



*Peacemakers in Action:
Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution*

Authored by the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding
Edited by Dr. David Little with Foreword by Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke
Cambridge University Press, 2007

A STUDY GUIDE
FOR
DISCUSSION & REFLECTION

This Study Guide is designed to accompany Tanenbaum's latest book, *Peacemakers in Action: Profiles of Religion in Conflict Resolution* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), which chronicles the stories of 16 local religious peace activists working at great risk to help resolve some of the world's most violent conflicts. For each of these men and women, religious texts and traditions have served both as sources of inspiration and as practical resources for bringing peace to their communities around the world: from Israel-Palestine to Sudan, Afghanistan, Northern Ireland, Ethiopia, the Balkans, South Africa, Nigeria, El Salvador, Sierra Leone, and West Papua.

At a time of increasing religious extremism and sectarian violence, these grassroots religious leaders are powerful — but underutilized — actors for resolving today's most horrifying conflicts. Their unique stature in the community, their credibility, and their effective religious peacemaking techniques set them apart from their secular counterparts, making them a critical partner in diplomacy.

As such, *Peacemakers in Action* contains timely information for diplomats, government officials, and conflict resolution practitioners — and, in particular, today's students of religion and international affairs: our future peacemakers.

This Study Guide is intended to help you probe the themes and lessons that emerge from *Peacemakers in Action*, especially the role that religious peacemakers can play in resolving various types of conflict. It is designed for readers in a variety of contexts, including (but certainly not limited to):

- *Classrooms studying conflict, its resolution, the role of religion, and/or international diplomacy.*
- *Secular or religious book clubs and study groups.*
- *Interfaith dialogues.*
- *The independent reader interested in exploring the book's findings in more depth.*

The Study Guide is divided into three categories:

Questions for Each Story are applicable to all of the *Peacemakers'* case studies. They focus on the community and the conflict situation, the role of religion, and the use of religious peacemaking techniques. We recommend reviewing these questions during or after reading each *Peacemaker's* story.

Questions for Analyzing Comparisons explore similarities and differences among the *Peacemakers'* unique experiences, encouraging analysis of their effective and diverse approaches to religious peacemaking. We recommend reviewing these questions after you have read at least a few of the case studies.

Questions for Reflection apply to the overall themes of the book and can be used to relate the lessons derived from the *Peacemakers'* lives and skills to other communities and conflict situations — including the ones you encounter in your own lives.

Of course, there are no strictly defined right or wrong answers. The questions in this Study Guide are just that — a guide. Discussion leaders and educators can simplify them or make them more complex depending on the familiarity of the readers to this subject.

Please send comments, questions, and ideas on using the book and this guide to conflictresolution@tanenbaum.org. Your feedback will help us develop more materials to disseminate the critical stories and lessons that these remarkable *Peacemakers* offer to all of us.

QUESTIONS FOR EACH STORY

The Community in Conflict

1. Discuss how and when the initial conflict originated.
 - What were the catalyzing events?
 - How did the conflict progress over time?
 - What factors contributed to its escalation?
2. Consider the critical issues affecting the community in the conflict as depicted in the story (whether political, economic, cultural, religious, or other).
 - How have these issues evolved over the duration of the conflict?
 - How are these issues related to one another?
3. Identify and discuss the different actors in the conflict.
 - What were/are their perspectives?
4. Identify the *Peacemaker's* multi-faceted identity.
 - How does the *Peacemaker* describe him/herself?
 - What are his/her religious denomination and beliefs, gender, ethnicity, and membership in other social groups, such as race and class?
5. What is the relationship, if any, between the *Peacemaker's* personal background and his/her multi-faceted identity, the community's identities, and the conflict?
6. How did the *Peacemaker* gain the trust of the specific individuals and institutions mentioned in the story?
 - How did (s)he establish credibility and authority?
 - What challenges, if any, do you suspect the *Peacemaker* experienced in gaining trust?
 - What skills did (s)he use to address the challenges?
7. Has the conflict situation changed since the printing of this book?

The Role of Religion

1. What role does religion play in the conflict?
 - Is it a central or peripheral issue?
 - What are the roles of religion and religious individuals, if any, in fueling the conflict?

- What are the roles of religion and religious individuals, if any, in the reconciliation among opposing groups?
2. Describe the role of religion in the *Peacemaker's* life.
 - Consider its influence on a personal level: did the *Peacemaker's* understanding of religious teachings influence his/her decision to be involved in peacebuilding? How?
 - Consider the role of religion at an interpersonal level: did the *Peacemaker's* understanding of religious teachings influence his/her relationship to the community, including the specific individuals and institutions mentioned in the story? How?
 3. Identify the various religious traditions, symbols, metaphors, texts, and/or resources that the *Peacemaker* drew upon to work for peace and reconciliation.
 - Why do you think the *Peacemaker* chose these particular resources?
 - Assess the impact of using these resources. How were they effective?
 - In your own opinion, and considering your own perspectives and experiences, could the *Peacemaker* have used any of the religious resources more effectively?
 - Could (s)he have used other religious resources at his/her disposal?
 - Did the *Peacemaker* use religious resources for different purposes and in different ways? If so, how?
 4. Describe and discuss the relationship between the *Peacemaker* and religious institutions (think about places of worship and/or religious bodies that are mentioned in the story).
 5. Describe and discuss the relationship between the *Peacemaker* and non-religious institutions.

Techniques in Religious Peacemaking

1. How does the *Peacemaker* gather information in order to best respond to the needs of the community?
2. Identify the different peacemaking techniques used by the *Peacemaker*.
 - Describe each one, and how and why they were effective or ineffective.
 - What was the intended purpose of each technique?
3. How did the *Peacemaker* adapt his/her approach to the specific, on-the-ground circumstances?
 - Did the *Peacemaker's* methods/approaches change and evolve over time? If so, why?
 - Did this effort strengthen the peace process? How?
4. How does the *Peacemaker* understand peace?
 - Does he/she consider peaceful resolution and true reconciliation as an ongoing process? How do you know?

5. The first chapter describes only some of the religious peacemaking techniques depicted in the book (i.e., the ones that were identified as being used more often). Identify techniques used by the *Peacemaker* that were not discussed in the first chapter.

6. Consider the two commonly defined “tracks” of diplomacy: Track I Diplomacy that generally involves official diplomats and politicians, and Track II Diplomacy that generally involves civil society actors.

- What track best describes the work of the *Peacemaker*?
- Were there times when the *Peacemaker* was involved in multiple tracks?
- How did the *Peacemaker's* work influence the diplomatic efforts in each track? Did it strengthen, weaken, or act as a neutral force?
- Did the *Peacemaker* experience any limitations in working within either Track I or Track II?

7. Identify the different risks the *Peacemaker* took to pursue his/her work.

8. Describe the different sacrifices the *Peacemaker* made for his/her work.

9. Did anyone support the *Peacemaker* in his/her efforts? Who? How?

10. Did anyone try to stand in the *Peacemaker's* way? Who? How?

11. Did the media play a role in the work of the *Peacemaker*?

- If so, how?
- If not, consider the multiple ways the *Peacemaker* could have utilized the media, and how media attention would have benefited or harmed the peace process.

12. Consider the different challenges the *Peacemaker* and the community faced in working to resolve the conflict.

- What additional resources or skills would have supported the *Peacemaker's* efforts?

QUESTIONS FOR ANALYZING COMPARISONS

1. Compare the *Peacemaker's* methods to those of the others featured in the book.
 - How are they similar?
 - How are they different?
2. Could any of the *Peacemaker's* specific religious peacemaking techniques be adapted effectively in the conflicts described *in the other chapters*?
 - How?
 - Would any techniques be inappropriate in the other conflict situations?
3. Could any of the specific religious peacemaking techniques featured in the other chapters be adapted effectively in *this conflict situation*?
 - How?
 - Would any techniques be inappropriate for resolving this conflict?
4. Religion is a significant factor in only some of the conflicts described in this book.
 - Compare how religious peacemaking techniques were used by *Peacemakers* when religion was a factor and when it was not. Why were the techniques effective even when religion was not a significant factor in the conflict?
5. Not all the *Peacemakers* agree on nonviolence and the use of force. Identify some of their perspectives and compare them. What is the stance each *Peacemaker* takes on nonviolence (some explicitly, others implicitly), and why?
6. Each *Peacemaker* uses education, whether formally or informally, to instill and sustain a culture of peace in his/her community. Describe the different education techniques used and discuss their effectiveness.
7. How do the *Peacemakers* support and sustain themselves? Think about their needs for spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical sustenance.
 - How do they meet their needs?
 - What resources do they draw upon?
8. Discuss the concept of neutrality in the work of conflict resolution. Were all the *Peacemakers* "neutral"? Is neutrality necessary to achieve credibility?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Imagine creating a religion.

- What would you want it to teach?
- What would you want it to say about conflict resolution and the steps to ensure peace?
- How would it relate to the teachings used by the *Peacemakers*? Is it similar or does it differ from them?

2. Consider the fact that four-fifths of the world's population identify with a religion. Now consider the role of religion in your life or in the life of someone close to you.

- Does it influence day-to-day decisions? How?
- How does it influence larger decisions?
- Does it influence interpersonal relationships? How?

3. Consider one of the case studies and the religious resources it describes. In your experience, are there similar religious resources in your tradition or in another tradition with which you are familiar?

4. How do the peacemaking techniques described in the stories apply to conflicts in your community, or other conflicts that you have encountered?

- Which peacemaking methods could be adapted and applied in your community?
- Which peacemaking methods could be adapted and applied in your life and relationships?
- Which peacemaking methods would be inappropriate for your community? For your life and relationships?

5. What comparisons can you make between the *Peacemaker* and well-known figures in religious peacemaking (such as Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Bishop Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Elie Wiesel, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi, and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)? Compare their ideas, teachings, and actions as they relate to:

- Nonviolence
- Forgiveness and reconciliation
- Grassroots community organizing and empowerment
- Generating a global reach and impact

6. Consider secular countries that profess a separation between religion and the state. Is this separation always clear?

- Do religion and religious individuals influence government policies, even in secular states? How?
- Think about a particular secular government. How does religion influence the countries that it borders, trades with, and/or its allies?
- Would an understanding of the role that on-the-ground religious peacemakers play help in meeting foreign policy goals? If so, how?

7. Throughout the globe, religion is often seen as a factor in conflict. Tanenbaum's 2004 *Peacemaker in Action*, Canon Andrew White who currently works in Iraq, once said:

The reality is that religion has power. And that power can either be used creatively or destructively...I do believe that religion is indeed the major cause of much conflict in the world today. And I would say if it is a cause, it must also be the cure.

- Discuss the meaning of Canon White's statement. How can religion and religious individuals be re-framed or recognized as a "cure" or a resource for peace?
- What are the advantages and the challenges in seeking and using such a cure?

8. Consider current conflict situations not featured in the book in which religion *is* a significant factor. How could a religious peacemaker play a role?

9. Consider current conflict situations not featured in the book in which religion *is not* a significant factor. How could a religious peacemaker play a role?

10. How can we measure impact and success of religious peacemaking?

- What are short-term indicators?
- What are long-term indicators?
- What are the challenges of such measurements in the short and long term?

11. This book focuses specifically on religious individuals as opposed to religious institutions. Compare the role of individuals versus institutions in conflict situations.

- Are there situations in which a religious person working in his/her individual capacity (and not on behalf of a religious institution) would be more effective than an institution?
- Are there situations in which an institution's involvement would be more effective than an individual working on his/her own?

12. A version of the Golden Rule exists in almost every religious tradition (see below).

- How does each *Peacemaker* translate the Golden Rule into action?
- Can local religious leaders help their communities put the Golden Rule into practice? If so, how?

The Golden Rule

Bahá'í: "And if thine eyes be turned towards justice, choose thou for thy neighbour that which thou choosest for thyself." Lawh'i 'Ibn'i 'Dhib, "Epistle to the Son of the Wolf" 30

Buddhism: "Hurt not others in ways you yourself would find hurtful." Udana-Varga, 5:18

Christianity: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets." Matthew 7.12

Confucianism: "Do not unto others what you do not want them to do to you." Analects 15.13

Hinduism: "This is the sum of duty: do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you." The Mahabharata, 5:1517

Islam: "Not one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself." Fortieth Hadith of an-Nawawi 13

Jainism: "A man should wander about treating all creatures as he himself would be treated." Sutrakritanga 1.11.33

Judaism: "What is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbor: that is the whole of the Torah; all the rest of it is commentary." Talmud, Shabbat 31a

Native American: "Respect for all life is the foundation." The Great Law of Peace

Sikhism: "Treat others as thou wouldst be treated thyself." Adi Granth

Taoism: "Regard your neighbor's gain as our own gain and your neighbor's loss as your own loss." T'ai Shang Kan Ying P'ien

Zoroastrianism: "That nature alone is good which refrains from doing unto another whatsoever is not good for itself." Dadistan-I-Dinik, 94:5

13. Discuss the idea of taking on peacemaking as a vocation or life pursuit.

- What types of support and resources would you need?
- What challenges would you anticipate?
- What would motivate you and sustain your work?