

War and Peace in World Religions

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Perry Schmidt-Leukel



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8. Global Ethic: Development and Goals

HANS KÜNG

The Long History of Humanity

The history of our globe shows 'grandeur' and 'misery', and the history of humanity is great and sublime, but also infinitely cruel. Human beings and nations, with all their inventions, creations and achievements, with all their disputes, conflicts and wars, are sometimes in danger of taking themselves too seriously. Would it really make any difference to the universe if the human race destroyed itself? Our globe is a very insignificant star on the periphery of one of 100 million Milky Ways. Just as the human race came into being, so it can pass away again – and our generation is the first in the long history of the earth which proves to be technically able to destroy itself, by nuclear weapons or by eroding the ecological basis of its survival.

According to a number of scientists the world has existed for at least 13 billion years. There has been human life on our planet for perhaps 1,500,000 years. So 99.9 per cent of human history will have been primal history: a history without writing, without the name of a people or a religion, a political or a religious leader. But since the early Stone Age the *homo sapiens*, as present-day human beings proudly call themselves, have been distinct from the animal world by their consciousness of themselves. *Homo sapiens* invented tools and weapons, learned to control fire, and seized the dens occupied by marauding beasts; at that time already they buried their dead and offered sacrifices, and were

able to produce cave paintings, carvings and statues, motivated by magic and religion.

Only about 5,000 years ago, at the beginning of the third millennium BCE, the early historical high cultures and high religions developed in Mesopotamia, the Nile valley, the Indus valley and the Huangho valley in China. That brings 'prehistory' without writing to an end and written 'history' into being, which is able to speak to us for itself in a living way through its literary documents. The real 'historical' period of the human race begins, in which an increasing number of specific peoples, religions and historical persons emerge into history. Now, not only information about administration and trade, but later also myths and sagas, customs, laws and morals are recorded.

From a historical perspective the concrete ethical norms, values, insights and key concepts of religions and philosophies have been formed in a highly complicated social and dynamic process. Where the basic human needs and concerns emerged, there was from the beginning of human history pressure for regulations for human conduct: priorities, conventions, customs, commandments, instructions and laws, in short particular ethical norms. Much therefore that is proclaimed in the Bible as God's commandment is already found in the ancient Babylonian Code of Hammurabi from the eighteenth and seventeenth centuries BCE.

Human beings had to test and still have to test ethical norms and ethical solutions in projections and models, often practising them and proving them over generations. After periods of proving and acclimatization, such norms finally come to be recognized by a group, tribe, people or nation, but sometimes – if the times have changed completely – they are also diluted and replaced. Are we perhaps living in such a time of change?

Given the reality of our modern technological society which is so many-layered, changeable, complex and often impenetrable, nobody can avoid making use of scientific methods in order to investigate as far as possible without prejudice the material laws and future possibilities of this society. Certainly not every average person needs to make use of these scientific methods.

Even today, of course, the pre-scientific awareness of particular ethical norms, insofar as it still exists, retains basic significance for a high proportion of people. And happily, many people still 'spontaneously' act correctly in particular situations without ever having read a treatise on moral philosophy or moral theology. Nevertheless, the wrong verdicts (for example in connection with war, racism, the situation of women or the significance of birth control) which have found their way into many religions in the course of more recent history have shown that modern life has become too complex for defining specific ethical norms – particularly with regard to sexuality or aggression, economic or political power – in a naïve blindness to reality, which overlooks empirical data and insights confirmed by science.

In positive terms, this means that nowadays a modern ethic is depending on contact with the sciences: psychology and psychotherapy, sociology and social science, behavioural research, biology, cultural history and philosophical anthropology. Also the religions, their responsible leaders and teachers, should not show any anxiety in becoming involved in all these: the human sciences in particular offer them a growing wealth of relatively certain anthropological insights and information which is relevant to action, and these can be used to facilitate decisions in a way that can be justified.

A Coalition of Believers and Non-Believers for a Common Ethic

Over the millennia the religions were the systems of orientation which laid the foundation for a particular morality, which legitimated it, motivated it and often also sanctioned punishments. But does that need to be the case even now, in many largely secularized societies? Religions, like all historical entities which have been ambivalent for men and women, have perceived their moral function for better and for worse. The religions have contributed a great deal to the spiritual and moral progress of the peoples. But undoubtedly also non-religious people can have a basic ethical orientation and lead a moral life without religion.

Indeed, in history there have often been non-religious people who pioneered a new sense of human dignity and did more for human emancipation, freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and other human rights than their religious allies. Many non-religious people have also developed and pursue goals and priorities, values and norms, ideals and models, criteria for good and evil.

In our days many religious and secular people around the world are pioneering together a morality which takes its bearings from the human dignity of all men and women, and according to present understanding this human dignity includes reason and responsibility, freedom of conscience, freedom of religion and the other human rights which have been established over the course of a long history. And it is of utmost significance for peace among the peoples, for international collaboration in politics, economics and culture, and also for international organizations like the UN, that religious people – whether they are Jews, Christians or Muslims, Hindus, Jains, Sikhs, Buddhists, Confucians, Taoists or whatever – and non-religious people, who call themselves ‘humanists’ or by whatever name, can in their own way advocate and defend human dignity and human rights, in short a humane ethic. In fact both believers and non-believers advocate what stands as Article I in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights which was passed on 10 December 1948 – after World War Two and the Holocaust: ‘All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.’

A coalition of believers and non-believers in mutual respect is indispensable for a common global ethic. Non-believers can join believers in resisting all trivial nihilism, diffuse cynicism and social apathy and devote themselves with conviction to the following aim: that the basic right of all human beings to a life worth living (no matter what sex, nation, religion, race or class they belong to) is not largely ignored, as it used to be, but is increasingly being realized. This is not pure utopia, but a realistic vision. A society without war has become a reality since 1945,

at least in the OECD world in which the material imbalances are slowly reduced by strengthening democratic structures and institutions and by raising the standard of living of the poor.

Globalization Needs a Global Ethic

Globalization concerns not only internal and special issues of the economy: it concerns universal social, highly political, and ultimately also ethical issues. In concrete terms it is about the question of whether profit, and therefore the pursuit of profit that is justified in principle, should be the one and only purpose of the economy, of a bank, or an enterprise. The phenomenon of economic globalization makes it clear that along with globalization the question of what is ethical should also be posed, and ethics should also be applied to globalization. We need also a *globalization of ethic*.

Globalization is therefore much more than just an economic concept. In order to lend *sustainability* to the globalization of markets, technology and communication, the profits of the economy must be produced in such a way that they are society- and environment-friendly. The globalization of the economy, technology and the media means also the globalization of problems: from financial and labour markets to the environment, organized crime and terrorism. For this reason reflection on global ethical standards is essential. In order to ensure that economic performance remains subordinate to human and social goals, globalization needs a political foundation and an ethical framework. What is needed is not a uniform ethical system (‘ethics’ in the strict sense), but only a necessary minimum of shared ethical values, basic attitudes and standards to which all regions, nations and interest groups can subscribe – in other words, a shared basic ‘ethic’ for humankind, an ‘ethos’ in the sense of a moral attitude.

‘Global ethic’ is therefore not a new ideology or superstructure. It will not make the specific ethics of the different religions and philosophies superfluous. It is therefore no substitute for the Torah, the Sermon on the Mount, the Qur’an, the Bhagavadgīta,

the Discourses of the Buddha or the Analects of Confucius. Global ethic is nothing but the necessary minimum of common values, standards and basic attitudes. In other words: a minimal basic consensus relating to binding values, irrevocable standards and moral attitudes, which can be affirmed by all religions despite their 'dogmatic' differences, and can also be supported by non-believers.

There is a need for the rediscovery and reassessment of ethics in politics and economics, a need for morality (in the positive sense), but not for moralism (morality in the negative sense). For moralism and moralizing overvalue morality and ask too much of it. Moralizers make morality the sole criterion for human action and ignore the relative independence of various spheres of life like economics, law and politics. Speaking out for a few basic ethical standards does not mean deciding every controversial issue on which an ethical consensus cannot be reached in the present situation.

On the other hand, ethics excludes also a libertinism which claims rights without any responsibilities. The dignity of the human person is the basis of both rights and responsibilities. Article 29 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights affirms the importance of 'duties' and of the 'just requirements of morality':

1. Everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.
2. In the exercise of his rights and freedoms, everyone shall be subject only to such limitations as are determined by law solely for the purpose of securing due recognition and respect for the rights and freedoms of others and of meeting the just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society.

A Global Process of Growing Ethical Awareness

There are already several important international documents which explicitly speak of human rights and human responsibility:

ties, indeed which programmatically call for a global ethic and even attempt to identify specific areas of application:

1. The 1995 report by the UN Commission for Global Governance calls for an ethic of neighbourhood in all areas: 'global values must be the core of a world political order'.
2. The equally important report by the World Commission on Culture and Development, also of 1995, calls in the very first chapter for 'a New Global Ethic', an ethic of humankind, a global ethic 'to cope with the global problems mentioned'.
3. This request also found support in the UNESCO Universal Ethics Project of 1997, the World Economic Forum at Davos in 1997 and the Indira Gandhi Conference at Delhi in 1997.

Such international conferences and commissions not only stress the need for a global ethic but also in part call for a formulation of human responsibilities. This was first done in 1993 by the Parliament of the World's Religions in its Declaration Toward a Global Ethic, and later by the InterAction Council, made up of former heads of state and government, which in 1997 published a proposal for a Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities. In 1999, the Third Parliament of the World's Religions meeting at Cape Town issued a 'Call to our Guiding Institutions'. Let me first recall the main thrust of the 1993 Declaration Toward a Global Ethic.

Two Basic Ethical Principles of Humanity

We have not to re-invent the wheel of ethic again. In the often millennia-old cultural traditions of humanity we find very elementary ethical standards which are convincing and practicable also today for all women and men of good will. Of course, these cultural traditions differ in many ways from each other in their understanding of what is helpful and what is unhelpful for the human being, what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil. It is absolutely impossible to gloss over or to ignore the very serious differences among the civilizations. However, these differences should not be obstacles to perceiving

and appreciating those ethical values and standards which are already held in common and which can jointly be affirmed, on religious or non-religious grounds. On the basis of all the scholarly work in this field done so far, it is now possible to outline the content of a global ethic.

Now, as before, women and men are treated inhumanely all over the world. They are robbed of their opportunities and their freedom; their human rights are trampled underfoot; their dignity is disregarded. In the face of all inhumanity ethical traditions demand strongly that *every human being must be treated humanely*. 'Humanity', 'Humaneness' (Chinese: *ren*) in the sense of benevolence is already a central ethical term in the Analects of Confucius and can be found in most cultures and religions.

There is a broad ethical consensus worldwide, that every human being, without distinction of age, sex, race, skin colour, physical or mental ability, language, religion, political view, or national or social origin, possesses an inalienable and untouchable dignity. And everyone, the individual as well as the State, is therefore obliged to honour this dignity and protect it. Humans must always be the subjects of rights, must be ends, never mere means, never mere objects of commercialization and industrialization in economics, politics and media, in research institutes, and industrial corporations. No one stands 'above good and evil' – no human being, no social class, no influential interest group, no cartel, no police apparatus, no army, and no state. On the contrary: possessed of reason and conscience, every human is obliged to behave in a genuinely human fashion, to do good and prevent evil.

There is another principle which is found and has persisted in many cultural traditions of humankind for thousands of years: *What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others*. This 'golden rule' is already attested by Confucius (c.551–489 BCE); it is also expressed in Judaism by Rabbi Hillel (60 BCE to 10 CE), and in Christianity (Sermon on the Mount): 'Whatever you want people to do to you, do also to them.' Kant's categorical imperative could be understood as a modernization, rationalization and secularization of this 'golden rule': 'Act in such a way

that the maxims of your will at any time can be taken at the same time as the principle of a universal legislation', or, 'Act in such a way that you always use humankind, both in your person and in the person of anyone else . . . , at the same time as an end, never as a means.'

These two principles of humanity can serve as the irrevocable, unconditional norms for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations and religions. Racism, nationalism, sexism or religious fanaticism prevent humans from being authentically human. Self-determination and self-realization are legitimate so long as they are not separated from human self-responsibility and global responsibility; that is, from responsibility for fellow humans and for the planet earth.

On this basis four irrevocable directives are developed, four imperatives of humanity (extensively in the Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions, in a more condensed and juridical form in the proposal of the InterAction Council):

1. 'Have respect for all life!' The ancient precept, especially urgent in a time of children killing children: 'You shall not kill!' That means today the responsibility for a culture of non-violence and respect for life.
2. 'Deal honestly and fairly!' The very old commandment, important more than ever in the age of globalization: 'You shall not steal!' That means today the responsibility for a culture of solidarity and a just economic order.
3. 'Speak and act truthfully!' The ancient axiom, valid also for politicians and the media: 'You shall not lie!' That means the responsibility for a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness.
4. 'Respect and love one another!' The age-old directive, even more important in an age which seems to be without taboos: 'You shall not abuse sexuality, not commit sexual immorality!' That means the responsibility for a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women.

Recent Developments of the Global Ethic Project

During the first week of December 1999 the Third Parliament of the World's Religions convened at Cape Town, following those held in Chicago in 1893 and in 1993. One of the main tasks of the 1999 Parliament consisted in building upon the process of the past six years and in concretizing further the Global Ethic Project. This was done on the basis of a 'Call to our Guiding Institutions', those institutions which play a decisive and influential role in society: religion and spirituality; government; agriculture, labour, industry, and commerce; education; arts and communications media; science and medicine; international intergovernmental organizations; organizations of civil society. They are invited to adopt the principles and directives of the Global Ethic and to apply them to concrete issues. The rationale focuses on the notion of 'creative engagement':

When reflecting on the future of the human community, one must consider the world's most powerful institutions – institutions, whose policies, for better and for worse, influence every aspect of life on the planet. Clearly, the critical issues facing the world today present an acute ethical challenge to these institutions. What is urgently needed is a new opening to creative engagement among the guiding institutions – an active, attentive, and inventive collaboration, rooted in shared moral principles and expressed in mutually sustained programs on behalf of the peoples of the twenty-first century.

The 'Call' document is directly based on the Chicago Declaration of 1993, the related quotations of which are printed at the margin of each single call.

In addition, an increasing number of political and religious personalities have joined the calls for a global ethic. Some examples follow.

Václav Havel, former President of the Czech Republic, emphasized at the annual meeting of IMF and World Bank in Prague in 2000 that

the crucial task is to fundamentally strengthen a system of uni-

versally shared moral standards that will make it impossible, on a truly global scale, for the various rules to be time and again circumvented with still more ingenuity than had gone into their invention. Such standards will truly guarantee the weight of the rules and will generate natural respect for them in the societal climate. Actions proven to jeopardize the future of the human race should not only be punishable but, first and foremost, should be generally regarded as a disgrace. This will hardly ever happen unless we all find, inside ourselves, the courage to substantially change and to newly form an order of values that, with all our diversity, we can jointly embrace and jointly respect; and, unless we again relate these values to something that lies beyond the horizon of our immediate personal or group interest.

Important support for this vision was given by the new Director General of the IMF, Horst Köhler. He recalled the appeal by President Václav Havel 'to reflect on the wider dimension of the task, to allow globalization to work for the prosperity of all, to seek new sources of a sense of responsibility for the world'. And Dr Köhler added: 'I fully share this call for generally recognized moral standards. Indeed, as Hans Küng says, a global economy needs a global ethic.'

The following statements reflect consent from a variety of civilizations:

Mary Robinson, High Commissioner for Human Rights:

What is clear is that for the first time ever the pursuit of a goal by humanity, the attempt to move in the direction of a minimal consensus of shared values, attitudes and moral standards, will require the same degree of commitment and equal contribution of women and men.

Prince Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan:

By providing a starting point that all can agree upon, a global ethic would begin to traverse the split between subject and object. It would identify the fundamentals that are common to all religious traditions, and distill from them the essence of

human belief. A global ethic should constitute a core of belief, acceptable to all. It should not seek to impose one vision, or to legislate away our differences. It should strive for unity, but seek neither to eradicate nor to compromise diversity. After all, in this global age, only a truly global ethic can be of real value.

Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate:

The challenge we now face is for the different nations and peoples of the world to agree on a basic set of human values, which will serve as a unifying force in the development of a genuine global community.

The need for a global ethic is also confirmed by religious authorities. Pope John Paul II declared in his address to the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences in Rome in 2001:

As humanity embarks upon the process of globalization, it can no longer do without a common code of ethics. This does not mean a single dominant socio-economic system or culture which would impose its values and its criteria on ethical reasoning. It is within man as such, within universal humanity sprung from the Creator's hand, that the norms of social life are to be sought. Such a search is indispensable if globalization is not to be just another name for the absolute relativization of values and the homogenization of lifestyles and cultures. In all the variety of cultural forms, universal human values exist and they must be brought out and emphasized as the guiding force of all development and progress.

The Moderator of the World Council of Churches Central Committee Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia, underlined the global ethic idea in his Official Report to the 8th Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Harare, Zimbabwe, in 1998:

We are committed to the development of a basic common ethics that may lead societies from mere existence to meaningful co-existence, from confrontation to reconciliation, from degeneration of moral values to the restoration of the

quality of life that restores the presence of transcendence in human life. Global culture must be sustained by a global ethics that will guide the relations of nations with each other and with the creation, and will help them to work together for genuine world community. Such a global ethics, the idea of which was launched by the Parliament of World Religions in 1993, should not reflect the Western Christian ethos; it must be based on a diversity of experiences and convictions. The Church, together with other living faiths, should seek a global ethics based on shared ethical values that transcend religious beliefs and narrow definitions of national interests. Human rights must be undergirded by ethical principles. Therefore, dialogue among religions and cultures is crucial as the basis for greater solidarity for justice and peace, human rights and dignity.

Let me conclude by mentioning a particularly exciting development: the global ethic on the UN level. The year 2001 had been proclaimed by the UN 'International Year of Dialogue Among Civilizations', taking up a proposal made by the President of Iran, Seyed Mohammad Khatami to the UN General Assembly in 1998.

At the end of that International Year of Dialogue among Civilizations a 20-person expert group of 'Eminent Persons' convened by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan presented a report to him and to the General Assembly. I was privileged to be a member of this group, together with outstanding personalities such as Hanan Ashrawi, Jacques Delors, Nadine Gordimer, Prince Hassan of Jordan, Graca Machel, Amartya Sen, Dick Spring, and Richard von Weizsäcker, to name only a few of them. The main thrust of the report, with the title 'Crossing the Divide' is to develop a new paradigm of international relations able to meet the new challenges our world is facing. The horrible events of 11 September 2001 manifested in a cruel way that political thought and action today has to take the political, economic, cultural and religious aspects seriously into account. Let me now quote some sentences of the report which clearly

show how strongly the contribution of a global ethic for a new paradigm of international relations is now perceived on the UN level:

It is reconciliation that may lead all of us, no matter how this reconciliation process is achieved, to discover and to establish a global ethic. A global ethic for institutions and civil society, for leaders and for followers, requires a *longing and striving for peace, longing and striving for justice, longing and striving for partnerships, longing and striving for truth*. These might be the *four pillars of a system of a global ethic* that reconciliation, as the new answer to the vicious circle of endless hatred, is going to provide us.

The new hegemonialism of the United States which found its striking expression in the illegal and immoral Iraq war of spring 2003 seems however to jeopardize seriously all attempts towards a new paradigm and is clearly a relapse into the old paradigm of confrontation. But let us not lose hope, and conclude these reflections with a forward-looking question:

How is a Global Ethic to be Established?

This is a question which is valid for all new ideas. An example could be the demands of the UN Global Compact, which have now attained UN status, at least as demands. But what a long process of conscientization has it taken for human rights, humane working conditions and environmental demands to reach the level of the UN! In all these issues, as in the cases of peace and disarmament and the partnership between men and women, a very complex and long process of growing awareness has been needed. As such, this is already a prerequisite for a change of human awareness towards an ethic for humankind.

Many people can help here: pioneer thinkers, activists and initiative groups, but equally the countless teachers, from kindergarten to secondary school, who are already committed to a new understanding of the world religions, universal peace and a global ethic. Reflection on the ethic that all men and women

have in common is more than ever necessary for the peaceful coexistence of humankind, on the local level (in countless multicultural and multi-faith cities) and on the global level (in terms of global communication, global economy, global ecology and global politics). What happens in an individual's sphere of life, larger or smaller, depends therefore on that individual and his or her motivation.

In order to meet the challenges of the future, humanity needs not only science, but wisdom; not only technology, but spiritual energy; not only economy, but humanity. Humankind has to remain humane, has to become even more humane. And for a humane survival of humanity, human beings need an *ethic*! Ethical values and standards as mentioned above:

- non-violence and respect for life;
- justice and solidarity;
- truthfulness and tolerance;
- partnership and mutual respect and love.

Smartness and toughness are not enough. Professional and political competence is not enough. Ethical competence is required, based on moral values and standards. This is an insight of all the different civilizations: in 500 BCE Confucius said: 'If a man is not humane, what can he do with the rituals? If a man is not humane, what can he do with music?' And Mahatma Gandhi finds as the 'seven social sins of human kind', which can be overcome on the base of a global ethic:

Politics without principles,
wealth without work,
enjoyment without conscience,
knowledge without character,
business without morality,
science without humanity,
religion without sacrifice.



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