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(Yannoulatos)

Archbishop of Tirana, Durres and All Albania

Coexistence

PEACE, NATURE, POVERTY, TERRORISM, VALUES

(Religious Perspectives)

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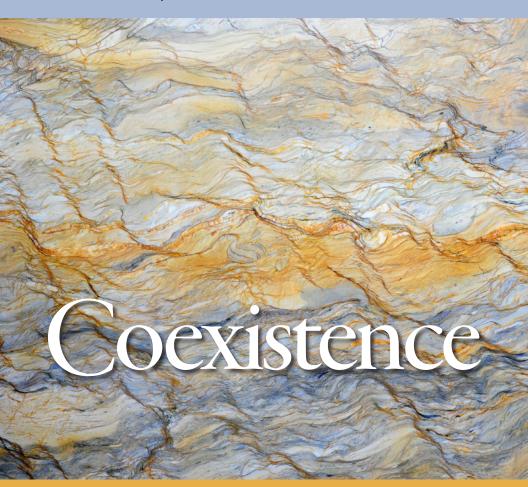### (Religious Perspectives)

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Translated by John Chryssavgis

World Council of Churches

C O E X I S T E N C E
Peace, Nature, Poverty, Terrorism, Values (Religious Perspectives)

ANASTASIOS (YANNOULATOS), Archbishop of Tirana, Durres and All Albania

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Praise for the Book

On awarding this book the prestigious 2016 Free Thought Essay Award in memory of Panagiotis Foteas in Greece, the selection committee explained their decision as follows:

"This book contains essays dealing with universal issues of momentous significance: peace, environment, poverty, and terrorism. Its approach to fundamental principles and global values is innovative and authentic, inspiring and scholarly.

The Archbishop's writing is uniquely reflective and profoundly spiritual, communicating a vibrant and lucid, comprehensive and evocative quality, far removed from the indifference and mediocrity of his contemporaries.

Archbishop Anastasios is an acclaimed personality of international authority, highly respected for his diverse ministry, for the restoration of the Church in Albania from ruins as well as for his diverse missionary and social outreach."

Contents

Foreword

Coexistence has constituted a fundamental element of human life since the dawn of history. Originally, it was found in smaller groups, like families and tribes; later, it marked larger communities, such as nations and peoples; and gradually, it served Nation states and multi-ethnic empires or commonwealths on various continents. The necessity to encounter and communicate with other people, to create relationships with one's fellow human beings, has always been a reality. At the same time, it has proved to offer an exceptional advantage, multiplying the potential of individuals, groups, and nations, and leading to their creative harmony.

Coexistence is no simple matter. It is often undermined and poisoned. Its diminishment or dissolution is normally due to the virus of egocentrism – individual or collective – that manifests itself in various ways. In order to achieve peaceful coexistence among diverse human groups, it became necessary to define fundamental values, institute rules, and adopt laws and legislation. Despite these, however, in every time and place, there were violations. These resulted in deprivation, suffering, and devastating warfare for millions of people. The human race still sighs from the history of bloody conflicts between individuals and nations. Injustice, corruption, and poverty have continued to destroy the harmonious coexistence of human beings. Indeed, in recent decades, violence has assumed new dimensions, culminating in multiform terrorism evoked by religious or political motives.

Human aggression has extended to exploitation and even disdain for creation, with painful consequences for both the natural environment and human life itself. The proper rhythmical coexistence of humanity and creation has degenerated in modern times from a divinely endowed blessing to a fragile and even disastrous relationship.

The great religions that have influenced the civilization of various peoples have formulated principles concerning these problems. The essays of this collection view through a religious lens the following global issues: peace in its global dimension and in the context of a specific nation; the human being and nature; poverty; contemporary terrorism; and universal values.

These chapters were originally delivered as lectures in various academic settings and published in special volumes. Some of the ideas and clarifications pertaining to the viewpoints of various religions are repeated throughout this book, since the lectures were addressed to different audiences. We have deemed it preferable to reprint these studies in a single publication in the hope that they might contribute to the ongoing global pursuit of these ideas within the multiplicity of contemporary theological and religious forms.

The development of science and the spectacular application of technology – such as, for example, digital media – have accelerated a universal and mutual influence, namely the global coexistence of people and nations. Whether we like it or not, they reinforce what we call globalization. We all have a duty not to surrender to passive observation and description of the consequences of a globalization of corruption, injustice, and violence. On the contrary, we should strive for a globalization of peace, solidarity, and love. Many may dismiss this as utopian. Nevertheless, it is the vision, desire, and struggle of those who continue to believe in the vital need for universal harmonious coexistence. This does not imply the elimination of cultural particularity among peoples, but rather the creative development of diverse gifts among people and nations.

The ultimate goal is not just any kind of coexistence, but a harmonious cohabitation that contributes to the organic unity of

humankind. The final aim is not simply the accumulation of individuals, like countless grains of sand on a vast seashore beaten by the waves of the ocean. It is, rather, the organic coexistence of cells, whose particular characteristics contribute to the further development of the universality and totality of the world.

Blessed are they who labor for:

- Peace in their region and wherever peace is threatened
- Tangible respect for the natural environment
- Reduction and annihilation of poverty
- Condemnation of violence and the obliteration of terrorism
- The prevalence of spiritual values that culminate in love.

Blessed are they who labor for harmonious coexistence in their immediate environment, their land, and the entire world.

+ Anastasios
Archbishop of Tirana, Durres
and All Albania
Tirana, September 2015

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Voices of Peace from the Lungs of Religions

The eleventh of September 2001, brought to the world's attention in the most tragic manner another aspect of the nuclear power contained in religious emotion, when energized by anger and long-term sociopolitical assertions. Upon studying the details of the tragic attacks, we can identify the presence of a clear religious vein that empowered the actions of the protagonists.

Despite the diverse motivations which many people have for the invocation of religious sentiment, it is evident that religious conscience and the role of individual religions are, in the beginning of the twenty-first century, once again acknowledged as a fundamental parameter for peace.

I Concrete Religion

In Greek, alongside the word θρησκεία, or *religion*, there is also the term θρήσκευμα, or *concrete religion*, denoting the specific shape assumed by religion among particular peoples and in particular regions. With regard to defining religion, we observe some degree of diversity. In general, we can define religion as a dynamic system of beliefs, convictions, experiences, and principles of conduct related to the Transcendent, Sacred, and Holy, the Supreme Reality, that perennially influences human existence and society. Through such systems, historically formed as social institutions, human beings strive to respond to the deeper, existential questions of life.

1. Religions Based on Universal Harmony

Let us explore in greater detail some of the characteristic contours of the first group of concrete religions that developed around the

notion of universal harmony in the world. These include Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism, all of which emerged from India and China.

a) Hinduism The multifaceted Hindu religious tradition of the Indians contains in smaller scale most of the categories of religious experience. Many Hindu texts emphasize inner silence and peace. In the Atharva-Veda,[1] we read: "Peace be to earth and to the airy spaces! Peace be to heaven, peace to the waters, peace to the plants and peace to the trees! May all the Gods grant to me peace! By this invocation of peace may peace be diffused! By this invocation of peace may peace bring peace! . . . with this peace all evil I now appease so that peace may prevail, happiness prevail! May everything for us be peaceful!" (19: 9; 14). And the classic Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad Gita*,* states: "God is established in the hearts of all beings. . . . In every way, seek refuge in him alone. Through his blessings, you will attain supreme tranquility (peace) and the eternal abode" (18: 61–62).[2]

Today, Hinduism boasts many schools and sects, which interpret and expound upon Hindu positions with great flexibility. One distinguished scholar of Sanskrit and the Vedanta philosophical school, Swami Dayananda Saraswati, explains: "The Bhagavad Gita describes a mature person as 'one who is entirely free from hatred toward any being and whose love and compassion embraces all beings'" (12:13).

"We opened the new millennium with many hopes and expectations for change," notes Sri Mata Amritanandamayi Devi, a contemporary Hindu leader. "The inner change must occur within us. For it is only when conflict and denial flee from within, that we can truly play a role in establishing peace."

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1. Quotations from the Athara-Veda are from *Hinduism: The Vedic Experience: Mantramanjari*, Panikkar, Raimon and Paven, C. Milena ed. (Maryknoll, New York, USA: Orbis Books, 2016).

2. Quotations from the Bhagavad Gita are from *The Bhagavad Gita*, trans. Bibek Debroy (Gurugram, India: Penguin Books, 2005).

b) Jainism Another very ancient Indian religious system that passionately supports the avoidance of violence (*ahimsa*), is Jainism, which, it should be noted, rejects any belief in gods or God. *Ahimsa* (nonviolence), as the lack of causing injury, is not only an ethical goal for Jainists, but also a metaphysical principle that determines the way to redemption.

"Tolerance is, in the ultimate analysis, the only way to unshackle humanity from egocentric pride and prejudice, from hatred and violence, from racial discrimination, and religious fanaticism,"[3] writes the Jainist L. M. Singhvi.

c) Buddhism Buddhism exercised, and continues to exercise, a very large influence on millions of people of various countries. All Buddhist schools emphasize with marked clarity and vigor the concept of inner peace and, by extension, social peace.

An ancient Buddhist scripture, Anguttara Nikaya (nipata 3 sutta 32), states: "This is peaceful, this is sublime, that is, the stilling of all activities, the relinquishing of all acquisitions, the destruction of craving, dispassion, cessation, nibbana (*nirvana*)."[4] *Nirvana* means the supreme good because it is the absolute end of all impulse and passion caused by evil. (See Dhammapada 96). "Wise people, after they have listened to the laws, become serene, like a deep, smooth, and still lake."[5]

Buddhism is monasticism *par excellence* and normally refers to the inner life of the monk. The Sutta Nipata explains: "It is internally that he should achieve peace; a bhikkhu (monk) should not seek peace through another." (Sn IV 14.5).[6] In our age, the style of

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3. L. M. Singhvi, quoted in Vartan Gregorian, *Islam: A Mosaic, Not a Monolith* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2003), 127.

4. Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Anguttara Nikaya* (Boston, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 2012).

5. Müller, Max, trans., *The Dhammapada: The Sacred Books of the East*, Vol. 10 (New York: Routledge Taylor and Francis Group, 2013), 82. See also Anguttara Nikaya 3, 34.

6. Bhikkhu Bohi, trans., *The Teachings of the Buddha, The Suttanipata* (Sommerville, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 2017).

speaking of the Buddhist leaders has successfully adapted to the pacifistic language. In the words of Chiko Iwagami, former chairman of the Japan Buddhist Federation: "The basis for Buddhist realization of peace does not lie in the balancing of powers but in overcoming our natural instinct to think in terms of 'us and them.'"[7]

An incident from the life of the Buddha is characteristic of the absolute denial of any use of violence. A general and his army from the neighboring kingdom of Kosala approached Kapilavastu, capital of the Shakyas. After meeting with the Buddha, the general decided not to invade Kapilavastu and ordered his army to retreat. This happened on two occasions. On the general's third attempt, the Buddha's disciple Moggallana recommended that the city resist the invasion, but the Buddha refused. The result was that the invading army obliterated the entire *phratry* (kinship group) of the Shakyas. Thus, the Buddha even forbade the act of self-defense. Nonetheless, his dominant personality and reputation proved unsuccessful in maintaining peace. The Buddha finally formulated a great truth, which is preserved in Dhammapada: "If one man conquer in battle a thousand times a thousand men, and if another conquer himself, he is the greatest of conquerors (103). Elsewhere the same scripture states: "For hatred does not cease by hatred at any time: hatred ceases by love, this is an old rule" (5).

It would be wrong, however, to perceive Buddhists as indifferent to their national interests. During the last century, Buddhist monks adopted significant political and national initiatives. The struggle for peace is very often associated with the desire for independence and the protection of each country's particular identity. In the decade of the 1960s, during the bloody confrontations between governments in North and South Vietnam, Buddhists assumed the initiative of launching a nonviolent campaign in

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7. Chiko Iwagami, *Peace: a Single Goal and a Shared Intention: Forum of Religious Representatives (Vatican City, 23 January 2002), Day of Prayer for Peace (Assisi, 24 January 2002)* (Vatican City: Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 2002), 50

search of a "third way" for a neutral Vietnam that would develop its own political identity (Program of the Buddhist Socialist Block, 1967). Many other people of different faiths and traditions enlisted in this Buddhist movement, which mobilized them for the cause of peace and independence. On 16 May 1967, when a young Buddhist woman Nhat Chi Mai lit herself on fire like "a torch to dissipate the dark,"[8] a Roman Catholic intellectual, Fr Ngouyen Ngots Lan, undertook the responsibility of publishing her letters and poems – a very risky matter.

The current 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, has emphasized that the more we understand the mentality of one another, the more we can learn about one another. He expresses that through this we can more easily acquire respect and tolerance in our lives and in our relationship with others. This will certainly help us to increase peace and friendship throughout the world.

d) Confucianism and Taoism A quick overview of traditional Chinese religions would prove helpful here. The many-faceted teachings of Confucius insist on respect for law and order by all people, while promoting peaceful coexistence in complete symphony with universal harmony as an ideal of human society. Taoism[9] underlines the principle of inner tranquility and its importance for social life. In the Chuang-tzu, Chapter 5, we read: "A man does not seek to see himself in running water, but in still water. For only what is itself still can instill stillness into others."[10] This means that only someone at peace with oneself can be at peace with others.[11]) Another passage, which speaks of various leaders, states: "Simplicity, which has no name, is free of desires. Being free

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8. Quoted by Sallie B. King, "They Who Burned Themselves for Peace: Quaker and Buddhist Self-Immolators During the Vietnam War", *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Vol. 20 (2000) 127.

9. All romanizations follow the Wade-Giles system.

10. Herbert Giles, trans., *Chuang Tzu: Mystic, Moralist, and Social Reformer* (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1889) 58.

11. See also Tao Te Ching 4 and 56

of desires, it is tranquil. And the world will be at peace of its own accord." (Tao Te Ching, Chapter 37)[12] The general guideline of Taoism is the acceptance of the natural flow of things.

2. Monotheistic Religions

The second great religious current is the so-called monotheistic, which derives its source from the historical revelation of God. In addition to Judaism and Christianity, Zoroastrianism (with few followers), Islam, and Sikhism (which integrates Hinduism and Islam) belong to this current.

a) Sikhism In the sacred scripture of Sikhism, Adi Granth, questions about devotion to God and peace in the world assume a prominent place: "Sing, and listen, and let your mind be filled with (God's) love. Your pain shall be sent far away and peace shall come to your home." (Adi Granth, Section 01, *Jup*, Part 02 v. 5). Another passage of the same book reads: "Now is proclaimed the compassionate commandment of the Lord. Let no one cause pain or injustice to another. All of humanity should live in peace" (Adi Granth, Section 05, *Siree Raag*, Part 61 v. 13).[13]

b) Islam Today, there appears to be a special interest in Islamic ideas about peace. The definitive text on this matter is of course the Quran, which for Muslims is the very word of Allah sent identically from heaven. A classic verse from the Quran insists: "And God summons to the Abode of Peace, and He guides whomsoever He will to a straight path" (10:25).[14]

Muslims stress, especially in our day, the verse from the Quran that guarantees the common origin of all people: "Mankind, fear

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12. Wing-Tsit Chan, trans., *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1963) 158.

13. All quotations from the Adi Granth are from *Shri Guru Granth Sahib Khalasa Consensus Translation* (Global Gray, 2018).

14. All quotations from the Quran, unless otherwise noted, are from A. J. Arberry, trans., *The Koran Interpreted: A Translation* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1955).

your Lord, who created you of a single soul, and from it created its mate, and from the pair of them scattered abroad many men and women" (4:1).

The eminent mufti of Syria and Sikh, Ahmed Kuftaro, comments: "Since all people constitute God's family, Islam insists that there must be absolute equality and respect among all human beings. The sole criterion of assessment in Islam is not race, color, ethnic roots, or other individual privileges, but only justice alone." Nonetheless, what is systematically overlooked in such declarations is that Islam accepts these principles predominantly in relation to Muslims.

There are certainly verses in the Quran that refer to peace. The most famous among these is the verse: "making peace is better" (4:128).[15] (Arberry translates this verse as "right settlement is better"). Yet, the context reveals a distinct nuance. Before the above-mentioned beautiful saying, we read: "If a woman fear rebelliousness or aversion in her husband, there is no fault in them if the couple set things right between them; right settlement is better" (4:128).

Some people cite the verse from the Quran that describes the familiar story of Cain and Abel: "Whoso slays a soul not to retaliate for a soul slain, nor for corruption done in the land, shall be as if he had slain mankind altogether; and whoso gives life to a soul, shall be as if he has given life to mankind altogether" (5:32). Those who wish today to condemn terrorism isolate the first part of the verse: "whoever murders someone who has not committed any murder"; whereas those who regard terrorism as resistance to exploitation may invoke the next phrase: "or has not corrupted the land."

In our age, a number of Muslim intellectuals avoid referring to passages in the Quran that speak of "holy war" or jihad. (In Arabic, the word is in the masculine gender.) Nevertheless, they persist with equal vehemence on the revealed validity of their sacred text,

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15. This quotation is from the translation by two 14th century scholars, Muhammad Muhsin Khan and Muhammad Taqi-ud-Din Al-Hilali.

encouraging an aggressive treatment of the "unbelievers." Thus, for example: "When you meet the unbelievers, smite their necks, then, when you have made wide slaughter among them, tie fast the bonds. . . . O believers, if you help God (in his battle against unbelievers), He will help you, and confirm your feet" (47:4; 7). Still, many Muslim scholars have attributed a broader significance to jihad and holy war, relating it to a protest against abuses by Muslim leaders. However, the classic meaning of this commandment remains forceful. Those nations outside the dominion of Islam are labeled "House of War" (*Dar al Harb*), in contrast to nations within called the "House of Islam" (*Dar al Islam*). Throughout history, it is well known that the impetus of holy war galvanized Islam in periods of its expansion. Today, moderate Muslims emphasize that these passages from the Quran must be considered and interpreted in their historical context: namely, with a view to when, why, and to what end they were spoken.

c) Judaism Inasmuch as many contemporary Jewish ideas are based on the Old Testament, in general terms they concur with similar ideas in Christianity. However, since the Jewish people reject the New Testament, they remain absorbed in an Israel-centered viewpoint. Later books of Judaism also underline the importance of peace. For instance, the Talmud states: "The whole Torah (law) is peace. And to whom do I give it? To the nation which loves peace!"[16] The conventional greeting among practicing Jews is the word "*shalom*," which as a salutation and aspiration encapsulates all things good, in contrast to all things evil. It signifies not merely the absence of war and turmoil, but also blessing, glory, abundance, leisure, salvation, and life.

Modern representatives of Judaism express their opinions in statements at official interfaith gatherings. Thus, the Israeli chief rabbi Meir Lau writes: "For let all people walk everyone in the name of his god, and we will walk in the name of the Lord our God

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16. Yalkut Shimoni, Yithro 273, translation taken from Richard H. Schwartz, *Judaism and Global Survival* (New York: Lantern Books, 2002) 19.

forever and ever." (Micah 4) ... Everyone has his way of serving the Almighty, but one way is common and must be common for all mankind, all the believers of all the religions, especially the brother of the monotheistic faith. Peace, friendship, understanding, listening to one another, even though we do not agree with everything. In spite of all obstacles and differences to overcome obstacles and differences we have to speak, we have to listen."[17]

The well-known rabbi Israel Singer emphasized: "When we fought, we looked to our Scriptures not as the justification for war but as the religious basis for our actions. The Bible is replete with God's injunctions to the Jews to do battle against their enemies when necessary." Indeed, Rabbi Singer has no difficulty mentioning that there is even a "commandment to wage an ultimate war against the ultimate evil that is represented by Amalek, a war in which no prisoners are taken and all are to be killed." However, he then subdues his tone to conclude: "Military battle is not the core of Judaism. The Jewish Bible, our Oral Law, our Talmud, our midrashim and our rabbinic writings, all stress the importance of peace – both amongst ourselves and with our neighbors."[18]

From what we have gleaned thus far, it is clear that in a study of the peaceful voices emerging from the lungs of religion, we may discern the following: 1) the quest for inner peace; 2) an effort to control human aggression; 3) the pursuit of a peaceful relationship with the Supreme Reality, whether this is conceived as an impersonal or a personal God; 4) the establishment of principles that facilitate peaceful coexistence in a specific social context; and 5) the support for peace in every human community, both limited and broader.

17. Meir Lau, "Speech by Chief Rabbi Israel Meir Lau." *Interreligious Meeting at the Notre Dame Pontifical Institute*, Jerusalem, 23 March 2000.

18. Israel Singer, *Peace: a Single Goal and a Shared Intention: Forum of Religious Representatives (Vatican City, 23 January 2002), Day of Prayer for Peace (Assisi, 24 January 2002)* (Vatican City: Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 2002), 87

3. Christianity

The notion of peace emerges more strongly and clearly in Christianity, which is why it deserves more systematic attention here.

a) Peace is a gift from God. The Greek word for peace (εἰρήνη), which permeates the New Testament and the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament, only partially parallels the Hebrew term for peace (*shalom*).

The supreme Reality or true Being, the Creator and provider of the universe, is revealed in the biblical texts as the God of peace. Peace is not something that human beings can achieve of their own accord, through decisions or actions. Peace always remains a gift of God. But it is a gift that requires the correct attitude from the receiver. First of all, we are obliged to recognize the true source of peace by means of faithful and trusting communication with God in prayer, worship, and observance of His will: "Lord our God, give us peace" (Is. 26:12 LXE).

b) Christ is our peace. In accordance with the gospel, the decisive phase in divine revelation occurs with the incarnation of the Word of God, Jesus Christ. In his person the prophesy of Isaiah about the "Prince of Peace" (9:6) and suffering servant (53:5) is realized. Faithfully adhering to Old Testament tradition that regarded God's presence among His people as the supreme gift of peace (Lev. 26:12; Ezek. 37:26), John the Evangelist perceives the presence of Jesus as the source of peace: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you" is what Christ promises his disciples prior to His passion (John 14:27). And after his resurrection, Christ offers them a new kind of peace: "Peace be with you. . . . Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:19–23). It is a peace established on his victory over death. By receiving the Holy Spirit, the disciples acquire a new authority to overcome sin, which ceaselessly undermines peace in the life of humanity.

St Paul's letters closely connect grace and peace, thereby describing the origin of the latter and determining its relationship with salvation. Christ is "our peace" (Eph. 2:14; see also Col. 1:18–20). Thus, Christ is exalted as the eternal protagonist of reconciliation

and peace in the personal, local, and global dimensions. Therefore, the unshakable inspiration for Christians with regard to overcoming violence and obtaining reconciliation and peace, is derived not only from a collective personal relationship with the historical Jesus, but also from an existential and personal relationship with the ever-present Lord, who is "the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb. 13:8). This is why, as the body of Christ in the world, the Church incessantly prays "for the peace from above" and "for the peace of the whole world."[19]

c) We participate in the peacemaking work of God. The more we are estranged from God, the more we are alienated from peace. And the converse also holds true: The more we are alienated from peace, the more we are estranged from God. This awareness of the inalienable bond between God and peace does not lead believers to some passive expectation of divine intervention in order for peace to prevail on earth. On the contrary, it motivates believers to wholeheartedly participate in the peacemaking work of God. Those who are blessed with inner peace bear the responsibility of becoming peacemakers and reconciling those who live in conflict.

Basil the Great characteristically observes: "I cannot persuade myself that without love to others, and without, as far as rests with me, peaceableness towards all, I can be called a worthy servant of Jesus Christ."[20]

d) Peace and justice are closely associated. False prophets in every age endeavor to appease powerful leaders with arbitrary promises of peace. However, the people of God must be people who "keeps righteousness and keeps truth, supporting truth and preserving peace" (Is. 26:2–3 LXE).

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19. St John Chrysostom, "The Litany of Peace," in *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, at: https://www.goarch.org/-/the-divine-liturgy-of-saint-john-chrysostom

20. St Basil of Caesarea, *Letter 203, To the bishops of the sea coast*, at: https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3202203.htm

From earliest times, Christian thought identified peace and justice. In the expression of Clement of Alexandria, Christians are "a peaceful race" (*Paedagogus* in Minge's Patrologia Graeca 8.428), which is why God loves and adopts them as "soldiers of peace" (*Protrepticus* in Minge's Patrologia Graeca 8.236).

The authentic passion for peace on both local and global levels indicates a sincere desire and drive for justice. It involves a fundamental religious principle that no one can ignore.

e) Inner peace must be given priority. The biblical teaching insists that peace must commence from within: "Be at peace among yourselves" (1 Thess. 5:13). "The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:7). "Live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you" (2 Cor. 13:11). This applies even in environments which are at odds with peace. As far as we possibly can, we are obliged to maintain peaceful relations with all people and at all times: "If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Rom. 12:18). Inner peace radiates as respect for the dignity of all human beings as creatures of God, irrespective of their faith or lack of faith.

f) Love is the foundation of peaceful coexistence. Christian experience has always contended that the essential opposite of peace is not war, but egocentrism – individual or collective – which seeks its own interests, whether personal, social, or religious. It also leads to diminishing others, despising differences, and internal disturbance. The only effective antidote to egocentrism is love.

Thus, the Christian faith and experience offer vision and spiritual power for the continual overcoming of the causes of conflict and the successful negating of egoism. Those who wish to belong to the church of Christ and follow in His footsteps must become agents of peace. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" (Matt. 5:9). "Nothing is comparable to peace," concludes St John Chrysostom.[21]

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21. St John Chrysostom, Homily 36 On Genesis in Minge's Patrologia Graeca 53.335).

The common quest for universal peace can contribute immensely to the approachment of all those who believe in God. "He who seeks after peace, seeks Christ," writes Basil the Great, "because 'he himself is our peace.'"[22] In this perspective, Christians may discern in every human being that sincerely desires and pursues peace not only a companion but also a fellow disciple of Christ and invaluable friend.

II How Religions Can Suppress Violence

After the sudden ambush of September 11, 2001, several ideas and efforts were proposed for ways in which religions might contribute to and promote the suppression of violence.

1. The Importance of Self-Criticism

The first obligation of all religious people in the 21st century is self-criticism. It is crucial no longer to overlook the fact that, in their specific historical expression, religions have repeatedly undermined peace, thereby betraying the deeper peaceful spirit of the healthy religious experience.

Various religious factions have from time to time become embroiled in armed confrontations, promoting religious slogans and contributing to the arousal and perpetuation of diverse clashes. After all, it is not difficult to extract from the texts of various religions material that supports hostility toward individuals or groups outside of one's own religious community. In fact, one can even find material against fellow believers, who may not be in agreement with one's own specific faction. History is replete with such dismal pages. It is time to stop idealizing the past and unilaterally highlighting the errors of other religious communities while overlooking our own.

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22. St Basil of Caesarea, "Homily 16, on Psalm 33," in *Saint Basil: Exegetic Homilies*, trans. Sr Agnes Clare Way, C.D.P. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963), 266.

Objective scholarly research is certainly able to shed light on abuses in the name of religion. Religions neither emerged nor developed in a social vacuum; they do not function as independent entities. They lie in constant interdependence and mutual influence with many other factors: ethnic, racial, social, and financial. They exert influence and are subject to influence. It would be historically untrue and unjust to cast blame solely on religions for what has occurred in the world. Moreover, we must acknowledge that contemporary adherents of various religions are not responsible for the mistakes of previous generations.

2. Calling Forth the Peacemaking Nucleus of Religions

In order to assess the peace-bearing layers that exist in the various religions, the way in which we interpret the fundamental nucleus of each religion is of decisive significance.

Fortunately, today, scholars tend to adopt a methodology of interpretation that advocates peaceful coexistence. Thus, a convergence of opinion is observed on certain basic issues, such as the common origins of all people, as well as the concepts of peace and justice.

Various religious leaders and intellectuals reveal and even champion elements in their traditions that correspond to present demands. This dynamic means that Christian ideals penetrate and flourish in other religious pursuits throughout the world by means of multiple channels. It is crucial for us to concede the power of the Holy Spirit – the Comforter, who is "everywhere present and fills all things" – to influence those born into other faith communities and religious environments as He alone knows best.

3. The Promise of Sincere Interfaith Dialogue

One of the more hopeful legacies bequeathed to us by the 20th century is interfaith dialogue. From 1975 to 1983 I had the opportunity of officially participating in the responsible theological group, entitled "Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies" established by the World Council of Churches. Since 2001,

I have participated in dozens of interfaith gatherings organized by various organizations on the topic of peaceful coexistence and cooperation in the modern world. It has been a challenging affair, and frequently disappointing: every effort has its limitations.

However, serious interfaith dialogue facilitates a better appreciation of fundamental aspects of the religious experience of other peoples and cultures: it is not merely a matter of abstract encounters between religious systems, but of communication among human beings, who share the same human nature.

This does not mean that during these dialogues we remain silent about the particularities of our own faith, or that we shall betray our religious identity. Nonetheless, it is one thing to express our faith and the truths upon which our life is based, and another thing to act or react with aggression, distorting the opinions of our neighbors, and cultivating suspicion and hostility.

Following 11 September 2001, a number of official and unofficial organizations accelerated the organization of interfaith meetings throughout the world. Unfortunately, on many occasions, these events proved to be serial monologues more than substantial dialogues. Nevertheless, I believe that even as simple opportunities to meet one another, these occasions are ultimately helpful. They transmit peaceful notions and proposals on an international level. We must avoid the illusion that there will soon be any comprehensive agreement among representatives of the world's religions. However, the effort and struggle for mutual understanding is quite apparent. These encounters contribute to overcoming misconceptions and misinterpretations, and to exchanging ideas and views that encourage appreciation of the concerns, positions, and arguments of others.

His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew observed boldly and prudently in Brussels on 19 December 2001:

> We know that there are different religious views among us. We do not consider it necessary to have these differences extinguished in order to achieve social peace. We respect our

fellow human beings and their convictions, and it is exactly on this basis that we engage in dialogue and peaceful cooperation with them. . . .

We, the religious leaders, are obliged to lead the peacemaking process and not to follow behind the politicians. Greater still, it is not fitting for us to create obstacles to peace through preaching fanaticism and bigotry.[23]

Some of the ideas and messages from such interfaith meetings include the phrases: "No war is holy; peace alone is holy"[24]; and "A crime committed in the name of religion is a crime against religion."[25]

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23. John Chryssavgis, ed., *In the World, Yet Not of the World: Social and Global Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 84.

24. This phrase was first used by Archbishop Anastasios in 2004 at a service in commemoration of the 3rd anniversary of the terrorist attatcks on September 11th (*Ngjallja*, September 2004, 3–4).

25. *The Bosphorus Declaration*, International Conference on Peace and Tolerance, 9 February 1994, at: https://appealofconscience.org/bosphorus -declaration/

Supporting documents include the Brussels Declaration, which stated: "One major role of religion is to bring the peace of God into the world on a local and global level. It is the responsibility of religious leaders to prevent religious fervor from being used for purposes that are alien to its role. . . . We unanimously reject the assumption that religion contributes to an inevitable clash of civilizations. On the contrary we affirm the constructive and instructive role of religion in the dialogue among civilizations" ("The Peace of God in the World," Towards Peaceful Coexistence and Collaboration among the Three Monotheistic Religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam, 2001, paras. 3,8, at: http://www.orthodoxa.org/GB/patriarchate/documents/BrusselsDeclaration.htm

Also, the Assisi Declaration, the culmination of a day of prayer called by Pope John Paul II, on 24 January 2002, stated noted,: " We commit ourselves to proclaiming our firm conviction that violence and terrorism are incompatible with the authentic spirit of religion, and, as we condemn every recourse to violence and war in the name of God or of religion. . . . We commit ourselves to taking up the cry of those who refuse to be resigned to violence and evil, and we are desire to make every effort possible to offer the men and

In the end, these meetings and their messages suffuse humanity with ideas of reconciliation.

4. Assessing the Power of Other Influences; Remaining Faithful

Surely, we must always remain vigilant so as not to be swept away in any exaggeration of our prospects.

In our age, religions certainly possess significant influence, but they do not determine the decisions of political leaders and economic strategists, or even the criteria of artists, intellectuals, journalists, and all those who ultimately shape common opinion. The broader lay populations of all countries remain more the flock of television stars and multinational corporations than of religious leadership. Religious fading and atheism play central roles on the contemporary world stage; they also share a great portion of responsibility for what is happening on our planet.

This is why it is inappropriate to blame religions for their inability to sustain peace. What remains critical, however, is to continue to ask ourselves whether we as the representatives of religions are in fact faithful to what we claim to believe.

5. Promoting a Peaceful Theology

The values of every religion that contribute to peaceful coexistence should be the object of serious study and reflection both in formal and informal settings of religious scholarship and education.

The younger generation in particular is entitled to a conscientious peaceful education nurtured by religious inspiration. It is crucial that all learning resources about religion be prepared with objectivity throughout the world, without distortions pertaining to the spirit of the other religions.

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women of our time real hope for justice and peace." at: http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/letters/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii_let_20020304_capi-stato.html

Those of us who believe in God are obligated to research and promote a peaceful theology and anthropology, drawing from the deep resources of our religious doctrines and the best pages of the history of our traditions. By emphasizing sincere respect for every human person and our duty to overcome violence, we are called to labor for reconciliation and stable peace on earth.

6. Defining Justice, War, and Terrorism

In international conferences, at least in more recent years, it is not difficult to find everyone in agreement on the subject of peace. Moreover, everyone emphasizes that peace goes hand in hand with justice. The problem, however, lies in what follows: How do we define what is just in each given situation and how is justice imposed? The expectation that international organizations have the capacity to respond to these questions has been refuted repeatedly, and continues to be debunked.

In our times, a certain terminology has been selectively adopted, which, instead of facilitating understanding, has in fact created more confusion. I am referring to the deplorable abuse of the words *terrorism* and *war*. What, then, is war? And what is terrorism? It is difficult in some cases to convince even the most impartial person that the actions of a division of tanks or squadron of military aircraft that indiscriminately destroy the homes of innocent civilians may be described as *war*, while the act of self-holocaust by a young female student strapped with a bomb – often carrying the Quran, convinced that she is defending the rights of her homeland in her own country – is *terrorism*. Rather than neutralizing religious fervor, such selective use of words accentuates the religious obstinacy of those who regard themselves as victims, even when outsiders feel they can dismiss such emotions as religious fundamentalism. This is certainly one lesson learned from the calamity of 11 September 2001. Indeed, such an attitude does not support the more sober students of the Quran in moderately interpreting relevant passages from the sacred book of Islam as much as it tends to reinforce those who despise its allegorical inter-

pretation and mobilize believers to adhere literally to the verses of the Quran that refer to holy war. There are many others that even convince the enthusiastic and still maturing younger generation that the most secure way of becoming martyrs for their faith and nation is to end their mundane lives in a heroic manner, thereby gaining the reward of paradise. Religious sentiment contains wily roots. Its resilience is not easily cancelled by external pressures. These young people require internal guidance, illumination, and spiritual transformation.

We are not endeavoring to defend "terrorist actions," as we shall also see in Chapter 5 of this book. We are simply indicating that many acts of war, specifically those that perpetuate injustice, are also terrorist acts.

The Church never ceases to be concerned with moral dilemmas related to the theory of "just" or justified war and absolute peace or "pacifism." Fortunately, there are many areas where the two approaches appear to coincide: such as cases in which war is condemned for being waged for unjust causes, or when tactics are denounced because they do not meet the criterion of moderation, etc.

7. The Power of Spiritual Encouragement

As leaders and intellectuals of various faith communities, we are frequently inclined to defend the opinions of our communities on the international stage. In many ways, this is natural and legitimate. However, when we return to our homes, we should boldly articulate a prophetic and critical word within our communities concerning our own inconsistencies and omissions. In this way, we can assist our communities to regard the rights and particularities of those with other religious convictions in a spirit of understanding and respect.

Accurate formulations and the invocation of reason will not help people to overcome hostility and enmity, which is in fact increasing and intensifying in many regions of the world. What is also required is spiritual encouragement. Most religions include

commandments about magnanimity and conciliation. Christianity in particular proposes the inspiration and power of reconciliation. This is why it is our supreme responsibility as leaders to advocate and apply such teachings. Their experience (and expression) is the most precious gift that religion can offer in response to the contemporary global unrest.

8. Peace and "Development"

Moving beyond the truth that peace aligns with justice, I would add that the other name for peace is "development." It is essential that all people be guaranteed the necessary conditions for freedom and dignified living. The emerging challenges are countless when vague generalizations are exhausted and implementation begins. Once again, the role of religious sentiment is immense in this regard: it supports responsibility, selflessness, self-sufficiency, and self-control, all of which sustain community. "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you" (Matt. 7:12).

I believe firmly, and reiterate in all international conferences, that western societies equipped with political, scientific, and military power must practice a creative and critical self-reflection in order to perceive their duty within contemporary worldwide dimensions. The peace and security of which everyone speaks will only be attained by preserving social justice and by elevating development among the poorer societies of our planet. It would be spiritually, politically, and strategically tragic if, through negligence or arrogance, we allow a new, multiform proletariat to develop, which would in turn exploit the "atomic energy" of religious sentiment in order to forcefully impose itself locally, regionally, and internationally.

Conclusion

By way of summary, I would remind the reader that:

1) Many religions refer to a peace that is associated with the conquest of passions, the transcendence of desires, and the over-

coming of anxiety or stress. This peace is derived from harmony with the Supreme Reality, and is expressed in tranquility of heart and purity of mind. In the monotheistic religions, founded on the Abrahamic tradition, the concept of peace is highlighted as the spiritual result of trust in an almighty and benevolent God, but it also assumes a vivid social tenor and historical dimension. Peace is not simply granted from God; it requires human effort for its fashioning.

2) For us Christians, the convictions that peace is a divine gift, that Christ is our peace, and that it is the obligation of every faithful to strive for peace are all very fundamental principles that support peaceful coexistence in the world. And peaceful coexistence is further achieved by cultivating genuine respect and love toward every human being irrespective of political, religious, or other persuasion. Each of us is called to practice reconciliation and sincere collaboration with all people of good will, as well as to promote justice and peace in every corner of the planet.

Finally, it would behoove us to recall a phrase of Basil the Great: "For, nothing belongs so peculiarly to a Christian as being a peacemaker, and therefore the Lord has promised us the greatest reward."[26]

For us Christians, the struggle for peace in the depth of our hearts, in our immediate surroundings, in our wider regions, and throughout the world is an imperative. In the 21st century, it should become our preeminent concern, with the certainty that the God of peace is permanently with the peacemakers, inspiring and invigorating them in their endeavors for peace.

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26. St Basil of Caesarea, "Letter CXIV. To Cyriacus and His Followers in Tarsus," in *Saint Basil: Letters Volume I (1-185)*, trans. Sr Agnes Clare Way, C.D.P. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1951), 241.

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Tradition and the Vision of Peaceful Coexistence in Religious Communities of Albania

The peaceful coexistence of religious communities may gener-ally emerge from two opposing sources. It may evolve from an indifference to religious experience, or from a conscious experience of the deeper essence of religion, as manifested in the lives of many exceptional personalities in the faith communities. By contrast, religious bigotry and hostility among coexisting faith communities may develop either from extremely fanatic religious seeds or else from non-religious roots, such as political and nation-alistic factors, or psychological and selfish causes that endeavor to use religion for other intentions. All the above-mentioned roots have been powerful in the past and remain robust in the Albania of today.

The basis of a common acceptance regarding the peaceful coexistence of religious communities and non-religious circles in contemporary Albania, lies, I believe, in the freedom of religious conscience and in the tangible respect for human rights. In the first part of this chapter – because I am convinced that history is not only related to the past, but also constitutes the subconscious dimension of the present – Consequently, I would like to make reference to the contemporary dynamic. In the second part of the chapter, I will define what I believe to be the imperative direction and action to be taken.

I am convinced that this subject is of importance to the wider Balkan region. It is also relevant for the modern international reli-gious reality overall, especially since Christianity and Islam are the two largest religions in the world, whose adherents surpass half of the planet's population and which impact the global community in countless definitive ways.

I Characteristic Historical Phases and the Contemporary Dynamic

Albanian historians and politicians state with satisfaction that "despite being divided into three religions opposed to one another, Albania never experienced religious wars in the course of its history."[1] However, could this articulation prove to be a simplistic interpretation of a much more complex reality?

1. Historical Phases

The possibility of religious war presupposes the existence of diverse religious communities, their relative and proportional strength, and their potential for conflict. In Albanian society, such conditions did not exist during the first millennium of the Christian era. At least until the age of the East-West Schism of Christendom in the 11th century, the religious unity of the Albanians was more or less taken for granted. Up until the early part of the 8th century, the eastern Illyricum[2] – to which the current territory of Albania belonged – was under the immediate ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Rome. Around the year 732–733, it was incorporated into the jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.[3]

After the 13th century, the two great religious belts that formed roughly corresponded to the Orthodox Church in the south and the Roman Catholic Church in the north.[4] In the first period,

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1. Stefanaq Pollo and Arben Puto, eds., *Histoire de l'Albanie des origins à nos jours* [*History of Albania: From Its Origins to the Present Day*] (Roanne: Horvath Publications, 1974), 331. See also the statement by Alfred Sereqi, Albanian Minister for Foreign Affairs: "In the history of Albania, there have never been religious wars, nor even the danger of religious division, because the Albanian tradition supports peaceful coexistence" *ΚΑΘΟΛΙΚΗ* (*Catholic*) newspaper, 2 March 1993

2. The region included the east coast of the Adriatic Sea.

3. See Basilios Stephanides, *Ecclesiastical History From the Beginning Until Today* (Athens: Astir, 1948), 235, 258. [In Greek].

4. Pollo and Puto, *Histoire de l'Albanie*, 70.

which extended from apostolic times to the end of the 15th century, Albanians did not experience any internal conflicts or dissensions, despite the intense influence from both East and West.

In the second period, the age of Ottoman dominion, we observe a constant hemorrhaging of Christian communities to the benefit of Muslim communities. Islamification culminated in the 16th and 17th centuries. Ultimately, then, alongside the two Christian communities, the Islamic communities of the Sunnis and the Bektashi and certain other Shiite sectarian groups took shape. There was, of course, no possibility of Muslims converting to Christianity because Islamic legislation strictly forbade it with the penalty of death. Therefore, it was natural that there was no room for religious war or conflict within the Ottoman Empire.

A more exceptional conversion to Islam was observed among Albanians than among other ethnic groups in the Balkans.[5] Aside from the general reasons for the Islamification of Christians of various ethnicities,[6] I believe that there was an additional and very significant reason that has not been sufficiently stressed to this day. This is the fact that Albanians were deprived of a formidable base, which was at the disposal of other neighboring peoples: namely, a Christian literature in their own mother language. The absence of a developed linguistic instrument diminished the religious resistance of the

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5. Teki Seleniça writes: "Turks found in Albanians their comrades, while Albanians found in Turks an *effendi* (overlord), who opened for them the free space to realize all that their hearts desired. Turkey offered them everything: property, honor, and weaponry." See his book *Shqipëria më 1927* [*Albania in 1927*] (Tirana, 1928).

6. A number of reasons have been proposed for the overall escalation of Islamification among Albanians. These include the concern of certain affluent members of the community to preserve their wealth; the forced apprehension and conversion of children; ethnic and political competition; activities of proselytism by enthusiastic Muslims; and especially the desire of oppressed Christians to rid themselves of their identity as *rayah* (lower-class citizens) and their consequential taxation and humiliation, and become incorporated into the privileged class.

Albanians, who were obliged to adopt a second or even third language beyond their own, which remained spoken but not written. Thus, Muslims embraced Arabic and Turkish, Orthodox Christians Greek, and Roman Catholics Latin and Italian. Had a written ethnic Albanian language been created in timely manner and the abundance of Christian literature been even partially translated – as was the case with other Balkan nations – the growth of a solid Christian consciousness might have been facilitated. The religious development of the Albanian people might then have been quite different.

When, later, the movement for liberation arose within the Ottoman Empire, there were many times when Orthodox Albanians aligned themselves with other Orthodox in the Balkans, while Muslim Albanians often fought alongside the ruling Ottomans. There are historical references to 27 Albanians who were elevated as viziers of the High Porte, and 100 Albanian commanders of the janissary orders.[7] However, there are also examples of Muslim Albanians – for instance in Shkodër during the 18th century – who aligned themselves both with Orthodox Christians and Roman Catholics against the Ottomans.[8] In general, despite religious, racial, and ethnic differences, a common culture was fashioned in the wider region of the Balkans during the period of the Ottoman Empire, to which all of the neighboring peoples contributed their exceptional gifts and offered their own particularities. Albanians, too, participated in this cultural fermentation irrespective of their religious affiliation.

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7. *Të drejtat e Shqipnisë ethnike*, volume 1, Tagret e Shqipnisë për pamvarsi politike, "Leka," (Shkodër: Zoja e Paperlyeme, 1944), 286, which contains a list of names of great Albanian viziers. Also note this statement by Eqrem Bej Vlora: "Albania provided Turkey with many viziers and, most recently, with Ferid Pasha, first among the greatest viziers of Turkey, as well as one hundred commanders of the janissary orders" (*Flëte shënimesh ditari nga Berati dhe Tomorri* [Tirana, no date])

8. On the last phase of the period of Turkish occupation, see Peter Barti, *Die albanische Muslime, Zur Zeit der nationalen Unabhängigkeitsbewegung: 1878–1912* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1968).

The third period extends from the creation of the Albanian state to its annexation by Italy (1912–1939). In this phase, the coexistence of religious communities was grounded in a common effort by Albanians to highlight their national identity.[9] We see a development of Albanian literature and a special emphasis on racial or ethnic origin as a key element of unity for Albania. In this way, religious consciousness assumed secondary significance in Albania; whereas in other Balkan nations it was promoted alongside ethnic consciousness. A line from the poet Pashko Vasa became a slogan in Albania: "*Feja e Shqiptarit* është *Shqiptaria*" ("The religion of the Albanians is Albanianism")[10]. Given that national unity could not rest on a common religious tradition, only a common origin remained and was, therefore, elevated to the sphere of the sacred, thus ruling out religious conflicts and reinforcing peaceful coexistence.

In this period, the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania was also being established with a view to including in its embrace all Orthodox citizens, irrespective of origin or language: Albanians, Greeks, Vlachophones, and Slavs. Within the broader context of turmoil and nationalism in the Balkans, there were various efforts to create dissension and conflict among Orthodox communities of diverse ethnic descent. Ultimately, however, the

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9. Originally there were influential voices, such as Ismail Qemali, writing in 1912: "There is no division in the Albanian movement. Albanians feel that they are Muslims and their only desire is to contribute to the revival and progress of Turkey." See the Vienna newspaper *Neue Freie Presse*, 27 August 1912. Also see Hasan Basri Bej, parliamentarian of Dibër county, who declared in the Roman newspaper *La Tribuna* on 18 October 1912: "Albanians will never forget that they are Muslims and will always support the Turkish Empire." Subsequently, on 20 May 1913, Ismail Qemali visited the Bible Society in London to thank the society for the publication of the New Testament (in an Albanian translation by an Orthodox Christian K. Christophoridis) and proposed certain improvements. In Ismail Qemali, *Drejtoria e Përgjithshme e Arkivave të Shtetit* (Tirana, no date).

10. Pashko Vasa, "Oh Albania," 1878.

ecumenical spirit of Orthodoxy prevailed. In recognizing the *auto-cephaly* of the local Church in 1937, the Ecumenical Patriarchate emphasized that "every community in Albania, irrespective of ethnicity, will enjoy the same conditions of ecclesiastical development and the same privileges, which the Church took great pains to enshrine officially."[11]

During the same period, the fundamental religious communities of Albania may be clearly discerned. According to the statistics of 1927, Muslims (Sunni and Bektashi) comprised 67.5 percent of the population, Orthodox Christians 22.3 percent, and Roman Catholics 10 percent.[12] In 1942, immediately prior to the period of religious persecution, of a total of 1,106,610 Albanians, Muslims numbered 763,723 (68.9 percent). Of these, 599,524 (54.17 percent) were Sunnis; 164,199 (14.83 percent) were Bektashi. Orthodox numbered 229,080 (20.7 percent) and Roman Catholics 113,807 (10.3 percent).[13] Relations among adherents of the

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11. This assurance may be found in the last paragraph of the formal Letter by Ecumenical Patriarch Benjamin proclaiming the bestowal of Autocephaly for the Church of Albania to the Churches of Serbia and Romania. The same Letter continues to clarify: "More specifically, with regard to the use of ethnic languages in the holy churches and in addressing our own Church, on the basis of our relevant recommendation, the Albanian government repeated that it would respect its statement submitted before the League of Nations on October 20, 1921, which explicitly foresees the same assurance about equal rights of all minorities." Patriarchal Codex in the Archives, number 989, 115–117. See Apostolos Glavinas, *The Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania*, 2nd ed. [In Greek] (Thessaloniki, 1989), 74–76.

12. Tiki Seleniça, *Shqipëria më 1927*. This was "the last Albanian census, which is considered valid by specialists and religious communities. Later statistics are either not regarded as official or have not included the subdivision of the population according to religion" (*Gazeta Shqiptare, Supplemento a La Gazetta del Mezzogiorno*, Tirana, 24 April 1993), 14.

13. These are the statistics supplied by Italian authorities. See Alexandre Popovic, *L'Islam Balkanologische. Les Musulmans du Sud-Est Européen dans la Période Post-Ottomane* (Berlin: Osteuropa-Institut an der Freien Universität Berlin, 1986), 38. Some today would claim that the Orthodox

various communities were developing rather smoothly, albeit with some occasional shadows of opposition beneath the surface.

The fourth phase (1939–1944) includes the Italian annexation and then the German occupation. This period of subjugation reveals the religious communities continuing to coexist, although the Italians had a clear preference for the authority of the Roman Catholic Church. Parallel to this, there was indirect and even direct pressure on the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania, compelling the Orthodox to approach Roman Catholicism and adopt Uniatism, much like the case of the Arbërëshë (or Italo-Albanians) who had emigrated to Italy in previous centuries. This plan was finally abandoned with the decline of the Axis.[14]

The fifth period covers the time from the rise of communism in Albania to its demise (1944–1990). In the first 23 years, the various religious communities coexisted under the common yoke of an atheistic regime that mercilessly persecuted religion. Frequently, Muslims, Orthodox, and Roman Catholics imprisoned in concentration camps resorted to common prayer.[15] From 1967 to 1990, the Albanian State constitutionally forbid the manifestation of any voice of faith and every expression of reverence to God. Instead, the Marxist ideology erected Albanian identity on the pedestal of the supreme truth, replacing the notion of the Holy

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make up approximately 23 percent and Roman Catholics 12 percent of the Albanian population.

14. For more details on the last two phases, see Popovic, *L'Islam Balkanologische*. See also Roberto Morozzo Della Rocca, *Nazione e Religione in Albania: 1920–1944* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1990); and Nathalie Clayer, *L'Albanie, Pays des Derviches. Les Orrers Mystiques Musulmans en Albanie à l'Epoque Post-Ottomane: 1912–1967* (Berlin: Osteuropa-Institut an der Freien Universität Berlin, 1986).

15. F. Baxhaju, "Filloi kështu pëersekutimi ndaj fësë," *Gazeta Shqiptare del Mezzogiorno*, Tirana, 24 April 1993, 15. Also see Gjon Sinishta, *The Fulfilled Promise. A Documentary Account of Religious Persecution in Albania* (Santa Clara, Cal.: Sinishta, 1976). This book that deals mostly with the Roman Catholic community.

in religion. "The Religion of the Albanian is Albanianism," Enver Hoxha repeated, adding greater gravity to the phrase. Ultimately, the coexistence of religious communities in Albania reached a tragic level, namely the final silence of the graveyard.

In the past, then, the absence of civil war in Albania had a variety of causes. In the first period, it was due to the existence of a single religion, namely Christianity before the Great Schism of 1054. Toward the end of this period, we observe differentiation of a predominantly geographical nature: Orthodox in the south; Roman Catholics in the north. During the second phase, the era of the Ottoman Empire, coexistence was sustained by Muslim rule. In the third phase, of independence, Albanian descent and identity provided the base for coexistence. In the fourth phase, the foreign occupation, the absence of civil war can be attributed to maintenance of the traditional balance. And in the fifth phase, with the ascendance of atheism, coexistence is sealed by burying all religious communities.

2. The Contemporary Dynamic

After the establishment of democracy in Albania in 1991, a new phase opened up with a sixth period of coexistence among religious communities. This era should be examined in more detail. The contemporary religious configuration of Albania is more complex than in its past history. There is no accurate current statistical information, although older data is frequently accepted.[16] However, these numbers today reveal a cultural origin rather than a religious affiliation. Alongside the traditional faith communities, which have been reorganized, about 70 new Protestant groups have emerged. The latter are not from the mainline Protestant denominations affiliated with the World Council of Churches. They are often supported by the United States and Scandinavian countries. And there are, as well, new religions, such as the Bahai. The large vacuum created by the former regime has

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16. See Popovic, *L'Islam Balkanique*, 38.

led to the creation of a peculiar religious free market, with diverse groups vying for investment. A significant number of Albanians also remain faithful to the old Marxist worldview, simply declaring themselves atheists or unwilling to be classified as belonging to any religious community.

On the question of relations between the state and religion, the current political leadership of Albania has unreservedly adopted the identity of "secular state" and boasts no special relationship with any of the religious communities. However, in specifically applying these relations between state and religious communities, there still appears to be a certain confusion and vagueness, which is justified by the insufficient knowledge regarding the peculiarities of each faith community. There is also a concern and suspicion among some politicians that religion might become a channel of foreign political pursuits.

In the official documents and declarations of the modern Republic of Albania, religious freedom is guaranteed by appropriate legislation. Law 506, passed in 1993, and entitled "Basic Freedoms and Human Rights," states in Article 18: "Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion cannot be violated. Each person is permitted to change religion freely or express convictions individually or collectively, both in public and private life, through worship and teaching as well as through rituals and conduct."[17] This law clearly adopted the formulation of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The same line is also used in addresses and public statements of the political leadership in Albania. One usually observes a great gap between the written law and the actual reality; we hope that this gap will slowly but surely diminish.

In post-communist Albanian society, religious faith and the spiritual quest are reemerging from a multitude of political upheavals, social problems, ethnic yearnings, and also severe economic

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17. *Supplement to Law 749*, 29 April 1991: "On Principal Constitutional Provisions" with a new chapter entitled: "Basic Freedoms and Human Rights", Law 506, 31 March 1993.

crisis. The horrible decline in standards of living and the financial depression,[18] as well as the drive for radical changes, are ever so clear to the naked eye of any observer. The communist regime not only left behind semi-paralyzed administrative structures, but corroded the entire mentality of the people. All of this in turn had an overall negative impact on other areas of life, particularly of health and education, while at the same time it provided fertile ground for the planting of diverse religious ideas and the development of new religious groups. The diversity of religious orientation in Albania is further influenced by the contemporary outward orientation of the country: on the one hand, its inclusion in the Islamic Conference; and on the other, its ties to the USA as well as its persistent overtures to western Europe.

During this transitional period, there also appears to be a broader crisis in the value system of Albanian society: a dire loss of trust in institutions of authority and uncertainty about what is authentic. Whereas in the past slogans of vague collectivism prevailed, today young people are bombarded with mottos of self-centered capitalism. There prevails among the youth a peculiar sense of reservation, which is sometimes expressed as apathy and indifference, while at other times manifests as a syndrome of emmigration.[19] Within this spiritual vacuum, there is at least the hope that in cultivating faith in God and opening new spiritual horizons, religious communities of Albania will be able to reinforce moral ideals, inner discipline, mutual respect, and a sense of civil sociability, while at the same time fortifying the endurance

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18. See the data in the Report on Economic Assistance to Albania, Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Document 6859, 8 June 1993, at: http://www.assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewHTML.asp?FileID=7212&lang=EN

19. Note the title and content of the book by Elisabeth Champseix and Jean-Paul Champseix, *L'Albanie, ou la Logique du Désespoir* [*The Albania of Despair*] (Paris: La Découverte, 1992).

and creativity of the people. However, this presupposes that everyone will coexist in harmony.[20]

In the context of this developing dynamic, three outcomes are possible. First, there may be a cultivation of religious fanaticism, especially with the infiltration of extreme fanatical trends from abroad. Already several such instances have occurred through an imported fundamentalism. An Albanian translation and commentary of the Quran, which arrived from abroad in one million copies, contained a foreword written by Ahmed Raif. In it he stated: "Albania was liberated from the fire of communism. It is now the head of the Islamic triangle in Europe, which comprises Albania, Kosovo, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Communism tried to destroy everything related to Islam in this beautiful triangle. . . . But the Albanians managed to eradicate communism, although subsequently the cursed devil appeared on the scene: the devil of Christian evangelization. We must resist at all cost and do our best with the help of our Muslim brothers in Albania."[21] At the same time, the association *Rinia dhe Kultura Islame* (Youth and Islamic Culture) circulated tens of thousands of anti-Christian leaflets by foreign authors with extreme Islamic views.[22] There is, however,

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20. One step toward coexistence occurred with the International Conference in Tirana, entitled "Freedom of Conscience. Basis for Social Peace," which included Albanian intellectuals, religious leaders, and other specialists from all over the world. The proceedings of this conference were published in a volume of the British *Conscience and Liberty. International Journal of Religious Freedom* iv 2 (8) (1992) in a special issue entitled "Freedom of Conscience in Albania."

21. Ahmed Raif, Foreward to *Kur'an-i, Përkthim me Komentim. Përktheu dhe komentoi* (Cairo: H. Sherif Agmeti, 1992). Raif's forword appears in Albanian and Arabic in the luxurious edition sponsored by Prince El Velijd bin Tabal bin Abdulaziz Al Saud, who "ordered the publication of this translation at his personal expense as a gift to his brothers, the Muslims of Albania. May Allah richly reward him and guide him in his will."

22. Ahmed Diat, *"Zoti," që kurrënuk ka ekzistuar* (Tirana, no date). Also Ahmed Dedat, *Ç'thotë Bibla për Muhamedin*, translated from the English by G. Bakëllbashi (Tirana, 1992); Maneh Hammad al Johani, *Evërteta rreth*

some glimmer of hope in the immediate reaction of local authorities. Both the Muslim and the political leadership condemned these occurrences. A similar, albeit much smaller, fervor was created by some of the more extreme Protestant groups. In any case, an imported fanatical trend is one of the possible outcomes.

A second possible outcome of Albania's religious development is the conscious cultivation of a silent confrontation. Potentially using various forms of authority and inducements or even the creation of technical external hindrances to the growth of the politically weaker religious communities. There are always some other factions that, on the basis of their own interests and national or international orientation, handle religion only as a sociopolitical entity which they exploit.

Finally, a third possible outcome of the current dynamic is the consolidation of religious tolerance, the creation of a climate of acceptance of others, and the protection of peaceful coexistence. This would involve cultivating the positive elements in all religious communities with a view towards shaping Albanian society. This is the direction chosen by the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania after its reconstruction, which was achieved at the initiative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the venerable Center of Orthodoxy.[23]

Jezusit, Studime Islame translated from the English by Albano Qojle (Tirana, 1993); and Hasan Baxhi, *Dialogu kristiani dhe muslimani*, (Tirana, 1993). Besides the association *Rinia dhe Kultura Islame*, which published the above leaflets, other Muslim groups also disseminated similar booklets: for example, Ahmed Dedat, *A është Bibla fjala e Zotit?*, translated from the English by Zija Merepeza. Alouakf Alislami, *Stichting* (no date or place of publication); and Muhamed Kutub, *Dilemat rreth Islamit*, translated by Sulejiman Osmani and Ramiz Zekaj (Tirana: International Islamic Relief Organization, 1993).

23. See Archbishop Anastasios (Yannoulatos) of Tirana, Durres and All Albania, "Orthodoxy in Albania Today" (address, International Symposium on Eastern Orthodoxy in a Post-Communist World, Porto Carras, Greece, September 1993).

II Toward a Conscientious Peaceful Coexistence

The vision of a conscientious and creative peaceful coexistence supports a broader, universal, and favorable climate. In the last decades, at a time when Albania was still completely isolated, dialogue among Christians was cultivated, relations between Orthodox and Roman Catholics improved, and in various parts of the world Christian-Muslim conversations have progressed: all with the aim of together exploring long-standing theoretical issues as well as contemporary mutual challenges.

The most radical fermentations in Muslim and Christian circles pertaining to the sense and significance of human rights took place after World War II. More recently, over the last 50 years, Albanian intellectuals of all religious traditions have lived in the captivity of an atheistic regime and were in no position to participate in this search to develop new parameters for the issue.[24]

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24. On early and recent efforts to establish Christian-Muslim dialogue, see Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Islam. A Study in Comparative Religion*, 15th ed. [in Greek] (Athens: Akritas, 2006). Also Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Christian Dialogue with Islam. An Orthodox Perspective,* which originally appeared in *Festschrift for Metropolitan Maximos of Sardis (1914–1986)* (Geneva: Metropolis of Switzerland, 1989), vol. 1.

Similar initiatives have been taken by Christians as well as Muslims. Representatives of the WCC and the Vatican have repeatedly met with representatives of the Muslim World Congress and the World Muslim League in order to exchange information and opinions. There have also been various initiatives taken by Orthodox Christians (for instance, the Orthodox Center of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Chambésy-Geneva, the Church of Russia, and theological groups in the Church of Greece). However, the disposition for dialogue and cooperation is not taken for granted in modern Christian and Muslim circles. On the contrary, in many cases, there still remain seeds of suspicion, conflict, and even hostility. Nevertheless, the trend toward a broader approach and communication is constantly increasing. See Stanley J. Samartha and John B. Taylor, *Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Papers Presented at the Broumana Consulation, July 1972* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1973); Secretariatus Pro Non-Christianis, *Orientations pour un dialogue entre chrétiens et musulmans* (Rome: Ancora, 1969); John B. Taylor, ed., *Christians Meeting*

Today, as religious consciousness and thought are once again evolving, it is imperative to advance on the basis of our religious creed, but also incorporate the most mature interpretation provided in recent decades on the question of freedom of conscience and more generally human rights. For an accurate understanding of human rights within the context of Islam and Christianity, a reexamination of their teachings about the human person is needed.

1. Islam and the Dignity of Every Human Person

It is a fundamental axiom for Islam that the human person constitutes a divine "sign."[25] The dignity of every human person derives from human nature, which is the very basis of any further thought on human rights. In his farewell pilgrimage to Mecca, Muhammad stressed: "O mankind, We have created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes, that you may know one another. Surely the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most god-fearing of you" (Quran 49:13).

However, at the same time, Islam highlights first, the social dimension of the human person as well as the human links to the political, economic, and cultural whole. Second, Islam emphasizes the human person's direct relationship to and dependence on God, which indicates the relative nature of the human condition as subjected to the divine will (*Islam*). In the words of a contemporary Muslim thinker: "Every human being is essentially a servant of God and thus does not constitute an autonomous human value. A humanism that is isolated from the divine, deprived of its spiritual

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Muslims: World Council of Churches' Papers on Ten Years of Chrisitan/Muslim Dialogue (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1977).

25. According to expression of the Muslim philosopher Ibn Arabi, the Arabic term *aya* (sign) clearly signifies the manifestation of a reality, its manifest power, and the undeniable evidence of its presence. See Muhyi d din Ibn Arabi, *Fuçus al-Hikam*, in the French translation and notes by Titus M. Burckhardt, *La Sagesse des Prophètes* (Paris: Albin Michel Editions, 1955).

dimension, is inconceivable in Islam. It would run the risk of lead-ing to a deification of the human."[26]

The more moderate thinkers, who do not usually comprise a majority, regard these declarations on human rights in a favorable light. According to Ihsan Hamid Al-Mafregy, law professor at the University of Baghdad, the contemporary Western expression "individual rights" could be translated in Islam as "the moral right of every citizen" with an emphasis on the natural dignity of the human person. . . . According to Islam, a human person possesses an innate dignity, an ethical value, which the architects of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights labeled "reason and conscience."[27]

Islam acknowledges the same human dignity for adherents of other monotheistic religions. It respects and protects the rights of non-Muslims, who are called *dhimmis* (protected).[28] The Quran generally refers to non-Muslims several times and, on some occa-sions, specifically to the followers of Jesus. These passages of the Quran sometimes reveal a certain sympathetic attitude; at other times they display a clear antipathy. For instance: "Thou wilt surely find the most hostile of men to the believers are the Jews and the idolaters; and thou wilt surely find the nearest of them in love to the believers [Muslims] are those who say 'We are Christians'" (Quran 5:82). Elsewhere, however, the Quran speaks negatively about both aforementioned groups: "O believers, take not Jews and Christians as friends; they are friends of each other" (Quran 5:51). Thus, from time to time, Muslim authorities could

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26. Nadim dine Bammate, "Destin de l'homme musulman," *L'Age Nouveau* 66 (October 1951).

27. Ihsan Hamid Al-Mafregy, "L'Islam et les Droits de l'Homme" (address to the Consultation of Specialists, UNESCO, Division of Human Rights and Peace, Bangkok December 1979), 33. See also Abdelaziz Benabdallah, "L'Is-lam et les Droits de l'Homme," address to the same consultation.

28. According to one tradition, the Prophet is said to have declared the fol-lowing before his death: "Preserve the protection (*dhimma*) that I conceded to my non-Muslim subjects." Louis Massignon, "Le Respect de la Personne Humaine en Islam," *Revue Internationale de la Croix* (June 1952), 454.

conveniently interpret the various passages according to the situation at hand and had the opportunity of deciding on the desirable attitude on each occasion.

Still, even within the Islamic state in itself, there is a theoretical recognition of the rights of non-Muslims, including: 1) individual freedom of movement, commerce, and organization of their communities; 2) rights related to specific family and personal institutions; and 3) freedom to organize places of worship and education, as well as observation of religious holidays.[29]

Islamic attitude becomes rigorous and intolerant when it comes to polytheists and atheists. Certain passages of the Quran – which always remains the unalterable word of God – are definitive: "Then, when the sacred months are drawn away, slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them, and confine them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they repent, and perform the prayer, and pay the alms, then let them go their way" (Quran 9:5).

As for those who claim no religious affiliation – and there are many who fall into this category in Albania today – how will they be treated? This is a critical question, but Islam defines itself as a religion of reason, and so a rational proposal will be researched according to the contemporary global situations. Thus, in its contact with world Islam, the ruling class of Muslim Sunnis in Albania faces two tendencies: on the one hand an absolute, fanatical approach; and on the other hand, a moderate-dialogical approach. The Islamic tradition in Albania has to date basically adhered to the second approach; and only such an approach can contribute to peaceful coexistence. As for members of the Bektashi – who combine traits of the Shiite Islamic tradition, together with Christian elements and even Hindu philosophy and mysticism – they have always been more flexible and open to people of other religions, as well as to contemporary ideologies.

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29. On the place of non-Muslims in Muslim society, see Panayiotis J. Vatikiotis, *Islam and the State* (London: Croom Helm, 1987).

2. Western Christianity and Human Rights

In the western Christian world, a certain opposition was observed in official church circles with regard to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights because it was considered to be a product of a humanistic philosophy and anti-religious trend. At the same time, however, many Christian scholars endeavored to ground these rights in theological principles. In Christian anthropology, the foundation remains on the one hand the Old Testament verse "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness" (Gen. 1:26); and on the other, the doctrine of the incarnation of the divine Word and the assumption of human nature in its entirety by Christ. This is the inalienable foundation for the concept and conviction about the dignity of every human being.

Nonetheless, the Roman Catholic Church was for a very long time opposed to the concrete declarations on human rights.[30] In 1975, the Pontifical Commission (now the Pontifical Council) for Justice and Peace confessed: "It is clear that the reception and dissemination of declarations on human rights, as these have been

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30. Scholars will recall the negative position of Popes Pius VI, Pius IX, Gregory XVI, and even the outright condemnation of the declaration of the rights of human beings and citizens in 1889: "Such declarations establish absolute freedom as a human right within society and thereby secure a lack of concern for religious conviction. Moreover, they concede permission for anyone to think, speak, write, and even publish texts without any penalty on matters pertaining to religion and containing all that the most unbridled fantasy could ever create. It is a dreadful right, which nevertheless the Council claims to derive from equality and freedom as innate traits of all people. It is a delusional right, which contradicts the rights of the almighty Creator, to whom we owe our existence and all that we possess." Pius VI, *Lettre au Cardinal de la Rochefoucauld*, quoted in J. Joblin, "L'Église et les droits de l'homme: Un regard historique et perspective d'avenir," in *Les Droits de l'Homme et l'Église. Réflexions Historiques en Théologiques* (Vatican City: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 1990), 13.

promulgated by liberalism and populism, have created difficulties, reservations, and at times resistance for Catholics."[31]

Another "Copernican Revolution" within the Roman Catholic Church took place at the beginning of the 1960s with Pope John XXIII's encyclical letter *Pacem in Terris* and the document of the Second Vatican Council pertaining to the Church and the modern world, entitled *Gaudium et Spes* (1965). The latter states: "Every type of discrimination, whether social or cultural, whether based on sex, race, color, social condition, language or religion, is to be overcome and eradicated as contrary to God's intent" (29:2); and "therefore, by virtue of the gospel committed to her, the Church proclaims the rights of man; she acknowledges and greatly esteems the dynamic movements of today by which these rights are everywhere fostered" (41:5).[32]

Almost the entire Protestant world supported the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The first and founding assembly of the World Council of Churches (WCC) – in which the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania participated in – declared that religious freedom is a consequence of the fact that the human person was created free by God and consequently the concession of religious freedom cannot depend on any government.[33] Such

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31. *L'Église et les Droits de l'Homme*, 3rd ed. (Vatican City: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 1983), 11 (no. 17). Also see G. Filibeck, *Les droits de l'homme dans l'enseignement de l'Église: de Jean XXIII à Jean-Paul II. Recueil de textes du Magistère de l'Église Catholique de Mater et Magistra à Centesimus Annus* (1961–1991) (Vatican City: Vatican Publishing House, 1992).

32. J. Joblin, "L'Église et les droits de l'homme: Un regard historique et perspective d'avenir," 13. Pope John Paul II emphasized: "Among the fundamental liberties that the Church is obliged to support in an unwavering manner is quite naturally the freedom of religion. The right to religious freedom is so intimately connected to other basic rights that it is justly claimed that religious freedom comprises a criterion for the preservation of other basic rights." See G. Filibeck, *Les droits de l'homme dans l'enseignement de l'Église*, 343 (no. 252).

33. The World Council of Churches: Declaration on Religious Liberty which was adopted at the First Assembly of the World Council of Churches

a position, declared in August of 1948, decisively influenced the final formulation of the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was passed on 10 December of the same year.[34] In the many decades since its establishment, the WCC has demonstrated a keen interest in human rights, attributing particular emphasis to the matter of religious freedom (for example, the three assemblies in Amsterdam, 1948; Evanston, 1954; and New Delhi, 1961). Not only has it supported, but it has led the struggle for human rights on the local, national, and international levels.[35]

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in Amsterdam, August 1948 stated: "An essential element in a good international order is freedom of religion. This is an implication of the Christian faith and of the world-wide nature of Christianity. Christians, therefore, view the question of religious freedom as an international problem. They are concerned that religious freedom be everywhere secured. In pleading for this freedom, they do not ask for any privilege to be granted to Christians that is denied to others. While the liberty with which Christ has set men free can neither be given nor destroyed by any Government, Christians, because of that inner freedom, are both jealous of its outward expression and solicitous that all men should have freedom in religious life. The nature and destiny of man by virtue of his creation, redemption and calling, and man's activities in family, state and culture establish limits beyond which the government cannot with impunity go." (https://original.religlaw.org/content/religlaw/documents/wccdecreliglib1948.htm)

34. One year later, in 1949, in Chichester, England, the Central Committee of the WCC resolved that "religious freedom is a prerequisite and protection for all other freedoms." On the concept of human rights in Christianity in general and in Protestantism in particular, see Jean-François Collange, *Théologie des Droits de l'Homme* (Paris: Cerf, 1989). See also *Forms of Solidarity: Human Rights on the Ecumenical Agenda* (Geneva: CCIA, 1983); and Ulbrich Schenner, "Les Droits de l'Homme à l'Interieur des Églises Protestantes," *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuse* 58 (1978): 379–397.

35. The World Council of Churches has assumed a clear position on violations of human rights, such as racism (1968), torture (1977), and illegal executions (1982). One of its Secretaries General, Philip Potter, stressed that "just as theology was once considered the 'queen of sciences,' so too was religious freedom a kind of prince of human rights in the early years of the World Council of Churches" (quoted in *Religious Freedom: Main Statements by the WCC:*

In the case of Albania, it has repeatedly taken a clear position on defending human rights.

3. The Orthodox Viewpoint

In all relevant Christian discussions, declarations, and efforts, the Orthodox Church has participated actively since 1948, with the Ecumenical Patriarchate as her basic moderator. Through the course of her history – by means of dogma, worship, and activity – the Orthodox Church unceasingly experiences and unwaveringly proclaims the biblical revelation that human beings are created in the image of God and must move toward the likeness of God, as well as that all humanity derives from one human couple created by God. Consequently, all human beings, irrespective of race, color, language, or education, are endowed with the dignity of their divine origin. While Western thought has emphasized the intellect, reason, and will as characteristics of this divine image, Eastern theology has underlined in particular the element of freedom and love, placing at the very center of all reference the free and harmonious love and communion of the persons of the Holy Trinity.[36]

Through the divine incarnation, the Word of God became united with every aspect of human substance (*firama*). As St Gregory of Nyssa explains: "We have repeatedly stated that the Body

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1948–1975 (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1976); Leonard Swidler, ed., *Religious Liberty and Human Rights in Nations and Religions* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Ecumenical Press, 1986); Leonard Swidler, "Religious Liberty," *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. Nicholas Lossky et al. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991), 860.

36. Anastasios Yannoulatos, "Eastern Orthodoxy and Human Rights," *International Review of Mission* 73 (1984): 455. See also Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Toward a Global Community: Potential and Responsibility* (Athens, 1976). [Offprint of the Academic Annual of the Theological Faculty of the University of Athens, volume 20] See also Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Facing the World: Orthodox Christian Essays on Global Concerns* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary, 2003): 49–78.

of Christ was completely mingled with all human nature."[37] Since then, every human person is called to attain to something inconceivably great in Christ and through the Holy Spirit: namely, to advance toward *theosis* (deification). This deification does not imply the union of human nature with the inaccessible divine essence, as imagined by pantheism, but rather communion and participation in the uncreated energies of God, commingling with His glory.[38] By assuming human nature, Christ granted unfathomable value to human beings, to every human person, definitively sealing human freedom and dignity.

From within the ongoing ruptures and divisions in the world, the Church is called to continue the ministry of reconciliation in every place and period (2 Cor. 5:18–20): the very same restoration of harmony that Christ realized in its universal dimensions. The Orthodox Church lives out the mystery of salvation in Christ – the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of the divine Word – by proclaiming the inscrutable "love of Christ that surpasses knowledge" (Eph. 3:19). In this regard, it has constantly emphasized the sacredness of each human person, irrespective of origin, ethnic identity, religious affiliation, culpability, or virtue. More importantly, it has always emphasized the human right to love and be loved as the only way for a human person to be fulfilled: "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them" (1 John 4:16). Therefore, the central

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37. Gregory of Nyssa, *Homily on "then the Son was subjected to the one who subjected all things to him"* Minge, Patrologia Graeca 44.1320. Elsewhere, Gregory comments: "By mingling with man and assuming upon himself our entire nature, in order that he might deify with himself all that he mingled with the divinity, he sanctified every aspect of the substance of our nature by that first fruits." *Against Apollinarius*. Minge, Patrologia Graeca 45.1152.

38. St Gregory of Nyssa, quoted in Georgios Mantzarides, *The Deification of Man: St. Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition* (Yonkers, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1989). See also Andrew Theodorou, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Fathers of the Church until St. John of Damascus* (Athens, 1956) [In Greek].

perspective from which a Christian believer regards his or her responsibility on the local or universal level, the basic source of all inspiration and action, is always love in its unfathomable dimensions, as revealed by the person of Christ in scripture, theology, and life.

Within this perspective, the Orthodox Church in Albania endeavors to advance peaceful coexistence, ever remaining steadily devoted to the truth it incarnates. The freedom of love is never restricted by the convictions of someone else. As Maximus the Confessor declared, "Blessed is the one who is able to love everyone equally."[39] Christian love, by definition, contains global, universal dimensions. No barrier, whether ethnic or religious, can ever regulate or restrict it. When we accept another person or another community with profound respect for their freedom, without demanding that they accept our own opinions, then we shall also have a comfortable sense of fellowship with adherents of different religious convictions, a deep respect for human rights, and an openness to essential cooperation for the sake of their universal acceptance and defense.[40]

The common Orthodox view on this subject was ultimately summarized in 1986 by the Third Preconciliar Panorthodox Consultation with its declaration on peace, justice, and human rights. Among other principles is the statement: "Because we live every day the divine condescension, Orthodox Christians struggle against all forms of fanaticism and hostility. Because we continuously proclaim the reality of the divine incarnation and human deification, we support human rights for all people and all nations. Because we experience the divine gift of freedom through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ, we are also able to

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39. Maximus the Confessor, *First Century of Chapters on Love* 17 in Minge's Patrologia Graeca 90.961.

40. Anastasios Yannoulatos, "Human Rights in the Orthodox Church," *Conscience and Liberty: International Journal of Religious Freedom* 4, 2 (8) (Winter 1992): 75–79.

promote in a fuller way its universal value for every human being and every nation."[41]

At the same time, however, together with this sense of duty to love without boundaries, the Orthodox conscience embraces a painful historical experience from relations with people of other religions and a steady eschatological perspective, both of which protect us from wavering between utter despair and naïve over-optimism. Bearing in mind the intricate tributaries of evil and sin within the social structure and the center of human existence, the Orthodox believer strives to maintain a tranquil realism by focusing his or her gaze on eternity. It may well be that the course of history will prove many of our expectations wrong, but an eschatological vision helps us remain consistent in our principles and strengthens us with hope, even if we daily ascertain a tension and conflict between the "end" that we expect and the historical events that we experience.

4. Peaceful Coexistence among Albania's Religious Communities

In order for the vision of peaceful coexistence among religious communities in Albania to become reality, general perceptions about the past and vague optimism about the future will not, of course, suffice. Tradition and historical experience are undoubtedly invaluable, but they do not offer themselves as models for mere imitation. After all, the contemporary political and social data, as well as international contexts, differ greatly; they demand new initiatives, creative imagination, and expansive perspective. This implies that all religious communities must search within the deeper layers of their doctrine and better pages of their tradition for the values of a sound anthropology, with an emphasis on genuine respect for each human person. Furthermore, religious communities must strive for the development and prevalence of these

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41. Periodical *Episkepsis* 369 (15 December 1986).

values by means of the ethos of their leadership and the education of all their members. Each religion is called to promote all that is genuine, all that is best, and all that is beautiful at its disposal with which to approach humanity and society. Indeed, it should offer these in a peaceful and constructive manner for the benefit of the greater good.

The realization of peaceful coexistence among religious communities in Albania, as well as with those not affiliated with any religion, could provide a precedent for broader coexistence in the Balkans. The only possibility for peace to prevail in our region – at least through the initiative of religious communities – is for diversity to be accepted, and the freedom of each person's conscience, together with the freedoms of each nation's minority, to be genuinely respected.

The goal here is not simply religious tolerance – mere acceptance – or simply for religion to avoid becoming embroiled in nationalistic paroxysms. The aim is, rather, something far more positive: namely, mutual respect and understanding, solidarity among nations, and creative cooperation in common humanitarian pursuits. It includes vigilance for the region's ecosystem. This means a consistent drive for social harmony: authentic love in practice. For "anyone who loves God cannot but love every person as himself."[42] It is only in this way that we may remain consistent with the deeper inspiration and experience of our faith. Our final proposal, then, is that we should move toward a Balkan commonwealth of peace and solidarity, with the active participation of religious communities. In this way, we may secure social justice and human dignity for every person and every nation. That is what will ultimately lead to a truly human civilization.

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42. Maximus the Confessor, *First Century of Chapters on Love*, 13 in Minge's Patrologia Graeca 90.961.

III Factors beyond religion

When it comes to peaceful religious coexistence in Albania today, a significant role is played by two other frequently overlooked factors. First, there is the large group of those who are not affiliated with any religion. Second, there is the power of the state.

1. The Influence of Those Unaffiliated with Religion

The informal group of those who are not affiliated with any religion is very diverse. They are not organized into any particular community with any specific name. They may derive from a Christian or Muslim past, but they nonetheless remain faithful to the Marxist and atheistic viewpoints on which they were raised, educated, and incorporated into society during the decades of the communist regime. Some label themselves as atheists and others as agnostics, while still others declare that they are religiously indifferent. A few of them even present as militant populists. They have at their disposal vast wealth and ownership of mass media, newspaper outlets, and television stations. Thus, they play a significant role in the formation of public opinion.

2. The Influence of the State

The second factor relates to the state. There are specific events that demonstrate the state's influence on religious harmony. Government circles never refrain from advertising abroad the religious harmony that exists in Albania. Within the country, however, these very circles frequently and silently, unwittingly or deliberately, undermine its religious harmony. Depending on external influences or personal preferences, they favor certain religious communities and simultaneously discriminate against others. For instance, the census of 2011 proved very provocative, with 56.70 percent registering as Muslim, 10 percent as Roman Catholic, 6.7 percent as Orthodox Christians, 2.09 percent as Bektashi, 0.14 percent as Evangelical Protestants, 0.07 percent as other Christians,

2.52 percent as atheists, and 0.02 percent as adherents of other religions. It is enlightening, however, that 13.79 percent are recorded as not responding to this question. Moreover, according to an official report of the US State Department, 20 percent of the population did not participate at all. This casts a shadow on the accuracy of this census.

Nonetheless, the state continues to regard the 2011 census as providing official statistical data and reports it as such overseas. Yet the census is "statistical genocide" at the expense of the Orthodox Christians and the Bektashi. By prioritizing Roman Catholics as the largest Christian community and with the Roman Catholic Church remaining silent about this manifest injustice, the census created a silent bitterness among other Christians.

Without further delay, the state granted public property to certain favored religious communities. However, although it has been decades since the restoration of the Orthodox Church, the state has still not returned all of its former places of worship. Not even the property records of the Orthodox Church are shared publicly. These records, along with evidence about churches and lands confiscated over the years by the atheistic oppression, lie hidden in the archives of the Defense Ministry. The government actually passed relevant property legislation, which was subsequently signed into law but the law (no. 1057/22 January 2009) was never implemented. There are countless other examples of an effort by the state to undermine certain religious communities on which there is no need to expand upon further. Suffice it to say that some circles of authority patently not only tolerate, but even encourage such phenomenon. All this certainly does not contribute to harmonious religious coexistence in Albania.

3

Humanity and Nature in the Great Religions of the World

I Nature as an All-Encompassing System

A common religious worldview is that nature – its beauty, expanse, and eternal rhythm – comprises a closed system that includes all that exists. It even includes deities that are not easily distinguished from the elements of the world.

1. Views of Nature in the Far East

The worship of nature and of ancestors has emerged in most religions throughout history. In the Far East, nature is considered by many religions as both real and good. The Chinese, for example, regarded humankind as a particle within an endless earth and beneath a boundless heaven, whose duty it was to adapt and harmonize with the laws of nature.

Confucius in particular developed an anthropological philosophy, whose central feature was the harmonious relationship and social balance among people. He, too, believed that human existence was good. Furthermore, he accepted and affirmed the Chinese doctrine, prevalent until his time, about ancestral spirits and especially heaven (*Tiān*), that he considered as a transcendent force, determining the target and destiny of the human being and the world. Confucius was not, however, concerned with metaphysical problems.

For the Japanese religion of Shinto, the material and the spiritual are intertwined in nature. Human beings participate in this unity. The human being is the son of *Kami* (a Shinto deity) and, thus, inherently good. There is a mutual interdependence in the

triangle: nature – *kami* – human beings. The three are constantly and harmoniously interconnected. This mutuality is manifested in three directions: first, in a vertical relation, since the *kami* are related to a living energy that is transmitted from one generation to another; second, in a horizontal relation, since the *kami* constitute the energies that connect human beings among themselves; and third, in a universal interdependence, as human beings and nature are also themselves related to the *kami*.

2. Monistic Worldviews

A second theory attributing more profound meaning to the question claims that there is only one principle in the entire universe. This is a monistic worldview.

We see a monistic tendency, perceiving absolute unity in the universe, already in the 6th century BCE. It is a tradition combined with Lao Tzu and the teaching about Tao (or Dao). Tao is considered the first and all-encompassing principle of the universe. It is described as ineffable (too great to be expressed in words), impersonal, and timeless. The worldview and lifestyle proposed by the Tao Te Ching, considered as crystallizing the thoughts of Lao Tzu, are diametrically opposed to those advanced by Confucius. They are disposed against knowledge, action, and wealth. They favor apathy and silence, as displayed in the Taoist proverb describing a virtuous life: "Do everything by doing nothing" (*wu wei*). In general, Lao Tzu encouraged spontaneous and natural behavior.

The development of a monistic worldview is, however, arguably demonstrated most clearly in the Hindu spiritual context. The central tenets of Hinduism, found throughout its scriptures (the Upanishads), converge on the conviction that all forms of existence contain a unique principle. The Absolute, the Eternal, the Transcendent Reality is the *Paramatman*, or *Brahman-atman*, the universal divine soul. From this eternal principle flows the world of time and space in circular cycles. In this philosophy, the so-called natural world is merely a by-product of reality.

The unique value of the human being does not lie in physical existence but in the fact that it contains a germ of the cosmic soul, an infinitely minute molecule of the *Paramatman*. The fundamental anthropological axiom of Hindu religiosity is that the *atman*, or human soul, is regenerated through endless reincarnations in accordance with the law of karma that controls the closed system of the universe.

There are no clearly determined boundaries between the human being and animals or plants because the *atman* may assume a different form in each phase of life. The hierarchy of beings begins with plants, progresses to animals, advances to human beings, and then to the world of the deities. The boundaries that separate these categories are not impenetrable; thus, their differentiation is based not on essence, but rather on degree.

The basic position in Hindu thought is that the Divine becomes the world, while not creating either from itself, from nothing, or from anything else. In the final analysis, the Divine itself obeys the eternal law of the universe; by the same token, the world of the senses or natural world is self-delusion (*maya*), by which human beings must not be absorbed. The various worlds are closed within an ever-renewed cycle of life, while the universe is periodically destroyed and later appears anew.

Consequently, within this closed system of the universe, human beings are called to an awareness of the *atman* within themselves, which is actually a part of the *Paramatman*. and to contribute to an end in this adventure of successive incarnations (*Saṃsāra*), in which the *atman*, the vital aspect of human existence has become entangled.

3. Samkhya, Buddhism

A radical differentiation from the previous philosophy may be found in the original Hindu Samkhya, the kernel of which was later adopted by Buddhism. According to this system of thought, the universe consists of two principles: the *prakriti* (the natural

material world of the universe)[1] on the one hand and the *purusha* (endowed with conscience) on the other hand. *Prakriti* is not static, but rather involves a creative force without conscience. Its evolutionary movement is not the result of an external drive, but instead is due to the liberation of an internal system of energies through the *karma* that belongs to every specific being. The supreme level of development in *prakriti* is attained only when the *purusha*, which is spiritual in its nature, awakens and directs the *prakriti* in its evolutionary journey. For the Samkhya philosophy, *prakriti* is considered to produce the world through successive combinations of diverse elements.

While Buddhism was founded on Samkhya, it strongly opposed the anthropological teaching of the ancient Hindu tradition, and rejected the existence of personal, eternal, and inalienable souls. Consequently, it also discarded the suggestion that the deeper essence of the human being lies in the *atman*. The Buddhist teaching instead persistently underlined the opinion regarding no-self or no-soul (*anatman* or *anatta*), denying the existence of an immortal soul. While other cultures use the word self to define self-consciousness, Hīnayāna Buddhism believes in no-self because of the constantly changing combination of natural and intellectual forces of energy. The human being is simply a physical and spiritual organism (*nāmarūpa*), which ceaselessly changes inasmuch as the combination of elements to which it owes its existence is also in constant flux.

At this point, the boundaries between human beings and the animal or plant kingdoms are once again fluid. Nature and the human being exist in direct interdependence. The notion of a personal, universal Lord, who is the creator and ruler of the world, is absent here. The law of *karma* controls everything. The world did not come into existence from nothing. Instead, it lies in a state of mutual dependence, subjected to the law of *karma*.

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1. Mary Pat Fisher and Robin Rinehart, *Living Religions*, 10th ed. (Boston: Pearson Education, Inc., 2017) 85.

In the Mahāyāna branch of Buddhism, the theory of emptiness, or void (śūnyāta), was articulated and led the basic principle of Buddhism regarding "no-self" (*anatman*) to extremes. Accordingly, all things exist in a relationship of interdependence. Not only are there no entities that *shape* visible reality, but there are also no elements that *constitute* this visible reality. The term śūnyāta does not signify nothingness or chaos, but rather denotes that reality is an intricate network of relations, from which any self-subsisting essence is entirely absent. Thus all philosophies based upon the concepts of being or non-being, along with their derivative worldviews, are simply abandoned. Ultimately, a logical emptiness accompanies the ontological "emptiness."

II Monotheistic Worldviews

With the monotheistic current of thought, a new definitive factor is added to the older bipolar relationship between the human being and nature: namely, the energy of the transcendent God, who is absolutely "other".

1. Zoroastrianism

In Iran, the perception developed that humanity moves within a dualistic universe. Despite its monotheistic tone, Zoroastrianism is usually described as dualistic. While the creation of the universe is the work of the Wise Lord (Ahura Mazdā), who is considered the closest friend to humankind, the source of evil is Angra Mainyu or the evil, destructive spirit that shaped the demons and always acts in opposition to whatever Ahura Mazdā does. The creations of Ahura Mazdā are also called Amesha Spenta (the generous, the immortal ones), who correspond to the six distinct creations: cattle, fire, earth, the arc of the sky, water, and plants. A seventh creation is the human being, which is more intimately connected to Ahura Mazdā. The final texts of the Avesta promote a marked dualism. However, more recent studies question whether Zarathustra (or Zoroaster) actually preached a sharp doctrine of dualism.

2. Judaism

Within a world of idolatry that regarded as divine all that existed in nature, while at the same time disregarding the complex mythologies of Egypt, Canaan, and Mesopotamia, the Hebrew people declared their faith in one unique God, who creates out of nothing without being identified with creation. Indeed, creation constitutes a spontaneous divine action. Thus, the Old Testament distinguishes between the world and a transcendent God; stresses that the universe came into existence through the almighty word of God alone, who "spoke, and [all things] came to be" (Ps. 32/33:9); declares that God did not abandon the world after its creation, but continues to provide for it; and sets the world in the framework of "divine economy," or dispensation, for the salvation of humankind.

Jewish and Christian thought more or less developed in parallel, at least to the degree that they are based on the books of the Old Testament. Beyond this, however, their teachings are differentiated inasmuch as Christian theology perceives the Old Testament in the light of the New Testament.

The basis of biblical thought pertaining to human beings remains the Genesis account. Human beings were created in the "image" and "likeness" of God (Gen. 1:26–27; 5:1). The command given by the Creator to human beings is not to dominate or conquer nature, but to preserve and protect it. As the rational crown of nature, human beings invariably influence and impact the rest of creation through their behavior. All that was fashioned by the creative energy of God is "very good" (Gen. 1:31). As the culmination of creation, then, and as the intellect of the world, human beings are called to govern, direct, decipher, and develop the potential of all creation.

Created with the capacity to choose, human beings were called to realize all that is good for the world by means of their free will. The capacity of free will – that is, the choice of either abiding in a relationship of obedience to God or rejecting such a relationship –

was misused by Adam, the first-created human being. Adam used his free will in a self-centered manner to exalt himself without God and obey the devil, who falsely promised: "you will be like God" (Gen. 3:5). Thus, Adam betrayed and corrupted his authentic being. This distortion constitutes sin. It constitutes the distortion of the human existence, in which every human person participates.

The immediate result of this sin was the disruption of the harmonious relationship between the human being and nature, together with the more widespread disturbance of cosmic balance. For there is a profound link between the human being and nature, inasmuch as the former are the rational crown of the latter. The Book of Genesis (chapters 6–8) subsequently records the flood as the original, general ecological disaster, which is the direct consequence of humankind's corruption. Later, the prophetic books also make various references to catastrophe (Amos 7:1–6; Nahum 1:2–12; Joel 2:1–27) resulting from collective sin. In particular, the Prophet Jeremiah (chapters 4; 12) warns of wider ecological annihilation.

Nonetheless, the prophetic eschatology of the Old Testament emphasizes that history moves in an evolving process and that, following God's intervention, the disorder occurring in the universe as a result of sin will be overcome, while "new heavens and a new earth" (Is. 65:17; 66:22; and elsewhere) will appear. This eschatological expectation remained a fundamental aspect of Judaism, despite its many expressions and various external influences. In later Jewish mysticism, especially from the 13th century, the Kabbalah tradition developed its theory of the ten *sephira* that exist between the eternal God and His creatures. One of the offshoots of this current claimed that the pious human being contributes actively to the original restoration of the universe.

3. Islam

Islam adopted the Judeo-Christian tradition in a liberal manner, without depending too closely on the books of the Old and New

Testaments. At the same time, Islam avoided any expression that could limit the irreconcilable gap between Allah and the human being. According to the Quran, Allah "created the heavens and the earth in six days. . . . He directs the affair from heaven to earth, then it goes up to Him in one day . . . who has created all things well" (32:4–5; 7).

The creation of Adam is in itself good. Therefore, human will is responsible for the overthrow of the natural order. Human beings must bear in mind that they derive from and are connected to the earth. Whatever occurs in nature is the result of the direct action of God. Every creature constitutes a sign of Allah's divine power and majesty.

The human being's relationship with the earth is described very graphically in the Quran. Allah fashioned "man out of clay" (32:7) is a phrase repeated in various passages, such as the following: "We created man of an extraction of clay, then We set him, a drop, in a receptacle secure, then We created of the drop a clot then We created of the clot a tissue then We created of the tissue bones then We garmented the bones in flesh; thereafter We produced him as another creature. So blessed be Allah, the fairest of creators!" (23:12–14).

However, the element of dust, from which Adam was fashioned, assumed life with Allah's breath. "Then He fashioned his (Adam's) progeny of an extraction of mean water, then He shaped him, and breathed His spirit in him. And He appointed for you hearing, and sight, and hearts; little thanks you show" (32:8–9). And elsewhere: "And when thy Lord said to the angels, 'See, I am creating a mortal of a clay of mud moulded. When I have shaped him, and breathed My spirit in him, fall you down, bowing before him!'" (15:28–29). Human beings contain a living principle, which seems to be closely linked to the seat of the conscience or, as the Quran variously defines it, the heart (*galb*), soul (*nafs*), and spirit (*ruh*).

Adam is infinitely superior to all other beings as a result of his ability to name them. This gift of rational definition and logical

thought gives him the possibility of acting as well as of judging the consequences of his actions. Rational conscience and moral responsibility determine the uniqueness of human beings, while also differentiating them from all other creatures. The Islamic tradition frequently repeats the teaching that the earth belongs to Allah, which also signifies that the earth is not the property of human beings. It is only as a representative of Allah that the human being is able to use nature.

Based on the assurance of the Quran that every creation of Allah manifests and praises Allah's power, many Muslim mystics (Sufi) have described in poetic prayers the revelation of Allah's majesty and beauty in nature. Indeed, one such mystic, Ibn Arabi (d. 1240) sought to integrate the Quran's teaching about Allah and the human being with Neoplatonist notions that tended toward a pantheistic worldview, claiming that Allah inconceivably transcends creation, whereas the created world returns to its original unity through the mediation of human beings. However, Islam officially rejected such concepts.

III The Distinctiveness of Christianity

1. The Relationship of Humankind to God

In Christian theology, the concepts of the creation of the material and spiritual world out of nothing (*ex nihilo*) and the eschatological prospect of history are fundamental and essential. Everything created is also changeable. There is nothing static in the world. Animate and inanimate things evolve in an ever-transforming process. Anthropology and cosmology are mutually interpreted in the light of theology. The world and history are replete with a sense of tragedy, which began with the estrangement of creation from God as a result of human sin.

Nevertheless, the Gospel proclaims that the world continues to be an object of God's love and, above all, that God entered human history, assuming human nature, thereby restoring humankind to

its authentic state and rendering human beings into "persons" able to choose love with their own free will. "And the Word became flesh and lived among us . . . full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Through the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection, Jesus Christ saves the human being – namely, the bond that connects all parts of creation. With the renewal of human nature, the logical crown of creation, all things return to a harmonious and loving relationship with God.

From the outset of creation, God entrusted this world to Adam, the forefather of all humankind, in order that he might labor in it and develop all its potential. In the phase of the re-creation, Jesus Christ becomes the new Adam, the restorer of humanity and nature. However, this new creation, which is inaugurated through the saving work of Christ, has not yet attained its fulfillment. Humanity has regained the possibility of communion with God, and the future of the world depends on the realization of this possibility. Christ's victory will only be fulfilled on the day when He returns in glory; that is when all things will be subjected to Him and He will offer all things to (1 Cor. 15:25–28). In the meantime, "the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now" (Rom. 8:22).

As God's creation, the human being does not lose communion with God. Participation in God's life is not something offered in addition to human nature; it comprises its most authentic expression. The "image of God" defines human nature and includes reason, free will, and the intellect. Yet, in fact, as Professor Elias Oikonomou of the University of Athens reminded us: "Practically, a conceptual analysis of the concept of the 'divine image' reveals a far broader – almost endless – range of meaning than the definitions often attributed to it."[2] The concept of the "image of God" expresses a static aspect, while the concept of the "likeness

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2. Elias B. Oikonomou, *Interpretation of the Old Testmanent: Exquisite Texts* [in Greek] (Athens, 1989), 155. (Translated)

of God" manifests the dynamic aspect and incorporates a sense of becoming. In this regard, the "divine likeness" is the "divine image" in the process of realization.

As created "in the image" of God, human beings have the exceptional privilege of becoming co-creators with God. We do not, of course, create out of nothing, but instead intervene in the mutability of the environment, making good use of the laws and secrets of nature which we discover.

There is an interdependence between human existence and material creation, as well as between the spiritual and material reality. When human beings behave in an arrogant, selfish, and greedy manner, they also sweep all of the created material world toward the fallen nature. After all, created nature, too, requires grace inasmuch as it participates in the fallen state of human existence.

2. The Human Person

In their theoretical, theological reflection, the Greek Fathers developed the notion of the human person as a microcosm of creation, and the concept of the mediatory role of the human being as sharing in both the spiritual and the material world. For St Gregory of Nyssa, the "human being is a kind of small cosmos, containing in himself the same elements with which the whole is built up."[3] As St Gregory of Nazianzus (also known as Gregory the Theologian) explained: "The human being is a kind of second world, great in smallness, placed on the earth, another angel, a composite worshiper, a beholder of the visible creation, an initiate (*mystis*) into the intelligible"[4] Therefore, human beings are endowed with a priestly role in creation. The culmination of the entire process

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3. Gregory of Nyssa, quoted in Catharine P. Roth, trans., *On the Soul and the Resurrection* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 34.

4. Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration on Holy Pascha,"quoted in Nonna Verna Harrison, trans., *Festal Orations* (Yonkers, N.Y.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 166.

is that the human person is defined as "a living creature trained here and transferred elsewhere, and, to perfect the mystery, deified through inclination toward God."[5]

Orthodox theology regards this complete transformation, or deification, of the human person, along with the transformation of creation, as the final purpose of history. However, we should add some points of clarification. The Aristotelian terms *metaphysical* and *supernatural*, together with their corollary concepts, can only be accepted in a conventional manner by Orthodox theology. This is because Orthodox theology does not recognize a natural aspect on the one hand and a supernatural aspect on the other. It does not speak of nature on one level and God on another level, with the "supernatural" level somehow in the middle. The fundamental distinction in Orthodox theology is between uncreated and created. The essence and energies of God are the uncreated; the world is the created. God's essence is incomprehensible, immutable, ineffable, and inaccessible. By the same token, however, through God's energies, God is revealed to human beings, who come to know and participate in the divine energies. Moreover, through those energies, which are distinguished, albeit inseparable, from the divine essence, human beings are exalted and glorified.

At the same time, *theosis* (deification) is not a human achievement, but a gift of God's grace, the divine energies. What Orthodox theology labels as *theosis* is the human participation in the energies but not in the essence of God. The entire universe is the space of God's sanctifying energies, of God's uncreated grace. Christianity does not embrace the Platonist distinction between body and soul, or matter and spirit. Matter is not the enemy of the spirit; the body is not the prison of the soul. When St Paul speaks of the opposition between spirit and flesh, he is in fact referring to the human person without the presence of the Holy Spirit: "For what the flesh desires is opposed to the

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5. Gregory of Nazianzus, "Oration on Holy Pascha," quoted in Harrison, *Festal Orations*, 69.

Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other" (Gal. 5:17). So Orthodox tradition emphasizes the close connection between human beings and creation. It does not attribute importance solely to the sanctification of the soul, but also to the entire created nature. The restoration of harmony between humankind and nature occurs through love and thanksgiving.

3. The Relationship of Humankind to Nature

In its liturgical and sacramental life, the Church makes use of material creation – water, oil, bread – transforming these elements into bearers of divine grace, and at the same time sanctifying created matter itself. In its central sacramental expression, namely the Divine Eucharist, the Church offers bread and wine to God. These become body and blood of Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, and after their sanctification are transmitted to the faithful. "Your own of your own, we offer to you in all and for all."[6] Together with these offerings, as the mystical Body of Christ, the Church also offers all of creation, thereby proclaiming the harmonious relationship between humanity and nature.

This common conscience of the Church is highlighted in this Message of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches: "The Orthodox Church regards the human person as the steward and not the proprietor of material creation, a concept particularly expressed in its ascetic and liturgical – especially its Eucharistic – tradition and experience."[7]

As emphasized by the Greek Fathers of the Church, the human person cannot reach God by avoiding nature. On the contrary, the

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6. St John Chrysostom, "The Holy Anaphora," in *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, at: https://www.goarch.org/-/the-divine-liturgy-of-saint-john-chrysostom

7. Message of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches, Patmos, 26 September 1995.

human person progresses in the spiritual life by realizing the ethical virtues within the world and acquiring knowledge of the divine "words" realized in the event of creation, thus attaining unity with the Word of God.

In the framework of all the above, it is the duty of human beings to develop their own potential as well as the potential of nature. Or, as another professor from the University of Athens, Nikolaos Bratsiotis, explained: "By means of the 'divine likeness,' man should ultimately become a 'coworker of God' and even a co-creator of his own perfection, and through this of the whole visible creation."[8] On the other hand, Christian thought highlights the ever-present danger and illusion of euphoria, which results from human greed over success and achievement. Equally, there is the problem of human surrender to the basic temptation of history: namely, the quest for theosis or deification on the basis of human criteria alone, or the belief that by one's own accomplishments, one can dethrone God and become God oneself.

Modern humankind has failed to grasp the sense of sacredness and has reached the point of perceiving nature through sacrilegious eyes, without respect, and frequently without love or with aggressive cynicism. By contrast, Orthodox theology and tradition insist that nature too is sanctified, that all of creation lies within the activity and radiance of the Holy Spirit, and that the entire world is called to transformation.

In summary: 1) Various religious and philosophical systems regard nature as animated by divine forces and human beings as subject to the will of these forces. 2) Some of these systems perceive human beings as a small part of an impersonal nature, a tiny molecule subject to nature's impersonal laws. The fundamental reality is nature, and nature rules. 3) Certain religions consider the present world as unreal, as self-delusion. 4) The monotheistic

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8. Nikolaos P. Bratsiotis, *Anthropology of the Old Testament: The Human Being as Divine Creature*, 8th reprinting [in Greek] (Athens, 1996) 306.

religions see human beings and the world as creatures of an inaccessible, infinite God. This last teaching is also promoted by the Christian faith that also proclaims that these are destined to progress in harmony to transformation.

Conclusion

The human being and nature are of inconceivable value and importance. The entire world is the space of the sanctifying energies of God, and God's uncreated grace. It exists in a continuous, dynamic movement. Above and beyond any notion that rejects the world, Orthodox thought invites human beings to active participation and cooperation in relation to the natural environment: ultimately to an extension of the creative energies of God.

It is, therefore, a sacred task and special blessing for someone to toil with diligence, enthusiasm, and vision to study and decipher the secrets of nature, as well as to use this knowledge appropriately for the benefit of humankind.

In an age when our planet is threatened by terrible ecological destruction, we are obligated to become aware of the fact that nature is sacred. This is particularly the case for those of us, who live in arrogant, so-called "developed," societies. It is only by respecting nature and reestablishing harmonious relations with nature that we shall be able to guarantee a tomorrow.

The universe, according to Christian revelation, was created with the purpose of being transformed together with human beings in an act of thanksgiving and glorification to the loving God.

The complete development and fulfillment of the human being, however, is not attained on the purely plant or animal level: that is, on the level that is "according to nature." Rather, it stretches to the level that is "above nature": namely, the level that is ultimately the authentic "nature" of the human being. This is what determines the internal dynamic of the human person. In the words of St Gregory the Theologian: "Man has one task alone

. . . one natural destiny alone, namely to ascend and be united to God."[9] The human being's ultimate vocation and destination is always "straining forward to what lies ahead" (Phil. 3:13).

Thus, the unceasing development of human potential, which characterizes scientific research, is fulfilled in the most majestic, eschatological perspective of freedom, love, and communion. And it is here that our optimism finally and fundamentally culminates with regard to the future and fate of humanity and the natural environment. In the end, by offering us a steady creative energy and breath, it is also what supports and strengthens us even in the most adverse circumstances.

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9. Gregory the Theologian, *Ethical Poems* in Minge's Patrologia Graeca 37.685.

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Religions and World Poverty

In July 2002, those responsible for the World Food Programme of the United Nations claimed that "around 12.6 million people in six countries of the southern belt of Africa would die of hunger by the end of that year."[1] At the same time, over 800 million people were suffering from extreme malnutrition, while another three million of our fellow human beings lived on less than two dollars a day. What was most concerning, however, was that these numbers, and so many other statistics published from time to time, have ceased to make any impression on those who are smug and content. May I dare to add somewhat cynically that so many of us, too, are no longer shaken by such facts and figures.

The lack of elementary means for human survival, the tragic phenomenon of poverty, has always accompanied human history. Very frequently, agricultural populations have especially felt its pressure. Indeed, with the creation of cities and, later, of large urban centers, poverty was rendered still more evident and complex.

The tragedy of poverty has increased in our period through the proliferation of horrible diseases, most prominently through HIV and AIDS, which has claimed millions of victims principally in poorer regions of the planet. At the same time, the misfortune of indigence has multiplied as a result of various military conflicts and local wars waged in different parts of the world.

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1. Chief Public Affairs Officer Trevor Rowe, "Africa Hunger Crisis: WFP Backs Global Campaign", (Media Release, AFR/521-WFP/1066, 21 November 2002).

Contemporary electronic media and sources of information now bring us face-to-face with painful scenes of abysmal adversity and hunger. Nonetheless, above and beyond the outrageous instances of extreme poverty encountered in the continents of Africa and Asia, the deprivation of basic goods also afflicts, albeit to a varying degree, millions of our brothers and sisters in developed nations of the world. For example, there are millions of people suffering from poverty in the United States, the United Kingdom, Russia, and elsewhere. Therefore, despite the technological advancement and progress of humanity, poverty today ranks as the foremost problem of our world.

I Religious Teachings on Poverty

From their beginnings and in their foundations, the diverse religions of the world have never overlooked the issue of poverty. In one way or another, they have all sought to interpret and address it. Within the broader framework of their teachings and traditions, they have also taken a very clear position in response to this question.

1. Hinduism

A first category of religions, which originated in the peoples of the Indian peninsula, adopted the view that the circumstances of people's poverty or prosperity are the consequence of a former life. With the accumulation of good or bad deeds (*karma*) in various incarnations (*saṃsāra*) ultimately led to the present state of either fortune or misfortune. In the Hindu worldview, the way out of this situation is possible only in a future phase of life, namely in the evolution of reincarnations to come. The theories about *karma* and *saṃsāra* led to a more static concept of life, with an acceptance of the status quo of one's situation, and without any margin for challenging those circumstances or bringing about social change.

Compassion toward the misfortunate is naturally encouraged and praised, increasing one's positive *karma*, but it does not offer

any solution to the problem of poverty. The fundamental under-standing remains that the patient acceptance of poverty and its circumstantial consolations is the mandated way of life. At the same time, Hinduism has perceived poverty as a form of asceticism contributing to one's liberation from the endless series of reincar-nations and toward union with the highest universal principle, the ultimate reality (*Brahman*). Poverty is not considered an end in itself, but rather a means for one to exercise renunciation for the sake of a better good.

2. Buddhism

Buddhism sprang from the heart of the Hindu philosophical-religious systems, although it disputed its teaching on the soul (*atman*). Buddhism adopted Hinduism's convictions about *karma* and *saṃsāra* but proposed absolute poverty as an ideal for the perfect man, namely the Buddhist monk. Hence, poverty was adopted as a discipline, characteristic of monastic communities (*sangha*). At the time of his tonsure, a monk symbolically receives an alms bowl and three pieces of clothing, which are supposed to be his sole material belongings. Along with the practice of pov-erty, Buddhist doctrine has advanced compassion as a basic vir-tue for its lay followers. The practice of *mettā* (loving-kindness) is expected as a gesture to those in need. Greed, immorality, and hatred are regarded as degenerate passions. A frugal and simple life is promoted as an ideal for liberation from the illusion of this life, particularly from the delusion of the self. It is a way to the perfect tranquility of nirvana. These views have shaped a more moderate lifestyle in addition to the patient endurance of poverty.

3. Confucianism and Taoism

In the vast land of China, there were two basic forms of religion that were shaped by the ancient Chinese tradition: Confucian-ism and Taoism. The first endeavored to impose a social order, determining rules of conduct for the family and the wider circle of relatives, the city, and society. It thereby limited the risk of

abandoning individuals. The fundamental virtue in the Confucian system, at least as this emerges from his disciples, is humaneness or human heartedness (*rén*), which is sometimes misinterpreted as *kindness*; more broadly, *rén* is mutuality in human relations and concern for other human beings. It can be defined by the exhortation: "What you do not want others to do to you, do not do to others."[2]

Taoism embraced a more passive way of living, one that was indifferent to comfort and wealth. Lao Tzu, who is considered its father and founder, expected his followers to be humble, meek, and content with little; he also praised spontaneous and natural behavior. His famous axiom "*wu wei*" can be summarized in the exhortation "Do nothing," or "Do everything as if doing nothing."[3]

Thus, in the Chinese tradition until the last century, poverty was regarded more or less as a natural or even inevitable phenomenon for many people. The communist revolution of Mao Tse-tung brought about a new attitude by exercising a harsh criticism towards the widespread notions of Confucius and Lao Tzu. Nonetheless, the control of this vast land to this day continues to be concentrated in the hands of a few, while poverty continues its existence in the multitude.

4. Judaism

In Hebrew thought, poverty was a tragedy to be overcome or a misfortune to be endured with patience. At the same time, material wealth was considered a reward for faithfulness to God (Ps.

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2. Confucius, *Analects* 15:24 (see also 12:2). All citations from the Analects are taken from Burton Watson, trans. *The Analects of Confucius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

3. According to Smith, *wu wei* is: "a phrase that translates literally as inaction but in Taoism means pure effectiveness. Action in the mode of wu wei is action in which friction – in interpersonal relationships, in intrapsychic conflict, and in relation to nature – is reduced to the minimum." Huston Smith, *The World's Religions: 50th Anniversary Edition* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991) 200.

1:3; 11/12:6). The first book of the Old Testament informs us that the patriarchs were affluent people (Gen. 13:2; 26:13–14; 30:43).

The biblical texts define specific religious and legal obligations for Jews: for example, the duty to surrender a portion of one's harvest from the field and the vineyard for the poor (Lev. 19:9–10; 23:22. Also Deut. 24:19–21; Ruth 2). Another obligation for property owners is to tithe every three years for the benefit of those who do not own their own property, as well as for priests, widows, orphans, and foreigners (Deut. 14:28–29; Tobit 1:8). And Deuteronomy 15: 11 states, "Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you; 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in the land.'" (See also Prov. 3:27; 14:21; and Tobit 4:7–11.)

In the psalms, we frequently encounter complaints and aspirations of the indigent, as well as the prayers of the oppressed. The poor are presented as friends and servants of Yahweh (see Ps. 85/86:1), in whom they trustingly seek refuge and whom they ardently pursue. Poverty is often the result of a lack of righteousness, which all members of the Jewish community are obliged to work together in order to overcome.

For later Judaism, whose principles are outlined in the Talmud, "nothing is harder to bear than poverty; for he who is crushed by poverty is like one to whom all the troubles of the world cling" (Midrash, Rabbah Exodus, 31:14)[4] Elsewhere, the Talmud adds: "If all the world's pain and suffering were concentrated on one end of a pole, with poverty on the other, then poverty would still tip the balance" (Midrash Rabbah Exodus, 31:14)

Simultaneously, the Jewish tradition underlines the virtue of almsgiving as a duty. Nonetheless, the fundamental principle is always compassionate lending. The Mishne Torah, composed in the 12th century by the renowned Hebrew juristic scholar and philosopher Rabbi Moses Maimonides to codify the two thousand years of

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4. Harry Freedman and Maurice Simon (trans.), *The Midrash Rabbah*, II. *Exodus, Leviticus*. (London: Soncino Press, 1977).

Jewish religious laws and traditions related to almsgiving, declares that the supreme form of almsgiving is the offering of a loan or of labor, whereby the recipient is able to provide for oneself. We must, of course, remember that such prescriptions are predominantly directed toward the poor within the Jewish community, even if several exceptions appeared from time to time.

5. Islam

Later, Islam also moved along the same lines, adopting many elements from Judaism and Christianity. One of the five basic obligations of every Muslim believer is almsgiving (*zakat*), which may be offered in either money or items.[5] The Quran repeatedly refers to the duty of giving alms. Here are some typical passages: "It is not piety, that you turn your faces to the East and to the West. True piety is this: to believe in God . . . to give of one's substance, however cherished, to kinsmen, and orphans, the needy, the traveller, beggars, and to ransom the slave, to perform the prayer, to pay the alms. And they who fulfil their covenant when they have engaged in a covenant, and endure with fortitude misfortune, hardship and peril, these are they who are true in their faith, these are the truly godfearing" (2:177). "If you publish your freewill offerings, it is excellent; but if you conceal them, and give them to the poor, that is better for you, and will acquit you of your evil deeds; God is aware of the things you do" (2:271).

There is a saying attributed to Omar the Caliph: "Prayer brings us half way to God; fasting brings us to the door of his palace; and almsgiving precures us admission."[6] Muslim almsgiving is a form of social welfare taxation and corresponds to 2.5 percent – or, as tra-

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5. See, for example, Quran 2:273–275; 30:37–38.

6. George Sale, *The Koran: Commonly Called the Alcoran of Mohammed : Translated Into English Immediately from the Original Arabic : with Explanatory Notes Taken from the Most Approved Commentators : to which is Prefixed a Preliminary Discourse*. 5th ed. (Philadelphia, Pa.: J. Moore, 1856) 79.

dition prescribes, 1/40th – of the surplus profit for each believer. Beyond the stipulated *zakat*, there are also the conventional voluntary acts of charity (*sadaqah*) that occur at the conclusion of the Ramadan fast. Acts of charity compensate for personal sins and transgressions of other duties. Some have said that the almsgiving mandated by the Quran and offered beyond the legislated tax covers the greater part of the budget for most Muslim states.

It was not long before the ascetic current of Sufism emerged in Islam. This tradition gradually developed the notion of spiritual poverty as an aspect of self-renunciation (*zuhd*). Muhammad advised his disciples to be self-disciplined in the acquisition of goods; he is believed to have said: "Poverty is my glory." Thus, most Sufis endorsed poverty as a way of liberation from everything that alienates us from God.

6. Christianity

However, the greatest advocate of the poor in the history of humankind is arguably Jesus Christ:

1) With his life and work, he gave special attention to the indigent, underlining their human dignity and stressing their value in the eyes of God. From the outset, Jesus appears as the champion of the poor, repeating the words of the Prophet Isaiah about the Messiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free" (Luke 4:18).

2) Christ condemned the heartlessness and greed of the rich. We only need to recall the striking parables of the rich man and Lazarus, as well as of the foolish rich man as examples (Luke 16:19–31; 12:13–21).

3) He linked poverty to liberty and humility, and he called all those who suffer – which includes the majority of the world – to come to him, who is "gentle and humble in heart" (Matt. 11:29). He also blessed the poor (Luke 6:20), and the humble: "Blessed

are the poor in spirit" (Matt. 5:3); he proclaimed the inner renunciation of worldly things, whether people possess them greedily or obsess about them greedily (Matt. 6:24; 31; Matt. 13.22). Basically, he advocated a life of simplicity and frugality.

4) Jesus gave his own life as an example of simplicity and frugality. The entire span of his earthly life from Bethlehem to Nazareth – his public life to the point of his utter humiliation when He was stripped naked on the cross – was an acceptance of voluntary indigence.

5) He preached the duty of solidarity, defining as the basis for the behavior of all those that followed him: "In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets" (Matt. 7:12).

6) He elevated love as the greatest human ideal, defining unconditional love as the essential identity of his disciples. Finally, he stressed that the duty to support one's "neighbour" extends to the unknown other, the stranger, and the adherent of another creed; it also takes place in silence, isolation, and even risk.

All those who have loved Christ and followed him conscientiously and consistently have experienced a love of poverty; millions have also imitated his voluntary life of frugality. Christian literature is replete with superb texts praising the poor.

As a significant current within the Christian tradition, monasticism adopted voluntary poverty as a way of life, thereby participating in the life of the greater majority of the world's population. However, Christianity never attributed to the acceptance of poverty a self-sufficient or soteriological (salvific) content, as we have already seen in Buddhism. Instead, Christianity associated poverty with charity and humility, as these were defined by Christ.

Through its many and diverse initiatives, the Church has played a pioneering and determinative role in the immediate mitigation of world poverty, and the establishment of appropriate institutions to overcome indigence in different countries where Christianity has spread. Christian faith and doctrine have inspired prophetic

voices of criticism against social injustice, influenced government legislation, supported international organizations, nurtured social measures, and created institutions to respond to and resolve all forms of poverty.

Just as our age is witnessing the expansion of a global society, the most fundamental challenge is how we shall extend in practice the Christian obligation for tangible solidarity from state to state, nation to nation, and race to race. There are many factors that prevent such a response. The ancient Hebrew concept of tribalism or sectarianism remains dominant in most contemporary communities, whether they be religious, economic, or cultural. What is demanded, then, is creative thought and bold action, inspired by Christian spirituality, in order to formulate and advance new solutions.

The transcendence of boundaries in the concept of neighbour, as defined by Christ in his parable of the good Samaritan, has already paved the route that we should take on the global level. Indeed, Christ spectacularly elucidated the duty toward one's neighbour with his image of the last judgment, in which he identified himself as our neighbour, casting himself as among the most despised and deprived of our world – the hungry and thirsty, the sick and the naked, the stranger and the imprisoned (Matt. 25:35–36).

The Christian recommendation for spiritual maturity, for the meaning of life, and for the development of a just society, is crystallized in the multifaceted notion of love, as described and defined in the New Testament. Love is identified with God, the Supreme Reality: "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them" (1 John 4:16).

II Global Perspectives on Poverty

1. The Necessity of Structural Change

The problem of poverty assumes particularly complex dimensions in its macroeconomic and global perspectives. Whether directly or

indirectly, there are many seen and unseen factors that contribute to its creation and promotion. The contemporary globalization of trade and technology, a process that occurs despite the naïve wishes or rhetorical anathemas of many, precipitates an accumulation of wealth in certain nations. At the same time, it exerts horrible pressure on the economies of other nations, thereby generating vast waves of indigence. The previous framework of the state is incapable of protecting many nations, especially when their national economies are stifled by the flood of international competition. The problem of world poverty cannot be addressed or resolved through circumstantial acts of charity and gifting: it demands structural changes. While there is no longer any shortage of food on the planet, billions of people still encounter problems of undernourishment or malnourishment as a result of the system of production and distribution.

In earlier times, many of us would follow world developments as passive observers. However, with the networks and communications brought about by globalization, like it or not, we are all now invariably part and parcel of this web of relations that shapes our world.

It is helpful to consider another broad sketch of world poverty by recalling some additional statistical details.[7] Seventy years ago, the earth's population was two billion. In 2002, it had reached over 6.1 billion, and it is estimated that it will rise to well over 9.3 billion by 2050. Only five percent of this increase will occur in the developed world, whereas 95 percent will occur in the developing world. Seventy percent of the world is currently illiterate, while only one percent has attended some schooling at a tertiary level. Meanwhile, sixty million people have been infected by HIV, 95 percent of whom live in developing nations. Moreover, 20 million people have already died of AIDS, leaving a further 30 million as orphans.

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7. The following section is based on facts and figures from 2002.

These statistics, only some of the many that could be presented, reveal a painful reality that impacts everyone. For Christian believers in particular, humankind in its entirety comprises an organic whole. Each cell exists in organic relationship with the others: the healthy and the unhealthy, as well as those affected by bacteria or infected by viruses. Therefore, we might say that it is our Christian conscience that must first and foremost be awakened. World poverty is not a natural evil for a conscientious Christian, something that we have the right to consider with apathy or interpret as destiny. It is immediately and intimately linked to human responsibility: individual and collective; national and racial; religious and cultural.

Naturally, we are obliged to begin with our immediate environment, with our own people and nation. All of us must commit to a social contract of solidarity in order to address poverty in our own land and other major scourges associated with poverty, such as HIV and AIDS and the use of drugs. However, we have no right to limit our interest and concern to the perimeters of our land. The Christian vision, and, consequently, the Christian duty, extends to the entire *oikoumene*. With today's pace of globalization and informatics, we can no longer claim ignorance about the poverty of others. Empty words about human dignity and social justice irrespective of origin, race, and education, no longer suffice. We must mobilize scientific knowledge, creative thought, and decisive action in a common struggle for justice and progress. These are the essential antidotes for indigence in our world.

a) Calling Out the "Christian" Nations The majority of people agree that the current gap between rich and poor nations must be bridged. It is unacceptable that 80 percent of the earth's goods are enjoyed by 15 percent of the planet's population. These "haves" include countries and nations that became developed through Christian influence and tradition. Despite the degree to which they might be corrupted by secularism and the new idolatry of money, sex, and indulgence, they still declare that they belong to the Christian world. It is time, then, for a prophetic voice and

criticism to be raised against the strategy of those who overtly or covertly rule these nations. Let me outline one specific dimension of this problem.

b) The Connection of Poverty and War We have known for centuries that human poverty is indescribably exacerbated by war. Many people agree that local military conflicts are sustained by the weapons trade, with the great powers of the world playing a leadership role. Professor Amartya Sen, a Nobel laureate in economics, currently the Thomas W. Lamont University Professor, and Professor of Economics and Philosophy at Harvard University, informs us that:

> In the period between 1996–2000, the weapons that were trafficked in the global market from the most affluent nations, known as the G8, reached 87 percent of the total sum of the world's weapons. The permanent members of the Security Council of the United Nations – namely, those who are considered responsible par excellence for world peace – are collectively responsible for 81 percent of the exportation of weapons contracts. In seven of these nations, which compose the club of the G8 financial powers, Christians comprise a definitive majority, although they choose to ignore the connection between poverty and weapons. The United States exports 50 percent of the weapons trafficked throughout the world, while 68 percent of American weapons end up in developing nations.[8]

c) Attention to the Protest of the Most Poor Societies Christians must pay special attention to the protests of upheaval expanding in the Islamic world, which cannot simply be addressed by adopting methods of oppression, or dismissed by applying to them the general label of terrorism. A growing number of Muslim populations are demonstrating an increased sense of grievance and an

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8. Amartya Sen, "How to Judge Globalism," *The American Prospect* 13, 1 (2002).

intense sense of outrage at the accumulation of wealth in Christian nations. It does not take long for this frustration to be transformed into animosity at the Christian world for the injustice it perpetrates, and at their own governments who support this injustice.

Previously, many groups of oppressed farmers and laborers – namely, those who had no chance in the world of prospering, those who were labeled as proletariat – followed a system, Marxism, that promised justice and progress. Adhering to the fashion of its time, this system was based on historical materialism and atheism. History has proved its abysmal failure. However, in the new conditions of globalization, there is now another proletariat seeking bread, justice, and hope. Indeed, it may originate from and be driven by another political and religious system with its own knowledge and passion incited by religious enthusiasm. It is no less dangerous simply because we choose to describe it as Islamic fanaticism. If we dismiss it as such, our responsibility as conscientious Christians for our social, economic, and global inconsistency and lack of integrity would be, for a second time, immense.

d) Positive Action on the Global Front Thankfully, there are also plenty of admirable examples in the appropriate direction that contribute to the consolation and resolution of world indigence. On the occasion of the beginning of the third millennium, in September of 2000, 147 heads of state and government out of a total of 191 nations adopted the UN Millennium Declaration that outlines their interest in and concern for goals such as peace, security, and development. More recently, new ideas and proposals were incorporated into a new document of the UN called the Millennium Development Goals, which are organized around eight principal targets. The first of these is the eradication of poverty and hunger.[9]

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9. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) are the world's time-bound and quantified targets for addressing extreme poverty in its many dimensions: income poverty, hunger, disease, lack of adequate shelter, and exclusion, while also promoting gender equality, education, and environmental

Such grand targets, which are occasionally proposed by various international organizations, do not, of course, bring about the hoped-for results. In 1996, a summit meeting of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations set as its goal the reduction of world hunger – estimated at the time to include 800 million people – by 50 percent by 2015. Unfortunately, six years later, very little progress had been made. Nonetheless, many still believe that the goal can be met with the proper political will of the powerful nations in the world.[10]

e) A Key Role for Religious Communities Behind many of the positive initiatives in the world, there are frequently vigilant and sensitive people with a religious conscience. However, particularly with the beginning of the 21st century, religion has come to the foreground as a special and strong force. The events of 11 September 2001 have indirectly contributed to this. Large organizations, such as the World Bank, have become aware of the significance of religious communities for the eradication of world poverty. More recently, from 6 to 8 October 2002, in Canterbury, England, I was

sustainability. They are also basic human rights: the rights of each person on the planet to health, education, shelter, and security. The MDGs are the world's commitment: 1) to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; 2) to achieve universal primary education; 3) to promote gender equality and empower women; 4) to reduce child mortality; 5) to improve maternal health; 6) to combat HIV and AIDS, malaria, and other diseases; 7) to ensure environmental sustainability; and 8) to develop a global partnership for development. It is evident that all of these are directly or indirectly linked to the issue of global poverty.

10. The Food and Agriculture Organization estimated that about 795 million people of the 7.3 billion people in the world, or one in nine, suffered from chronic undernourishment. Of these, 780 million lived in developing countries, representing one in eight of the population of developing counties. More recently (2019), the UN prepared the State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report which estimated that 821 million people of the 7.6 billion people, or 10.8 percent of the world population, were suffering from chronic undernourishment. These statistics indicate that after years of a gradual decline, world hunger is rising since its low in 2015.

invited to a meeting of representatives of the world's great religions, along with leading economists. Some time ago, a dialogue was established on the subject of development, with the participation of trailblazers from the world's religions. It seems that the need for cooperation among as many broad fields as possible – intellectuals and technocrats, and especially economists, but also religious leaders – is increasingly acknowledged and encouraged.

At these interfaith meetings that target the eradication of poverty in the world, it is remarkable to witness all the religious representatives in agreement about the necessary measures to be taken together. The Christian emphasis on respect for the human dignity of every person irrespective of origin, race, and religious persuasion, is endorsed without difficulty. We are progressively overcoming old notions about restricting our interests to those of our own religious community. No matter how much the various world religions may differ in their teachings, in the final analysis, they are living communities capable of being positively influenced and of adopting vital recommendations. This is yet another example of the silent and benevolent radiance of Christianity in invisible cells of the religious thought and life of other peoples.

Something else that is steadily emphasized is the contribution of religion to the advancement of humanity, integrity, responsibility, and boldness, which certainly inspires all those who strive for the eradication of world poverty on various levels. Indeed, even the direct contribution of religious faith in reaffirming the dignity of the poor, enduring tribulation, and reinforcing hope and creativity even in the most tragic circumstances, is welcomed and encouraged on a global level.

In addition to the above criticism about the responsibility of the Christian world, it would be fair to state from personal research and experience that in developing countries, such as the African nations, that Christian communities are the ones that contribute in a very decisive manner to the eradication of poverty. They are particularly active in building critical infrastructure in the domains of health and education, as well as in supporting

people's faith in their most dire needs. The Christian faith is what often emerges as the most crucial form of assistance. Ultimately, the problem of world poverty is not merely material; it is predominantly and profoundly spiritual.

Moreover, from my experience in Albania, I should observe that there is much potential even in the harshest conditions. Alongside its restoration literally from ruins, the Orthodox Autocephalous Church of Albania has endeavored to develop pioneering programs in the social domain – health, education, welfare, agriculture, culture, and environment – by offering employment to thousands of people, creating infrastructure for development, and underlining the dignity of all those in need. In this way, we have brought some consolation to thousands of the poor, irrespective of origin, background, and religious conviction. This activity was not merely colorless social activism, but rather an expression of the self-consciousness of the Orthodox Church in response to specific and local social circumstances, which the Albanian society encountered when democracy was established.

f) The Responsibility of the EU Nations Once upon a time, in Greece, we would follow world events somewhat with the psychology of a poor relative anticipating support from others. However, the development of our nation over the last decades obliges us to recognize the degree of our own responsibility for solidarity in the global domain.[11] The European Union has committed to providing 0.7 percent of each nation's GDP through its programs for the eradication of poverty in developing countries. Moreover, its recent report titled "Health and the Poverty Reduction in Developing Countries"[12] adopted new initiatives. Nevertheless,

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11. Translator's note: This lecture was delivered in November 2002, some seven years prior to the debt crisis faced by Greece.

12. Commission of the European Communities, *Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament. Health and Poverty Reduction in Developing Countries*. COM (2002) 129 final. Brussels, 22 March 2002. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri

in the decade of the 1990s, this assistance was reduced and member-states committed only 0.22 percent of their GDP. In fact, even of this amount, just 0.06 percent of the member-states' GDP actually reached the poorest nations.[13] More specifically, $125 billion is supposed to be granted as aid to developing nations. If the European Union remains faithful to its promises, and if the contribution of the affluent nations to the developing nations doubles, then the World Bank estimates that world poverty can be reduced by half in 2015.

Most often, people listen to these facts and figures with a sense of indifference. They regard them as an opportunity simply to lay blame on others, usually on the great nations or corporations. Yet these general financial statements also touch our own responsibility and pocket. Greece now belongs to the circle of affluent nations, which in turn obliges it to contribute 0.2 percent of its GDP to developmental aid. Are we prepared to increase this amount to 0.7 percent of our GDP, as determined by the goals of the European Union, thereby perhaps limiting our own comfort in order to console those living in complete poverty? Our instinct is to respond by saying that we have our own poor. However, this logic automatically leads to an escape from our global obligations and aligns us with the mentality of even wealthier nations – the nations that we conventionally and conveniently like to blame. Thankfully, even beyond such contractual obligations, the Greek people respond in a spontaneous manner and Orthodox ethos to appeals for solidarity with individuals and groups that suffer both locally and abroad.

Conclusion

To summarize, I would emphasize that the great religions of the world generally condemn greed, injustice, and self-centeredness as

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　　13. *Oikonomikos Tahidromos*, [Economic Postman] 34, 24 August 2002 [In Greek].

constituting the basic roots of the bitter forest of poverty. They also condemn iniquity, immorality, and irresponsibility, as leading many people to indigence. They agree with what today we know as the Golden Rule of behavior, which underlines the mutuality and duty of solidarity. Moreover, they recommend compassion and immediate consolation toward the poor, particularly those who suffer from circumstances for which they are personally not to blame. These include widows, orphans, the sick, and the elderly.

The Christian faith expressly teaches the personal and spiritual value of every poor. It also emphasizes the duty to work for justice and solidarity in order to eradicate poverty. In this regard, it exalts voluntary poverty as a way of following in the footsteps of Christ and as a model for the apostolic lifestyle. Moreover, it defines frugality and self-sufficiency as a way of life, which indirectly also contributes to the consolation of those in need. Finally, it proclaims – as the absolute principle of the spiritual life – a love without any boundaries. "For God is love" (1 John 4;8).

In our modern globalized economy, the issue of poverty has assumed tragic and intricate dimensions, which are further complicated by the financial and political perceptions, as well as the practices, of the powerful. Everyone agrees that the eradication of world poverty ultimately signifies the eradication of injustice and through this, results in a balanced development.

Conscientious Christians are among those with both the responsibility and the capability of confronting poverty. A great challenge lies in the gradual estrangement of Christians, on the basis of any number of excuses and pretexts, from the principles established by Jesus Christ. It has been aptly formulated by Nikolai Berdiaev in his book, *The Fate of Man in the Modern World*: "It is in the social realm, which holds the centre of the stage in our time, that the judgment upon Christianity is passed, first of all. . . . [Christians did not immediately experience justice in the social domain]. . . . They have succeeded in adapting a "bourgeois" Christianity. And now the most merciless judgment is being passed

upon this "bourgeois" Christianity, on every adaptation of Christianity to human, selfish, interests."[14]

No one today could ever say that he or she was unaware or uninformed about this subject. All of us can do something more than we have previously done to reduce poverty, from the immediate circles of our own community and city to the broader circle of our region and nation, gradually expanding the range of our mind and heart to the global relief of world poverty.

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14. Nicholas Berdyaev, *The Fate of Man in the Modern World*, trans. Donald A. Lowrie (London: Student Christian Movement Press 1935), 121.

5

Terrorist Actions and Religious Conscience

I won't go into detail about my dreams; but very simply, my dream is holy war." These are the words of the young Nigerian student, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, to explain his ambition to become a "martyr of Islam" before endeavoring to blow up a Northwest Airlines plane. He added: "I imagine the Muslims conquering and dominating the world, establishing the greatest empire of all time." Thankfully, the vigilance of his fellow passengers and crew spoiled his plan.[1] The *New York Times* quoted a statement by a relative of the young African terrorist, who revealed that Umar had sent a text message to his father, informing his family that he had discovered "a new religion, the real Islam."[2]

After this failed terrorist attempt in the United States on Christmas 2009, we witnessed another attack in Russia on Easter 2010, with tragic consequences. Earlier that week, on Holy Monday for Orthodox Christians (29 March 2010), two young women showered death in the underground transit system of the Moscow Metro. They left behind no note to explain their motives. However, very soon afterward, Doku Umarov, the self-described "Emir of the Caucasus" who finalized the conversion of the Chechen militant rebels from nationalism to Pan-Islamism,[3] assumed responsibility

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1. From an article in the Greek newspaper *To Vima of Sunday*, 31 December 2009.

2. From an article by Thomas Friedman, "Father Knows Best," *New York Times*, 5 January 2010 also quoted in a Greek newspaper, *H Kathimerini*, 8 January 2010.

3. From an article in the Greek newspaper *H Kathimerini*, 31 March 2010, 3–4 April 2010, 11 April 2010.

for the slaughter of the 39 victims. In a video message posted on his website on Holy Thursday, he issued new threats against the Russians, declaring that his activities would expand and be crowned with success "with Allah's assistance."

The first years of the 21st century have been replete with news about terrorist attacks in various parts of the world. Some have been unsuccessful and others have had tragic results. The range of these terrorist attacks is also striking. The horrible attack on the Twin Towers of New York on 11 September 2001 was followed by others in Bali, Indonesia, in 2002; Istanbul, Turkey, in 2003; Madrid, Spain, in 2004; London, England, in 2005; and Mumbai, India, in 2008. There were countless others in Iraq, Syria, Northern Africa, and many other parts of the world.[4] What we are talking about is an "asymmetric war" that has caught the entire world and traditional military strategy by surprise.

In world news, terrorism has become a permanent fixture, with details that shock even the most daring imagination. In researching the internet to explore the available contemporary bibliography on the subject, I was myself terrified when I learned that a mere Google search revealed 141,000 books on the topic "terrorism and religion." In the month of June 2010 alone, a search on this subject produced around 14,400,000 websites and blogs!

I Terrorism Inspired by Religion

The phenomenon of terrorist acts is not something new. The history of the last hundred years is full of cases where the provocation of terror was pursued with various end targets, such as political causes, national liberations, or other ideological goals. (One need

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4. Translator's note: In 2016 in Turkey alone, there were over 20 terrorist attacks, including single-victim shootings and multiple-victim bombings; the year closed with a mass shooting on New Year's Eve in Istanbul.

simply recall the events in Czarist Russia, and later in Germany, Italy, Ireland, Palestine, and Israel).[5]

Examples of religious violence existed many centuries ago, such as those of the Jewish Zealots in the 1st century CE, the Muslim Order of Assassins (also known as the sect of Nizari Ismailis) in the 12th and 13th centuries, and other historical cases. In his study titled *Inside Terrorism*, Bruce Hoffman highlights the fact that modern religious terrorist groups did not appear before 1980. However, as he explains, until 1994, one-third (or 16 of the 49 known terrorist groups) "Could be classified as religious in character and/or motivation; and in 1995, their number grew yet again, to account for nearly half (twenty six, or 46 percent) of the fifty-six known active international terrorist groups."[6]

Instances of terrorism with religious connections are not, of course, limited solely to the extreme Muslim groups focusing on Western targets. We are also familiar with the conflicts between Protestants and Roman Catholics in Ireland, and the clashes

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5. See Charles Townshend, Terrorism: *A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) 86. According to Townshend, the USA has assumed a leadership role in the war against terror, defining terrorism as the calculated use of force or threat of violence destined to incite fear with a view to dominating or terrorizing societies. A more extensive bibliography may be found at the end of this chapter.

6. Bruce Hoffman, *Inside Terrorism* (London: Victor Gallancz, 1998), This study was produced in association with the Rand Corporation. For Hoffman, religious terrorism has several characteristics. 1) It provides a transcendent, rather than political service. It is carried out in direct association with some religious demand or mandate. 2) In contrast to secular terrorists, religious terrorists frequently seek the obliteration of broadly defined categories of enemies and are, therefore, fearless with regard to potential political repercussions of such generalized slaughter. 3) Finally, and most significantly, religious terrorists do not endeavor to address any random authority, with the exception of their own. On extreme violence in religions, see also Martin Geoffroy and Jean-Guy Vaillancourt,eds., *Le Religion à l'Extreme* (Paris: Mediaspaul, 2009), especially 169–218 on Islam.

between Sunnis and Shiites, as well as terrorist activities between Sunnis and Sunnis or Shiites and Shiites in Iraq. Moreover, even in other cultural environments, there have been cases of religious terrorism. We recall, for example, the Tokyo subway sarin nerve gas attack in 1995 by the para-religious cult of Aum Shinrikyo (Supreme Truth).

The terrorism that prevails in our times on the global stage and increasingly preoccupies public opinion throughout the world has three characteristic features: first, a closer link to Islam; second, a determination by its protagonists to sacrifice themselves for its cause, not simply by embracing danger, but by consciously choosing death; and third, a skillful use of technology and imaginative organizational methodology.[7]

Representative of the nature of Islamic terrorism are the declarations and interviews of an infamous protagonist of our time, Osama bin Laden, founder of al-Qaeda, most especially with his 23 August 1996 manifesto, "Declaration of Jihad Against the Americans Occupying the Land of the Two Holiest Sites. Message from Osama Mohammed bin Laden to his Muslim brothers throughout the world and more specifically to those living in the Arab Penin-

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7. See Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* (Berkley, Cal.: University of California Press, 2001); Walter Laqueur, *The New Terrorism: Fanaticism and the Arms of Mass Destruction* (London: Phoenix Press, 2001); Francois Burgat, *Face to Face with Political Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003); Meghnad Desai, *Rethinking Islamism: The Ideology of the New Terror* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007); Amélie Blom, Laetitia Bucaille, and Luis Martinez, eds., *The Enigma of Islamist Violence* (London: Hurst and Company, 2007). On global jihadism, see R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (Syracuse N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1995). On the ideology and organization of the Taliban, see Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan* (London: Hurst and Company, 2007). On the diverse conflicts within the Arab world itself, see Lee Smith, *The Strong Horse: Power, Politics, and the Clash of Arab Civilizations* (New York N.Y.: Doubleday, 2010).

sula." This document, written in Afghanistan, is a peculiar Muslim sermon with numerous references to the Quran and the Hadith, together with a mixture of contemporary economic and political issues and rhetorical ecstasies of enthusiasm directed to young men. It concludes with a long, prayer.

Nevertheless, the religious rhetoric of Osama bin Laden is not original. Curiously, it closely resembles the religious rhetoric of the famous Pope Urban II, who in a sermon in the Cathedral of Clermont France on 27 November 1095 exhorted Christians of the West to become mobilized for the First Crusade.

Just as Urban II had at the outset of the second millennium, so too, in our time, did Osama bin Laden assure his followers of the heavenly rewards that awaited all those who sacrificed their lives in battle. Their sins would be absolved, and the earthly life of suffering and sorrow would give way to the joy of eternity. In fact, he even quoted from a text of the Hadith, where Ahmad al-Tirmidhi narrates a story: "A martyr will not feel the pain of death except like how you feel when you are pinched. . . . A martyr's privileges are guaranteed by God; forgiveness with the first gush of his blood, he will be shown his seat in paradise, he will be decorated with the jewels of belief, married off to the beautiful ones, protected from the test in the grave, assured security in the Day of Judgement, crowned with the crown of dignity, a ruby of which is better than this whole early world and its entire content, wedded to seventy-two of the pure, beautiful ones of paradise and his intercession on behalf of seventy of his relatives will be accepted."[8]

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8. See Brad K. Berner, *Jihad, Bin Laden in His Own Words* (New Delhi: Peacock Books, 2007), 53. Also see Olivier Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (London: Hurst and Company, 2004), especially chapter 7, "On the Path to War: Bin Laden and Others": 290–325. Also see Gilles Kepel, *Jihad: Expansion et Déclin de l' Islamisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 2000); and Antoine Basbous, *L' Islamisme: Une Revolution Avortée* (Paris: Hachette, 2002).

The Western attacks on Afghanistan and Iraq after 11 September 2001 gave occasion for the nightmare of the Crusades to awaken vividly in the conscience and thought of the Islamic world. It is very interesting to note the similarities between the motives and political-economic contexts that led to the Crusades and the corresponding Islamic operations. Loretta Napoleoni formulates a fascinating argument related to the economic connections:

> The real forces that set the Crusades in motion, like those that ignited the Modern Jihad, arose from the new, economically-oriented social classes. In the economic wasteland of eleventh-century Western Europe, a new class of merchants, traders and bankers was born. They had established commercial links with the East and imported silk and spices while exporting timber, iron, and cloth. These new classes looked to the East as the natural habitat for expanding their businesses, but were limited by Islam's commercial supremacy. The alliance with the Church (Roman Catholic) for the Crusades opened up endless commercial opportunities for them. . . . A millennium ago, the Church sanctified with the Crusades the unusual partnership between the peasants of Western Europe and the emerging merchant and banker classes, which became the embryo of the European bourgeoisie. Similarly, today Islam has stamped the Modern Jihad with a religious seal in order to pursue the economic and political interests of the new Muslim forces, the poor as well as the entrepreneurial classes. A new, unforeseen alliance has been forged around Islam to fight Muslim oligarchic regimes and their backers, Western capitalists. These are the ultimate targets of the Modern Jihad."[9]

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9. Loretta Napoleoni, *Modern Jihad: Tracing the Dollars Behind the Terror Networks* (London: Pluto Press, 2003), 103–104. On the finances of terrorist organizations, see Eli Berman, *Radical, Religiou,s and Violent: The New Economics of Terrorism* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009).

Of course, parallel to the similarities, there are also many differences between the sociopolitical contexts of the 11th century and the globalized circumstances of the 21st century.

The basic slogan that prevails in contemporary acts of aggression by Muslims is the term *jihad*. The conventional translation of this word as "holy war" is not entirely accurate. *Jihad* literally signifies "struggle" or "wrestle."[10] Some Muslims contend that jihad refers to a spiritual struggle, while others claim that it supports the defense against corruption of the faith and morality, but not military war. For extreme Islamists, however, who in many regions influence the Muslim majority, the meaning of jihad is ruthless war against "infidels." The leader and leading theoretician of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in the mid-20th century, Sayyid Qutb, explicitly declared: "God has determined only one reason for murder – when there is no other way – and that is called jihad. God has defined the purpose of the believer and the unbeliever in the clearest and most resolute way: The believer struggles for God; the unbeliever struggles for idols. So fight against the followers of Satan; they are certainly nothing else but weaklings."[11] Mary

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10. Townshend, Terrorism, 127. For a valid and detailed analysis, see Rudolph Peters, *Jihad in Classical and Modern Islam* (Princeton N.J.: Markus Wiener Publications, 1996), especially 197–202, for a general bibliography on the subject. Also see Mary Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy: Jihadist Ideology and the War on Terror* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2007), in which the author claims that Jihadists do not regard their struggle as something theoretical or ideological that can be performed peacefully; on the contrary, the existence of political or legal systems that violate the boundaries of sharia law, constitutes an act of aggression against Islam and must therefore be addressed by revolutionary force. For a study on the situation in the Middle East, see James Hider, *The Spiders of Allah: Travels of an Unbeliever on the Frontline of the Holy War* (New York N.Y.: Doubleday, 2009); and Ahmed Rashid, *Le Retour des Talibans* (Paris: De la Villa Editions, 2009).

11. Sayyid Qutb, quoted in Andrew G. Bostom, *The Legacy of Jihad* (Westminster, Md.: Prometheus, 2008), 238. See also Gilles Kepel, *The Roots of Radical Islam* (London: Saqi, 2005); and Tariq Ali, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms:*

Habeck observes that "thus the jihadis believe that they are more than small groups of violent people who have murdered thousands of men, women, and children. Instead they are honored participants in a cosmic drama, one that will decide the fate of the world and that will ultimately end with the victory of the good, the virtuous, and the true believers"[12] against immoral and corrupt infidels. Islamic fanaticism exists, and it is real, resembling a fire blazing in a forest and fueled by raging winds.

Beyond its immediate tragic consequences, contemporary Islamic terrorism has resulted in immense financial burdens for Western societies. It has deeply disturbed the pace of life and especially erupted the volcanic sense of fear in general and of xenophobia in particular. It has also created a vicious cycle inasmuch as terrorism generates fear, while fear in its diverse manifestations engenders terrorism. The result is that in our age, fear has increased and intensified both in the Muslim world and in the Western world.

The Pew Research Institute organized a telephone survey, reaching out to 14,030 people in 13 countries from 1 April to 14 May 2006, posing the question: Do you believe that relations between Muslims and Westerners are generally good or generally bad? The response for "generally bad" was given by Germans at 70 percent and French at 66 percent, with the British and Spanish at 61 percent. Responses from Muslims in the same countries differed only mildly: In Germany, 60 percent of Muslims regarded relations as "generally bad," while in France and Great Britain 58 percent and 62 percent respectively responded similarly.

Another study by the European Observatory on Racism and Xenophobia, an advisory council of the European Parliament,

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Crusades, Jihads and Modernity (London: Verso, 2002), where the author observes that the followers of Qutb inspired Al Qaeda (and Osama bin Laden) and believed that the "Emirate of Afghanistan" was the only model of true Islam, while the Taliban were the symbol of the past and future.

12. Habeck, *Knowing the Enemy*, 163.

revealed that Islamophobia is on the rise in Europe. The number of those negatively disposed toward Islam manifested a sharp increase of 60 percent in one year alone.

It is clear, however, that this rise of fear, xenophobia, and hostility against Islam cannot possibly be the ideal response to the phenomenon of terrorism.

II Abuse of Religious Conscience: A New Awakening

1. Muslim Attitudes toward Terrorism

Among Muslims, there is no uniform position with regard to terrorism. A large group maintains the conviction that such acts respond to the commandment of jihad.[13]

It is certain that in many terrorist acts, there has been a calculated preparation, and even a kind of doping of the religious conscience. From objects left behind by the protagonists of the attack on the Twin Towers in New York, it appears that alongside the purely technical and almost military preparation, there was also an intense religious instruction that contributed to the control of mind and emotion of those who undertook the assault. For millions of Muslims, the acts labeled in the West as terrorism are actually acts of heroes and martyrs in the defense and promotion of Islam. Thus, we see mothers encouraging their children and offering them their blessing as they set out with the Quran in one hand for an act that, in their conviction, is tantamount to absolute and supreme self-sacrifice.[14] Religious thought has its own labyrinths and unexpected forces that match the volatility and catastrophe of nuclear explosions.

There are, of course, passages in the Quran that inspire and invigorate believers to aggressive conflict with infidels. For

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13. For examples of extreme preachers, see Basbous, *L' Islamisme*, 270–274.

14. One such instance, known as the "Eilat bakery bombing," took place in Israel on 29 January 2007.

example: "Then, when the sacred months are drawn away, slay the idolaters wherever you find them, and take them, and confine them, and lie in wait for them at every place of ambush. But if they repent, and perform the prayer, and pay the alms, then let them go their way; God is All-forgiving, All-compassionate" (9:5). Another passage states:

> When you meet the unbelievers, smite their necks, then, when you have made wide slaughter among them, tie fast the bonds; then set them free, either by grace or ransom, till the war lays down its loads. So it shall be; and if God had willed, He would have avenged Himself upon them; but that He may try some of you by means of others. And those who are slain in the way of God, He will not send their works astray. He will guide them, and dispose their minds aright, and He will admit them to Paradise, that He has made known to them. O believers, if you help God, He will help you, and confirm your feet. But as for the unbelievers, ill chance shall befall them! He will send their works astray. That is because they have been averse to what God has sent down, so He has made their works to fail (47:4–9).

Many moderate Muslims today stress that these passages from the Quran should be studied and interpreted in the historical context in which they were originally spoken. Certainly distinguished Muslim intellectuals and leaders condemn terrorism, emphasizing that it cannot be characterized as *jihad*.[15] At the same

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15. For instance, in 1996, the former Grand Mufti of Egypt and Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Muhammad Sayyid Tantawy, fiercely condemned those engaging in terrorist attacks, refusing to label them as martyrs when they slaughtered innocent victims, including women and children (Basbous, *L'Islamisme*, 277–278). See also the lectures and sermons of the Grand Mufti of the Syrian Arab Republic, Sheikh Ahmad Kuftaro, *The Way of Truth* (Damascus: World Quran School, 2004); and R.N. Trivedi, *Terrorism Has No Religion* (New Delhi: MD Publications, 2009).

time, they also persistently strive to condemn terrorism when it is enacted by non-Muslims with various methods on other fronts, such as in Gaza. They especially insist on a solution to the Palestinian problem.

The same circles claim that the Quran is replete with exhortations for moderation, devotion, and submission to the will of God. They underline that the value of Islam lies in the fact that the human being is a divine "sign" (*aya*). The dignity of every human being is innate. In his farewell pilgrimage to Mecca, Muhammad stressed: "O mankind, We have created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes, that you may know one another. Surely the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most god-fearing of you" (Quran 49:13).

Islam admits human dignity for all people, including those of other monotheistic faiths.[16] It respects and protects the rights of non-Muslims or *dhimmis* (protected ones). On some occasions, the Quran refers generally to non-Muslims; at certain specific times, it even refers to the followers of Jesus. These passages of the Quran sometimes reveal a kind of compassion or sympathy; at other times a clear opposition or hostility. Thus, for example: "Thou wilt surely find the most hostile of men to the believers are the Jews and the idolaters; and thou wilt surely find the nearest of them in love to the believers are those who say 'We are Christians'; that, because some of them are priests and monks, and they wax not proud" (5:82). Elsewhere, however, the Quran refers pejoratively to all "infidels," including Christians: "O believers, take not Jews and Christians as friends; they are friends of each other. Whoso of you makes them his friends is one of them. God guides not the people of the evildoers" (5:51). So, there are two different bases in Islam that can foster either a negative or a more positive attitude towards Christians.

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16. See David Marshall, God, *Muhammad, and the Unbelievers: A Qur'anic Study* (Surrey: Curzon, 1999).

2. Christians and Terrorism

Let us now turn to the advisable Christian attitude with regard to terrorism. In "The West and Islam: Conflict or Compromise?", Greek politician and European Parliament member Ioannis Varvitsiotis and Professor Sotiris Roussos analyze the dilemma and reach the following conclusion: "Based on rationalism and institutional establishment of otherness as well as diversity, while at the same time open to the pursuit of ever-new ideological currents and ethical systems, there are two things that the Western world is not entitled to do: It cannot choose blind conflict with the Muslim world but it cannot also proceed to an unprincipled compromise."[17]

This conclusion is certainly valid. However, at this point, we should also add a more general observation. We often speak of "Islam and the West," but this terminology attaches a particular emphasis to the political and military, if not necessarily the radical, aspect of Islam. At the same time, whether directly or indirectly, the religious nucleus and character of Islam assumes a secondary role. It is, however, the religious dimension that nurtures, inspires, and invigorates the political dimension of Islam with specific metaphysical principles and persuasions: a system of dogmatic val-

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17. Ioannis Varvitsiotis and Sotiris Roussos, "The West and Islam: Conflict or Compromise", in *Blind Armies: The West and the Threat of Islamic Fundamentalism* (Athens: Kastaniotis Editions, 2008), 152–170 [in Greek]. For interesting recommendations as to what Muslims and the West are called to do, see Muslim philosopher Akbar S. Ahmed, *Islam under Siege: Living Dangerously in a Post-Honor World Policy* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), especially 152–160. On the vast differences between the Islamic world and the West, as well as on anti-Islamic and anti-Western rhetoric, see Fred Halliday, *Islam and the Myth of Confrontation*, rev. ed. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003). Another dilemma sometimes formulated is: Conflict or cooperation? See Amin Saikal, *Islam and the West: Conflict or Cooperation?* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); and Hugh Goddard, *History of Christian–Muslim Relations* (Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2000), especially 177–194.

ues and convictions, a moral mandate, and a sacred text of absolute authority and inflexible validity.[18]

The term *West* embraces particular cultural, political, and economic elements, which were originally derived and shaped under the influence of Christianity, but also later evolved as a result of other currents of a diverse rationalism. This led to the secularized West of our day. In this respect, a contrast or comparison with Islam, in its complex and dynamic religious and political form, demands of the West a sense of self-criticism with regard to its self-consciousness. The West's increasing religious indifference ultimately diminishes the spiritual defense of its system. Moreover, the term *West* does not even include the entire Christian world. Islamic terrorists, for instance, also target Russia. So the conventional terms *West* and *Islam* are not distinctly defined or distinguished; nor again do they correspond to one another. The first is literally geographical in nature; the latter is purely religious in content and is by no means restricted by geographical boundaries.

In a recent interview, historian Edward Luttwak, author of the exceptional book *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire*,[19] commented on the successful resistance of the Byzantines against the pressures of the expansive wave of Islam. He highlighted the fact that, in the struggle of Constantinople to defend itself against Islam, what played a definitive role was the threefold and overwhelming identity of the Byzantines, who were simultaneously Greek, Christian, and Roman. This identity as representatives

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18. Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Islam: A Historical and Religious Survey* (Athens: Akritas, 1975), originally published in Greek; translation forthcoming. For an analysis of Islamic jihadism, see George Weigel, *Faith, Reason, and the War Against Jihadism* (New York: Doubleday, 2009), in which the author insists that the West must take into serious consideration the religious roots of jihadism in order to understand those who act violently in the name of God.

19. Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2009).

of an important civilization made the Byzantines feel proud and powerful. They had mastered the ancient Greek education and were, therefore, in a position to comprehend the world around them. They were profoundly devout Christians, whose Christian faith was so passionate that we, their descendants, can fathom it only with great difficulty. Their political foundation lay in the solid Roman institutions, laws, military, and state. In confronting threats and adversaries, the Byzantines were extremely skillful diplomats.

Of course, circumstances have changed; but the foundations of education, religious faith, and institutions, continue to bear immense significance for a proper resistance against contemporary terrorism. If we wish to exercise self-criticism, then we must admit that both education and faith have been critically eroded in the traditional Christian world. Indeed, unfortunately, they continue to be undermined. While the Islamic world displays the establishment and development of religious sentiment – and frequently even an enthusiasm to impose Islam in new regions through economic and political means – the so-called Christian world by contrast manifests a reduction in the importance of religious consciousness, and skepticism in the value of religion itself.

It is time for us to become aware that technological progress is not sufficient to secure the integrity and immunity of our society. Vigilance and revival, not marginalization, of the Christian faith – along with the genuine experience and expression of its essence, energy, and beauty – will assist Christians, and especially us Orthodox, to preserve our identity and expand the universal values that constitute the nucleus of Christian civilization, as well as its surprising endurance and creative dynamism.

3. The Importance of Interfaith Dialogue

The Islamist terror attacks have provided new impetus for contacts among intellectuals of various religions with a view to interreligious dialogue. There have been countless such conferences over

the last couple of decades. Instead of a clash of civilizations, about which Samuel Huntington spoke so categorically, [20] the goal today is a dialogue of civilizations and harmonious coexistence. Serious interfaith conferences and international organizations can make significant contributions in this direction.[21]

We do not nurture any delusions that such endeavors will offer swift or decisive solutions. Nor, of course, is there much leeway for dialogue on substantial theological issues, such as discussion about Christian doctrine or the understanding of the Quran and Muhammad in Islam. However, there are many universal issues, such as the protection of the natural environment, peace and reconciliation among nations, economic development and international justice, drugs and bioethics, and so on, all of which could be the object of a common search and dialouge. These encounters especially contribute to overcoming misconceptions and to sustaining a more balanced religious conscience so that we may better appreciate the concerns and arguments of others. Dialogue is preferable to silence, which only cultivates suspicion and frequently hatred. Moreover, such encounters and their joint statements have a broader impact in terms of reconciliation and communication. Ideas have their own long-term dynamic and influence.

In their final message during the Synaxis that took place in October 2008 at the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Istanbul, the Primates of the Orthodox Autocephalous Churches emphasized the need to continue inter-Christian and interreligious dialogues, "especially with Judaism and Islam, given that dialogue constitutes the only way of resolving differences among people, particularly in

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20. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Touchstone Books, 1998).

21. One such organization is the World Conference of Religions for Peace (today Religions for Peace), which first convened in Kyoto, Japan, in 1970, and is the largest international coalition of representatives from the world's religions dedicated to promoting the cause of peace.

an age like ours, when all sorts of divisions, including those in the name of religion, threaten the peace and unity of the world."[22]

It should here be stressed that dialogue that respects the religious principles and opinions of others does not imply syncretism (amalgamation) or blemishing of one's faith. On the contrary, it demands substantial knowledge as well as the constant experience of one's faith. None of the responsible Orthodox representatives participating in these interreligious encounters is favorably disposed to denying or diminishing his or her Orthodox identity or to compromising his or her Orthodox doctrine. After all, our substantial contribution is not compromise or silence, but serious and critical thought, and witness to the treasure of Orthodox tradition and theology at every given opportunity.

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22. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, "Messages of the Primates," in *Speaking the Truth in Love: Theological and Spiritual Exhortations of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, ed. John Chryssavgis (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 406–411. Translator's note: The same message was proclaimed in the final decision, "On the Mission of the Orthodox Church in Today's World," by the bishops attending the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church in Crete, June 2016: "As a presupposition for a wider co-operation in this regard the common acceptance of the highest value of the human person may be useful. The various local Orthodox Churches can contribute to understanding and co-operation for the peaceful co-existence and harmonious living together in society, without this involving any religious syncretism. . . . The Orthodox Church resolutely condemns the multifaceted conflicts and wars provoked by fanaticism that derives from religious principles. There is grave concern over the permanent trend of increasing oppression and persecution of Christians and other communities in the Middle East and elsewhere because of their beliefs; equally troubling are the attempts to uproot Christianity from its traditional homelands. As a result, existing interfaith and international relations are threatened, while many Christians are forced to abandon their homes. Orthodox Christians throughout the world suffer with their fellow Christians and all those being persecuted in this region, while also calling for a just and lasting resolution to the region's problems. Wars inspired by nationalism and leading to ethnic cleansing, the violation of state borders, and the seizure of territory are also condemned."

Parallel to the theoretical dialogue, such multi-religious communication offers significant occasions for a "dialogue of life." This does not demand any acceptance or agreement on issues of religious persuasion, but is focused instead on a mutual response to common, daily challenges. For example, in Albania, where we experience such a multi-religious society, this is precisely what we have successfully achieved over the last decades of the country's democracy. Abandoning interfaith dialogue leads to the emergence of new expressions of religious fanaticism, which ultimately usher in another horrible "dialogue" articulated by the startling actions of terrorists and nuclear warheads of the powerful.

It was interesting to see the proposal in 2007 that 138 Muslim intellectuals made to the Vatican, the Primates of the Orthodox Churches, the Anglican Communion, and others, regarding a common study of the meaning of the concept of love in Christianity and Islam.[23] Regrettably, to this day, there has been no follow-up to this call.

4. The Necessity of Social Justice

The nations and peoples that traditionally belong to the Christian world are especially obliged to become more conscientious and consistent on matters of justice, poverty, and peace in the world. A substantial portion of the Muslim world believes that the West has behaved and continues to behave in an unjust manner. This

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23. "An Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders," issued on 13 October 2007, at: https://www.acommonword.com/lib/downloads/CW-Total-Final-v-12g-Eng-9-10-07.pdf . The opening lines of the letter read as follows: "Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world's population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians.

The basis for this peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbour. These principles are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam and Christianity."

sense of injustice provokes anger, indignation, and an attitude of vengeance. On the one hand, of course, everyone is familiar with the Muslim critique that the West, and especially the USA, unconditionally supports Israel in the question of the Middle East. On the other hand, however, Muslims too are obliged to appreciate that jihadists are a moral and political problem for Islam. As long as Islamic communities continue to label the terrorist actions of suicide bombers as "martyrdom," there will always be turmoil and peril in the world.

With regard to a more effective response to economic crisis and world poverty,[24] we need to overcome injustice, balance development, and cultivate solidarity on all levels. In the succinct phrase attributed to Mahatma Gandhi: "Poverty is the worst form of violence." Last century, many oppressed social groups resorted to the communist system, which identified with historical materialism. Today, another pole of attraction has arisen for those living on the margins of desperation and poverty, especially in Asia and Africa. It is the political dynamism of Islam, which adopts and promotes religious faith without in the least shying away from the most extreme methods. Economically developed communities that originated in the Christian tradition without remaining faithful to its fullness and principles – especially the principles of justice and love – must make every effort to become more tangibly just in their global responsibility. If the affluent nations of the world persist in their indifference to the wretchedness of many millions of our fellow human beings, then we may well witness many more surprises and tribulations in all corners of the planet.[25]

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24. For a general study on the issue of world poverty, see David S. Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor* (London: Little, Brown and Company, 1998). Also see Muhammad Yunus, *Creating a World Without Poverty: Social Business and the Future of Capitalism* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2008).

25. Translator's note: This lecture was delivered in the summer of 2010, when the world economy was still recovering from the collapse of 2008.

5. A Ministry of Reconciliation

In the recurring rifts created by human partitions, the Orthodox Church as the Body of Christ is called to continue without ceasing, in every place and every time, its "ministry of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:18–20): the reconciliation of universal dimensions that Christ realized. By experiencing the mystery of salvation in Christ, the incarnation of the Word, as well as the cross and resurrection, the Church proclaims the inscrutable "love of Christ that surpasses knowledge" (Eph. 3:19), underlining the sanctity and dignity of every human person irrespective of origin, race, religion, vice, or virtue. Moreover, it is vehemently and persistently opposed to violence. Above all, the Church must emphasize the right of each individual to love and be loved, because this is the only way of personal fulfillment. "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them" (1 John 4:16). This is precisely why the vital perspective from which Christians view their responsibility and role on the local or global level – the fundamental source of their inspiration and action – is always love in its immeasurable dimensions, just as it is revealed through the person of Christ in Holy Scripture.

The freedom of love is never bound by the convictions of the other. "Blessed is the one who is able to love every human being equally," writes Maximus the Confessor.[26] Christian love by definition has universal, global dimensions. No barrier, whether ethnic or religious, can ever inhibit or obstruct it. Such "perfect love casts out fear" (1 John 4:18). Any and every fear! And it fills us with resilience and hope.

Conclusion

To conclude: all of us need to resist any attempt to use – in actuality, to abuse – religion for military conflicts or to support

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26. Maximus the Confessor, *First Century of Chapters on Love* 17 in Minge's Patrologia Graeca 90.961.

terrorism. No culture or religion is represented by terrorism. In fact, terrorism symbolizes a rejection of civilization and a return to a jungle mentality.

The essence of religion must be protected and preserved by all means. Religious experience, as the drive toward the beyond, opens one's mind and heart toward the boundless and infinite by manifesting the divine spirit and strength. Religion leads us to communion with the Holy, with God, as well as to respectful and loving relations with our fellow human beings. It would be awful if this drive toward the heavenly was perverted to become a weapon that discharges hatred.

In our time, religions continue to exert influence, even if they do not determine the decisions of political leaders and financial agents. Such decisions are taken on the basis of different criteria and interests. Yet, at the same time, leading representatives of adversaries adopt religious terminology and invoke the name of God. Therefore, it is the obligation of all the truly faithful not to permit religion to become embroiled in the mechanism of terrorism and continue to nurture such conflicts. We must repeat and stress: Any crime committed in the name of religion is a crime against religion itself. Every form of violence in the name of religion violates in every possible sense religion itself. No war is holy. Only peace is holy.

When some circles tried to add a religious tone to the conflict in the Balkans, we had insisted in an address on 19 March 1998: "No one has the right to use the sacred oil of religion to kindle the fire of military conflicts. Religion is a divine gift offered to soften human hearts, to heal wounds and to peacefully bring people closer."[27]

27. These ideas were accepted and repeated almost verbatim in the final Message and in the Encyclical of the Holy and Great Council of the Orthodox Church in Crete, June 2016 which can be found in their entirety at https://www.holycouncil.org/official-documents They also can be found in Anastasios Yannoulatos, *In Albania Cross and Resurrection* (Yonkers, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2016) 147–148.

Such an attitude presupposes the continual cultivation of religious conscience, which mobilizes the noblest personal capacity, while sustaining social solidarity and all efforts for universal peace.

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6

Universal Values: The Perspective of Religions

I Context and Challenge

1. Plurality of Religions

Let me state from the outset that I do not believe that there is only one perspective. Today, there continue to exist 19 religions, which may be subdivided into 240 branches.[1] At the same time, within these same religions, there are differences and divisions among those who cling to the letter of the tradition and those who look for new openings to the contemporary world.

Wherever the various religions have prevailed, they have, to a greater or lesser extent, influenced human and social life as a whole. Therefore, it is natural for them to be integrated, directly or indirectly, with intellectual, aesthetic, moral, and, of course,

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1. The most significant among these religions in terms of numbers of adherents at the beginning of the 21st century were Christianity (approximately 33.1 percent) and Islam (approximately 20 percent). They are followed by Hinduism (approximately 13 percent), Buddhism (approximately 6 percent), Taoism and popular Confucianism (approximately 4 percent). There are various new religious groups, such as the old tribal religions of Africa (each of these groups approximately 2 percent), while at a lower percentage of approximately 0.5 percent the religions of Judaism, Sheikhism, Bahá'i, Jainism, and Shintoism. Comparative religious statistics are quite relative for many reasons and, therefore, can only be considered as representative. At the same time, a large percentage of the inhabitants of the planet, and especially the technologically developed countries, belong to no religion at all: approximately 15.2 percent consider themselves agnostics; declared atheists comprise approximately 3.5 percent. See David B. Barrett, ed., *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

metaphysical values. This is because religions do not exist as independent entities.[2] They exist in a relationship of mutual dependence and influence alongside many other factors: racial, political, cultural, social, and financial. They influence and are influenced.

Each mature and established religion has an orientation toward the Transcendent that directs believers toward an absolute truth or supreme goal. It also has a system of teachings, principles, and positions through which it interprets the world. These are what define the logical and metaphysical values maintained by each religion.

The coincidence of opinions or ideas, at least in the domains of absolute truth and transcendent orientation that they determine, is very difficult to achieve. Indeed, the religions that influence more than half of the world's population – namely, Christianity and Islam – as well as Judaism, which precedes both of them, are religions based on divine revelation. The fundamental principles related to truth, goodness, and the sacred, that go hand in hand with these religions are considered as given "from above," while corresponding philosophical analyses and legal regulations follow.

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2. With regard to defining and dividing values, many theories have been proposed. The most familiar is based on the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, which distinguishes values into logical, aesthetic, and moral. Some thinkers add religious values (pertaining to the meaning of the world) and financial values (pertaining to the material interests of the world) (*Great Greek Encyclopedia* [in Greek] Vol. 5, 39). Furthermore, on the basis of the threefold division in psychology, other more systematic divisions have also been suggested. See, for example, Hugo Münsterberg, *Philosophie der Werte* (Leipzig: J.A. Barth, 1921), who originally proposed two categories (animal and cultural), while later introducing four subdivisions within each: logical, aesthetic, moral, and metaphysical. Other thinkers (such as N. Hartman, E. Spranger and J. Hessen [Spell out first names]) have proposed their own categories. For more recent scholarly proposals, see Charles Taliaferro, *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998), 190–199; Hilary Putnam, *The Collapse of the Fact/Value Dichotomy and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Joseph Raz, *The Practice of Value* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

The other religious current, deriving from the Indian and Chinese pursuit of the Transcendent, is not, at least at first glance, dependent on a once-and-for-all revelation from above. Nonetheless, even these religions have developed various schools with specific theories concerning absolute truth.

Moreover, each religion has its own ritual traditions and many symbolic elements surrounding its collective experience. Within these, too, there has been an evolution of literature and the arts (such as architecture, music, painting, sculpture, and craftsmanship) as well as manifold cultural values. After all, the most impressive achievements in the arts bear the seal of religious inspiration. Consequently, religions are intimately linked to many aesthetic values. The cultural creativity of each religion is usually perceived as enriching the cultural heritage of humanity as a whole.

In the contemporary search to attain some concurrence among religions on the question of universal values, the predominant emphasis is on ethics. However, we should not overlook the fact that the intellectual, aesthetic, moral, and metaphysical virtues are interconnected and interdependent, just like the various systems within any living organism that include nerves, muscles, and circulation.

2. Organized Efforts toward Interfaith Understandings

From the end of the 19th century, there have been efforts to reach a better understanding and rapprochement among people of different religions, especially through international interfaith conferences and organizations. Efforts toward more permanent structures have not proved successful. The movement toward rapprochement has been more fruitfully established by determining specific issues and goals related to humankind's contemporary challenges. For instance, the World Conference on Religion and Peace (today Religions for Peace) has been effective in the many countries where it continues its activity and influence. After 11 September 2001, there was a marked acceleration of interreligious conferences organized with the hope of assisting in overcoming terrorism and maintaining peace. The search for

mutually accepted universal values is also gaining momentum through manifold avenues.

In our age, we are becoming increasingly aware of the historical challenge and responsibility of religious communities before all of humanity. The thinking of intellectuals from various religions may emanate and evolve from different presuppositions, but they can still endeavor to reach agreement on certain fundamental positions. They recognize, for example, that many principles governing individual religions were shaped in previous eras and under different circumstances. Consequently, as the modern age experiences new international upheavals, new possibilities are opening up a reinterpretation of the nucleus of each religion.

The vital issues that remain on the table for contemporary interfaith dialogue include addressing world peace, understanding the process of globalization, achieving a reduction of violence, and resolving the question of climate change.

Nevertheless, it is crucial that we avoid simplistic generalizations. Not too long ago, a friend of mine who is a university professor called to persuade me to join him in an initiative for peace. He proposed that we assemble leaders and intellectuals from the great religions of the world in order to expunge from all of our sacred texts anything that was opposed to peace and sympathetic to war. In response, I tried to explain that something of this nature would be impossible to achieve because the sacred scriptures of the various religions retain a non-negotiable authority for their adherents and are not open to any revision – much like the constitutions of the world's states. Neither could any organization – any kind of religious United Nations – ever dare undertake such an task. The only way to promote peace on an international level is to cultivate a more moderate climate between the representatives of each religion and to support the nucleus of the religious sentiment.

3. Maintaining the "Peculiarity" of Groups and People

In the search to clarify universal religious values, there is, of course, a great deal that may be contributed by objective scholarly research

and interreligious dialogue. However, this also demands much patience because the course is uphill and slippery. The original enthusiasm that such research and dialogue demonstrated over the last decades has given way to serious reservations and disappointments. Many people are afraid of syncretism – and the gradual transformation of their faith as well as the new internal divisions that have appeared. Thus, it is mandatory that we work for such mutual understanding and peaceful coexistence with a sense of discernment, not sacrificing the peculiarity of groups and peoples. We are called to pursue the golden way and unceasingly explain the character, purpose, and hope of such dialogue.

II Basic Religious Values

1. Interfaith Efforts toward a Universal Moral Code

During the 1990s, interfaith efforts toward formulating a global code of ethics increased. The best known among these proposals are the two advanced by the international community. The first was inspired by the German Professor of Tübingen University, Hans Küng, and came in the form of a proposal from the Parliament of the World's Religions, which convened in Chicago in 1993.[3] The second was articulated by Professor Leonard Swidler of Temple University in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA. The latter was discussed in a series of conferences, primarily over the internet and coordinated by the Center for Global Ethics.[4]

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3. Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions, *Towards a Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration*, 1993, at: https://www.weltethos.org/1-pdf/10-stiftung/declaration/declaration_english.pdf. See also Hans Küng and Kari-Josef Kuschel, eds., *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2006).

4. Leonard Swidler, "Toward a Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic," 1996, at: https://dialogueinstitute.squarespace.com/s/Toward-a-Universal-Declaration-of-a-Global-Ethic.pdf.

The declaration of the World Parliament of Religions determines the following as principles of a universal ethic:

1) There can be no global order without a new global ethic
2) A fundamental demand is for every human being to be treated humanely
3) The basic obligations for a civilization include nonviolence and respect of life; solidarity and just economic order; tolerance and love of truth; and equal rights and partnership between men and women
4) There is a need to renew people's conscience.

Almost all of these sets of rules also refer to and are based on ancient ethical codes of the world's great religions.

Professor Swidler's proposal adopts different terminology and highlights different values. He underlines freedom, dignity, respect for all beings (human and non-human), universal love, tolerance, and the need for interreligious dialogue.[5]

Many scholars and religious leaders, mainly Asian, note that the above efforts are written by white, wealthy, Roman Catholic scholars living in powerful, Western countries – and that this is especially true of Swidler's declaration.

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5. The first draft of "Toward a Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic" affirms: 1) the freedom of every human being; 2) the innate dignity of all people; 3) respect for all beings, human and non-human; 4) the need for an individual to transcend oneself and embrace broader entities, such as community, nation, world, and universe; 5) a love that extends to include everyone and everything; 6) respect and freedom for every religion and faith; and, 7) dialogue as a necessary condition for harmonious human existence on the planet. There subsequently followed another version with ten points, which is also coordinated with the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nations. See Sallie King, "A Global Ethic in the Light of Comparative Religious Ethics," in Sumner B. Twiss and Bruce Grelle, eds., *Explorations in Global Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000): 118–140.

2. Principles Accepted by All Religions

From the various interfaith quests over the last few decades, we may summarily highlight the following principles and values as accepted by all religions in common:

a) The Common Origin of All People The monotheistic religions assure their believers that God created the first human couple. The key verses in this regard are well known from scripture: "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27; see also Gen. 1:26; 5:1). There is also the passage by St Paul from the Book of Acts: "From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live" (Acts 17:26). After all, as we read in the Quran: "O mankind, We have created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes, that you may know one another. Surely the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most godfearing of you" (49:13). References that affirm the conviction about the common origin of humankind are also found in religions that have no theistic perspective. Every human person, then, irrespective of race, gender, color, language, and education, is endowed with the dignity of divine origin through his or her relationship with God, whether conscious or not.

b) The Golden Rule A fundamental principle in almost all developed religions in the Golden Rule. In the classic Hindu scripture Mahabharata, we read: "One should not direct towards someone else what is unpleasant to oneself: this would be a succinct version of moral duty." (Mahabharata, Udyoga Parvan (5) 39.57 and Anushasana Parvan (13) 114.8)[6] When Confucius was asked: "Is there a single word that may be used as a practical rule for one's whole

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6. Translation taken from Kathleen Garbutt (trans)., *Mahabharata Book Five (Volume 1): Preparations for War (Clay Sanskrit Library 40)* (New York: New York University Press, 2008)

life?" he replied: "Is not 'mutuality' the word that you are looking for? Do not do, then, unto others what you would not wish them to do unto you."[7] And from the expansive sacred Buddhist literature, a single phrase from the Tripiṭaka: "What is displeasing and disagreeable to me is displeasing and disagreeable to the other too. How can I inflict upon another what is displeasing and disagreeable to me?"[8]

Jewish thought, frequently repeats the principle "And what you hate, do not do to anyone" (Tobit 4:15); also, the words of the great Rabbi Hillel, who lived from the 1st century BCE to the 1st century CE: "That which is hateful to you do not do to another."[9] In the preaching of Jesus Christ, the rule is formulated in a dynamic and positive manner: "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31; see also Matt. 7:12). The Islamic world adopted the same notion, often limiting it to the *umma* (the Muslim community). Thus, in the sayings later attributed to Muhammad, we encounter the following: "None of you is a believer unless you wish for your brother what you wish for yourself."[10]

However, in order not to create idealized images from selective passages, we must observe that the sacred texts of the various religious communities also contain phrases that lead in quite different directions.

c) Respect for Life All religions prohibit murder. The Hindu religious schools recommend respect for all forms of life and avoidance of animal killings. Indeed, the commandments against murder might also be taken to prohibit all forms of torture. Moreover, terrorism and violence in family, professional, and international rela-

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7. Confucius, *Analects* 15.24

8. Tripiṭaka, Saṃyutta, Nikaya 5, v. 353. Translation taken from Bhikku Bodhi (trans), *The Connected Discources of the Buddha, A Translation of the Saṃyutta, Nikaya* (Sommerville, Mass.: Wisdom Publications, 2000).

9. Hillel, Talmud, Shabbat 31a.6. Translation taken from *The William Davidson Talmud* published on www.sefaria.org.

10. Hadith 13 in the collection of An-Nawawi's Forty Hadith.

tions are also forbidden. Nonetheless, the question of war – whether defensive or aggressive – remains a complex matter, to which religions sometimes respond with diametrically opposed positions.

d) Justice and Integrity Justice and integrity are recognized as fundamental virtues in many religions. For instance, in Confucianism, justice is one of the four essential virtues. Chinese philosopher Mencius even elevated it to the highest level of ethical values. All three of the monotheistic religions regard justice as a basic characteristic of the people of God. The notion of justice includes the concept of integrity, piety, and even sanctity – because justice brings people closer to God.[11] The general principle of justice translates and is clarified into the commandments: Do not steal, do not exploit, do not bribe, do not support corruption, and do not deceive.[12]

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11. The obligation of justice is vigorously emphasized in holy scripture: "Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent and those in the right, for I will not acquit the guilty. You shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the officials, and subverts the cause of those who are in the right" (Ex. 23:7–8; see also Deut. 19:15; Ps. 57/58:2). The just – or "righteous," as scripture commonly refers to such a person – is one who responds to the divine will and obeys the divine commandments: "You are righteouse, O Lord, and your judgments are right. . . . Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, and your law is the truth" (Ps. 118/119:137;142). "For when your judgments are in the earth, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness" (Isaiah 26:9). Indeed, in the New Testament, the ideal of justice is raised to an even higher level: "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness" (Matt. 5:6). "For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20. See also Eph. 4:24; 6:14; Phil. 1:11; 1 Tim. 6:11; Heb. 1:9).

12. The above-mentioned Declaration of the Parliament of the Religions of the World added a section – albeit not without protest by some – that no one has the right to use even their own property without concern for the wider community and the entire planet. Property, whether large or small, connotes responsibility; the use of property must simultaneously serve the common good. For further reading on justice in Islam, see Majid Khadduri, *The Islamic Conception of Justice* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984).

Integrity goes hand in hand with love of truth. The great religions exhort: Do not lie. Or, phrased more positively: Speak and act with sincerity. Of course, this is a principle that very few are able to keep with consistency, including the believers of the various religions of the world.

e) Respect in Sexual Relations All religions incorporate commandments or simple directives about conduct between couples and determine the need for respect in sexual relations. At this point, however, the disparities become greater. Nevertheless, the commandment generally remains: "Do not be profligate," or do not take part in sexual immorality. Basically, the representatives of the various religious traditions agree that no one is entitled to undermine or dishonor others in sexual relations, leading or holding them in a state of sexual dependence. The rise in abuse of young women and children, which we observe in our times, is unanimously and unilaterally condemned.

f) Peace as a Goal Most religions refer to *peace* as a wish or prayer, and as a duty or goal. Attaining peace involves the effort to control human aggression; it is a way of achieving harmonious coexistence in society on the basis of specific rules of conduct. It is also the struggle for inner peace, the curbing of inner passions, and the balance of fear and anxiety. More especially in Buddhism, the principal pursuit of the human being, the supreme good or *nirvana* is paraphrased as peace.

In the monotheistic religions, peace is, on the one hand, considered a gift of God and the fruit of trust in God, while on the other, it has social and historical dimensions. In order for peace to prevail in the world, humankind is called to labor and persist. Our ultimate goal should be the establishment of multidimensional peace: with God, with ourselves, with others, and with all creation. (For more on this topic, see Chapter 1.)

g) Addressing Poverty On the problem of poverty, there is less dissimilarity as to interpretations and proffered solutions. Pioneering religious personalities, such as Confucius, Lao Tzu, Zoroaster, and the Buddha encourage compassion and benevolence. More-

over, all religions more or less seek the diminuation and resolution of poverty, while emphasizing kind-heartedness.

Religious systems that originated in the Indian peninsula adopted the view that the circumstances of life are an accumulation of *karma* – good or evil deeds in previous forms of life or reincarnations (*saṃsāra*). The way out of this impasse is possible in a subsequent form of existence. Benevolence toward the indigent is praised and secures positive *karma*. Buddhism adopted the same principles of *karma* and *saṃsāra*, but proposed as the ultimate solution (or ideal of the perfect human, namely, the Buddhist monk) the virtue of absolute poverty. At the same time, it was careful to preserve the well-being of the monks by advancing as a fundamental virtue for laypersons the practice of benevolence (*mettā*) toward those living in poverty or other need, and by condemning greed and self-indulgence.

Early Jewish thought underlined the obligation of almsgiving, frequently combining it with the virtue of justice. In later Judaism, poverty was considered the greatest misfortune, while the traditional principle of almsgiving was transformed into charitable lending. Justice and almsgiving also play a central role in Islam. One of the five duties of a Muslim is *zakat* (almsgiving).[13]

Jesus Christ, however, is the one who was revealed as the greatest defender of the poor both in his life and his teaching. Jesus Christ underlined the dignity of the poor and their value in the eyes of God. He also castigated the mercilessness of the rich, while praising and insisting on justice and revealing love. (See Chapter 4 of this book for a further analysis.)

h) The Universal Dimensions of Love Love is regarded as the culmination and summit of offering in the hierarchy of virtues. Christianity emphasizes love's universal dimensions in a unique way. It brilliantly illumines the multifaceted meaning and importance of love. It extends love beyond every boundary – racial, religious, and

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13. The conventional *zakat* reaches up to one-fortieth of the believer's assets, that is, 2.5 percent of the surplus after one's expenses are met. It is a form of taxation for the sake of social welfare.

social – especially with the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5–7), the Parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), and the hymn of love (1 Cor. 13). It renders love a universal force, which embraces and transforms all things. It identifies love with the supreme reality, God: "God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God and God abides in them" (1 John 4:16). It inspires in the most exceptional manner the way of experiencing and practicing love.[14]

In our age, we observe the tendency for other fundamental principles proposed through the ages by religions also to be interpreted in light of the concept of love. One example of this is the Buddhist virtue of *mettā*. One way or another, the fact that others following various rough religious paths come to accept the value of love as the summit of values is very encouraging.

3. Universal Values Articulated by Secular Bodies; Religious Responses

Beyond the interreligious initiatives, universal values have also been advanced by UN declarations on human rights. These, too, have naturally been very much influenced by religious ideas. Despite occasional objections to specific paragraphs (mostly by representatives of Asian religions although also from certain Christian confessions), these documents have increasingly received approval from the adherents of most religions. Such declarations also contribute to the formation of an ethical terminology, whose most dominant features include human dignity, freedom, religious tolerance, and peace.

As a rule, representatives of the various religions agree with the first article of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, formulated and adopted by the UN on 10 December 1948. It states: "All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They

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14. The emphasis on love is very well articulated in Swidler's "Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic": "The expansive and inclusive nature of love should be recognized as an active principle in personal and global interaction" (Basic Principles 5).

are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood."[15]

In December 1989, UNESCO organized a conference in Bangkok, Thailand, on the theme "The role of human rights in the religious and cultural traditions of the world," in which the ideas of the great religious currents of thought – Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity (including Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism and Protestantism), Shintoism, and Islam – were presented. Participants also discussed a draft declaration advanced by the UN to diminish all forms of religious hostility, oppression, and discrimination based on religious conviction.[16] Another conference titled "World Conference on Human Rights"[17] took place in Vienna in 1993. I recall from the very opening session, in which I participated as keynote speaker, that we reached several common and significant conclusions. First, the problem of human rights constitutes a very serious issue for almost all of the religions of the world, irrespective of how they define or interpret human rights. Second, the recognition of the sacredness of the human being and the respect for human dignity facilitates the cooperation of religious communities in the work of international organizations. And third, the Universal Declaration and other similar UN efforts

15. This article is clearly, even explicitly, influenced by Christian ideas and more particularly by the founding assembly of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam, whose documents circulated in early September 1948.

16. This meeting took place after the relevant decision by the UN on human rights, which was passed on 14 March 1979. In the end, the official Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and Discrimination Based on Religion or Beliefs was published on 25 November 1981. Text available through the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, at https://www .ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/ReligionOrBelief.aspx

17. The Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action was adopted on June 25, 1993. Text available through the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, at https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/ pages/vienna.aspx.

mark a vital evolution in the recognition of the value and dignity of human beings.

Those of us representing the various religious communities insisted that every human being is unique, and that any reference to individual rights also generates the responsibility of recognizing and respecting the rights and freedoms of others. We also affirmed that many of the insights found in declarations and legislation are implicit in the principles of the various religions.[18] Furthermore, we emphasized that, beyond any individual and social rights, human beings perceive another dimension of reality – which might be labeled transcendent, sacred, or divine – and is deeply interested in this reality.

However, alongside these common positions, we should also observe that a significant number of those representing non-theistic religions claim that the preconditions on which the Universal Declaration is founded are foreign or even unacceptable to their traditions. In this regard, many scholars of comparative religion note that the issue of human rights is not limited by the advancement of various declarations; and, further, that these documents provide each religion an opportunity to explore and cooperate with the rest of the world in order to diminish tensions that distress humankind today.[19]

Conclusion

Finally, it should be emphasized that the role and contribution of religions is not restricted to certain common points or common

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18. For instance, with regard to Buddhism, see Damien Keown, *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 104–106. Also see Leonard Swidler, ed., *Religious Liberty and Human Rights in Nations and Religions* (Philadelphia Pa.: Ecumenical Press, 1998); Tad Stahnke and J. Paul Martin, eds., *Religion and Human Rights: Basic Documents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

19. For Christian perspectives, see Emmanuel Hirsch, ed., *Christianisme et Droits de l' Homme* (Paris: Librairie des Libertés, 1984). See also Yannoulatos, *Facing the World*, 49–78.

values, but also extends to basic particularities that they demonstrate and distinctive details that they highlight. Furthermore, in the search for universal values, religions highlight the existential depth of the human code of conduct. Therefore, they insist that the solution to the problem of evil cannot be limited simply to a superficial improvement of society, but instead must be addressed on a deeper level, namely in the abyss of human egoism. In this regard, religions are able to provide the inspiration and motivation for overcoming evil in the world.

Indeed, in the face of the impasses to which humankind is led by our technological civilization through a cultivation of self-sufficiency, arrogance, and greed, religions can remind us that the means for achieving spiritual balance is not the subjection of nature to the desires of the individual. Spiritual balance can, rather, be attained by self-discipline and self-renunciation, the submission of individual desire, ascesis and purification of the ego, and the pursuit and experience of the Holy.

In closing, I wish to reaffirm what I noted at the beginning of this chapter: namely that, above and beyond the values pertaining to ethical conduct, the contribution of religion is invaluable and vital for those values pertaining to *truth*, which gives meaning to life, and *beauty*, which gives light and grace to life. Every religion has contributed in its own way to the intellectual search and promotion of diverse aspects of these values of truth and beauty.

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From Coexistence to Communion

Every human being is born into a particular cultural environment and context, within which he or she develops, progressing from mere existence to coexistence. It is natural for that person to be influenced by the values that prevail for the cohabitation and mutual respect among other human beings. Throughout his or her lifetime, a human being is called to draw from the most fertile spiritual deposits of the surrounding religious tradition in order to acquire those values that inspire life toward harmonious coexistence.

In relation to the spiritual wealth that exists in the religious traditions held by many people, and seeing the Christian perspective regarding the convictions of believers of other faiths,[1] I should remind the reader that the recognition of values in other religious communities and the respect for other religious perceptions, shaped in other cultural environments, do not signify a disposition toward syncretism, or amalgamation of religions. On the contrary, this recognition and respect are essential for fruitful interreligious

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1. See Yannoulatos, "A Theological Approach to Understanding Other Religions," in *Facing the World*: 127–154.

dialogue and intercultural conversation, as well as for the promotion of the gospel message.[2]

Following many years of research into the history of religions, after studying and living with people of other religious persuasions, and having acquired a respect for the diversity of the spiritual traditions of different peoples, I would like to highlight with simple strokes some of my academic perceptions and personal inspirations.

What we experience in the domain of Christian faith not only contributes to harmonious coexistence, but also elevates and transfigures faith into something far more significant: namely, a "communion of persons." What occurs is a gradual awareness and development from existence to coexistence and from coexistence to communion.

According to the Christian faith, the supreme and absolute principle, the One who is the Trinitarian God, is a communion of love of persons: "Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:8). It is love that transforms mere existence into communion. It is love that reshapes a human being from individual to person. The Christian tradition is grounded in this conviction, and it evolves through its subsequent phases with the boldness of love. God's relationship with the world, and particularly with humankind, is a relationship of love that inclines toward the creation of communion. The incarnation of the divine Word constitutes a surprising movement of divine love that aspires to communion between God and human beings.

The Church of Christ, "the fullness of him who fills all in all" (Eph. 1:23), continues the commission of the incarnate Word,

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2. See my address "Sharing the Good News in a Multi-Religious Country: Theological Reflections on Other Religions," given at the Orthodox Christian Studies Center, in *Orthodoxy in America Lecture Series* (New York City: Fordham University Press, 2014 https://www.fordham.edu/download/downloads/id/2070/anastasios_lecture.pdf

Jesus Christ, in the journey of history.[3] The existence of the Church and its witness in the world, together with its sacramental life, pursue the experience of communion between God and human beings, as well as among human beings themselves. Communion is achieved by inspiring, encouraging, and enhancing – with the grace of the Holy Spirit – love in its manifold forms and expressions, with the breadth and dynamism revealed in the New Testament,[4] and by retaining its liturgical and spiritual focus on the sacrament of Holy Communion.

It is the calling of every human being to contribute to this harmonious coexistence. Yet, as Christian believers – we who behold the sacred mystery of the divine persons of the Holy Trinity and the incarnation of the Word of God, who reveals the very fullness of love – it must also be our vision and prayer to rise to the next level. With the aid of the mystical energy of the Holy Spirit, we may aspire and expect to contribute to the further evolution of human beings – from mere coexistence to the communion of persons.

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3. On the Christological and trinitarian dimensions of such communion, see Yannoulatos, "Toward a Global Community: Resources and Responsibilities," in *Facing the World*: 15–48.

4. New Testament passages that are especially useful in this pursuit are the Sermon on the Mount, the parable of the good Samaritan, the hymn of love (1 Cor. 13), and the First Letter of St John.

Short Biography of the Author (2020)

Anastasios Yannoulatos, Archbishop of Tirana, Durres, and All Albania, is Professor Emeritus of the National Kapodistrian University of Athens, Honorary Member of the Academy of Athens, Honorary Senator of the European Academy of Sciences and Arts – Salzburg, Austria. He has combined theological knowledge, research, and writings with Christian witness, pastoral diakonia, and social efforts.

He was born in Piraeus, Greece, on November 4, 1929. He studied theology at the University of Athens from 1947 to 1952, graduating with the highest honors. He continued post-graduate studies in the History of Religions, Mission, and Ethnology at the Universities of Hamburg and Marburg in Germany, with a scholarship from the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. He became a Doctor of Theology (Th.D.) of the Theological School of the University of Athens (*summa cum laude* with special award) in 1970. He speaks Greek, English, French, German, and Albanian; he reads Ancient Greek, Latin, Italian, and Spanish (he has worked with two African languages).

In the Academic Field

He has been Professor of the History of Religions (1972–91) and Dean of Theological Faculty of the National and Kapodistrian

University of Athens (1983–86). He has been Corresponding Member of the Academy of Athens (1993–2005).

He studied and came to know Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Islam, and African religions in the countries where these religions flourish – India, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Korea, Japan, China, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Nigeria, Mexico, and the Caribbean.

He has been awarded Honorary Doctorates of Theology or Philosophy from twenty Universities or University Schools or Departments (Greece, U.S.A., Romania, Cyprus, Georgia, Albania, and Italy). He was awarded the title of Honorary Professor of the School of Business Administration of the University of West Attica (2020–). He was granted the highest scientific distinction of Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, the "Golden Aristotle" (2018).

He has authored and published 24 books (religious research, missionary essays, Orthodox spirituality) and more than 200 studies and articles of theological and religious themes. His books and texts have been translated into 17 languages (see attached bibliography).

Church Diakonia

He was ordained to the Diaconate in 1960 as a Priest – receiving the title of Archimandrite in 1964 – and to the Episcopate as Bishop of Androussa to be the General Director of the "Apostoliki Diakonia of the Church of Greece" from 1972–91. He played a pioneering role in rekindling Orthodox foreign missions from 1958 on. He was Acting Archbishop (*Locum Tenens*) of the Holy Metropolis of Irinoupolis (East Africa: Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania) where he realized a broad missionary and social work. In 2009, he was recognized as "Great Benefactor of the Patriarchate of Alexandria and all Africa."

As Archbishop of Tirana, Durres, and All Albania (1992 to present), under tremendously difficult circumstances, he suc-

ceeded in restoring and reconstructing the Autocephalous Orthodox Church of Albania, which had been fully dissolved for 23 years. He developed a multifaceted work in the areas of education, healthcare, culture, the environment, and humanitarian and social welfare projects. To create places of spiritual communion between people and with God, he erected 155 new churches, restored 63 ancient churches, and repaired 160 damaged churches. Moreover, he initiated the construction of more than 70 other buildings, including schools, clinics, and youth centers. He has struggled tirelessly to assist in relieving the many tensions in the Balkans. In 2000, after the proposal of 33 members of the Academy of Athens and many personalities of Albania, he was nominated to receive the Nobel Peace Prize.

He has been repeatedly elected to distinguished positions of leadership in international organizations. Positions to which he was elected: member of the Theological Working Group of the WCC Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies (DFI) program (1974–83); Moderator of the Commission of World Mission and Evangelism (1984–91); member of the European Council of Religious Leaders (ECRL) (2001–12); Vice-President of the Conference of European Churches (2003–09); President of the WCC (2006–13); and Honorary President of the World Conference of Religions for Peace (2006 to present).

He has been honored with 30 medals and awards from many Orthodox Churches and various countries, including the Grand Cross of the Order of Honor of the Hellenic Republic (1997); the Athenagoras Human Rights Award, New York (2001); the Award for "distinguished activities for the unity of the Orthodox Nations," Moscow (2006); the Medal of George Kastrioti Skanderbeg by the President of Albania for "his contribution to religious harmony and peaceful coexistence in Albania" (2010); the Klaus Hemmerle Prize of the Focolare international movement for his efforts as a "bridge builder among religious communities and various peoples," Aachen, Germany (2020).

His contributions to theology, to Christian *martyria*, to inter-Christian rapprochement, to interreligious dialogue, and to the peaceful coexistence of peoples and religious communities have been recognized internationally.

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Many of his studies and articles have been published in English, German, French, Albanian, Russian, Swedish, Finnish, Serbian, Romanian, Bulgarian, Spanish, Portuguese, Korean, Armenian, Italian, Arabic, and Polish.

Coexistence has been an essential component of the life of humanity, however, it is frequently undermined and even poisoned. Its attenuation is primarily due to the virus of ego-centrism, individual or collective, which is manifested in various ways. Injustice, corruption, and poverty continue to destroy the harmonious coexistence of humanity. Through the last decades in particular, violence has taken new uncontrollable forms which culminate in polymorphous terrorism. Human aggression expands to exploitation and even to the contempt of creation, with painful consequences for both the natural environment and for human life itself.

The great religions, which have influenced many cultures, have developed certain insights and principles about these issues. The texts of this anthology approach the following problems through a theological and religious point of view:

- **Peace in both its ecumenical dimensions as well as in a specific country**
- **The human being and the environment**
- **Poverty**
- **Terrorism in our times**
- **Universal moral values**

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