**RELIGION AND PUBLIC LIFE AT HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL**

White Paper for RPL Staff

November 11, 2020

**NORMATIVE ASSERTIONS**

Though there are many reasons to deepen the public understanding of religion, our focus in the RPL is to enhance “religious literacy” in service of a just world at peace. Our commitment to “justpeace” is a normative claim based on the following assertions:

1. structural forms of inequity are widespread and intersecting;
2. these inequities are harmful to both those in positions of privilege as well as those who are marginalized, albeit in very different ways;
3. structural inequities are not inevitable; and
4. their eradication is a condition of justpeace.

In this way, justpeace is an aspiration and a guiding framework for engaging in a *process of praxis* in our attempts to mitigate structural inequities in and through our work.

The aspiration of contributing to a future where justpeace is realized is one we share with countless others in civil societies here in the US and globally. Our particular contribution or “lane” of engagement relates to the complex roles that religions play in both promoting and thwarting structural inequities as they manifest in particular social and historical contexts. Understanding these influences is can provide fresh insights into understanding the persistence of inequities as well as constructing imaginative strategies for their mitigation.

**FOUNDATIONAL ASSUMPTIONS THAT FRAME RPL**

1. Religion is a powerful force in human experience. From the beginnings of human history into our contemporary moment, religious convictions continue to inspire terrible acts of violence as well as profound acts of courage, compassion, and imagination.
2. In spite of this reality and for many reasons, few citizens of the world understand the depth and breadth of this power. Particularly how it manifests in so-called “secular” arenas of our lives.
3. This lack of understanding about religion and its power has many consequences. The ones we are most concerned with are civic consequences. Partial or superficial understandings of religion too often fuel bigotry and prejudice. They also hinder creativity, imagination, and cooperation in local, national and global contexts.
4. We believe that promoting a nuanced and capacious understanding of religion provides tools to mitigate the destructive power of religion and enhance its ability to generate compassion, beauty, and just peacebuilding.
   1. Mitigate the destructive power by identifying the ways that dimensions of religion function as forms of cultural violence;
   2. Enhance the imaginative power by considering what is possible v. probable within particular contexts and recognizing how *“...religious worldviews provide alternative frameworks from which to critique normative cultural assumptions. In this way (contrary to popular belief) the study of religion can serve to enhance rather than thwart critical thinking and cultural imagination regarding human capacity and agency.”* (Moore, ORI, 2010)

Just like pathbreaking scholarship that has illuminated the pervasive role of class, race, gender, and so many other important factors in addressing issues of civic importance, we believe this approach to understanding religion in context is crucial to understanding the rich complexity of modern human affairs.

**METHOD PAPER**

This White Paper assumes knowledge and adoption of the RL Method as represented in a slightly modified (swapping RLP for RPL) version of “Methodological Assumptions and Analytical Frameworks Regarding Religion” that I have attached here as an appendix.

**TWO ARENAS OF ENGAGMENT**

RPL at HDS is organized as two complementary initiatives: The Religion, Conflict, and Peace Initiative (RCPI) and the Religious Literacy and the Professions Initiative (RLPI). Each has a specific “entry” point into promoting the public understanding of religion in service of a just world at peace, but their intersections are quickly apparent.

**RELIGION, CONFLICT, AND PEACE INITIATIVE**

The entry point for RCPI is social/political context. When considering a particular geographic region or nation state, what are the social/political dynamics that shape the context and what role(s) do religions play in those dynamics?

For example, in our case study of the secular state of Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories, we begin with the assertion that Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories is a form of structural inequity/violence that is harmful to all, albeit in vastly different ways. Thus our engagement is focused on learning and teaching about the region through this critical theory lens and the framework of an intersectional understanding of religion. We also focus on collaborating with those working to mitigate the structural forms of violence that occupation represents and fosters while also consciously committing to mitigating forms of violence and the hierarchies of power that sustain them. This requires engaging in the process of praxis to reimagine present and future forms of civic life guided by a vision of justpeace.

The employment of a critical theory and intersectional lens of religion provides an avenue for understanding this complicated region in fresh ways. Examples include the following: the complex and fluid expressions of Jewish and Christian forms of Zionism historically and in the contemporary moment; Christian nationalism in the U.S. and its influence on Israel; the history of religious influences on European colonialism of the region; the religious and cultural diversities that constitute “Israelis” and “Palestinians;” the long history of Christian anti-Semitism; the diverse roles that religious communities and actors play in various forms of oppression and resistance historically and currently; indigeneity and how it is defined and defended; and the roles that religions play in supporting and challenging the normative neoliberal political and economic structures of globalization as they impact and shape the region, to name but a few different arenas of investigation and insight. These investigations reveal complexities that challenge simplistic binaries, showcase a multiplicity of narratives, and lay bare cultural forms of violence and peace that animate agency and expose how structural inequities are socially constructed as opposed to predestined.

**Primary audiences:** students interested in the region; practitioners/professionals engaged in justpeace efforts in I/P and globally with a special focus on “cultural activism” (defined as artistic/creative engagements broadly defined); scholars at Harvard engaged in justpeace efforts in the region.

**The intersection of RCPI with RPLI:** In this case study, one arena of intersection is in our collaborative work with Fellows in the region who are actively engaged through their profession or vocation in challenging the occupation and working creatively and constructively toward justpeace. Few, if any, of our past and current Fellows had considered religion relevant to their work in any but a cursory way prior to their engagement with us. Through our bi-weekly seminar meetings, and support of their projects, we learned and are learning more about their work in context as professionals, artists, and activists; the “language” of their professions/vocations and how they define/experience the relevance of religion; and the ways that a complex understanding of religion can inspire pathways for reimagining possibilities beyond the zero-sum frameworks that sustain structural violence and that are so ubiquitous.

Another clear arena is the internship opportunities in the region that our students have pursued. Internships are in areas that represent professions/vocations that often map on to our five current areas for the RLPI.

**Strengths, challenges and opportunities in our current configuration:** The focus on a particular region is a real strength of the RCPI because it allows for depth of exploration and development of focused networks. Furthermore, our choice to explicitly name the occupation as a form of structural violence and as a starting point for engagement provides an all too rare “space” for creative and constructive collaborations among Palestinians and their allies.

Another strength of the RCPI is the affiliates network we’re building within Harvard with scholars from multiple disciplines. Like our Fellows, these scholars have rarely considered religion in a nuanced way relevant to their work, but find common ground in our starting place that the occupation is a form of structural violence that is not inevitable. They are interested in learning about what a critical theory framework of religion can foster and have agreed (in principle) to participate in a reading group that we plan to launch in the coming months…again, keeping in and advancing our “lane” of promoting RL.

Regarding challenges (and as I’ve mentioned in the past) I don’t believe the current structure of the Fellowship program provides adequate exposure for our Fellows to become adequately religiously literate (in ways they can employ in their work), though we are learning a lot about the particular contexts of how professions/vocations function in the region. (E.g., architecture in Gaza, journalism in the West Bank, filmmaking in Lyd.) Beginning in the fall of 2022, we will suspend the current Resident Fellowship program and instead divert funds to support colleagues in the region to pursue the MRPL degree with a designated project to engage. (We will continue with the non-resident Fellows program to continue to build our networks and learn from partners about their work and contexts.)

**RELIGIOUS LITERACY AND THE PROFESSIONS INITIATIVE**

The entry point for RLPI is vocation or profession with a current focus on education, humanitarian action, government, media and entertainment, and journalism in primarily (but not exclusively) “secular” contexts. When considering a particular vocation or profession, what is the relevance of religion broadly defined for the work professionals/actors in different fields engage? Critical questions to initially explore and define include investigating the prevailing assumptions about religion within these “secular” professions and how have those assumptions shape the nature of the work produced and perceptions of acceptable arenas of engagement. The relevance of attention to structural inequities becomes apparent when narrow assumptions about religion promote bigotry and prejudice; mask how powerful religious influences have shaped or are currently shaping embedded policies and practices within the profession itself and in regards to work engaged; and reproduce and give sanction to further marginalizing minority actors within religious communities through universal characterizations, to name only a few examples.

**Primary audiences:** students interested in CRPL; MRPL candidates; professionals/practitioners in the five areas of RLPI focus and related arenas who are interested in exploring RL relevant to their work with justpeace vision (broadly defined); and relevant scholars/practitioners at Harvard.

**The intersection of RLPI with RCPI:** The social/political context that is the entry point for RCPI is critically relevant for RLPI because professionals/vocational actors don’t ever work in a vacuum. An educator working in a public school in rural Kentucky is going to have a different set of challenges and opportunities related to religion than will an educator in urban Los Angeles or one in Ramallah. A journalist working a local beat anywhere will have a different set of opportunities and challenges related to religion than one on the China desk of the NYT. Contexts for humanitarian action, government, and media and entertainment are all equally salient and require skills to understand from the perspective of religious literacy.

**Strengths, challenges and opportunities in our current configuration:** The new MRPL and the Certificate program are the fruits of the seeds we were able to plant through the education initiative, the symposia series, the RLPI intro courses and the internships. This marks a tremendous accomplishment of which we should all be proud.

Our track record with internships through the RLPI is mixed, but we have some great successes. Developing a strong network and infrastructure of support for both RLPI and RCPI internships is an important place of connections between the programs. (See below.)

We are challenged by the necessity to have a wide range of professions for our students to explore while also needing to develop depth of connections and understanding of the complexities within these professions. We have the most depth and long history with education, of course, and need to find ways to focus our engagements within the other professions and to minimize fragmentation.

**IDEAS FOR DEEPER COLLABORATION AMONG INITIATIVES**

1. I suggest that we develop singular internship structure serving both programs, including creating a structure for RCP interns to earn CRPL and for CRPL students to pursue internship opportunities in I/P. This is a natural place of connection that can both enhance the internship experiences for our students and provide generative collaborations among staff. Both internship programs need more structure which we’re ready to build based on experiences over the past two years.
2. Another arena of collaboration can be the development of a coherent continuing/executive education program for RPL.
3. A third (inchoate in my mind) arena could be issue oriented with possible foci on BLM and climate change through the vehicles of 1) establishing a CRPL track for cultural activism (which would entail courses and internships); 2) continuing/exec ed offerings; and 3) webinars and other public programming. We already have some foundations for this through the RCPI that has Fellows (past and current) who are involved in the Palestinian-Black solidarity efforts that are longstanding and well established. Climate change is a global concern, of course, and both BLM and climate change are commitments we as a staff share and that have interest among HDS faculty as well. I hesitate to go too far down this road until we have our new AD in place, but these are areas of both critical importance and great generative promise.

**VISUAL REPRESENTATION**

The Venn diagram below provides a visual image of the intersections and independence of each initiative. The representation of the scale of intersections is too modest, but the conceptualization is helpful.

RPL

•the methodological framework that forms the foundation for all projects and programs

•CRPL and MRPL programs

•room for independent faculty led and staffed initiatives that may fall outside of RCPI

and RLPI

Public Programing and Continuing/Executive Education

•faculty initiated and led programing relevant to RPL

•Ministry of Ideas podcast

•venues for faculty to engage contemporary issues/questions

•jointly sponsored events outside of RCPI/RLPI

RCPI

•RCPI affiliates at Harvard

•RCPI Fellows (with some possible overlap with RLPI Fellows)

•RCPI networks (with some possible overlap with RLPI networks)

•RCPI resource development (with some possible overlap with RLPI resource dev)

•RCPI courses (with some possible overlap with RLPI courses)

RLPI

•RLPI affiliates at Harvard (need to be established)

•RLPI Fellows (with some possible overlap with RCPI Fellows)

•RLPI networks (with some possible overlap with RCPI networks)

•RLPI courses (with some possible overlap with RCPI courses)

RCPI/RLPI overlap

•Internship program

•Possible strands representing BLM and Climate Change

•possible Fellows

•possible networks

•possible courses

RCPI/Public Programming overlap

•webinars

•conferences

•symposia

•book talks

•jointly sponsored programming with other relevant groups (Ash, HLS, CMES, etc.)

•continuing/exec ed opportunities relevant to RCPI

RLPI/Public Programming overlap

•webinars

•conferences

•symposia

•book talks

•jointly sponsored programming with other relevant groups (HHI, HLS, Medical School,

HKS, HGSE, etc.)

•continuing/exec ed opportunities relevant to RLPI

RCPI/RLPI/Public Programming overlap

•BLM and Climate Change programming

•webinars with professionals in I/P

•possible book talks

•possible symposia focused on a particular profession in I/P region

•cultural activism programming and development



**Appendix**

**METHODOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORKS REGARDING RELIGION**

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2020

**OVERVIEW**

Religions have functioned throughout human history to inspire and justify the full range of human agency from the heinous to the heroic. Their influences remain potent here in the 21st century in spite of modern predictions that religious influences would steadily decline in concert with the rise of secular democracies and advances in science. Understanding these complex religious influences is a critical dimension of understanding modern human affairs across the full spectrum of endeavors in local, national, and global arenas. This chapter on methods outlines a framework for understanding *how* religions function in human experience and this framework provides the foundation for Religion and Public Life at Harvard Divinity School.

**FOUNDATIONAL ASSUMPTIONS**

1. There is a fundamental difference between the devotional expression of a religious worldview as normative and the study of religion which recognizes the factual existence of diverse devotional assertions;
2. Religions are internally diverse;
3. Religions evolve and change;
4. Religious influences are embedded in all aspects of human experience;
5. All knowledge claims (including religious ones) are socially constructed and represent particular “situated” perspectives;
6. There is nothing inevitable about either violence or peace; both are manifest in three intersecting formulations: direct, structural, and cultural and both are shaped by conscious and unconscious human agency where religious influences are always operative.

**DEVELOPMENT OF ASSUMPTIONS**

For a variety of reasons dating back to the Enlightenment (including Christian influenced theories of secularization that were reproduced through colonialism) there are many commonly held assumptions about religion in general and religious traditions in particular that represent fundamental misunderstandings. Scholars of religion are well aware of these assumptions and have articulated some basic facts about religions themselves and the study of religion that serve as useful foundations for inquiry. [[1]](#footnote-1)

Differentiating Between Devotional Expression and the Study of Religion

First and foremost, scholars highlight the difference between the *devotional expression* of particular religious beliefs as normative and the nonsectarian *study of religion* that presumes the religious legitimacy of diverse normative claims. The importance of this distinction is that it recognizes the validity of normative theological assertions without equating them with universal truths about the tradition itself.

Unfortunately, this distinction is often ignored in public discourse about religion. For example, there is a great deal of contemporary debate about the roles for women in Islam. In truth, there are a variety of theological interpretations of the tradition that lead to different, sometimes antithetical practices and assertions. Equally common is that differing communities will have similar practices but with diverse theological justifications.

It is appropriate for members of a particular community to assert the orthodoxy of their theological interpretations of the tradition, but it is important to recognize the difference between a theological assertion of normativity and the factual truth that multiple legitimate perspectives exist. The latter represents the nonsectarian study of religion. This is the approach promoted here and the one most appropriate to advance the public understanding of religion.

There are three other central assertions about religions themselves that religious studies scholars have outlined and that flow from the recognition of the distinction between devotional expression and the nonsectarian study of religion outlined above:

1) religions are internally diverse as opposed to uniform;

2) religions evolve and change over time as opposed to being ahistorical and static;

3) religious influences are embedded in all dimensions of culture as opposed to the assumption that religions function in discrete, isolated, “private” contexts.

Religions are Internally Diverse

This assertion is a truism but requires explanation due to the ways that religious traditions and practices are frequently portrayed as uniform. Aside from the obvious formal differences within traditions represented by differing sects or expressions (e.g., Roman Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant for Christianity; Vaishnavism, Shaivism, Shaktism, for Hinduism, etc.) there are differences within sects or expressions because religious communities function in different social/political contexts. One example is the debate mentioned above regarding the roles of women in Islam. The following assertions are also commonly repeated: “Buddhists are nonviolent”, “Christians oppose abortion”, “Religion and science are incompatible”, etc. All of these comments represent particular theological assertions as opposed to factual claims representing any given tradition itself.

Religions Evolve and Change

This is another truism but again requires explanation due to the common practice of representing religious traditions without social or historical context and solely (or primarily) through ritual expression and/or abstract beliefs. Religions exist in time and space and are constantly interpreted and reinterpreted by believers. For example, the Confucian concept of the “mandate from heaven” evolved within dynasties, geopolitical regions, and historical eras and continues to evolve today. Another example is that the practice of slavery has been both justified and vilified by all three monotheistic traditions in differing social and historical contexts. Finally, in a more specific example, the Southern Baptist convention in the United States passed a series of resolutions in the 1970s supporting the moral legitimacy of abortion and reversed those resolutions in 2003.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Religious Influences are Embedded in Cultures

Religions are collections of ideas, practices, values, and stories that are all embedded in cultures and not separable from them. Just as religion cannot be understood in isolation from its cultural (including political) contexts, it is impossible to understand culture without considering its religious dimensions. In the same way that race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, and socio-economic class are always factors in cultural interpretation and understanding, so too is religion.

Whether explicit or implicit, religious influences can virtually always be found when one asks “the religion question” of any given social or historical experience. For example, political theorists have recently highlighted the ways that different interpretations of secularism have been profoundly shaped by varied normative assumptions about Christianity.[[3]](#footnote-3) This is just one representation of a fundamental shift in political theory that is challenging the legitimacy of the longstanding assertion that religion both *can be* and *should be* restricted to a private sphere and separated from political influence.

Modernist claims predicting the steady decline of the transnational political influence of religion that were first formalized in the 17th century have been foundational to various modern political theories for centuries. In spite of the ongoing global influences of religions in political life throughout this time period, it is only in the aftermath of 1) the Iranian Revolution in 1979; 2) the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and the subsequent rise vs. the widely predicted demise of religion; and 3) the 9/11 and 7/7 terrorist attacks that political theorists in the West began to acknowledge the highly problematic ways that religions and religious influences have been marginalized and too simplistically rendered.

This shift is a welcome one and paves the way for multi and cross-disciplinary collaborations with religious studies scholars across the full range of social science investigations in order to explore the complex and critically important roles that religions play in our contemporary world.

Definition of Religious Literacy

Given the above principles, we have adopted the following definition of religious literacy articulated by Diane L. Moore has been adopted by the American Academy of Religion to help educators understand what is required for a basic understanding of religion and its roles in human experience:

Religious literacy entails the ability to discern and analyze the fundamental intersections of religion and social/political/cultural life through multiple lenses. Specifically, a religiously literate person will possess 1) a basic understanding of the history, central texts (where applicable), beliefs, practices and contemporary manifestations of several of the world's religious traditions and expressions as they arose out of and continue to be shaped by particular social, historical and cultural contexts; and 2) the ability to discern and explore the religious dimensions of political, social and cultural expressions across time and place.

Critical to this definition is the importance of understanding religions and religious influences *in context* and as *inextricably woven into all dimensions of human experience*.Such an understanding requires both the basic understanding of religious traditions described above and an awareness of the complex (and often contradictory) ways in which religion influences human behavior and social structures. A religiously literate person will be equipped not only to recognize religious references, whether to texts, ideas, or practices, etc., but also to critically interrogate how they manifest in cultural and historical contexts.

**Cultural Studies**

The cultural studies approach to understanding religion assumes the basic elements of the study of religion outlined above and frames them within a postmodern worldview with the following specific characteristics.

First, the method is multi and inter-disciplinary and recognizes how political, economic, and cultural lenses are fundamentally entwined rather than discrete. For example, economic or political dimensions of human experience cannot be accurately understood without understanding the religious and other ideological influences that shape the cultural context out of which particular political or economic actions and motivations arise. This is the methodological framework related to the third tenet of religious studies above: that religions are embedded in culture and that “culture” is inclusive of political and economic influences.

Second, the method assumes that all knowledge claims are "situated" in that they arise out of particular social/historical contexts and therefore represent particular rather than universally applicable claims. This notion of "situatedness" is drawn from historian of science Donna Haraway's assertion that "situated knowledges" are more accurate than the "god-trick" of universal or objective claims that rest on the assumption that it is possible to "see everything from nowhere."[[4]](#footnote-4) Contrary to popular opinion, the recognition that all knowledge claims are "situated" is not a manifestation of relativism whereby all interpretations are considered equally valid. Rather, "situated knowledges" offer the firmest ground upon which to make objective claims that are defined not by their detachment but rather by their specificity, transparency and capacity for accountability.

Regarding the study of religion, this understanding of "situatedness" offers a tool to recognize that religious claims are no different than other forms of interpretation in that they arise out of particular contexts that represent particular assumptions as opposed to absolute, universal and ahistorical truths. (For example, claims such as "Islam is a religion of peace" and "Islam promotes terrorism" are equally problematic and need to be recognized as particular theological assertions as opposed to ultimate Truths.)

Third, this notion of situatedness applies to the texts and materials being investigated, the scholarly interpreters of those materials, and all inquirers regardless of station. The method recognizes that all forms of inquiry are interpretations filtered through particular lenses. By acknowledging this fact, an essential dimension of the inquiry itself is to identify those differing lenses and make transparent that which would otherwise be hidden.

Fourth, the method calls for an analysis of power and powerlessness related to the subject at hand. Which perspectives are politically and socially prominent and why? Which are marginalized or silenced and why? Regarding religion, why are some theological interpretations more prominent than others in relationship to specific issues in particular social/historical contexts? For example, what are the factors that led to the Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan and why did their interpretation of the role of women in Islam, for example, gain social legitimacy over other competing claims within the tradition itself?

In another vein, what are the converging factors that lend social credibility and influence to some religious traditions over others and which dimensions of those traditions are interpreted as orthodox and which heretical and by whom? What were the conditions that allowed Muslims, Christians and Jews to live together in relative harmony in medieval Spain and what are the religious influences that have contributed to shaping contemporary tensions in the Middle East and more globally regarding the "war on terror" and “the Arab Spring”?

Fifth, this approach highlights what cultural anthropologists know well: that cultural norms are fluid and socially constructed even though they are often interpreted as representing uncontested absolute truths. This dynamic tension is powerfully demonstrated in social science theorist Johan Galtung’s three-pronged typology of violence/peace. This framework also provides an excellent foundation for discerning and representing the varied ideological influences of religions in human affairs.[[5]](#footnote-5) What follows is an overview of his typology and examples of how it can be useful for highlighting the significance of religious influences in human experiences across time and place.

**Johan Galtung: Direct, Structural, and Cultural forms of Violence and Peace:**

Often referred to as the “Father of Peace Studies”, Norwegian theorist Johan Galtung has developed a three pronged typology of violence that represents how a confluence of *malleable* factors merge in particular cultural/historical moments to shape the conditions for the promotion of violence (and, by inference, peace) to function as normative.[[6]](#footnote-6)

* **Direct Violence** represents behaviors that serve to threaten life itself and/or to diminish one’s capacity to meet basic human needs. Examples include killing, maiming, bullying, sexual assault, and emotional manipulation.
* **Structural Violence** represents the systematic ways in which some groups are hindered from equal access to opportunities, goods, and services that enable the fulfillment of basic human needs. These can be formal as in legal structures that enforce marginalization (such as Apartheid in South Africa) or they could be culturally functional but without legal mandate (such as limited access to education or health care for marginalized groups).
* **Cultural Violence** represents the existence of prevailing or prominent social norms that make direct and structural violence seem “natural” or “right” or at least acceptable. For example, the belief that Africans are primitive and intellectually inferior to Caucasians gave sanction to the African slave trade. Galtung’s understanding of cultural violence helps explain how prominent beliefs can become so embedded in a given culture that they function as absolute and inevitable and are reproduced uncritically across generations.

These forms of violence are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Galtung provides a representation of these intersecting forces in the following commentary on slavery:

Africans are captured, forced across the Atlantic to work as slaves: millions are killed in the process—in Africa, on board, in the Americas. This massive direct violence over centuries seeps down and sediments as massive structural violence, with whites as the master topdogs and blacks as the slave underdogs, producing and reproducing massive cultural violence with racist ideas everywhere. After some time, direct violence is forgotten, slavery is forgotten, and only two labels show up, pale enough for college textbooks: “discrimination” for massive structural violence and “prejudice” for massive cultural violence. Sanitation of language: itself cultural violence.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Galtung’s typology provides a helpful vehicle to discern the complex roles that religions play in all three forms of violence as well as in their corresponding forms of peace. The formulations of cultural violence and cultural peace are especially helpful and relevant. *In all cultural contexts, diverse and often contradictory religious influences are always present.* Some will be explicit, but many will be implicit. Some influences will promote and/or represent socially normative beliefs while others will promote and/or represent marginalized convictions.

For example, in Galtung’s illustration cited above, religions functioned to both support and to challenge the moral legitimacy of the transatlantic slave trade and religions continue to function to support and to thwart structural and direct forms of contemporary racism. Similarly, religions currently function in particular ways to shape and support as well as to challenge prominent economic theories and their policy manifestations. In a final example, normative cultural assumptions about gender roles and sexuality in particular social-historical contexts are always shaped as well as contested by diverse religious voices and influences. One has to simply look for these voices and influences in any context and about any issue to find the ways that religions are embedded in all aspects of human agency and experience. For professionals, this framework can serve as a useful tool for analyzing the diverse and sometimes contradictory ways that religions function in all cultural contexts.

**SUMMARY**

The following methodological and analytical assumptions about religion have been briefly outlined in this chapter:

1. There is a fundamental difference between the devotional expression of a religious worldview as normative and the study of religion which recognizes the factual existence of diverse devotional assertions;
2. Religions are internally diverse;
3. Religions evolve and change;
4. Religious influences are embedded in all aspects of human experience;
5. All knowledge claims (including religious ones) are socially constructed and represent particular “situated” perspectives;
6. There is nothing inevitable about either violence or peace; both are manifest in three intersecting formulations: direct, structural, and cultural and both are shaped by conscious and unconscious human agency where religious influences are always operative.

These frameworks form the foundation for Religion and Public Life at Harvard Divinity School.

1. See [*The American Academy of Religion Guidelines for Teaching About Religion in K-12 Public Schools in the United States*](https://www.aarweb.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/Publications/epublications/AARK-12CurriculumGuidelines.pdf), Atlanta: AAR, 2010. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For a full text compilation of all the Southern Baptist resolutions on abortion from 1971-2005, see [www.johnstonsarchive.net/baptist/sbcabres.html](http://www.johnstonsarchive.net/baptist/sbcabres.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Charles Taylor, *The Secular Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); J. Bryan Hehir, “Why Religion? Why Now?” in Timothy Samuel Shah, Alfred Stepan, and Monica Duffy Toft, eds., *Rethinking Religion and World Affairs* (NY: Oxford, 2012) pp. 15-24; José Casanova, “Rethinking Public Religions” in Shah, et. Al., eds., pp. 25-35; and Elizabeth Shakman Hurd, “The Politics of Secularism” in Shah, et. Al., pp. 36-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective" in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (NY: Routledge, 1991) p. 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Though his own representation of religion is problematic in that he falls victim to making universal claims about religion based on a specific interpretation of one tradition, the typology itself is extremely useful when a more sophisticated and complex understanding of religion is employed. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Johan Galtung, “Cultural Violence” in *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 27, No. 3. (Aug., 1990), pp. 291-305. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Galtung, p. 295. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)