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# Living Out the Second Greatest Commandment

## Applying the American Library Association's Ninth Principle

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**ABSTRACT** The American Library Association revised its Code of Ethics in 2021 to include a Ninth Principle, which starts with a sentence that reflects the Golden Rule. In this presentation, texts from multiple religions are presented to suggest how the Ninth Principle aligns with those religions, as well as with the Golden Rule. Further consideration is given with Jewish and Christian scriptures and suggests a resonance with the second part of the Ninth Principle. Questions in the latter part of the presentation call the reader to professional and personal actions based on the religious principles presented, ALA's Ninth Principle, and one's own personal ethics. The audience and readers are invited to continue the discussion in future Atla conferences.

The American Library Association (ALA) adopted the Ninth Principle to the Association's Code of Ethics in June 2021. The Ninth Principle states:

We affirm the inherent dignity and rights of every person. We work to recognize and dismantle systemic and individual biases; to confront inequity and oppression; to enhance diversity and inclusion; and to advance racial and social justice in our libraries, communities, profession, and associations through awareness, advocacy, education, collaboration, services, and allocation of resources and spaces. (American Library Association 2021)

The first sentence of the Ninth Principle, "We affirm the inherent dignity and rights of every person," seems to call to the Golden Rule and what Jesus, in Mark 12:31, called the second greatest commandment. This start of the Ninth Principle also resonates with many world religions, which also have statements similar to the Golden Rule. This paper will consider several of those religious statements

and then compare statements from Jewish and Christians scriptures with phrases in the rest of the Ninth Principle.

The first item considered is the United States of America's civil religion. The United States started with its Declaration of Independence, published in 1776. ALA's Ninth Principle harkens to the Preamble of the Declaration of Independence, which states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" (US 1976). They both state that people are valuable and have rights. US politics focus on finding a balance between the expression of and limits to rights. Some seek to find that balance personally by the Golden Rule.

Norman Rockwell, a popular US artist in the mid-twentieth century, published his "Golden Rule" painting on the cover of the April 1, 1961 issue of *The Saturday Evening Post*. This picture featured people of different religions, races, and ethnicity behind the text "Do Unto Others As You Would Have Them Do Unto You." Rockwell's commentary on the picture was, "I'd been reading up on comparative religion. The thing is that all major religions have the Golden Rule in Common. 'Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.' Not always the same words but the same meaning" (Rockwell 1961). Many academic encyclopedias and dictionaries list passages from religious texts that support the Golden Rule (Bok 2005; Carson 2013; Himelstein et al. 2002; Singer 2001; Traer 2011; Unterman 1997).

This author sought the quotes within their original contexts. The following were found in English translations of the religious texts or from apologetic sources for that religion.

- Buddha said, "Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful." (*Udanavarga* 5.18, as cited in Scarborough Missions 2000)
- In Confucius' *Analects*, "Tsze-kung asked, saying, 'Is there one word which may serve as a rule of practice for all one's life?' The Master said, 'Is not *reciprocity* such a word? What you do not want done to yourself, do not do to others'." (*The Analects*, XV:24, Classical Library 2001)
- Hindu scriptures state, "This is the sum of duty. Do not unto others that which would cause you pain if done to you." (*Mahabharata* 5:1517, from the Vedic tradition of India, as cited in Humanity Healing 2012)

- Guru Nanak states to Sikhs, “Accept all humans as your equals, and let them be your only sect.” (Discover Guru Nanak 2019)
- Taoist writings say, “Therefore, surrender your self-interest. Love others as much as you love yourself. Then you can be entrusted with all things under heaven.” (*Tao Te Ching* 13.4, Terebess Asia Online 1982)

These five quotes present principles similar to the first sentence of ALA’s Ninth Principle. They call for treating others as valuable and avoid things that one would not want done to themselves. Some even call for treating others as your equal and loving them.

This is like the statements in the scriptures of the Abrahamic faiths:

- The Prophet states: “On the authority of Abu Hamzah Anas bin Malik (may Allah be pleased with him) — the servant of the Messenger of Allah (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) — that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said: ‘None of you will believe until you love for your brother what you love for yourself.’ Related by Bukhari & Muslim.” (40HadithNawawi.com n.d.)
- The Jewish law states: “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the sons of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself; I am the Lord.” (Leviticus 19:18, NASB).
- Jewish commentary, the Talmud, expands on the law: “There was **another incident involving one gentile who came before Shammai and said to Shammai: Convert me on condition that you teach me the entire Torah while I am standing on one foot.** Shammai **pushed him away with the builder’s cubit in his hand.** This was a common measuring stick and Shammai was a builder by trade. The same gentile **came before Hillel. He converted him and said to him: That which is hateful to you do not do to another; that is the entire Torah, and the rest is its interpretation. Go study.**” (Talmud, Shabbat 31a, Steinsaltz 2019; bold in original)

The Christian Synoptic Gospels have similar stories about this command in Leviticus.

- “One of them, a lawyer, asked [Jesus] a question, testing Him, ‘Teacher, which is the great commandment in the

Law?’ And He said to him, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 22:35-40)

- “One of the scribes came and heard them arguing, and recognizing that [Jesus] had answered them well, asked Him, ‘What commandment is the foremost of all?’ Jesus answered, ‘The foremost is, “Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.” The second is this, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’ (Mark 12:28-31)
- “And [the lawyer] answered, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.’ And [Jesus] said to him, ‘You have answered correctly; do this and you will live.’” (Luke 10:27-28)

The Gospel of John extends this concept by Jesus stating his new command:

- “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35)

The Apostle John continues this command in his epistle, stating:

- “And this commandment we have from Him, that the one who loves God should love his brother also.” (1 John 4:21)

The Apostle Paul follows Jesus’ new command to love one another and removes the first commandment listed in the Synoptic Gospel.

- “For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Galatians 5:14)

The Ninth Principle echoes these religious commands and the Golden Rule. Affirming the dignity and rights of others in one’s practice of librarianship is supported by religious ethics and ALA’s code of ethics. How can or do you implement the Golden Rule in your library?

ALA's Ninth Principle continues with, "We work to recognize and dismantle systemic and *individual biases*; to confront *inequity and oppression*; to enhance diversity and inclusion; and to *advance* racial and social *justice* in our libraries, communities, profession, and associations through awareness, advocacy, education, collaboration, services, and allocation of resources and spaces" (ALA 2021; italics added). The primary sentence is expanded in the second compound sentence—which this author will focus on, with specific reference to the italicized phrases.

Recognizing one's own individual biases addresses the philosophical critique of the Golden Rule about the person who likes pain wanting to inflict pain on others. One must know oneself to see where there are biases that might negatively impact one's application of the Golden Rule and treating others and their rights with respect. This self-assessment is also basic information literacy practice and instruction.

Confronting inequity and oppression, and advancing justice are common themes in the prophets in the Hebrew Bible and the Sermon on the Mount. Walter Houston, in "Social Justice and the Hebrew Prophets," defined social justice as "*Social* justice is fairness between social classes and groups. Social justice involves treating different groups in society fairly. Fair treatment is not necessarily equal treatment because different groups may be unequal to begin with" (Houston 2021, 1382). The prophets sought to remind the rulers to provide that fair and just treatment to the poor and disadvantaged. Below are select sections from the Prophetic literature:

- Poetry in Isaiah:

"Woe to those who enact evil statutes,  
 And to those who constantly record unjust decisions,  
 So as to deprive the needy of justice  
 And rob the poor of My people of their rights,  
 So that widows may be their spoil  
 And that they may plunder the orphans.  
 Now what will you do in the day of punishment,  
 And in the devastation which will come from afar?  
 To whom will you flee for help?  
 And where will you leave your wealth?  
 Nothing remains but to crouch among the captives  
 Or fall among the slain.  
 In spite of all this, His anger does not turn away  
 And His hand is still stretched out." (Isa. 10:1-4)

- “Behold, the rulers of Israel, each according to his power, have been in you for the purpose of shedding blood. They have treated father and mother lightly within you. The alien they have oppressed in your midst; the fatherless and the widow they have wronged in you.” (Ezek. 22:6-7)
- “Therefore because you impose heavy rent on the poor and exact a tribute of grain from them, though you have built houses of well-hewn stone, yet you will not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, yet you will not drink their wine. For I know your transgressions are many and your sins are great, you who distress the righteous and accept bribes and turn aside the poor in the gate.” (Amos 5:11-12)

Many have heard of Micah 6:8 (“He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”), but Micah also states:

- “Now hear this, heads of the house of Jacob, and rulers of the house of Israel, who abhor justice and twist everything that is straight...” (Mic. 3:9)

Jesus also provides these themes during his Sermon on the Mount:

- “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matt. 5:43-48)

ALA’s Ninth Principle calls for librarians to practice in ways that align with these scriptures. How can or are you implementing these principles into your ethics in your library and librarianship? The discussion in this session suggested a panel at Atla Annual 2024 that expands this discussion; would you be interested in joining as part of investigating how to apply these principles into your librarianship?

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