RELIGION, VIOLENCE AND PEACE: CONTINUING CONVERSATIONS AND STUDY GUIDE

Essays from the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding Conference in Fairfield, Connecticut "Pathways to Peace in the Abrahamic Faiths" April 2003

Edited by David L. Coppola

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CONTENTS

Preface
Joseph H. Ehrenkranz vii

Acknowledgements xii

PART I:
Pathways to Peace in the Abrahamic Faiths: Essays

Creating Space for Dialogue
David L. Coppola 3

A Biblical Meditation on Jewish Pathways to Peace
Rabbi René-Samuel Sirat 11

Jewish Pathways to Peace: A Response to Rabbi Sirat
Adolphe Steg 27

Jewish Pathways to Peace: A Response to Rabbi Sirat
Rabbi René Gutman 33

Finding What Is Good in Jewish-Christian Relations
James G. Williams 39

Paths of Peace: A Challenge to the Three Monotheistic Religions
Jean Dujardin 55

Pathways to Peace in Islam: From Satanic to Prophetic Logic
Azizah Al-Hibri 65

Islamic Pathways to Peace: Privileging Prophetic Principles over Prophecies
Louay M. Safi 73
## Contents

**PART II:**
Religion and Violence, Religion and Peace: Study Guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion and Violence</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence as Choice</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence in History and Ritual</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fundamentalism and Violence</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion and Peace</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace in Judaism</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace in the Hebrew Scriptures</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justice and Peace in Judaism</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Halakhah</em>: A Guide to Justice</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace in Christianity</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace in the New Testament</td>
<td>102</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Early Martyrs and Nonviolent Resistance</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Just War Theory: Insights and Problems</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace in Islam</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peace in the Qur'an</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance as a Principle of Peace</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Jihad, Justice and Peace</em></td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes 115

Appendix 1: Suggestions for Further Reading 119

Appendix 2: Websites Concerned with Interreligious Peace and Understanding 123

Index 125
The Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding (CCJU) of Sacred Heart University sponsored a symposium April 28-30, 2003, on the University's Fairfield, Connecticut, campus. The meeting of Jewish, Christian and Islamic scholars and leaders, "Pathways to Peace in the Abrahamic Faiths," is part of the Center's ongoing work to promote peace through dialogue and understanding.

The purpose of the conference was for leaders and scholars in the Jewish, Christian and Muslim religions to identify those teachings and values in each tradition that promote peace, the failures of each tradition to live up to their ideals, and ways to improve the teachings and practices to achieve peace. The conference did this and so much more. The participants and observers left with many questions answered and with a commitment to continue discussions such as these and open them up to larger audiences.

Jewish presenters included: Rabbi Samuel Sirat, former Chief Rabbi of France; Professor Adolphe Steg, president of the Israeli Alliance of France; and Rabbi Rene Gutman, Rabbi of Strasbourg, France. The principal Christian presenters were Dr. James G. Williams, professor emeritus of Religion, Syracuse University, New York; and Reverend Jean Dujardin, former secretary of the Episcopal Committee of the Conference of French Bishops, Paris. Dr. Azizah Al-Hibri, professor at the University of Richmond Law School, Virginia, and Dr. Louay Safi, Muslim Social Scientists, Herndon, Virginia, presented Muslim paths to peace. All of the presentations were candid and self-critical. Each group acknowledged the difficulties of terrorism and were resolved to stop such distortions of their religion, especially through education.

At the conclusion of the conference, the 40 participants left with a feeling of hope as well as a greater understanding of each religion and each other. If the letters of encouragement and thanks that the Center received are any indication, these scholars and religious leaders will
undoubtedly continue to teach what they have learned for years to come.

The papers from this conference have now been integrated here into a study guide that will build upon other important work of the Center begun at the 1998 conference held in Auschwitz, Poland, that resulted in the book, *Religion and Violence, Religion and Peace* (Sacred Heart University Press, 2000). At that time, speakers warned that religions still have the potential to incite wars and, as such, have a vital responsibility to foster a spirituality for life and cultures of justice. Since then, my colleague and associate, Dr. David Coppola and I have been speaking and teaching about the importance of informed, respectful and balanced dialogue between Jews, Christians, Muslims and all people of good will in pursuit of peace — especially in the face of what appears to be a marked increase in the violent expression of fundamentalists and fanatics in the name of religion. Often after a presentation, people would come up to us and ask for additional materials about another religion's teachings or scriptures. This book tries to meet some of those needs for religious leaders and educators on the local level.

We are living in exceptional times and such times require ordinary people to also be exceptional. I hope that this resource will inspire greater understanding and respect between religions and most of all that it will give courage to all to promote peace as God intends.

A special word of thanks is due to Gabriel V. Rossettie, coordinator of conferences and publications at the CCJU, for shaping the study guide; Guillaume Dale and Joan Jackson of the CCJU staff for their administrative support; Christopher J. Sheehan for his editorial assistance; Roberta Reynolds and Ruth Baxter for their creative and graphic work for the "Pathways to Peace in the Abrahamic Faiths Conference" and this volume; and Anthony J. Cernera, president of Sacred Heart University, for his support of the Center and championing the cause of peace by working to secure justice for all.

Rabbi Joseph H. Ehrenkranz
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Pathways to Peace in the Abrahamic Faiths Conference
The Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding of Sacred Heart University
April 28-30, 2003
Fairfield, Connecticut

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