresses the need for emotional distance and intellectual discipline. She explains to her students that mistrust, anger, and fear are common reactions to cognitive dissonance and to negative reflections on one's own tradition, but that such reactions are impediments to learning and can be avoided by emotionally distancing oneself from the subject matter. Further, she has discovered that it is helpful if students understand the difference between learning religion in one's home or place of worship and studying it in a college classroom.

Sonn also emphasizes the range of ideas and practices in societies identified as Islamic. Her courses present an overview of the varieties of Islamic practice and the diverse beliefs in Islam regarding such controversial issues as pluralism, politics, and the status of women. Sonn identifies her pedagogical methodology as historic and comparative. She places Islamic beliefs and practices within their historical contexts, examining the conditions surrounding their development. By comparing elements of Islamic belief and practice to their counterparts in other religions, students are able to build on what is familiar to them and gain insights into the nature of religion.

Sonn indicates that her overall goal is to have the students understand Islam in a way that would be recognizable to Muslims. She does not expect students to accept what they are learning about Islam as true belief or correct practice, but she does want them to understand and appreciate it from the perspective of those who do. With her encouragement, many of her students take up internships in organizations that work on religious freedom, human rights, and conflict resolution. Recognizing that these are issues that transcend ideological boundaries, she hopes that the combination of classroom learning and practical experience will help reduce interreligious fears and prejudices, and break down interfaith barriers.

George Washington University

In teaching Jewish studies to both Jewish and non-Jewish students at George Washington University, Robert Eisen conveys both the beliefs and noncognitive aspects of the Jewish faith. He wants students to appreciate what draws adherents to the faith. Prayer, ritual, and chanting are all explored. He finds the classroom an ideal place for interfaith dialogue: students are sufficiently mature and curious, and the classroom generally offers a safe environment. Eisen hopes that what they learn in the classroom will nourish their own spiritual lives, whatever their faith.

Interestingly, Eisen finds that his best students are generally non-Jewish. It is easier to teach non-Jewish students, he believes, because some Jewish students carry with them the somewhat simplistic teaching of Judaism they absorbed in Hebrew school. The papers written by Jewish students often read more like sermons than academic term papers, he says, as it is not easy to apply critical analysis and a historical perspective to the study of one's own religion. While the non-Jewish students have no such preconceived notions

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about Judaism, he does note that their own religious beliefs sometimes do interfere with their absorption of Judaism.

Seton Hall University

Charles Carter sees some of the same problems in teaching Catholic students at Seton Hall University. Students, contrary to their own assumptions, are generally not very sophisticated in their understanding of their own faith, he says. The challenge is to enable students to think intellectually about their own religion. He maintains that many students prefer a confessional rather than an academic approach, partly out of fear that an intellectual approach will challenge their religious beliefs and practice.

In teaching his course titled "People of the Book: Jews, Christians and Muslims in Conversation," Carter starts with this introduction:

Ours is a world in which the three Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, often mistrust and misunderstand one another. The fundamentalist and radical elements of each tradition are the more strident voices and their hateful, often violent actions are highlighted in both the media and the public consciousness. The need for a more comprehensive understanding among the "children of Abraham" is even more necessary in the wake of the tragic events of 9/11, the U.S. occupation of Iraq, and the daily cycle of violence in Israel and Palestine. This course will focus on moving the cultural and religious conversation among the faithful of each of the Abrahamic traditions to a more inclusive and positive trajectory. It will seek to promote a genuine "trialogue" that may in turn use the emphases in the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Holy Books that focus on justice and peacemaking.

In contrast to some of the approaches described above, Carter makes no pretense of disinterested objectivity. While attempting to present fairly the various sides of complex issues, he says, he brings his own convictions and critiques to his teaching. He believes that both students and professor need to be engaged with the issues, and he speaks out about his own passions. He wants to enable the students to comprehend the religious other and to help them define themselves, in part, through their new knowledge of the other. He also wants to validate the other but refuses to give any of the three Abrahamic faiths exclusive hold on the truth. Students are urged to give each tradition its right to make claims about the truth. He also makes clear that differences among the three faiths do not overwhelm their common commitment to peace and justice. He believes that all three faith communities need to own their dark sides, but that all three should also aspire to a shared ethic of interreligious peacemaking. At the beginning of the term he gives an ungraded exam to assess the students' level of knowledge about the three faiths and then repeats the exam at the end of the semester to see how much the students have learned.

Radboud University Nijmegen

From his experiences teaching Dutch students about the religious other at Radboud University Nijmegen, Pim Valkenberg has drawn the following conclusions:

- Preparing and presenting materials about religious others cannot be done without the religious other being present in some way or another.
- For those who want to approach Abrahamic religions from a theological point of view, it is important to foster interreligious dialogue at the academic level, at the grassroots level, and at the level of lived spiritualities.
- The best way to counter increasing fears of religious others is to empower those who want to establish good relations among the Abrahamic religions.

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Teaching High School Students

The Council on Islamic Education

The Council on Islamic Education (CIE) is a California-based research institute founded and directed by Shabbir Mansuri. CIE works nationally in the U.S. education field to improve teaching about the world and world religions. CIE was established in 1989 as a response to perceived inadequacies in the adoption process of history and social science textbooks in California. It has successfully worked to encourage education policymakers, K-12 textbook publishers, and educators to reflect on how this country's constitutional framework requires us to continually revisit and refine how Americans view and represent the world. The institute's initiatives have led to the preparation of a nonpartisan report on national and state history–social science standards; improved textbook coverage of Islam and other religions (including Christianity and Judaism), Muslim history, and world history; increased teacher training nationwide on guidelines for teaching about religion; and the development of high-quality teaching resources on world religions. CIE also shares this newly emerging model for teaching about religion with educational institutions and agencies in other countries as part of its international education development efforts. (See www.cie.org for further information.)

The Interfaith Youth Core

The Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), based in Chicago, promotes engagement among people aged thirteen to thirty of diverse religious backgrounds. Its program is based on the premise that ignorance stimulates conflict. According to IFYC's Eboo Patel and Garth Kartner, religious extremists build their youth programs but religious pluralists have not been as energetic in organizing programs to promote positive relations among youth. Patel and Kartner have concluded that teaching about the religious other is most effectively combined with involvement in a shared service project. Their objective is to help young religious people strengthen their own faith commitments and learn about the other by cooperating with one another to serve the community and/or those in need. By taking part in the program, participants recognize that they are both members of their own faith community and citizens of a religiously plural society.

The service project may involve cleaning a park or helping to build a house. Following participation in the service project, the young people are asked to reflect on what they have done in faith terms. The facilitators help the participants identify shared values among the religions, and then they select illustrative texts from scripture, noting both similarities and differences among the texts used by the different faiths. The facilitators work hard to avoid homogenizing the religions and papering over differences. This interaction helps improve the participants' ability to articulate their own faith. Participants also develop practical skills for interfaith interaction and a new understanding of how to be a religious person in a changing and diverse world. In recruiting participants, IFYC reaches out beyond committed pluralists and religious progressives and actively recruits conservative members of all faith traditions. While the IFYC program has thus far been confined to the United States, IFYC intends to begin training facilitators internationally.

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Teaching on the Web

Youth in Peace Education

Led by Patrice Brodeur of the University of Montreal, Youth in Peace Education (YPE) is an international, interfaith, and intergenerational project that aims to assist peace educators worldwide by providing online resources for interfaith curriculum development. Through its website, YPE will also offer material that will allow students to learn about the

religious other, interfaith dialogue, and peacebuilding, and to acquire the religious literacy and dialogue skills so central to peaceful coexistence. YPE will also develop an e-learning global certificate program that will teach about the religious other, geared particularly toward young people living in conflict areas. YPE also hopes to develop a network of individuals and organizations that will both share and utilize this portal as a means of promoting peacebuilding worldwide.

Conclusion

While opportunities to learn about the religious other need to be much more widely available, especially in countries experiencing religious conflict, considerable progress has been made in recent years.

While opportunities to learn about the religious other need to be much more widely available, especially in countries experiencing religious conflict, considerable progress has been made in recent years. Particularly promising are the new programs being developed in Bulgaria, Bosnia, Serbia, and Indonesia. But to build on the progress already made, mechanisms must be developed to enable professors in this field to share their materials and approaches with others. The introduction of Internet-based resources may be one such solution.

There are several reasons why teaching about the religious other is so important. In Bosnia and Serbia, for example, learning about the religious traditions of the other has contributed to the process of reconciliation. Understanding the religion of the other can also help “rehumanize” the other, which is particularly significant when the other is seen as the source of one’s own suffering. In Bulgaria, meanwhile, teaching about the Abrahamic faiths has helped cultivate mutual respect between the country’s Christians and Muslims. In the Netherlands, too, such instruction helps empower those who want to establish good relations among the country’s religious communities. Finally, even those studying at seminaries benefit by learning about the religious other by becoming more secure in their own religious identities.

Though the sixteen expert participants in the workshop did not always agree on the best approach for teaching about the religious other and offered a variety of methodologies, several universal insights were made:

- In teaching about the religious other, the instructor needs to teach in a fashion that would make what is taught about the faith recognizable to a believer.
- Teaching about the religious other should ideally be done in the presence of the other.
- In teaching about the religious other, instructors must “pluralize” otherness by emphasizing the diversity within the other faith community.
- In addition to teaching about the beliefs of the other faith, instructors should expose students to the prayers, music, rituals, celebrations, and religious services of the other faith.
- To make a long-term contribution to interfaith communication, instructors must offer guidance on how dialogue with the other community should be conducted.
- Teaching about the religious other can be effectively combined with a joint service project in which members of the various faith communities participate together.

Of Related Interest

An online edition of this report can be found at our website (www.usip.org), together with additional information on the subject.

A number of other publications from the United States Institute of Peace examine issues related to interreligious dialogue.

Recent Institute reports include

- *What Works? Evaluating Interfaith Dialogue Programs* (Special Report, July 2004)
- *Healing the Holy Land: Interreligious Peacebuilding in Israel/Palestine*, by Yehezkel Landau (Peaceworks, August 2003)
- *The Chaplain's Evolving Role in Peace and Humanitarian Relief Operations*, by Paul McLaughlin (Peaceworks, July 2002)

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