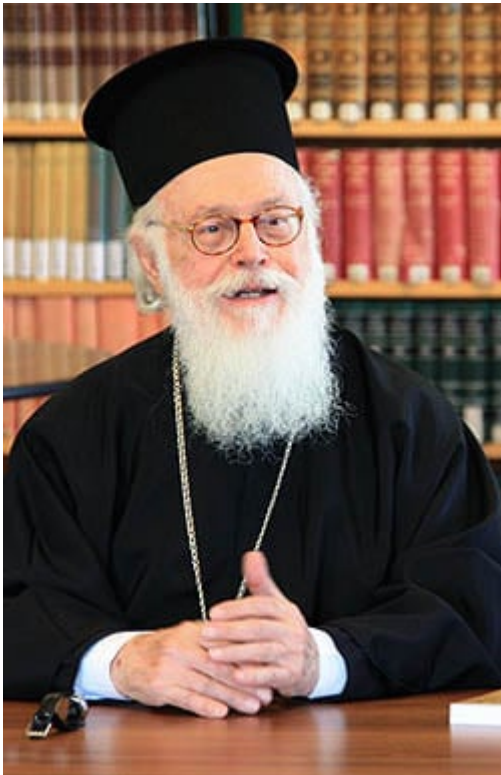


The Quest for Universal Human Values - 1 (Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



Archbishop Anastasios of Albania

A. What are the basic principles that would be acceptable to representatives of different religions?

1. To begin with, I do not think that there is just one view. Today, there are 19 religions in existence, and these are divided into 240 branches[1]. At the same times, there are conflicts within their ranks between those who are attached to the letter of tradition and those who are seeking new openings onto the modern world.

Wherever the various religions have held sway, they have influenced human life as a whole and to a great extent. And it is to be expected that they would be associated, directly or indirectly, with all facets of the various values we hold- the rational, emotional, moral and, of course, metaphysical[2]. Because religions do not act as independent entities. They interact and are interdependent with many other

factors: national, political, cultural, social, and economic. They influence and are influenced.

Every evolved religion has: a) a transcendental orientation which directs us to an absolute truth, to a supreme goal; and b) a system of dogmas, of axiomatic positions, to help understand the world. These determine the rational and metaphysical values which the religion supports.

Clearly, any convergence of views in the spheres of absolute truth and the defining transcendental orientation is going to be very difficult. In particular, the religions which affect more than half the population of the earth (Christianity and Islam), as well as Judaism which preceded them, are religions which depend on divine revelation. The fundamental values regarding the true, the good and the holy which inform them are regarded as having been given 'from above'. Any philosophical and legislative guidelines follow on from this.

The other religious current, which derives from the Indian and Chinese search for the transcendent, seems at first sight not to be dependent on a once and for all revelation from above. Nevertheless, a number of schools developed, with specific theories concerning absolute truth [...].

In the modern search for some kind of convergence between religions on the subject of universal human values, emphasis is typically given to 'moral values'. We ought not to ignore, however, the fact that rational, moral and metaphysical values are interwoven and affect each other, as do the various systems of the organism: the nerves, muscles and circulation.

2. Since the end of the 19th century, attempts have been made to improve mutual acquaintance and approaches on the part of people of different religions, with inter-religious conferences and organizations. Efforts to create more permanent structures, did not bear fruit, however. Approaches became easier when particular issues and aims were defined, regarding problems faced by the whole of mankind today. For example, the World Conference on Religion and Peace found a greater response in many countries and is continuing its activities and interventions. After 11 September 2001, there was a proliferation of inter-religious conferences, in the hope that this would assist in the fight against terrorism and the support for peace. The quest for commonly accepted universal human values was given greater urgency in a number of ways.

These days, we are becoming increasingly aware of the historic challenge and responsibility of the religious communities towards humanity as a whole.

Intellectuals belonging to different religions, even though they may be impelled by different sets of circumstances, are attempting to come to some agreement on fundamental positions.

[...] Nevertheless, we would do well to avoid over-simplifying. Some time ago, a university professor I know called me to urge me to join him in a peace initiative. His proposal was that leaders and thinkers of the great religions should come together and decide to expunge from our sacred texts anything that was opposed to peace and which favoured war. I tried to explain to him that this would not be feasible. Because, for the adherents of the various religions, their sacred texts have a prestige which is not open to discussion and cannot be reviewed as if they were state constitutions. Nor could there be an institution, a kind of religious UN, which would dare to attempt any such thing. The only way to strengthen peace efforts on a world-wide scale is to cultivate a climate of moderation between the representatives of the religions and to boost the peaceful core of religious sentiment.

3. Academic research and inter-religious dialogue certainly contribute to the quest for and clarification of universal values. Great patience is required, however, because the path is long and precarious. The initial enthusiasm has been succeeded, in recent years, by serious reservations and frustrations. Many people fear the possibility of syncretism and the gradual vitiation of their faith, as well as new internal divisions. It is therefore necessary that we proceed with caution towards peaceful co-existence, without sacrificing the singular features of groups and peoples. [...]

B. The fundamental values which might come into play for an inter-religious agreement

1. In the decade of the '90s, a more intense effort was made to draw up a moral code which would have world-wide validity. The best known of these were two that were put forwards to the international community: the first was a proposal of the Parliament of the World's Religions, which met in Chicago in 1993, with the German, Hans Küng, professor of the University of Tübingen, playing a leading role. The second proposal was put together by Leonard Swidler of Temple University, in Philadelphia, USA. The latter proposal was discussed at a series of conferences and, particularly, on the Internet, co-ordinated by the Center for Global Ethics.

The proposal of the Parliament (known as the Declaration Towards a Global Ethic), defines, as the principles of a global ethic: a) that there can be no global order without a new global ethic; b) a fundamental demand is that every human being

should be treated humanely; c) there are four basic obligations for any civilization: non-violence and respect for life; a culture of solidarity and a just economic order. Tolerance and a life of truthfulness. Equal Rights and Partnership Between Men and Women. Transformation of Consciousness. Almost all these groupings are mentioned in and depend upon the ancient moral codices of the great religions.

Swidler's 'Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic' is another formulation, with different priorities and stressing freedom, dignity respect for all things, living and not, universal love, religious tolerance, and the need for inter-religious dialogue[3].

To be continued...

[1] The most important, in terms of numbers are Christianity (about 33.1%) and Islam (almost 20%). These are followed by Hinduism (about 13%), Buddhism (6%), then Taoism and popular Confucianism (about 4%). There are a variety of relatively new religions and the old tribal religions of Africa (2% for each group). Judaism, Sikhism, the Baha'i, and Shintoism all come in at less than 0.5%. Statistics about religions are, for a variety of reasons notoriously unreliable and can be taken only as indicative. It is also true that a large number of people on the planet, particularly in technologically advanced societies, do not belong to any religion (15.2 % are reckoned to be agnostic and 3.5% declared atheists) D. Barrett, *World Christian Encyclopaedia' A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*, OUP, Oxford-New York 2001.

[2] As regards the definition and division of these values, I would mention in passing that a variety of theories have been formulated. The best known rests on Kant's philosophy and distinguishes values into rational, emotional and moral. Other thinkers add religious values to these (which have to do with the meaning of the world and economic ones (which are concerned with utilitarianism). Apart from these distinctions, which are based on the tripartite division of psychology, certain systematic divisions of values have been formulated. One such is that of H. Münsterberg (*Philosophie der Werte*, 2 1921), who initially distinguishes two categories: the vital and the cultural and has four sub-categories within each of these: rational, emotional, moral and metaphysical. Other thinkers, such as N. Hartman, Ed. Spranger, Joh. Hessen, have put forward other distinctions. For more, see Ch. Taliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, Blackwell, Malden MA, Oxford 1998, 190-199, 211-218 and passim. H. Putman, *The Collapse of the Fact / Value Dichotomy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 2002. J. Raz, *The Practice of Value*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 2003.

[3] The first draft affirms 8 fundamental points: 1. The freedom of every human person; 2. The innate dignity of all people; 3. Respect for things, living and not; 4.

The need for individuals to transcend themselves and embrace greater entities: society, the nation, the world, the universe. 5. A love that extends to include everything. 6. Respect and freedom for every religion and faith; 7. Dialogue, a necessary condition for harmonious human co-existence on the planet. There followed a later formulation with 10 points, which was in line with the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948. For more, and in greater detail, see King, *A Global Ethic in the Light of Comparative Religious Ethics*; S.B. Twiss and B. Grelle, *Explorations in Global Ethics*, Westview, Oxford 2000, 118-40.