



# FAITH-BASED DIPLOMACY: AN ANCIENT IDEA NEWLY EMERGENT

By Brian Cox and Daniel Philpott

## THE CFIA TASK FORCE ON FAITH-BASED DIPLOMACY:

Daniel Philpott (Chair), Brian Cox, Darin Hamlin, Tom Farr,  
Katie E. Johnson, Diana Barnes, Scott Thomas, and Nell Bolton

Since the attacks of September 11, 2001, a chorus of scholars and analysts has been singing heartily about what only a few had spoken of for many decades: the influence of religion in international affairs. But their dominant melody is agonistic—religion, they say, has provoked a clash of civilizations, communal conflict in Bosnia, Kosovo, Kashmir, and the Sudan, and terrorist attacks against the United States. Audible, too, however, is a discordant strain, one that tells of churches and synagogues, imams and pastors, religious communities, organizations and networks who have worked to bring peace to Sudan, Kashmir, Nicaragua, and Mozambique, nonviolent transitions to democracy in Poland, Portugal, the Philippines, South Africa, and across Latin America, and truth commissions to South Africa, Chile, and El Salvador. This strain cries out for amplification. Irenic, restorative, and constructive, it holds realistic promise for those who seek to quell violent conflict, effect reconciliation, and elicit justice in the wake of evil.

What begs to be amplified, in fact, is a whole family of initiatives that may be sum-

marized as “faith-based diplomacy.” In the parlance of diplomats, faith-based diplomacy is “track two,” that is, diplomacy practiced by non-state actors, officials of non-governmental organizations (NGOs), religious leaders and private citizens.<sup>1</sup> Most distinctively, it is rooted in religions—their texts, their practices, their traditions, and the two-vectored spiritual orientation around which all of them revolve: first, the proper orientation of politics to the

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**Brian Cox** is an ordained Episcopal priest, Senior Vice President for Dispute Resolution Training for the International Center for Religion & Diplomacy in Washington D.C., President of the Reconciliation Institute of Santa Barbara, and Adjunct Professor at Pepperdine University School of Law. He received his B.S. in Geological Sciences at the University of Southern California and his Master of Divinity from Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, MA. He also holds a Master of Dispute Resolution from Pepperdine, and is one of the pioneers of faith-based diplomacy.

**Daniel Philpott** is Assistant Professor of Political Science and Faculty Fellow at the Joan B. Kroc Institute of International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame. He is the author of *Revolutions in Sovereignty: How Ideas Shaped Modern International Relations* (Princeton, 2001). He is currently working on a book about reconciliation in politics, and, in a collaborative project based at Harvard University, on a global comparative project on the influence of religious organizations on peace, democratization, and transitional justice.

transcendent, and second, the active role of the divine in human affairs. Practitioners of faith-based diplomacy will, to be sure, draw upon secular expertise in conflict resolution and analysis, political science and philosophy, experience in national security, diplomacy, community development, and the like. But their central, orienting compass is their faith.

Here, we seek to describe these principles and practices in the hope that with a keener understanding of them, practitioners can better integrate their faith and their expertise and become what Scott Appleby has called “militants for peace.”<sup>2</sup> From what sources do we draw such principles and practices? One is our own experience. Between us, we have practiced faith-based diplomacy in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia, Kosovo, Sudan, Burundi, and Kashmir (India and Pakistan). Currently, under the auspices of the International Center for Religion and Diplomacy in Washington, D.C., we are working together on a project in Kashmir that seeks to develop a movement of faith-based reconciliation among the younger generation of Kashmiris, a movement that serves as a means to a political settlement, a framework of socio-political healing, and a moral vision that shapes the political order and civil society.

We have also learned much from the experiences of other scholars and practitioners working along similar lines, including John Paul Lederach, Rabbi Marc Gopin, Scott Appleby, Mohammed Abu-Nimer, and the Community of Sant’Egidio.<sup>3</sup> Most recently, Douglas Johnston has edited a book on faith-based diplomacy that presents the insights of prominent scholars and activists on the subject.<sup>4</sup>

Finally, our understanding of faith-based diplomacy arises from our own faith perspective, particularly from our reflection upon the political implications of the life and teachings of Jesus of Nazareth. In profound respects, the principles and practices of faith-based diplomacy are embedded in other faith traditions, too. In Kashmir, we have witnessed them effect reconciliation between Hindus and Muslims. To recognize such commonality is not to assert a universalistic or syncretic convergence of

religions, but only to seek out their mutual potential for fruitful diplomacy. What principles and practices of diplomacy, then, do religions yield?

## Principles

Faith-based diplomacy is oriented towards the divine. That is its most central and distinctive principle. Its motivating vision of politics, its assumptions about human nature and the political order, and the norms that govern its conduct all arise from an understanding of the nature and activity of the divine—understood in some traditions as a personal God and in other traditions as the source of meaning and existence.

Expressing crucially this divine orientation is a vision of the political order that serves as the lodestar of the faith-based diplomat. As the Abrahamic faiths understand it, God reveals his vision for how his people are to live together through scriptural texts. The Jewish Torah, for instance, describes this vision as *shalom*, a harmony that amounts to far more than a negative peace in which people refrain from harming one another, but implies a condition of active love for each person consistent with his God-given dignity. Many faiths also look to “natural law,” divinely instilled moral precepts understood through reason, for guidance in governance.

From these sources emanate principles that prescribe the nature and purpose of government and temporal authority, the duties and entitlements of citizens, the respective roles of temporal and spiritual authority, the distribution of economic wealth, the treatment of the poor, punishment, war, and other matters. Of course, a multiplicity of interpretations of these texts and principles has proliferated down through the centuries, and some principles will overlap with secular conceptions.

What is important for the faith-based diplomat is that the political order is shaped by a divinely grounded vision. In any such vision, the “horizontal” relationships among members and between members and outsiders will reflect their “vertical” relationship with the divine. The Abrahamic faiths hold that a recognition of God’s sovereignty is the basis of community

among God's followers. The very meaning of Islam is submission to God, a concept that is the basis of Shari'a, the divine law. For Jews, God's covenant with the people of Israel and the laws revealed in it are the basis of their common community. Christians view society as ordered around God's self-revelation in Jesus of Nazareth.

When Pope John Paul II proposed forgiveness as a principle for the nations in his address on the World Day of Peace, 2002, he understood this to be a direct response to God's mercy towards humanity.

So, too, the faith-based diplomat—whether she is helping to construct a truth commission, imparting a moral vision to a divided village, building networks of relationship between political and religious leaders, working for a peace settlement, or seeking to build a movement for reconciliation within a civil society—will base her work on what she understands to be a divine plan for humanity. Though her immersion in the darkest corners of human suffering will frequently remind her of the distance between this vision and the world as it is, it will yet be this vision that motivates her and makes her work intelligible.

An orientation towards the divine, though, involves more than a vision for the political order. Faith-based diplomacy is also premised upon divine agency in human affairs. Reconciliation between enemies, solidarity with the poor, and the overturning of unjust structures, along with the practices through which the faith-based diplomat contributes to them—prayer, fasting, religiously based conflict resolution, love for enemies, spiritual friendship—are understood to be the work of the divine.

Such an understanding helps to make sense out of events that may seem surprising on their own terms. Our work in Kashmir, for instance, features a four-day seminar that imparts a moral vision of reconciliation to activists and lead-

ers in civil society, both Hindu and Muslim. At the start of one seminar, an angry Hindu stood before the participants and issued a bitter diatribe against the Kashmiri Muslim community—surely an inauspicious beginning of a vision of reconciliation. But over the subsequent days, through the prayer of the seminar leaders, through spiritual conversations between him and several Muslims that extended into the wee hours of the night, through Muslim expressions of repentance towards him, his spirit was gradually changed. On the final day, he stood

up again before the group and apologized for Hindu insensitivity towards Muslim suffering and forgave Muslims for their oppression of Hindus. It was an instance of what we understand to be the work of the divine.

History's more famous faith-based social movements were conducted

with a similar understanding. The American civil rights movement of the 1950s was famous for its commitment to overturning unjust laws and its spirit of reconciliation and love of enemies. What is less often recognized is that the movement's signature activities of marching, imprisonment, and verbal protest were enconced in prayer, worship, the seeking of the guidance of God, and the life of the Christian community. Individual and community sought God; God shaped the movement's unique and astonishing politics. Spiritual practice shaped political practice similarly in the Indian movement against British colonialism led by Mahatma Gandhi and in important parts of the anti-apartheid movement against South Africa.

Faith-based diplomacy's orientation to the divine is found, too, in its view of human nature. It understands first that people matter. A trivial statement? Not when one recalls that leading views of international politics view diplomacy as the outworking of colossal forces—the international balance of power, the global economic system, the class structure, and technology. In such theories human nature

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tends to be either ignored, underestimated, or misconstrued.

In faith-based diplomacy, human nature matters in general, as does the vision and leadership of certain humans in particular. In humans is found a spiritual hunger, an alienation that is fulfilled in a living relationship with the divine. Faith-based diplomacy also recognizes the evil in the human soul. Taking the form of the *animus dominandi*, envy, anger, hatred, and spite, evil is a living, efficacious, spiritual reality, not a mere dysfunction or a byproduct of social conditions. Its eradication and defeat are, in turn, accomplished not through human agency, whether the work of psychology or arms, but through divine intervention. Alienated and susceptible to evil, fulfilled through the divine, the person is the site of potential spiritual transformation. It is with this potential in mind that faith-based diplomacy is conducted.

Flowing out of its orientation towards the divine is a second broad theme in faith-based diplomacy: reconciliation. “Reconciliation” is now a familiar term in public discourse, a buzzword today in America, and a common phrase elsewhere. Yet it can also arouse deep passions. In the July 2002 opening of the Institute for Reconciliation in Srinagar, Kashmir, one prominent Kashmiri journalist challenged the very idea of reconciliation. In a moment of passionate anger he shouted out, “Does reconciliation mean submitting lamely to a rapist when you are being raped as we are here in Kashmir?”

Reconciliation, though, is neither a recent trend nor a Western importation. The ancient religions express it most deeply, defining it as the restoration of relationship. In Hebrew, reconciliation is expressed as *tikkun olam*, meaning “to heal, to repair, to transform.” Its Greek derivatives are *katallage*, *apokatallasso*, and *diallasso*, meaning “to bring forces together that would naturally repel each other,” “to break down walls or barriers” and “to heal or change the nature of a relationship.” In Latin, the word *concilium*, meaning a deliberative process by which adversaries work out their differences “in council,” expresses the concept, while Arabic denotes reconciliation as *salima*, meaning peace,

safety, security, and freedom, and *salaha*, meaning to be righteous, to do right, settlement, compromise, restoration, and restitution. In Sanskrit the word *dhyan* (zen) means awakening or enlightenment leading to liberation, reconciliation and atonement. *Yoga* means “union, integration.”

To be sure, differences abound among and within faith traditions about the meaning of reconciliation and about the relative roles of punishment, forgiveness, apology, atonement, and the practice of these concepts in public law. Still, reconciliation is important in each tradition. It pervades Judaism, in which atonement, central to the Torah, infuses halakhah, the Jewish law, wherein punishment, repentance, and restitution are all arrayed towards restoration. Christianity extends the logic of atonement to God’s mercy toward sinners on the cross. In Islam, the Qur’an’s repeated references to Allah’s mercy and injunctions to forgiveness imply a restorative logic, one indeed practiced in Arabic rituals of *sulh*, designed to bring reconciliation between offenders and victims. In Hinduism the conception of dharma, or human obligations, found in the Laws of Manu, appears to stress retributive punishment, but speaks also of repentance and penance through which an offender is restored in his soul and returned to his rightful place in the social order. Reconciliation reached its height in Hinduism through the life and thought of Mahatma Gandhi, though he drew upon other faiths as well. He once exemplified his vision by counseling a Hindu murderer of a Muslim to find an orphan Muslim boy and raise him as Muslim. The Buddhist faith is epitomized by the restoration of the offender’s soul and of relationships among the estranged. Both its compendium of ethics, the Vinaya, and the judicial practice of traditional Tibetan culture stress reconciliation as a response to evil.

If restoration of relationship is found in faith traditions, then so, too, the restoration of political orders wounded by war and injustice is a natural principle for faith-based diplomacy. When armies are squared off and guns are firing, reconciliation demands first a political settlement among leaders. But a settlement

is not enough. Reconciliation involves a far greater breadth of participants and depth of transformation. Absent this breadth and depth, a political settlement itself may not succeed.

Six years after Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yassir Arafat achieved an apparent breakthrough for peace in the Oslo Accords, the two sides descended into a war of suicide bombings and harsh Israeli reprisals. When asked why Oslo had collapsed, the lead U.S. negotiator of the agreement, Dennis Ross, commented that whereas political leaders had come to an agreement, far too much hatred and far too little sympathy for peace persisted between the Israeli and Palestinian people. What was needed was a change of hearts and minds at the grassroots and middle levels of society. Such reconciliation on the ground can exert upward pressure on political leadership, eliciting new possibilities for a lasting peace.

The deeper, broader reconciliation of faith-based diplomacy is in fact a family of interwoven ideas. Together, they propose reconciliation as a moral vision for wounded societies. The first of these ideas is the healing of historical wounds. Prominent contemporary theories hold that bitter memories of past injustices are only illusory causes of racial, ethnic, and religious conflicts, conflicts whose true causes are cynical elites who manipulate popular identities, globalization, and dysfunctional demographic patterns, and the trauma of economic and political transition. A faith-based perspective demurs. Such factors contribute to conflict, but so do memories of past crimes against one's parents, grandparents, great grandparents, and one's historic community, dormant resentments that may ever erupt into atrocities. Left unhealed, historical wounds fester endlessly. "That which is forgotten cannot be healed and that which is unhealed becomes the cause of greater evil in the future," as the Jewish author Elie Weisel once wrote.

If the power of memories is not illusory, neither is the power of healing. Crucially, healing is not forgetting. It begins with the members of a community examining their suffering at the hands of their enemy. The next, more dramatic

step is their acknowledgment of their enemy's suffering. This recognition can, often to surprising degrees, lead to the change of heart, the repentance, and the embrace of the other in which healing begins. As the religious traditions—and faith-based diplomacy—understand it, this occurs before, through, and with the assistance of divine power.

The second idea, flowing from the first, is apology and forgiveness, practiced with respect to misdeeds perpetrated in the name of the political order. Apology is the acknowledgment of one's misdeeds and the expression of sorrow to one's victim; forgiveness is the victim's foregoing of all claims to anger, resentment, and payment against the offender. Such practices are usually not the first inclination of doers and sufferers of evil; the change in heart that comes from examination and acknowledgement are usually prerequisites. Apology and forgiveness, though, are essential to the restoration of wounded communities. It is not surprising that most religious traditions give prominent place to these practices. The Abrahamic faiths understand them as direct responses to God's mercy.

In our seminars in Kashmir, we have often found that we could not talk about apology and forgiveness until we had first addressed yet a third aspect of reconciliation—social justice. The participants could not acknowledge or forego anger, they insisted, until the seminar addressed such issues as self-determination, human rights, colonialism, racism, democracy, economic justice, and restitution for past evils. So we discovered the important interrelationship between justice and forgiveness. Forgiveness does not mean giving up the pursuit of justice. But without forgiveness, "justice" becomes angry, hostile revenge—an escalation, not a solution.

Like visions for the political order and reconciliation, social justice has a contested history of thought in virtually all of the faith traditions. But a few threads are broadly common. First, accountability for injustices on the part of offenders is essential. Reconciliation without it is cheap. Second, most religions propose a healthy pluralism and inclusion where people of varying ethnicities, races and religions not

only tolerate one another's rights, but also value differences and affirm the richness of complementarity. Surah 49:13 in the Qur'an expresses just such inclusivity: "O mankind! We created/ You from a single (pair)/ Of a male and a female,/ And made you into/ Nations and tribes, that/ Ye may know each other/ Not that ye may despise/ (Each other)." Third, virtually all faith traditions advocate an economics of compassion that gives special emphasis to the dignity of the poor.<sup>5</sup>

Reconciliation and a divinely grounded vision of the political order, then, are foundational principles of faith-based diplomacy. To articulate them is not to deny the complex differences in how religions understand them or the "internal pluralism" within religions.<sup>6</sup> Nor is it to deny the overlap in many matters between faith-based principles and ones that do not require faith to grasp—traditional Western criteria for the justice of war, for instance. Rather, to set forth these broad principles it is to point to distinctive ideas that religious traditions have to offer about statecraft in the hope that in their application, new political possibilities will emerge.

## Practices

How, then, is faith-based diplomacy conducted? Into what courses of action do a divinely grounded vision of the political order and reconciliation translate? At least six practices emerge.

### *Impartation of Moral Vision*

One method is simply the inculcation of principles of faith-based diplomacy in people who are likely to be agents of change in their society. Such is the aim of our seminars in faith-based reconciliation. They impart to participants a moral vision—a set of foundational values—centered upon reconciliation and informed by a divinely grounded understanding of politics. We communicate this vision through eight principles, taught through lecture and considered in small group discussions: pluralism, inclusion, peacemaking through conflict resolution, social justice, forgiveness, healing collective wounds, sovereignty, and atonement. The participants are

challenged to comprehend these principles, but also, through examining their own suffering and their community's suffering, and then, through a "learning conversation," come to embrace the principles as relevant ones for their world. Many participants then make the decisive, activating commitment to carry this embrace into Kashmiri society as agents of reconciliation. The result is a nascent cadre of foot soldiers committed to reconciliation.

### *Civil Society at Work*

A cadre of foot soldiers—working outside government, and often comprising leaders of NGOs, universities, religious bodies, and various professions—evokes the concept of civil society, a favorite theme of political philosophers dating back to Alexis de Tocqueville and G.W.F. Hegel in the nineteenth century. Associations, clubs, religious bodies, sundry organizations—this "middle layer" of society, the theory runs, is a vital source of democratic participation and a limit to the power of the state. In the democratic revolutions of 1989 in East Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia, civil society, alloyed heavily with religious bodies, evidenced this claim in catalyzing non-violent political change.

So, too, civil society is a strategic site for faith-based diplomacy. John Paul Lederach, a contemporary practitioner of reconciliation hailing from the Mennonite tradition, argues for the practical importance of the middle layers of society in bringing "sustainable peace."<sup>7</sup> Compared to top officials, whose responsibility for the whole creates confining political pressure, the middle rungs enjoy more flexibility to envision and practice creative ideas. Yet, unlike people at the grassroots, they also have the influence and contact with leaders above them to urge reconciliation upon them effectively. Both flexible and efficacious, they are positioned to be conduits of new ideas.

If the members of a civil society were to embrace a moral vision of reconciliation, they could then speak about it in universities, at religious gatherings, in newspapers, on television, and at public forums, and urge it more privately upon leaders of warring factions in a conflict.

This is the premise of our seminars in Kashmir, which bring together religious leaders, civil servants, officials of NGOs, student leaders, and professionals including lawyers, doctors, business people, academics, journalists, and writers. This whole group, comprising both Hindus and Muslims, males and females, usually numbers about 80 participants. They range in age, though a significant portion are likely future leaders who are now in their 20s and 30s. Over the past three years, the seminars have graduated over 300 participants, many of whom have formed the ranks of a movement committed to advocating reconciliation in Kashmir. Thus is civil society at work, propelled by faith.

### *Personal Relationships*

A movement of reconciliation needs a special ingredient both to hold it together and to gain the cooperation of political and military leaders. It is personal relationships that accomplish these tasks. Only naturally are they central to faith-based reconciliation, given its emphases on the activity of God, personal transformation, and the role of healing and apology. The faith-based diplomat forms and encourages friendships.

One of the dramatic success stories of faith-based diplomacy is the work of the Sant'Egidio Community, a Catholic lay organization that, in 1992, facilitated the settlement of a 16-year-long war in Mozambique that took over one million lives. The Community began in 1968 among high school students in Rome who began to pray together and to live simple lives of friendship, especially with the poorest of the poor. Over subsequent decades, these friendships expanded throughout the globe, coming to include countries like Mozambique, where friendships extended to leaders of both major factions in the war as well as to local Catholic bishops and other civil society figures. In the late 1980s, when the factions showed signs of a willingness to explore peace, the Community drew upon its deep network of friendships to bring both sides to its headquarters in Rome, where it sponsored nine rounds of negotiations over two years. It practiced sound diplomacy by keeping the parties away from the international

media, but also ordinary friendship, even taking one negotiator with a toothache to a dentist for treatment. In such an atmosphere, the Community negotiated a settlement that has remained peaceful ever since.

Our work in Kashmir likewise depends crucially upon personal relationships. It began in September 2000 with a meeting with a young Muslim man who had trod his own path of reconciliation. Once a top leader of the underground Kashmiri separatist struggle who had both wielded the gun and suffered imprisonment, he had experienced a change of heart that led him to become a leading spokesman for peace. Hearing the message of reconciliation, he was moved to embrace it and to become the key Kashmiri leader of our work. Over time, our deep commitment to one another's welfare and to encouraging one another in our mutual work has become essential for the trust that allows us to take risks together. The resulting movement for reconciliation is also bound together by friendships, these sustained though a network of cell groups, where committed alumni of the seminars meet regularly to encourage one another and grow deeper in their understanding of the work.

### *Spiritual Conversations*

Arising from personal relationships is the practice of spiritual conversations. It is in track two diplomacy that such dialogues usually take place, that is, in meetings between unofficial emissaries and official political and military leaders. But spiritual conversations are hardly a traditional tool of statecraft, even in unofficial settings. Such discussions engage leaders in "conversations of the heart" in which they share what they have suffered: the friends, loved ones, career hopes, and property that they have lost; their hatred or resignation or hopefulness about these losses; their dreams for the future; and the place of the divine in all of these matters.

We often find political and military leaders to be surprised by these conversations—not only that they take place, but that they elicit sympathy and lead to friendships. On one occasion when we brought up forgiveness in a conversation with a prominent Kashmiri sepa-

ratist leader, he responded with a 45-minute screed cataloging his suffering. Upon finishing, he looked up at us and we thanked him for trusting us enough to share deeply personal affairs. He responded that we were the first people who seemed to care enough to listen to his suffering. He later acknowledged that both he and his people would need to practice forgiveness if Kashmir was to have any future. It was a spiritual change wrought by a spiritual conversation.

### *Prayer and Fasting*

Devout believers of virtually all faiths pray and fast. Should not prayer and fasting also infuse faith-based diplomacy? Expressing the believer's submission to the divine, prayer and fasting usher a spiritual power into the site of a violent conflict, one that effects personal transformation. Our work in Kashmir commonly involves a team of people who pray and fast during seminars, diplomatic meetings, and public forums. Certain episodes of transformation, typically instances where an embittered person comes to express profound words of healing, apology, or forgiveness, bear the marks of the sort of divine assistance that can come as a response to prayer and fasting.

Our seminar of July 2002 was the first one to bring together Kashmiri Muslims with Pandits, a Hindu ethnic group that Muslims had expelled from the Kashmir Valley in the early 1990s and who are now living in refugee camps in Jammu, a southern, Hindu-majority region of the state of Jammu and Kashmir.<sup>8</sup> It was a risky proposition from the outset. We held the seminar in Gulmarg, a high mountain village in Kashmir, to which many of the Pandits were returning for the first time since their expulsion. The prayer and fasting team was, in our view, essential to our prospects for success.

Two days later, we witnessed a poignant outbreak of healing when several Islamic clerics and scholars stood up during a service of reconciliation, acknowledged the role of the Muslims in driving out the Pandits, repented, asked forgiveness, and vowed to work for the repatriation of the Pandit community to the Kashmir Valley.

Days later, when the Pandits returned home to the refugee camps in Jammu, their stories of changed Muslim hearts reverberated through the refugee community, stirring up new interest in reconciliation.

### *Rituals for Reconciliation*

Like prayer and fasting, rituals and ceremonies that are normally directed towards worship, celebration, mourning, petition, and healing can be potently redirected towards the resolution of conflicts and the transformation of people wounded by political violence. The reading of sacred texts, common prayer, liturgy, and rites of healing can all become tools of faith-based diplomacy.

The most powerful moments of our work in Kashmir come in a reconciliation service at the close of the seminar. With the participants seated in a circle, sacred scriptures about reconciliation are read. Participants then take the opportunity to inscribe on a slip of paper any memories of which they want to unburden themselves, whether through apology, forgiveness, or general healing. Next, while the group is carrying out prayer and meditation, some of the participants will rise and speak words of healing. Often, a member of the opposing community will then reciprocate with an acknowledgment and further words of healing. Together, members of each community also practice rituals of coming together with members of the other community. At the end—surprising us the first time we saw it—the participants typically close the ritual with songs of peace, even including “We Shall Overcome,” sung in Urdu.

At one seminar, words of healing were spoken by a Kashmiri Muslim man who had lost his father, a politician, to the guns of Muslim militants eight years earlier. Militants then came to his house one night, murdered his brother, and shot him many times. He survived his wounds, after nine surgeries. He had vowed to seek revenge, and for the past eight years had been seeking to find and kill the gunman. But in the service of reconciliation, following three days of intense reflection on reconciliation, flanked by the prayers of his fellow participants,



he stood and announced emotionally that he had experienced a transformation of heart and publicly forgave his perpetrator, renouncing all revenge. In a meeting nine months later, he recounted the story of his transformation, showing me pictures of himself before and after he had been shot: “You see, I used to be handsome!” He spoke emotionally of the freedom he had discovered, and of his renewed commitment to working with other victims of violence, widows, and orphans.

Rabbi Marc Gopin has proposed that rituals of grieving can also be used to heal conflict between communities. The Jewish practice of *aveilus*—the mourning of a loved one through acknowledgment, burial, remembering, and then healing and recovery—could, he argues, be used by Arabs and Jews in the Middle East to address and heal memories of lost loved ones, homes, and land dating back one hundred years.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, Arab Islamic communities have developed rituals of *sulh* for settling conflicts between community members that could be practiced on a larger scale. Conceived of as alternatives to cycles of vengeance, they involve entire families and even village leaders in the hearing of grievances, mutual mourning, restitution, forgiveness, and restoration of normal friendship. As with the other practices of faith-based diplomacy, rituals for reconciliation emanate from faith and draw from the wells of healing.

## Contexts

The practical, the worldly, the skeptical, surely every diplomat of the traditional sort will want to know: what difference does faith-based diplomacy make? With all the equanimity of a divine grounding, the faith-based diplomat might respond with Mother Teresa’s quip that faithfulness, not success, is what matters. True, the most important virtue of faith-based diplomacy is doubtless faith itself, the belief that one’s actions will, through divine assistance, bear munificent fruit. Still, even the least worldly-minded faith-based diplomat must interest himself in whether his work effects good or ill, succeeds or backfires.

An interest in effects of the work begets an interest in the contexts in which the work is most likely to occur. Of these there are at least four. First, there are conflicts whose parties define themselves by their religion and perhaps even fight over religion: Sudan, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and, in important ways, the conflicts of the 1990s in Yugoslavia. Kashmir is ever more such a conflict as militant groups come increasingly to seek not merely self-determination but the spread of Dar al Islam. In such conflicts, an approach that resonates with the religious worldview of the factions may well achieve successes that purely secular approaches will not. As a former militant leader told us, “it is not enough to take the gun out of the militant’s hand. One must deal with the ideas that compel him to pick up the gun in the first place. To do that, one must present a more compelling idea.”

The second situation favorable to faith-based diplomacy is one in which, regardless of the identities of the parties, certain religious leaders enjoy a charisma that they may exercise for settlement and reconciliation. Gandhi’s ability to halt rioting through fasting during the partition of India is exemplary, explainable only through his own concept of “soul force.”

The third situation is civilizational dialogue. Conflict, at least of the broad ideological sort, occurs even among the broadest religious collectivities—Islamic and Western civilizations, for example, between whom popular tensions have escalated as of late. In response, both President Mohamed Khatami of Iran and Pope John Paul have proposed a “dialogue between civilizations” that involves spiritual conversations among religious leaders. People of faith are indeed equipped well to foster such dialogue as they understand the complexities of the theologies that define worldviews, and are able to avoid shallow forms of “consensus” that seek only a lowest common denominator that few devout religious believers can endorse.

Fourth are situations in which faith-based diplomats are well positioned to become trusted envoys. This position may arise from their links within a society—witness Sant’Egidio’s network of friendships in Mozambique. Or, it may come

from a leader's prestige. The role that Reverend Jesse Jackson played in negotiating for hostages in Yugoslavia and Lebanon is such a case. In both situations, parties were more willing to accord respect to faith-based diplomats because of their religious calling.

All told, then, in any of these situations, what difference might the principles and practices of faith-based diplomacy make? Dramatic results abound on the personal level—in the bitter partisan who comes to embrace forgiveness and healing, in the cadres of committed friends and activists who willingly put themselves in danger by coming to urge reconciliation, in transformations and healings and renewals. We have seen such results in Kashmir.

But faith-based diplomacy might well effect social change, too. It takes inspiration from religious movements that have, over the last twenty years, altered the history of nations: toppling authoritarianism in Poland, the Philippines, East Germany, Brazil, South Africa, and elsewhere; bringing reconciliation in the wake of political transitions in South Africa and Chile; and brokering peace settlements in Mozambique, Nicaragua, and between Chile and Argentina. Claims of efficaciousness should not, of course, be overstated. Few of the changes in Eastern Europe or South Africa, for example, would have occurred apart from new environments created by the end of the Cold

War; in every case, economic, political and social circumstances and leadership on many fronts helped to produce the outcome. These many layers of causality warrant humility. Still, the same episodes also ought to inspire boldness for our contemporary diplomacy. Large in significance, concentrated in time, each bearing the unmistakable influence of faith, they together suggest that faith-based diplomacy is, in the words of Victor Hugo, “an idea whose time has come.” ❖

### Recommended:

- For policy makers and diplomats: build relationships with faith leaders based on the aforementioned principles.
- For young activists in faith-based diplomacy: attach yourself to an experienced practitioner as a mentor.
- Explore programs in peace studies that have a strong religious component such as that offered by the Kroc Institute at Notre Dame, or programs in conflict resolution such as that offered by Pepperdine University School of Law.
- Become committed to specific international conflict situations—long-term involvement, relationship-building, trust, and on-site knowledge are the keys to making a difference.

1. Joseph Montville, “Transnationalism and the Role of Track-Two Diplomacy,” in *Approaches to Peace: An Intellectual Map*, ed. W. Scott Thompson and Kenneth M. Jensen (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1991).
2. R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000), pp. 10-13.
3. See *Ibid.*; Marc Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of World Religions, Violence, and Peacemaking* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 1997).
4. Douglas Johnston, *Faith-Based Diplomacy: Trumping Realpolitik* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
5. Other principles can also be included, as should the familiarly liberal democratic ones that our participants stressed.
6. Appleby, pp. 245-280.
7. Lederach, pp. 38-55.
8. To clarify, Jammu and Kashmir is a state of India, consisting of three sub-regions, Kashmir (often called the “Kashmir Valley”), Jammu, and Ladakh. The Kashmir Valley is a Muslim majority area, Jammu a Hindu majority area, and Ladakh is divided evenly between Muslims and Hindus. The term “Kashmir” is often used generically to mean either the entire State of Jammu and Kashmir or else the even larger region that is disputed by India and Pakistan, straddling the Line of Control that de facto divides the sovereign states of India and Pakistan. Thus far we have used “Kashmir” in these more generic senses.
9. Gopin, p. 172.