

Global Ethics and Global Citizenship

from the Perspective of Religion and Spirituality

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1. Preface

I am honored to participate in the CoNGO-ICCGC (Conference of NGOs – Interfaith Coalition Conference for Global Citizens) Global Futures Conference at the Church Center for the United Nations in New York. This conference serves as a vital forum for exchanging insights and initiating actions to create a better world by integrating religion with civil society. Session 1 will address the crucial topics of global ethics and citizenship. This session aims not only to highlight the theoretical foundations of global ethics, but also to inspire practical actions that promote peace, justice, and sustainability. As a panelist, I will explore global ethics and citizenship through the lenses of religion and spirituality.

We live in an era of unprecedented interconnectivity, in which every action ripples through the global web of cause and effect. Our current situation is a result of past choices, and the decisions we make today will shape our future. Although our global civilization has made remarkable progress in science and technology, creating unprecedented levels of comfort and abundance, we still face profound challenges.

Our world is confronted with continuous regional conflicts, escalating wars, and a growing number of refugees without homes. Inequality pervades our societies, as reflected in systemic structures that favor a few, while disadvantaging many. Racial discrimination and human rights abuses are still widespread, and exploitation in labor markets deepens economic inequalities. Meanwhile, the deterioration of our natural environment and the looming climate crisis are endangering the very essence of life on Earth.

The 2023 Global Sustainable Development Report (GSDR) offers a comprehensive analysis of progress and challenges, including those related to the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change. The report emphasizes that incremental and fragmented changes are inadequate for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030 (Global Sustainable Development Report, 2023). In addition, climate change is the "biggest threat modern humans have ever faced" (UN Press Release on Climate Change, 2021). These sources collectively highlight the urgency and complexity of addressing climate change and economic

instability. The interconnectedness of these issues requires a comprehensive, globally coordinated response that not only reduces environmental impacts but also promotes sustainable development in our society.

At this pivotal moment, it is evident that material wealth and scientific achievements alone cannot resolve the pressing issues that threaten our collective future. The clear disparity between spiritual poverty and material wealth is a major challenge facing contemporary society. To build a peaceful civilization, we must cultivate spiritual values alongside global ethics and citizenship. These elements strengthen our moral compass, enrich our cultural diversity, and uphold the ethical principles that we share with the members of our global family.

2. Revitalizing the Principle of Global Ethics and Citizenship

Over the centuries, many scholars and religious leaders have discussed global ethics and citizenship, particularly in the modern era. One notable figure is Hans Küng, who advocated interreligious dialogue and the creation of global ethics that transcend individual religions and cultures. He believed that “there will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions” (Küng, 1992; 1993). This highlights religion's dual potential; it can either fuel conflicts and wars or promote a peaceful world by encouraging understanding and cooperation among diverse religious traditions. The Global Ethic, often referred to as the “golden rule,” emphasizes common ethical standards as a basis for mutual respect and collaboration. It was adopted on the centennial anniversary of the Parliament of the World Religions in Chicago in 1993.

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), together with scholars from around the world, is working to develop a global ethic that transcends current conflicts between civilizations and addresses critical issues such as nuclear proliferation, environmental degradation, and inter-religious strife. This initiative seeks to establish a guiding principle that moves beyond traditional power dynamics such as the divide between strong and weak nations. In 1997, UNESCO adopted the Declaration on the Responsibilities of the Present Generations Towards Future Generations. This declaration sets out the ethical principles and responsibilities to ensure that future generations enjoy a good quality of life. It focuses on promoting sustainable development and intergenerational equity, and preserving cultural, natural, and scientific heritage. In addition, the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in 2015, provides a global blueprint comprising 17 SDGs, that aim to create a better world by eradicating poverty, protecting the planet, and ensuring prosperity for the current and future generations. It is time to revitalize global ethics and citizenship both in principle and in practice.

3. Designing a Peaceful Civilization: The $C = MS^2$ Formula

In contemporary society, the rapid advancement of technology and the global economy have led to unprecedented levels of material wealth. However, this material prosperity has not been accompanied by a corresponding growth in spiritual or moral well-being, leading to what is often described as a condition of "spiritual poverty."

From the perspective of religion, the teachings of Master Sotaesan, the founder of *Won*-Buddhism, provide a profound critique of the imbalances in modern civilization, emphasizing the need for a harmonious development of both material and spiritual dimensions. His vision for peace is encapsulated in the slogan, "As material civilization develops, cultivate spiritual civilization accordingly." This principle highlights a critical concern: the risk of human beings becoming enslaved by the very technologies and conveniences that are meant to serve them, leading to a world that is materially prosperous but spiritually impoverished. (Park, 1997) Sotaesan used the metaphor of a child holding a knife and unintentionally causing harm, to illustrate the dangers of relying solely on scientific advancements for comfort, while neglecting spiritual values. This analogy highlights the risks of an unbalanced civilization.

Pope Francis criticized consumerism and spiritual poverty, saying "The great danger in today's world, pervaded as it is by consumerism, is the desolation and anguish born of a complacent yet covetous heart, the feverish pursuit of frivolous pleasures, and a blunted conscience."(Pope Francis, 2013)

Spiritual poverty often emerges when individuals prioritize external achievements over internal growth, neglecting the development of personal and spiritual well-being. Addressing spiritual poverty requires a cultural shift towards valuing inner growth, emotional well-being, and community engagement. Encouraging practices such as mindfulness, meditation, and other spiritual disciplines can help individuals reconnect with their inner selves and cultivate a sense of peace and purpose (Kabat-Zinn, 1994). Lane discusses spiritual poverty and mentions that despite the abundance of material wealth, many individuals experience spiritual poverty—a condition marked by feelings of emptiness, lack of fulfillment, and disconnection from deeper values and beliefs (Lane, 2017).

How can we create a peaceful world that balances material civilization with spiritual civilization?

As we know, Albert Einstein's most famous equation, $E = mc^2$, expresses the relationship between energy (E), mass (m), and the speed of light (c). In this equation, energy is equivalent to mass multiplied by the square of the speed of light, indicating the interchangeable nature of mass and energy. In our quest for a peaceful and flourishing world, we can imagine a simple yet profound equation, $C = MS^2$. However, it is not a simple mathematical formula. I consider this a blueprint for our civilization's future.

C represents the civilization as the culmination of all our collective efforts and achievements. It is the world we build together and the legacy we leave behind. However, what makes a civilization truly flourish? The answer lies in balancing two critical elements: Material Civilization (M) and Spiritual Civilization (S).

Material Civilization (M) encompasses the tangible technological advancements that improve our lives. This is our cities, infrastructure, and scientific achievements. This provides a foundation for comfort, security, and opportunities. Yet, while M is crucial, it alone cannot sustain a thriving civilization.

Spiritual Civilization (S) symbolizes our moral compass, cultural richness, and ethical values. It is the heart and soul of a society that guides us towards empathy, compassion, and understanding. It is what breathes life into our technological advancements, ensuring that they are used for the betterment of all.

In the equation $C = MS^2$, the square of S emphasizes the exponential impact of spiritual growth on civilization. When we double our efforts to foster a spiritually enriched society, the results multiply, creating a civilization that is not only advanced, but also just and humane.

4. Cultivating Global Ethics and Citizenship Through Interfaith Dialogue

How can we cultivate a sense of global ethics and citizenship by actively fostering networks of interfaith dialogue?

Major religions and world's religious organizations should offer valuable insights into the best practices for global collaboration, helping us build a more unified and compassionate world. The formal history of dialogue and cooperation between religions in the modern era began with the Parliament of the World's Religions held in Chicago in 1893. This event, known as the "1893 Chicago World Parliament of Religions," was a pivotal moment in history, providing a practical platform for interreligious dialogue and establishing the ideological groundwork for religious pluralism.

Following this event, numerous international interfaith organizations were established, including the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) in 1900, World Fellowship of Religions in India in 1950, Temple of Understanding (TOU) in 1960, and the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP)—presently known as Religions for Peace—in 1970, the Asian Conference on Religion and Peace (ACRP) in 1976, the Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions (CPWR) in 1988, the International Interfaith Centre (IIC) in 1993, the United Religions Initiative (URI) in 1996, and the Millennium World Peace Summit in 2000.

In the realm of interfaith dialogue and cooperation, the pursuit of unity among diverse religious traditions presents significant opportunities and challenges. A crucial area requiring attention is the need for a more cohesive and effective network among international interfaith organizations. Despite nearly a century of efforts in religious cooperation, there remains a significant gap in achieving robust and lasting collaboration. Marcus Braybrooke's observations shed light on the current weaknesses within interfaith movements (Braybrooke, 1993, pp. 85-87). He advocated for the creation of a more substantial and permanent international network of interfaith organizations by developing a global interfaith network that transcends temporary and limited collaborations.

In this context, Master Daesan of *Won*-Buddhism proposed and advocated for the establishment of a global interfaith organization/networking known as United Religions (UR). This initiative is particularly noteworthy as it represents a bold step towards creating a more integrated and effective framework for interfaith dialogue and cooperation, serving as a

counterpart to the United Nations (UN). However, realizing this vision requires sustained and gradual efforts to build a strong and interconnected network of religious organizations. It is essential to develop cohesive structures that link existing interfaith organizations into a unified global network. This integration should aim to strengthen the collective impact of interfaith initiatives while respecting the autonomy and contributions of individual organizations.

What mindset is essential for meaningful engagement in interfaith dialogue?

In our diverse world, it is essential to approach these conversations with a genuine curiosity and understanding. Embracing and celebrating different beliefs not only fosters deeper connections but also helps build a more harmonious society. Just as individuals grow through education and experience, our civilization can evolve through interfaith dialogues and intercultural communication, leading to a more enlightened and united world.

However, the contemporary surge in religious fundamentalism presents a formidable barrier in achieving this understanding. Fundamentalism, as Armstrong (2000) notes, is a modern reaction to perceived threats against traditional ways of life. History offers numerous examples of religiously motivated conflicts, including the Crusades, which are among the most devastating "holy wars" in human history.

Stanley J. Samartha, in his critical examination of interfaith dialogue, highlights the issues inherent in an exclusivist stance. He argues that a religious mission focused solely on the salvation of its own adherents results in a "one-way proclamation" (Samartha, 1991). This approach mirrors the dynamics of colonialism in which religious doctrines became entangled with economic and political power, perpetuating systems of dominance and subjugation. Such a narrow view of salvation not only exacerbates inter-religious conflict but also heightens civilizational clashes, ideological disputes, and even wars.

In interfaith dialogue, the issue of conversion often arises, touching upon the complexities of religious identity and spiritual evolution. In Korea, the idea of conversion is not just about abandoning one religion for another. Instead, many individuals retain aspects of their previous faith while adopting new beliefs, thereby enriching their spiritual journey rather than entirely replacing their previous practices. Philip-Ho Hwang introduces the concept of "addversion" (*gajong*, 가종, 加宗 in Korean), which translates to "adding religion." This term elegantly encapsulates the process of integrating new religious beliefs into an existing spiritual framework, akin to adding new chapters to a lifelong narrative. It emphasizes that spiritual growth involves embracing new beliefs while simultaneously honoring past traditions and experiences rather than discarding them (Hwang, 2000). Members of the Korean Conference on Religion and Peace (KCRP), an association that brings together the seven major religions in Korea, refer to different faiths not as "other religions" but as "neighbor religions." This choice of language fosters a friendly and inclusive spirit that promotes unity and cooperation among diverse faith traditions.

In contemporary civil society, the term "global citizenship" has evolved beyond the traditional notion of "citizen," advocating for a broader commitment to international cooperation. This concept, embraced by the UN and various global civil society groups, emphasizes that individuals are responsible not only for their local communities and nations, but also for the wider global community. In the religious context, the idea of "global familyship" extends this notion further, envisioning all of humanity as a single family, united

as brothers and sisters.

The teachings of Chiara Lubich, the founder of Focolare, rooted in the exhortation of Jesus Christ to "May they all be one," resonated deeply with me. She eloquently described those who embrace unity as embodiments of "living purity" and "living light" (Lubich, 2007, pp. 36-37). Her vision has profoundly influenced us to broaden our perspectives and lifestyle in the pursuit of global peace and unity.

Master Jeongsan's concept of "Samdong Yulli" (K. 삼동 윤리), or the "ethics of triple identity" within *Won*-Buddhism, presents a profound vision for global harmony and unity. Central to this framework are three guiding principles that collectively advocate for a universal moral order. At its heart is the principle of One Equivalent Family in All Beings, which underscores the intrinsic interconnectedness of all lives.

As we deepen our capacity to understand and embrace one another, we transcend the superficial notion of neighbors as mere geographic entities. Instead, we come to recognize them as essential members of a broader human family, our spiritual kin. This transformation is more than an intellectual exercise; it represents a profound emotional and moral awakening that compels us to broaden our circles of empathy and compassion.

5. Conclusion: Practical Steps for Fostering Global Ethics and Citizenship

Creating a global ethic is not merely a theoretical exercise but a practical necessity. It demands a commitment to overcome historical grievances and power imbalances, and foster a shared sense of humanity that respects the dignity of all individuals and cultures. This ethic must be strong enough to tackle the most pressing challenges of our time, thus paving the way for a more just and peaceful world.

A holistic approach that integrates both scientific and spiritual development is essential for creating a society that is not only materially prosperous but also ethically and spiritually enriched. Such a balanced approach can help prevent environmental degradation, social unrest, and existential discontent, leading to a more harmonious and sustainable future. In addition, embracing others as part of our extended family demands that we actively listen to, appreciate, and honor our differences while celebrating our shared humanity.

In today's interconnected world, closer interfaith collaboration among global religious organizations is more essential than ever. PWR, RfP, IARF, TOU, and URI all play pivotal roles in promoting global interfaith dialogue. Establishing an inclusive and respectful global interfaith network, such as the United Religions as a counterpart to the UN, is essential. This initiative will foster a more cooperative and unified response to global challenges, promoting mutual understanding and collaboration.

The future of the world lies in the hands of the next generation. It is essential that we underscore the significance of grassroots movements and interfaith cooperation, while embedding the principles of global ethics into educational frameworks for young people. This

approach not only emphasizes the value of civic engagement and social activism, but also nurtures creative problem-solving and critical thinking—skills that are indispensable for addressing the challenges of tomorrow.

In our increasingly interconnected world, the necessity of harnessing advanced digital systems for global education has never been more pressing. Establishing a structured and regular educational program—be it weekly or monthly—can significantly enhance the sharing of knowledge and experiences, effectively transcending geographical and cultural boundaries. This initiative demands the creation of a comprehensive system that bridges cross-cultural, cross-religious, and cross-network divisions to promote global ethics and nurture a profound sense of global citizenship. Now is the time to take decisive action and construct this educational network, ensuring that future leaders are adept at navigating and addressing the intricate challenges of a global society.

The wisdom exchanged and actions undertaken today will have enduring repercussions, shaping a future in which subsequent generations can live in harmony and confront challenges with confidence. By integrating ethical teachings from various religious traditions, we can foster a more harmonious and peaceful global community. It is imperative that we commit to this cause, as the impact of our efforts will resonate through time, creating a world in which peace and mutual understanding prevail. Thank you.

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