

an interfaith dialogue on



**Pre-Conference Study Guides
2008 Trinity Institute
Religion and Violence: Untangling the Roots of Conflict**
by Edward O. de Bary

Notes For the Group Leader

These study guides are for five interviews that precede the January 21-23, 2008 Trinity Institute, "Religion & Violence: Untangling the Roots of Conflict", An interfaith Dialogue with James Carroll, James H. Cone, Susanna Heschel, Tariq Ramadan and Katharine Jefferts Schori, preacher.

Each study guide is designed for one-hour sessions and includes time for the interviews that last about 20 minutes. The five interviews introduce the preacher and the four speakers of the 2008 Trinity Institute. They also provide an opportunity to engage some of the ideas they will develop in their January 2008 presentations.

To provide effective discussion groups we suggest that groups of five to seven persons are optimal. In any case it is advisable to keep the discussion groups at no more than twelve participants. If more or less time is available for each session group leaders need to make the necessary adjustments to the schedule.

It may be helpful, either to read the short biographies of each speaker to the group, or to provide a copy to each participant. Providing everyone with a copy of the study guide may be the most convenient way to achieve this.

Equipment required:

DVD player, projection equipment, sound system and a large screen, or a large television set(s), attached to a DVD player, that can be viewed and heard by all.

A space large enough to sub-divide your group if there are more than ten to twelve participants.

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Katharine Jefferts Schori

Katharine Jefferts Schori (preacher) was elected Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in 2006. She is chief pastor to the Church's 2.4 million members in 16 countries and 110 dioceses, ecumenical officer, and primate, joining leaders of the other 38 Anglican Provinces in consultation for global good and reconciliation. The first female primate in the Anglican Communion, her work for reconciliation in difficult times has drawn international attention.

Purpose: To engage The Rt. Rev. Katharine Jefferts Schori's interview with Robert Scott, director of the Trinity Institute. She is the preacher for the January 21-23, 2008 Trinity Institute. Her homily will set the tone for the conference.

Introductions and/or greeting participants: 10 minutes. If the group is sufficiently large, use this time to subdivide into groups of five to seven persons.

Screen the DVD: Approximately 18 minutes

Questions to discuss in sub groups: 20 minutes

Bishop Katharine suggests that the entanglement of religion and violence occurs when on person or group of persons believe themselves to be so utterly right that they have the authority to impose that view(s) on others. What is your reaction to this? In what ways does this (or does this not) square with your own experience?

Some claim that we have received divine revelation through Holy Scriptures and that the scriptures are unchangeable. Others, like Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori, affirm that revelation continues and that our doctrines evolve. What would you do to reconcile these different points of view that serve as roots of conflicts?

Wrap-up: 10 minutes

To the entire group, ask, "After this discussion, what have you learned to look for in subsequent presentations from the Trinity Institute about the possibilities of untangling the roots of conflict?"

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James Carroll

James Carroll is a best-selling author of fiction and nonfiction, a former Roman Catholic priest, and a lifelong activist for peace. His recent books include the National Book Award-winning memoir *An American Requiem: God, My Father, and the War that Came Between Us*; *Constantine's Sword: The Church and the Jews -- A History*; and *House of War (2006), a History of the Pentagon*. His regular column for the Boston Globe newspaper engages national and global issues.

Purpose: To engage the thought of James Carroll, one of the speakers for the January 21-23, 2008 Trinity Institute.

Introductions and/or greeting participants: 10 minutes. If the group is sufficiently large, use this time to subdivide into groups of five to seven persons.

Watch the DVD: Approximately 20 minutes

Questions to discuss in the sub groups: 20 minutes

1. James Carroll raises a provocative question: "Why is this magnificent embrace of peace that's taken place over the last two generations in Europe,...ending a 400-year-long history of war-making...taking place simultaneous to the collapse of religion?" What is your reaction to this observation by Carroll?
2. Carroll raises a fundamental challenge to Christian theology, to replace that understanding of the violence of the sacrifice of the cross with an understanding of the cross as the expression of mercy, forgiveness, toleration and peace that Easter manifests. What opportunities do you have to make that a reality?

Wrap-up: 10 minutes

To the entire group, ask, "What word or single sentence captures what you have found most interesting or provocative?"

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James H. Cone

James H. Cone forged black liberation theology in the crucible of the civil rights movement and has remained on the cutting edge of its development. His ten books began with *Black Theology and Black Power* and include *Martin & Malcolm & America: A Dream or a Nightmare*; *God of the Oppressed*; and his most recent work, *Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation, 1968-1998*. He is the Charles A. Briggs Distinguished Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Seminary in New York City.

Purpose: To engage the thought of James H. Cone, one of the four speakers for the January 21-23, 2008 Trinity Institute.

Introductions and/or greeting participants: 10 minutes. If the group is sufficiently large, use this time to subdivide into groups of five to seven persons.

Watch the DVD: Approximately 20 minutes

Questions to discuss in the sub groups: 20 minutes

1. James Cone challenges us with the violence that emerges from religious dominance, but that religion can also provide hope to those who are suppressed. He suggests that this is a global issue that affects many religions. What is your understanding of this complex issue?
2. What does Cone's presentation evoke in terms of your own personal experience of the relationship of religion and violence?

Wrap-up: 10 minutes

To the entire group, ask, "What are you called to do in response to the challenge posed by Cone's presentation?"

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Tariq Ramadan

Tariq Ramadan writes and speaks on the future of Islam in pluralistic society. Named one of *TIME* magazine's "100 Innovators for the 21st Century," his widely translated books include *In the Footsteps of the Prophet: Lessons from the Life of Muhammad*; *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*; and *Islam, the West, and the Challenge of Modernity*. He is currently Senior Research Fellow at St. Antony's College (Oxford), Doshisha University (Kyoto, Japan), and the Lokahi Foundation (London).

Purpose: To engage the thought of Tariq Ramadan who will be one of the speakers for the January 21-23, 2008 Trinity Institute.

Introductions and/or greeting participants: 10 minutes. If the group is sufficiently large, use this time to subdivide into groups of five to seven persons.

Watch the DVD: Approximately 20 minutes

Questions to discuss in the sub groups: 20 minutes

1. Tariq Ramadan offers definitions of Arabic terms such as jihad and fatwah. He also states that sacred texts must be understood in the "historical context" from which they originate as well as the need to be humble before the inevitable mediation of our own minds. What challenges do these assertions raise for you and your understanding of the sacred texts of Islam and Christianity?
2. Tariq Ramadan calls a paradox of remaining faithful and yet providing for a progressive evolution of religion, affirming self-doubt as humility, and requiring at least a moratorium on ancient rules that developed in a context very different from our own age. What thoughts does his call strike for you and your own faith affirmations?

Wrap-up: 10 minutes

To the entire group, ask, "In a word or a sentence state, what insight(s) occur to you from this discussion that offer hope for the future as we struggle to live in a world filled with conflict and violence that contains very diverse religious affirmations?"

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Susannah Heschel

Susannah Heschel holds the Eli Black Chair on Jewish Studies at Dartmouth. She is the editor of *On Being a Jewish Feminist* and *Moral Grandeur and Spiritual Audacity*, an anthology of essays by her father, Abraham Joshua Heschel, and co-editor of *Insider/Outsider: American Jews and Multiculturalism*. She is the author of *Abraham Geiger and the Jewish Jesus*, which won a National Jewish Book Award, and the forthcoming *The Aryan Jesus: Christians, Nazis and the Bible*.

Purpose: To engage the thought of Susannah Heschel who will be one of the speakers for the January 21-23, 2008 Trinity Institute.

Introductions and/or greeting participants: 10 minutes. If the group is sufficiently large, use this time to subdivide into groups of five to seven persons.

Watch the DVD: 20 minutes

Questions to discuss in the sub groups: 20 minutes

1. Susannah Heschel raises the question, "Does violence come out of the religious teachings, or is religion used, manipulated, and misinterpreted in order to justify violence?" What is your response to this question?
2. Susannah Heschel speaks about attempts during the Hitler era in Germany to de-Judaize the church. In what ways have you experienced or known of similar attempts in this day and age?

Wrap-up: 10 minutes

To the entire group, ask, "What can we do to untangle the roots of violence that have been so much a part of the Jewish-Christian relations for nearly 2,000 years?"