

*A Shared Sacred Worldview:*

A Framework for

*Shared Sacred Flourishing*

~ Religions *for* Peace

## Introduction

The Religions for Peace tagline, ***Different Faiths-Common Action***, expresses RfP's core mission of promoting Peace and its fundamental principle of respecting each participating religious community's way of experiencing, cherishing, and understanding the Sacred.<sup>1</sup>

Since its beginning, RfP has continued to deepen its profoundly "relational" vision of Peace by discerning reality through its World Assembly themes, as illustrated by the last five Post-Cold War Assembly themes: *Common Healing* (1994), *Action for Common Living* (1999), *Advancing Shared Security* (2006), *Welcoming the Other* (2013), and *Advancing Shared Well-Being* (2019). These Assembly themes make clear that for RfP, Peace is fundamentally relational, and this relationality is "tacitly"<sup>2</sup> anchored in each tradition's experience of the Sacred.

Each religious tradition has its own Sacred Worldview and a related vision of flourishing that is directly rooted in its specific experience of the Sacred.

This summary<sup>3</sup> of the paper "A Shared Sacred Worldview: A Framework for Shared Sacred Flourishing" builds on previous RfP Assemblies and replaces the powerful but implicit connection to the Sacred with an explicit one, while still allowing each religious tradition to honor its own experience and understanding of the Sacred.

The term "A Shared Sacred Worldview" requires careful explanation: For RfP, it does not mean a melding, blending, or homogenization of each religion's distinctive Sacred Worldview. In RfP, each religious community retains its particular Sacred Worldview. But—of great importance—all in RfP **"share"** in holding one form or another of a Sacred Worldview.

This has vital importance, as today's prevalent reductionist, materialistic worldview severely distorts the concept of flourishing by excluding the Sacred. This exclusion of the Sacred profoundly wounds the human family, fostering isolation, a loss of meaning, cruel exploitation, and a wanton disregard for the Earth. A misunderstanding of science supports this reductive, narrow, and non-relational worldview. This reductive materialistic worldview can be understood as a pervasive but typically unacknowledged "Problem" behind today's

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<sup>1</sup> Each RfP reader is encouraged to read the word "Sacred" in this document through the lens of their respective tradition's experience of the Sacred.

<sup>2</sup> It is "tacitly" anchored in the Sacred because RfP's discernments have typically not referred to the Sacred explicitly and instead depended on each participant to do so in the background of related discussions in accord with their respective sacred tradition.

<sup>3</sup>The full 48-page document is available on request.

many challenges. Conversely, developing a Shared Sacred Worldview that is open to plural Sacred Worldviews (and a proper interpretation of science) can be seen by RfP as a background or foundational "Solution" for the many concrete solutions needed to meet today's challenges. An SSW can help bring to light the roots of these challenges in relation to the truth and goodness of the Sacred.

Importantly, adopting a Shared Sacred Worldview as a "meeting place" for our diverse Sacred Worldviews is not an effort to create a new syncretistic religion or replace the unique worldviews that define each religious tradition. Instead, its goal is to emphasize where different experiences of the Sacred converge or "resonate," forming a united front of resistance against the dominance of materialistic reduction and its distortions of flourishing. This will help RfP to focus on engaging the "sacred dimensions" of our respective traditions, such as Sacred Love (Mercy, Compassion), forgiveness, self-sacrifice, and religiously motivated volunteerism for the common good. The social and moral strengths that religious communities bring to their cooperative efforts in RfP are also directly linked to their respective experiences of the Sacred.

### **I. Three Challenges to a Shared Sacred Worldview**

Successfully addressing three key challenges is essential for a useful vision of a Shared Sacred Worldview. These are:

- **Honoring Religious Diversity:**

This SSW Framework draws on RfP's commitment to honor religious diversity. It is also informed by the work of teams of religious scholars, many with deep roots in RfP, who labored to ensure that their traditions' experiences of the Sacred were honored in the SSW Framework.

- **Engaging Historical Traditions with Modern Challenges:**

Religious scholars have identified the core features of their ancient sacred worldviews and skillfully and faithfully "unfolded" them to address modern issues, ensuring their traditions remain relevant today while staying true to their origins. This SSW Framework celebrates the creative fidelity of the religious traditions that work together in RfP.

- **Integrating Science:**

A distinguished group of scientists contributed to the vision of an SSW Framework by highlighting scientific advancements, such as quantum mechanics and biological theories, which suggest intentionality and interconnectedness in nature. They challenged the still-dominant material and mechanistic models of science,

arguing that these models lacked solid scientific foundations. This group advocates for a "new natural philosophy" that seeks the complementarity of the scientific and spiritual ways of inquiry, grounded in a shared sense of wonder at the mystery of existence.

The SSW, serving as a meeting point for diverse Sacred Worldviews, offers a broad view of reality. It recognizes the Sacred as the foundation of everything—the entire "community of being," which includes the Earth, its complex web of life, all people, and society. While each religious tradition has its own unique experience of the Sacred, all share the belief that everything is rooted in the Sacred. Today, science is approaching this perspective as it recognizes the fundamental interconnectedness of the Cosmos and acknowledges the philosophical presuppositions of science, such as the intelligibility of reality.

This SSW Framework sharply contrasts with the modern materialistic worldview, which has become increasingly dominant over the past four centuries and often depicts the universe as meaningless, matter as lifeless, and the Sacred as a fiction to outgrow. This reductive worldview, which excludes the Sacred, pervasively distorts the vision of flourishing.

### **From a Shared Sacred Worldview to Shared Sacred Flourishing.**

Every religion has a sacred worldview and a corresponding notion of sacred flourishing. It follows that a "Shared" Sacred Worldview invites action for "Shared" Sacred Flourishing, understood as relational flourishing within the community of being rooted in the Sacred.

### **SSF has four components:**

- The Sacred:

The Sacred is the ultimate, unconditioned reality, expressed variously by words such as God, Allah, Brahman, Ik Onkar (Sikhism), Wakan Tanka (Lakota for Great Spirit), the Tao, or the Luminous Void. It forms the foundation of the community of being, uniting everything through Love (Compassion, Mercy).

SSF encourages believers to experience and draw close to the Sacred through their sacred tradition. Sacred Love (Compassion, Mercy) is the highest power that connects the community of being with the Sacred, fostering relational growth.

- People as Relational Beings:

People are inherently relational because they, along with the other members of the community of being, are grounded in the Sacred. Deeply rooted in and consciously open to the Sacred, the ground of everything, people are not mere "parts" of reality but have the potential for expressing its "wholeness."

Modern human rights are crucial for *protecting* essential aspects of human potential. However, this potential is *actualized* through virtues, which can be understood as dimensions of flourishing. Freedom, when grounded in Sacred Love, is central to this process, enabling self-determination and commitment to relational well-being.

- Society as a Relational Whole:

Society, from the perspective of SSF, can be viewed as a "whole of whole people," characterized by a reciprocal relationship between individuals and social structures that serve the common good. These common good institutions—both private and public—ranging from families and educational systems to the economy — are to be designed to support each person's flourishing. At the same time, individuals are called to contribute to society's well-being through virtuous actions, including the building up of "common good" social structures. This reciprocity between personal virtue and common good institutions contrasts with collectivist ideologies on both ends of the political spectrum that too often can be tempted to sacrifice individual dignity for the collective.

- The Earth and Its Web of Life:

Traditions vary in their views on whether the Earth is Sacred or an expression of the Sacred. However, all traditions view the Earth as grounded in the Sacred. Today, modern science reveals the interconnectedness of ecosystems, necessitating virtues such as sustainable consumption and common good structures like renewable energy systems to honor the Earth.

## **Scientific Contributions to SSF**

Insights from the physical and social sciences are to be integrated into SSF, thereby overcoming the split between science and the Sacred.

- Physical Sciences:

Advances in quantum mechanics and biology challenge modern "machine-like" views, revealing a dynamic and interconnected universe. Quantum mechanics questions principles such as locality and determinism, while biological theories like systems biology suggest intentionality in natural systems. These discoveries align with spiritual perspectives, encouraging a "spirit-open" understanding of science that can contribute to SSF. Many scientists today advocate for a renewed "natural philosophy" that bridges scientific and spiritual inquiry through a shared wonder at the mystery of being.

- **Social Sciences:**

Research indicates that experiences of Sacred Love (Compassion, Mercy) enhance mental health, promote social trust, and cultivate kind behavior, thereby fostering growth at both the personal and community levels. For example, individuals who frequently experience Sacred Love are more likely to engage in acts of kindness, such as volunteering or supporting global causes. Sacred Love also enhances social unity, tolerance, and "ecosystems of sacred hospitality" in organizations, aligning with SSF's focus on relational growth.

### **The Heart of Shared Sacred Flourishing**

The core of SSF lies in the reciprocal relationship between (1) the virtuous actualization of the potential of individual persons grounded in the Sacred and intrinsically connected to everything else grounded in It, and (2) protecting and building up the common good structures that can support all persons to advance in SSF.

People cultivate virtues to realize their relational potential, while societies establish institutions that support the common good, designed to enable all people to realize their potential. Everyone needs to cultivate virtues such as honesty, perseverance, justice, wisdom, and love (compassion and mercy) to turn their potential into reality. Meanwhile, institutions that serve the common good—such as families, schools, sustainable energy systems, economies, and governments—need to provide the social support necessary for individuals to flourish. This reciprocal process forms a spiral: individuals draw from and contribute to the common good throughout their lives, and this cycle extends across generations.

### **Principles for Advancing SSF**

Respect for freedom of religion and belief, solidarity (concern for all), and subsidiarity (respecting agency at all levels of society) are key principles for advancing SSF. People everywhere and institutions on all levels should foster freedom, protect rights, nurture virtues, and support the Earth's sustainability. SSF advocates for a context-specific yet community-wide understanding of the common good, with religious and spiritual communities playing a vital role in developing the common good on all levels of society.

### **Healing and Sacred Love (Mercy, Compassion)**

A commitment to SSF can give us the lens and courage to acknowledge that the human family has, across time, gravely hurt itself due to ignorance and evil. These acts of ignorance and evil can be understood as forms of "lovelessness." These loveless

distortions manifest as personal and social faults, which skew the value scale by prioritizing selfish personal or group gain over the greater good.

Solidarity in Sacred Love (Mercy, Compassion) is the foundational antidote behind all the needed personal and collective efforts to heal these distortions through justice, including repentance, restitution, and forgiveness.

Each religious tradition offers practices rooted in its unique experience of Sacred Love (Mercy, Compassion) to address these challenges. These practices include countless personal acts of Love, Mercy, Compassion, kindness, and forgiveness. They also include encouraging the opposition of loveless oppression through morally justified means, such as self-defense, civil disobedience, and dialogue. The experience of the Sacred can help religious communities identify important seeds of truth in modern non-religious ideologies and then reimagine and apply them within holistic visions grounded in the Sacred.

## **II. SSF as a Complement to the UN Sustainable Development Goals**

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted in 2015 as a call to action for people worldwide to address challenges related to the five "P's": People, the Planet, Prosperity, Peace, and Partnership.

The Framework for SSF presented here welcomes and embraces all that is good in the UN SDGs. It can and should draw thoughtfully from the moral commitments and best ideas behind them. At the same time, the SSF Framework includes the crucial dimensions of human relatedness to the Sacred and the community of being rooted in the Sacred. Therefore, it can guide us toward a more complete and integrated vision of relational flourishing. SSF anticipates an ever-expanding sense of relational wholeness within reality anchored in the Sacred.

Foundational dimensions of the relational potential of human beings, which are often absent from the UN SDGs, especially their capacity to engage in Sacred Love (Mercy, Compassion) as well as many other virtues essential for community and care for the Earth, can be explicitly addressed by RfP in the SSF Framework. In addition, this Framework highlights the spiritual and moral agency essential to realizing the great good within the SDGs, as well as the added dimensions of truly *integral* development open to the Sacred.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, RfP was a vital partner<sup>5</sup> in a three-year investigation into the ethical dimensions

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<sup>4</sup> This is vitally important to approximately 85% of the world's population who believe in the Sacred, according to Pew research.

<sup>5</sup> The other partners included the Pontifical Academy for Science and Social Science, SDSN, the University of Notre Dame, and the Fetzer Institute

essential to realizing the SDGs.<sup>6</sup> Seeds of this SSF Framework were nurtured in that creative partnership.

## **Conclusion**

The Framework for SSF offers a hopeful, integrative vision for human flourishing that both honors and respectfully aligns diverse religions' experiences of the Sacred as a foundational dimension for relational flourishing open to science. By centering relational flourishing in the Sacred and fostering solidarity in Love (Compassion, Mercy), SSF honors religious differences while countering the soulless, reductive narratives of modernity. The SSF Framework provides an anticipatory guide for collaborative action toward a flourishing, interconnected world of persons on our shared Earth, all grounded in the Sacred.

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<sup>6</sup> See *Ethics in Action for Sustainable Development*, Columbia University Press, 2020, edited by Jeffrey Sachs, Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, Owen Flanagan, William Vendley, and Jesse Thorson with a foreword by Pope Francis and Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.



A stylized, light green olive branch with several leaves, curving across the middle of the page. The background is a gradient from dark blue at the top to green at the bottom.

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