A photograph of a bright sun setting or rising over a layer of clouds, with the sun's rays creating a lens flare effect. The sky is dark, and the clouds are illuminated from below, creating a dramatic, high-contrast scene.

Universal Ethical Principles as Foundations of Human Rights

JESUS GONZALEZ LOSADA
<http://jesus-gonzalez-losada.blogspot.com/>

US Declaration of Independence: “endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights”



Declarations of rights in both the United States and France, which are bases of modern political thought, begin with a reference to God as the source of rights:

“We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

(DECLARATION OF INDEPENDENCE - July 4, 1776)

French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen: “under the auspices of the Supreme Being”



“... the National Assembly recognizes and declares, in the presence and under the auspices of the Supreme Being, the following rights of man and of the citizen” recognizing them as “*natural, inalienable and sacred.*”

(Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen, Paris, August 26, 1789)

If the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a synthesis of previous thinking about human rights, why is there no mention of God?

Early Draft of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: “endowed by their nature with reason and conscience”

The draft of the first article, stating that “*human beings are endowed by their nature with reason and conscience,*” was debated between September 21 and December 8, 1948.



Austregésilo de Athayde

The delegation from Brazil suggested that the first article of the Declaration read as follows:

“Created in the image and likeness of God, they are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

Debates within the Commission on Human Rights about a reference to God in the UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS



Austregésilo de Athayde
Representative of Brazil
in the Commission

“With the goal of defending the rights proclaimed by the declaration, it is important that they not be expressed in terms that are too general. In the Preamble, there should be a reference to God as the absolute origin of human rights, as of all rights.

This would recognize the importance of the great spiritual currents for maintaining and developing international cooperation....

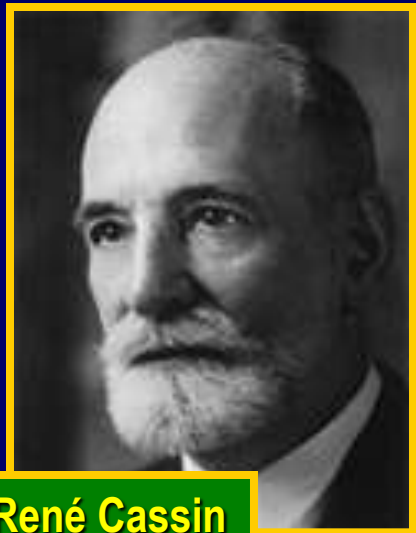
The work of the Commission would be much more profoundly tied to the will and hopes of the masses of people if, instead of being only a dry expression of agnostic philosophy, it would also reflect the religious faith of the greater part of humanity.”

Debates within the Commission on Human Rights about a reference to God in the UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS



Charles H. Malik

Charles H. Malik of Lebanon wanted an explicit reference to God in the first article, to establish that people are endowed with *“some inalienable rights given by their Creator.”*



René Cassin

René Cassin of France, among others, did not agree, because this could have reduced the universality of the document. Priority was placed on gaining universal support for a proclamation of human rights in a complex world divided by traditions, religions, and ideologies with different view of life.

(**René Cassin** asked that the Declaration be defined as “universal” instead of “international.”)

Debates within the Commission on Human Rights about a reference to God in the UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS



Dr. Chang Peng-chun

Dr. Peng-Chun Chang of China wanted to accommodate the Confucian perspective, which acknowledges “heaven” but does not have a concept of God. He had **“God”** and **“by nature”** eliminated from the text of Article 1, which in its final form reads:

“All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.”

Consider adding reference to God in the UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS



Eleanor Roosevelt holding up the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in Spanish.

More than 60 years later, it is time to consider adding a **references to God and absolute values** without danger of losing universal acceptance.

One way of protecting the necessary “universality” (respecting all positions) is to use the elegant text of the Preamble to the Constitution of Poland, which recognizes **“those who believe that God is the origin of justice, beauty and goodness, [the bases of human rights] and many other values, and those who may not believe in God but still appreciate these values.”**

Human Rights: Granted by Law and Endowed by Nature

Adherents of natural law hold that human rights do not reside in legal documents but are inherent in our very nature as human beings, a nature that is superior to and precedes all legal decrees. Religious traditions hold that such **natural rights** are God-given characteristics.

Adherents of positivism hold that the only rights are those accorded by legal documents. *“Rights are not something pre-existing by nature which we may discovered, such as chromosomes or continents. Rights are something that we create through our conventions. Thus, the question is not what rights do creatures have but rather what rights do we want to have?”* - Jesús Mosterín. “Creating Rights.” El País, 29-8-1999

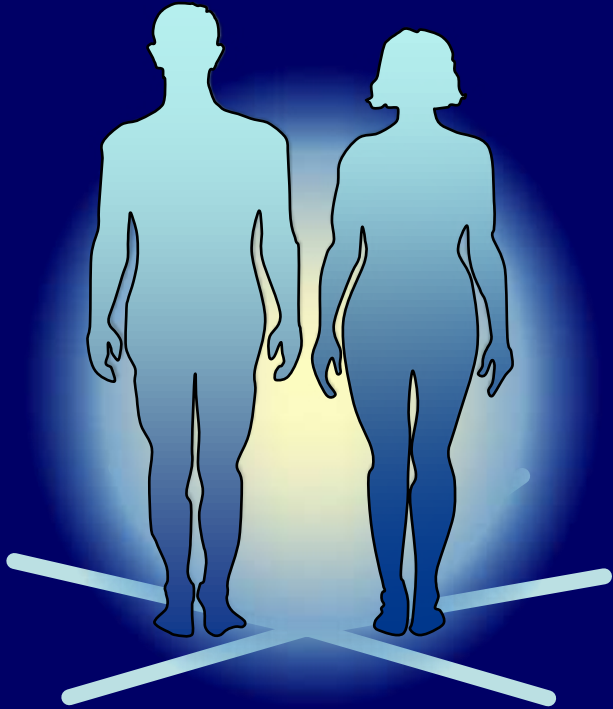
Human Rights: Granted by Law and Endowed by Nature



*"Only if they are grounded in the objective requirements of **the nature bestowed on man by the Creator**, can the rights attributed to him be affirmed without fear of contradiction.... Consequently it is important for international agencies not to lose sight of the natural foundation of human rights. This would enable them to avoid the risk, unfortunately ever-present, of sliding towards a merely positivistic interpretation of those rights."*

Benedict XVI. Message on the World Day of Peace, January 1, 2007

Human Rights: Granted by Law and Endowed by Nature

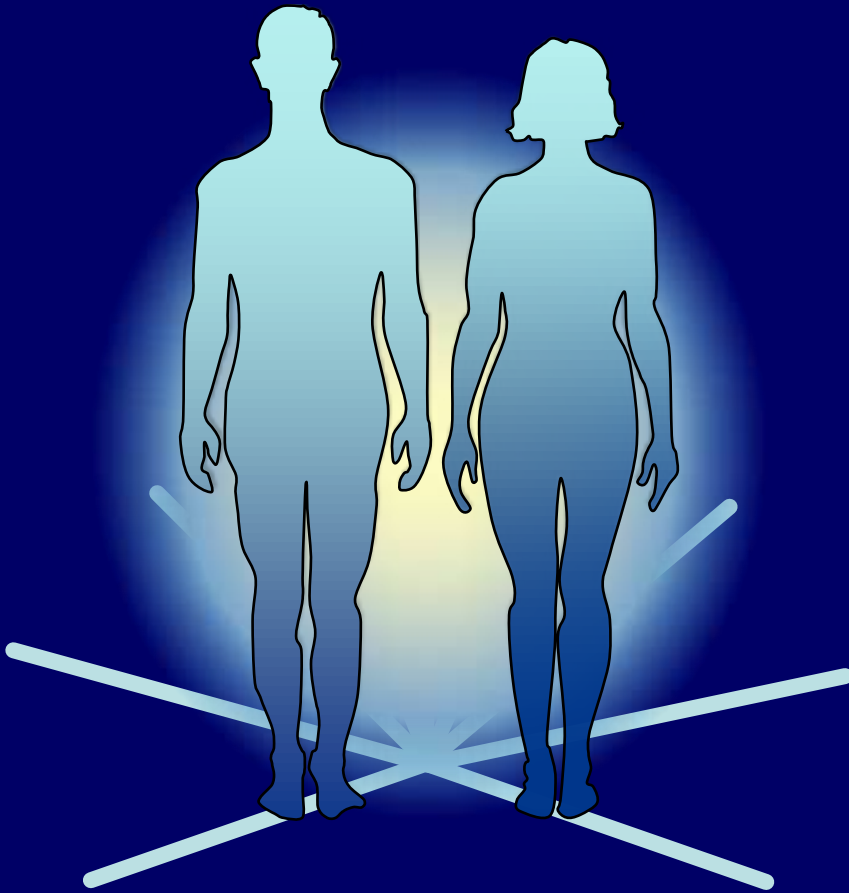


The protection of love and life, freedom of conscience and responsibility as well as property and many other **inalienable rights** do not exist merely because some people have discovered or recognized them or because laws have been decreed about them.

On the contrary, love, life, freedom of conscience, and responsibility as well as property in fact existed before hand. This gave people the need to make laws for their protection.

The existence of **a written constitution** which expresses the sovereign will of the people and their families in terms of principles of justice and natural law is the most effective protection against the abuse of power, destruction of liberty, and human weaknesses of those who govern us.

Human Rights Are Conferred by God



Each and every human being, without distinction of gender, race, ethnicity, class or social condition possesses the same special dignity, **by nature or because it was conferred by God**, which distinguishes them from the rest of the creatures, and they bear the same sacred, cosmic, unique, and eternal value which is innate and intrinsic to their human condition, and therefore they all merit the same exquisite consideration and greatest respect.

(Dr. Miguel Angel Cano – Ethics and Peace)

Each Person Has Sacred Value

Judaism: “Then the Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.” *Genesis 2.7*

Christianity: “Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s spirit dwells in you?” *I Corinthians 3:16*

Islam: “He shaped him, and breathed His spirit in him.” *Qur’an 32.8-9*

Sikhism: “All from one clay are made; in all one Light shines. One breath pervades all.” *Adi Granth, Gauri, M.5 p. 188*

Hinduism: “That which is the finest essence—this whole world has that as its soul. That is Reality. That is the Self. That art thou.” *Changogya Upanishad 6.8.7*

Confucianism: “Fire blazing from the earth. The superior man reflects in his person the glory of [Heaven’s] virtue.” *I Ching 35: Progress*

Each Person Has Cosmic Value

Judaism: “All that the Holy One created in the world He created in man.”
Talmud. Abot de Rabbi Nathan 31

Christianity: “For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?” *Matthew 16:26*

Islam: “We shall show them Our signs in the horizons and in themselves, till it is clear to them that it is the truth.” *Qur'an. 41.53*

Hinduism: “Man is the product of the attributes of Heaven and Earth, by the interaction of the dual forces of nature, the union of the animal and intelligent souls, and the finest subtle matter of the five elements.” *Aitareya Upanishad 1.1*

Buddhism: “The Essence of Mind is great because it embraces all things, since all things are within our nature.” *Sutra of Hui Neng 2*

Transcendent Value Endowed by God

Each person has sacred, cosmic and unique value and is endowed with irrevocable dignity; therefore, people are not means but ends in themselves.



Sacred value. We have intrinsic and inalienable dignity as visible manifestations of the invisible Creator.

Cosmic value. We are microcosms of the macrocosm.

Unique Value - Never will be another person exactly like each one of us. We are unique, unrepeatable and irreplaceable.

The fact that each person has these transcendent values is the basis of universal human rights and an ethical society.

Religion Gives Both Vertical and Horizontal Orientations

Spiritual and religions traditions have a vertical role, which calls us to a relationship with the Creator, and a horizontal dimension, which calls us to accept, respect, and love others.



Judaism: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.” *Deuteronomy 6:5*

Christianity: “Our Father, who art in heaven.” *Matthew 6:9*

Islam: “In the name of God, the Beneficent, the Merciful.” *Qur’an 1:1*

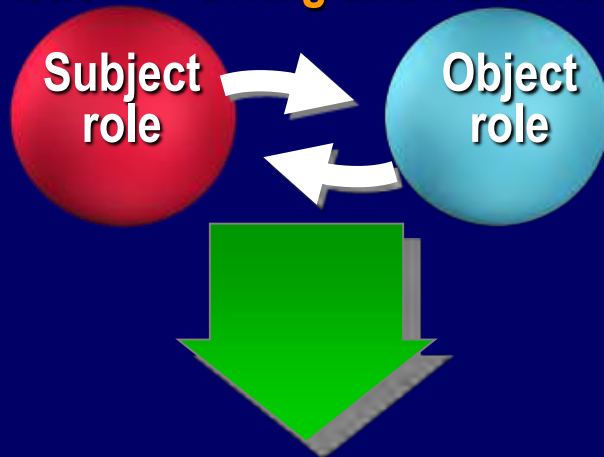
Confucianism: “The superior man, taking his stance as righteousness requires, adheres firmly to Heaven’s decrees.” *I Ching 50: Sacrificial vessel*

Hinduism: “From the unreal lead me to the Real! From darkness lead me to the light!” *Brihaaranyaka Upanishad 1.3.28*

Universal Principle of Reciprocal Relations

Principle of Interaction

Action of Giving and Receiving



Existence
Action
Reproduction

Human beings—just as all creatures and all things—are not made to exist or live alone, isolated or completely independent. Instead, they are configured by nature or by God to maintain multiple physiological interactions within themselves and with their environment. Therefore, we establish—in voluntary, responsible and creative forms—a series of fluid, harmonious, and stable relationships in which we reciprocally exchange love, affection, care, ideas, knowledge, goods, and services with other human beings and other creatures. This is vital for the preservation of our existence, multiplication, the development of our character, the cultivation of our talents, and our ability to experience the highest degree of joy and shared happiness.

(Dr. Miguel Angel Cano – Ethics and Peace)

Natural Law of Karma - Cosmic Justice

Judaism: “I the Lord search the mind and try the heart, to give to every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his doings.” *Jeremiah 17:10*

Christianity: “Whatever a man sows, that he will also reap.” *Galatians 6:7*

Islam: “Whatever affliction may visit you is for what your own hands have earned.” *Qur’an 42:30*

Hinduism: “Unrighteousness, practiced in this world, does not at once produce its fruit; but, like a cow, advancing slowly, it cuts off the roots of him who committed it.” *Laws of Manu 4:172*

Buddhism: “An ignorant man committing evil deeds does not realize the consequences. The imprudent man is consumed by his own deeds, like one burnt by a fire.” *Dhammapada 136*

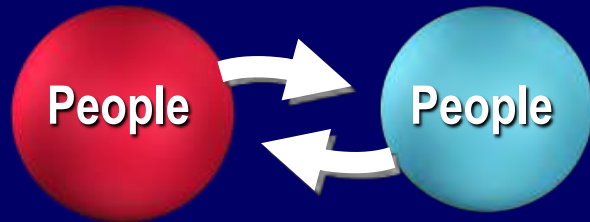
Taoism: “In heaven and earth there are spirits that take account of men’s transgressions, and, according to the lightness or gravity of their offenses, take away from the term of their life.” *Treatise on Response and Retribution 1-2*

African Traditional Religions: “Ashes fly back in the face of him who throws them.” *Yoruba proverb (Nigeria)*

Moral Law Expressed in Religious Codes

4 general prohibitions:

- Don't rob.
- Don't lie.
- Don't kill.
- Don't have illicit sexual relations.



These prevent bad interactions

Judaism and Christianity: 10 Commandments (*Exodus 20:1-17*)

Islam: Sacred duties (*Qur'an 6:151-53*)

Hinduism: Universally applicable dharma (*Laws of Manu*)

Buddhism: Five Precepts (*Nagarjuna, Precious Garland 809*)

Justice and Reciprocity in Both Natural Law and Moral Law

Justice

Judaism: “Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God.” *Micah 6:8*

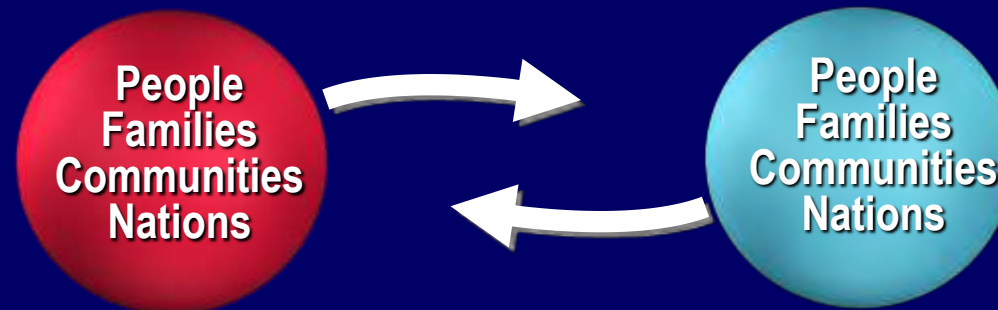
Islam: “Stand out firmly for justice.” *Qur’an 4:135*

Confucianism: “Recompense injury with justice, and recompense kindness with kindness.” *Analects 14:36*

Reciprocity

Hinduism: “According as one conducts himself, so does he become.” (*Brihadaranyaka Upanishad 4.4.5*)

Buddhism: “According to what deeds are done, do their resulting consequences come to be.” *Garland Sutra 10*



Expressed in the Golden Rule

Golden Rule - Treat others as you wish them to treat you.

Christianity: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." (*Matthew 7:12*)

Islam: "No one is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself." (*Sunnah*)

African Traditional Religions: "What you give - or do - to others, they will give - or do - to you." (*Rwandan proverb*)

Silver Rule - Don't do to others what you don't want them to do to you.

Hinduism: "This is the sum of duty: Do *naught* unto others which would cause you pain if done to you." (*Mahabharata 5:15, 17*).

Buddhism: "Hurt *not* others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful." (*Udana-varga 5:18*)

Confucianism: "Surely it is the maxim of loving kindness: Do *not* unto others what you would not have them do to you." (*Analects 15:23*)

Judaism: "What is hateful to you, do *not* do to your fellow man. That is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary." (*Talmud, Shabbat 31a*)

God is the source of love, life and peace... Those who promote conflict, hatred, violence and terrorism have to be informed that to the extent to which they do that, to that extent they are not good members of any religion. (*Cardinal Francis Arinze - Assisi - January 24, 2002*)

Benefits of Living by the Moral Law



Judaism: “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul.”
Psalm 19:7

Christianity: “He who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer that forgets but a doer that acts, he shall be blessed in his doing.” *James 1:25*

Islam: “Let there arise out of you a group of people, inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong.”
Qur’an 3:104

Hinduism: “Those who live in accordance with the divine laws without complaining, firmly established in faith, are released from karma.” *Bhagavad Gita 3.31*

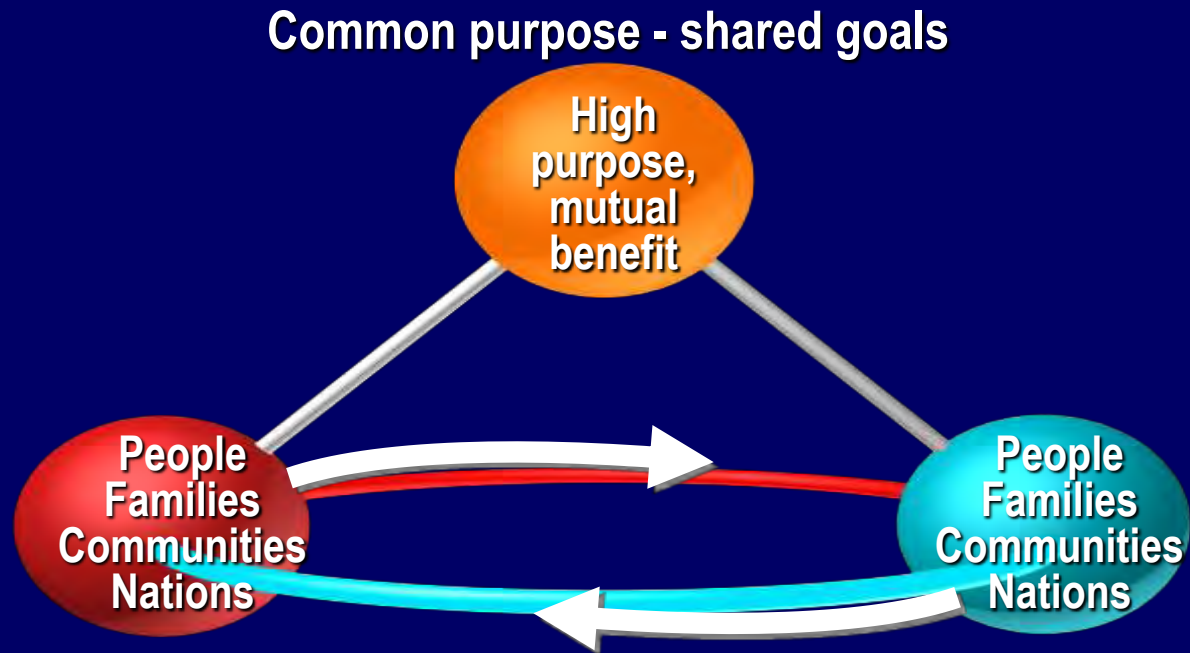
Buddhism: “He who loves Dhamma progresses, he who hates it declines.” (*Sutta Nipata 92*)

Confucianism: “The moral man’s life is an exemplification of the universal order, because he is a moral person who unceasingly cultivates his true self or moral being.” *Doctrine of the Mean 2*

Taoism: “What the Tao plants cannot be plucked, what Tao clasps cannot slip.” *Tao Te Ching 54*

Principle of Development Through Cooperation Centered on a Common Purpose

The progress or development of humanity—whether economic, scientific, technical, artistic, or social—produces principally, by means of communication, understanding, dialogue, or consensus, a harmonious cooperation and mutual interdependence among individuals, families, communities, nations and civilizations, centered on common purposes and shared goals, and not by means of fighting, conflict, or mutual destruction.



Progress is based on ethical interaction.

COOPERATION

Judaism: “All God's creatures borrow from the other, yet make peace with one another without lawsuits.” *Midrash, Exodus Rabbah 31.154*

Christianity: “We are members one of another.” *Ephesians 4.255*

Islam: “Abu Musa narrated that the Prophet said, ‘A believer to another believer is like a building whose different parts enforce each other.’” *Hadith of Bukhari 8:55*

Buddhism: “It is not difficult to see that my body is also that of others in the same way as the hands and so forth are regarded as limbs of the body,” *Shantideva, Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life 8.112-167.*

Taoism: “Everything has its ‘that’; everything has its ‘this’. From the point of view of ‘that’ you cannot see it, but through understanding you can know it. So I say, ‘that’ comes out of ‘this’ and ‘this’ depends on ‘that’--which is to say that ‘this’ and ‘that’ give birth to each other. A state in which ‘this’ and ‘that’ no longer find their opposites is called the Hinge of the Way. When the hinge is fitted into the socket, it can respond endlessly.” *Chuang Tzu 2*

Serving the Common Good

Living for Others



“...he who wishes to be great among let him be a servant... the Son of man came not to be served but to serve...” (Matthew 20: 26-28)

SERVING THE COMMON GOOD

Islam: “There is not one of us but has his appointed position, and we are verily ranged in ranks [for service].” *Qur’an 37:164-65*

Hinduism: “Strive constantly to serve the welfare of the world; by devotion to selfless work one attains the supreme goal in life.” *Bhagavad Gita 3:23*

Confucianism: When the Great Tao prevailed, the world was a commonwealth; men of talent and virtue were selected, mutual confidence was emphasized, and brotherhood was cultivated. Therefore, men did not regard as parents only their own parents, nor did they treat as sons only their own sons. Old people were able to enjoy their old age; young men were able to employ their talents....They hated not to use their energies, and they used their energies not for their own benefit.” *Book of Ritual 7:1.2*

Judaism: “I am God’s creature and my peasant neighbor is God’s creature. My work is in the town and his work is in the country. I rise early for my work and he rises early for his work.” *Talmud. Berakot 17a*

Christianity: “Let no one seek his own good but the good of his neighbor.”
1 Corinthians 10:24

African Traditional Religions: “Guardianship is not to give an order but to give one’s self.” *Nyika Proverb (Kenya and Tanzania)*

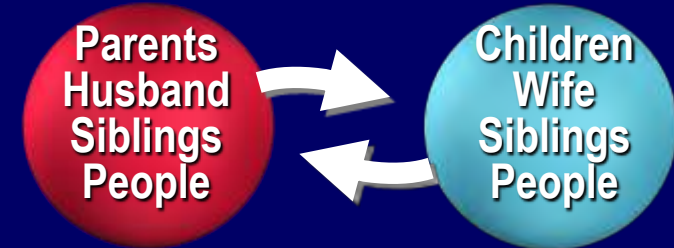
The Family as the School of Love and Seedbed of Peace

4 ethical imperatives:

filial piety
fraternity

fidelity in marriage
loyalty

These promote good interactions



FILIAL PIETY

Judaism & Christianity: "Honor your father and your mother." *Exodus 20.12*

Islam: "The Lord has decreed ... that you be kind to your parents." *Qur'an 17.23*

Hinduism: "Let your mother be to you like unto a god! Let your father be to you like unto a god!" *Taittiriya Upanishad 1:11.2*

Buddhism: "Those who wish to be born in [the Pure Land] of Buddha ... should act filially towards their parents and support them." *Meditation on Buddha Amitayus 27*

Confucianism: "Surely proper behavior towards parents and elder brothers is the trunk of Goodness." *Analects 1.2*

African Traditional Religions: "If your parents take care of you up to the time you cut your teeth, you take care of them when they lose theirs." *Akan Proverb (Ghana)*

FIDELITY IN MARRIAGE

Judaism: “A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” *Genesis 2:24*

Christianity: “What God has joined together, let not man put asunder.” *Mark 10:9*

Islam: “He has planted affection and mercy between you.” *Qur’an 30.21*

Hinduism: “Enshrine me in your heart and let one spirit dwell within us.” *Atharva Veda 7:36*

Confucianism: “I will love you, and will never be weary of you.” *Book of Songs, Ode 218*

FRATERNITY

Judaism: “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity.” *Psalms 133:1*

Christianity: “Every one who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment.” *Matthew 5:22*

Islam: “Set things right between your two brothers, and fear God; haply so you will find mercy.”
Qur’an 49:10

Confucianism: “When brothers live in concord and at peace, the strain of harmony shall never cease.” *Doctrine of the Mean 15.3*

Hinduism: “One is my brother and the other is not – is the thinking of a small man or a narrow-minded person. For those who are broad-minded or wise people the entire world is a one big family.”
Maha Upanishad 6:72

LOYALTY

Hinduism: “Sit in the assembly of the honest; join with those that are good and virtuous; nay, seek out a noble enemy where enmity cannot be helped and have nothing to do with the wicked and the unrighteous. Even in bondage you should live with the virtuous, the erudite, and the truthful, but not for a kingdom should you stay with the wicked and the malicious.”
Garuda Purana 112

Islam: And the believers, men and women, are protecting friends one of another; they enjoin the right and forbid the wrong, and they establish worship and pay the poor-due, and they obey God and His messenger.” *Qur’an 9.71*

Buddhism: “As the man one makes his friend, as the one he follows, such does he himself become.” *Itivuttaka 68*

Confucianism: “When two people are at one in their inmost hearts, they shatter even the strength of iron or of bronze. When two people understand each other in their inmost hearts, their words are sweet and strong, like the fragrance of orchids.” *I Ching, Great Commentary 1.8.6*

Christianity: “Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.” *John 15:13*

“The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the state.”

Paragraph 3, Article 16 - Universal Declaration of Human Rights - 1948

As the school of love and seedbed of peace, the family is indispensable to the functioning of any society. Religious teachings encourage love in our homes, which is the basis for peaceful and thriving societies, nations, and the world.



Unconditional Giving as an Extension of the Parental Heart

Priority of giving over receiving

Christianity: “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” *Acts 20:35*

Hinduism: “Giving simply because it is right to give, without thought of return, at a proper time, in proper circumstances, and to a worthy person is enlightened giving.” *Bhagavad Gita 17:20*

Buddhism: “Enlightened beings are magnanimous givers, bestowing whatever they have with equanimity, without regret, without hoping for reward, without seeking honor.” *Garland Sutra 21*

The supreme value of unconditional love

Confucianism: “One who extends his bounty can bring peace to the Four Seas.” *Mencius !.A.7*

Hinduism: “Compassion is the root of all religious faiths.” *Basavanna, Vacana 247*

Buddhism: “I should be like the sun, shining universally on all without seeking thanks or reward.” *Garland Sutra 23*

Judaism: “Aid an enemy before you aid a friend, to subdue hatred.” *Tosefta, Baba Metzia 2:26*

Christianity: “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.” *Matthew 5:44*

Islam: “Repel the evil deed with one which is better, and lo!, he between whom and you there was enmity shall become as though he were a bosom friend.” *Qur'an 41.34*

Transcendent Value Endowed by God

Each person has not only sacred, cosmic and unique value but also eternal value



Sacred value. We have intrinsic and inalienable dignity as visible manifestations of the invisible Creator.

Cosmic value. We are microcosms of the macrocosm.

Unique Value - Never will be another person exactly like each one of us. We are unique, unrepeatable and irreplaceable.

Eternal value. We are eternal beings who will live forever in the spiritual world with God.

The fact that each person has these transcendent values is the basis of human dignity and universal human rights.

Each Person Has Eternal Value

Judaism: “The dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” *Ecclesiastes 12:7*

Christianity: “For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.” *2 Corinthians 5:1*

Islam: “You prefer this life, although the life to come is better and more enduring.” *Qur'an 87.16*

Sikhism: “Man wails over the loss of what he calls his: know, the Self is not perishable.” *Adi Granth, Gauri, M.5 p. 188*

Hinduism: “Now my breath and spirit goes to the Immortal, and this body ends in ashes.” *Isha Upanishad 27*

Confucianism: “All living living must die, and dying, return to the ground.... But the spirit issues forth, and is displayed on high in a condition of glorious brightness.” *Book of Ritual 21.2.1*

Native American Religions: “Mourners who wail for their dead hear spirit voices reply, and thus they know that their lost ones are always near.” *Yakima tradition*

Integrative Perspective of Human Rights



**Both decreed by law and
endowed by our creator**

**Both guided by natural law
and moral law**

Principles for Securing Peace and Human Rights

1. **Promote the common good** by living for the sake of others
2. **Uphold the family as the school of love and peace**, protecting family values.
3. Promote **understanding, respect, and cooperation** among people of different religions, cultures, and nations.
4. Promote spiritual, moral, and unifying leadership based on **universal values**.





For further reflection see:

***World Scripture:
A Comparative Anthology of
Sacred Texts***

<http://origin.org/ucs/ws/ws.cfm>

For interreligious perspectives on human rights, see:

- Universal Peace Federation: www.upf.org/united-nations/human-rights
- Fundacion Educativa para la Paz: www.fei.edu.uy/ - <http://educacion.co.nr/>
- Geneva Interfaith Intercultural Alliance: www.giia.ch