

Why Dr. Hans Küng Was Selected For the Twenty-Second Niwano Peace Prize

The Niwano Peace Foundation (Nichiko Niwano, President; Kinjiro Niwano, Chairman) has decided to award the twenty-second Niwano Peace Prize to the Catholic theologian, Dr. Hans Küng, 76, president of the Global Ethic Foundation in Germany and Switzerland. Together with his contributions to interfaith dialogue and cooperation, Dr. Küng's advocacy of a "Global Ethic" as a way of realizing world peace has won him recognition around the world. The Niwano Peace Prize is awarded on the basis of recommendations gathered from over 1,000 leading figures in 125 countries, which are deliberated in strict fairness by the Niwano Peace Prize Committee (presently consists of nine religious leaders involved in religious cooperation and peace movements in their countries) before it reaches a decision.

Dr. Küng entered the Catholic priesthood after receiving master's degrees in philosophy and theology from the Gregorian Pontifical University in Rome. He also studied at the Sorbonne and the Catholic Institute in Paris, and received a doctorate in theology in 1957. He was appointed by Pope John XXIII as official theological consultant to the Second Vatican Council, a post he held from 1962 to 1965. From 1960 until 1996 he served as a professor of theology at the University of Tübingen in Germany, where he has worked unstintingly to promote the ecumenical movement toward unity among the various Christian churches. In addition, he has carried out research on the common features and resemblances of religions, taking into consideration not only those that have Abraham, the "Father of Faith," in common—Christianity, Judaism, and Islam—but also Hinduism, Buddhism, and others. He has pursued the discussion of the universal values found in religions through his writing, the Internet, and the mass media. These activities have gained him recognition around the world as a pioneer both in theological dialogue and in establishing the universality of religions.

Dr. Küng has declared that there is "No peace among the nations without peace among the religions, and no peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions." We must all awaken to the responsibility that is common to us all, irrespective of our different religious convictions, and not insist that ours is the only true religion. God expects us to transcend our individual selves and become agents for realizing world peace. People who have deep religious faith are in possession of the power to change society and save it. No single religion, however, can by itself bring about the world peace hoped for by humanity. This is why interfaith dialogue

and cooperation are essential. Having realized this, Dr. Küng has consistently shown respect to all religions while maintaining his position as a Catholic theologian, and pursued the common ethic that lies at the core of all religions. He is also playing a pivotal role in his capacity as one of the presidents of the World Conference of Religions for Peace.

The ethic universally found in all religions has been given a more immediate and applicable form in the “Global Ethic” advocated by Dr. Küng, which addresses the wide variety of problems facing our modern world—violence and war, persecution and discrimination, moral degradation, and the endangered global environment. As Dr. Küng points out: “There has never been an age when a mechanism to relieve the world’s distress has been so urgently needed. Fortunately, however, an ethic already exists within the religious teachings of the world, which can counter global distress. This ethic can supply the moral foundation for a better individual and global order: a vision that can lead men and women away from despair and society away from chaos.” He adds that: “By a global ethic we do not mean a single, unified religion beyond all existing religions, and certainly not the domination of one religion over all others. By a global ethic we mean a fundamental consensus on binding values, irrevocable standards, and personal attitudes.”

A document drafted by Dr. Küng, “Declaration Toward a Global Ethic,” was presented at and adopted by the Parliament of the World’s Religions held in Chicago in September 1993. This Declaration, which starts by saying “The world is in agony,” lays out “Four Irrevocable Directives” that symbolize the universal ethic found in the world’s religions. The precept expressed as “Thou shalt not kill,” or as “Have respect for life,” leads naturally to social and political justice, the promotion of nonviolence, the protection of the natural environment, the permanent abolition of armaments, and so on. The precept expressed as “Thou shalt not steal,” or “Deal honestly and fairly,” emphasizes the importance of eradicating poverty and establishing a fair economic order. The precept expressed as “Thou shalt not bear false witness,” or “Speak and act truthfully,” brings to mind the responsibility of the mass media and politicians to give a proper account of what they know. The precept expressed as “Thou shalt not commit adultery,” or “Respect and love one another,” urges us to reexamine about how we should conduct family life, marriage, and relations with others.

With deep emotion, Dr. Küng declares: “We confirm that there is already a consensus among the religions that can be the basis for a global ethic—a minimal fundamental consensus concerning binding values, irrevocable standards, and fundamental moral attitudes.” The “Declaration Toward a Global Ethic” has made

an impact not only in religious circles; the major American daily USA Today made the document available to its forty million readers by publishing it as a full-page article. It has been published around the world, where councils, seminars, and research groups are being held to study it. There are expectations that in future it may bear fruit in the form of a declaration of a global ethic by the United Nations.

Dr. Küng was also one of the drafters of the “Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities,” which was proposed by the InterAction Council and adopted by the United Nations on the 50th anniversary of the UN’s “Universal Declaration of Human Rights” in 1998. He was also appointed in 1997 by the Secretary-General of the United Nations to join Richard von Weizsaecker, former president of Germany, as a member of the Group of Eminent Persons. As president of the German Global Ethic Foundation since 1995, he has been energetically working to develop all kinds of activities aimed at raising awareness about the global ethic.

In today’s confused world, many people never encounter a firm path, and continue to wander aimlessly through life. In this context, the effort to put the universal ethic found in all religions into place as a moral foundation that is common to the whole world and to every individual may be one of the most significant events in the course of human history. In order to express its deepest respect for Dr. Küng’s true religious commitment and his passion for realizing world peace, as well as for the myriad of distinguished results he has achieved, and, in the hopes that many will be moved to join him in his work, the Niwano Peace Foundation hereby awards him the twenty-second Niwano Peace Prize.