

YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL News Release

**CONTACT: Gustav Spohn, Director of Communications and Publications,
203-432-3466, gus.spohn@yale.edu**

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CONFERENCE AT YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL TO ADDRESS VULNERABILITY, SECURITY, NUCLEAR WEAPONS

NEW HAVEN, CT—Nearly two decades after the end of the Cold War—but at a time when the legacy of nuclear weaponry is still very much alive—religious leaders, policymakers, businesspersons, and scholars will gather at a Yale Divinity School conference in September to take up the topic “Are We Safe Yet? Vulnerability and Security in an Anxious Age.”

Religious values played a critical role in framing the nuclear weapons debate in the 1980s, and organizers of the Sept. 18-19 Sarah Smith Memorial Conference at Yale believe it is now time for the religious community to take up the subject with renewed vigor—especially because the incoming Administration will conduct a congressionally mandated nuclear posture review in 2009, which will determine the direction of U.S. nuclear weapons policy for the next 5 to 10 years.

The primary aim of the conference will be to promote serious public engagement on the twin topics of security and vulnerability in ways that will shed light on extremely difficult issues of war and peace such as nuclear arms.

“It is vital that the religious community once again bring its unique gifts and contribution to the discussion,” said Yale Divinity School theologian Miroslav Volf, one of the primary conference organizers and director of the Yale Center for Faith and Culture. “If we cannot describe the seminal questions of what it means to be secure, and what vulnerability is, then we will never be able to comprehensively address the nuclear issue that is currently rising again to public attention.”

Featured keynote speakers at the conference will be Sergio Duarte, United Nations High Representative for Disarmament Affairs, and Douglas Roche, chairman of the Middle Powers Initiative, which seeks to eliminate nuclear arms by working with countries that have renounced the nuclear arms race. Also participating, among others, will be Jonathan Granoff, president of the Global Security Institute and Co-Chair of the American Bar Association’s Blue Ribbon Task Force on Nuclear Nonproliferation; Jonathan Schell, senior fellow at The Nation Institute and author of *The Seventh Decade* (Metropolitan, 2007), as well as the seminal *The Fate of the Earth* (Knopf, 1982); Emilie Townes, the Andrew W. Mellon Professor of African American Religion and Theology at Yale Divinity School and president of the American Academy of Religion; and Tyler Wigg-Stevenson, director of the Two Futures Project, a nuclear disarmament initiative

centered around young evangelicals, and policy director at Faithful Security: the National Religious Partnership on the Nuclear Weapons Danger.

The conference, open only to registered participants but available to the general public via webcast, begins on the evening of Thursday, Sept. 18, with a panel discussion. The second day of the conference starts with Duarte's address, "Moral leadership and Nuclear Weapons," followed by a moderated dialogue featuring Schell and Granoff and then breakout sessions for pastors and theologians. Roche will deliver his keynote speech, "The Human Right to Peace," in mid-afternoon. Following a brief open discussion in late afternoon, Volf will offer closing remarks.

Said Volf, "As traditionally pursued, security has come with an extremely high price in both monetary and human terms. The 2008 Sarah Smith Conference will explore whether there are ways to envision vulnerability positively, rather than viewing it exclusively as a liability, and whether we can describe means to understand and enact security outside of the typical turn to power dynamics."

Discussion of nuclear arms has been magnified recently by calls for reduced nuclear arsenals by both John McCain and Barack Obama. The candidates' attention to the issue follows on the nonpartisan call for a world free of nuclear weapons by an unlikely quartet of eminent U.S. policy makers—former Secretaries of State Henry Kissinger and George Schultz, former Secretary of Defense William Perry, and former Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Sam Nunn—in a pair of landmark *Wall Street Journal* Op-Eds in January 2007 and 2008. Public pronouncements such as these have galvanized the disarmament and non-proliferation community and created a number of new, high-profile initiatives.

The annual Sarah Smith Memorial Conference celebrates the life and ministry of Yale Divinity School graduate Sarah Smith, who had a passion for moral leadership. She was a speaker at numerous retreats and seminars across the country, was selected as layperson of the year by the Council of Churches and Synagogues, and was nominated as a delegate to the World Conference of Methodism in Río de Janeiro. Smith was also the author of the book *Mid-Life: Coming Home* (Ragged Edge Press, 1999).

The 2008 conference keynote addresses and panel discussions will be broadcast live on the Yale Divinity School web site, at: <http://www.yale.edu/divinity/video/index.shtml>. The proceedings will also be archived on the web for later viewing.

Following the conference, in spring 2009, Yale Divinity School will publish an issue of *Reflections*, the school's magazine of ethical and religious inquiry, on the relationship of faith and security, inviting religious communities to continue the conversation.

Further information is available at the conference web site at:
<http://www.yale.edu/faith/ssmc/ssmc-2008.htm>

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