

24 July 2018 Ministerial Philanthropy Panel Remarks
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Good morning. My name is Chris Stewart, and I'm the chief grants officer of the Templeton Religion Trust, which is organized in the Caribbean and operates from offices in Nassau, The Bahamas, where our Founder, Sir John Templeton, lived from the late 1960s until his death in 2008. TRT is one of three independent foundations established by Sir John, the other two being the John Templeton Foundation (based in the United States), and the Templeton World Charity Foundation, with which we share an office in Nassau. TRT and Templeton World Charity were both chartered in the 1980s, but by design were not activated until after Sir John's death, when their considerable endowments were released from his estate and professional staff (like me) were recruited to set up their grantmaking platforms.

On this panel and throughout the day you're going to hear lots of advice about the process of obtaining funding. I wanted to take a moment to describe TRT's general approach to the issues that are going to be addressed in this Ministerial. Generally speaking, obtaining funding isn't simply a matter of understanding the application process, but aligning your programs with the mission and mindset of the funders. We fund both research and what we call engagement, which is about the dissemination of research, as well as advocacy. These are the sorts of activities we fund, but before we open it up for questions, I want to focus for a few moments on why we're interested in religious freedom and how we approach it.

Sir John Templeton regarded religion as a dynamic, prosocial force – a force for good in the world, part of, and even a source of, solutions to the wide range of problems we face, like poverty, sickness, and even conflict.

A basic premise for Sir John is that we (collectively) know less than 1% of what he called “spiritual reality.”

He believed that progress is possible, in three respects: (i) Firstly, with respect to new discoveries about spiritual reality or what he sometimes referred to as “the work and purpose of the Creator”—discoveries that deepen and enrich existing traditions; (ii) Secondly, with respect to the massive social dividend he associated with religious faith and practice at its best.; (iii) and thirdly, with respect to “spiritual growth,” by which we mean the creation of more, and more diverse, expressions of religious faith and practice.

And the key to progress in each of these respects is to foster *constructive engagement across religious differences*.

With respect to religion, Sir John was a pluralist, not an ecumenist. We're not looking for some religious lowest common denominator. It's the contrast between alternative perspectives on a single reality that is the engine of progress.

As a student of world religions, Sir John believed that the impulse to spirituality and the yearning for transcendence is universal. He also understood the forces that can (and sometimes have) led to the “obsolescence” of particular religions, such as lack of humility or imagination, or inflexibility and close-mindedness on the part of religions, particularly in their leaders, to ideas from sources outside themselves, whether that means other religions or even the sciences.

Echoing something Ambassador Brownback said earlier, we don't talk much about “tolerance,” not because tolerance isn't a good thing, but because it's too easy to combine tolerance with indifference. We “tolerate” things we don't like, such as back pain or toothaches. We're more interested in what you have to add to diversity and tolerance to arrive at pluralism, and we think that this additional ingredient is engagement, across and in full awareness and appreciation of our differences, without coercion, on a level playing field.

We think that any effective strategy in this area should be characterized by humility, empathy and patience, and we seek to partner with people and programs that embody and express these virtues. We're also interested in developing these character traits in people and populations, because without them we don't think we're going to get very far.

Finally, the conditions we seek to create in partnership with advocates and other funders include (a) respect for liberty of conscience, which includes the freedom to orient or re-orient one's life in accordance with our ever-deepening and sometimes changing beliefs, (b) an environment of learning and increasing religious literacy, and (c) a recognition that, at the end of the day, all religious liberty, like all politics, is local – although we think globally we act locally. So we are interested in local expressions of these ideals.

All of this comes together to create the conditions necessary for a Covenantal Pluralism that moves beyond tolerance to embrace mutually respectful engagement with people of other faiths or no faith, a commitment to seeking joint solutions to shared problems, the absence of coercion, unfettered access to spiritual information, and the integration not assimilation of minorities.

That is our vision. And as a funder, we're interested in partnerships with people and institutions that share it.

Thank you.