

Redefining Interfaith Discourse: Applying Invitational Rhetoric to Religion

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There exists a peculiar, reoccurring loss in religious conversations held between rhetors of differing religious beliefs—that is, the building up of the person-to-person relationship. This article, however, proposes that *invitational rhetoric*, as offered by Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin, will provide the rhetor with a more sympathetic, even empathetic, means of discussing the subject matter of religion. While this essay focuses on the individual spiritual quest, religious rhetoric is here-in examined with the intent of arriving at a juncture that will allow one to go beyond the usual conflicts by nurturing what might be considered an unusual, but effectual, respect.

There is no doubt that our world is religiously diverse as well as religiously conflicted. And one cannot help but notice, amidst the tensions, our desperate need for a rhetorical mediation that acknowledges diversity while abating conflict. Recently, at my local bookstore, I found this tension embedded and enacted within various titles lining the shelves of the religion/spirituality section: *God without Religion: Questioning Centuries of Accepted Truths* (2005), *God Is Not a Christian, nor a Jew, Muslim, Hindu . . . : God Dwells with Us, in Us, around Us, as Us* (2010), *Toward a True Kinship of Faiths: How the World's Religions Can Come Together* (2011), *God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World—and Why Their Differences Matter* (2011), *The Faith Club: A Muslim, a Christian, a Jew—Three Women Search for Understanding* (2007), *The World Turned Upside Down: The Global Battle over God, Truth, and Power* (2010), *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (2009), *The Case for God* (2010), *The Evolution of God* (2010), *God Is Not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything* (2009), *The God Delusion* (2008), and *Speaking of Faith: Why Religion Matters—and How to Talk about It* (2008).

Indeed, the diverse ways these authors approached religion cover the whole gamut of rhetorical styles as outlined and addressed in the original 1993 version of Sonja K. Foss and Cindy L. Griffin's essay "Beyond Persuasion: A Proposal for an Invitational Rhetoric": conquest, conversion, advisory, and invitational, going from the middle to the extremes—quite the mishmash. But these same titles also create an interesting variance when looked at in reference to their different metaphorical perspectives, which I have simplified and overgeneralized here to communicate my point: religion is personal experience; religion is transcendent; religion is pluralistic; religion is diversity; religion is community; religion is rational progress; religion is reason; religion is practical discipline; religion is evolutionary; religion is illusion; religion is misconception; and religion is a conversation.

From this list of titles and their accompanying metaphorical implications, we can begin to see exactly how widespread tensions have become within the realm of religious discourse. It can also be generally deduced that the major philosophical rift is not as much between the different

religions of the world (not that I mean to underestimate the importance of these conflicts) as it is between religion and nonreligion. This poses a very difficult question: “How do religious believers and nonreligious persons share in a conversation about religion without the war metaphors of our attack culture persuading us to behave like a circus of fools?” From adherents of the main religions of the world to the nonreligious, we are all still *human*, and there, if anywhere, is a place to start—because, inevitably, we are all wrestling with the same questions.

So the problem becomes: “How might we span these gaps between us?” The answer, as explored in the following pages: “By embodying an invitational rhetoric.”

Invitational rhetoric is a form of dialogue based on the tenets of safety, value, and freedom as opposed to rhetorical forms that are grounded in contention, dominance, and elitism.¹ This is why invitational rhetoric proves to be a worthier format for instituting interfaith dialogue. For instance, a conversation framed by invitational rhetoric can demonstrate that religion can be approached without the use of war metaphors. An argument regarding the existence of the Divine, for example, when framed by invitational rhetoric, requires that both parties must put aside any agenda other than one that seeks to understand why the other person believes the way he or she does. Though this may sound absurd to some, the questions of whether God exists or whether it is this god who is the true God or whether there is not one but many gods become secondary because the goals are to offer both perspectives and to learn to respect the other person by recognizing what her/his viewpoint means to her/him. According to Foss and Griffin, “When rhetoric establishes a safe context, the rhetor makes no attempt to hurt, degrade, or belittle audience members or their beliefs,” allowing “audience members [to] not fear rebuttal of their most fundamental beliefs” (27).² In other words, we must learn to let the religious belief speak for itself. And so the questions then become: “Why is a literal interpretation and belief in one God important to those of the Judeo-Christian tradition?”; “Why is a pluralistic interpretation of the pantheon important to Hinduism?”; “Why is it important for a secular humanist to profess a system of belief not centered around a concept of the Divine?” The objective of these questions is, therefore, to understand how and why the beliefs are important to those who hold them, not whether they are right or wrong, true or false. Arriving at an understanding becomes the safe context.

However, the war metaphors that dominate religious discourse often encourage the rhetor to argumentatively attack the other person by demanding belief in a particular viewpoint. When we do this, Foss and Griffin assert, we are deteriorating the *ethos* of the relationship; we are desecrating another’s values; and we are imposing a system of thought that imprisons their free will. When we approach religion with the “I’m right; you’re wrong” attitude, it is no surprise that the relationship suffers—it is simply splintered by a contentious rhetoric.

Because of this, throughout the course of this discussion my goal is to offer a general—and, hopefully, edifying—approach to religious discourse in which we will primarily concern ourselves with the *universal* applications of rhetoric as we look at how to talk about religion. Therefore, my intent is to construct an analysis of how we might be able to adjust, and even change, our previous approaches—so that we may advance toward establishing a more “respectful” and “meaningful” common ground in an arena of discourse that has long been confounded by *conquest* and *conversion* (proselytism).

Primarily, the argument is to rethink religious discourse. This is where the art of rhetoric comes in. And, somewhat ironically, invitational rhetoric parallels certain fundamental religious

thought, so by applying it to how we approach talking about religion we will see the methodology of it begin to come full circle. Therefore, this offering will be structured to look closely at the following aspects of rhetoric and religion: the magic and art of rhetoric, the intersection of potential change, the new cultural context, immanent value, developing a new perspective, offering versus imposing, transcending the divide, self-risk, metaphor, and analogy and theory.

The Magic and Art of Rhetoric

In relation to recent religious tensions, there has been a developmental rise in social trends moving towards an idealism of “tolerance” and “coexistence.” These trends beg two questions, though: “Is just being tolerated really enough?” and “Is simply acknowledging the differences in religious views sufficient?” Of course, I am not suggesting that these ideals are moving in the wrong direction—on the contrary. But for us to be able to answer (as well as to go beyond) these questions, not only do we need to learn how to appropriately talk about religion but, more importantly, we need to learn how to effectively *build relationships across religious barriers*. Thus, the human element of the religious experience is wholly expressed in a process where the larger questions of life are lived out together, and this requires a reframing of religious discourse. Once we expand what the religious relationship entails (i.e., bridging religious barriers), we are redefining how to create a larger context for religious conversation in general and vice versa. And the larger questions of life—“How is it that we exist?” “Who are we?” and “How should we live or prepare to die?”—then are seen as questions that are not specific to any one religion but are, in fact, mysteries of the human condition—mysteries that we all share. Religious discourse needs reframing because most of the viewpoints are not asking how we can live out these questions together. This is where the overarching themes of mythology preside—where people can adapt to a more applicable system of relating to a world that is simultaneously diverse and interconnected. In such a world, we need to create an environment where religious conversation can be “voiced” in an intermediary way both in person-to-person religious conversations and within the larger cultural setting.

However, from the get-go a majority of us are taught to “defend” (notice the metaphor: rhetoric = war) our religious beliefs, yet we are rarely taught how to *respect* another’s beliefs; we are taught how to debate, not how to have a *conversation*. This is the lost voice of interfaith discourse, and my intentions in the current article are wholly to reclaim that lost voice.

Thomas Jefferson noted: “[D]ifference of opinion leads to inquiry, and inquiry to truth” (qtd. in Turner and West 251). Likewise, lawyer and author Gerry Spence writes, “The magic comes when, by argument, we unearth a bit of ourselves, and, thereby, we likely discover something about all others who inhabit the universe” (15–16). Therefore, argument—much more specifically, *religious* argument—is about self-discovery. But it does not end there because it is also about connecting with others; and, paradoxically, we can only really come to know ourselves through exploring the arguments together: “*The art of argument is the art of living*” (Spence 16). Hence, the lost religious voice is reborn when we embody a rhetoric that is invitational as opposed to confrontational.

The Intersection of Potential Change

The overarching commonality is the consensual belief that religious conversations by nature hold the greatest potential for creating an environment where “change [can occur] in the audience

or rhetor or both,” which “may lead to transformation for themselves and others” (Foss and Griffin 6). At the same time, we must recognize that invitational rhetoric acknowledges this as a probable outcome, not the primary goal or motive. The primary goal is creating an authentic relationship through identifying with one another, so that the relationship becomes more powerful than the argument itself.

This is how we bridge the divide. It is not a matter of struggling for power; it is about seeking a *cathartic* response together. When this element is fulfilled, there is an experience of *presence*—a mysterious god-feeling, an enthusiasm for “a new understanding . . . gained in the exchange of ideas” (Foss and Griffin 6).

Deborah Tannen, author of *The Argument Culture*, has highlighted that approaching argument in an adversarial way is disenchanting; argument needs to be about finding a “common ground,” because “[i]f people are able to see people actually listening to each other and changing their view, that’s drama. It’s the drama of changing your view. It’s the drama of a new solution” (“The Argument Culture,” para. 16). In addition, Krista Tippett, radio host of what was formerly known as *Speaking of Faith* (2003), now entitled *Being*, comments particularly on the role of sharing our religious lives: “[W]hen we trace the intersection of religious ideas and human experience together, we also learn how to walk that line more imaginatively and practically together” (4). Invitational rhetoric is a form of argument that offers a *new solution*, and its values bring people together, enabling them to *learn how to walk* side by side.

The New Cultural Context

But as we turn our attention to American culture—where one aspect of the political structure is defined by a polarization of liberalism and Christian fundamentalism³—I cannot help but note how ironic it is that in a country founded on religious freedom there seems to be no appropriate round-table approach available for open religious discussion. Rather, discussions are framed debates, which usually end in anger or in silence. If there do exist well-educated people who know how to hold productive discussions about religion, they are not widely known. The old unwritten rule of the dinner table—to avoid religion or politics—seems all too prevalent even in our regular, “everyday” conversations. That such strictures are valid is a preposterous assumption on our part, and it is most probably a result of our ignorance and fear. These are important issues that are in need of demystification, and we should take care to not avoid them.

Also, whenever there is a topic under discussion, you will find that there are, inevitably, those who will arrogantly rush off to however many extremes they can, raise their flags, and start their wars—this is exactly what we need to avoid. And although I will briefly take time to identify some of the extremes that characterize religious discussion, this analysis will be far more concerned with those who occupy American culture’s “middle ground,” to whom I direct the following question: “How do we constructively bring religion back into the realm of public discourse (along with the weather, traffic reports, and sports)?”

Public radio’s Krista Tippett has been trying to do just that. In her book *Speaking of Faith*, she offers many interesting insights into this conundrum, some of which I will pair up with the key concepts/principles held by invitational rhetoric as reviewed within this article. To begin with, Tippett declares, “In the vast middle, faith is as much about questions as it is about answers” (2).

Anthropologically speaking, religion is a phenomenon that has cultural roots all over the

world; likewise, we cannot deny the power of myth/religion in our world's history: past, present, and future. Whereas in earlier times, all the religions of the world were primarily culture-bound—that is, religion and culture were seen as a holistic entity—in our present time, these boundaries are becoming less and less distinguishable. For instance, Judaic and Hindu beliefs, just like many other beliefs, were once bound by the cultures that gave rise to these religions. Now cultures are less bound by place, in the same way religion is less bound by place. Today we are much more aware of all the different faith/belief traditions of the world; they are not localized as they once were in ancient times. This reveals that there is a great need for a well-educated and open-minded populace as we encounter religious diversity: Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Islam, the magic traditions, the “nonreligion religions” and so on. The debate format of discussion is simply ineffective in this context.

Immanent Value

The primary precept of invitational rhetoric is *immanent value*. Immanent value professes that “every being is a unique and necessary part of the pattern of the universe” (Foss and Griffin 4). As humans, we must first recognize that we exist within a realm of equality; we share the same Image. When we create a mentality of opposition, we oppress the object of that opposition; we tend to dehumanize (or even demonize) other faith/belief traditions, and this type of inequality would be what Tippet refers to as the problem of viewing others as “less than human” (169). We don't see the *I* as *you* and the *you* as *me*, the *we* as *they* and the *them* as *us*. This is where “[i]nvitational rhetoric constitutes an invitation to the audience to enter the rhetor's world and see it as the rhetor does” (Foss and Griffin 5). This is also what rhetorician Kenneth Burke refers to as *consubstantiation*⁴ (being a clear-cut example of how the rhetoric of religion aids us in understanding the motive of language). However, notice the dramatic shift in perspective here, because again the emphasis is on seeing the world through the *other's* eyes.

As we look at different faith/belief traditions, this is where our human sympathies can achieve empathy. What if a Jew looked at the world through the eyes of a Buddhist? What if a Muslim looked at the world through the eyes of a Hindu? What if a Christian looked at the world through the eyes of an agnostic? And, as a real mindbender, what if we had been born into a different culture? Also, because history repeats itself, we have to ask, “What happens when we fail to see *them* as *us*?”: the Crusades, the slave trade, the Thirty Years' War, Manifest Destiny, imperialism, colonialism, the Holocaust, 9/11, and the ongoing tensions in the Holy Land. These are extreme examples of conflict and destruction, but the truth is that it all begins within the individual because the war on the outside is just a reflection of the war within.

Developing a New Perspective

Most of the toughest obstacles that we run into when talking about religion are, in one respect, unnecessary because they are the by-products of a zealotry that is most probably brought on by a fear of our own insecurities. Tippet expounds on this idea, quoting Thomas Merton, Catholic writer and advocate of interfaith dialogue:

[T]here is a far worse anxiety, a far worse insecurity, which comes from being afraid to ask the right questions—because they might turn out to have no answer. One of the moral diseases we communicate to one another in society

comes from huddling together in the pale light of an insufficient answer to a question we are afraid to ask. (116–17)

Moreover, if we would approach things in honest contemplation, we would begin to discover the real relationship that exists between our faith/belief and our doubts. Also, it is our own ego, in fact, that gets in the way of virtue, for self-righteousness is by far the most deadly spiritual outlook, giving rise to extremism in any religious context. Indeed, it is those who are willing to take on the yoke of the other's view, see from the other's perspective, even become skeptics of their own religion, who will aptly become the most faithful of their tradition—because they love without fear. For instance, when you find yourself engaged in your next discussion about religion, as a mental exercise, try arguing it from the other's point of view. As Aristotle remarked, "It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it" (Moncur). Comparative religion author Karen Armstrong magnifies this idea:

[T]o divest yourself of that rationalistic outlook and enter the minds of these mystics and sages and poets and keep on asking, "But why? But why?" And filling up with scholarly knowledge the background until you come to the point where you can *imagine* yourself feeling the same, or believing the same as them, until basically the intellectual idea learns to reverberate with you personally. (Qtd. in Tippett 43; italics added)

Therefore, to see the world as someone else does requires that we summon the powers of imagination—those same powers that led us to our own beliefs in the first place.

Offering versus Imposing

Approaching the issue in this way by no means prohibits disagreements or rids the atmosphere of awkward tensions, but it allows us to empathize with another human being through the religious quest,⁵ and it can even prevent insolence and steer us away from the all-too-familiar attack response. We might even ask: "Why is their viewpoint important to them?" "How do our common psychological functions manifest themselves differently in the experiences of our spiritual ideals?" "How does this viewpoint challenge my own faith/belief—does it weaken or strengthen it?" and "What criticisms have they offered that I might have never thought of?" You might even find yourself agreeing more than you expected when it comes to what you and others believe to be faith-founding questions. The epiphany of these conversations lies in the realization: *You know, I never thought about it that way before*. Though if we never really "listen," we will never "connect"; and if we never connect, we will never be able to explore the questions together. And for the most part, religious traditions are full of stories about leaders and adherents who are questioners. For example, Abraham, who is considered the father of three major world religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), questions God more than a few times (refer to Genesis 12–22 and 25). As poet Rainer Maria Rilke notes, astute skepticism, unlike blind faith, is the road to belief: "Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer" (qtd. in Tippett 47).

Therefore, when we share our point of view, it is more beneficial to question things together, but when it comes to the rest of our dialogue, we also need to be aware of comments like, "You can't look at it that way, because *this, this, and this*." Instead, we might say, "Here's how I see it . . ." In this example, we can see that one comment suffers from condescension and the desire to dominate, while the other *offers* a new perspective. These statements are trying to accomplish the

same minor goal, but they are worlds apart: one is destroying the relationship; the other is building it up. The point that I want to further here is that it benefits all parties involved if we choose to offer and not impose when we share our beliefs, because “[i]n *offering*, rhetors tell what they currently know or understand; they present their vision of the world and show how it looks and works for them”; furthermore, “[i]t involves meeting another’s position ‘in its uniqueness, *letting it have its impact*’” (Foss and Griffin 7; italics added).

Transcending the Divide

Invitational rhetoric also proposes, “To attend to the other as other, the different as different, is also to understand the different *as possible*,” for it is in this moment that our *hypothetical* imagination must be engaged (Foss and Griffin 7). This notion also puts our ideas about Truth to an interesting test because, for at least as long as we approach religious conversation this way, the possibility of Truth being bigger than any one religion is a supposition that we must confront—whether our predispositions lie on the borders of absolutism or of relativism.⁶ Open-mindedness begins here: “We have to think about knowledge itself differently—the insides and edges of words and ideas, the richness of their forms—to understand the nature of religion and the work of theology in which we all might engage” (Tippett 13). Psychologist Carl Gustav Jung adds an enriching depth to this aspect of religious thought:

Without prejudice to my own subjective convictions I should like to raise the question: Is it not thinkable that when one refrains from setting oneself up as an *arbiter mundi* and, deliberately renouncing all subjectivism, cherishes on the contrary the belief, for instance, that God has expressed himself in many languages and appeared in divers forms and that all these statements are *true*—is it not thinkable, I say, that this too is a decision? . . . Has it not yet been observed that all religious statements contain logical contradictions and assertions that are impossible in principle, that this is in fact the very essence of religious assertion? . . . Oddly enough the paradox is one of our most valuable spiritual possessions, while uniformity of meaning is a sign of weakness. Hence a religion becomes inwardly impoverished when it loses or waters down its paradoxes; but their multiplication enriches because only the paradox comes anywhere near to comprehending the fulness of life. Non-ambiguity and non-contradiction are one-sided and thus unsuited to express the incomprehensible. (264–65)

Self-Risk

It would seem that one of the main problems with approaching religion through invitational rhetoric is that people tend to feel like they have to compromise their faith/beliefs; they become afraid of the “self-risk” factor involved, especially as they hypothetically approach their values as pliable. Again, we need to remember that “the goal is the understanding and appreciation of another’s perspective”; this has nothing to do with changing our own religious beliefs in any way, but it has everything to do with respecting the testament of another’s beliefs (Foss and Griffin 6). “It is possible to be a believer and a listener at the same time, to be both fervent and searching, to honor the truth of one’s own conviction and the mystery of the conviction of oth-

ers”; this is what is meant by appreciation and respect (Tippett 2–3). An editorial review of *Toward a True Kinship of Faiths* succinctly addresses this tension:

[D]ifferences between religions can be genuinely appreciated without serving as a source of conflict. The establishment of genuine harmony is *not* dependent upon accepting that all religions are fundamentally the same or that they lead to the same place. Many fear that recognizing the value of another faith is incompatible with having devotion to the truth of one’s own. Nevertheless, . . . a sincere believer can, with integrity, be a pluralist in relation to other religions without compromising commitment to the essence of the doctrinal teachings of their own faith. (para. 4)

It is important to be true to our own convictions, but there is also a lot that we could learn from other faith traditions. Philosopher Maurice Natanson defines the beauty of self-risk as “when I truly risk myself to the viable possibility that the consequence of an argument may be to make me *see* something of the structure of my immediate world” (qtd. in Foss and Griffin 7).

Taken in isolation, religion by its very nature is a bit abstract, but when we identify with a sacred text, the abstract nature of it merges with our existence, our *individuation*,⁷ and we become an embodiment of that belief system; “Religions become entangled with human identity, and there is nothing more intimate and volatile than that” (Tippett 2). So when we choose to attack a religion, we attack the heart of that religion—people: people who are just like you and me. This is where our war metaphors backfire. However, if we walk alongside people of other faith traditions, recognizing our similarities as well as our differences, acknowledging the diversity of our beliefs, we create a relationship with people—people who are just like you and me. This inevitably creates community. That is why there is such an important need for a safe and meaningful rhetorical approach to religion, because we have seen far too much aggression and not enough mutual understanding, as Deborah Tannen highlights:

The pervasiveness of warlike formats and language grows out of, but also gives rise to, an ethic of aggression: We come to value aggressive tactics for their own sake—for the sake of argument. Compromise becomes a dirty word, and we often feel guilty if we are conciliatory rather than confrontational—even if we achieve the result we’re seeking.

She also goes on to say that this problem has a lot to do with the rhetorical styles that we learn through school, the media, and politics; we’re taught to debate to win, not to seek a mutual understanding (“For Argument’s Sake,” para. 7).

It is also important that those involved in such conversations recognize that others are “authorities on their own lives” (Foss and Griffin 4). Their freedom is theirs, and our comprehension of this is brought to fulfillment by engaging in dialogue “with respect and care” (10). Invitational rhetoric provides a way for us “to disagree and at the same time not to hurt each other . . . and to have, actually, something very close and tender” (15). “These qualities [the importance of the relationship] should enlarge, not narrow, our public conversation about all the important issues before us. They should reframe it,” because when personal relationships become the context, the conversation’s outcome is more than just about winning and losing, right and wrong—we are in the middle (Tippett 3).

Metaphor

We can model our conversations on the approach of the early Jewish interpretive community that produced the Talmud (the Oral Torah), never letting religious interpretation and conversation lose cultural precedence. We need to keep asking questions; we need to continue the conversation. Therefore, the metaphor for religious conversation is more appropriately embodied as a sojourn between wanderers/seekers. It is then that the sharing and exchanging of ideas regarding our religious lives becomes a journey of self-discovery; spiritualist Deepak Chopra symbolically sums this up: “God[/religion/myth] is our highest instinct to know ourselves” (rev. of *The Essential How to Know God*, para. 10). And, as we are all wanderers in the religious quest, no one is forced to walk any certain path; we may part and go our own way at any time, or we may continue our fellowship. We are all pilgrims (religious or not) caught between the tensions of progress and regress, where there is always room to improve the quality of life. Through invitational rhetoric we can aspire *to love our neighbors as ourselves*⁸ and become “the change [we] wish to see in the world”⁹ while attempting to “avoid all extremes,”¹⁰ thus beginning to comprehend what it is to “[l]earn to know thyself”¹¹ by walking a mile in another’s shoes. Invitational rhetoric becomes the bridge between religious ideas and people.

The powers of Life and Death reside in words, and the greatest religious ideals are centered around unlocking the power of life in and through language. “We have to create quiet, *inviting*, trustworthy spaces . . . to keep the insights and presence of soul at the table. And we put words around what the soul knows, . . . not through what we *think*, but through who we *are*, through the story of our lives” (Tippett 126). This is evangelium at its best.

Analogy and Theory

We can also look at religions themselves as acts of persuasion. We tend to profess a particular faith/belief because it is the story that makes the most sense to us. And since religion is a language of symbolism (of poetry and mystery), the structure of any religion can be approached by discussing its symbols, and we do not have to literally believe in a religion to appreciate its symbolic worth, for “analogy is at the centre of an original vision either of the universe or of the relationship between man and the divine” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 114). Therefore, we can approach religion in many of the same ways we approach literary analysis. And there are a variety of formulas for analyzing a text, objectively or subjectively. Ultimately, this is where education comes in. The more we understand about language and philosophy, the more we will be able to discuss topics like religion with an open mind; and although there is no guarantee that education will be our saving grace, it nonetheless widens our horizons. But if we fail to embody an invitational rhetoric, ignorance and an unwillingness to seek to understand other faith/belief systems will continue to cause conflict and division, threatening the ideals of safety and freedom.

By exercising the principles of immanent value and consubstantiality in offering our beliefs as well as by developing a mutual understanding through respect, we will begin to be transformed by an invitational rhetoric. And as we are transformed, so our world will be also. But this begins with a conscious decision on our part to relinquish our war metaphors, to converse instead of debate, to build relationships, to acknowledge diversity and mystery, to bridge the religious divide.

Notes

¹ Elitism is a domineering “holier-than-thou” attitude by which religious adherents perceive that they are better than others based strictly on their exclusive interpretation, which they condemningly impose, and by which they self-righteously subject others to scrutinizing judgment.

² This quote is taken from the original 1993 version of Foss and Griffin’s work. All subsequent references are to the updated 2008 version.

³ Succinctly defined,

[l]iberalism is the default discourse of American politics because the country’s founding documents, and hence its system of jurisprudence, are saturated with liberal values. The vocabulary of liberalism includes commonplaces concerning individual rights, equality before the law, and personal freedom. Because of its emphasis on the last-named value, liberalism has little or nothing to say about beliefs or practices deemed to reside outside of the so-called public sphere. (Crowley 3)

In contrast with liberal ideals,

[f]undamentalist Christians, on the other hand, aim to “restore” biblical values to the center of American life and politics. If they have their way, Americans will conduct themselves, publicly and privately, according to a set of beliefs derived from a fundamentalist reading of the Judeo-Christian religious tradition. (Crowley 3)

⁴ Consubstantiality is commonly known as the ritual of Communion in the Christian tradition. Burke broadens and redefines the theological term to entail the notion that “[w]e form selves or identities through various properties or substances, including physical objects, occupations, friends, activities, beliefs and values[. . .] occur[ing] when two entities are united in substance through common ideas, attitudes, possessions or properties.”

⁵ Author and theologian Ralph C. Wood distinguishes between the low journey and the high journey; the latter is embodied best in the word *quest*: “The tales that rivet the mind . . . involve a Quest that we do not choose for ourselves. Instead we find ourselves embarked upon a journey or mission quite apart from our choosing” (147). This is essentially how most religious adherents perceive their religious life. We have not chosen to be a part of this world by our own power, but we are here nonetheless; therefore, submitting to this notion reveals the ideal of the quest—it embodies the grandeur of what is beyond our realm of power.

Emphasizing the importance of the high journey, psychologist C. G. Jung believed that psychology itself was to be ultimately equated with the *religious quest*, and that over the course of our lives, we must all find our own myth:

Despite the fact that we all know that the question of life and death, or of the origin and meaning of life, can never be answered rationally with any final certainty, according to Jung it is of tremendous importance, if not absolutely essential, that we try to form some idea about it. If a person has no myth about such questions, he is psychologically dried up and impoverished and is likely to suffer from a neurosis. . . . To have your own myth means to have suffered and struggled with a *question* until an answer has come to you from the depths of your soul. (Franz 11–12; italics added)

⁶ Religious absolutism is a logical and philosophical view of the nature of truth and morality as unchanging and noncontradictory. Religious relativism (also linked with pluralism) is a logical and philosophical view of the nature of truth and morality based on a particular frame of reference, i.e., culture. The controversial point here is that “[t]here is a profound difference between hearing someone say this is *the* truth, and hearing someone say this is *my* truth. You can disagree with another person’s opinions; you can disagree with his doctrines; you can’t disagree with his experience” (Tippett 128).

⁷ The process of individuation is best described as “becoming a single, homogeneous being, and, in so far as ‘individuality’ embraces our innermost, last, and incomparable uniqueness, it also implies becoming one’s own self. We could therefore translate individuation as ‘coming into selfhood’ or ‘self-realization’” (Jung 418). And, according to Jung, since the archetype of the Self is representative of the god image, we can, therefore, see how religious language and religious experiences become intricately interwoven into our psychological fabric.

⁸ Siddhartha Gautama and Jesus of Nazareth.

⁹ Mahatma Gandhi.

¹⁰ Ecclesiastes 7:18. This philosophical concept also relates somewhat to the Buddhist teaching of the Middle Way or Middle Path.

¹¹ The Prophet Muhammad.

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