

Commemorative Address

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There are dreams that never come true, and on the other hand one can experience realities in life which one would never have dreamt of. Indeed, when I first traveled to Japan as a young professor in 1964 or later when I visited Rissho Kosei-kai headquarters and had the privilege to meet Founder Nikkyo Niwano in 1982 it never came to my mind that I might once stand here as a laureate of the prestigious Niwano Peace Prize. This prize is an extraordinary honour for me and I am deeply grateful to the Niwano Peace Foundation for having selected me as this year's laureate. I consider this distinction as a threefold encouragement:

- for me personally as an acknowledgement of my life-long activities for ecumenism among the Christian churches and for dialogue among religions;
- for the Global Ethic Foundation for intercultural and interreligious research, education and encounter, of which I am the President;
- for all those around the world who strive for a global ethic as a basis of harmony among human beings and thus a more peaceful world.

I receive this prize precisely for my efforts to promote a global ethic and I would therefore like to recall some of its dimensions.

Certainly you are all aware that:

- Global ethic is not a new ideology or superstructure;
- it will not make the specific ethics of the different religions and philosophies superfluous; it would be ridiculous to consider Global Ethic as a substitute for the Discourses of the Buddha, the Sayings of Confucius, the Bhagavadgita, the Torah, the Sermon on the Mount, or the Qur'an;
- Global Ethic is nothing but the necessary minimum of common values, standards and basic attitudes. In other words:
 - a minimal basic consensus relating to binding values, irrevocable standards and moral attitudes-, which can be affirmed by all religions despite their undeniable dogmatic or theological differences and should also be supported by non-believers.

This consensus is formulated in:

The Declaration Toward a Global Ethic (Parliament of the World's Religions, Chicago 1993)

The Global Ethic as presented in the Chicago Declaration is based on two principles without which no human community or society can survive: First, what is common to all human beings is their humanity, and therefore »Every human being should be treated humanely«, according to his or her inalienable human dignity, foundation also of the universal human rights. This principle still remains very formal and therefore the declaration recalls a second principle, »which is found and has persisted in many religious and ethical traditions of humankind...« This is known as the »Golden Rule« of reciprocity: »What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others.« In positive terms: »What you wish done to yourself, do to others.« It is striking to discover that this basic rule of human behaviour appears already in the Analects of the Chinese Master Confucius, five centuries BCE, and can indeed be found, in slightly differing formulations, in the teachings of all religions.¹ In the scriptures of Buddhism it reads: »A state that is not pleasant or delightful to me must be so for him also; and a state which is not pleasant or delightful for me, how could I inflict that on another« (Samyutta Nikaya).

These guidelines of humane behaviour exist in all religions and also in non-religious ethics and can therefore form the basis for a humanist ethic, in the sense that it should be acceptable for all human beings. A buddhist leader at the Chicago Parliament told me that through the four directives he could hear the voice of the Buddha. He certainly thought of the four precepts formulated in the Dhammapada (183): »I vow to abstain from killing living beings. I vow to abstain from taking what is not given. I vow to abstain from sexual misconduct. I vow to abstain from lying« (a fifth precept does not encounter consensus among religions; it only occurs in Buddhism and some other religions and is therefore not included in the Global Ethic Declaration: I vow to abstain from taking intoxicants). Others may hear the voices of their own religious or philosophical traditions through the Chicago Declaration. Herein lies the unique value of the Chicago Parliament and of its Declaration: For the first time in the history of religions a representative group of leaders from all religions worldwide agreed on a set of common ethical guidelines. Goal and thrust of the Global Ethic Declaration join deep inspirations of Founder Nikkyo Niwano and of President Nichiko

¹ A list of such formulations is presented in: Hans Küng/Helmut Schmidt (eds), *A Global Ethic and Global Responsibilities. Two Declarations*. London, SCM 1998, p.68-69.

Niwano, which continue to guide the activities of Rissho Kosei-kai for interfaith cooperation and peace.

The Threefold Lotus Sutra and the teachings of Rev. Nikkyo Niwano

Let me therefore recall Founder Nikkyo Niwano's four-point-programme for world peace, based on the teachings of the Lotus Sutra and laid down in his booklet »Some Thoughts on Peace« in 1984.² He worked untiringly all his lifetime to translate these convictions into practice and thus became a pioneer of interfaith cooperation and peace work in Japan, in Asia and worldwide, and he made Rissho Kosei-kai a powerful and universally acknowledged movement for reconciliation, dialogue and peace.

His four points seem to touch insights which are also developed in the Global Ethic project:

1. Founder Niwano recalls the bodhisattva practice to believe implicitly that all people are brothers and sisters, because the various people, races, and nations are all equally the children of the Buddha. He calls on people of religion to stand in the front ranks to realize this truth. The awareness of the unity of the human family seems to me a basic prerequisite for peace, and the Chicago »Declaration Toward a Global Ethic« states, »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.«
2. Nikkyo Niwano emphasizes the Buddha's teaching that it is wrong to deprive others of life, to dispossess others of what is theirs, to lie in order to justify oneself, and to speak ill of others through hatred. He therefore calls on people of religion to engage in »planting the roots of virtue«. Here it becomes clear that the principles and directives of a Global Ethic can be identified also in the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha.
3. Nikkyo Niwano further calls on all people who are resolved to do good, regardless of their religion, to »join others who are determinedly seeking the ideal«, which means to cooperate for the common good. Yes, world peace can only be furthered through a coalition of all people of good will, be they religious believers or not.
4. Finally, Founder Niwano puts as the fourth requisite, »to aspire after the salvation of all the living«: against egoism, in a spirit of service to others. He understood salvation, liberation from suffering, never as a merely spiritual value but as an eminently social task, both on the individual and the collective level. The Global Ethic Project shares these thoughts by emphasizing that

² Cf. Nikkyo Niwano, *Some Thoughts on Peace*. Kosei Publishing Tokyo 1984, p.38-41

everyone has not only rights but also responsibilities for his fellow human beings, but also for all living beings and the environment.

The Universal Declaration of Human Responsibilities (InterAction Council 1997)

A further significant international development in the ongoing process toward a global ethic is the link of the InterAction Council of former heads of State or Government with the Global Ethic Project.³ The IAC was founded in 1983 by the former Japanese Prime Minister Takeo Fukuda (passed away in 1995) and still has its secretariate at Tokyo. The IAC members (at present about 30) develop analyses of global political, economic and social problems and recommend solutions. They encourage international collaboration on such issues and communicate their findings directly to heads of government and other decision-makers.

The synergy between IAC and the Global Ethic Project was mainly due to its then chairman's, Helmut Schmidt, the former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, general concern for ethical issues and his specific search for universal human values on behalf of IAC, supported here in Tokyo by Secretary General Isamu Miyazaki and the highly efficient Ms. Keiko Atsumi. As the 1993 Chicago Declaration Toward a Global Ethic had already proposed a set of such values, I was approached by IAC to assist in drafting a »Declaration of Human Responsibilities«. Such a declaration was considered by the Council as an appropriate expression of the relationship between human rights and responsibilities. The Declaration was adopted by the Council in 1997. The text follows closely the structure of the Declaration Toward a Global Ethic and turns its principles and irrevocable directives into responsibilities of individuals and the community. IAC suggests it should be understood as a support to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights from the angle of ethics.

This Declaration can also be considered as an attempt to reconcile two approaches: the »western« emphasis on the individual person and his or her rights, and the so-called »asian« tradition of considering the community first, focusing on the duties of the individual towards the community. Hence the IAC Declaration can serve as a useful element in the debate on the intercultural validity

³ Hans Küng/Helmut Schmidt (eds), *A Global Ethic and Global Responsibilities. Two Declarations*. London, SCM 1998. See also the InterAction Council's website: www.interactioncouncil.org, from where the Declaration can be downloaded in many languages.

of universal human rights. At this point it is however good to recall that both Declarations – Chicago and IAC – are first of all moral appeals and not juridical documents.

In December 1999 the Third Parliament of the World's Religions convened at Cape Town, following those held in Chicago in 1893 and in 1993. One of the main tasks of the 1999 Parliament consisted in building upon the process of the past six years and in concretizing further the Global Ethic Project. This was done on the basis of a »Call to our Guiding Institutions«, those institutions which play a decisive and influential role in society: religion and spirituality; government; agriculture, labour, industry, and commerce; education; arts and communications media; science and medicine; international intergovernmental organizations; organizations of civil society. They are invited to adopt the principles and directives of the Global Ethic and to apply them to concrete issues.⁴

Unfortunately the following Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona in 2004, while offering an interesting forum of encounter and discussion, was far less concerned with the Global Ethic project. This is the more regrettable as the process of globalization of economy, communication and technology in our world needs to be accompanied by a globalization of ethic.

Our globalizing world requires wisdom

Advances in science and technology have so significantly broadened our horizons and deepened our awareness of the world around us that many feel that the wisdom of the great religions and philosophical traditions is irrelevant to our modern education. Surely, globalization has greatly expanded the data, information and knowledge available for our use and consumption, but it has also substantially undermined the time-honored ways of learning, especially the traditional means of acquiring wisdom. We cannot confuse data with information, information with knowledge and knowledge with wisdom; we need to learn how to become wise, not merely informed and knowledgeable. There are three essential ways to acquire wisdom worth special attention in our information age:

- The art of listening;
- face-to-face communication.
- the cumulative wisdom of the elders. ... The wisdom of the great religious and philosophical traditions teaches us how to be fully human. The cumulative wisdom of the elders refers to the art

⁴ The »Call to Our Guiding Institutions« can be obtained from the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, P.O. Box 1630, Chicago, Illinois 60690-1630, USA. www.cpwr.org.

of living embodied in the thoughts and actions of a given society's exemplars. Only through exemplary teaching, teaching by example rather than by words, can we learn to be fully human. We cannot afford to cut ourselves off from the spiritual resources that make our life meaningful. ...

Learning to be fully human involves character building rather than the acquisition of knowledge or the internalization of skills. Cultural as well as technical competence are required to function well in the contemporary world. Ethical as well as cognitive intelligence is essential for personal growth; without the former, the moral fabric of society will be undermined. Spiritual ideas and exercises as well as adequate material conditions are crucial for the well-being of the human community. Cultural competence is also highly desirable. ... Ethical intelligence is necessary for social solidarity. Spiritual ideas and exercises are not dispensable luxuries for the leisure class; they are an integral part of the life of the mind that gives a culture a particular character and a distinct ethos.

Conclusion

When presenting my thoughts about a Global Ethic I meet sometimes with scepticism and doubts: can a Global Ethic be realized? Will people not always act against such principles? In his Global Ethic Lecture at Tübingen University in December 2003, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan gave an encouraging answer to this question, and I would therefore like to conclude with his words:

»What is my answer to the provocative question that I took as my title? Do we still have universal values? Yes, we do, but we should not take them for granted.

They need to be carefully thought through.

They need to be defended.

They need to be strengthened.

And we need to find within ourselves the will to live by the values we proclaim – in our private lives, in our local and national societies, and in the world.«

I thank you again, ladies and gentlemen, for the great honour, encouragement and joy I feel in this beautiful ceremony.