

# **The Genesis of Journal of Religion, Conflict, and Peace**

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Since 2002 Manchester, Earlham, and Goshen Colleges have been enjoying the benefits of the Plowshares Collaborative, an initiative designed to strengthen peace studies at these institutions and generously funded by the Lilly Endowment Inc. Asked by the collaborative to develop possibilities for long-term work, the three Plowshares professors—Saoud El Mawla at Earlham,<sup>[1]</sup> Joseph Liechty at Goshen, and Tim McElwee at Manchester—proposed creating a peace studies journal devoted to the comparatively neglected theme of religion, conflict, and peace. It fit well. The three professors had all been working for decades on these issues in their research, writing, and teaching, and sometimes as peace practitioners. Furthermore, the three schools participating in the Plowshares Collaborative are closely associated with what are sometimes called in the United States the “historic peace churches”: Manchester with the Church of the Brethren, Earlham with the Society of Friends (the Quakers), and Goshen with the Mennonite Church. Considerations of religion, conflict, and peace are lodged in the spiritual DNA of these traditions.

## **The Task of the Journal**

While the church traditions behind our colleges predisposed us to take up religion, conflict, and peace, these themes could hardly be considered quaintly sectarian. The problem of religion and conflict is one of the defining and increasingly inescapable features of our age, touching every level of society and politics. Growing global population and increasing mobility mean that religious difference, too often experienced as religious conflict, is no longer present only in great urban areas but in regions and towns long-accustomed to religious homogeneity. Learning to live well with religious and other differences becomes a need for everyone, not just for the residents of a few exceptional places. At the same time, the aftermath of the Cold War brought into visibility and stark relief what had long been the case, a plethora of regional conflicts, both inter- and intra-state, involving parties defined by some combination of ethnic, national, and religious difference. Ending such conflicts and healing from them have often proven to be intractable and tortuous tasks, though not

without significant success stories.

While religion as conflict-causing problem sometimes seems to dominate, even mesmerize, in both popular and scholarly thought, religion as resource for peace is already a significant theme. In South Africa, both the apartheid ideology and resistance to it drew from religion, as have post-apartheid attempts to build a new polity. While South Africa provides an especially striking example, many other conflict situations are marked by some mix of religion as source of both conflict and peace.

If the need is great, the resources for addressing it are not. Cold War peace priorities left peace advocates ill-prepared to address the problem of religion and conflict, and most social science training in the secular academy leaves academics equally at a loss. Certainly some individuals, across the disciplines, do outstanding work; some journals publish occasional articles on religion, conflict, and peace; the volume of books grows steadily. Nonetheless, the work available at present is on a scale not nearly adequate to the need.

## **The Shape of the Journal**

This brings us to what is for the Plowshares Collaborative and the journal team the great day of the first issue of the *Journal of Religion, Conflict, and Peace*. We begin by making the following commitments, which we will no doubt be continually interpreting and occasionally expanding. We believe that these commitments are apparent already in the articles that make up this first issue.

- As a peer-reviewed journal, *JRCP*'s first audience will be scholars. When possible, however, we also intend to publish work that will be relevant and accessible to peace practitioners and to anyone else concerned with these themes.
- *JRCP* will interpret its themes broadly, publishing work on everything from interpersonal relationships to international politics.
- *JRCP* will publish work rooted in any discipline or combination of disciplines that can illuminate its central concerns.
- The main criterion for publishing an article in *JRCP* will be that it makes an original

contribution to the field of study.

- *JRCP* will happily publish work that runs contrary to the analysis of the editors.
- *JRCP* will be shaped by but not confined to the perspectives of the three church traditions—Friends, Brethren, and Mennonites—associated with the colleges that compose the Plowshares Collaborative.
- While *JRCP* will address both the problem of religion and conflict and the possibility and practices of peace, we will whenever possible give particular attention to peace. This commitment does reflect *JRCP*'s peace church roots, since in these traditions the pursuit of peace can hardly be separated from religious texts, ideas, practices, and commitments. Attention to peace does not imply, however, shying away from hard questions about religion as a source and cause of violent conflict. As Brian Victoria says in his essay in this issue (“Holy War: Toward a Holistic Understanding”), whatever one might rightly say about religion’s many constructive contributions to human life, “it is not the bright side of religion that gives cause for concern but its dark side.” Nonetheless, we believe that presenting and analyzing ways that religion promotes peace is an important way of addressing religion’s “dark side.”

## **Making the Journal Work**

We tell our students that they will learn best as we form a community of scholarship. Already we discover that a scholarly journal, too, can only flourish with the aid of a community of people who make various contributions to its success. Our first debt is to the Lilly Endowment Inc. for funding the Plowshares Collaborative from which the idea and possibility of a journal emerged. As we began exploring the forms a journal might take, no one was more helpful and influential than Peter Suber, a most persuasive advocate for online, open-access journals. Working to establish the journal’s scholarly focus, we next benefitted from the generously offered energy, ideas, connections, experience, and vision of two scholars, Gabriel Palmer Fernandez of Youngstown State University and Lucinda Peach of American University, who agreed to work with us as an initial editorial board. Finally, we have encountered still more generosity from those who have agreed to help us with the various tasks necessary to establish and maintain a journal—not least the scholars who have

already submitted work for publication, including the nine pieces in this first issue.

We are grateful to all who have already made contributions, and we are eager to benefit from more. We welcome your submissions for publication (see guidelines on the home page), suggestions of books for review, willingness to review your peers' work, ideas about potential journal themes, and much more. A possible contribution made much easier by publishing online is an exchange of ideas through the "letters to the editor" feature on the journal's home page. We look forward to working with you in various ways on the intellectual journey ahead.

1. 1. Early in 2007 Saoud, a Lebanese Muslim, needed to resign his Plowshares post and return home. He has recently been replaced by B. Welling Hall, a political scientist and long-time professor in Earlham's Peace and Global Studies program.