

THE THEORIES THAT UNDER-GIRD THE PROGRAMS AT FRD
by Charles Randall Paul, Ph.D.

1) The Inevitability of Conflicting Perspectives Over Values, Ideals, Truths and Purposes

What seems by tradition and inertia to be something that cannot change, starts to change the instant an honest discussion about it commences.

There is nothing more fundamental to human nature than comparing oneself with all others in a quest to judge the “highest” truths and “best” practices. But as the sociology of knowledge shows, very few of these choices are made for objective reasons. They have far more to do with basic desire, individual temperament, how one was socialized, and one’s primary peer group.

Conflict over the things that matter most is ultimately irresolvable because we have no common metric for judging between ultimates based upon desires and subjective criteria. Hence, rather than trying to “resolve” conflicts over worldview and vision differences, we should strive to “sustain” healthy conflicts.

Attempts to avoid contests over inevitably different perspectives and values are rarely successful and generally lead to unintended and amplified negative consequences.

Persuasion rather than coercion is the only thing that is ever truly effective in changing the mind and heart of another person.

People have a strong desire to share their truths with others who might benefit from them. When respectfully done in mutual exchanges, this impulse needs to be honored as a legitimate act of care for others rather than an arrogant attempt at cultural genocide.

If people feel ignored, disrespected, or compelled to keep their deepest beliefs silent, resentment will build and eventually manifest itself in angry (and possibly violent) retribution against society and self.

When people exchange their stories of how they came to believe as they do, they open the heart of empathy between them. Then they can engage in honest contestation of their differences while respecting the wisdom and good will of each other.

2) How To Do Religious Diplomacy: Peaceful Co-resistance and Trustworthy Witnesses to Different Experiences

The proverbial co-existence between people with conflicting beliefs about the purpose of life and right way to live is impractical when they live at close quarters and interact with each other. As we interact with those who disagree with us about our world-views, peaceful co-resistance is a more realistic goal. In order to live together trustfully even with deep differences we are wise to develop a useful diplomatic skill and attitude. The skill is listening respectfully to the heart and mind of another. The attitude is provisional trust of another's good will. Together, this means hearing another's challenging testimony of a superior truth with appreciation for his or her wisdom and good will without taking offense.

Religious diplomacy is based on the desire to communicate with another about differences in beliefs and practices having to do with the most important matters of ultimate truth — even those that are strongly contested. Diplomacy is witness-to-witness communication that aims to listen and learn, speak and persuade at the same time. No diplomatic persuasion occurs unless the persuader sincerely listens as well as he or she proclaims. To be a witness in good faith requires both listening carefully and speaking clearly. Trustworthiness — the power of the witness — comes from speaking the truth transparently. Trust develops over time, after people encounter each other in mutually respectful communications.

Religious diplomacy can bring people who are in conflict over their world-views or practices to respectfully communicate their differences transparently. Disrespectful enemies can change to become trustworthy opponents and, if they desire, cooperative friends at the same time. Sustaining peaceful co-resistance or peaceful tension is a realistic and worthy goal for interreligious diplomacy.

3) Legitimate and Healthy Conflicts over Ultimate Truth

Question: How can the inevitable conflicts over ultimate truth be engaged in healthy ways that mitigate ill will and build trust between people in conflict?

Answer: Through legitimate interreligious diplomacy that welcomes respectful contestation of truth without taking offense.

For religious diplomacy to succeed, it must become a legitimate orthodox activity. Thus, both the rank and file as well as leaders of religious and ideological communities must see how it fits within their tradition and approve participating in it. The Foundation for Religious Diplomacy aims to muster the support for interreligious communication between traditional religious groups that do not normally engage in interreligious dialogue by providing a platform for proclamation of their messages in comparative encounters with others. The call to proclaim the truth is a powerful motive in the world.

As we are so interconnected in today's pluralistic world, a call to spread the truth can be most clearly answered by speaking openly with others who feel the same call to respectfully proclaim different views of the truth. The future of possible peace is in missionary-to-missionary dialogue, or heart-to-heart contestation that replaces the desire for hand-to-hand combat. Advocating the truth as one sees it and hearing another sincerely advocate a conflicting view is a bracing experience. A diverse society that avoids the contestation of differences will not flourish because its members feel they do not care enough about each other to express their hearts and minds freely about what matters most to them.

Religious or cultural diplomacy, respectfully engaged, is a continual heart-to-heart contest that sustains peaceful tension. Societies, religious and ideological groups, and families that find no respectable way of integrity to fight fairly over the ultimate truth will not have the strength to sustain their solidarity when economic, political, or natural pressures strain them to the limit. Beyond passive tolerance of the other is engaged caring—differences that matter are met head on through forthright contests of persuasion. This is the secret to living together even in full acceptance of the fact that parties have clear and different views of ultimate truth and practices about how we as human beings ought to live.

4) The Future of Peacefulness: Sustaining Healthy Contestation over Truth, Superior Purpose and Right Method

The Foundation is organized to provide the preliminary network for a system of legitimate interreligious communication that will be commonly used for respectful cooperative and contestational interaction in families, communities, and societies that are strained by conflicting world-views. Face-to-face conversation—including respectful contestation of differences—will be one of the main methods of legitimate engagement. By the end of the 21st century, we envision that people will broadly have learned the skill and attitude needed for respectful dialogue.

When religious diplomacy becomes a legitimate religious and social institution, people will have learned useful methods for engaging their inevitable religious and ideological differences that cannot be resolved simply through educational clarification. By more transparently engaging our religious and ideological differences, we will decrease ill will and mitigate acts of coercion and violence done in the name of religion or ideology. To this end, the Foundation for Religious Diplomacy has begun its work of showing how disrespectful ideological enemies can at least become trustworthy opponents through a conventional diplomatic process of mutual learning and persuasion called contestational dialogue.

Given the freedom of human beings, there can be no sure outcome for any program including person-to-person dialogue. People are free to betray trust, take offense, and act in envy and anger. However, if respectful, peaceful co-resistance can begin to replace rancorous contention, the benefits to all are obvious. When religious or ideological advocates exemplify a higher way of demonstrating their highest way, their credibility and persuasiveness rises. This is why religious diplomacy will become an orthodox aspect of any tradition that aims to grow. We show our real religion by the way we treat our critics and rivals. As someone once instructed, if we aim to be whole, we must actually love those who do not love us—thus opening the door to a good new possibilities.

5) Practical Methods for Effective Religious, Ideological or Cultural Diplomacy

1. To influence a change in the minds and hearts of others, they must trust that you care about them, and that they can also have an influence on you. Thus careful listening in balanced and open-minded conversation is crucial. The diplomat persuades transparently without manipulation.

2. Developing bi-lingual, bi-cultural, bi-religious knowledge is powerful preparation for diplomacy. It shows deep respect for people of another culture or religion, and it provides religiously bi-lingual diplomats deeper knowledge of their own beliefs through serious comparison with those of others.

3. Unless communication is respectful, no beneficial diplomacy occurs. People who pretend to respect others they actually disrespect or disdain will harm interreligious relations. Therefore, without necessarily approving the other's truth claims or practices, interreligious diplomats with integrity must in good faith at least commence communications by respectfully assuming the other to be a wise, knowledgeable, good-hearted person.

4. Critical as well as appreciative communication is a sign of serious respect for another's life, beliefs, and practices. Trust between people builds from sincerely sharing their experiences and beliefs — those that disclose our human imperfections as well as our most noble hopes. Trustworthy diplomats will try to engage in full and transparent communication including disagreements over the other's life, beliefs, and practices, thus full and transparent communication includes contestation.

5. Trust in the integrity and good will of the other—not consensus of doctrinal belief—is at the heart of healthy families, communities, and societies. FRD organizes respectful encounters between people in conflicts over their often unresolvable religious or ideological differences to

allow them to build trustworthy relations, not to resolve their deep differences. Participants engage in candid dialogue, sharing their beliefs and values and contesting their serious differences. While listening openly to each other, they can sense the wisdom, discipline, and good will in the other, making it possible to hear and give critical appraisals of differences without taking offense.

How To Do Effective Religious and Cultural Diplomacy (pdf link / download)

by Charles Randall Paul, Ph.D.

This essay outlines in some detail the way to effectively address cultural, ideological and religious rivals in a diplomatic encounter that allows for a mutual exchange of influence. Various motives might promote the encounter, and all of them should be presented before any serious exchange occurs. If parties remain game after the motives are disclosed, a fruitful conversation will follow. Here are the elements for effective engagement.

A) Peaceful Co-resistance and Trustworthy Rivals

The traditional social goal of peaceful co-existence between people with conflicting beliefs about the purpose of life and right way to live is impractical. As we interact with those who disagree with us about our world views, peaceful co-resistance is a more realistic goal. In order to live together trustfully even with deep differences we are wise to develop a useful diplomatic skill and attitude. The skill is listening respectfully to the heart and mind of another. The attitude is provisional trust of another's good will. Together, this means hearing another's challenging testimony of a superior truth with appreciation for his or her wisdom and good will without taking offense.

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become trustworthy opponents and, if they desire, cooperative friends at the same time. Sustaining peaceful co-resistance or peaceful tension is a realistic and worthy goal for interreligious diplomacy.

B) Legitimate Contestation of Different Ideals

Question: How can the inevitable conflicts over different ideals be engaged in healthy ways that mitigate ill will and build trust between people in conflict?

Answer: Through legitimate interreligious diplomacy that welcomes respectful contestation of truth without taking offense.

For interreligious diplomacy to succeed, it must become a legitimate orthodox activity. Thus, both the rank and file as well as leaders of religious and ideological communities must see how it fits within their tradition and approve participating in it. The Foundation for Religious Diplomacy aims to muster the support for interreligious communication between traditional religious groups that do not normally engage in interreligious dialogue by providing a platform for proclamation of their messages in comparative encounters with others. The call to proclaim the truth is a powerful motive in the world.

As we are so interconnected in today's pluralistic world, a call to spread the truth can be most clearly answered by speaking openly with others who feel the same call to respectfully proclaim different views of the truth. The future of possible peace is in missionary-to-missionary dialogue, or heart-to-heart contestation that replaces the desire for hand-to-hand combat.

C) The Future of Peace: Sustaining Contestations of Truth

The foundation is organized to provide the preliminary network for a system of legitimate interreligious communication that will be commonly used for respectful cooperative and contestational interaction in families, communities, and societies that are strained by conflicting world views. Face to face dialogue — including respectful contestation of differences — will be one of the main methods of legitimate engagement. By the end of the 21st century, we envision that people will broadly have learned the skill and attitude needed for respectful dialogue.

When interreligious diplomacy becomes a legitimate religious and social institution, people will have learned useful methods for engaging their inevitable religious and ideological differences that cannot be resolved simply through educational clarification. By more transparently engaging our religious and ideological differences, we will decrease ill will and mitigate acts of coercion and violence done in the name of religion or ideology. To this end, the Foundation for Religious

Diplomacy has begun its work of showing how disrespectful ideological enemies can at least become trustworthy opponents through a conventional diplomatic process of mutual learning and persuasion called contestational dialogue.

Given the freedom of human beings in relation to each other, there can be no sure outcome for any program including person-to-person dialogue. People are free to betray trust, take offense, and act in anger. However, if respectful, peaceful tension can begin to replace disdainful, rancorous, contention, aren't the benefits to families, communities, and societies worthy of the effort? Will not the religions involved embrace a higher way of demonstrating their highest way? This is interreligious diplomacy.

D) Practical Methods for Interreligious Diplomacy

1. To influence a change in the minds and hearts of others, they must trust that you care about them, and that they can also have an influence on you. Thus careful listening in balanced and open-minded conversation is crucial. The diplomat persuades transparently without manipulation.

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3. Unless communication is respectful, no beneficial diplomacy occurs. People who pretend to respect others they actually disrespect or disdain will harm interreligious relations. Therefore, without necessarily approving the other's truth claims or practices, interreligious diplomats with integrity must in good faith at least commence communications by respectfully assuming the other to be a wise, knowledgeable, good-hearted person.

4. Critical as well as appreciative communication is a sign of serious respect for another's life, beliefs, and practices. Trust between people builds from sincerely sharing their experiences and beliefs — those that disclose our human imperfections as well as our most noble hopes. Trustworthy diplomats will try to engage in full and transparent communication including disagreements over the other's life, beliefs, and practices, thus full and transparent communication includes contestation.

E) Aiming for Peaceful Tension: Trust not Consensus

Trust in the integrity and good will of the other—not being unified in beliefs—is the vital heart of healthy families, communities, and societies. The Foundation for Religious Diplomacy organizes respectful encounters between people in conflicts over their religious or ideological differences to allow them to build trustworthy relations, not to resolve their deep differences. Participants engage in candid dialogue, sharing their beliefs and values and contesting their serious differences. While listening openly to each other, dialogue partners can sense the wisdom, discipline, and good will in the other, making it possible to hear and give critical appraisals of their differences without taking offense. Facing their irresolvable religious differences without disdain or misrepresenting the other builds trust in their mutual integrity.

Advocating the divine truth as one sees it and hearing another sincerely advocate a conflicting worldview is a bracing experience. A diverse society that avoids the contestation of differences will not flourish because its members feel they do not care enough about each other to express their hearts and minds freely about what matters most to them. Interreligious diplomacy, respectfully engaged, is a continual heart-to-heart contest that sustains peaceful tension. Societies, religious and ideological groups, and families that find no respectable way of integrity to fight fairly over the ultimate truth will not have the strength to sustain their solidarity when economic, political, or natural pressures strain them to the limit. Beyond passive tolerance of the other is engaged caring—differences that matter are met head on through forthright contests of persuasion. This is the secret to living together in peaceful tension, in acceptance of the fact that we have divergent convictions about ultimate truth and right practices and how we as human beings ought to live.

A New Diplomatic Paradigm: Peaceful Co-Resistance Between Trustworthy Rivals
By Charles Randall Paul, Ph.D.

This essay lays out the philosophical, historical and practical underpinnings for sustaining more peaceful social rivalries between ideological, cultural or religious communities living in the same society. It is a subject vital to our shrinking world where isolation is no longer a viable option for groups that are alien to each other.

I The Texts for the Theme

“To each people God has prescribed a law and way to live. If God had willed that all nations have one religion He would have made it so. But God designed to test each people by the revelations given to them; so all religions should compete in a contest of righteousness. All return to God, and in the end God will clarify the things you now dispute.” (Qur’an 5:48)

Coupled with the above recitation my theme, developing a new diplomatic paradigm through peaceful co-resistance between trustworthy rivals in a morally strenuous never finished contest over the highest ideals will be advanced by a wise and statesmanlike American philosopher William James (1842-1910) who a century ago shared these apt thoughts for our time, from his essay, *The Will to Believe*, “The most interesting and valuable things about a man are his ideals and over-beliefs. The same is true of nations and historic epochs. . .” (James, 1956, p. xiii). And he elaborated further in his essay, *The Moral Equivalent of War*: “It would be simply preposterous if the only force that works ideals of honor . . . into [our societies] should be the fear of being killed by other [powers]. Great indeed is Fear; but it is not . . . the only stimulus known for awakening the higher ranges of human spiritual energy” (James, 1972, p. 328).

So far, war has been the only force that can discipline a whole society, and until an equivalent discipline is organized, I believe that war must have its way. But I see no serious doubt that the ordinary prides and shames of social man, once developed to a certain intensity, are capable of organizing . . . strenuous honor and disinterestedness [in us]. . . . Priests and doctors are in a fashion educated to it. . . . We should be owned [by a higher purpose], as soldiers are by the army, and our pride would rise accordingly. We could be poor, then, without humiliation (James, 1972, p. 326)

And this from his essay, *The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life*,

. . . All through history we see antagonism . . . between the ethics of infinite obligation to the Most High, and those of satisfaction of merely finite need. . . . Even if there were no . . . grounds for believing in God, men would postulate God simply as a pretext for living hard, and getting out of the game of existence its keenest possibilities of zest. . . . Every sort of energy and endurance, of courage and capacity for handling life’s evils, is set free in those who have religious faith. . . . The strenuous type of character will on the battlefield of human history always outwear the easy-going type, and religion will drive irreligion to the wall (James 1972, p. 213).

II The Perennial Conflict Over the Ultimate Map and Destination

The subject before us is not world peace in the sense of a stable tranquility that has never existed. It is the perennial matter of finding the best way for our divergent ideals and ways of life to flourish while minimizing the damage we do to each other in the process. In our churning 21st century world where we feel perhaps the nature of our troubling human predicament is starkly beyond our technical or rational or religious control. We sense in our pluralistic time that all our claims about order and truth are contestable and incapable of gaining a worldwide consensus. It

is not that the cosmic center is quaking (not yet) so much as we disagree about where that center is and thus about our orientation to everything else. In short we neither seem to agree about the map or the destination—less and less at home let alone abroad.

And to make matters worse we have no legitimate field or common rules for engaging the contestation over our comprehensive doctrines or religious beliefs. In our western civilization after the violent European debacles between religions the Enlightenment leaders chased all religious contenders from the public field. And religious leaders segregated themselves from their pious rivals to avoid unresolvable theological debates. Indeed, for the most part the history of social conflict over the purpose and destiny of humanity—religious conflict if you will—has been played out in enclaves where the faithful (be they adamant secular rationalists or theists) set up straw adversaries that they demolish or disdain in absentia. These shadow boxing sessions are preferred over religious persecution and war, to be sure, but they have reduced our societies to groups of economic consumers who often who hold each other's ideals in the silent contempt we call tolerance. We should be amazed that we get along as well as we do with the thin gruel of new product releases being the shared passion of our modern world.

I am not bemoaning the loss of the past; it is the waste of our future that is at stake. We are living among societies that on one hand are living to be entertained or distracted from the emptiness of a positive purpose for continuing their culture, and on the other hand are trying to promote often by coercion a mono-cultural unity—be it secularism in the western or Asian modes or one of the major religions. Of course, religion's great social value derives from its power to provide a positive zest for life in some high and noble purpose. More it creates communities of purposefulness and a common map to achieve high ideals—in times of boring peace as well as exciting war. To be blunt, as William James said in the extracts quoted above, humans are attracted to the excitement of life or death confrontations; and he hypothesizes that strenuous religious-like challenges can replace the intense vitality of mortal combat with intense forms of moral contests over the ultimate purpose and value of life, as well as battles with natural evils—disease and catastrophes—that plague all humanity.

Most of all when our positive ideals collide in rivalry for the utmost respect, we can strangely enjoy the excitement of contestation—not between good and evil, but between better and best systems of belief about purpose and destiny. Indeed as William James affirmed, these contests of ideals are the most interesting, important—and perpetually unresolvable—conflicts humans ever engage (James, 1956, p. 110). On the social plane they are truly invasions and counter invasions that determine the future of our cultures as much or more than our technology, economics, or politics.

So, we earthlings disagree about our reality maps and/or our preferred destinations. This is not a new phenomenon except for the pervasive awareness of our pluralistic situation due to enormously more global interaction with inexpensive media and communication. Our diverse cats are out of their provincial bags—and we now all appear awkwardly provincial each other. Our different ethical beliefs and moral behaviors cause frustrating tensions within our societies, and provide lethal suspicion and contempt to fuel dangerous antipathy between cultures.

The globalizing world has not increased mutual trust. With all the communication technology available, in fact we know only shallowly what is going on in the hearts and minds of those who disagree with us. Our children walk around with earphones all the time, tuned out to the very people with whom they live. This is a symbol of our global problem. We have the means to reach into that which is difficult and different like never before, but we also have greater means to focus narrowly on that which we find comfortable and familiar. This does not bode well for collaborations that face squarely the conflicts over our different maps and destinations.

First and foremost we must realistically acknowledge that we will not likely come to consensus over the true religion or highest path. Nor will we cease to believe others are wrong and we are right about ultimate truth. It is no longer possible to avoid conflicts by isolationism, and attempts to violently eliminate the rival will almost certainly bring counter-violent retaliation. So, the question for serious people is this: how are we going to work together at all in the face of our contests over the right map and destination?

The answer for many has been to privatize religion and make public interaction merely procedural transactions of law and commerce that require no shared meanings or purposes. However, even if we all agree to drive on the right side of the street, charge everyone the same prices, and punish anyone who harms another's body or property, there could be utter misery if people did not desire to enjoy living with each other. Beyond civil and economic stability is good will and civic enthusiasm derived from a shared sense of high purpose. So how do we deal with religious-type conflicts over ultimate purpose and social identity that keep us from calmly living next to people we think are naively or knowingly bound for hell? Should we not eliminate those voices of rivals and critics that—often under cover of religious freedom—threaten our tranquility by calling into question our true comprehensive belief system? How can we sail the ship forward while arguing over the accuracy of the chart and where we should be heading?

Without suppression, exile or genocide that are each difficult to implement in many modern societies, we could try the old 'civilized' tools of legal coercion and bribery to purchase the allegiance of opponents. But this is an impotent strategy that is not sustainable when the goal is permanently changing hearts and minds about the way of salvation. We have seen that coercive fixes imposed on minorities rarely last long without violent backlashes that could wreck the ship

of state. So what do we do without a consensus on a fundamental world view to create a flourishing collaborative community instead of a society prone to wasteful bickering and cultural civil war?

III Thinking Anew about How We Treat Critics, Rivals and Opponents

The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country (Abraham Lincoln, Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865).

There is no power for unifying the peoples of the earth greater than sharing the same religious worldview—regarding the ultimate purpose of life and best way to live. Over thousands of years religion has proven most capable of unifying large portions of mankind across ethnic, tribal, economic, geographic, age, class or political differences. In the 21st century when many focus on sustainable efficiency, it appears clear that hegemonic-like power is more efficiently sustained by an unforced allegiance to religious identity than by coercive military power or economic bribery. As state and ideological regimes come and go based on forcing people to live some plan, religious traditions tend to last much longer. In the face of recurring horrendous internal scandals the Roman Catholic Church, the oldest continuously operating organization, was transnational and trans-epochal embracing diverse cultures, classes, talents and temperaments over scores of human epochs because it was a comprehensive belief and social system that gave purpose to the past, present and future.

However, in our pluralized societies there is little chance one unifying world view will prevail—and even one did somehow, the hegemony would not last for fifteen minutes without a heretical movement forming to challenge the purity of the new regime. Therefore, we citizens of polarized societies need to learn to desire something rare and life-altering, namely, an honest, exhilarating friendship with a trustworthy rival, critic or opponent. Social science has shown that trust builds when people choose to honorably engage face-to-face over their unresolvable differences. Contempt and suspicion can be replaced with admiration and trust even for people who believe we are seriously wrong in our beliefs. There is a healthy way to fight persuasively, not coercively, over differences that matter deeply to us. In most cultures this can occur when debate is replaced with an honest exchange of thoughtful feelings in a place of mutual safety. In this situation the exploration of our deepest beliefs and desires allows for mutual heart-to-heart influence even between those with opposing worldviews. If we choose to risk caring about the well-being of our critics, then we can choose to be open with them. We can tell openly of our spiritual journeys and our current motives for interaction. When mutual good will, intellectual honesty and emotional intimacy combine our souls expand and our social world explodes with new possibilities for engaging our differences with integrity and optimism. This is the result of a

new therapeutic diplomacy that addresses feminine and masculine aspects of our beings—making our personal trust and friendship as important as our roles and power structures.

Of course economic interests and coercive powers are a major aspect of human social orders, but they are they do not muster the power of religious purpose that channels the desire to be part of something truly real and important beyond our time and place. Our 21st century diplomacy now needs to embrace this aspect of human desire and conflict if it is to be effective in promoting a better world that without requiring a unified worldview. To flourish in our time we can and should create and enjoy a world of peaceful tension where honorable contestation over unresolvable differences and helpful collaboration in serving our spiritual, emotional and physical needs and desires becomes the norm.

This is the social-psychological foundation for trust building and the practical basis on which to institute religious diplomacy and dialogue. This diplomacy over conflicting ideals (not interests) can become a new normal and legitimate mode facing our differences with hearty openness. Outrageously naïve as it might sound to some, sharing intimate honesty about our ideals, motives and practical goals provokes the necessary desire to see our opponents as both honorable rivals and trustworthy friends. This takes us beyond mutual understanding and compassion to mutual admiration and even love—between us who think each other wrong in our world-views.

Among all the trustworthy religious and ideological contestants in the 21st century there will be one value in common: their conviction (prompted by God or their own ethical experience) that human hearts and minds are moved to change in caring moments of mutual openness not by coercion or bribery. This value we place on each other's free assent to believe and worship and love opens the way for safe and trustworthy—even affectionate—contestations and collaborations with honorable rivals and critics.

As quoted above, William James said when there is a show down between idealist advocates, the religion drives the all rivals to the wall. This driving power is not necessarily or even primarily a coercive force. James also observed that the unresolvable and never-ending (at least until the world ends) contest between conflicting positive ideals is always the main event an epoch, with the superior laurels always going to that ideal that, in being accomplished, maximizes the chances for all competing ideals to also be achieved. In the realm of social influence the religion that would surpass its rivals today must find a way to remain uniquely inspiring while promoting a social-political-religious environment in which its rivals can also flourish as the best they can without disturbing civic safety. (See in James, 1972, the essay, *The Moral Philosopher and the Moral Life*, p. 205.)

This is a strategy for our pluralistic era to take seriously. Other strategies have great power too, but they are not sustainable. The perpetrators of the 9/11 attack believed they were implementing sacred justice with their horrible act. They aimed to shake the paltry secular and hypocritical religious world to death with one big explosion. They were not replaying Pearl Harbor, but Hiroshima (Lincoln 2003, 17-18). The overwhelming power of their religious commitment was the bomb they hoped would change the world for the better. But it backfired. This was an old strategy. In the Hebrew Bible Samson prayed for sacred strength to crumble the great building of his time and by his death and that of civilians to show everyone that God was in charge. Elijah in his way engaged in an interreligious event with 450 priests of Baal, and after he won the day, he slaughtered his competition without further conversations. But heart-felt commitment, the only thing that is sustainable in the long run, is never attained by killing or exiling your rivals. It takes too many material and psychic resources to enforce a belief system on people that do not believe it—and for the ‘winners’ to suppress the guilt of committing what Roger Williams called soul rape.

What does make economic and spiritual sense is persuasive diplomacy between religions that are confident in their positive messages. To repeat, the conflict over the map and destination will be with us until some ultimate event brings an end to different human perspectives. So in our time a healthy religious diplomacy will find its way in a currently developing interreligious space that honors all that authentically speak in their own spiritual voices. How do those with different spiritual experiences and languages hope to communicate in this interreligious space? Before treating that question it is instructive to reflect on the history of dialogue between religions or world views in a new way.

IV A Very Brief Historical Interpretation of Religious Dialogue

From earliest history there have been disagreements over either the purpose of life or the right way to live. Indeed, the great stories about the creation of the earth and humanity are replete with conflicts between divine beings too. Besides the heavenly debates that ended brutally in the Mesopotamian and Greek mythologies, we can read of debates between God and Iblis in the Qur’an that reflect perhaps similar conversations in the Books of Genesis and Job and in apocalyptic Christian literature. In the English epic poem by Milton and the Mormon grand narrative contestations between pre-mortal spirits occurred in a primordial council that resorted to violence when consensus was not attained about creating a new world for humanity. In short the mythic past does not affirm the irenic benefits of chatting over our deepest differences. Indeed, it is a wonder that there is any peace on earth when the God of Love could not or did not evade a war in heaven. In light of divine precedents both polytheistic and monotheistic religious societies have justified their earthly struggles by recourse to divine example and approval. And ironically the impulse to unify societies peacefully under one religious system or ideology has

inevitably produced major carnage—soul rapes and rivers of blood being Roger Williams’ gripping description.

Deliberate respectful engagement between religious communities has not been a common human activity. However, Al Buruni in the 9th century provided perhaps the first comparative written dialogue between religions with a tone of balanced fairness that was unique in his time. In the late 12th century in Andalusian Spain the Islamic, Christian and Jewish philosopher-theologians engaged in debates that required mutual learning that reflected in some ways what we construe as dialogue. Violent Crusades were more common than diplomatic religion with the exception of the famous encounter between the young would-be martyr Francis of Assisi and Saladin II when the latter sent Francis, cordially un-martyred, back to Italy after they contested Christianity and Islam for a couple of days.

It took the very bloody European wars between Catholics and Protestants in the 17th century to produce diplomatic efforts to engage in a religious effort to mitigate differences to avoid continuous wars based on unresolvable theological conflicts. While social philosophers Bodin, Cherbury, Fontenelle and Vico theorized about unifying religious beliefs to resolve harmful political conflicts underneath the Christian sacred canopy, the Enlightenment philosophers like Hume and Comte touted rationalism, scientism and atheism as the true way to end or temper the contentiousness of ‘superstitious spiritualities.’ Why fight over nothing after all? We can all agree as calm rational beings that we should only kill each other if it really makes sense here and now. And of course, it does if my bombs are bigger than yours. So after a century of enlightened genocides we have come to the 21st century where conflicts influenced directly by religion are all the rage, and dialogue between religious folks is being touted as a way to mitigate it—and more, perhaps provide a healthy spiritual practice for people who are not engaged in mortal rivalries.

The Roman Catholic Church has established standing committees of theological scholars to engage in discussions with Protestants and Eastern Orthodox to seek ways for uniting Christianity. These dialogues have treated the issue of Mary, the Eucharist and Apostolic authority without coming to terms. The Roman Catholic Church has also a standing dialogue group with Jews and is working on one with Muslims and other non-traditional Christian religions. World Councils and Parliaments of religions have had various discussions about religious similarities and differences, and Religions for Peace and the World Council of Religious Leaders have formed collaborative multi-religious efforts to help the poor in Africa and elsewhere as a result of years of conversations about similar social goals. There is no UN for religions because many religious communities do not have a central authority structure, and those that do, do not want to sit together in a formal way that would give the impression of

equality between their truth claims and authorities. Dialogue has thus occurred in an ad hoc way in out time mostly at a grass roots level.

An aside regarding social power and dialogue is perhaps appropriate here. Against a 19th and 20th century background of colonization and in some cases cultural exploitation if not genocide the practice of interreligious dialogue is tainted as a front for asymmetrical exploitation psycho-social seduction. Social and political power relations complicate the problem of teleological pluralism in its mode of emotional envy, resentment and contempt. For effective dialogue the power relations must be disclosed and discussed explicitly. However, since no relations are identical in power and indeed social power can shift in any relationship at any time, all dialogues are asymmetrical with respect to social power. This reality must be addressed in advance of any honest dialogue or for parties to be willing to risk the encounter at all.

V Sustaining Healthy Convassation between Rivals and Opponents

This is not the age of postmodernity. Globally most people still think love and truth can be known surely enough—and the contest is still very lively between those who know nothing can be known for certain and those who know for certain that that claim is wrong. This is an era of broad and blatant awareness of both the lack of universal hegemonic metrics for any truth claims and the desire to persuasively affirm the relative superiority of one worldview over all rivals. (That contest between world views includes on the right and left in the Eastern and the Western worlds those who hold that to hold nothing firmly is best, and others who think only a singular fervent affirmation can save us.) An epoch if not an age of contestational pluralism is rising across the world.

What is salient today is the speed and pervasiveness of contested information about almost everything even that which is important. With the exception of places like North Korea that have succeeded in severely censoring communications from outsider communities, most people now are recognizing the unsustainable futility of attempting to impose beliefs by coercive force. Therefore, in many cultures there is a rising awareness that religious identities are optional matters of choice. This opens the way for new waves of ‘missionary’ efforts as worldview rivals attempt to persuade the trust and allegiance of people who desire to share a common vision of the purpose of life and the best way to live in families, communities and societies. Religious ‘values’ have entered the contest for public attention as obtrusively as economic and political interests.

Humans have have no refuge from elemental questions about our purpose and destiny. We are all inculcated with an existential trust in some reality that viscerally hates and fears to be disturbed.

But we are inevitably in a pluralistic world that bothers us with its continual contests over truth, reality and values. (Connolly, 1999, 23, 39, 44-45).

In this time of contested pluralism all hegemonic contenders are aware more than in the past that people all live by ‘beliefs’ in unproved primitive assumptions—and this means no religious or ideological regime can be confident of standing confidently for long as criticism will always have a rhetorical leg on which to stand. The social cultural issue is not attaining broad certainty about truth, but attaining adequate persuasive consensus for long enough to build trusting human relationships in the face of uncertainty. The question in most cultures is this: will persuasion (the prime method for religion and economics) also overcome coercion as the primary means of exercising social and political power?

More to the point of this essay, the question is which worldview will most effectively next attract the allegiance of billions? The reinvigoration of missiology and rhetorical persuasion will mark the coming century. As ‘believing fanatics’ shift from strategies of impotent violence toward powerful persuasiveness the contest over the hearts and minds of people will be more intense and pervasive. However, unilateral missionizing is no longer viewed as legitimate or ethical. All persuasive actions now occur in a multi-cultural context of legitimate contestation. (Most everyone can check out the competition before buying.)

The late, great literary critic, Wayne Booth, foresaw our epoch and recommended a healthy prescription: the teaching of a new honest mutual rhetorology to replace unidirectional sophistic trickery. Booth’s listening-rhetoric is the mainstay of the new diplomatic paradigm that openly seeks both to influence ideological rivals and be influenced by them without loss of integrity:

Listening-Rhetoric is what I most long to celebrate and practice—the kind that is sadly rare. . . . Here both sides join in a trusting dispute, determined to listen to the opponent’s arguments, while persuading the opponent to listen in exchange. . . . Both sides are pursuing not just victory but a new reality, a new agreement about what is real (Booth, 2004, p. 149, 171-172).

As more and more people have become acutely aware of the on-going contestation over the fundamental purpose and ordering of life, the only hegemony that has a chance of worldwide acceptance is the view that the world provides no single overpowering view of ultimate reality—at least until eschaton. More and more people find they cannot avoid the fact they are amid diverse voices advocating and contesting different beliefs and values. In short, any new worldwide order in coming years will need to include methods for people to sustain continual contestations over the true foundation of reality, purpose and value. Legitimate new institutions that allow for respectful engagement in interreligious dialogues of persuasion will need to replace coercive sanctions against belief and allegiance. We must develop normative conventions

for advocating and contesting our differences in a new category of legitimate public space—interreligious space—that is not the court, the legislature, the academy, the market, the media or the sacred sanctuary. Interreligious space is a place (in a building, in cyberspace, in media space) for adults to contest the foundations on which these other estates stand.

How do we ‘think anew’ in our current situation? The admission that intelligent, wise, caring people disagree about ultimate reality, and that even if they wanted to use force, no society has the resources to constantly eliminate competing views, or to continually coerce people to believe something. As societies become more diverse the recognition of contested pluralism leads both advocates and defenders of truth to patiently influence others only by means of forthright persuasion. History has proved that avoiding contestation through legal coercion or social suppression eventually leads to pent-up resentment and violence.

In sum, research has shown that the prime factor for a flourishing society is public health. Only a healthy people can be consistently productive and maintain a sense of well-being. The number one public health issue facing our planet in the 21st century is not malaria or AIDS or any disease of the body. It is envy, resentment and contempt between people, suffering from mutual contamination of their conflicting comprehensive ideals or religions. This public health plague attacks the basic desire for humans to cooperate in collaborative groups without which no other disease of nature or culture and no positive creation of humanity can be achieved.

Everywhere people are concerned with the public social health threats of globalizing. Think what would the world be like if some folks were immune to a deadly bacterium common in a favorite vegetable that they held sacred as the elixir of truth and peace for humanity. Outsiders might well die from being exposed to this sacred vegetable. What would we do to avoid the missionaries who came from afar to save us with a deadly contagion?

We need not take physical possession of a place if we take over the minds and hearts of the people. The doctors with the dialogue cure are also the carriers of cultural contagion. Deep conversation is not for sissies. It changes us in ways that we cannot know in advance. It takes a very centered and confident person to engage a critic, rival or opponent with openness motivated by the desire to influence the other and to receive the other’s influence. This way of mutual openness is never safe although it is the most effective therapy for curing the perennial plagues of envy, resentment and contempt that undergird our desire to find righteous or ‘just’ means to harm others.

Soul contamination is a dangerous result of meeting an impressive stranger. Yet from such risky meetings new worlds are discovered and new religions revealed. Let us acknowledge the explosive risk to the status quo inherent to any serious heart and mind contact between souls. It

can ignite mutually transforming convasion. By this term, convasion, I refer to mutual contamination of different ideas, beliefs, tastes, values, practices, and above all, desires. Further, the verb ignite reflects John Fairfield's use of ignition to describe the instant of we act with courageous mutual trust in the good results of convasive encounters (Fairfield, Chapter 10 in total).

William James affirmed that courage is perhaps the greatest virtue required to face the convasions that shake us when we meet others with ideals that challenge our own. (See Connolly 2005, 80-82, 87-89). Courage derives in part from the centered conviction of acting rightly in ones own view, that of loved ones, society and/or God. So in a time where conviction is lacking, fear of encountering otherness thrives. It is not strong conviction but the lack of it that causes much ideological conflict to go bad.

VI The Way We Engage Our Rivals Is the True Sign of Our Religion

How we engage in our contests says more about us than any arguments we make. The way we engage our rivals and critics is the true sign of our religion. When it comes to persuading trust and change, the process and attitude matter more than the message or mission. This is a the social-psychological basis of effective religious or ideological diplomacy.

Social philosopher, John Connolly, unabashedly prescribes honest mutual engagement of adversaries, saying we must “proceed, of course, in a partisan way while simultaneously trying to open up the terms of conversation with others” (Connolly 1999, 39). But he adds this great advice: We must acknowledge that naming evil is “in the visceral experience of faith itself is how to embrace your faith ardently without acting forcefully to punish, correct, exclude, or terrorize those who interact with you and contest it. This problem is not confined to [militant Christians or Muslims.] Atheists are capable of it too. . . The problem does not necessarily flow from any particular doctrine of faith alone. The sensibility infusing carriers of the creed is highly pertinent. It exerts an effect upon the degree to which they feel besieged by ‘unbelievers’ or ‘the faithless.’—that is , by those who practice different existential faiths but who do not threaten their lives or stop them from practicing their own” (Connolly 2005, 19).

The critical issue is the kind of ethos toward the rival that is infused by a community into its doctrines or creeds. What counts is how the relational dispositions of people blend into the philosophies they embrace effecting the institutional ethos of engagement between partisans of different kinds (Connolly 2005, 6).

Connolly proposes the skillful virtue of agonistic respect for all of us in the current intermixed world. The virtuous desire to honor and at the same time criticize the testimony of another is congenial with an exhilarating, uneasy attitude that Lee Yearley, professor of religious studies, calls the virtue of spiritual regret—the holding of impossible desires to give full allegiance to two or more conflicting religious ways (Yearley 1994, 1-26). These virtues are derived from the inevitable (though usually unacknowledged) spiritual-emotional ‘temptation’ of mutual contamination or insemination. This prime motive is precisely not disloyal betrayal or apostasy, but a desire for competitive voices for good to thrive in a pluralistic mutually-contaminating society. Connolly preaches the forthright continual engagement of differences with an attitude of agonistic respect or honor as the best prescription for public social health given our inevitable mutual contamination.

Connolly goes further to advise the way toward agonistic respect comes from recognizing the differences of interpretation and the inevitable hypocrisy within our orthodox faith communities (be they secular or religious). He urges us all to experience ourselves as devout believers that “cannot observe each other without [mercifully] laughing” at our very human breaches.

I believe this effective way to engage our critics and rivals will be taught as the new 21st century diplomacy, and as a moral practice congenial with most religious traditions. It is a learned social discipline akin to martial arts, and young people will train in its practice as they desire to intensely increase their social influence. It will be a most potent form of social art cultivating attitudes and skills for engaging an opponent or rival in a way that exchanges social honor and power through both contestation and collaboration as integrity allows. It edifies the diplomats and their constituent communities. From observing these trainings already I can witness when done well thrilling and beautiful interpersonal experiences result that reflect what must be called love for a valued adversary.

It is instructive to distinguish here between old notions of diplomacy. Webster has it as 1) the art and practice of conducting negotiations between nations, and 2) skill or tact in handling affairs without arousing hostility. There is another even more robust definition that I like: Diplomacy is delaying your adversary’s use of violent force until you know you can beat them at it (saying, ‘nice doggy’ until you find a big stick.)

We could cynically agree that political diplomacy is a duplicitous game used by weaklings that can’t force others to behave as wished. Until violent victory is sure, to avoid looking weak, diplomats talk as if their nations really could control everything except for now they choose to constrain their overwhelming force for high moral purposes. Thus duplicitous diplomats are masters at making coercive threats cloaked in civil speech.

To effectively use the term diplomacy to describe a plan to improve religious relations, we must rehabilitate the cynical view of diplomacy in conjunction with communications between trustworthy religious rivals. Religious diplomats are skillful at making both their irresolvable differences and their unfailing good will clear across cultural and religious vocabularies. They aim to create the best social environment for their respective religions to thrive.

The real key to attaining religious relations based on trustworthy diplomacy is not even found in civil dialogue. It is found in the way diplomats talk with their own communities about their rivals when their rivals are not listening. This is the integrity required of religious diplomats. They cannot communicate with psychological transparency or spiritual confidence if they hide motives or speak differently when their rival is not present.

Religious diplomacy is precisely not the same as debate where we win or lose points. Religious diplomats help each other clarify their stories and explanations in a comparative light that allows their testimonies and claims to be understood—and to be appreciated as well as criticized with honesty and good will. In this context that allows full disclosure of motives and goals, practical conflicts between religious groups can be addressed without suspicion of duplicitous activity.

Religious diplomacy is designed to sustain healthy relationships of trust when religious rivals cannot with integrity resolve their conflicts. It is thus a diplomacy that might be described as the skill of flourishing in a religiously mixed marriage where loyalty and integrity—the foundation of any long-term friendship—thrive in honest tension. We learn in healthy marriages how to fight fair without contention and to make love without forcing resolution of our differences. When under attack by aggressive forces, counter-force is often a wise option—so we should be prepared for those who violently disregard us. However, when mutual diplomacy described above is commonly understood as the most effective way of dealing powerfully with our religious and even our political rivals, it will no doubt become the obvious way that anyone of influence will naturally employ—and the world will be changed thereby.

VII A Way for Respectful Contestation of Differences: The Way of Openness

In conclusion I will briefly describe a practical method used by The Foundation for Religious Diplomacy (FRD) to implement diplomatic engagements over unresolvable differences in beliefs or values. FRD has experimented over the past decade with several methods for fruitful interaction between people with divergent belief systems and developed The Way of Openness as an effective social-psychological method congenial with most religious traditions. The Way of Openness requires personal openness to the influence of God and/or one's conscience, then to one's family and community, and then to one's critics and rivals. It provides the fundamental ethical discipline for participation in all the foundation's trust-building activities. The Way of

Openness succeeds in attaining relations of respectful co-resistance and collaboration when two who are opposed open their hearts and minds to each other by disclosing their full motives for interacting along with their honest convictions, and by courageously receiving each other's persuasive influence. The Way of Openness, soon to be practiced by the public on a FRD's new Internet social media site called The World Table (TheWorldTable.org), includes these ten attitudes and skills that anyone can learn: Be Honest, Be Kind, Be Fair, Listen Well, Share the Floor, Acknowledge the Differences, Address the Tough Questions, Give Credit Where Credit Is Due, Speak As Yourself, and Keep Private Things Private.

At The World Table conversations will occur between people who disclose who they are, what they believe, and their commitment to practice The Way of Openness.

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