Do religious differences inevitably lead to conflict? Many of the major global conflicts that have taken place in the last century have been motivated by religion. At the same time, religion has been a great force for peace and the establishment of moral and ethical standards. In this course we will investigate the causes of religious conflict and peace. We will study sacred texts from the world’s religions and empirical studies on the psychological effects of religious identity. We will also examine topics ranging from terrorism to the power of faith-based diplomacy. In groups, students will select one major conflict to study in-depth and analyze from a social psychological standpoint. Finally, students will synthesize what they have learned over the course of the semester and in their case-study to present in a panel event open to the whole campus. The study of the psychology of religion is vitally important in understanding causes of global violence and preparing for roles of global leadership.

Class 1. Introduction
Welcome class.
Discuss concept of religious illiteracy and recent findings from Pew Forum.
Review syllabus and requirements
Homework: Beliefnet quiz and Reading

Class 2. Conflict I
Review results of Beliefnet quiz.
Brief run-through of religions throughout history, main spots of conflict
Watch in class: http://www.mapsofwar.com/ind/history-of-religion.html
Selecting case studies for final project.
Discussion: Reflecting on causes of conflict: Minimal group paradigm – how groups determined by a mere coin toss can still behave in a biased fashion; Moral exclusion and injustice; Prioritizing some identities over others; The many possibilities of religion for violence or peace.

Class 3. Conflict II
Scripture study: Judaism
Discussion: Psychological barriers to dispute resolution, including the false polarization effect, discounting, and the hostile media phenomenon

Class 4. Religion as Identity and Culture
Scripture study: Hinduism
Religion as an identity and religion as a culture. The difference between descent-based religions and assent-based religions. Cultural differences in collectivism/individualism, and in perspectives of the importance of religion to daily life.

Homework: Reading Pargament (2002); Valdesolo & DeSteno (2007); Nepstad (2004)

Class 5. Religion and Morality
Scripture study: Buddhism
Discussion: What sets religion apart from other identities – the role of religion in developing a moral framework; the malleability of morality. Religion as worldview.

Class 6. Religious zeal, uncertainty, and conflict
Due: Outline and working bibliography for case study.
Scripture study: Christianity
Discussion: The role of religion in filling other psychological needs – religion as answer to uncertainty and perceived lack of control – religion’s susceptibility to misuse and manipulation.
Homework: Reading Moghaddam (2005); Savage & Liht (2008)

Class 7. Terrorism
Scripture study: Christianity & Islam
Discussion: The motivations for terrorism and religious fundamentalism. When fundamentalism explodes into violence.

Class 8. Religion and peace
Scripture study: Islam
Discussion: Religion and its role in forgiveness; religion as a force for peace and nonviolence. Religion as opposed to violent approaches – the Golden Rule.

Class 9. Faith-based diplomacy and negotiation
Scripture study: Bahá’í
Discussion: The importance of utilizing faith-based diplomacy in addressing religious conflicts. Cultural awareness and adaptation of message framing.

Class 10. Group presentations (case studies)

Class 11. Group presentations (case studies)

Class 12. Group presentations (case studies)

Class 13. Course-led campus event
Due: Final papers on case studies

READINGS


