

## ON RELIGIOUS MORALITY AND UNIVERSAL RESPONSIBILITY AND DIALOGUE ACCORDING TO KÜNG'S GLOBAL ETHICS

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**Abstract:** *This paper explores the concept of universal responsibility and global ethics as essential foundations for achieving lasting peace in the modern interconnected world. It emphasizes that genuine peace cannot be established through violence or coercion but through the cultivation of ethical values, moral awareness, and interreligious dialogue. The study argues that every human action has both personal and universal dimensions, demanding responsibility not only toward oneself but also toward humanity, nature, and future generations. Within this framework, dialogue emerges as a fundamental ethical and communicative method for understanding, co-operation, and peaceful coexistence among individuals, nations, and religions. Drawing on the ideas of thinkers such as Emil Brunner, the Dalai Lama, Emmanuel Levinas, and especially Hans Küng, the paper highlights Küng's project Global Ethics as a crucial attempt to establish a shared moral framework based on humanism and dialogue. The work underscores the necessity of inter-religious understanding and the development of a universal ethical paradigm grounded in justice, compassion, tolerance, and responsibility. The conclusion calls for an ethical revolution centered on humanism and global solidarity, affirming that universal ethics should guide humanity toward building a more humane, just, and harmonious world.*

**Keywords:** *universal responsibility, global ethics, dialogue, Hans Küng, peace.*

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## Introduction

Peace in this “global village” of ours can only be achieved through respect for all our differences, always keeping in mind that differences are an essential part of our nature and therefore should be appreciated. But at the same time, it is necessary to accept the consequences of our actions, i.e. having awareness and a sense of responsibility.

This indicates that a world in which peace will reign cannot be established or imposed by war, aggression or bloodshed, but by promoting and respecting the values of ethics, morality as a sum of traditions, religions, beliefs... Especially in today's conditions, when a specific case on one side of the world can have a direct or indirect consequence on a case on the other side of the world, which points to the conclusion that each of our actions has both a personal and a universal dimension. Therefore, we need a universal responsibility in which a large active part has religious morality and responsibility, especially in the efforts of permanent establishment of peace, as a concrete part of our work, activities and efforts. In a fundamental Christian perspective, as emphasized by Emil Bruner, responsibility is a “characteristic essential pattern for man”, and therefore “one who has understood the essence of responsibility has also understood the essence of man. Responsibility is not an attribute, it is the “substance” of human being.” (Brunner, 1936: 81). Along with every human's right to happiness and justice comes the necessity of the same right for all other people. The basic awareness is that we can always be of use to others, and that, at the same time, we do not only represent our interests. Through a sense of universal responsibility, we should be able to care for all members of humanity and fight against disunity between people. “If we ignore the well-being of others and ignore the universal dimension of our actions, we will inevitably see our own interests as separate from the interests of others” (Lama, 2001:128). Ignoring universal responsibility can overlook the fundamental unity of humanity.

Therefore, according to the statement that the modern world is developing and connecting with enormous dynamics, it is meaningless to say that the interests of an individual, a community or a social group lie only within their own borders. Selfishness and inequality are the sources of much of today's problems. That is why universal responsibility today is no longer a matter of personal ethical choice, but becomes a necessity! Every human has an equal right to be happy and to avoid suffering. We all need each other. Therein lies the potential and hope for humanity and the world. In other words, “if earlier responsibility was considered through the prism of the old principle of interest in the fate of man, now the difference is huge because the interest in the fate of man as a neighbor as a goal is both spatially and temporally expanded due to technical practice!” (Bojanić & Krstić, 2008: 9-18)

### **1. The issue of universal responsibility and the idea of the dialogue and its ethical basis**

That is why universal responsibility is linked to humanity. If we are given the right and ability to use and manage the powers, forces and potentials of our world, that does not give us the right to abuse these powers. It is responsibility or humanity that dictates and obliges us to use our knowledge, will and powers correctly.<sup>2</sup> In other words, responsibility is that value that maintains the harmony of existence. Each of us should be a responsible ethical person who considers the effects and consequences of our thoughts, words and actions. A responsible person should set his ethical standard on the “ground” where the fundamental principles of existence overlap with the order and rules

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<sup>2</sup> See more details about these problems Richard Wisser, *Odgovornost u mijeni vremena*, Svjetlost, Sarajevo, 1988.

that are in the interest and benefit of all people. Only by promoting this form of balance in behavior will each individual be able to live a dignified life and fulfill his intentions, while respecting and protecting all human values.

Each of us has a great responsibility towards ourselves, towards all the people of the world, towards the planet, and towards future generations. He also has a responsibility towards humanity in the way he chooses the values and actions he makes. Only in this way and with this behavior will we be able to measure and evaluate the actions and the achieved results of each person, regardless of the time frame or social structure to which he belongs. With such responsibility and behavior, we will be able to place our actions and deeds in the timeless framework of humanity and progress.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, among the many methods by which religion and its role seek to be understood in the general context, and especially in a particular culture and history, such as the Balkans, one is particularly prominent in its importance today – the dialogue. Its birthplace is the Balkans. It was invented here, in the European Balkans, but due to the large number of conflicts in this region, it has been forgotten that this is where the path of dialogue began as a method of knowing the truth, as a method of good education, but also as a method for successful communication between people.

Today, the dialogue is mostly used as a means of resolving the inconsistencies and conflicts of modern living. Modern life has emphasized the validity of this method because it widens the field of view of the individual, and cognition has been critical since the very process of cognition. It is a method of initiating energy for creative and positive problem solving, for promoting the desire and obligation for unity, for developing a culture of friendship and understanding.

It is essentially possible on the basis of an ontological and historical assumption. Namely, in the modern epoch, the most significant relation to the world and life is their understanding as unity. This means that all elements in the world, all life forms and all forms of human activity must be considered as connected, as part of a whole and as its manifestations and functions. However, this is not a focus on uniformity of manifestations and action forms, but a choice between possible different approaches to the world.

Dialogue presents the essence of human appearance and mutual treatment, because only by mutual respect, exchange of views, joint appearance, joint problem solving, conversation and actions, the world can develop in accordance with modern aspirations. Man is created in communication with another man. If both parties believe that joined forces can come to the truth, faster than each of them separately, then the truth potentially belongs to both parties.

Hence, it can be argued freely that “the dialogue presupposes a universal openness of the beings to other experiences, ie. for the experiences of others” (Шушњић, 1994:63). In this sense, dialogue does not signify the conversation of the soul with itself, the way in which the individual originally exists and comes to a deep, self-indulgent knowledge, but much more as a method of knowing through the exchange of experiences and attitudes between at least two equal souls. That is why dialogue can be conducted – among the equals! Among the unequal, there are no conditions for dialogue due to imbalance and impatience and then the dialogue comes down to negotiations. “The word is a bridge built between me and you. If it leans upon me one end, it also leans upon the other interlocutor. The word is a common territory between the speaker and the interlocutor” (Шушњић, 1994:98).

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<sup>3</sup> In this context, the peace meeting of religious leaders in Assisi, Italy, which was held on January 24, 2002, under the auspices of Pope John Paul II and the Catholic Church, and where more than 200 leaders from 12 countries met, to pray to their faiths and beliefs so that they will never again be used as a justification for terrorist attacks or violence, speaks in this context. The gathering was particularly important as a moment in history because it represented a sign of world unity through the participation of representatives of different churches and religious communities on the Day of Prayer for World Peace, January 24, 2002.

The aforementioned confirms that the dialogue establishes an account of the other interlocutor and his/her views. That is why the dialogue is considered as a modern form of communication that does not disturb the real existence of the individual, self-aware of his/her attitudes, which is not reached through imposition, but through conversations and comparison of experiences and arguments. "In dialogue, the other interlocutor, a partner in spiritual and social exchange, is a condition for broad thinking and for more realistic insights. Dialogue allows the practice itself to be broader and more justified. Dialogue is a condition for better coexistence, a state in which people support, respect and complement each other" (Temkov, 2003).

The dialogue, as a state-of-the-art method of human communication and debate on issues that fit the new world of equal people, a world of unity where interests are settled and problems are resolved peacefully - presents an expression of goodwill, but also the skills and knowledge of modern people knowing how to control themselves, as well as how to reconcile with others. As a form of a better existence in which people stimulate each other and enter into exchanges of views for the sake of explaining, learning something better or doing something right, the dialogue is an integral part of democracy, a society of vibrant political, economic, social and spiritual activity, rich and open cultures.

Following the aforementioned, some ethical insights on the need for dialogue can be derived. Upon the first philosophy, the French philosopher Emanuel Levinas says that it should be a philosophy of dialogue. As such, it cannot be without ethics. It is the objectification of encountering the Other. The encounter with the other is always present here, and it should be transformed into ethical knowledge, thus preventing the flames of cooperation, exchange of views, joint activity.<sup>4</sup> What happened to be a standard contest of dissent in the Balkans up until 20 or more years ago, today can grow into a joint appearance and action in various fields, i.e. in all fields. Connectivity is a must for everyone, this is the path to go. That's the point of the good people's performance.

"It will not lead us", Leonard Swidler and Paul Moses claim, "to one global religion, but above all to the conscious acceptance of a common set of ethical principles - one global ethics" (Свидлер & Мойзес, 2005:9), so that people have been able to make competent and good decisions about the meaning of life, its individuality and uniqueness, especially about how to live it, in which the consequences of the biotechnological revolution are increasingly felt, its breakthrough in practice, thus significantly changing life and shifting the concept of the sanctity of life versus the concept quality of life.

Hence, the practical application and application of dialogue is a radically new consciousness that deeply changes the ways in which we understand the most comprehensive approach to life. This opens the door to an era of global dialogue as a global dialogic way of understanding life by not leading it to one global religion, but rather from taking it, the same should be directed towards conscious acceptance of a common set of ethical principles that play a big role.

## **2. Hans Kung's Global Ethics toward universal responsibility and dialogue**

One such attempt, perhaps the most significant to date, is the work "Global Ethics" (1990) by the world-renowned ethicist and theologian Hans Kung, a work that was not created as a result of developing a certain theoretical question, but also of the need to provide an answer to the real problem of the endangered survival of the planet Earth, as a result of the reckless behavior of man towards other people and towards nature.

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<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this paper, and in the interest of time and scope, the focus will be limited to Hans Küng's ideas and his concept of *Global Ethics*. A more detailed elaboration, analysis, and comparison of his views will be addressed on another occasion, within a separate study.

The work is a warning about the alarming situation in which humanity and the planet find themselves today. We are faced with mutual wars, corruption, exploitation of the weak, discrimination, poverty, immorality and irresponsibility in business and politics, with religious intolerance, with serious environmental problems and with terrorism on a global scale, which threatens us with extermination.

The goal of Kung's project is to achieve peace between people in the world, between believers and non-believers, between members of one religion and another, between man and nature - but through the establishment of a common ethic based on humanism, and using dialogue as the basic method. Only through humanism as an expression of unique human nature, all people of the world can agree, and dialogue as a method can provide them with a suitable, generally accepted change in their own beliefs and convictions. Kung's basic position is that "it is not possible to survive without global ethics" (Küng, 2003: 17), ethics based on dialogue between people and religions, an ethics that should bring peace to the world.

The work simultaneously imposes a request addressed to the entire human race, that dialogue, especially inter-religious dialogue, should no longer be treated as a problem of certain groups of experts, but should be conducted in all spheres. All world religions, in the interest of peace, should emphasize those things that they have in common, that unite them, and not those that separate them. Humanity, according to Kung, can no longer allow religions to incite wars and fanaticism, but they should create peace and dialogue between people.

Although world peace certainly does not depend only on dialogue, especially between religions, but also on political combinatorics, social activities, economic interests and the like, Hans Kung believes that only in religions can one find immutable ethical bases and standards that apply to all people regardless of their personal preferences. According to him, in this way, humanity will get out of the elemental crisis it is in, and into which it has only crawled. In this context, his three hypotheses were set in three parts of the "Global Ethics" project, namely:

- *we will not survive without global ethics* - Why do we need global ethics?;
- *world peace is not possible without religious peace* - Ecumenical path between fanaticism about the truth and forgetting the truth;
- *religious peace is not possible without believing in religious peace* - Prolegomena on the analysis of the religious situation.

At the end of his book "Global Ethics", Kung also gives certain guidelines and instructions on the realization, especially of inter-religious dialogue, which alone can bring peace and well-being to the Earth. Setting imperatives on interreligious dialogue, which consist of dialogue in all spheres and in all areas of human action, Hans Kung's idea is that humanity does not need "a single religion and a single ideology, but it needs a single ethics, based on binding and binding norms, values, ideals and goals" (Küng, 2003: 17). What the world needs most is a change in mindset. Responsibility, moral vision and awareness of consequences are necessary. Progress as a central position of modern ideologies is meaningless if it results in inhumane, self-destructive consequences. A preventive ethics is needed, a civilizational change is necessary, a new fundamental orientation, a new paradigm, a new postmodern constellation.

In more detail, humanity needs polycentricity, international cooperation, eco-social market economy, partnership relations, plural culture and "multiconfessional ecumenical world community" (Küng, 2003: 41). This paradigm shift should not destroy values, but fundamentally change them and direct them towards the ethically responsible development of science, towards the creation of technology that serves man, towards industry that meets the needs of man in harmony with nature, and towards true democracy based on freedom and justice. A universal view of the world and of man in all its different dimensions is needed. The new paradigm is not a new ideology, but a sum of many

heterogeneous life conceptions, actions, languages, social models, cultures, traditions and religious communities, which should function as a consensus of integrating human worlds.

Although ethics is possible without religion, as Kung points out, according to history, religions were the ones that formed the foundation of a certain morality. This means that any ethics requires mutual respect and appreciation between believers and non-believers, because everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, as well as to their manifestation. In this sense, the fundamental right of all people to realize a life worthy of man, a society that will live in peace and not in war, and in which work will be done to equalize the material inequality of all its members, confirms this. Religion can be oriented towards the future, inspire confidence in life, solidarity, social engagement, spiritual renewal and preach peace, which means that it must not be rigid in relation to the information and achievements of natural and social sciences.

Hence, the most important goal in Global Ethics, which only religions can achieve, is “establishing unconditional, universal ethical obligations” (Küng, 2003: 72), and enabling self-legislation and self-responsibility. Religion can offer a specific dimension of attitudes about suffering, injustice, meaninglessness and death. It can set the highest values, unconditional norms, deepest motivations and ideals about our existence, it can create trust, faith, security, hope and inner peace, but also finally establish resistance to injustice. According to Kung, the meaning of religion is that it gives meaning to life, as well as moral action here and now. Without the support of world religions that appeal to the individual and our consciousness or heart, voluntary commitment could not be translated into broad-based practice. World religions can mobilize millions of people through formulated ethical goals, moral ideas, and rational and emotional motivation to practically live ethical norms.

In this context, the general ethical in religions is that they serve humanity, respecting human identity and achieving a meaningful and fruitful existence. In a way, religion means the completion of human humanity, ie. religion as an expression of a comprehensive meaning, as an expression of the highest value and as an expression of unconditional norms, is the optimal assumption for the realization of humanity. Only religion can make humanity a universal obligation, because only humanity can be the basis of common ethics of all world religions and the basis of interreligious dialogue.

The previous implicitly says that the dialogue between religions does not exclude the truth of other religions, but recognizes them in a way according to which, if they are not contradictory, they can complement, correct and deepen the religion. The best dialogue is the one with optimal faith in one's religion and maximum openness towards other religions. Openness towards other religions does not mean suspending one's own religious conviction, but rather proclaiming common ethical values, mutual understanding and readiness for sustained long-term dialogue.

The imperatives of interreligious dialogue in today's polycentric and transcultural world are necessary. The world needs more and more global religious understanding, without which political understanding would be impossible. A new religious overall view is sought through interreligious dialogue in all areas: in politics, in business, in science..., and a self-critical and innovative approach to the future. A close network of interreligious information, communication and cooperation is also needed. Inter-religious dialogue is needed in all spheres, both unofficially and officially and at the local, regional and world level. There is even more need for scientific and spiritual dialogue and most importantly, daily dialogue between people of different religions. People are the basis of dialogue, not religion per se or as Kung summarizes:

1. human coexistence is not possible without global ethics among nations,
2. peace among nations is not possible without peace among religions,
3. peace among religions is not possible without dialogue among religions (Küng, 2003: 160).

At the same time, the previous ones also confirm the thesis about the study of religion and its positive benefits as a product of its applicability in today's world, i.e. in the era of global dialogue, or in other words - the formation of a global ethics in this third millennium is of exceptional importance.

Dialogue, and especially inter-religious dialogue, according to the valid catalog of conflicts in which religion, church or ideology are constitutive elements, has as its basic function to initiate us in the era of global dialogue, and to help religions, churches and ideologies to go through the stages of transition more quickly, because they are a key link in the chain of reconciliation. This is so because life is a continuous succession. The living world represents an endless series of the most diverse structures interconnected in an ideal balance. We as persons have a universal responsibility towards all living things, to protect and improve them. This is our stake in the future of the world and the next generations!

## Conclusion

Since we live in an area where many different peoples lived before us, it is perhaps the most mixed nationality soil in Europe, which is rich in experience. There were also terrible events of occupation, destruction, uprooting, chasing, displacement, violent assimilation... There were also attempts to fight back. Numerous and often long-lasting conflicts in the Balkans have a political, nationalistic, historical, economic, cultural spirit and background. However, except in a small number of cases, it seems that with a little goodwill even in cases of protracted and inflamed conflicts, dialogue can be conducted through which problems and relationships could be successfully resolved.

In other words, the basic problem facing modern society today is neither political, nor social, nor economic, but ethical. Humanity needs an ethical revolution in terms of humanism and general responsibility. Only such a revolution will save civilization from the ruin it is heading towards. In this sense, our world, which is becoming more and more globalized, needs, more than ever, a new, global, universal ethics, which would have relevance everywhere. Universalization carries within itself the hope and intention of creating an order, a universal order on the basis of a positive global scale. Such a world should be built on the foundations of love, compassion, forgiveness, dialogue, acceptance of others, mutual respect, justice and human rights. Then humanity will reach its true essentiality, while goodness, justice and virtue will become the essence of the world.

But, having in mind the fact that morality cannot be absolute, nor can its universality be timeless and superhuman, this does not mean that morality in itself is chaotic or left to the arbitrariness of the individual, rather it is deeply rooted in the foundations of culture and at the same time subject to changes brought by the new times. Its basic characteristic must be positivity. Life must be designed and purposeful, and therefore, the moral duty of every citizen is to build a world in which all people can satisfy their basic life needs and acquire the potential for the development of a higher human level.

Thus, the universality of man is embodied in his need for higher goals and ideals, for his moral behavior. Humanism is based on compassion and universal solidarity and on science and art. It is precisely these aspects that are dealt with by Universal/Global Ethics, which wants to incorporate the values of respect, responsibility, tolerance and cultural progress, as well as the preservation of the environment, into human everyday life. Universal/Global ethics will give directions in a great human feat - the creation of a more humane world. (Донев, 2008: 118) Its principles and norms do not only demand their strict observance and superficial implementation, but create a deep sense of the unity of the world, of preserving life and giving help to people in need, of uncompromising advocacy for truth and justice and of promoting equality, understanding and cooperation among people - in general, care for the world and for man. "The world should become a harmonious whole of people and nature" (Supek, 1995:388). Only with this kind of attitude and appropriate behavior could we reach the fulfillment of what is human in the true sense of the word.



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