

Faith and Unity: A Global Religious Tapestry

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Abstract

Despite the diversity of belief systems across the globe, the world's major religions share a remarkable number of ethical principles, spiritual themes, and human values. This article explores the foundational similarities among faiths such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and indigenous traditions. Through a comparative analysis of sacred texts, rituals, moral teachings, and philosophical underpinnings, the study reveals a shared emphasis on compassion, justice, peace, self-discipline, and the pursuit of a higher purpose. By focusing on what unites rather than divides, this research contributes to interfaith dialogue and global understanding, presenting religion not as a source of conflict, but as a bridge toward common humanity. This exploration of shared religious values invites readers to reconsider the spiritual connections that bind us across cultures and continents.

Introduction

In an era marked by deep cultural fragmentation and intermittent interreligious conflict, exploring the shared moral and spiritual values across global faith traditions offers a powerful counter-narrative to division. Despite the surface-level differences in doctrine, ritual, and cultural expression, the world's principal religions—including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and indigenous belief systems—converge on fundamental ethical principles such as compassion, justice, peace, and respect for human dignity. This convergence not only reflects humanity's collective spiritual conscience but also presents a viable foundation for interfaith harmony and global cooperation.

Scholars rooted in perennial philosophy, such as Frithjof Schuon, have argued for a “transcendent unity of religions,” asserting that beneath outward forms lie a metaphysical common ground where values like justice and compassion emerge universally (Aqil, 2020, Haramain, 2018). Complementing this view, Huston Smith emphasized that these universal principles form a bridge for interfaith dialogue, fostering reconciliation and mutual societal benefit (Irfan, 2018). Similarly, Karen Armstrong has identified compassion as a foundational cornerstone across multiple traditions, underlining its central role in promoting peaceful coexistence (Armstrong, 2022).

Recent interfaith initiatives further exemplify this shared moral repertoire. Documents such as *A Common Word Between Us and You* (2009) frame the mutual commandment of “love of God and love of neighbor” as the most profound common denominator between Christianity and Islam (David F. Ford, 2009). The 2019 *Document on Human Fraternity*, signed by Pope Francis and Grand Imam Ahmed el-Tayeb, explicitly highlights compassion and solidarity as imperatives for peaceful interreligious coexistence (Pope Francis & El-Tayeb, 2019). Meanwhile, grassroots efforts like the *World Congress of Imams and Rabbis for Peace* (2005–08) demonstrate how religious leaders actively deploy shared values to address sectarian tensions and foster peace (Hommes de Parole, 2005).

Academics investigating interfaith dialogue consistently identify common values—particularly compassion, justice, nonviolence, and human dignity—as the bedrock of effective engagement (Number Analytics, 2025;

Fiveable, n.d.; EBSCO, n.d.). These universal moral themes enable religious communities to transcend doctrinal boundaries and collaborate toward collective goals, enhancing societal cohesion (Hartford International University, 2024; Preprints.org, 2023).

This article aims to deepen our understanding of how religions of the world express these shared principles in sacred texts, moral teachings, and community practices. It will investigate the following questions: (1) What are the universal values articulated across diverse religious traditions? (2) How do religious leaders and philosophical frameworks articulate and operationalize these values? (3) In what ways can emphasizing these common values contribute to meaningful interfaith dialogue, peacebuilding, and global solidarity in modern contexts? By addressing these questions, the study underscores that religions—when emphasizing unity rather than exclusivity—serve not merely as individual spiritual paths but as collective forces for moral and societal uplift.

Literature Review

❖ Historical Foundations of Interfaith Commonalities

The foundational concept of shared spiritual truths dates back centuries, rooted in Renaissance thinkers like Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, who posited that a “*prisca theologia*” underlies all religions (Perennial philosophy, 2025). This idea evolved into the 20th-century perennial philosophy advocated by Frithjof Schuon and others, asserting that despite differing exoteric forms, religions emerge from a universal metaphysical truth (Frithjof Schuon, 2025; Perennial philosophy, 2025). Schuon emphasized that the unity resides at the esoteric level beyond outward rituals and doctrines (Frithjof Schuon, 2025).

❖ Compassion and Empathy as Universal Values

Karen Armstrong’s assertion that all religions center on compassion has inspired academic and social initiatives, such as the Charter for Compassion, elevating compassion as a societal imperative (Armstrong’s work cited in Schneider, 2010; Charter for Compassion, 2025). Empirical studies reinforce this: basic interreligious values like compassion, justice, generosity, and respect are consistent across religious traditions—even in culturally diverse educational contexts (Harmonizing Faith and Inclusion, 2024). Moreover, theoretical analysis underscores empathy as a crucial mechanism in interfaith dialogue, reducing prejudice and enabling integration (On the Value of Empathy..., 2023).

❖ Empirical Evaluation of Interfaith Interventions

Recent systematic reviews of interfaith initiatives have shown positive impacts: improved mutual understanding, conflict resolution, and social cohesion across religious groups (Evaluating interfaith initiatives, 2023). Global interfaith programs—such as the Parliament of the World’s Religions, Interfaith Youth Core, Jordanian Interfaith Coexistence Research Center, United Religions Initiative, and KAICIID—exemplify structured engagements that translate universal values into tangible social action (Interfaith dialogue initiatives, 2025; Interfaith dialogue in a globalized world, 2025; Interfaith dialogue, 2025).

❖ Challenges and Best Practices

Despite demonstrated benefits, interfaith engagement is not without challenges. Political interference, doctrinal differences, fundamentalist resistance, and segmented efforts can undermine effectiveness (Interfaith dialogue in a globalized world, 2025; Evaluating interfaith initiatives, 2023). Scholars recommend best practices such as active listening (“*fusion of horizons*”), sustained dialogue, local traditions integration, and shared practical activities for conflict prevention and policy influence (Interfaith dialogue in a globalized world, 2025; On the Value of Empathy..., 2023; Local wisdom model, 2024).

❖ Theoretical and Practical Integration

The literature underscores the imperative to translate abstract ethical commonalities into practical outcomes. Integrating local wisdom—such as indigenous notions of harmony—enhances the relevance and sustainability of interfaith interventions (Local wisdom as a model..., 2024). Additionally, structured models like AFFIRM demonstrate that interfaith activities enhance empathy and relational competence among participants, grounded in sustained engagement (AFFIRM Model, 2023).

the literature confirms the historical and philosophical roots of universal religious values through perennial philosophy. Compassion and empathy emerge as core ethical bridges validated by both theory and empirical research. While numerous interfaith initiatives demonstrate success, they flourish when informed by empathy, local cultural wisdom, and structured engagement strategies. This growing body of literature underscores that religions are most effective as forces for unity when shared values are actively cultivated, embodied, and integrated into communal action.

Thematic Review

❖ Justice, Compassion, and Human Dignity

Justice and compassion emerge as universal ethical pillars across world religions. A recent analysis of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam highlights how each tradition emphasizes fairness, empathy, and respect for both humans and nature—ideas rooted in the Perennial Philosophy of Schuon and Smith (Peradaban Publishing, 2025). Specifically, Judaism underscores human dignity; Christianity calls for compassion for the vulnerable; and Islam emphasizes God’s unity as the foundation for social justice (Peradaban Publishing, 2025). Complementing this, comparative ethics research demonstrates that compassion and nonviolence are core values in Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, and Judaism (Number Analytics, 2025).

❖ Nonviolence and Peacebuilding

Nonviolence serves as a strong common thread. A peacebuilding manual affirms that all major religions uphold active nonviolence—Islam through “peace,” Judaism through its concept of shalom, Hinduism via ahimsa, and Buddhism through compassion and engaged mindfulness (ZFD, 2011). Gandhi’s interpretation of Jesus as an exponent of nonviolence reinforces this theme (ZFD, 2011). Empirical studies support that interfaith dialogue and peace-centric initiatives rooted in shared values can effectively resolve conflicts (ResearchGate, 2025).

❖ Social Cohesion Through Shared Spiritual Practices

Religion also functions as both a cohesive and divisive social force. One study on religious beliefs and community cohesion found that shared religious practices foster prosocial behavior and unity, yet can reinforce group bias and exclusion. The study recommends inclusive interfaith policies to mitigate these downsides (Kimani, 2024). Similarly, research on intra-religious and inter-group dialogue in Israeli contexts shows that meaningfully structured encounters among religious and secular individuals yield shared understanding and conflict resolution benefits (MDPI, 2023).

❖ Interfaith Dialogue and Practical Collaboration

Structured interreligious efforts like the *Dialogue of the Abrahamic Faiths* bring theologians from Judaism, Christianity, and Islam together to explore shared ethics (al-Faruqi, 1982/1995). Broader initiatives, such as the *Parliament of the World’s Religions* and its “Towards a Global Ethic” declaration, articulate global ethical commitments—respect, nonviolence, justice—endorsed across traditions (Parliament, 1993/2024). Moreover, thematic guides for facilitating interfaith conversations help community leaders center dialogues around shared moral values (Interfaith America, n.d.).

❖ **Religion as a Vehicle for Peace and Justice**

Contemporary scholarship highlights how religion supports social justice when linked with civic engagement. A recent article on faith-based racial justice demonstrates that religious frameworks have both empowered and constrained movements, but when harnessed consciously, religious values become effective tools for structural change (Tandfonline, 2025). Additionally, educational interfaith programs show increased empathy and mutual respect among participants when activities are focused on shared values rather than doctrinal debates (Smith & Interfaith Programs, 2025).

The tapestry of Themes

The academic conversation consistently centers on five interwoven themes:

Theme	Religious Traditions	Implications
Justice, Compassion, Dignity	Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism	Shared ethics rooted in metaphysical unity, prompting social action.
Nonviolence & Peacebuilding	All major faiths	Provides a universal framework for political resistance and conflict resolution.
Social Cohesion vs Division	Multiple religions	Religion builds community but can exclude; necessitates inclusive policies.
Interfaith Dialogue	Abrahamic and multi-faith initiatives	Theological and practical discourse fosters mutual understanding.
Faith-Driven Justice	Modern social movements	When connected to religious values, movements addressing social issues see increased efficacy.

Nonviolence and Peacebuilding

Nonviolence emerges as another prominent theme uniting diverse faiths. The concept of “compassionate reasoning”—a blend of internal ethics with peaceful political engagement—has been explored in religious peace studies (Gopin, 2022). Historical figures like Gandhi incorporated Hindu, Christian, and Muslim teachings into daily interfaith prayers, making nonviolent love—or ahimsa—the core of communal practice (Dear, n.d.). Such reflections bridge doctrine with activism, strengthening faith-based peace efforts worldwide.

Empathy, Dialogue, and Social Cohesion

Empathy supports better religious understanding—but also carries challenges of bias and partiality. Psychological-theological studies show that empathetic engagement promotes integration and relational growth, so long as scope isn’t limited by in-group bias (Hartshorne et al., 2022). Practical guidelines from Hartford International highlight empathy and listening as pathways toward peace in global contexts (Hartford International University, 2024).

Institutional Interfaith Engagement

Institutional initiatives exemplify how shared values are operationalized. The Appeal to Conscience Foundation (est. 1965) and interfaith centers under the United Nations were early efforts to convene religious leaders for peacebuilding through neutral facilitation (USIP, 2003). Organizations like the European Council of Religious Leaders collaborate across traditions to prevent conflict by emphasizing human dignity and mutual respect (ECRL, 2025).

Justice, Human Dignity, and Global Ethics

Justice and human dignity are universally upheld across the world's major religious traditions, forming a critical ethical bridge for interfaith understanding and cooperation. From the Hebrew Bible's emphasis on *tzedek* (justice) and care for the marginalized (Micah 6:8), to the Qur'an's insistence on *'adl* (equity) and the inherent dignity of all humans (Qur'an 17:70), and Jesus' teachings on loving the oppressed and pursuing righteousness (Matthew 25:40), the shared commitment to justice reflects a global ethical consciousness rooted in divine command and moral reason (Jameelah & Aiman, 2025; Parliament of the World's Religions, 1993/2024).

This convergence is not merely theological but deeply practical. A comparative study of Abrahamic religions finds that justice is consistently linked to human dignity, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship (Jameelah & Aiman, 2025). For example, Judaism frames justice as a divine imperative tied to community well-being, Christianity centers it in the teachings of Christ and liberation theology, and Islam interweaves it with personal accountability and societal equity. These overlapping values reinforce the concept of "global ethics"—a shared moral framework that transcends cultural and religious boundaries (Parliament of the World's Religions, 1993/2024).

The Towards a Global Ethic declaration, launched by the Parliament of the World's Religions and endorsed by spiritual leaders from over 200 faith groups, articulates five ethical commitments that resonate across religious traditions: commitment to a culture of nonviolence and respect for life; a culture of solidarity and a just economic order; a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness; equal rights for men and women; and a culture of sustainability and care for the Earth (Parliament of the World's Religions, 1993/2024). These principles represent the ethical heart of the world's spiritual traditions and challenge humanity to move from coexistence to co-responsibility.

Importantly, justice in the religious context is not confined to legalism but embraces the moral imperative to uphold the dignity and equality of all human beings. This aligns with the philosophical underpinnings of Frithjof Schuon's perennial philosophy, which asserts that all authentic religions point to the same transcendent truths and ethical core—among them the sacredness of life and the inviolability of human worth (Schuon, 2010). It also echoes Huston Smith's view that while religious forms differ, they point to a single reality that promotes justice, love, and humility as universal virtues (Smith, 2009).

Thus, justice and human dignity are not only religious ideals but also necessary building blocks for global citizenship. They allow diverse communities to work together toward peace, inclusion, and human rights while staying rooted in their own spiritual convictions. Emphasizing these values in interfaith dialogue fosters not just mutual tolerance but active moral partnership.

Mutual Tolerance

Mutual tolerance is a foundational thread in the global religious tapestry, binding diverse faith traditions through respect, humility, and coexistence. In the context of "Faith and Unity," mutual tolerance is not simply passive acceptance, but an active principle that allows religious communities to honor each other's differences while recognizing shared ethical values. Most world religions—while maintaining theological distinctions—promote tolerance through sacred teachings and interfaith engagement.

The Qur'an encourages believers to engage with others "in the best manner," recognizing religious plurality as part of divine will (Qur'an 16:125, 5:48). Similarly, the Hindu concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*—"the world is one family"—offers a powerful cultural and religious foundation for inter-religious tolerance (Parliament of the World's Religions, 1993/2024). In Christianity, Jesus' encounters with Samaritans and Gentiles model inclusion and radical hospitality (Luke 10:25-37), and Buddhism advocates *metta* (loving-kindness) toward all beings, regardless of belief (Harvey, 2013).

Modern interfaith frameworks have institutionalized these teachings. The Parliament of the World's Religions' *Towards a Global Ethic* explicitly identifies tolerance and truthfulness as ethical pillars for a peaceful global society (Parliament of the World's Religions, 1993/2024). It asserts that "there can be no global justice without religious tolerance," pointing to the necessity of mutual respect in navigating both religious difference and political pluralism.

Scholars such as Küng (1991) have emphasized that while doctrinal consensus is unlikely, an "ethic of shared responsibility" is both possible and essential. Mutual tolerance thus becomes a strategic virtue in a world where religious identity often intersects with political and cultural boundaries. As Armstrong (2006) notes, when tolerance is grounded in compassion, it becomes a catalyst for reconciliation, healing, and collective moral growth.

In practical terms, mutual tolerance enables meaningful interfaith dialogue, reduces prejudice, and empowers collective responses to social injustice. Programs like interfaith youth exchanges, shared community service projects, and theological roundtables all function effectively when participants prioritize tolerance as a lived value rather than a mere ideal (Hartford International University, 2024). In the tapestry of global religion, mutual tolerance is the thread that allows vibrant diversity to coexist with spiritual unity.

Discussion

The exploration of world religions through the lens of shared values and principles reveals a compelling narrative of unity beneath diversity. While theological doctrines, rituals, and histories differ across religious traditions, the foundational values of compassion, justice, peace, and human dignity are remarkably consistent (Armstrong, 2006; Smith, 2009). This thematic convergence is not coincidental but speaks to a deep-rooted moral and spiritual intuition common to humanity (Schuon, 2010).

Interfaith dialogues and academic studies increasingly support the idea of a transcendent unity of religions, a concept emphasized by Frithjof Schuon and echoed in contemporary initiatives like *A Common Word* and the *Charter for Compassion* (Aqil, 2020; David, 2009; *Charter for Compassion*, 2025). These efforts demonstrate how shared ethical commitments can foster not only interreligious understanding but also global cooperation on issues such as climate change, conflict resolution, and social justice (Hartford International University, 2024; Küng, 1991).

Moreover, modern empirical studies underscore that engaging in interfaith activities significantly improves attitudes toward religious "others," strengthens social cohesion, and reduces prejudice (*Evaluating the learning outcomes...*, 2023). The importance of empathy and mutual tolerance as tools for peacebuilding has been reaffirmed in both scholarly discourse and grassroots interfaith programs (*On the Value of Empathy...*, 2023; Ziviler Friedensdienst, 2011).

The recognition of universal values in Abrahamic and Eastern traditions—such as charity, humility, and the pursuit of truth—reveals that dialogue is not about diluting one's beliefs, but rather about appreciating the ethical common ground (Jameelah & Aiman, 2025; Number Analytics, 2025). The presence of these values across traditions affirms that religions can serve as bridges rather than barriers in our increasingly interconnected world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *Faith and Unity: A Global Religious Tapestry* argues that while religious diversity is real and valuable, so too is the spiritual and ethical unity that links the world's faiths. This unity, grounded in shared human values, offers a powerful antidote to the divisive narratives of extremism and intolerance. As Schuon (2010) suggests, at their metaphysical core, religions are rays of the same divine light refracted through different cultural lenses.

For global societies facing polarization, inequality, and environmental crises, recognizing this tapestry of shared spiritual values is not merely academic—it is essential. Efforts in interfaith education, peacebuilding, and policymaking must be grounded in this awareness of unity in diversity. If embraced, the wisdom and ethics common to all great religions can lead humanity toward a more compassionate, just, and harmonious future.

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