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Editorial

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On 5–7 April 2013 the Spalding Symposium, in conjunction with Religions for Peace International and the Centre for Religions for Reconciliation and Peace, University of Winchester, organized a conference on Peacebuilding, Conflict and Non-Violence in Indian Religious Traditions at Merton College, Oxford University. The two-day conference, convened by Anna King and Mark Owen, explored the role of religion in mobilizing violence and promoting peace, the ways in which the contribution of religion to peacebuilding can be conceived, and the potential of Indian religious traditions as resources for values promoting peace. Since 9/11, religions and religious actors are more commonly associated with extremism and conflict than peace and harmony. Much research has focused on the role of religion in violence, war and rioting; far less on its role in ending violence and promoting reconciliation. Speakers were encouraged to understand the notion of conflict broadly: not only actual war, but its underlying structural causes, such as social and economic injustices, religious and political repression, poverty, and lack of basic rights. 'Peacebuilding' was understood as encompassing a wide range of interventions designed either to prevent or to transform conflict, and as focusing on structural interventions such as state-building, the strengthening of civil society, education, work tackling poverty and social and economic injustices, and the vital processes of reconciliation after conflict. They were asked to explore resources in Indian religious and cultural

traditions which promote values compatible with a global culture of peace and justice.

This issue of *RoSA* presents rewritten papers from this Symposium. Several show that considerations that at first seem religious are frequently bound up with political or socio-economic factors, and that 'religious' conflict should not be understood as solely or primarily arising from religious issues. Contributors challenge the view of religious traditions as competing belief systems, irreconcilable in their differences.

Trey Palmisano surveys examples of prison writing, from British India and Nazi Germany, that speak of social change, revolution, theological promise, despair, and future transformation. His principal focus is the writing of Mahatma Gandhi and of the German Lutheran pastor and Nazi-resister Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Because Bonhoeffer expressed an interest in studying under Gandhi in the early 1930s, Palmisano argues that their ways of thinking offer an interesting reflection in contrasts and intellectual development. He also incorporates the voices of Bhagat Singh and Martin Niemöller, and the lesser-known voices of the Jesuit Alfred Delp, the Austrian Franz Jägerstatter, and the revolutionary Barin Ghosh. In conclusion, he claims that prison letters carry a theological 'presence' that reveals a common experience.

Tony Milligan notes that Gandhi followed Tolstoy both in understanding religion as a carrier of universal truths, and in advocating a politicized conception of love for our enemies, which he believed could be found in the *Bhagavad Gita*. Milligan wonders how viable this appeal was, and how much Gandhi was relying upon a thinly reworked version of Christian *agape*. He suggests that while there was a clear Christian influence, Gandhi's understanding of love also had a significant innovative dimension. Whereas Tolstoy based his overtly Christian 'law of love' upon no expectation of reciprocal response, Gandhi believed that the heart of the protester which addressed the conscience of the oppressor in a spirit of love and truth would inevitably be answered. Milligan points to a 'doubling' of Gandhi's discourse: Gandhi backs up his claims about a quasi-communicative love with a much less demanding appeal to a concept of civility, variously represented as action expressing an underlying state of virtue, and, more minimally, as action in compliance with important civil norms. Milligan believes that the latter is Gandhi's key legacy, from which a more plausible account of civil disobedience can be constructed.

Kieko Obuse is concerned that reports of violence between Buddhist and Muslim communities in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Burma and Thailand present the conflicts primarily as religious ones, painting a simplistic picture of antagonism between Buddhists and Muslims in general. To highlight the complexity of these conflicts, she revisits the Taliban's destruction of the giant Buddhas in Bamiyan in 2001, one of the most significant incidents in recent Buddhist–Muslim relations. She shows that the political concerns of Taliban members, who themselves disagreed about the treatment of the statues, came to be presented as theological. She examines the diversity of

Muslim reactions to the destruction from different parts of the world; some focused on its political aspects, while others argued for or against it on doctrinal grounds. Finally, she considers how we could better understand the ongoing problems involving Buddhists and Muslims in different parts of Asia, and prevent them from being used as an excuse for the propagation of religious hatred elsewhere.

Ronie Parciack also asks readers to be wary of binary views of inter-religious relations. She examines how the language, rhetoric and theological worldview of some popular Islamic preaching in contemporary India have become permeated by Sanskrit vocabulary, Brahmanic codes and religio-national conceptualizations often identified with the ideology of Hindu nationhood. She focuses on Sayyed Muhammad Hashmi Miyan Ashrafi al-Jilani, a preacher popular throughout the Hindi-Urdu belt. His unique terminology employs Sanskrit vocabulary and Brahmanic forms of thought, acknowledging the Indian territory as pure, sacred space; these notions are re-contextualized into Islamic credal frames, creating a bridging framework for Indian Muslims and providing new interpretations of Islamic history and its significance in and for India.

Though Anna King's article was not given as a paper at the Symposium, it is relevant to its theme. It deals with an ongoing research project on the conflict and post-conflict context in Nepal, and the religious contribution to peacebuilding, rehabilitation and development. It focuses on Buddhist engagement in peacebuilding and post-conflict recovery, at a time when the successful transformation of Nepal into a democratic, secular state has highlighted underlying and systemic tensions, and challenged élite caste dominance, the oppression of women, inequalities, and exclusions. Buddhism in Nepal is not only a marker of ethnic, cultural and regional identity, but a 'world' religion and universalist doctrine; the concept of 'Buddhism' as a 'culture of peace' has become axiomatic at international and national levels. The Dalai Lama's commitment to dialogue in response to state violence resonates in the domestic peace discourse. King explores the contribution of Buddhist peacebuilding and interfaith organizations at local and grassroots level, before offering a critique of the impact and effectiveness of Buddhist communities, leaders and NGOs in the peace process.