

Testing the Global Ethic

Voices from the Religions on Moral Values

Edited by **Peggy Morgan** and **Marcus Braybrooke**

The World Congress of Faiths
CoNexus Press

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Moral Values

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**International Interfaith Centre,
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The World Congress of Faiths**
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There will be no human life together without a world ethic for the nations

There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions

There will be no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions

(Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility*, p.138)

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PREFACE

'Time to make a difference' is the overall theme of the Millennium Exhibition to be held in London. During extensive consultation the planners of the exhibition found that the great majority of people wanted the Millennium 'to make the world a better place'. A similar hope is to be found in many of the religious traditions, although their suggestions about how such an improvement is to be achieved vary considerably. Even so, is there enough agreement in the teaching of the religions for their members to have a common message to the world at the start of a new millennium?

This is the claim of those who endorsed *A Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* at the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions. Can such a claim be justified from the teaching of the religions? This is the question we asked the contributors to this book. We began with two daylong consultations to get to know each other, to discuss the *Global Ethic* and to agree on our approach. Some contributors had serious questions about the methodology of the *Global Ethic* and whether it was too western. Does the very concept of the global suggest a denial of the particular? Can a religion's ethical teaching be separated from the wider framework of beliefs and practices?

Despite some hesitations, the contributors accepted working within the framework of the *Global Ethic* and agreed to say what their religion taught about 'being fully human' and about the directives, as well as about 'the transformation of life'. Originally we were going to call the book 'Trialing the Global Ethic', as you the readers are the jury to judge whether there is enough agreement to support the claim that the religions have a common message, but there was no agreement on whether one can use the word 'trial' as a verb!

If a *Global Ethic* is indeed to command world-wide support it will need to be authenticated in a very large number of religious traditions. Although not all faiths could be represented nor all express their views on every issue, contributors include a Zoroastrian, a Baha'i and a Rastafarian, as well as members of the six so-called 'world religions'. There is also a contribution from someone with a non-religious viewpoint and a member of a new spiritual movement. We have in several cases involved two people from a religious tradition to emphasise that no religious tradition is monolithic. We hope the book enshrines the principle of dialogue and encourages you to reflect on how the ethical principles which guide your life relate to the *Global Ethic*.

The importance of the *Global Ethic* and therefore of this book is that as 'the global city' becomes ever more plural and interdependent, we need to find shared values for our common life. As Hans Küng has said 'there will be no human life together without a world ethic for the nations'.¹

The book, therefore, is relevant to all who are concerned with the future of our societies and our world. It is especially relevant for the

Preface

young, so we hope it will be a resource book for teachers in a number of areas, including education in personal, social and moral values, citizenship and religions, not only in Britain and North America, but across the world.

The book is an original contribution to the discussion about a global ethic and shared values in a plural society, but it could also be used for information about the teachings of particular religions (e.g. what do Sikhs say about war and peace?). The book also provides resources for discussion in interfaith groups and indeed amongst members of one faith who wish to see how their teachings relate to the teachings of others.

It is hoped that this book will be a useful resource in a wide variety of educational situations. Teachers will be able to add their own examples to what we have begun. Students will also be able to make their own contributions in each area on the basis of the stimulus given. The text is intended to be open to growth in that way and is not seen as definitive, either in the case of the individual religions or the variety of worldviews generally. It begins the further discussion that is needed across the world about these important issues and in that discussion adds stimulus to co-operation and action. As we want the book to be widely used, permission is given to teachers and religious educators, with due acknowledgement, to photocopy material from the book for use in group discussion.

We are very grateful to all the contributors for their willing participation. We also wish to thank Professor Hans Küng and the Global Ethic Foundation, and Sir Sigmund Sternberg, Founder of the Three Faiths Forum, for their encouragement and financial support with this project. We also express our gratitude to Celia Storey and Sandy Martin, the Co-ordinators of the International Interfaith Centre and hope this project will be a significant contribution to the Centre's research programme. We also express our thanks to Diana Hanmer, Office Secretary of the World Congress of Faiths, to all the staff of Quorn Litho, to Joel Beversluis of CoNexus Press for their help, to Jim Kenney of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions for reading the text, to Brian Pearce of the Inter Faith Network for his advice and to those who supplied pictures. Very particularly, we wish to record our deep appreciation of Sally Richmond's care and patience in the preparation of the material for the printer. She was assisted with the page lay-out by Richard Westgarth. Our thanks also to the Central Board of Finance of the Church of England, for permission to quote from the Alternative Marriage Service.

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SECTION A

Introduction

Ancient Guidelines:

The Golden Rule

Baha'i

Blessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself.

Tablets of Bah'a'ullah, 71.

Buddhism

A state which is not pleasant or enjoyable for me will not be so for another; and how can I impose on another a state which is not pleasant or enjoyable for me?

Samyutta Nikaya, V.

Confucianism

Do not do to others what you do not want them to do to you.

Analects 15, 23.

Christianity

All things whatsoever ye would that others should do to you, do ye even so to them.

Matthew 7, 12.

Hinduism

This is the sum of duty; do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you.

Mahabharata, XIII, 114.

Islam

No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.

An-Nawawi, 40 Hadith, 13.

Jainism

A person should treat all creatures as he himself would be treated.

Sutrakritanga 1.11.33.

WHAT IS THE GLOBAL ETHIC?



At the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions at Chicago in 1993, most members of the Assembly of Spiritual Leaders endorsed the Global Ethic. ©John Reilly.

Is there anything on which all religions can agree? The Global Ethic claims that: *'There is a principle which is found and has persisted in many religions and ethical traditions of humankind for thousands of years: What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others! Or in positive terms: What you wish done to yourself, do to others!'* Or as the Global Ethic itself puts it: *'We must treat others as we wish others to treat us'*.

This claim may seem surprising as history is full of wars about religion, such as the Crusades. Even today religious differences have made conflicts in Northern Ireland or the Middle East more bitter. The claim may also seem surprising as religions disagree about their ideas concerning ultimate reality and how people should live their lives.

Parliaments of World Religions.

Just over one hundred years ago, a first attempt was made to bring together representatives of all religions to a World Parliament of Religions. This was held at Chicago in 1893 as part of the World Fair, which marked the four hundredth anniversary of the 'discovery' of America by Christopher Columbus. Charles Bonney, an American lawyer, whose idea it was to hold the Parliament, hoped *'to unite all religion against all irreligion and to make the Golden Rule the basis of this union.'*

In 1993, another Parliament of the World's Religions was again held in Chicago. In the century between the two Parliaments, a lot has been done to encourage people of different religions to learn about each other's beliefs and to get to know each other. This is often called 'interfaith dialogue'. Now, there is an even more urgent desire for people of all religions to act together to help a suffering world. At the 1993

Introduction

Judaism

You shall love your neighbour as yourself.

Leviticus 19, 18.

Native American

Respect for life is the foundation.

The Great Law of Peace

Sikhism

Do not create enmity with anyone as God is within everyone.

Guru Arjan Devji 258, Guru Granth Sahib

Zoroastrianism

That nature only is good when it shall not do unto another whatever is not good for its own self.

Dadistan-i-Dinik, 94,5.

Parliament leading members of many religions signed the Declaration Toward a Global Ethic.

Declaration Towards A Global Ethic.

As a result of much meeting and talking, many members of all religions recognise that despite important differences of beliefs and practices, there is basic agreement on moral and ethical principles. They also believe that it is vital for this agreement to be better known so as to inspire people of all faiths together to tackle the great problems of war and violence, of poverty and hunger and of threats to the environment, because as the Declaration says, *'the world is in agony...peace eludes us... the planet is being destroyed... neighbours live in fear... women and men are estranged from each other ... children die'*.

The basic ethical principle is *'that every human being must be treated humanely. This means 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'*.

Four Directives.

If everybody is to be treated as having an inherent right to a fully human life, then, the Declaration says, there are four guidelines or irrevocable directives for behaviour;

1. *Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life.*

This would mean banning war, unfair imprisonment, torture and perhaps making the arms trade unnecessary, as well as protecting animals and plants.

2. *Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order.*

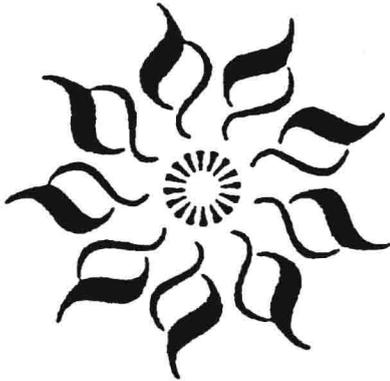
This would ensure a basic standard of living for all people, do away with exploitation, such as child labour and require a fair system of international trade, which might mean cancelling Third World debts and checking the power of multi-national companies.

3. *Commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness.*

This would mean that politicians always told the truth, that nations honoured the treaties which they signed and that the media were fair and unbiased.

4. *Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women.*

Religions have often not practised this themselves, but changes are taking place as women begin to take positions of leader-



The Symbol of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions.

ship in some religious traditions. Many religious people are campaigning against child pornography and against the international sex trade.

Attempts are now being made to see how adherence to these four irrevocable directives should be applied in key areas of our life together. In preparation for the next Parliament of the World's Religions, which is to be held in South Africa in 1999, a Call to the Guiding Institutions is to be issued. This would indicate how the irrevocable directives might be applied, for example, in economic and political life.

Questions

Not everyone is persuaded that religions do agree on basic ethical principles. Even at the 1993 Parliament there was disagreement about 'non-violence'. Does this rule out the right to self-defence? Would it prevent the United Nations sending a 'peace-keeping' force to a troubled area of the world? Others thought that the Declaration said too little about the environment. Others questioned whether there are universal moral values. Some people suggested that the declaration was an attempt to impose 'Western' values on the rest of the world. Other people do not think that moral teaching can be separated from the beliefs of a particular religion of which that moral teaching is a part.

The Global Ethic needs to be tested to see whether it does indeed represent the teachings and practices of people of many religions. In this book, people of different religions discuss what they think being 'fully human' means and whether their religious teachings support the four 'irrevocable directives'.

Those who signed the *Declaration Toward A Global Ethic* at Chicago in 1993 said: '*We commit ourselves to this global ethic, to understanding one another, and to socially-beneficial, peace-fostering, and nature-friendly ways of life. We invite all people, whether religious or not, to do the same*'.

How would you respond to that invitation?

Think of one socially beneficial teaching you would support and of one socially beneficial action, one peace-fostering action, one nature-friendly action that you would support. Reading what members of different religions think may help you to make up your mind and will be one step towards a better understanding of each other.

The 1993 Declaration Toward a Global Ethic

The world is in agony. The agony is so pervasive and urgent that we are compelled to name its manifestations so that the depth of this pain may be made clear.

Peace eludes us . . . the planet is being destroyed . . . neighbours live in fear . . . women and men are estranged from each other . . . children die.

This is abhorrent!

We condemn the abuses of earth's ecosystems.

We condemn the poverty that stifles life's potential; the hunger that weakens the human body; the economic disparities that threaten so many families with ruin.

We condemn the social disarray of the nations; the disregard for justice which pushes citizens to the margin; the anarchy overtaking our communities; and the insane death of children from violence. In particular we condemn aggression and hatreds in the name of religion.

But this agony need not be.

It need not be because the basis for an ethic already exists. This ethic offers the possibility of a better individual and global order, and leads individuals away from despair and societies away from chaos.

We are women and men who have embraced the precepts and practices of the world's religions.

We affirm that a common set of core values is found in the teachings of the religions, and that these form the basis of a global ethic.

We affirm that this truth is already known, but yet to be believed in heart and action.

We affirm that there is an irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations and religions. There already exist ancient guidelines for human behaviour which are found in the teachings of the religions of the world and which are the conditions for a sustainable world order.

We declare:

We are interdependent. Each of us depends on the well-being of the whole, and so we have respect for the community of living beings, for people, animals, and plants, and for the preservation of Earth, the air, water and soil.

We take individual responsibility for all we do. All our decisions, actions, and failures to act have consequences.

We must treat others as we wish others to treat us. We make a commitment to respect life and dignity, individuality and diversity, so that every person is treated humanely, without exception. We must have patience and acceptance. We must be able to forgive, learning from the past but never allowing ourselves to be enslaved by memories of hate. Opening our hearts to one another, we must sink our narrow differences for the cause of world community, practising a culture of solidarity and relatedness.

We consider humankind our family. We must strive to be kind and generous. We must not live for ourselves alone, but should also serve others, never forgetting the children, the aged, the poor, the suffering, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely. No person should ever be considered or treated as a second-class citizen, or be exploited in any way whatsoever. There should be

equal partnership between men and women. We must not commit any kind of sexual immorality. We must put behind us all forms of domination or abuse.

We commit ourselves to a culture of non-violence, respect, justice and peace. We shall not oppress, injure torture, or kill other human beings, forsaking violence as a means of settling differences.

We must strive for a just social and economic order, in which everyone has an equal chance to reach full potential as a human being. We must speak and act truthfully and with compassion, dealing fairly with all, and avoiding prejudice and hatred. We must not steal. We must move beyond the dominance of greed for power, prestige, money, and consumption to make a just and peaceful world. Earth cannot be changed for the better unless the consciousness of individuals is changed first. We pledge to increase our awareness by disciplining our minds, by meditation, by prayer, or by positive thinking. Without risk and a readiness to sacrifice there can be no fundamental change in our situation. Therefore we commit ourselves to this global ethic, to understanding one another, and to socially-beneficial, peace-fostering, and nature-friendly ways of life.

We invite all people, whether religious or not, to do the same.

The Declaration Toward a Global Ethic is printed as the Introduction to *A Global Ethic*, Ed. Hans Küng and Karl-Josef Kuschel, SCM Press and Continuum 1993, which contains the fuller text and explanation prepared by Professor Hans Küng.



This Babylonian clay tablet preserves a representation of the world dating from the fifth century BCE. ©The British Museum.

QUESTIONING AND TESTING THE GLOBAL ETHIC

WHY A TRIAL IS NEEDED

I am going to start my discussion of issues relating to the global ethic, which is intended to be an interactive discussion with you, the reader, by referring to the statement that 'the world is in agony'.

First of all, think about this language of 'world'. Have you ever looked at old maps and been surprised at how people have seen 'the world' at different times? Sometimes whole areas that we now hear about every day were not known. Sometimes continents are a completely different shape. Japanese and Chinese maps present the world quite differently from European maps; tenth century maps vary enormously from those of the twentieth century.

Think about the emergence of the current language of 'global' and 'one world' with our image of a single planet. It seems to derive from the images sent back by the 1969 Apollo space mission and seeing the whole earth and earthrise from space. Since then thinking globally has become very fashionable, but can lead people to ignore the local and the positive things about diversity and difference. Added to that are issues like the concern to provide tomatoes on supermarket shelves everywhere all the year round which can lead to the decline of the local market gardener, local varieties and market stalls. Who has decided which kind of tomato is to be grown? If you transfer that kind of query to a concept like that of equality it is a good basis for criticising high-flown, sweeping statements which assume that everyone has accepted or is assumed to have, the same idea of equality.

Whatever your age, put down, **in one word**, how you think the world is getting on. Can you select (or create) a picture or a story of how the world is for you? Your example might be a great work of art or literature or an advertising image. From your knowledge of history can you think of how a person from a different century and place might have answered this question? Examples might be an Indian village woman in the eleventh century, someone in Spain at the time of the inquisition, a Chinese farmer in the fourteenth century, an English landowner in the seventeenth century, an American soldier at the time of the civil war. Also ask yourself and discuss with others whether we should talk about individual agonies or local agonies rather than 'world' agony. How do these differ from and how affect each other? Is the agony of the 'world' different from the sum

total of the other agonies and if so how is it different? Is it just that we are more aware of the sum total of agony because of mass communications? But if all the local agonies were healed, all would be well.

Would I be asking you the same question if I asked how the planet is getting on? Is planet a term which is more inclusive of other than human living beings, such as trees and animals, with which we share this planet? Is using planet, like using the term Gaia, rather than globe, an ethical shift of language that indicates that we need to be sensitive to the elephants' and oaks' experience of the world as much as the views of other human beings? And if you respond that these are not views we can know, then I would suggest that imagination and rational discussion can provide this picture just as clearly as for any of the humans about and for whom we assume we can speak. How far do religions take account of the variety of all living things and beings on the planet? How far does the global ethic as it stands take account of them or is it too human-centred?

Just as old maps are entirely the product of one explorer or civilisation's view of the world as they knew it, so the popular language of 'global' is a product of our age's discoveries and perspectives. Be aware in all that you read and hear how often the language of 'global' and 'world' occurs. Using it is very much the fashion of the age and might, in reference to politics and economics be rather imperialistic!

The teachings of religious traditions may say that they bring to the question of the state of the world key teachings that focus on the inadequacies of life at any time compared with how things should be and ultimately are. This sense is inherent in the Indian term samsara and in the Christian teaching that the world is fallen and a vale of tears. They also have a vision of how things should be and the paths to those ideals. Ethics are part of the whole framework of understanding in these traditions and cannot be separated from the other dimensions of religions such as doctrines, communities, narratives, rituals and experiences. An emphasis on ethics isolated from these other dimensions may derive too strongly from the eighteenth century philosopher Kant and the European Enlightenment to be particularly sympathetic to members of all religious traditions, even though all have ethical teachings.

Another key question for those who articulate a global ethic is whether it is **words** that effect ethical change in people's lives. Would it not be helpful if documents were combined with tangible programmes of joint action? Will asserting what we 'must' do help people to change? If, as

it is asserted, common teachings are already present in all the key traditions, then why is the world not transformed where members of those traditions are dominant? It has been pointed out that religions have often contributed to injustice, intolerance and violence. The key question then is **how** lives are changed. This is the substance of the last section on the transformation of life. Is there any agreement on the **how**, and have the suggested practices of the traditions been successful? The answer is likely to be 'sometimes **yes** and sometimes **no**'. What also, as our philosopher asks, are the other factors contributing to the agony of the world and how can they be faced and overcome by everyone, whether religious or not?

Some of our contributors are critical of what they see as the Christian style of the language of the original declaration, pointing out that *their* traditions have important ethical principles but that they are not expressed in the same way and that the paradigms and inter-relationships vary. For example equality is often discussed in matters of ethics, but it is not a term that everyone likes. Some, like our Muslim contributor, prefer to talk about equity and Buddhists and Hindus like to emphasise interconnectedness. We then have to ask about equality of voices. Where are the children's voices in religious traditions? Trees (as well as babies and mentally or physically challenged human beings) cannot speak. Does that mean they do not matter? Can there be equality when language is not gender-sensitive? Why are most of the world's religious leaders men and what do ordinary people say? Religious people **within** traditions often disagree with each other, so can there ever really be full agreement across traditions? One example emerged in the planning of this book. As an earlier chapter points out, we wanted to include more than one voice within traditions where possible. But one person, having accepted our invitation to join the writing group, found out that there was to be another person from a different sectarian group in his tradition making a contribution and so, instead of being prepared to discuss and articulate differences in the final text, withdrew. To acknowledge the potential for diversity within traditions, we have called each section 'a view on' though some writers have written in terms of what they think 'the tradition' says and are prepared to be more sweeping than others.

At all times the reader needs to carry these questions and others that they have to the text and from that into creative dialogue, and perhaps action, with those from religious traditions and worldviews other than their own. We have begun the process of testing, its continuation lies with you, the reader.

SECTION B

What does it mean to be fully human?

The basic ethical principle suggests *'that every human being must be treated humanely. This means 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'*.