PERSPECTIVES ON MORALITY AND ETHICS

The Role of Religion in Moral Education

INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION

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Second in a Series

SEARCHING FOR LIFE'S TRUE PURPOSE

Perspectives on Morality and Ethics

The Role of Religion in Moral Education

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Other Volumes in This Series

The content of these presentations is the product of the International Educational Foundation's involvement in hundreds of conferences, beginning in the former Soviet Union and then expanding to China and other countries. Our organization has been working with educators and other professionals in response to the moral and ethical challenges that have accompanied the rapid economic and social transformations in those countries. At the conclusion of each of these important events, the team of lecturers and writers reviewed each presentation and offered proposals for improvement. That process of development continues. Therefore, the volume that you now hold in your hands is more of a beginning than an end.

This is part of the series, Searching for Life's True Purpose: Perspectives on Morality and Ethics. Topics covered in other volumes include:

- The need for moral education
- Universal principles and life goals
- The family as the school of love
- The consequences of the sexual revolution
- Family life education: which road to take?
- An ethic of true love and sexuality
- Preparing youth for marriage
- Promoting a marriage culture
- Building healthy marriages
- Causes and resolution of conflict
- Drugs and our youth: focus on prevention

This volume is designed to fulfill several functions: as a manual for lecturers, as a resource of people wishing to deepen their understanding of the topic, and as a general introduction to IEF's perspectives on the role of religion in moral education. The content set apart in boxes supplements the text. The colored rectangles in the text mark a change in slides.

Acknowledgements

I would like to gratefully acknowledge the meaningful guidance and inspiration provided for this project by Hyun Jin Moon, president of the worldwide Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles. Furthermore, I would like to take this opportunity to recognize the sincere investment of heart and effort by all of the writers, researchers, presenters, artists and organizers who cooperated in this endeavor. Gareth Davies, Thomas Phillips and Joy Pople developed this presentation in conjunction with Andrew Wilson, dean of the Unification Theological Seminary and editor of *World Scripture: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts.* In the course of this project, they collaborated with several other IEF staff members who graciously offered their expertise. Thus, special gratitude is given to Istvan Sleder, Toshiji Maeda and Kostya Loginov who created the slides that enhance this presentation. Finally, particular recognition is due to all the donors who provided their valuable financial support. It is impossible to name everyone who contributed; nevertheless, their efforts are greatly appreciated.

Dr. Joon Ho Seuk

Preface

The experiences of the 20th century have demonstrated that scientific, technological and economic developments alone do not guarantee harmony and true happiness. People need a solid base of values in order to find fulfillment as individuals and establish true families and healthy societies. Such a foundation integrates the best of spiritual and material values, traditional and contemporary values, and Eastern and Western values. Indeed, the well-being of nations and the entire world requires some common framework of values.

The other presentations in this series explore issues of morality and ethics in non-religious terms, allowing them to be used in any context. However, the greatest impetus behind morals and ethics is ultimately religious, and religion has traditionally shaped moral education. In many parts of the world, religious voices have been excluded from public forums because of their tendency towards exclusivism, divisiveness and conflict.

Thus, the challenge facing religious people is to find areas where it is possible to speak with a similar voice. The greatest area of commonality and thus the best hope for interreligious cooperation concerns values.

The founders of the International Educational Foundation, Dr. Sun Myung Moon and Mrs. Hak Ja Han Moon, have sponsored many conferences about values from the perspective that an Ultimate Reality exists and human life continues beyond physical death. They call this perspective "Godism." In particular, the International Conference on the Unity of the Sciences brings together scholars for annual forums on absolute values.

The International Educational Foundation has been stimulating educators and policy makers to address moral and ethical issues. Since many of these people themselves are religious or are working in societies where religious differences have become a divisive issue, this presentation focuses on common religious concerns in the hopes of revitalizing the link between religion and moral education.

Dr. Joon Ho Seuk
Director, Writers' Team
President, IEF International

Introduction - Religion Motivates People to Lead a Moral Life

For millions of the world's people, religious faith provides a central motive for leading a moral life. Two beliefs in particular have a profound influence on human behavior: a deep-rooted sense of the existence of an omnipresent absolute being, and belief in an afterlife that is determined by how we live in this world. This series of publications, *Searching for Life's True Purpose: Perspectives on Morality and Ethics,* would not be complete without a consideration of the contribution of religion to the realm of moral values.

The positive contribution that religion makes to individuals and society is receiving increased recognition. Recent research has revealed links between religious faith and individual health, happiness and longevity.' More importantly, religion satisfies a yearning for meaning, orientation and understanding our place in the universe. Consider the observations of two noted historians of religions, Mircea Eliade and Huston Smith. Throughout the ages, religion has given people a spiritual centering, according to Mircea Eliade. [2] Primitive peoples often identified a sacred mountain or some other place near their home as the center of the universe, through which the axis of the world passed and reached directly to the heavens. This was the spiritual center of their world and the place through which they found access to the divine. According to Huston Smith, this craving for orientation is perhaps the most fundamental of all human desires. [3]

In traditional societies, the physical center of the universe is often linked to the spiritual center. As people became more mobile, they developed the conviction that no matter where they are in the physical universe, they can find the spiritual center if they hold the right beliefs—beliefs that hold true for all persons at all times. Just as people considered their mountain the physical center of the universe, they considered their beliefs the true beliefs and their gods the true gods.

Such approaches to the spiritual center have been challenged by scientific discoveries, secularism and competing religious worldviews. For example, Copernicus'

announcement that the earth was not at the center of the universe rocked European civilization. This reaction was natural, since the physical center of the universe and their nearness to it represented their spiritual center and their nearness to it. The loss of one seemed a loss of the other.

Traditionally, this spiritual center has been anchored in the divine and energized by the words and examples of those who represent ultimate reality. People might turn to a sacred book, a prophet, a religious group or wise person and take their words as absolute. The age of technology provides a wealth of information but little sense of orientation. The widely varying religious voices, each claiming to represent the divine point of view, are like different broadcasting stations, each competing for an audience. Furthermore, secularization interferes with receiving any of the signals, casting suspicion on sacred books, prophets and organized religion of all kinds.

The Age of Technology Provides a Wealth of Information but Little Sense of Orientation

Thus, the convergence of scientific discoveries, secularization and religious pluralism has been eroding the spiritual center of people and societies. Moral certainty has been challenged, and religion has been relegated to the periphery of life. In the absence of traditional authority, many people have no firm basis for making decisions, setting priorities or choosing role models. They follow each passing fad. Young and old, people from all walks of life experience a crisis of identity. Witnessing the effects of this inner vacuum, educators and concerned citizens are awakening to the need to revitalize moral education.

As explained in the presentation on the Need for Moral Education, "All three dimensions of education—the cultivation of heart, education in norms and education for mastery—are involved in realizing the third of the three goals of education: raising up truly productive citizens. This goal of education is realized when the home, school and community work in partnership to ensure that all three dimensions are in balance."

If we consider education in the broadest sense, there are three major arenas in which moral education takes place: the family, the school and the community.

Of these three arenas, the family is most fundamental. The presentation on the Family as the School of Love discusses how filial piety and related virtues can be cultivated

Partners in Education

Home

School   Community
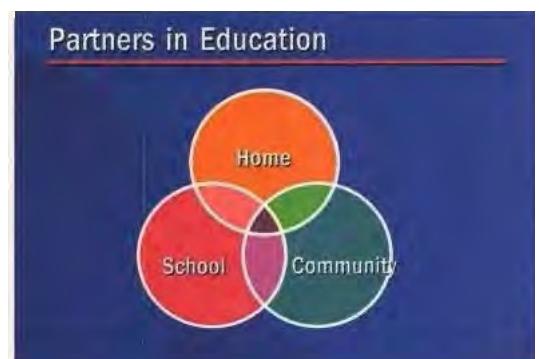
within the family and then extended to the society. Within the family we learn to how to exercise loving authority and how to play a supporting role, how to integrate the spiritual and material dimensions, and how to balance private ownership and public domain. The goal of education in this school of love is to become a person of mature character who lives for the sake of others. Moral education needs to play a major role in our schools; it is in fact the foundation on which an effective education is built.

This presentation is concerned with the contribution of religion to the development of character, identity and morality. It is not the purpose of this presentation to argue for or against the existence of God or an afterlife. Rather, it is based on the fact that these beliefs are held by a majority of the world's population and have the potential for a substantial positive impact on the moral climate of our families, communities and nations. A community depends on commonly agreed-upon standards of behavior, and its institutions are entrusted with preparing people to become good and responsible family members, citizens and leaders of their society.

The response of the International Educational Foundation (IEF) to the erosion of moral certainty revolves around its high school curriculum, *My Journey in Life.* This course of study was developed in Russia in the years immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Communism had been discredited, and so there was no ideological foundation for the moral education courses that were offered in the schools. Seeking a more universal and lasting approach to life, many teachers looked to IEF for help. Thus, My *Journey in Life* was born. It is a character education curriculum that helps young people to develop their character and find their identity within their cultural and religious traditions. During the past decade, the curriculum has been embraced by thousands of schools throughout the former Soviet Union. Educators appreciate the sensitive way in which My *Journey in Life* presents the various religious traditions found in that part of the world. For many teachers and students, one of the most attractive parts of the book is its objective material about religion, which provides a basis for tolerance among people from various religious traditions and ethnic groups.

Some Responses to My Journey in Life
(published in Russian as *Moi Mir i Ya*, or My World and I)

The book reflects the realization of two concepts. One, realized in its content and structure, supports the development of the students' personality by means of studying the ethical teachings of the world's religions. The other, realized as a pedagogical concept, encourages the process of self-analysis and self-understanding. Even more, the content is so rich and embraces so many different areas that even a mere reading of the book cannot but be very useful to a person.

Y V *Sokolov, Ph.D.*
Professor of Theory and
History of Culture
State Academy of Culture
St. Petersburg, Russia.

The general impression from both a quick and attentive reading of the student textbook is extremely positive. It truly, in a very holistic way, introduces the reader to the world of fundamental moral and spiritual values. I haven't seen a publication like it in our country.

R.C. Aprysian, Ph.D.
Senior Lecturer, Institute of Philosophy
Russian Academy of Science, Moscow

The main moral question that every person needs to answer in his life is: "What kind of person am I now and what kind of person do I want to become?" The course My World and I helps students to answer these most crucial questions. The course provides students the opportunity for self improvement based on the ethical experience of humanity. It helps students form an image of themselves. While studying this course, teenagers develop a desire to understand their unique value and their inner world; what it means to be a human being.

Larisa Shmakova
School vice-principal, Ryazan, Russia.

Several chapters in My *Journey in Life* introduce the life and teachings of the founders of the major religions. Additional chapters describe the impact of religious traditions on marriage and family. Religion is intimately connected with family life, and the significant phases of life such as birth, marriage and death are often accompanied by religious rituals. If the family is the "school of love" and the arena in which we develop our moral values, then it is imperative to consider all influences that nourish and sustain families. Religious conviction and involvement can have profound positive impact on the family and thus contribute significantly to the health of our communities and of our society.

In addition to providing clarity of purpose and orientation, shared religious values can form a powerful framework for people of different faiths to understand and respect each other. Values and beliefs that are in apparent conflict can provoke bitter enmity. Much attention has been given to the troubled history of conflict among different religions and to the rivalries among factions of the same religion. This presentation has a different purpose. It focuses on the

potential of religion to give us a common orientation and sense of interconnectedness.

This presentation begins by tracing the changing influence of Christianity upon moral education in the West. As scientific and humanistic outlooks rose to dominance, religion became isolated from public life. This generated a moral vacuum that has had worldwide impact.

The next part examines the two beliefs that have the most profound influence on human behavior: the existence of an Ultimate Reality and an afterlife in which we reap the consequences of how we live in this life. These two beliefs are commonly held by religious people and open the way for mutual respect and understanding.

The final part considers the possibility of a God-centered society that allows for religious pluralism within a consensus about common values. It introduces Dr. Sun Myung Moon's work to bring together the world's religions in the quest for a universal ethic. His concept of "Godism" can provide the framework for a culture of peace.

For example, see Gregg Easterbrook, "Faith Healers," New Republic, July 19 & 26, 1999.

[2] Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1959).

Huston Smith, Why Religion Matters: The. Fate of the Human Spirit in an Age of Disbelief (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2000), p. 26.

PART 1 - Religion and Moral Education throughout History

A. The Relationship between Religion and Morality

Religions have always played a significant role as moral guides, instructing their adherents in the norms of right and wrong. A familiar expression of this role is seen in the great codes of conduct set forth by many of the historic religious traditions, ranging from the Ten Commandments in the Jewish and Christian scriptures to the Five Precepts of Buddhism. The fact that the teachings of widely separated traditions contain so many similar principles testifies to an underlying commonality of religious understanding.

Prescribing rules of conduct is only one aspect of the guidance offered by religion. Underlying any rules of conduct is a center and touchstone of moral reasoning. Fundamentally, religions teach unselfishness. Through means that range from religious narratives to the examples of saintly personalities, religions encourage people to set the interests of their fellow human beings on a par with their own.

The question of the precise relationship between religion and morality arises in a variety of contexts—both ancient and modern, theoretical and practical. Socrates asks in Plato's *Euthyphro:* "Is what is holy holy because the gods approve it, or do they approve it because it is holy?" Thomas Aquinas maintains that certain kinds of action are divinely prohibited because they are wrong, rather than the reverse. William of Ockham, on the other hand, has been interpreted to say that rightness is equivalent to, "commanded by God."

In recent centuries, two trends have challenged the link between religion and morality: the discrediting of faith and religious pluralism.

Thoughtful people have expressed concern about the impact of the loss of religious belief on morality. In the extreme, chaos and nihilism result. In the *Brothers Karamazov,* a novel by Fyodor Dostoyevsky, one character proclaims: "Without God, everything is lawful." Philosophers such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus created an existentialist morality for those who view the universe as alien and uncaring. Some humanists propose an ethic of

equal regard, treating each human being as having equal value and deserving equal consideration.

Concerns about the basis of moral values impact public policy. For example, can democratic values and institutions be sustained without the presupposition of a supreme being? Should moral education in public schools refer to religious beliefs, or would that be considered indoctrination?

Religious pluralism within a society presents challenges. Liberal democratic states depend on a basic consensus about values while at the same time respecting the autonomy of the individual. Their constitutions guarantee respect and protection for basic human rights, such as freedom of religion, freedom of the press and freedom of assembly. Within such freedom, social stability depends on citizens who adhere to some ultimate values. However, governments cannot legislate ultimate values without abandoning the liberal principles that guarantee basic freedoms.

No modern democracy can function without the foundation of human dignity, but laws cannot force people to respect the value of their fellow human beings. There is general agreement that only a basic consensus on values, norms and attitudes enables people to live together in a way that promotes dignity.

How should society instill values, norms and attitudes? In traditional societies and throughout most of history, religious instruction at home, in places of worship and at school have constituted the basic moral education. Religious literature, folk tales and selected secular literature communicate the desired values. Instructors exhort and guide the young people, correcting mistakes and seeking to instill good habits. Motivations range from fear of punishment to loving guidance by example.

Dilemma of Modern Democracy

❖ Dependent on a basic consensus on values

❖ For the state to prescribe values threatens its ideological neutrality

B. A Case Study: Christianity in Western Europe

Religions generally use a combination of methods of cultivating moral behavior. The challenge is to find a balance between loving guidance and fear of punishment, between nurturing an innate moral capacity and imposing strict external constraints.

As an example of the shifting balance between offering moral guidance through personal example, encouragement and love and imposing rules through rigorous discipline, we examine the views of key thinkers who influenced the
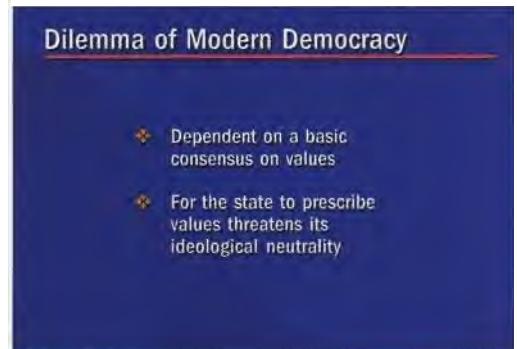
development of Western Christianity. Many other religions have experienced similar tensions, at times emphasizing moral education through love and encouragement and at other times through strict rules and discipline.

Cultivating an Innate Moral Capacity

Some of the wisest advice on moral education in the early Christian church is found in the writings of Augustine, Bishop of Hippo (354-430). In his theory of education he emphasized people's "indwelling" capacity to learn with encouragement and love. He counseled teachers to begin their instructions with an awareness of the concrete situation of each child. For Augustine, learning derived from the students' response to the teacher's confidence in their capacity to respond correctly.

Augustine presented a strikingly modern approach to moral reasoning in his emphasis on internal dynamics, introspection and induction. Religion has always played an important role in encouraging reflection. Many people find contemplation, prayer and meditation to be invaluable sources of rejuvenation and inspiration in the effort to lead a moral life.

In the Middle Ages, Anse1m of Canterbury (1033?-1 109) was a strong voice for kind treatment of the young. He opposed beatings as a way to correct children. Education in morality was also a concern of theologians at the great medieval universities. As theological study became systematized, summaries of Christian thought were compiled which gave explicit attention to the moral life.

In the view of the Franciscan priest Bonaventure (1217- 1274), the purpose of theological education was to make persons holy by encouraging them to use the power of their wills to decide and choose to lead a moral life. Bonaventure followed the tradition of Augustine in emphasizing the power of God working within people.

The greatest Medieval treatise on moral education was written by the Dominican theologian, Thomas Aquinas (1224?-1274). The primary thrust in Aquinas' ethical system is the emphasis on human reason and intellect. He argued that knowledge of what is good must precede the doing of what is good. Following in the Augustinian tradition, Aquinas argued that the living principle of knowledge and education is within the pupil. The teacher has a secondary role in helping the

St Augustine, Bishop of Hippo

- Indwelling capacity of the pupil to learn with encouragement and love
- Moral reasoning based on internal dynamics, introspection and induction

Thomas Aquinas

- Emphasized reason and intellect
- Knowing the good precedes doing the good

student develop judgment, intellectual skills and understanding.
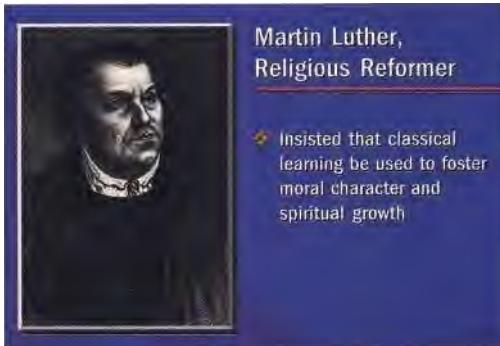
Educating the Whole Person

With its goal of developing the whole person who could be competent in many spheres of life, the Renaissance impacted moral education in a number of ways. Educators called for a marriage between the claims of faith and the rediscovered Classical focus on the potential of the human being. The Renaissance ideal was that of the universal man— a soldier and a person of action, a many-sided individual, noble in bearing, courtly in speech, a connoisseur of the fine arts, and a loyal subject of the Church.

While the Middle Ages witnessed little speculation on education, the Renaissance ushered in a period of intense discussion of all aspects of education, with a special interest in moral education. Parents were advised to be aware of the innate potentialities of their children and to educate them toward wholeness. Stress was placed on physical, literary and religious education.

Desiderius Erasmus of Rotterdam (1466?-1536) discussed the elements of a complete education: Christian piety, scholarship, moral conduct and preparation for civic life. Erasmus was one of the most influential voices in the call for a balance of heart and norm. He believed in the innate capacity of the child to learn moral values. Like all humanists, he placed great stress on parental example, direct moral and religious instruction, and the natural associations between old and young. He advocated an intimate personal religion that included dependence upon the Creator. Erasmus criticized punishment and fear as the principal ways to motivate moral behavior.

Implanting a Fear of God's Punishment

The ideals of Renaissance humanism continued to influence educational theory during the Protestant Reformation and the response from the Catholic church. All of the reformers made education a central concern in their efforts to revitalize the Christian faith. They saw education as a way to correct abuses and superstition in the Medieval church.

Martin Luther, Religious Reformer

❖ Insisted that classical learning be used to foster moral character and spiritual growth
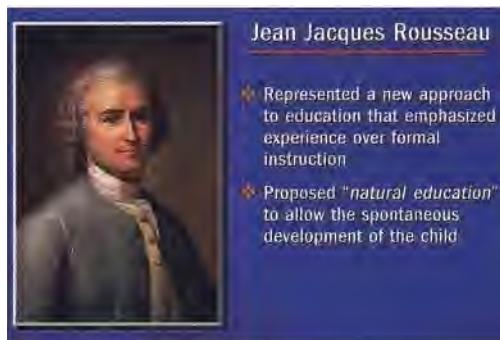
Martin Luther (1483-1546), the German monk who became a religious reformer, continued the tradition of Renaissance humanism in his insistence on fostering moral and spiritual growth through classical learning. Luther recommended combining punishment with gentle admonition and positive examples, but he was a strong believer in trying to impose moral behavior from without. Children were to be taught the Scriptural warnings about God's judgment on sinful lives in such a way that the fear would last throughout their entire lives.

The central contribution of the Reformation was its emphasis on individual relationships with God, without the need for an intermediary. When God is seen as an unconditional source of love, a personal relationship with God is a powerful impetus for leading a moral life.

Learning from the Natural Order

Tradition and authority in education (especially religious tradition and authority) were rejected during the Enlightenment, when educators placed much more emphasis on the natural capacities of individuals.

Jean Jacques Rousseau

❖ Represented a new approach to education that emphasized experience over formal instruction

❖ Proposed "natural education" to allow the spontaneous development of the child

The leading critic of education based on punishment and fear was Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778). In *Emile* he proposed a "natural education," based on the spontaneous development of the child's capacities. Rousseau asserted that in the ordinary course of living, especially in play, the child learns by observing the environment, responding to it, and using things spontaneously. Instead of basing education on obedience to persons and their commands, Rousseau argued for obedience to things of the natural order. In Rousseau's view, if persons are not led into vice by others, they will adapt naturally to the social world, and thus to virtue.

The Enlightenment views reshaped moral education in the twentieth century in the United States and in Europe. In the 1960s, educators began to adopt a "values-neutral" perspective, claiming that they had no right to "impose" their value system on their students. Everyone's viewpoint was to be respected no matter what it was, and standards of right and wrong became suspect. Three decades later, the character education movement in the United States began promoting basic moral values that resonate with people of diverse religions as well as non-religious people, Children thrive when they are taught basic moral values at home, at school and in their religious community.

Considering some of the extreme tendencies in moral education, it is wise to seek a balance between heart and norms, or between love and obedience to rules. Moral education that emphasizes rules and fear of punishment can be harsh and formal. People raised in this way may be disciplined and reliable but lacking in compassion and sensitivity. On the other hand, moral education that emphasizes emotion and free choice at the expense of principles and standards can produce people who are undisciplined and irresponsible.

C. limitations of the Scientific View

After the Protestant Reformation and bitter religious wars in Europe, people increasingly turned to science and humanism for guidance. Moral education lost its grounding as religion diminished in influence. For many people, a scientific or humanistic worldview replaced the spiritual centering traditionally provided by religion.

Despite its current ascendancy, however, the scientific worldview offers little sense of orientation or purpose. It has a limited ability to answer life's most profound questions.

This series of presentations is concerned with the search for life's purpose. It addresses questions about why are we here and what life is life all about. People have been asking such questions from time immemorial. The Old Testament character Job questions God because he cannot understand the tragedy of his own situation. "Where shall wisdom be found? And where is the place of understanding? Man does not know the way to it, and it is not found in the land of the living."

Scientists can advance theories about the origins of life and guess at the nature of the universe itself, but these are impersonal speculations. They tell us nothing of the human condition. Science can tell us how forces act and how organisms function, but these are largely descriptions, not explanations of meaning. They offer little to satisfy the human spirit.

Although the questions are ageless, every generation is impatient for an answer. In the words of sociologist Emile Durkheim, "Science is fragmentary and incomplete; it advances but slowly and is never finished; but life cannot wait. The theories which are destined to make men live and act are therefore obliged to pass science and complete it prematurely." The questions that transcend the scope **of**

science enter the realm of religion. People sense that there must be a meaning to existence, and millions of people find that meaning in a relationship with an absolute. For many people this absolute is known by a name such as Yahweh, God or Allah.

It is a mistake to think that science and religion are mutually exclusive or that one discipline's claim to truth outweighs the claim of the other. To find meaning in religion does not mean rejecting science. Some may think that if one follows a scientific discipline, belief in an Absolute Being is not an intellectually valid option. At the same time, some devout people reject scientific assertions that they believe to be in conflict with their faith.

Throughout history, however, religious people have tried to reconcile their faith with the leading philosophical views and scientific theories. For example, early Christian thinkers showed how Greek philosophy was supported and completed by Christianity. Augustine developed his perspectives based on Plato's philosophy, while Thomas Aquinas did the same based on Aristotle's philosophy. Muslim philosophers and naturalists, such as Averroes (lbn-Rushd) and Avicenna (Ibn Sina), followed Muhammad's instruction to "seek knowledge even if it be in China." Averroes (1126-1198) was the greatest Arab philosopher who expounded the Koran according to Aristotle. The medical system of the Arab philosopher and physician Avicenna (980-1037) provided a foundation for Western medicine. He developed a treatment for smallpox and an anesthetic for operations. Their achievements laid the foundations for modern science.

Throughout the Renaissance and rise of humanism, the Church celebrated scientists along with the leading artists. Members of the Benedictine, Dominican, Franciscan and Jesuit monastic orders led the research into the natural world. Many of the most eminent scientists have been believers in God, including Nicolaus Copernicus, Johannes Kepler, Galileo Galilei, Isaac Newton, Charles Darwin and Albert Einstein. They found no contradiction between their scientific views and adherence to a faith.

In a discussion of science, it is helpful to distinguish between experimental studies and their interpretations. Those who appreciate the scientific method recognize that properly conducted research produces objective data. However, the larger meaning of the data can be expressed in either secular or religious terms. Many of the greatest

To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom... this knowledge, this feeling is at the center of true religiousness. In this sense, I belong in the ranks of the devoutly religious men.

Albert Einstein
Scientist

scientists have realized this. Albert Einstein eloquently voiced a religious view:

> "The most beautiful thing that we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand, wrapped in awe, is as good as dead; his mind and his eyes are closed. The insight into the mystery of life, coupled though it be with fear, has also given rise to religion. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty which our dull faculties can comprehend . . . this knowledge, this feeling is at the center of true religiousness. In this sense I belong in the ranks of the devoutly religious men."'

Dr. Sun Myung Moon, the founder of IEF, has a keen interest in the relationship between science and religion. He has convened conferences of the world's leading scientists to discuss questions relating to absolute values. His efforts are based on his understanding that religion and science complement each other and that they should inform each other.

Religion and Science: Mind and Body

The relationship between the essential world and the phenomenal world is similar to that between mind and body. It is the relationship between cause and result, internal and external, subjective and objective. Since man can attain perfect personality only when his mind and body become harmonized in perfect oneness, the ideal world can be realized only when the two worlds—one of essence, the other of phenomena—have been joined in perfect unity.... The day must come when religion and science advance in one united way, so that man may enjoy eternal happiness, completely liberated from ignorance and directed toward goodness which is what the original mind desires."

– Dr. Sun Myung Moon

Currently, this harmony is not expressed, and many people lament the decline of the influence of religion. For religion to play an active role in society it has to overcome its reputation as a divisive force. In fact, critics claim that one cannot speak of "religion" but only of "religions." Any discussion of "a religious perspective" on morality must address this question of religious diversity. Is it possible for "religion" to speak with one voice on questions of morality?

D. Unity and Diversity

Religion…can conjure up moods of sublime exaltation, and also images of dread and terror

Elizabeth Nottingham
professor

Modern opinion is prejudiced against viewing religions from the standpoint of their unity, and religious conflict is more noticeable than religious harmony. Elizabeth Nottingham pointed out both the best and worst sides of religion: "Religion is associated with man's attempts to plumb the depths of meaning in both himself and the universe. It has given rise to the most spacious products of his imagination, and it has been used to justify the most extreme cruelty of man to man. It can conjure up moods of sublime exaltation, and also images of dread and terror."[2] Nevertheless, in the face of those "images of dread and terror," religious leaders often respond with declarations of solidarity. In January 2002, for example, Pope John Paul II convened an ecumenical gathering in Assisi, Italy, in response to the terrorist attacks on the United States four months earlier. Addressing an audience that included leaders of a dozen religions, the Pope sought affirmation that "whoever uses religion to foment violence contradicts religion's deepest and truest inspiration."[3]

Most textbooks on world religions treat each as a distinct entity and emphasize its uniqueness. The relativism that pervades Western education distrusts universal patterns, and scholars focus on the expressions of truth that are unique to each religion. Yet, there are points of convergence, especially in values. Certain themes characterize the common ground which religions share.

In *World Scripture: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts,* passages from the sacred writings of the various world religions are arranged by theme, providing an endless source of comparative material, with introductory overviews and comments to illuminate the meaning of difficult passages.[4] *World Scripture* creates a common ground of religious understanding which people from each religion can recognize for themselves and on their own terms. Editor Andrew Wilson observes a remarkable amount of convergence. He calls these commonalties Ten Points of Unity. These include the belief that the universe is moral and purposeful, that human beings are subject to spiritual laws, and that each person reaps the fruit of his or her deeds. Most fundamentally, all share the conviction that there exists an Ultimate Reality or transcendent God that defines the purpose and meaning of life, and to which human beings are related.

Ten Points of Unity among the World's Religions

- There exists an Ultimate Reality, or transcendent God, which defines the purpose and meaning of life, and to which human beings are related.

- The universe is moral and purposeful, human beings are subject to spiritual laws, and each person reaps the fruit of his or her deeds.

- Each person has an eternal destiny, a life hereafter; the cosmos includes various spiritual realms.

- There is a highest goal (salvation, enlightenment, liberation, wholeness) which is potentially within the reach of every person.

- Human beings are tarnished by an evil condition that prevents people from reaching the highest goal unaided.

- Each person is free and responsible for his or her personal growth, yet can never fully realize that freedom unless the aforementioned condition of evil is dealt with.

- Each person has ethical obligations in the contexts of family, society, and the natural world.

- To become a moral person, one should train oneself to control the body and practice self-denial.

- The way of goodness includes an ethic of love and self-sacrifice. The fullness of spiritual truth goes beyond this common ground and includes the teachings of the historical religions.

- Knowledge of Ultimate Reality and the path to salvation comes to us through the unique founders of religion, who were given insights and revelations transcending ordinary knowledge attainable through reason alone.*

t Andrew Wilson, "World Scripture and Education for Peace." Paper presented at a conference sponsored by the New Ecumenical Research Association at Chateau de Bellinglise, Elincourt Ste-Marguerite, France, May 7-12, 1992 (New York: International Religious Foundation, 1992).

It is notable that these points of unity focus on personal morality, especially self-denial, goodness, love, ethical obligations, purposeful living and obedience to spiritual laws. For thousands of years, the moral exhortations of the world's religions have been clearly and prominently proclaimed. The following selections from sacred writings illustrate the continuity of that call to personal morality and goodness:

___ Not to do any evil, to cultivate good, to purify one's mind—this is the teaching of the Buddhas.
                    Buddhism. Dhammapada 183

Train yourself in godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.
                    Christianity. *1* Timothy 4.7-8

A watery hole at the foot of a mountain amidst uncultivated growth.
The superior man by determined good conduct nourishes his virtue.

                    Confucianism. *I* Ching 4: Immaturity

Not to do any evil, to cultivate good, to purify one's mind—this is the teaching of the Buddhas.
Buddhism
Dhammapada 183

This Atman, resplendent and pure, whom the sinless disciples behold residing within the body, is attained by unceasing practice of truthfulness, austerity, right knowledge, and continence.

Hinduism. Mundaka Upanishad 3.1.5

By the ... soul, and Him who perfected it
and inspired it with conscience of what is wrong for it
and right for it:
He is indeed successful who causes it to grow,
and he is indeed a failure who stunts it.

Islam. Qur'an 91.7-10

And what does the Lord require of you
But to do justice, and to love kindness,
And to walk humbly with your God?

Judaism and Christianity. Micah 6.8

Thus, a strong case can be made for linking religion and morality. However, does one depend on the other?

E. Can We Be Good without Religion?

Can only religious people lead a moral life? The answer is obviously no. People who are only nominally religious or even non-religious may be just as moral as believers, and sometimes they show greater moral sensitivity. Many secular people respect the dignity of every human being. Guarantees of human rights are based on such respect for human dignity.
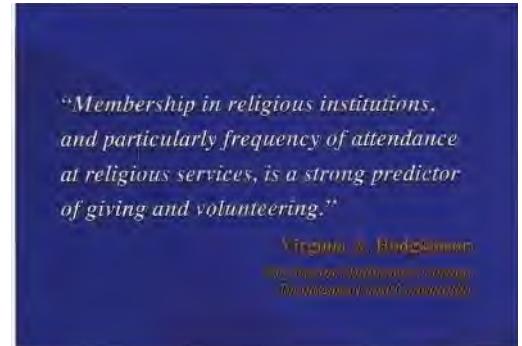
Can people be religious without being good? Religious belief does not always result in moral behavior. Religions teach moral codes, inspire people to be good, and specify consequences for violations. However, religions sometimes hinder or even prevent progress, closing the doors to enlightenment and reform. The histories of the great world religions illuminate both the heights of human achievement as well as the depths of degeneration.

Nevertheless, only prejudice could blind people to the huge contribution of the great religions to the spiritual and moral progress of the peoples of this world. All communities depend on the willingness of their members to care for others and to share responsibility. Research confirms the valuable impact that religious individuals and groups have on the moral health of societies.

In "Key Factors Influencing Caring, Involvement and Community," Virginia A Hodgkinson, author and executive director of the (U.S.) National Center of Charitable Statistics, concluded that, "Findings from the giving and volunteering surveys have consistently shown that membership in religious institutions, and particularly frequency of attendance at religious services, is a strong predictor of giving and volunteering."[5] The findings held true for all age groups, including young people. Teens who reported attending religious services nearly every week volunteered at more than three times the rate of those who never attended. Adults who attended religious services volunteered at four times the rate of those who never attended.

Hodgkinson found that people who are members of a religious group share common traditions, devote time and resources to supporting each other, and participate with the group in meeting the needs of the larger society. "Thus," she concludes, "congregations provide primary and long-term experience for a majority of Americans in learning to care and to share responsibility within a community." Her research also indicated that members of religious organizations are more likely to join other voluntary, service and professional organizations.

Thus, moral behavior is not only an ideal promoted by religions but also the fruit of religious practice.

"Membership in religious institutions, and particularly frequency of attendance at religious services, is a strong predictor of giving and volunteering."

Virginia A. Hodgkinson

[1] Louis Untermeyer, Makers of the Western World (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1955), p. 54.

[2] Elizabeth K. Nottingham, Religion and Society (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1954).

[3] New York Times, January 25, 2002, p. 5.

Andrew Wilson, Ed., World Scripture: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts (New York: Paragon House, 1991).

[5] Virginia A. Hodgkinson, "Key Factors Influencing Caring, Involvement, and Community." In Paul G. Shervish, et al., Care and Community in Modern Society: Passing on the Tradition of Service to future Generations (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995).

PART 2 — Religious Belief and Morality

Two core religious beliefs that are common to religions around the world have an especially important impact on moral behavior. These are belief in an Ultimate Reality and in an afterlife.

A. Ultimate Reality

The existence and nature of an Ultimate Reality or Absolute Being is perhaps the greatest of human questions. Since the dawn of history, people have been pursuing this "ultimate question" through religion and philosophy. People have arrived at many answers. This Ultimate Reality—known variously as God, Allah, Yahweh, the Absolute, etc., or by no name—is considered knowable by some and mysterious to others. Ultimate Reality may be transcendent or immanent, disinterested or passionate. Some people experience God as a personal being, while others perceive an impersonal force or a Truth that is neither being nor non-being. In spite of such differences in understanding, the great majority of people throughout history have believed in some transcendent reality. This phenomenon strongly suggests that human beings have an innate religious sense that causes them to seek that reality. Some claim that this in itself is evidence that God does exist: in our inner being we are seeking to return to our origins.

Our understanding of this reality shapes our view of the world and our place in it. Most significantly, the existence or non-existence of an Ultimate Reality has profound implications for morality. Some have argued that if there is no God then everything is permitted. If that is so, a godless world is a world without moral standards. It is a world where the strongest and most selfish ones rule. On the other hand, if we not only believe in an Ultimate Reality but see in it the source of all that is good and true, we naturally feel that life has purpose and meaning. We have a motivation to develop our character and pursue a life of goodness. We believe that in the end virtue will be rewarded.

Of particular interest is how this Ultimate Reality is sometimes portrayed as a personal God and even as a good and loving parent. As noted in the presentation on the Need for Moral Education, the experience of unconditional love

within the family has a significant impact on moral behavior. While the understanding of God as a benevolent and loving being is most prevalent in the Biblical faiths, it is also present in other faiths.

> "I am the Tathagata,
> The Most Honored among men;
> I appear in the world
> Like unto this great cloud
> To pour enrichment on all
> Parched living beings,
> To free them from their misery
> To attain the joy of peace,
> Joy of the present world,
> And joy of Nirvana...."
>
> *Buddhism.* Lotus Sutra 5: Parable of the Rain Cloud

The Master said, "Is Goodness indeed so far away? If we really want Goodness, we should find that it was at our very side."

Confucianism. Analects 7.29

To love is to know Me, My innermost nature, the truth that I am.

Hinduism. Bhagavad Gita 1 8.55

It is He who sends down to you out of heaven water of which you may drink, and by which (grow) trees, for you to pasture your herds, and thereby He brings forth for you crops, and olives, and palms, and vines, and all manner of fruit. Surely in that is a sign for people who reflect.... If you count God's blessing, you can never number it; surely God is All-forgiving, All-compassionate.

Islam. Qur'an 16.10,18

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made.

Judaism & Christianity. Psalm 145:89

It is the Way of Heaven to show no favoritism. It is forever on the side of the good man.

Taoism. Tao Te Ching 79

The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all he has made.
Psalm 145.89
Judaism and Christianity
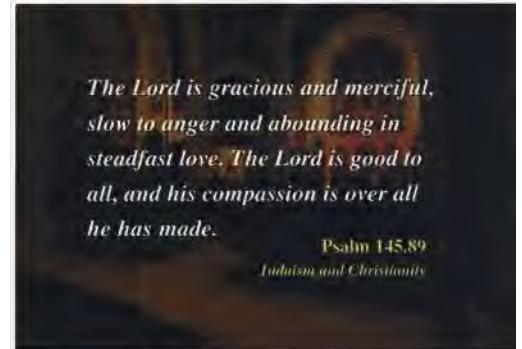
Relationship with a Loving God:

- Creates order out of chaos
- Provides a model for moral development
- Provides a moral authority
- Can provide strength in adversity
- Can be a source of unconditional love

A relationship with a just, good and loving God has profound implications for our understanding of the world and our role in it.

For the individual believer, it can create order out of chaos by providing a context for understanding one's self within the larger scheme of things. Some widespread religious concepts, such as the idea of the omnipresent judge who watches us when no one sees us, provide believers with a clear moral horizon.

Belief in God and in our potential to reflect our "creator" provides a model for moral development. The current confusion over the goals of moral education reflects a confusion about the purpose of education and the nature of the person who is to be educated. Without a clear idea of the self who is to be educated or an understanding of the purpose of human life, the methodology and objectives for education have no destination. From the viewpoint of some of the major religions, the fundamental assumption about the education of the individual is that humankind is created by God to fulfill a purpose, an original ideal of creation.

God's existence provides a moral authority that strengthens moral resolve. Humanistic conceptions of the moral life carry little moral authority. According to Immanuel Kant, the good life is guided by what rational thinking defines as one's duty. The utilitarian prescription is to exercise impartial benevolence, or show equal regard. When challenged, these ethical principles cannot be defended without referring to an Ultimate Reality. Why should I act in accordance with what reason shows to be my duty? The answer is: you just should. Why should I adopt an impartial attitude and regard my own happiness as no more important than anyone else's? The answer is: you just should. For many, the way out of this circular reasoning lies in the authoritative will of God.

A relationship with a loving God can be a vital source of strength in adversity. It has been well documented that love can offer powerful sustenance under seemingly unbearable suffering. For example, in *Man's Search for Meaning,* psychologist Victor Frank] wrote about his experiences in the Nazi concentration camp where he spent several years. Amidst the horrors and hopelessness of his surroundings, he was still able to find fulfillment:

"A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth—that love is the ultimate and the highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart; the salvation of man is through love and in love. I understood how a man who has nothing left in the world may still know bliss, be it only for a brief moment in the contemplation of his beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when a man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring sufferings in the right way—in an honorable way—in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image of his beloved, achieve fulfillment. For the first time in my life, I was able to understand the words, 'The angels are lost in perpetual contemplation of an infinite glory.' "

The most important aspect of a relationship with a personal God is the experience of an unconditional source of love. As noted in the presentation on Universal Principles and Life Goals, we reach our full humanity through relationships of love. True love is the source of joy and of the energy of life. The family has the unique mission to educate the heart through the experiences of love. The core of the family experience is parental love, which creates the realm of heart within which children can fully mature and blossom.

One significant factor in determining the strength and happiness of family bonds is religious conviction. When parents have a close relationship with a loving God, then the family is strengthened. Nicholas Stinnett has noted that research over the past 40 years has consistently shown a positive correlation between religion and fulfilling family relationships. Stinnett emphasized that in the families that he studied, this religious involvement went beyond mere ritual:

"There are indications that this religious quality went deeper than going to church or participating in religious activities together. It could most appropriately be called a commitment to a spiritual life style. Words are inadequate to communicate this, but what many of these families said was that they had an awareness of God or a higher power that gave them a sense of purpose and gave their

I understood how a man who has nothing left in the world may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved.

Victor Frankl
Man's Search for Meaning

What many of these families said was that they had an awareness of God or a higher power that gave them a sense of purpose and gave their family a sense of support and strength.

Nicholas Stinnett

family a sense of support and strength. The awareness of this higher power in their lives helped them to be more patient with each other, more forgiving, quicker to get over anger, more positive, and more supportive in their relationships."'

Commenting on these observations, James Henslin wrote, "If Stinnett's findings are generalizable, as they appear to be, to encourage the religious involvement of families would not only strengthen families, but also the communities in which they live."[2]

If the family is the school of love, then we can describe God as the source of love. Some would say, "God is love." Often it is within the experience of love that we are most moral. As stated in the presentation on Universal Principles and Life Goals, "Love in its truest sense is inherently moral. It requires altruistic action: giving, serving and sacrificing ourselves for the sake of our beloved." When God is placed at the center of family life, people have a powerful and consistent experience of love. Contact with this loving force energizes and strengthens families. As Henslin suggests, this may offer the hope of stronger, more moral communities.

What exactly does religion offer families? A personal strengthening and reaffirmation through prayer and reflection, and an experience of a religious community. According to Dartmouth College professor of religion Ronald Green, the genuine experience of community represents "an experiential vivification of the moral point of view." Religion helps people see beyond social distinctions and perceive the essential equality of humanity; it infuses moral principles into the social order. Green points out that ritual moments "embody and reflect the key elements of the moral point of view, and they impart the information and skills needed for its successful application." When religious rituals are voluntarily undertaken, they "symbolize and enact the essential relinquishment of possession, comfort, or advantage that marks adoption of the moral point of view."[3] In other words, rituals help translate moral commitment into social commitment. Thus, religion helps communities flourish.

Religion undergirds morality with the power of conviction that comes from our having seen "the word made flesh." Philosophers may discuss great moral principles and prophets

> *Ritual moments are thus a pedagogy in ethics. They embody and reflect the key elements of the moral point of view, and they impart the information and skills needed for its successful application.*
>
> Ronald Green
> *Professor of Religion*
> *Dartmouth College*

may proclaim the commandments of God, but only when we see the human embodiment of these abstract principles and commandments are we able to believe and become empowered to act. Thus, unlike systems of philosophy and law, all the great religions present to us a person or persons who incarnate moral law. This may be a prophet like Moses or Mohammed, a series of avatars as in Hinduism, or a unique and superlative revelator as in Gautama the Buddha or Jesus the Christ. Then our challenge is to measure up to the potential revealed by the incarnation of moral law.

B. Belief in the Afterlife

Belief in a life after death in which we experience the consequences of our earthly life is shared by all cultures. For those who believe in a personal God of love, goodness and justice, it is inconceivable that God's beloved should not share in God's eternity. If God is eternal and we are God's beloved, then we too must be eternal.

Of course, it is sometimes argued that a belief in the afterlife diminishes the need for full commitment to the here and now, but this is not necessarily the case. As historian Arnold Toynbee has stated, there are three alternatives: (1) belief in the reality of only this world, (2) belief in the reality of only the next world, and (3) a vision of this world as only one province of a Kingdom of God which also includes another world.' A belief in the reality of only this world tends to promote the ethics of pleasure and power. On the other hand, those who take seriously only the next world tend to hold the responsibilities and institutions of this world in contempt. When religion promotes such a teaching, it indeed functions as an opiate.

The Hebrew-Christian-Islamic traditions envision a larger setting for human affairs than scientific analysis provides. This vision casts an arc beyond the limitations of space and of time. The life-to-come is coherent with this life, although a dialectical tension is sometimes evident. What is done here has its fulfillment there; what is done now has its consummation then.

While conceptions of the afterlife vary from faith to faith, most assume that there are direct consequences in the next life of our actions on earth and that a heaven or paradise awaits the good while punishment awaits the bad. "Heaven" is described variously as a place of endless love, joy and fellowship with God and others. On the other hand, "hell" is

characterized by the absence of love and a dominion of selfishness, pettiness, guilt and vengeance. Both the promise and the threat of the afterlife can provide significant motivation toward a moral life.

"Heaven" in the World's Religions

-- here are numerous heavens, hierarchically arranged and inhabited by joyous, long-lived, but ultimately mortal beings known as "gods" and "demi-gods." There are also heaven-like realms, usually called Pure Lands, where the Enjoyment Body—an exalted body composed of light—of an enlightened being resides. This heaven is itself made of light that arises from that being's enlightened wisdom: it has no independent existence without his or her presence there.

– Buddhism

Heaven is a place where the redeemed go to receive the reward of eternal companionship with God. It is depicted as being filled with mansions and golden streets. A new heaven and new earth will be formed after the final judgment (Baptist view). Heaven is dwelling in perfect holiness and joy with God; little is said about the nature

of the next world because both heaven and hell are indescribable (Presbyterian view). "Heaven" designates a condition rather than a place: eternal fullness of life, supreme happiness flowing from intimacy with God (Roman Catholic view).

– Christianity

The most ancient sacred texts of the Hindus, the Vedas, speak of the journey of the "soul" to the heavenly realm of the ancestors. Later texts describe two paths that the departed soul may take: the path of the ancestors, which leads to rebirth, and the path of the gods, which leads to liberation from rebirth. For those who take the path of the ancestors, heaven is a temporary place for the soul to enjoy the fruits of his or her good actions performed while on earth. When their merit is exhausted, their desires drag them back to earth and to rebirth.

– Hinduism

Heaven is described as a "Garden" having several layers (usually seven), with the highest being directly under God's throne. Souls there are content and are able to gaze into the face of God.

– Islam

Heaven is a place where anxiety and travail are ended. Some sages have said that quiet, peaceful intellectual activity takes place and the mysteries of life are solved there. To live a praiseworthy life is of greater importance to the Jew than is seeking Heaven.

– Judaism

Heaven is called garo-demana ("the house of song") or wahisht ("best place"). Heaven is regarded as a garden of delight where souls dwell in peace and joy, enjoying warmth and pleasure until the resurrection.

- Zoroastrianism

Potential Significance of a Belief in the Afterlife

❖ Can enhance moral development

❖ Provides motivation to check one's actions

❖ Less attachment to body and material things

❖ Establishes priority on loving relationships and service

Belief in an afterlife can enhance moral development since it conveys a sense of the long-term consequences of our actions. It influences our orientation. Those who anticipate a continued existence after physical death tend to be less attached to the body and to material things. Instead of focusing on external accomplishments, they place priority on loving relationships and service to humanity.

Regardless of how rewards or punishments will be meted out, a belief in the afterlife gives moral significance to our actions. This point is made in the scriptures of most of the world's religions. As Sikh literature asserts, "Heaven is not attained without good deeds."[5] The Bhagavad Gita declares, "No one who does good deeds will ever come to a bad end, either here or in the world to come."[6] Therefore, there is encouragement for the believer to live a moral life.

Of course, the impact of belief on moral behavior depends on the depth and intensity of that belief. When people come face to face with their mortality, their instinctive reaction is to cherish their loved ones and the simple joys of earthly life. Contemplating the afterlife brings the meaning of earthly life into high relief. There is conclusive evidence of this point in the studies of those who report near-death experiences.

Substantial numbers of people have reported curiously similar "near-death" experiences. A report in the British medical journal Lancet concludes that such accounts are valid.· Researchers studied 344 patients in the in ten hospitals in the Netherlands who were successfully resuscitated after suffering cardiac arrest. About 12 percent of these patients reported "near-death" experiences, such as seeing lights at the end of tunnels or being able to speak to dead relatives or friends. Most had excellent recall of the events, discounting theories that such memories are false.

Lead researcher Pim van Lommel said the study suggests that researchers investigating consciousness should look beyond cells and molecules. Even when the brain is not showing signs of electrical activity, it is possible that a person can still be conscious. Many people describe seeing their own bodies from a distance, as though watching a movie. Others say they felt themselves rushing toward a brilliant light.

The idea that consciousness may somehow exist independently of matter is significant. Traditionally, one of the strongest arguments against life after death has been the observation that spirit is at the mercy of matter. Mental functions appear to cease when the brain dies. The body and its nervous system seem to be the fuel or cause; and consciousness as a non-material function seems to be the effect. If the cause is removed, the effect goes away. However, the Netherlands study concluded that consciousness can continue even after brain death; thus, consciousness rather than matter appears to be the cause. Some of the remarkable testimonies of patients with near-death

experiences (such as the account in the accompanying box) were validated by the research team.

A Remarkable Report after Resuscitation

The British medical journal Lancet reported the following out-of-body experience of a resuscitated patient.

During the night an ambulance brought to the hospital coronary care unit a 44-year-old man who had been found by passersby in a meadow about an hour before. He was in a coma and his skin had turned blue. Initially he was given artificial respiration, a heart massage, and treated with a defibrillator. He did not respond, so a breathing tube was inserted. A coronary care nurse reported what happened next:

"When we want to intuhate the patient, he turns out to have dentures in his mouth. I remove these upper dentures and put them onto the 'crash car.' Meanwhile, we continue extensive CPR. After about an hour and a half the patient has sufficient heart rhythm and blood pressure, but he is still ventilated and intubated, and he is still comatose. He is transferred to the intensive care unit to continue the necessary artificial respiration."

After more than a week, the same nurse was distributing medication on the cardiac ward, where she met the patient, who was recovering. The moment he saw her he said, "That nurse knows where my dentures are." To her surprise he stated: "Yes, you were there when I was brought into hospital and you took my dentures out of my mouth and put them onto that car, it had all these bottles on it and there was this sliding drawer underneath and there you put my teeth."

The nurse was amazed, remembering that this had happened while the man was in a deep coma. She investigated and reported: "It appeared the man had seen himself lying in bed, that he had perceived from above how nurses and doctors had been busy with CPR. He was also able to describe correctly and in detail the small room in which he had been resuscitated as well as the appearance of those present like myself. At the time that he observed the situation lie had been very much afraid that we would stop CPR and that he would die. And it is true that we had been very negative about the patient's prognosis due to his very poor medical condition when admitted. The patient tells me that he desperately and unsuccessfully tried to make it clear to us that he was still alive and that we should continue CPR. He is deeply impressed by his experience and says he is no longer afraid of death. Four weeks later he left hospital as a healthy man."

Whether or not we believe in the validity of near-death experiences, it is interesting to note that a strengthened belief in the afterlife has significant implications for the subsequent priorities and behavior of those who had the experience. The Dutch researchers found that people who had such experiences reported marked changes in their personalities compared with those who had come near death, but had not had those experiences. They seemed to have lost their fear of death and become more compassionate, loving people. In the words of the report, people with near-death experiences "had become more emotionally vulnerable and empathic, and often there was evidence of increased intuitive feelings. Most of this group did not show any fear of death and strongly believed in an afterlife."

So far, we have concluded that religion can be a powerful force for good in our world. Beliefs that are held in common by all of the world's religions are significant influences on moral behavior, and the moral behavior of individuals and communities in turn makes a vital contribution to the well-being of society as a whole. But perhaps the greatest contribution of religion is in the way it expands our sense of connectedness to the larger world.

[1] Nicholas Stinnett, "Strong Families." In James M. Henslin, Ed., Marriage and Family in a Changing Society (New York: Free Press, 1992), p. 185.

[2] James M. Henslin, Ed., Marriage and Family in a Changing Society (New York: Free Press, 1992), p. 302.

Ronald M. Green, "Religious Ritual: A Kantian Perspective," Journal of Religious Ethics, 7:2 (1979), pp. 41-53; and Ronald M. Green, Religion and Moral Reason: A New Method for Comparative Study (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[4] Arnold Toynbee, "The Meaning of History for the Soul," Civilization on Trial. Ch. XIII (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948).

[5] Adi Granth, Ramkali-ki-Var, M.1, p. 952.

[6] Bhagavad Gita 6.40-41.

Pim van Lommel, Ruud van Wees, Vincent Meyers, and Ingrid Elfferich, "Near-death Experience in Survivors of Cardiac Arrest: A Prospective Study in the Netherlands." Lancet Vol. 358, No 9298, December 15, 2001.

PART 3 — Religion and a Universal Ethic

Religion has made a valuable contribution in expanding our concept of "community." Robert Bellah and his co-authors of *The Good Society* point out that when we care only about our circle of our family and friends, or people with skin the same color as ours, or our own nation, we do not contribute much to an improved world community. Furthermore, when we care only about human beings, we do not treat the natural world with the respect it deserves. The authors note that it is not easy for any of us to override our mistrust and to act responsibly in the universal community. It is only in "critical moments" that we ask about ultimate causes and examine the extent of our interactions. Only then do we begin to see that the boundaries of our life cannot be drawn in space or time. Religious experiences open our awareness of participating in that boundless world:

"We can indeed try genuinely to attend to the world around us and to the meanings we discover as we interact with that world, and hope to realize in our own experience that we are part of a universal community, making sense of our lives as deeply connected to each other. As we enlarge our attention to include the natural universe and the ultimate ground that it expresses and from which it comes, we are sometimes swept with a feeling of thankfulness, of grace, to be able to participate in a world that is both terrifying and exquisitely beautiful. At such moments we feel like celebrating the joy and mystery we participate in. Religions at their best help us focus that urge to celebrate so that it will include all the meanings we can encompass. The impulse toward larger meaning, thankfulness, and celebration has to have an institutional form, like all the other central organizing tendencies in our lives, so that we do not dissipate it in purely private sentiment."'

Can religious belief really provide a basis for an ethic that promotes unity rather than division? Of course, religions have very different conceptual frames of reference. However, ethics are more related to behavior than metaphysics. Hans Kung argues that ethics are concerned with what should or

should not be done in daily life. "And with reference to this praxis, people who are religious in the best sense of the word from the various religions have always found and understood each other."[2]

The move toward genuine religious dialog and cooperation began relatively recently but has moved forward. The Roman Catholic Church, for example, first blessed tolerance as a civic virtue in the 1960s, at the close of the Second Vatican Council. Each of the great religions has created, almost from its inception, a colorful spectrum of voices that range from pacifist to terrorist. But each religion holds within it the potential for development and adaptation. These developments have many digressions, but the development is almost inevitably from exclusiveness towards inclusiveness and from militancy towards peace. With occasional steps sideways and backwards, each religion learns over the ages that it must find a way to live with the offshoots it considers heretical and with other religions. It cannot engage the whole world except in love.

But what should be the focus of such interreligious dialogue? What is the practical basis for a common focus? Islamic scholar Muzammil Siddiqi argues that that goal should be nothing less than a global ethic:

> "I believe that religious dialogue is a supremely ethical enterprise. The objective of such dialogue is not only to learn the facts about other people, their faiths and traditions but also to clear the world community of prejudice and misunderstanding and to establish human fellowship based on fairness, justice, and goodwill. Religious dialogue should help us take practical steps toward establishing a global ethics that will bring about social, economic, and political justice as well as ecological balance and responsibility."[3]

I believe that religious dialogue is a supremely ethical enterprise. The objective of such dialogue is not only to learn the facts about other people but also to clear the world community of prejudice and misunderstanding and to establish human fellowship.
Muzammil Siddiqi

Values Emphasized by Each Religion

Religions shape civilization through promoting moral values and transmitting them from one generation to the next. Each religious tradition emphasizes certain ideals that have broad appeal. It is possible to cherish and uphold the ideals of one's own tradition, while acknowledging the admirable ideals of others and learning from them.

One way to create a moral common ground for a harmonious world culture is to view each religion as having something to offer to the entire world. The following list of ideals promoted by various traditions offers a starting point for such an enterprise:

African traditional religions – communal solidarity

Buddhism - self-discipline, compassion

Christianity - faith, sacrificial love

Confucianism - personal integrity, family responsibilities, ethical social order

Hinduism - understanding and development of the inner self

Islam - obedience to God, harmony among races

Jainism - nonviolence, respect for life

Judaism - ethical monotheism, divine guidance

Native American religions - harmony between human beings and the natural world

Shamanism - harmony between the spiritual world and the physical world

Shintoism - inner harmony, sincerity

Sikhism - elimination of barriers between various socioeconomic groups

Taoism - balance among the vital forces of nature

For four decades, Dr. Sun Myung Moon has committed his energy and resources to the effort to establish common ground among religions as the basis for a God-centered, pluralistic society. He believes that that common ground lies in articulating practical solutions to social problems. "Godism," as he calls this approach, calls on each religious community to rededicate itself to the fulfillment of its highest ideals. This paves the way for religious communities to serve one another as part of a harmonious whole in pursuit of the common ideal of world peace.

Up until now, democratic societies have been accommodating religious pluralism by establishing a secular common ground. This fosters civility but at the sacrifice of religious belief. However, the cost is high. Without religious values, society does not provide the nourishment that can sustain civilization. Only religious values bring out the highest qualities in people and allow them to fulfill their purpose in life.

Godism calls for the return of religion to the center of public life. In particular, Dr. Moon has called for the participation of the world's religions in the United Nations. How, he asks, can the United Nations effectively mediate in world conflicts without acknowledging and addressing the religious undercurrents that characterize many of them?

Renewing the United Nations to Build Lasting Peace

Excerpts from Sun Myung Moon's address at the United Nations on August 18, 2000:

When we witness the many global tragedies occurring around us, we should recognize how critically important it is that the religions come together, dialogue with one another, and learn to embrace one another. In the modern age, in most nations, religious ideals have come to hold a place wholly separate from the centers of secular political power, and most people have come to accept this reality as the way things ought to be. I believe, however, that it is time that international organizations whose purpose is to support the ideal of world peace reconsider their relationship with the great religious traditions of the world.

I believe there is an urgent need today, within the United Nations and through its many activities, to encourage mutual respect and increased cooperation between the world's political and religious leaders.

The time has come for religion to renew itself and manifest true leadership in the world. People of faith should feel responsibility for the plight, suffering and injustices experienced by the world's peoples. Religious people have not been good examples in the practice of love and living for the sake of others, and for this reason should engage in deep self-reflection. It is time for religious people to repent for their preoccupation with individual salvation and narrow denominational interests. Such practices have prevented religious bodies from giving their utmost to the cause of world salvation. Our age more than any other demands that we go beyond our faiths, and the interests of particular religions, and put our love and ideals into practice for the sake of the world. In particular, God calls upon us leaders, especially religious leaders, in hope that we will stand against the injustices and evils of the world, and bestow His true love upon the world. Hence, all people of faith must become one in heart in order to give full expression, both in words and actions, to God's passionate desire for humanity's restoration and peace.

World peace can be fully accomplished only when the wisdom and efforts of the world's religious leaders, who represent the internal concerns of the mind and conscience, work cooperatively and respectfully with national leaders who have much practical wisdom and worldly experience about the external reality or "body." In this light, it is time for us to give serious consideration even to the prospect of restructuring the United Nations. For example, perhaps it is possible to envision the United Nations as a bicameral institution. The existing United Nations structure, composed of national representatives, may be regarded as a congress where the interests of each member nation are represented. However, I submit that serious consideration should be given to forming a religious assembly, or council of religious representatives within the structure of the United Nations. This assembly or council would consist of respected spiritual leaders in fields such as religion, culture, and education. Of course, the members of this inter-religious assembly will need to have demonstrated an ability to transcend the limited interests of individual nations and to speak for the concerns of the entire world and humanity at large. The two chambers, working together in mutual respect and cooperation, will be able to make great advances in ushering in a world of peace. The wisdom and vision of great religious leaders will substantially supplement the political insight, experience and skill of the world's political leaders.

Godism seeks to reverse the trend that has relegated religious values to the private sphere. For this to happen, it will be essential for the individual religions to transcend their exclusive claims and acknowledge the values that they share in common. Modern prophets envision the day when interreligious dialogue will indeed bear fruit in a global ethic that supports and strengthens moral education.

' Robert Bellah, Richard Madsen, William Sullivan, Ann Swidler and Steven Tipton, The Good Society (New York: Random House, 1991).

 Hans Kung and Jurgen Moltmann, Eds., The Ethics of World Religions and Human Rights (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), p. 118.

3 Muzammil Siddiqi, "Global Ethics and Dialogue among World Religions: An Islamic Viewpoint," Ethics Religion and the Good Society: New Directions in a Pluralistic World (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), p. 178.

Conclusion

Despite the challenges of Enlightenment thought and the gradual secularization of society, religion continues to play a vital role in modern life, providing answers to the ultimate questions that people ask concerning the meaning of existence. Such questions define our humanity. They are, as Huston Smith has stated, "the determining substance of what makes human beings human."

In a world of conflicting religious voices and texts, each claiming to speak from the divine point of view, the path to meaning is sometimes clouded, but the International Educational Foundation believes that it is still possible to present our young people with a moral education that avoids promoting the interests of one religion at the expense of other religions. The key is to emphasize universal values.

IEF emphasizes the need for cultivating heart and conscience in addition to educating the intellect, which was overemphasized in the twentieth century. Based upon the teachings of Dr. Sun Myung Moon, the two-volume curriculum *My Journey in Life* is an attempt to meet this need.

By teaching universal principles and values, the first volume, *A Student Textbook for Character Development,* seeks to help young teenagers develop their heart and character, emphasizing the importance of mind/body unity, the development of the conscience, and sexual purity. In support of this, the volume includes the moral and ethical teachings of the world's great religious traditions, which are at the root of most of the world's cultures.

With lesson themes such as "What Kind of Person Should I Become?" "What to Live for?" and "The Challenge of Life," the text engages pupils in internalizing fundamental values that are at the center of good character. In this way the curriculum seeks to help young people develop the inner strength to resist negative peer pressure and other detrimental influences.

This volume on character development challenges the student to examine the principles and values that constitute a meaningful life. It offers a framework of three basic life goals: becoming persons of mature character, establishing loving

relationships and family, and caring for and contributing to the natural and human environment. Young people who aspire to these life goals are empowered to resist the appeals of drugs, crime and promiscuous sex. Ultimately, socially destructive influences will be overcome only when people focus on an achievable alternative that speaks to their most fundamental hopes and dreams in life.

The second volume, *A Student Textbook for Developing Loving Relationships,* is written for older teenagers. It focuses on human relationships, particularly in preparation for marriage and family. Topics include human sexuality, marriage, family, conflict resolution and social responsibility. It also covers challenges such as divorce, single parent families, alcoholism and experiencing rejection. The book features marriage and family traditions in the world's religions to demonstrate that there are basic universal norms for human love and its sexual expression. In this way, students can develop their vision of a realistic ideal for their relationships and future marriage while being aware of the pitfalls along the way. Thus, the two volumes of *My Journey in Life* affirm the role of the great religious traditions in promoting moral education.

It is not the purpose of the current series of presentations, *Searching for Life's True Purpose,* to give religious perspectives on all aspects of moral education. However, this presentation explores two areas of congruence in the teachings of the major world religions: Ultimate Reality and an afterlife. When it focuses on universal values, religion has a vital role in moral education even in pluralistic societies. The curriculum *My Journey in Life* can serve as a model.

Objectives for Presenters

During the course of the presentation, the presenter should:

Make every effort to engage the audience. This means moving the heart as well as stimulating the intellect. As much as possible, the presentation should be a dynamic interaction between the presenter and the audience.

Make the presentation one harmonious whole. During the course of the presentation, the audience should be able to see how each slide leads into the next. The presentation should be understood as one entity rather than a series of unconnected statements and ideas.

Always be aware of the salient points of each slide and make those points clear. Supporting information should be concisely presented and clearly connected to the main points.

Encourage the audience to reflect personally on the content. This presentation seeks to awaken people to the need to give young people moral and ethical guidance. At the conclusion of the presentation, the audience should have a deeper understanding of how religion can guide and reinforce moral education. As a result, people may feel empowered to exert a substantial positive influence on the youth with whom they come into contact.

Before the presentation, the presenter may look for recent news stories about the relationship between religion and moral education. Whenever possible, the presenter should meet with members of the audience. Since interactive learning has so much potential, the presenter can try to elicit audience response during the presentation.

Immediately prior to making the presentation, the presenter should reflect on the significance and meaning of the content. When the presenter is newly enthused about the content, then there is a greater likelihood that the audience will also respond with enthusiasm. The presenter may choose to reflect on some of these key points:

Religion can be a central motive for leading a moral life.

Religion provides us with orientation and centering.

Shared values can be a powerful framework for unity.

Ideally, moral education strikes a balance between love and rules.

Science does not satisfy the deeper questions about the meaning of life.

When disaster strikes, religions are more likely to find a unifying purpose.

Religion calls people to personal morality, but religious people are not always moral, and moral people are not always religious.

Religious people often actively promote the good of their community.

Our understanding of Ultimate Reality shapes our view of the world and our place in it.

The experience of God as a loving and benevolent parent has a profound positive impact.

Belief in people's potential to reflect their origin in an Absolute Being provides a model for moral development.

Belief in God's existence strengthens people's moral resolve.

Belief in the afterlife conveys a sense of the long-term consequences of one's actions.

Religious experiences can expand the boundaries of people's awareness.

Each religion has the potential for development and adaptation.

For a God-centered pluralistic society to exist, religions need to find a common ground.

Interreligious dialogue and interaction can bear fruit in a global ethic.

ABOUT THE INTERNATIONAL EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION (IEF)

The International Educational Foundation is a nonsectarian, nonprofit organization fim.inded in 1990 by Dr. and Mrs. Sun Myung Moon to promote moral and ethical education among people ofall ages. To that end, the four main objectives of IEF are:

To cultivate heart and character through a balanced approach to education that integrates the best of Eastern and Western, spiritual and material, and traditional and contemporary values.

To address youth issues such as abstinence education and drug abuse prevention with a heart-centered approach to character development and an ethic focused on pure love.

To empower families through marriage and parenting education that upholds the family as the seedbed of virtue and the school of love.

To promote civic responsibility and foster a culture of peace through teaching about conflict resolution and encouraging volunteerism that reaches across boundaries such as race, religion, ethnicity and nationality.

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Religions have always played a significant role as moral teachers, instructing their adherents in normative issues of right and wrong. A familiar expression of this role is seen in the great codes of conduct set forth by many of the historic religious traditions, ranging from the Ten Commandments of the Bible to the Five Precepts of Buddhism. The fact that the teachings of widely separated traditions contain so many similar rules testifies to the underlying moral rationality of human religiousness. This volume considers this relationship between religion and moral behavior and asserts that religion, despite a history of division, may yet provide the basis for a global ethic.

Not to do any evil, to cultivate good, to purify one's mind
—this is the teaching of the Buddhas.
BUDDHISM · *Dhammapada 183*

The superior man by determined good conduct nourishes his virtue.
CONFUCIANISM · *I Ching 4: Immaturity*

By the soul, and Him who perfected it and inspired it with conscience of what is wrong for it and right for it: He is indeed successful who causes it to grow, and he is indeed a failure who stunts it.
ISLAM · *Qur'an 91.7-10*

Train yourself in godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.
CHRISTIANITY · *1 Timothy 4.7-8*

He who carries out one good deed acquires for himself one advocate in his own behalf, and he who commits one transgression acquires one accuser against himself. Repentance and good works are like a shield against calamity.
JUDAISM · *Mishnah, Abot 4.13*

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