

COSMOPOLITANISM, GLOBAL ETHIC, AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

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1. Introduction

We live in a world of “‘overlapping communities of fate’ where nations’ destiny is significantly intertwined,”¹ argues, David Held. Indeed, our world has become so globalized² that concerns have been raised on how to make sense of (a) the scope and extent of justice as well as duties across nation-states, (b) the coverage of transnational political and social realities, (c) the limit of complex affiliations, meaningful attachments and multiple allegiances to issues, people and places,³ and (d) the parameters of global democracy and world citizenship. The dramatic transformations that the processes of globalization have brought about, call for a new way of relating to the socio-economic, cultural as well as political realities of our times. This article, then, attempts to provide some suggestions on how to better respond to our rapidly changing world. The article is a *trptych*, consisting of three inter-related themes namely that of cosmopolitanism, global ethic, and inter-religious dialogue. Each attempts to provide a meaningful avenue to relate to the globalized world yet united in one

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¹David Held, “Globalization, Corporate Practice and Cosmopolitan Social Standards,” <http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/global/Publications/PublicationsProfHeld/GlobalizationCorporatePractice.pdf> (accessed, August, 2006), 4,

²Globalization is “a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity, and impact – generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power.” David Held, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999, 16.

³Steven Vertotec and Robin Cohen, “Introduction: Conceiving Cosmopolitanism,” <http://www.oup.co.uk/pdf/0199252289.pdf> (accessed, August 2006).

overarching goal which is the promotion of the good of humanity regardless of race, culture, sex, and religion.

2. Cosmopolitanism

In recent times, cosmopolitanism has generated a renewed and widespread appreciation in social and political theories. Such a fresh interest in the said issue has been occasioned by the pressing issues related to the globalization, global governance, and global civil society. These three interrelated processes are responsible for the continuing significance of cosmopolitanism for our times.

2.1. Origins

Cosmopolitanism traces its beginnings back to the Stoics. The cynic philosopher Diogenes of Sinope (c. 400-323 BC) is believed to have set off this cosmopolitan sentiment in his famous statement, “I am a citizen of the world.” Contrary to the Aristotelian ideal of the *polis*, Diogenes sees man as a multicultural animal who is a *kosmopolitēs*, that is, a citizen of the ‘cosmos’, or the universe.⁴ Human beings are first and foremost ‘citizens of the world’ (*kosmou politê*) and only secondarily or accidentally are members of a single political community (local origins, local group membership-polis). All human beings, the stoics hold, constitute a single community where every person possesses moral worth equivalent to one’s own.

The 18th century saw Immanuel Kant giving an actual legal and juridical elaboration to this general ethical sensibility of the Stoics. Through his ideas of the categorical imperative⁵ and the kingdom of ends⁶ Kant holds that certain universal/objective law can be enacted as bases for the promotion of freedom, justice, and happiness of human beings, as rational beings. Kant, for example, wrote: “So, act that you use humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the

⁴Derek Heater, *World Citizenship: Cosmopolitan Thinking and Its Opponents*, London: Continuum, 2002, 27.

⁵A categorical imperative necessitates an absolute and universal moral obligation. The idea was popularized by Immanuel Kant. His ideas on the subject matter are inscribed in his *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1785) and *Critique of Practical Reason* (1788).

⁶Kant’s notion of categorical imperative is a corollary to his notion of an ideal moral community called kingdom of ends. The kingdom of ends, a sort of a legislative body is the methodical union of rational beings who actively participate in creating universal laws meant to guide them in their exercise of justice and freedom.

same time as an end, never merely as a means.”⁷ Kant’s moral theology dovetails with his juridical framework of public law. For him public law has three components, namely, the civil law (*ius civitatis*), international law (*ius gentium*), and cosmopolitan law (*ius cosmopolitanicum*). Such laws can be embodied in a cosmopolitan constitution where a common set of laws can be stipulated as a common basis for bringing about peaceful mutual relations and reciprocal understanding among nations (league of independent states), especially on issues of peace, freedom, and treatment of strangers (immigrants).

Contemporary theorists of cosmopolitanism differentiate between institutional cosmopolitanism (reshaping of political structures to meet the changes of the times) from moral cosmopolitanism (moral standards to make sure that political theory and practice respect the “*humanum*” as the ultimate unit of moral concern). Several typologies⁸ on cosmopolitanism have been presented, however, most agree on three basic tenets of cosmopolitanism: (1) Individual persons are the ultimate units of concern, not states or other particular forms of human association. (2) The status of equal worth and recognition should be enjoyed by all. (3) This status of equal worth should be acknowledged by all persons without any exception.⁹

While cosmopolitanism is sometimes equated with being privileged, bourgeois, elitist, or being an intellectual/scholar, not to mention its reference to being a frequent traveller, a tourist, and a cosmocrat,¹⁰ there is a deeper meaning to cosmopolitanism that deserves to be retrieved. Cosmopolitanism actually denotes respect for others, dialogue, formation of complex identities, shared human values, etc.

⁷Hayden, *Cosmopolitanism*, 19.

⁸Derek Heater presents six major typologies based on six authors. Heater, *World Citizenship*.

⁹Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002, 169.

¹⁰Cosmocrats are the new global economic elite, a meriocratic but elusive ruling group, e.g., wealthy jet setters, corporate managers, financial experts, intergovernmental bureaucrats and academics who have been trained abroad. See Vertotec, “Conceiving Cosmopolitanism,” 5.

2.2. Characterizations

The contemporary notion of cosmopolitanism has several elements.

2.2.1. A Dialogic Imagination

Imagination plays a central role in cosmopolitanism. Imagination is an active act of consciousness that discloses what is in the world but, at the same time, reveals what is possible in the world. It is a mediating act between what is and what the imagined relationships of the self, the world, and the future could possibly hold for all. Described differently, as a form of imagination cosmopolitanism would attempt to ask questions like, What happens if the self is enmeshed in a wider constellation of other selves? What becomes of one's self-identity when other different life stories are readily available for examination? What probable horizons are open for a world that is rapidly interconnected? What is the future of cultures, of politics and of ethical discourses in a world where there are no outsiders? Such a questioning is facilitated by what Ulrich Beck calls "a dialogic imagination." This form of imagination necessarily recognizes the legitimate uniqueness, distinctiveness or even the strangeness of the other, whether these are persons, cultures, traditions, civilizations, rationalities, other ways of life, heritages, etc.¹¹ Cosmopolitan imagination allows one to "compare, reflect, criticize, understand, contradictory certainties"¹² about life in general. It involves a basic act of negotiating and disclosing varied and even contradictory cultural experiences into the very centre of one's day-to-day personal decisions in life. Dialogic imagination brings into one's cognizance the following realizations:¹³ (1) Clashes of cultures happen in my life. (2) We have globally shared collective futures in a society where everyone is implicated; hence, the need for global responsibility. (3) It is a commitment to dialogue; hence, it is against violence. (4) It is we who construct/invent/create our personal/communal identities through the process of self-reflexivity as we encounter others. This imagination has an aversion for an environment that nurtures (a) ethnic nationalism and postmodern relativism leading to sectarian acts of violence and eccentricities of extremists (fundamentalism), (b) neo-liberal

¹¹A cosmopolitan model nourishes a dialogic imagination while a nation-state model of societies develops a monolithic form of imagination. The latter is exclusive and involves an either-or looking at the world. It always excludes what does not belong to its boundaries. See Beck, *Cosmopolitan Society*, 18 (online edition).

¹²Beck, "Cosmopolitan Society," 18.

¹³Beck, "Cosmopolitan Society," 18-38.

globalization (globalism) which threatens democratic freedom by radicalizing social inequalities and revoking the fundamental social justice and security, and (c) democratic authoritarianism resulting in the loss of achieving consensus in a democratic way. Expressed differently, dialogic imagination attempts to be inclusive and if possible defend our place as one open to the world.¹⁴ The enemies of the cosmopolitan imagination are those who think that life is monochromatic. The danger of a monolithic imagination is that it is one-sided and cannot allow for the existence or even the survival of the *different*.

2.2.2. An Intellectual Aesthetic Stance of Openness

Cosmopolitanism is a basic orientation or stance in life. It speaks of a way or a path in which one makes sense of life in general as well as the manner in which one creates meanings in one's life. As a stance and orientation, it needs to be cultivated or nourished the way one perfects a particular craft. In the end, it becomes really a matter of competence. Ulf Hannerz argues that a genuine cosmopolitanism is “first of all an orientation, a willingness to engage with Other. It is an intellectual aesthetic stance of openness toward divergent cultural experiences, a search for contrasts rather than uniformity.”¹⁵ Through “listening, looking, intuiting and reflecting” the cosmopolite develops a competence/skill/talent to participate in other cultures but also to make sense (manoeuvre through systems of meanings) of these diverse experiences in himself or herself. To be a cosmopolite entails a mastery of one's culture plus a surrender to the other. But by surrendering, one also achieves further mastery of one's own. For, through the lens of the other, he/she understands/clarifies, even corrects, more his or her own ideas, praxis, and background. It is in this sense that we can say that cosmopolitanism has a therapeutic function. It cures the myopia, that is, our short-sightedness and lack of (dialogic) imagination and intellectual insight about the power of the strange or the unfamiliar to give us a general sense of wellbeing.

2.2.3. A Minimal Common Ground for Action

Cosmopolitanism offers a possible galvanizing framework in a world characterized by a growing, multifarious, and even competing political and

¹⁴Beck, “Cosmopolitan Society,” 35.

¹⁵Ulf Hannerz, “Cosmopolitans and Locals in World Culture,” cited in M. Featherstone, “Global Culture,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 7, 3-4 (June 1990), 239.

cultural actors that transcend the nation-states¹⁶ (conventional locus of authority and power). In a global village, there is a need to bring people together toward a particular objective for the common good. Cosmopolitan ideals generate mediating structures aimed at developing common principles as a general reference point of action and forming institutional arrangements for diverse groups, political entities and associations to deal with complex socio-political-cultural issues afforded by the process of the trans-nationalization of experiences. As a result of a genuine dialogue by all involved parties, these arrangements seek the protection of basic humanitarian values regardless of countries of origin.

In the political arena, for instance, David Held (among others such as Daniele Archibugi Andrew Linklater, etc.) advocates a global political agenda with his notion of cosmopolitan democracy. Accordingly, persons should be protected by a juridico-political system to ensure that human beings can exercise their autonomy. The principle of autonomy in the sense of the human capacity to reason self-consciously, to be self reflective and self-determining must be assured by a cosmopolitan democratic law. In an era marked by overlapping communities of fate, cosmopolitan political and ethical spaces need to be created to bridge simultaneously local, national, regional and global concerns, and where trans-boundary issues (beyond the nation-state) are resolved such as peoples' equal moral worth, their active agency, and concerns for autonomy and development.¹⁷ "Unlike political nationalism, cosmopolitanism registers and reflects the multiplicity of issues, questions, processes, and problems which effect and bind people together, irrespective of where they were born or reside."¹⁸

Culturally, cosmopolitan principles and institutions offer venues where issues related to identity politics, ethnicity, immigration, issues on multiple affiliation/allegiances or citizenship can be talked about.

¹⁶David Held names the essential elements of a nation-state paradigm: (1) members have a common socio-cultural identity; (2) there is a common framework of prejudices and objectives leading to a common political ethos; (3) an institutional structure exists which protects and represents the community; (4) congruence and asymmetry prevail between a community's governors and governed; (5) members enjoy a common structure of rights and duties due to the preceding items mentioned above. Held, "National Culture, the Globalization of Communications and the Bounded Political Community," *Logos* 1, 3 (Summer 2002; online edition), <http://www.logosjournal.com/issue-1.3pdf> (accessed, August 2006), 5.

¹⁷Vertotec, "Conceiving Cosmopolitanism," 13.

¹⁸Held, "National Culture," 11.

Individuals can now assume complex, overlapping, changing, and often highly individualistic choices of identity and belonging.¹⁹ So, for Held, we need more and more to learn how to behave as cosmopolitan citizens. Cosmopolitan citizenship “involves a growing mediating role: a role which encompasses dialogue with the traditions and discourses of others with the aim of expanding the horizons of one’s own framework of meaning, and increasing the scope of mutual understanding.”²⁰ The political democratic communities of the future should afford multiple citizenships to people. “Faced with overlapping communities of fate they need to be not only citizens of their own communities, but also of the wider regions in which they live, and of the wider global order.”²¹ As Nick Stevenson would put it, cultural cosmopolitanism is going beyond national exclusivity, the dichotomous forms of gendered and racial thinking, or even the rigid separation between nature and culture. It seeks to appreciate various ways in which humanity in general is involved in layers of intercultural involvements. For him, then, cosmopolitan thinking involves “the transgression of boundaries and markers and the development of an inclusive democracy and citizenship.”²² This is achieved through creating cultural spaces for communities of communication and consent.

Economically, cosmopolitan ideals related to economic practices can be a starting point to discuss the repercussions of a neoliberal form of economic globalization especially to the disadvantaged countries. Here, a cosmopolitan framework of accountability and regulation – a cosmopolitan social standard – can be developed to “reframe neoliberal economic globalization.”²³

3. The Global Ethic Project²⁴

Modern day cosmopolitan values may be a fertile ground toward the promotion of a global ethic. Hans Küng’s book *Global Responsibility*

¹⁹Vertotec, “Conceiving Cosmopolitanism,” 14.

²⁰Held, *Global Transformations*, 449.

²¹Held, *Global Transformations*, 449.

²²Nick Stevenson, *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitan Questions*, Berkshire, UK: Open University Press, 2003, 5.

²³Held, “Cosmopolitan Social Standards,” 11-14.

²⁴Marcus Braybrooke, informatively, chronicles the initial reflections of different world bodies on the idea of a shared ethic that led to the eventual development of a global ethic project. See Marcus Braybrooke, *Stepping Stones to a Global Ethic*, London: SCM, 1992.

contains a blueprint for a global ethic. In it, he signifies the need for one basic ethic for our global village. He argues that rather than seek a sort of a unitary religion or a unitary ideology, what needs to be promoted are “some norms, values, ideals and goals to bring it together and to binding on it.”²⁵ To this task, he identifies religions of the world as wellspring for these ethical demands. The world religions have enormous responsibility for world peace. They should, therefore, work together toward this endeavour. According to Küng, there is no survival without a world ethic, no world peace without peace between the religions, and no peace without dialogue between the religions.²⁶

3.1. The Need for a Global Ethic

Our postmodern world, with its epoch-making changes, has produced a vacuum of meaning, values, and norms. Socialism, neo-capitalism, and the evolutionary-technological ideology of progress with their one-sided stress on rationality and unlimited growth used to function as “scientific total explanations and attractive quasi-religions.”²⁷ Today these ideologies are bankrupt. Because of their perceived failures, countries are experimenting with mixed economy (eco-social market economy or social democracy). Nation-states are venturing into a more holistic approach to development that takes into account both the eco-socio-political aspect of life and the aesthetic, ethical and religious dimensions of human beings.²⁸ Küng,

²⁵Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*, New York: Crossroad, 1991, xvi.

²⁶Küng, *Global Responsibility*, xv. Küng gave an initial presentation of his project in Paris, February 1989, as the main speaker in a symposium organized by the educational services of the UNESCO. The topic of the symposium was the significance of the world religions for the UNESCO program “Education towards Respect for Human Rights.” In the elaboration of the project, Küng takes his inspiration from the “conciliar process” (Basel 1989) which sought to promote ecumenism among the Christian churches through a common commitment to “justice, peace, and the integrity of the earth.”

²⁷Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 12.

²⁸Küng sketches his blue-print of holistic postmodern society in the following way: “from an ethic-free society to an ethically responsive society; from a technology which dominates people to a technology which serves the humanity of men and women; from an industry which destroys the environment to an industry which furthers the true interests and needs of men and women in accord with nature; from the legal form of democracy to a democracy which is lived out and in which freedom and justice are reconciled.” Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 20-21.

generally sees these developments as positive, but even so, a lack of specific reflection on ethic will eventually lead these achievements to nothing. He states:

Without a minimal basic consensus on certain values, norms and attitudes, no human society worth living in is possible in either a smaller or a larger community. Even a modern democracy cannot function without such a basic consensus, which constantly has to be rediscovered in dialogue; indeed, it collapses in chaos or a dictatorship...²⁹

Küng, therefore, pleads for a reflection on ethics, i.e., the basic (minimum) moral attitudes of human beings that direct their decisions and actions. This is especially urgent for postmodern people who dabble in randomness, colourfulness, and anarchistic trends of thoughts and lifestyle, in short, a methodological anything goes. There is need to strive for a new basic consensus of integrative humane convictions.³⁰ Put concisely, people need universally binding ethical norms or global standards without which we will experience socio-eco-political catastrophes and disintegration. For the third millennium, the most appropriate ethical orientation is planetary responsibility.

3.2. Towards an Ethic of Responsibility

A global ethic of responsibility strives to achieve the balance – a middle way – between ethic of success and a mere dispositional ethic. On the one hand, a single-handed emphasis on an ethic of success, asserts Küng, brings about crass libertism and Machiavellianism. The reason is that it would, then, justify “an action for which the end sanctifies the means and for which whatever functions, brings profit, power or enjoyment, is good.”³¹

On the other hand, a one-sided stress on mere dispositions and inner convictions (justice, love, and truth) may “justify terrorism on grounds of disposition.” For, it fails to account for the consequences of its actions or decisions. According to Küng, such ethic is unhistorical for its failure to acknowledge historical contingencies. Moreover, it is also unpolitical because of its neglect of the complex dynamics of society and the power play involved in it.

²⁹Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 28

³⁰Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 22.

³¹Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 29.

The challenge is to stir the middle course between the two. What is needed is an ethics of responsibility along the lines of Max Weber and Hans Jonas. Weber in a speech in 1918/19 stood for an ethic that asks “realistically about the foreseeable ‘consequences’ of our action and takes responsibility for them.”³² Hans Jonas, in a similar way, speaks about the need for a global responsibility for the world in the light of our endangered planet due to the preponderance of instrumental rationality. He calls for “a self-imposed limitation by human beings on their freedom in the present for the sake of their survival in the future.”³³ Both for Weber and Jonas, a dispositional ethics and an ethics of responsibility are complementary. They are both needed for a potent political action. Küng puts it this way:

Without a dispositional ethics, the ethics of responsibility would decline into an ethics of success regardless of disposition, for which the end justifies any means. Without an ethics of responsibility, dispositional ethics would decline into the fostering of self-righteous inwardness.³⁴

An ethic of responsibility is a call for social and ecological responsibility. Eventually, however, the goal of the ethic of responsibility must serve the betterment of the *humanum*.

3.3. *Humanum*: The Goal and Criterion

Küng holds that politics, economics, science, and religion should put humanity into the focus of their concern. All these forces in society must work together to bring about “what preserves and furthers thus humanity.”³⁵ In a Kantian way, he holds that “... whatever projects one plans for a better human future, the basic ethical principle must be that human beings may never be made mere means. They must remain an ultimate end, and always be a goal and criterion...”³⁶ In view of the furtherance of the *humanum*, Küng develops an ecumenical strategy for interreligious dialogue. He finds strategies like the exclusivist, relativist,

³²Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 30. See the famous lecture of Max Weber, “*Politik als Beruf*” in *Gesammelte Politische Schriften*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1958, 505-60.

³³Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 30. See Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984.

³⁴Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 30.

³⁵Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 31.

³⁶Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 31-32.

inclusivist approaches wanting.³⁷ He proposes to make the *humanum* the universal ecumenical criterion for dialogue among religions. True and authentic dialogue is measured by the degree in which the *humanum* (human dignity, wellbeing) is enhanced. A religion is true and good to the degree that it serves humanity; likewise a religion is false and bad to the degree that it disseminates inhumanity.

3.4. Religion as the Foundation of Global Ethic

The real point, however, that Küng wants to make is that no ethic of responsibility can be firm and solid, unless it draws its inspiration from religion. A global ethic that is solely founded on a rational or philosophical basis (e.g., Kant’s categorical imperative or the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) will not be as generally binding for the whole as a global ethic which is anchored in religion. The former, he maintains, “cannot give a reason for the absoluteness and universality of ethical obligation.”³⁸ Religion, Küng holds, provides a certain unconditional “oughtness” that motivates a person to follow norms in (1) an unconditionally binding way (and not just where it is convenient for me as a matter of personal taste or judgment), and (2) in a universal way (for all) even if this means sacrificing one’s own interests. A rational or philosophical ethics (such as Kant’s categorical imperative) may claim a universal applicability, but it lacks a real, absolute grounding from which to raise this claim. In other words, one may or may not follow the prescription of the Universal

³⁷An exclusivist or fortress strategy presupposes that there is only one true religion in the world. The rest are false religions: “*Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus*” (“no salvation outside the Church”). True religious peace can be achieved only through the one true religion. A relativist position plays down differences and sees all religions as basically the same in essence. Religious peace is achieved by ignoring their differences and contradictions. An inclusivist position believes that there is one true religion and that the rest takes part in its truth. Religious peace is obtained by the embrace of the “one true religion” by others. Typical approach here is the idea of anonymous Christianity. See Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 79-88.

³⁸Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 51. A purely philosophical ethics on a rational basis runs the risk of circuitous reasoning since we cannot make absolute norms from a basis that is not absolute in itself, worst, in the case of such a basis, one runs the danger of making something absolute (a grand narrative) out of a non-absolute, thus, making a particular norm universally binding to all. See G. De Schrijver, “Some Reservations about Hans Küng’s World Ethic,” *MST Review* 3, 1 (1999), 87.

Declaration of Human Rights. Küng succinctly explains it in the following words:

An unconditional claim, a ‘categorical’ ought, cannot be derived from the finite conditions of human existence, from human urgencies and needs. And even an independent abstract ‘human nature’ or ‘idea of humanity’ (as a legitimizing authority) can hardly put an unconditional obligation on anyone for anything. Even a ‘duty for humankind to survive’ can hardly be demonstrated conclusively in a rational way.³⁹

Küng, therefore, stresses that the firm grounding of ethical demands will not simply depend on philosophically ‘established’ criteria of the wellbeing of all human beings. The anchorage is found in the mystery of the Absolute present in the religions. The universal and unconditional obligation to stand up for the *humanum* grounds itself on the *divinum*. He writes:

Nowadays – after Nietzsche’s glorification of ‘beyond good and evil’ – we can no longer count on a ‘categorical imperative’ which is quasi-innate in all, and make the wellbeing of all human beings the criterion for our own action. No, the categorical quality of ethical demand, the unconditional nature of the ought, cannot be grounded by human beings, who are conditioned in many ways, but only by that which is unconditional: by an Absolute which can provide an overarching meaning and which embraces and permeates individual, human nature and indeed the whole of human society. That can only be the ultimate, supreme reality, which while it cannot be proved rationally, can be accepted in rational trust – regardless of how it is named, understood and interpreted in the different religions.⁴⁰

3.5. Function of Religion

Although religion has been judged negatively – as projection or alienation (Feuerbach), opium of the people (Marx), or psychological immaturity (Freud) – Küng emphasizes the need to take religion seriously in our contemporary analysis of our postmodern-globalized world. Failure to do so is to “fail to do justice to an essential dimension of human life and human history, whether one affirms it or denies it.”⁴¹ Although, religion

³⁹Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 52.

⁴⁰Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 52-53.

⁴¹Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 45.

can be narrow-minded, authoritative, reactionary, and tyrannical, at times, we must not lose sight of its liberating elements.

Küng provides four general reasons why he highly values religion.⁴²

(1) It communicates a specific depth-dimension, an all embracing horizon of meaning even in the face of suffering, injustice, and meaninglessness and even at death. (2) It provides the *raison d'être* for our responsibility, for it guarantees supreme values, unconditional norms, and deepest motivations and highest ideas. (3) Its common symbols, rituals, experiences, and goals foster a sense of trust, faith, certainty, security, hope, and even a sense of community and allegiance. (4) It provides the seeds for protest and resistance against oppressive situations by its longing for the ‘wholly Other’ which is already now at work and which cannot be stilled. The positive functions of religion allow him to challenge the different world religions to come up with ethical demands that will contribute to our responsibility for world peace. For world peace to be realized, it needs the special commitment of religions. He encourages them to let go of their differences and contradictions and work for “what holds them together in spite of everything – with a view to the principle of responsibility.”⁴³

Küng comes up with six decisive perspectives that are common to world religions and which are needed in view of constructing a global ethic.⁴⁴ (1) Human wellbeing: all religions advocate with authority the furtherance of the wellbeing of the *humanum* as basic principle and goal of human ethics. This is seen, for example, in the Jewish command to love God and fellowmen, or it is stipulated in the Sermon on the Mount. The Quran emphasizes justice, truth, and good works. This is also seen in the Hindu concept of *dharma*, etc. (2) Maxims of basic humanity: the world religions are in agreement with certain basic ethical norms for guiding actions such as, (a) do not kill, (b) do not lie, (c) do not steal, (d) do not practice immorality, and (e) respect your parents and love your children. (3) A reasonable middle way: the teaching of the world religions emphasizes the need to take account not only of one’s actions but also of the consequences and responsibilities inherent in these actions. They require not only the observance of rules but also nurture the dispositions and virtues that guide human conduct. (4) The golden rule: the golden rule

⁴²Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 54.

⁴³Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 55.

⁴⁴Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 56-60.

is categorically and unconditionally required in the different religions. Different formulations of the golden rule are manifested in the world religions. (5) Moral motivations: all religions provide convincing moral motivations for people by the authentic and living examples of the lives and teachings of their revered figures, such as Buddha, Jesus Christ, Confucius, or Muhammad. (6) A horizon of meaning and identification of goal: in a world where people experience meaningless and emptiness in life, all religions offer a meaning and goal in life whether they call it, eternal life, *moksha*, or *nirvana*.

4. A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics

In his book, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics* (1997),⁴⁵ Küng builds on what he started in his *Global Responsibility* (1991). Here he reiterates the need for a global ethic (basic moral attitude) that will influence the conduct of politics and economy and will serve as the foundation of global society. A global ethic, he maintains, is neither a new ideology, nor superstructure, nor does it presuppose a single global culture. It has no ambition to replace the ethics of different religions with something like an ethical minimalism. The Torah, the Bible, or the *Bhagavadgita* remains foundational for the faith and life of their respective followers. The global ethic project is about “the necessary minimum of common human values, criteria, and basic attitudes.”⁴⁶ To put it concisely, it is “... a *basic consensus* on binding values, irrevocable criteria, and basic attitudes which are affirmed *by all religions* despite their dogmatic differences, and which can indeed also be contributed by *non-believers*.”⁴⁷ Our present day politics and economics need such an ethic.

4.1. Responsible Politics and a Middle Course

Küng distinguishes between real politics and ideal politics. The former is identified with Henry Kissinger and his political predecessors such as Nicoló Macchiavelli (1469-1527), Comte de Richelieu (1585-1642), and Otto von Bismarck (1815-1898). Real politics is “concerned not only with the politics of rights but also with politics of power, which attempts to

⁴⁵Küng differentiates between ethic and ethics. Ethic refers to the “basic moral attitude of an individual or a group, whereas ethics means the (philosophical or theological) theory of moral values, norms and attitudes.” *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*, London: SCM Press, 1997, 93.

⁴⁶Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*, 92.

⁴⁷Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*, 92-93.

calculate and impose national interests coolly, unhindered by moral feelings, and which therefore can easily take on inhumane features.” The issue here is power play (increasing and maintaining one’s power).

The latter view is identified with Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924). The ideal politics is “concerned not with ‘geopolitics’ but with ‘conversion’ of the kind that is necessary at any epoch-making paradigm shift.”⁴⁸ Wilson’s global policy, for example, consists of ideals such as freedom for all peoples, justice for all, and peace through the League of Nations. What is at stake here is purely moral motivation and good aims, e.g., national unity, peace, human rights, etc. Küng rejects these two extreme features of politics and opts for a middle way between them, in the spirit of an ethic of responsibility we have sketched above. A new paradigm of *responsible* politics is one that is not only cognizant of political prowess but also of ethical convictions. Küng explains:

Only an *ethic of responsibility* is of any use for a new world order. It presupposes conviction, but realistically seeks the predictable consequences of a particular policy, especially those that can be negative, and also takes responsibility for them. The art of politics in the postmodern paradigm consists in combining political calculation (of modern real politics) convincing with ethical judgment (ideal politics).⁴⁹

The new humane paradigm of politics, then, consists of political actions guided by ethical considerations.

4.2. A Responsible Economy

Küng’s analysis of global politics applies to the global economy. Globalization, he claims, has brought about a structural revolution in the world economy. Neo-liberalism and the preponderance of the market have taken reign of society. A *responsible* economics, however, does not have profit maximization as its foundation. Küng points out that the “interests, constraints, and calculations of economic rationality must in no way overwhelm the fundamental demands of ethical reason and of the great religious traditions.”⁵⁰ Social Darwinism should be avoided. Economic forces that nurture humanity must prevail. The global economy must be guided by a basic global ethic that benefits the wellbeing of all humans,

⁴⁸Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*, 30.

⁴⁹Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*, 66.

⁵⁰Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*, 213.

their societies and the environment. The new ethic of the global economy “combines economic rationality with a basic ethical orientation.”⁵¹ This clearly points to an ethic of responsibility.

A responsible politics and economics will draw from the resources of religions for their main source of ethical conviction. There is, therefore, a need that world religions as well as the representatives of other institutions (businessmen, politicians, economists, media practitioners, artists, etc.) come together for a dialogue toward a global ethic that links rights as well as responsibilities.

4.3. Interreligious Dialogue in Asia: A Dialogue-of-Life

Interreligious dialogue, in Asian style, entails a three fold dialogue: a dialogue with the poor, a dialogue with other religions of Asia, and a dialogue with Asian cultures. This represents a consensus among Asian theologians as stated by the *Working Paper (Instrumentum Laboris)* worked out by the *Special Assembly for Asia of the Synod of Bishops* (April 19-May 14, 1998).⁵² This threefold dialogue provides the “concrete manner for announcing the person and message of Jesus” to “inspire and provide a method for the church’s mission” (WP 37). The method “brings closer together the elements of dialogue and mission/evangelization and it gives the believer the opportunity to immerse oneself into the life-world of the poor, as well as Asian religions and cultures.”⁵³ This interreligious approach to dialogue is embodied in, what Asian theologians call, dialogue of life. Michael Amaladoss explains:

For us Asian Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and others are part of our life. We share a common culture and way of life. We belong to a common economic and political system. We have a common history. Our religious differences have cultural, political, and even economic implications. In this ongoing dialogue of life, we have begun to appreciate the believers of other religions. We respect and read with profit their scriptures and other sacred writings. We learn from their *sadhana*, methods of prayer, and religious experience. We regard positively their moral conduct. We collaborate with them in the promotion of common human and

⁵¹Küng, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics*, 234.

⁵²For critical comments on the Apostolic Exhortation, see Felix Wilfred, *Ecclesia in Asia and the Challenges of Evangelization*, <http://www/carmelifekgprovince.in/amc5.pdf> (accessed, October 2008).

⁵³De Schrijver, “Mission,” 12.

spiritual values like freedom and justice, love and service. We do not feel superior to them.⁵⁴

Dialogue of life begins with a reverential respect for other religious traditions. It happens at the level of day-to-day experiences of people or, as the WP refers to it, grass-roots approach to dialogue (WP 49). This implies a two fold task: (1) a concerted effort of different religions to find solutions to common material problems, and (2) as a result of this close collaboration, people with different religious persuasions must begin to discover, learn, and be enriched in the process. De Schrijver describes this grassroots approach to dialogue:

For the dialogue of life, which also includes interreligious collaboration to combat dire poverty, is the concrete milieu in which believers of various religions come to appreciate what they have in common, as well as what they can really learn for each other. Indeed, Christians engaged in such a dialogue of life, are given the opportunity to acquaint themselves with a variety of cultural and cultic equivalents to their own faith that are present in other religions – whereas these equivalents, in turn, allow them to get a deeper understanding of their own basic faith convictions, which they now are able to better communicate to the others.⁵⁵

The approach taken here with regard to interreligious dialogue happens on the level of shared experience of life realities. The WP enlightens us that, in Asia, the emphasis “has always been on religious experience rather than on dogma” (WP 47). The question is not “What do you believe? but on What has been your religious experience” (WP 47). Some respondents even consider that “such interaction is perhaps the only kind of proclamation possible in some parts of Asia” (WP 47). The WP continues to say that “Christ is better communicated not on the purely theoretical or verbal level in an orderly presentation of doctrines, but through a shared experience” (WP 47). Differently put, the only credible form of proclamation in Asia is when Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslim, encounter a Christian who is truly imbued with the words and deeds of Jesus Christ. The purpose of dialogue and proclamation is no longer seen primarily as strategy to win converts to Catholicism. But, now, they

⁵⁴Michael Amaladoss, “Interreligious Dialogue: A View from Asia,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 19, 2 (January 1995), 2.

⁵⁵De Schrijver, “Mission,” 13.

represent relationships where open communication and dialogue lead people of different religions to attempt to build a more just and humane society where everyone is reconciled to God. In short, it leads to the establishment of the Kingdom of God, through their close collaboration. Amaladoss expresses the strategy of dialogue that the Catholic Church should undertake:

I think that the church is called to be at the centre of an international moral movement of people... I think that the appropriate image for today would be that of a people's movement that is committed to the building up of the Reign of God in this world. The church is aware of and rooted in its own identity as the body of the disciples of Christ, as witnesses in word and deed of the Good News he proclaimed, and as sacraments of unity of all peoples. Therefore, it needs to be a community with open frontiers, ready to dialogue and collaborate with everyone in the service of the Reign of God. It needs to be a community alive and sensitive to the mystery of God's action among peoples and in the world, often in ways unknown to it.⁵⁶

5. Conclusion

In the Asian context – home of world religions, home of rich diverse cultures, and home of many of the world's poor – statistics (the number of newly baptized) is not an obvious priority. What is urgent is finding ways wherein various peoples with different religions and cultures can work together to confront the massive poverty and exclusion (caused by economic globalization) that many of Asia's population is beset with. Evidently, this is an approach to dialogue that will gain little support from the official organs of the church. Yet, as some missiologists would argue in this situation, we need what they refer to as eschatological patience. These missiologists “believe that God, as the true eschatological power, knows much better than any Christian organized religion engaged in mission how to attract the non-Christian believers to the core values of Christian life.”⁵⁷

⁵⁶Michael Amaladoss, “The Challenges of Mission Today” in William Burrows, *Redemption and Dialogue: Reading Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1993, 395-396.

⁵⁷D. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991, 505-506; 519, cited in De Schrijver, “Mission,” 15.