

Global Ethic and Education

Hans Küng

As a university professor it is a rather rare case for me to speak to school children. Just recently however I was invited by the Bosch Foundation to give an introduction to Global Ethic to a group of high school girls and boys of a Bosch scholarship program for excellence. I used a very simple method: I just took the frontpage and the backpage of the local newspaper of the same day and quoted six or eight main articles which all had specific ethical implications. It was easy to prove that ethics is not an academic matter but has to do with everyday life, politics, economics, and culture. This was an excellent preparation to show that rules are required wherever people live together and want to achieve particular aims.

I told the high school students:

- Look to your school class: It can prosper only if the pupils have a sense of fairness, if they can trust one another and need not be afraid of theft, bullying, discrimination and violence - and if they feel fairly treated by the teacher. For this to happen, regulations are needed which are observed by all those involved in school life.
- Look at the business world: Profit is important, but if the enterprise is to flourish there is also need for a basis of trust between employer and staff, among the staff, and between customers and firm. Honesty in business practices, in accounting and financial reporting, is important, as is reliability and mutual esteem. Business and employment regulations are required which are supported by all concerned.
- Look to a local or even national community: It can not exist unless a legal order is affirmed, unless differences are resolved without violence, unless its members deal with one another confidently, and those who hold office exercise it fairly and honestly. A balance must always be found between the interests of the individual and the common good. So a consensus on some fundamental rules of social life is indispensable for holding a community together.

- And look at international relations: Time and again peoples, nations and states have different interests, priorities and rivalries. A just balance of interests and lasting peace can be achieved only if relations are not shaped by force, and if dialogue and cooperation take the place of aggression and confrontation. Politics and diplomacy, in matters great and small, also need rules of behaviour.

Ever since there have been human societies, ideas have been developed of how to achieve a flourishing social life and a good life for the individual. Ethical standards - an elementary ethic - have been developed in all cultures. Religions and philosophies above all have spelt out these standards and systematized them. But in our present-day pluralistic world no single religion, philosophy or ideology can lay down such an ethic for the whole of society. Yet it is possible and important to discover the common features in the ethic of the different religions and philosophies and make people aware of them:

- for the individual as personal orientation;
- for society as the presupposition for its cohesion;
- for nations and religious communities as a basis for understanding, collaboration and peace.

On the basis of these common ethical standards, called a 'global ethic' for short, people of all cultures and nations can live together and work together for a more peaceful and juster world.

What is a global ethic?

As early as 1990, in my book *Global Responsibility*, I presented my reflections on a global ethic to the public. In it I developed programmatically the idea that the religions of the world can make a contribution to the peace of humankind only if they reflect on the ethic that they already have in common: on a fundamental consensus concerning existing binding values, irrevocable standards, and fundamental personal attitudes. The decisive step was then taken by the Parliament of the World's

Religions, an interreligious gathering in Chicago in 1993 with more than 5000 participants. At it, more than 200 delegates from every religion and continent signed a 'Declaration Toward A Global Ethic' which I drafted in a process of interreligious consultation. Since then it has become the fundamental document for the development of the idea of a global ethic.

No peace among the nations
without peace among the religions.

No peace among the religions
without dialogue between the religions.

No dialogue between the religions

Without global ethical standards!

No survival of our globe without a global ethic,
supported by both religious and nonreligious people.

What is the content of a global ethic?

It is important in our times of disorientation and vacuum of meaning, values, and standards to indicate quite clearly some basic human imperatives. It is not difficult to explain this to children and youngsters: According to the declaration of the Parliament of World's Religions (1993) especially four ethical imperatives of humanity can be identified:

1. There is so much violence in our societies all over the world, and even in schools there is an increase of violence; even murder of children and school teachers by children occurs. A lot of children suffer under violence. It is therefore of greatest importance that they learn already in kindergarden and elementary school not to

murder, torture, torment, wound – but to have reverence for life, in order to build a culture of non-violence and reverence for life.

2. Because of the new possibilities to make money, of the globalized financial markets and the globalization of economy, technology, and communication there are much more opportunities for crimes in business and stock market. Also in our school youngsters discuss the scandals in Wall Street and the greed of top-managers who earn exorbitant salaries and are all too often involved in falsifying the balances of the company. It is therefore important that already youngsters learn not to steal, exploit, bribe, corrupt, but that they learn to deal honestly and fairly in order to build up a culture of fairness and a more just economic order.

3. Because of new possibilities of communication for spreading propaganda worldwide, also in the world of politics more and more lying occurs which has very often most harmful consequences for the different nations and even the whole world. The most striking example is the Iraq War which was built on the lie of weapons of mass-destruction whereas it was in fact aimed at establishing hegemony over the oil production in the Middle East and even at establishing a hegemony over the world. Therefore also youngsters understand today why they should not lie, deceive, forge, and manipulate, but speak and act truthfully in order to contribute to a culture of truthfulness and tolerance.

4. Even young girls today suffer from the discrimination of women which shows a different face in different parts of the world and in different cultures: In a number of countries it is even difficult for girls to have access to school education, in others they are often treated in an unfair way compared to boys, and are even sexually abused and forced into child prostitution. It is therefore important for our children and youngsters to learn not to abuse sexuality, to cheat, humiliate, and dishonour, but to respect and love one another in order to contribute to a culture of partnership and equal dignity of men and women.

These four irrevocable directives which you can find not only in the Hebrew Bible, in the New Testament and in the Coran, but also in the religions and philosophies of Indian, Chinese and Japanese origin and in humanist philosophies not rooted in any religion – these imperatives of humanity are ultimately based in two fundamental principles, the principle of humanity and the principle of reciprocity:

The principle of humanity means that »every human being – young or old, man or woman, white or coloured, rich or poor – must be treated humanely and not inhumanely, even bestially.

The principle of reciprocity is expressed in the famous 'Golden Rule' which can be found already in the Analects of Confucius but also in all the other traditions: *'What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others.'*

There is no doubt that the Japanese ethical tradition provides a strong foundation for a Global Ethic. Already Prince Shoutoku (AD 574-622) puts the value of «*Wa*» or »harmony« at the center of the virtue of the Seventeen Article Constitution. Article One contains the famous proclamation which can be shared also by Confucianism, Buddhism and other Chinese schools of thought: »Harmony is to be valued.« That common humanity should prevail also in conflicts, is beautifully expressed in Article 10 of the Constitution: »We« are not unquestionably sages, nor are ›they‹ unquestionably fools. Both sides are simply ordinary people.« – This is clearly the opposite of the widespread ideology of »We the good guys and they the bad guys«.

Consequences for education

The Third Parliament of World's Religions held in Cape Town in December 1999 reinforced and concretized the Chicago appeal: The Parliament's main document, „A Call to Our Guiding Institutions“ includes in fact a „Call to Education“, where it reads: „The principles of a global ethic make it clear that education should be a basic and universal human right. ... Particular attention must be paid to learning about values, since an understanding of how values are adopted, adapted and shared is crucial to a peaceful and harmonious life.“ Among the concrete invitations addressed to individuals and institutions in education we can read the following: „Each is

invited ...to renew their commitment to universal education and to develop and extend common statements of ethical standards and practices that can be accepted, implemented, and monitored around the world; ...to integrate learning about different cultures, religions, and spiritual practices into the standard educational process; ...to promote respect for other ways of life, and teach non-violence and peace-making at every stage of learning; ...to acknowledge that moral and spiritual questions are as critical to academic as to civil discourse and therefore to include considerations of values, personal responsibility, moral integrity, and community service throughout higher education.”¹

Declarations can remain lofty words unless we put their appeals and inspirations into practice. Let me therefore turn to the question, by what methods, with what kind of pedagogical tools the concern for a Global Ethic can be brought into the classroom. The Global Ethic Foundation in Germany, Switzerland and Austria puts a special focus on working in the educational field and has developed a range of methods and tools over the last years. Just a few examples:

- Textbooks and resource books in matters such as ethics, philosophy, religious education, but also civil education and many other matters should include the concern for the ethical dimension. In many textbooks in Europe the Global Ethic approach has gained its place.

- Audio-visual media can provide lively and inter-active information on world religions and a Global Ethic. The Global Ethic Foundation developed the multimedia project „Tracing the Way“ („Spurensuche“, in german), authored and presented by myself: Seven one-hour TV films on Indigenous religions, Hinduism, Chinese Religions, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, accompanied by a book and a CD-ROM. The CD-ROM was developed especially as a pedagogic and didactic tool and is of great service for teachers in schools, adult training, teachers’ training, and

¹ Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions, A Call to Our Guiding Institutions. Presented on the occasion of the 1999 Parliament of the World’s Religions, Cape Town, p. 29-31. The text can be obtained from www.cpwr.org

in-service training.² I am most happy that the book »Tracing the Way« has already been translated into Japanese and that also a Japanese version of the seven films is currently being prepared by the efforts of Professor Rosan Yoshida.

- Posters or other exhibits: The Foundation developed a travelling exhibition on „World Religions – Universal Peace – Global Ethic“: The 12-panel exhibition presents the world religions with a special focus on their ethical teachings and attempts to visualize the principles and guidelines of the „Declaration Toward a Global Ethic“. The exhibition is accompanied by a nice brochure. All this material encounters a huge success especially in schools. The exhibition has been shown also in Malaysia and Taiwan but so far not in Japan. I am sure that a Japanese version would be as successful as the German, English, French and Italian versions.

- New means of communication such as online learning should be used also for learning on a Global Ethic. The Global Ethic Foundation is therefore currently developing an interactive online learning programme »A Global Ethic now!« in English and German which would make the Global Ethic approach accessible in virtually every part of the world.

- I hope that the above mentioned examples may inspire also educationists and teachers in other countries to adapt it to their conditions both in pedagogical reflection and in practical classroom projects. It would be great for example if the Arigatou Foundation would consider to develop a programme on a Global Ethic especially for children, perhaps something like the internationally successful TV series »Sesame Street«.

Tools are of course not enough. Without motivated and committed teachers all tools will fail. Global Ethic should therefore be included in programmes of teachers training and in-service training. That is why the Global Ethic Foundation puts an emphasis on this field of activity. To motivate teachers and schoolchildren and to

² While the videos and the CD-ROM are so far available in German only the book is translated into English: Hans Küng, Tracing the Way. Spiritual Dimensions of the World Religions. London/New York, Continuum 2002

bring out their creativity the Foundation organized teachers' contests in Germany in 1998 and in Switzerland in 1999, in which teachers developed classroom projects related to the Global Ethic. Teachers should also lobby their ministries and boards of education to include the Global Ethic in syllabi and curricula.

The Global Ethic approach proves also to be useful in the development of a „school ethic“ or a code of conduct for the classroom. Global Ethic is especially appropriate as a basis for the ethic (or ethos) of a multicultural school, as it draws upon the ethical insights of all religions and humanist ethics in general.

The strong interest which the Global Ethic Project meets especially in the educational field seems to confirm the view of Rev. Marcus Braybrooke, a pioneer of interfaith dialogue, „It may well be that it is through its educational applications that the [Chicago] Declaration will have its greatest impact“.³

In societies which have become multicultural and which are searching for a common basis of ethical values and guidelines in order to maintain their basic cohesion there is a vital need for introducing the spirit of the Global Ethic into education. This was fittingly illustrated a couple of years ago by the „Comment on the World Bank's World Development Report 2000“, written by the World Faiths Development Dialogue group:

„It is vital that all education, from the nursery school to the university, should have a strong moral content. ... All the technical training in the world will not help a society to advance unless people are given the necessary moral and spiritual education to enable them to use their skills for the good of all. A bank clerk, for instance, must not only be highly skilled in the technicalities of credit management, but must have a sense of honesty. ... Legal training to the highest standard will never produce good judges unless it is accompanied by the development of a sense of justice balanced by compassion.“⁴

³ Marcus Braybrooke, *Faith and Interfaith in a Global Age*. Grand Rapids/USA, CoNexus Press and Oxford, Braybrooke Press 1998, p.87.

⁴ World Faiths Development Dialogue, *A Different Perspective on Development and Poverty*. Comment on the World Development Report 2000. Oxford, WFDD 1999, p. 25

