



Care and Compassion. Sharing Values across Cultures and Religions  
Globethics.net Third International Conference  
25-29 January 2009, Kenya

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On the edge of the Athi plains of Kenya, about an hour-drive from Nairobi down the Mombasa Road, lie the Lukenya Hills, a rich and serene surrounding home to the Lukenya Getaway. In the large grounds of the compound, 46 participants from all over the world, belonging to various faiths and cultures, gathered for a five-day conference on the ways to share values across different systems of knowledge. They had previously exchanged thoughts and ideas over the internet, but most of them were meeting for the first time. After the opening evening, they started their first day of work by presenting their provisory group results to the plenum, then by reworking them within their group. The following day, they shared these improved results with envoys of the other groups, who challenged them. On the third day, participants set off to visit one of three social projects in and about Nairobi, to gain yet another perspective on their results. On the fourth day, a draft synthesis of all group reports was presented and discussed in the plenum. Aside group and plenary discussions, participants engaged in different ways of sharing values, including music, poetry, spiritual moments, planting tree as gifts to our planet, walking around watching wildlife, and dancing. This report recounts the conference and the participants' journey.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Opening session

As everyone had gathered in the plenary hall after dinner, night had already covered the surrounding savannah with her dark mantle.

Jesse N. K. Mugambi, Director of the Programme for Ethics in Eastern Africa, and host of the conference, gave a word of welcome to the participants.

Walter Fust, President of the Globethics.net Foundation Board, then shared reflections around his long-standing experience in intercultural cooperation. He was followed by Christoph Stueckelberger, Executive Director of Globethics.net, who described the overall vision of Globethics.net as defined by the newly formed Foundation Board, namely ‘to become the leading global platform of exchange of, and research on ethics and values,’ where ‘people with very different background come together in mutual respect.’ He also outlined the role of the conference in this mission.

Ariane Hentsch Cisneros, Programme Executive at Globethics.net, then gave more details and reflections about the origin of the conference as well as its objectives, programme, and methodology.

*Ariane Hentsch Cisneros*

“The primary, most concrete objective of the conference is to draft a general methodological framework on interreligious dialogue on ethics. The few days ahead are designed in such a way that the work group results will be presented, worked on, challenged, and finalised into guidelines for interreligious research and dialogue on ethics. How will we get there?

I am aware that the preparation process may have been difficult for some of you, included among the moderators, so before going into the particulars of the programme, I would like to say a few words about the origin of the conference and its methodology.

In my very first week at Globethics.net, I attended the second Globethics.net international conference on Fundamentalism and Ethics in the Netherlands. There were participants from all over the world, and from various religious traditions. As the day passed and the conference unfolded, I had a growing feeling that the classic conference methodology – presenting and discussing papers – was not giving justice to all participants. To simplify, participants from Europe and North America seemed very comfortable with the concept of critical thinking and presenting individual, innovative ideas, whereas participants from Asia, Africa, South America, presented ideas that had to do with activism, belonging with the community, magical realism, and credo, all which appeared difficult to confront with critical thinking. To give you a few examples, someone from Columbia was using linguistic analogies in a way the ancient Greek logicians would have forbidden. There was also a young African participant who was calling to a Third Concilium of the Vatican... Some participants were trying to play by the rules of others, and weren’t especially thriving at it. In fact, I was quite sad and shocked to see such potential and richness being lost because some had put the wrong shoes.

From there the idea emerged that there is a need to think about the methods of dialogue when we gather individuals from different cultures and religions. In the field of ethics especially, how can we best organise a dialogue so that everyone at the table can express herself in a way most relevant to her rich cultural and personal heritage?

It is a tricky question. As a first try, we wanted to organise a dialogue that would not only address the issue, but also implement some ideas we had about it. For instance, I wanted the dialogue process to

be participative and democratic, holistic, and fuzzy. A participative and democratic process meant as little intervention as possible. As a result, online preliminary discussions never really took off in some of the groups. But other groups managed, and things went quite well. In the case of the Kenya group, some participants met in person several times, thus eschewing the obstacles of online exchange. A holistic process meant to involve as many dimensions of our human being as possible in dialogue. This was of course difficult over the internet, but now that we finally meet in person, more will be possible. Finally, a fuzzy process meant for us to refrain from defining too much the content of the discussions in advance.

This approach made it all the more difficult to come around the work to be done, and the truth is, we received more than one message of frustration. But we also received positive signs and encouragement that this process was indeed very democratic and challenging in a constructive way.

Now is the time to get some fascinating discussion material and work together towards a collective result. Throughout the conference, we will have various ways of sharing and confronting our ideas, our culture, our art and folklore, our faiths... We will work in plenary and group sessions, we will catch the morning breeze during spiritual moments led by some of you, we will listen to local live music while having dinner in the bush, we will participate in a tree planting, we will meet activists in Nairobi and Utooni, and hopefully we will have a little spare time to casually meet with each other. In the days ahead, please use all your senses: your emotions as well as your mental faculties; your critical thinking as well and your flaming heart. Use your ego as well as your cosmic Self. Suck in the atmosphere... Care and compassion should not only be something that we talk about, but also something that we do and experience in our relationship with others. We are whole individuals with many resources to tap. Let us try our best and use them all.

To finish, I would like to give you two quotes that transmit the potential of this encounter in terms of mutual understanding, but also its paradoxical nature when it comes to giving voices an equal weight. One of the quotes was sent by one of you who found it in an article about US President Barack Obama:

‘We are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. For some strange reason, I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be. And you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the way God's universe is made; this is the way it is structured.’  
(Martin Luther King)

In our context, this can be translated as ‘We in the North can never what we ought to be until you in the South are what you ought to be’.

The other quote comes from a text by a Kenyan journalist wondering about the concept of African Renaissance. She writes:

‘This new trend – for lack of a better word? – of only appreciating those things African that are appreciated by the West – is it a form of self discovery or self awareness among the Africans, or is it another fad picked from the West? Is being more Africanised the new way for Africans to be white and branded on the global market? A conversation about my hair with a friend led me into thinking about the African renaissance differently. See, I love to keep my hair kinky and natural. I will braid it sometimes and most other times have a multi coloured and elaborate head scarf. But my hair remains ‘untreated’ and unstraightened as it were with ‘chemicals’. To this, my friend responds by telling me that I am so white.’ (Bertha Kang Ong Oi)

It is not my intention to discuss African Renaissance here. But I just wanted you to know that we are fully aware that we, as main organisers of this conference, bring along a cultural heritage and an ideal

of the future. In this respect we were glad and grateful to count with Prof. Jesse Mugambi to take the lead on some aspects of the programme.”

## **1.2 Preliminary group reports**

In the first plenary session on Monday morning, the groups presented the results of their online interactions over several months. Participants had been working on the following subthemes identified at the September 2007 Globethics.net workshop of experts in Caux, Switzerland: Defining Global Ethics; Ensuring a Successful Interreligious Dialogue on Ethics; Integrating Means and Methods of Sharing Values, in a Human-to-Human Approach; Balancing Power Relations, Inducing Real Transformation; and Sharing Values in the African Context.

### Group 1: Defining Global Ethics

*Sumner B. Twiss*

“The definition of global ethics encounters several problems. Language is the first issue: how can any given language – whose words are never neutral, have a history and a cultural background – be the base of global concepts such as universality or globalization? At the same time, of course, communication needs language.

Our group decided to work on three major perspectives: a) borders shall be overcome – we are living in a diverse world; b) practical problems need to be talked about: a human- and environment-oriented discussion has to take place; c) the Golden rule and human rights shall be considered as ground concepts.

To this last point: every human society has rules and it seems that a consensus exists on the validity of human rights. Actually one can only say that a consensus ‘seems’ to exist, because it was impossible (within our group) to come to a fundamental justification of these norms. Much opposition occurs when discussion comes to fundamental justification of human rights. Creating norms is an empirical process; it happens in concrete and contingent reality, and thus inherits those qualities. There was great scepticism in the group relative to the universalisation and fundamental justification of these norms. Certain participants think these aspects have to remain an aspiration; others think that reflecting on such meta-questions is a loss of time, and even a diversion: we have to think about urgent and concrete questions.

The group thought that certain minimal goals need to be found, such as good living for all, ‘all’ meaning every individual (health, education, decent life), people of the same nation living under governmental rules that have to be set, and finally all human beings (economic justice, global commons). Basic norms discussed so far include solidarity, as a concept that permits a balance between individual and community. We must keep in mind that certain nations have a bigger responsibility in international issues, and thus have to take a bigger role. This must not be made on the mode of charity, but of solidarity, because charity brings an idea of domination.

As the ‘butterfly effect’ wants it, an action on a side of the world can have a deep impact on the other side of the world – and this is true for bad things as well as for good ones.”

### Group 2: Ensuring a Successful Interreligious Dialogue on Ethics

*Ali Asghar Engineer*

“There was not so much debate in this group. Only a few people wrote something. A participant wrote a long e-mail where she insisted on the importance to establish a methodology, because without methodology one just doesn’t know how to proceed. Some fundamental questions have to be asked: are common values possible and do we even wish to find them?

The group needs to work with the following questions: what are common values? Do we need pluralism? What do we mean by values? The moderator came with a first way of answering these

questions. We shall make a difference between two types of values: 'fundamental values' that transcend all traditions, and 'instrumental values' that are local and contingent. We have to find common fundamental values and let the instrumental values remain diverse. But it is not always easy to make a difference between these two kinds of values. When we take an instrumental value to be a fundamental one, it leads to misunderstanding and conflict. Pluralism is very important. One cannot expect that everybody shares our way of dealing with instrumental values. We shall think pluralism within a fundamental unity."

### Group 3: Integrating Means and Methods of Sharing Values, in a Human-to-Human Approach

*Ingrid H. Shafer*

"I chose this group because I thought it would be a very interesting discussion. But the group never came to that point. There is a big work to be done in the next days. Why didn't people get involved a bit more in this discussion? Problems occurred with the Internet. It is possible that some people have had some problems with the connections. Another problem linked to the Internet is the one of human communication itself: it is not the same to communicate face to face or through the Internet. It sometimes leads to misunderstandings. This group has to determine means and methods for sharing values. There is a fundamental value that is to be shared, and this value is love. Love as an attempt to find the well-being of the other without waiting anything in return should be the basis for dialogue. There is also a method of communication that is not very often used and that is even not very well considered in the academic world: this method is telling stories. It allows the overcoming of cultural differences, it forms the spirit and makes one understand values. Stories point towards our common humanity. This is also the case for images, movies, sounds, music, etc."

### Group 4: Balancing Power Relations, Inducing Real Transformation

*Maricel Mena López*

"Three aspects of the topic were addressed in the discussions: community practice, religious perspective; political and economical incidence on the religions. But as a whole, more questions were raised than answers were brought. Community practice. We need to think from our own starting point. What is our location? Knowledge needs to be localised. Religious perspective. We need to criticize the values of our own religions. We have many preconceptions about many subjects and we need to be very conscious of that. In this domain, epistemological questions are a real challenge. We need to worry more about this fundamental problem. What is contextual and what is global? Political and economical incidences on religions. It is very important to learn about colonialism, postcolonialism, and history in general to understand the balance of power. Economical globalization is also a very central problem. Finally, are cultural differences as important as economic imbalances? What is the relationship between religion and public life? What are the implications of religious pluralism? All these questions need to be addressed."

### Group 5: Sharing Values in the Kenyan and East-African Contexts

*David W. Lutz*

"This group dealt with all precedent themes, seen in the context of Kenya and other countries in East Africa. Participants to this group come mainly from Kenya, but there are also two American living in Kenya and other participants coming from other African countries.

The group has already worked a lot. The communication by e-mail brought good discussions, but also a lot of frustration. Not all participants have a good access and a good connection to the Internet. At the end, the group still collected 35 pages of e-mails, and participants from Kenya organised four face-to-face meetings. The results of this group so far are a result of these two means of communication. The results split according to the themes of the other groups.

As far as defining global ethics is concerned, our group found that either the human ethic is universal or it isn't human, although being human is expressed in many ways, and universal ethics must be particular in order to be relevant. When the powerful universalise their particular, the ethic of the powerless goes underground, to await an opportunity to resurface constructively or destructively. Our approach to defining global ethics should be like drops forming a body of water, not like a lake from which we permit streams of water to flow. Our group thinks that Africa has much to offer to global ethics. Although African cultures differ from one another, these differences are in detail, not in essence.

On ensuring a successful interreligious dialogue on ethics, our group thought that in order for this dialogue to take place, people from different religions must respect each other, and instead of thinking we know more than others, we should listen to others. Religions have sometimes been abused by the rich and powerful, therefore, we cannot say that religions can automatically become instruments of promoting peace. Participants in interfaith discourse represent not only their religions, but also their societies. Religions are the custodians of the ethics of the societies in which they are dominant.

On integrating means and methods of sharing values in a human-to-human approach, we think there are many means and methods of sharing values other than academic discourse. Some obvious examples are theatre, music, dancing, poetry, art. A less obvious example is intermarriage. The political climate must permit these different means and methods of sharing values.

Finally, discussions on balancing power relations, inducing a real transformation led to reflecting on the various natures of power (power over vs. enabling power, oppressive power vs. nurturing power). There are two dominant models of power, the leader-follower or ruler-ruled model, and the centre-periphery model, both of which are unsatisfactory. It would be better to think of everyone at the periphery, in a circle. Then everyone could see everyone and no one would be more powerful than anyone else. Power as influence should be shared, not dispensed. In order to induce a real transformation, we need to bring global ethics down from the theoretical to the practical level. Global ethics needs to be local in order to be relevant.

Shanta Premawardhana, Programme Director for interreligious dialogue at the World Council of Churches, acted as the conference's general observer. He gave here his initial reaction to what he witnessed online.

*Shanta Premawardhana*

“Thank you for inviting me to be the general observer. I am particularly grateful because the methodology of interreligious dialogue is a serious research concern for me. My name is Shanta Premawardhana; I am a Baptist and the programme director for interreligious dialogue at World Council of Churches in Geneva, Switzerland. I was born and raised in Sri Lanka, a vastly Buddhist country, where I also studied. When I came to understand the gravity of the persecution of Buddhist by Christian colonial power, I could hardly believe that it was Christians who did that. Regardless of what religious community it is, those in power tend to oppress those who don't, and those in power seldom yield without significant pressure from below. I therefore understand what it means to be part of a religious minority. In a second part of my life, I went to the United States to work as a Pastor. I was then part of the majority religion, and got to understand what it means to be part of the religion of the majority. I thought of my mission in the United States in the following terms: I should help the majority Churches to understand their role in a different way, taking into account the point of view of the minority. For example, the missionaries shall think their action also from the

perspective of those who host them. Human beings are stuck in very strong paradigms. It is very difficult to take another perspective and to think from the point of view of another person. We must try to open our mental horizons. It is a very long and difficult struggle. I have been dealing with these issues for a long time in practice. I also feel the need for methodology, and am therefore very happy to be part of this conference.

I wish to share some observations with the assembly: the final goal of this week shall not be to have a very nice conference, but to have an impact on the world. Justice needs truth, and truth needs dialogue. There is a fundamental question to be raised here: who must be part of the dialogue? The people who will be around the table will have a tremendous impact on the result of the dialogue. The group of participants to this conference in Nairobi is in majority Christian. The result might then be coloured with Christianity, since it is very hard for every one of us to get out of oneself. We must remain very conscious of that problem.

Another problem of this group is that a majority of people have a western-style education. The spirits are gained in this way of thinking. These people are also in their majority middle class people. What is the voice that is not going to be heard in this conference? We must ask this question, because if we want to build peace, we need truth – and truth needs everybody's voice.

Another issue of this conference is the preparatory online work, which brings limitations as it keeps a significant portion of the world's population out of the communication loop

Finally one can also cite language as a problem. Not everybody is a native English speaker. Even for the ones who speak English very well, it is never the same as to express oneself in one's native language.

Dialogues need methodology. Dialogue is grounded on truth and the search for truth. Each participant of the conversation is a learner and a teacher. The aim of a good dialogue is to create a puzzle together. Which piece I put into the puzzle is not very important. Victory is not at stake, and arguing is not a problem. One should speak towards the centre and something new that nobody brought alone shall appear.

The steps should be as follows: (1) somebody initiates; (2) somebody supports; (3) team storms; (4) team observes (here is the time when new ideas emerge that nobody was looking for).

The organization of the group sessions is also important. The conversation shall be organized on the mode of a cross-communication. The moderator shall not have a frontal discourse. Everybody must be able to express himself and listen to the others.”

## **2. Working in Groups**

Throughout the conference, groups met daily to work on their assignments in seminar rooms or in the beautiful garden sheds (*bandas*) of the Lukenya Getaway. Participants would meet up and chat on tea breaks.

On Monday, participants introduced themselves to their group and gave their feedback and impressions of group work so far, including inspiring and challenging aspects. They then started to work on improving and/or completing the moderators' synthesis of their exchanges. At Tuesday morning's plenary session, groups met with each other in a dynamic configuration where delegates from each group were sent to listen to, and challenge the other four other groups. In the afternoon, participants brought back insights to their own workgroup and reworked their results accordingly. On Wednesday, participants chose one of three visits to projects in the region, as a way to confront their reflection to the social, ecological, and ecumenical realities of Kenya. As they were back in Lukenya, they met again in their group to integrate their impressions and new insights into their results, which were being synthesized in parallel by the conference General Observer Shanta Premawardhana and Globethics.net Executive Director Christoph Stueckelberger.

The group moderators or other observers report here their group's process throughout the week.

## 2.1 Defining Global Ethics

*Sumner B. Twiss and Gerhold K. Becker*

“The group began by discussing its pre-conference electronic exchanges (including sharing of, and responding to papers), which we did not find entirely satisfactory not only because we did not know one another but also because we were compelled in light of Globethics.net platform problems to maintain our own individual archives. We discussed the meanings attached to ‘globalization,’ ranging from a possible historical process to a possible neo-colonial (or at least neo-liberal) economic project with spin-offs (negative and positive) for other spheres of human life. With respect to methodology, we came to swift consensus that an inductive (bottom-up) approach to developing a global ethic – rather than a deductive (top-down) one – appears more viable for both pragmatic and principled reasons: e.g., in the former case, acceptability to diverse groups; in the latter, commitment to participatory multi-stakeholder involvement in something that will affect all. We agreed also that while the language of ‘global’ ethics may seem problematic to some (for reasons of perceived imposition), it nonetheless captures the crucial importance of focusing on practical transboundary moral issues regarding both human and nonhuman welfare. We spent considerable time in confirming our judgment about and conceptualization of these issues. As a group we also agreed that there is considerable world consensus on the content of existing human rights (if not the language) and that these should be regarded by us as a relatively indisputable component of a global ethic. With respect to the transboundary problems we identified, however, human rights need considerable supplementation in terms of intracultural and intercultural dialogue and negotiation on a variety of levels (e.g., local, national, regional, international). Since we envisage these dialogues as being as inclusive as possible within their respective contexts, we agreed that whatever we came up with in terms of guidelines or recommendations should be ‘metaphysically light.’ We further agreed that any global ethic worth its salt should be oriented toward not only respect for life and human dignity but also, and perhaps as important, the notion of responsibility, both short-term and long-term, for present and future generations of humans and the welfare of intricate ecosystems and the natural environment. Although the group began with a commitment to participatory deliberation and decision-making by all stakeholding groups, our various individual experiences with Kenyan NGOs and communities confirmed for us the necessity and wisdom of this approach to global ethics.”

## 2.2 Ensuring a Successful Interreligious Dialogue on Ethics

*John A. Raymaker*

“This group was very diverse being composed of one Buddhist, two Muslims, and four Christians including a Protestant, a Greek Orthodox and two Roman Catholics. The group included members from all continents. Perhaps due to this diversity, the group had only done a minimum of preparatory work through emails exchanges.

In Lukenya, after getting personally acquainted, the group proceeded to ‘brainstorming’ as to how we should go about discussing the various aspects of interreligious dialogue. The representative from Indonesia noted that we can distinguish at least three levels on which interreligious dialogue is conducted, namely the grassroots level, the institutional level and the academic level. A consensus emerged that discussion would be best conducted by assessing how interreligious dialogue is or should be conducted on each of those levels. It was further agreed that there are common values in approaches to defining global ethics but there are differences in how these are understood and applied. Analyzing what these common values are remained a primary focus of the discussion. The Buddhist representative noted that in her tradition, it is realized that the ‘common people’ have not the time or interest to explore academic niceties. The Buddha himself and the early and later traditions have always used ‘skilful means’ to teach uneducated people the core meaning of

Buddhism. Skilful means may be compared to Jesus' use of parables and metaphors to teach the people. The Muslim representative bemoaned the misuse of core teachings of the Koran and the Hadith by extremists. This falsifies the nature of Islam's peaceful message.

Let us summarize some of the main points of how the group discussed how interreligious dialogue is conducted on the three levels mentioned above.

1) On the grassroots level, we have to distinguish between two approaches. In some traditional societies interfaith dialogue has often been part of life in practice and theory. However in many societies which have been subject to an increase of new migrants, we can witness the rise of many challenges to harmonious living in a short term. The well-informed and/or economically secure people tend to agree more readily that there are common ethical values than do less informed or less economically well-off persons. This may be due to fear, ignorance, bias, insecurity, racial stereotyping, etc. Such negative realities can remain latent as well as manifest. This will hinder the process of dialogue and engagement. Dialogue within self (inner conversion) may be helpful – even needed – in remedying hindrances to dialogue. Is there such a thing as multiple religious identities which can be helped through a process of inner conversion? Dialogue is to learn about different values and to grow in compassion. There are common values but they can be distorted by institutions including the media.

2) On the institutional level, religious doctrines and traditions rooted in the past were less pluralistic than are most modern societies. Some problems that arise today on the institutional level are that religious texts and teachings are used selectively and not holistically, e.g. the Christian story of the Good Samaritan or Mohammed's inclusive Medina Charter are either ignored or misunderstood. Political and/or religious leaders can and often do abuse/ manipulate/ control teachings/ concepts to promote their own ends, e.g., at one time a government from South East Asia discouraged the Buddhist teaching of being content with a simple life for it impedes a materialistic life style.

3) On the academic level, theologians' interpretations differ among themselves and from those of religious studies departments. There is a lack of inter-disciplinary cooperation – even of adequate intra-disciplinary consultations. This amounts to a lack of accountability. The role of a global ethics is to foster trust among humans based on values. There can be legitimate forms of cooperation based on enlightened understandings and on accepting differences. Professors should be partners as well as competitors if they are to do justice to both value-laden teachings and alleged value-free research. There is no dialogue or interaction between economic and theology departments. One result of this is that ethics, both religious and secular, remain unaddressed or without due application. An ethics of human rights, for example, can be based on both religious and/or secular values. That is to say that religious as well as secular values/ traditions can be resources for ethics today.

Finally, the following points were also brought out. The group clarified its meaning with some examples. Religious teachings and ideas have been sources of inspiration for ethical reforms (abolition of slavery, justice and peace). This can best occur when the power of the continuity of religious traditions can be adapted to present circumstances. These traditions and their power of continuity can be fortified by revisiting (updating) the meaning of the teachings as they were initially formulated from how teachings and rules can be applied as needed in our modern, pluralistic societies.

Hopefully, it can be shown that humanistic, secular ethics do not conflict in principle with the various religious ethics of the world. Doing so would foster human understanding. Granted that one cannot compromise with evil, there is always need of a deeper appreciation of other people. On such a view, one's religious convictions underlie and reinforce values. This means that dialogue is that of life in action.

Dialogue between secular ethics and religious ethics should be encouraged. The group briefly discussed but left open the hermeneutical processes that can deepen our understanding of and respect for human rights and fundamental reasons. It is sometimes said that in Africa everything a

person does is religious. People should know where the other person is coming from. Instead of pointing the differences, one must respect contextuality.

The group noted that there are many NGOs and civil societies drawing attention to issues that are all too often ignored by the powers that be. Such NGOs might have to be provocative to start a dialogue.

### **2.3 Integrating Means and Methods of Sharing Values, in a Human-to-Human Approach**

*Amélie Vallotton*

“The very first discussion in this group dealt with a word-meaning misunderstanding that occurred online, and which brought immediately a second one with it: the moderator thought one participant was upset while he actually just intellectually disagreed, and had no personal emotion about it. This showed how online communication hindered to some extent a sound understanding of the other’s intentions and feelings. It was not obvious that these two elements were actually so central in what was supposed to be a purely academic exchange. Participants of the group agreed that it was now necessary to meet face-to-face.

As participants then introduced themselves, they spontaneously put more emphasis on their personal interest in the conference theme rather than their academic background. This reflected a central aspect of the conference, namely that participants were called to refer to their personal interests and convictions as much as to their academic knowledge and methods.

When participants discussed how to go about their common task, two strong oppositions emerged: on epistemology and methodology, and on content. One participant wanted indeed to focus it on the daily struggles of the poor and repressed, whereas the group thought it was another group’s mandate. The spontaneous brainstorming revealed three focus areas: the means of sharing values; the hermeneutical and epistemological approaches; and the content of dialogue. After the categories were presented, discussed and reformulated within the group, participants began to fill posters with their ideas corresponding to each area.

During the first day, the group dynamic was clearly organized around one articulate participant, who led the discussion, asked questions, answered them, and reformulated what other people say.

On the second day, the group met again after the plenary session where each group’s results had been presented. The group discussed questions raised from other groups in the morning and the input they received from the work and the results of other groups. There was again an opposition within the group as to whether practical issues should be discussed here. The answer of the group was again that these issues should not be dealt with in group 3.

On the third day, as participants came back from their excursion, they shared their experience, which for some had been more emotional than for others. This seemed to create some bonding. The moderator then distributed a first draft of the discussion, which one participant found too theoretical. There seemed to be some confusion as to what was actually expected from the groups at the end of the conference. Participants agreed to work on the document again when the conference was over.

The process organized by Globethics.net Executive Director and the conference general observer for the last plenary session found some opposition in the group, who felt their reflections and those of the other groups should not be merged into one single document. As an alternative, they suggested that the five group reports become five chapters in a book, with the overall draft as editorial.

As a conclusion, the moderator expressed her appreciation of how the group had worked cooperatively together, and even noted the loving relationship that she could observe emerging during the week.”

## 2.4 Balancing Power Relations, Inducing a Real Transformation

*Jack A. Hill*

“Process: this group utilised a thoroughly inductive method in developing a working paper on balancing power relations in interreligious dialogue. Although five of the six members who participated in the process had shared email correspondence beforehand, we essentially started from scratch in addressing the issue of power imbalances in interreligious dialogue. We spent the first Monday session introducing ourselves to one another. When it was found that several members of the group could not easily understand the moderator’s English (English was not the moderator’s first language), the group asked a member (myself) for whom English was the first language to ‘co-moderate.’ We then agreed that three questions were particularly pertinent: ‘What is power?’; ‘What have been our experiences of power imbalances?’ and ‘What is required for dialogue that takes these imbalances seriously?’, and brainstormed on these questions. The group asked me to type up a draft of the questions and our brainstorming, and this became the initial working paper for our Monday afternoon discussions. Then, this pattern was repeated in the next two small group sessions (Tuesday morning and evening) and a fourth and semi-final draft was prepared Wednesday morning, that also integrated a section on our experiences of power that was typed up by another member of the group. Each draft represented a substantial re-working of the previous one.

Challenges: The on-line preparatory work that commenced prior to the Nairobi meeting presented special challenges for several members of the group. Some experienced difficulties with utilising the Globethics.net website. Not everyone in the group responded to the initial discussion questions that were emailed by the designated moderator for the group. When members did respond, the conversation tended to move in different directions, such that it was difficult to discern a common agenda or focus. Once together in Nairobi, the main challenge was having enough time *between* meetings (and other activities) to write drafts or revisions of earlier drafts with substantial additional content. We needed about twice as many days.

Positive elements: However, once we began to meet face-to-face at the Lukenya Getaway in Kenya, we worked very well together. Almost from the beginning, there was a wonderful esprit de corps in the group, and all members seemed particularly intent on, and adept at, listening to one another. The drafts of the working paper were always both well received, and yet critically reviewed, in terms of deficiencies or misunderstandings. The cross-cultural composition of the group – which included participants from Latin America, Africa (2), Indonesia, North America and Europe – made for rich, searching discussions about the nature of power, how power is experienced in very different cultural and socio-economic contexts, and what is really needed for transformative dialogue. We also shared lots of laughter, even when we ‘agreed to disagree’ on certain issues, which were not many. I think we bonded as a group, and that helped build a great deal of trust, and that in turn led to a document that went far beyond what any of us could have developed in isolation from one another.”

## 2.5 Sharing Values in the African Context

*David W. Lutz*

“Since a majority of the members of Group Five had met face-to-face several times in Nairobi in the months preceding the conference, the group meetings during the conference were a continuation of the earlier meetings, with a few new members from Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria and Switzerland. The meetings were co-moderated by Jesse Mugambi and me. I also took notes with my laptop during the meetings. Everyone in the group contributed ideas. The degree of consensus was high, perhaps surprisingly high, given the ethnic and religious diversity of the group.

A specific example of how the group worked is that one group member stated that the approach of Christian missionaries in Africa was top-down; those who knew told those who did not know. Another group member disagreed, saying this was not true of all Christian missionaries in Africa. Then another group member said that some Islamic members also used the top-down approach. The statement was modified to remove the word ‘Christian’ and say ‘some (but not all) missionaries in Africa’. At this point, all members of the group were satisfied. At the end of the process, everyone agreed that it had gone well.”

## **2.6 Working across Groups: Sharing and Challenging Results**

On the second day, there was a dynamic plenary exchange where each group sent ‘delegates’ to other groups in order to find out about their results and challenge them. One participant shared her observations of the process.

*Amélie Vallotton*

“In our group, it was very easy to distribute ourselves in other groups, every participant had a very clear idea of the group he or she wished to visit, and all other groups were directly represented in these choices. It showed pretty well the strong diversity of interests that animated our group. As I visited other groups, it was really astonishing to see how diverse were the methods adopted. Each group has created something like a group culture. It was also interesting to see that some participants were keeping their reflection very close to reality, discoursing on what people’s real lives are like, telling stories about what they experienced with a particular human group, etc., whereas other remained fully theoretical. The same ‘conflict’ that opposed one participant to the rest of our Group was present in the bigger group of all participants.”

## **3. Sharing Our Values in Different Ways**

A central point of the conference was to allow participants to share values through means different than academic discourse, to which the great majority of them were mostly accustomed. Some participants volunteered and proposed a few spiritual moments at the beginning of each day; trees offered by the Lukenya Getaway’s owners were planted in the surroundings grounds; different styles of African music was performed; and participants finally had a chance to meet activists outside the conference perimeter – an opportunity to plunge into Kenya’s social and economic realities.

### **3.1 Spiritual moments**

Every morning after breakfast, participants freely shared moments of recollection in different religious and cultural styles.

On Monday, Asghar Ali Engineer from India addressed ethical behaviour in the Qur’an, by commenting three verses related to compassion. Someone cannot be called a true Muslim unless s/he is merciful for nature and the whole universe, lives in peace within the diversity of cultures, languages and religions, and be of assistance to the weak, the poor, the oppressed, etc. He emphasized how these three statements related to compassion indicate that those ethics need to be respected by anyone wishing to be called a true Muslim. Also, prophets not named in the Qur’an must be respected. Only 24 of the 1,034,000 have been named. The moment ended with a prayer.

On Tuesday, Jayendra Soni from Germany proposed an introduction to *batba yoga* to a couple of dozen participants. Some watched while others engaged into the physical exercises on the carpeted floor of the plenary hall.

*Jayendra Soni*

“In introducing the Yoga moment I attempted to gradually move from the gross to the subtle, namely, through physical movements of the body in a series of positions (forming a cycle of 24), to breathing exercises (including breathing through each nostril in a regular manner), to sitting comfortably in one position and inwardly watching the flow of thoughts and thinking about them as they flow. The aim was to encourage whoever is interested in it, to practice these exercises on his or her own, in order to try and get to know oneself better. The idea is to let the thoughts take their own course and to watch them carefully without influencing them: the thoughts which come and go incessantly are one’s own property and it is essential to be in touch with them regularly in a relaxed manner, as an important step towards self-knowledge, and indirectly as a help to understanding others.”

In the meantime, in one of the seminar rooms, Parichart Suwanbubbha was leading a meditation time with the Buddhist tradition, using a singing bowl. She first told about her weekly visit to a prison where she leads similar meditation times for juvenile delinquents, and their appreciation of this practice which, according to what they say, brings peace and a feeling of success within them. Then she invited participants to relax and concentrate for a moment on the continuous sound she produced by rubbing a wooden striker on the bowl’s rim. Finally, she read two texts in the Vajrayana tradition presented as ‘Ecological precepts’ by the Green Gulch Zen Center in San Francisco:

‘Three Pure Precepts

I vow to refrain from all action that ignores interdependence.

This is our restraint.

I vow to make every effort to act with mindfulness.

This is our activity.

I vow to live for the benefit of all beings.

This is our intention.’

‘Ten guiding Precepts

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,

We vow to not kill.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,

We vow to not take what is not given.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,

We vow to not engage in abusive relationship.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,

We vow to not speak falsely or deceptively.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,

We vow to not harm others through poisonous thought or substance.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,

We vow to not dwell on past errors.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,

We vow to not speak of self separate from others.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,

We vow to not possess any thing or form of life selfishly.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,

We vow to not harbor ill will toward any plant, animal, or human being.

Knowing how deeply our lives intertwine,

We vow to not abuse the great truth of the Three Treasures.’

On Wednesday morning, John M. Itty from India proposed a short reflection on consumerism based on a passage from the Bible.

*John M. Itty*

“And three of the thirty chief men went down, and came about harvest time to David at the cave of Abdullam, when a band of Philistines was encamped in the valley of Rephaim. David was then at the stronghold; and the garrison of the Philistines was then at Bethlehem. And David said longingly. ‘O that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate!’ Then the three mighty men broke through the camp of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem which was by the gate, and took and brought it to David. But he would not drink of it; he poured it out to the LORD, and said, “Far be it from me, O LORD, that I should do this. Shall I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their lives?” Therefore, he would not drink it. These things did the three mighty men.’ (2 Samuel 23:13-17)’

“We are living in an age of consumerism. In the past, the aim of consumption was to meet the biological needs. Later, conventional and social needs and desire for self-esteem enlarged the list of needs. Today, people consume not to satisfy the needs referred to above, but to make the neighbours envious. It must be admitted that the present ethical crisis springs largely from exaltation of unlimited consumption as the be all and end all of life. Consumerist greed begets the following ethical issues:

- The desire to lead a life beyond one’s means encourages people to rely on loans and credit cards. This is the reason behind the current financial crisis.
- Aggressions, wars, acquisitions and plunders both regionally and globally.
- Ecological, environmental and climatic catastrophe.
- Price/cost consciousness devoid of ethics.

We consider only the price we pay as the value of the product. People of poor countries who produce these goods bear a cost to make them available for the rich consumers in advanced countries. Starvation of millions in poor countries is the actual cost of this. In the biblical passage referred to above, David got water from the well of his choice for free, but suddenly he became cost-conscious. If the cost endangers the welfare of others, one has to renounce consumption.”

John M. Itty’s contribution was followed by that of Nikolaos Dimitriadis from Greece, who led a prayer in the Christian Orthodox faith and recounted a personal story of friendship over religious borders.

*Nikolaos Dimitriadis*

“In my morning meditation I would like to speak about the importance of prayer. Prayer according to St. John Chrysostom (in his *On Prayer – Peri Prosexhs*) is a large and almighty weapon, a great possession, an insurance to the coming together of man with God; it is a medicine, an never-ending richness, the veins of the soul in which the grace of God flows freely through, an invitation to the eternal life. Prayer makes man alike with the angels. Man, himself, in conversation with God.

Prayer is a skill thus it requires practice and continued effort. It must be made with a zealous soul, with deep concentration, so that we realize what exactly we are doing, who we are standing in front of, and of course who are we in conversation with.

I would like to pray now using a Christian Orthodox Morning Prayer and others, as well as a Psalm about care and compassion:

‘In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen./ Glory to You, Christ our God, our hope, Glory to You!/ Heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, present in all places and filling all things, Treasury of Goodness and Giver of life: come and abide in us. Cleanse us from every stain of sin and save our souls, O Gracious Lord./ Holy God. Holy Mighty. Holy Immortal Have mercy on us. (3x)/ Glory to the Father, and the Son and the Holy

Spirit, both now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen/ All Holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, forgive our sins. Master, pardon our transgressions. Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities, for the glory of Your name./ Lord, have mercy. (3x)/ Glory to the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen/ Our Father, Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil./ For Yours is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, both now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.'

Now a Prayer of Thanksgiving:

'As I rise from sleep, I thank you, Holy Trinity, for because of your great goodness and patience, you were not angry with me, an idler and sinner, nor have you destroyed me in my sins, but have shown your usual love for me. And when I was prostrate in despair, you raised me to glorify with your power. Enlighten now my mind's eye, open my mouth to study your words and understand your commandments, to do your will and sing to you in heartfelt adoration, and praise your most holy name, of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and forever and to the ages of ages. Amen.'

And another prayer:

'Glory to you, King, God almighty, who through your divine and loving providence have consented that I, an unworthy sinner, should rise from sleep and obtain entrance into your holy house. Accept, Lord, the voice of my prayer as you accept those of your holy and spiritual powers; and that not through my defiled lips, but from a pure heart and humble spirit, praise may be offered to you so that I also, with the bright lamp of my soul, may become a companion of the wise virgins and glorify you, God the Word, who is glorified in the Father and the Spirit. Amen.'

The psalm about God's compassion, Psalm of David 103:

'Bless the LORD [...] Who forgiveth all thine iniquities [...] Who redeemeth thy life from destruction [...]. The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy. [...] For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him. [...] But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children [...].'

Lastly, I want to share with you a personal experience from the past about how love and compassion for people unites believers from different religious traditions:

Three friends, a Christian Orthodox, a Christian Catholic and a Muslim that shared the same apartment in a different country of theirs, after 10 years of friendship they returned to that country for a reunion. They discovered that a very close friend of theirs had passed away. They went to the cemetery to put some flowers on his grave and to honour him. By the time they arrived there they started praying together holding their hands each of them according to his religious tradition."

Finally, on Thursday morning, Kamran Mofid from Iran and the UK told something of his life-path , and then presented texts by Persian poets Jalal al-Din Rumi (1207-1273) and Khadjeh Shams-e-Din Mohammad Hafez-e-Shirazi (1315-1390), accompanied with a moment of music from Rumi's native region organized by Kiarash Aramesh.

*Kamran Mofid*

“According to Rumi, the utmost mission of human beings is love. Friends, you have come from afar, how happy we are. African brothers, you must be proud of yourselves for your struggles and victories.

I was born in Tehran, Iran, emigrated at age 19 to England to further my education, and married my English wife, Annie in 1974. I completed studies in Economics in Canada, and ended up earning a doctorate in England. From 1980 onwards, for the next twenty years, I taught economics in universities, enthusiastically demonstrating how economic theories provided answers to problems of all sorts. I got quite carried away by the beauty, the sophisticated elegance, of complicated mathematical models and theories.

But gradually I started to have an empty feeling. I was telling my students to create wealth, but I did not tell them for what reason. I did not tell them that, without humanity, economics is a house of cards built on shifting sands. These conflicts caused me much frustration and alienation, leading to heartache and despair. I needed to rediscover myself and a real-life economics. After a proud twenty-year or so academic career, I became a student all over again. I would study theology and philosophy, disciplines nobody had taught me when I was a student of economics and I did not teach my own students when I became a teacher of economics.

It was at this difficult time that I came to understand that I needed to bring spirituality, compassion, ethics and morality back into economics itself, to make this dismal science once again relevant to and concerned with the common good.

It was now that I made the following discoveries:

- \* the root of happiness is ethical behaviour
- \* most economics students today learn that Adam Smith was the ‘father of modern economics’ but not that he was also a moral philosopher. Students today ignore his insight that the pursuit of wealth should not take precedence over social and moral obligations, and his belief that a ‘divine Being’ gives us ‘the greatest quantity of happiness’.
- \* the focus of economics should be on the benefit and the bounty that the economy produces, on how to let this bounty increase, and how to share the benefits justly among the people for the common good.
- \* ‘economic rationality’ in the shape of neo-liberal globalisation is socially and politically suicidal.
- \* every apparently economic choice is, in reality, a social choice.
- \*the moral crises of global economic injustice today are integrally spiritual: they signal something terribly amiss in the relationship between human beings and God.
- \*where the moral life and the mystery of God’s presence are held in one breath – because the moral life is the same as the mystical life – the moral agency may be found for establishing paths towards a more just, compassionate and sustainable way of living.
- \*it is the belief in collective responsibility and collective endeavour that allows individual freedom to flourish.
- \*there are three justifications for the common good which are not commonly discussed in economics: 1. human beings need human contact, or sociability; 2. human beings are formed in the community – their education and training in virtue (their preferences) are elements of the common good; 3. a healthy love for the common good is a necessary component of a fully developed personality.
- \*The marketplace is not just an economic sphere, ‘it is a region of the human spirit’. Profound economic questions are divine in nature; in contrast to what is assumed today, they should be concerned with the world of the heart and spirit.
- \*The greatest achievement of modern globalisation will eventually come to be seen as the opening up of possibilities to build a humane and spiritually enriched globalised world through the universalising and globalising of compassion.

Now I would like to read a couple of poems which helped me going through the deep personal, intellectual, professional crisis that I mentioned earlier.

'Joseph to his father in Canaan shall return, don't despair walk on;  
and Jacob's hut will brighten with flowers, don't despair walk on.  
Aching hearts heal in time, vanished hopes reappear,  
the disparate mind will be pacified, don't despair walk on.  
As the spring of life grows the newly green meadow,  
roses will crown the sweet nightingale's song, don't despair walk on  
If the world does not turn to your whims these few days,  
cosmic cycles are preparing to change, don't despair walk on.  
If desperation whispers you'll never know God,  
it's the talk of hidden games in the veil, don't despair walk on.  
O heart, when the vast flood slashes life to its roots,  
Captain Noah waits to steer you ashore, don't despair walk on.  
If you trek as a pilgrim through sands to Kaabeh  
with thorns lodged deep in your soul shouting why, don't despair walk on  
Though oases hide dangers and your destiny's far,  
there's no pathway that goes on forever, don't despair walk on.  
My trials and enemies face me on their own,  
but mystery always backs up my stand, don't despair walk on.  
Hafez, weakened by poverty, alone in the dark,  
this night is your pathway into the light, don't despair walk on.'  
(Hafez)

'What is to be done, O Moslems? for I do not recognize myself.  
I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Gabr, nor Moslem.  
I am not of the East, nor of the West, nor of the land, nor of the sea;  
I am not of Nature's mint, nor of the circling' heaven.  
I am not of earth, nor of water, nor of air, nor of fire;  
I am not of the empyrean, nor of the dust, nor of existence, nor of entity.  
I am not of India, nor of China, nor of Bulgaria, nor of Saqsin  
I am not of the kingdom of Iraqian, nor of the country of Khorasan  
I am not of the this world, nor of the next, nor of Paradise, nor of Hell  
I am not of Adam, nor of Eve, nor of Eden and Rizwan.  
My place is the Placeless, my trace is the Traceless;  
Tis neither body nor soul, for I belong to the soul of the Beloved.  
I have put duality away, I have seen that the two worlds are one;  
One I seek, One I know J One I see, One I call.  
He is the first, He is the last, He is the outward, He is the inward;  
I know none other except 'Ya Hu' and 'Ya man Hu.'  
I am intoxicated with Love's cup, the two worlds have passed out of my  
ken ;  
I have no business save carouse and revelry.  
If once in my life I spent a moment without thee,  
From that time and from that hour I repent of my life.  
If once in this world I win a moment with thee,  
I will trample on both worlds, I will dance in triumph for ever.  
O Shamsi Tabriz, I am so drunken in this world,  
That except of drunkenness and revelry I have no tale to tell.'  
(Rumi)''

There followed a contribution by Hassan Kinyua Omari from Kenya.

*Hassan Kinyua Omari*

'I thank God for who I am. I had trouble understanding the other, so I studied comparative religion, and since then my life has changed. We can reason together, we fight out of ignorance. Muslims and Christians are cousins fighting. We must love each other – love belongs to all religions, God created the creatures to worship Him, even when sleeping with your wife.'

### **3.2 Planting Trees as a Gift to our Planet Earth**

After tea break on Monday, a tree-planting ceremony organized by Jesse Mugambi and sponsored by the Lukenya owner, Timothy Malinda, took place around the Lukenya grounds. Participants representing different roles, continents or organizations planted ten trees, acacias and fig trees. This action symbolized care and hope – care because care is also care about our environment, and hope because this conference should have an impact in real life and should continue to grow after the conference. Here is a taste of what was said during the planting:

*John Mbiti*, most senior conference participant

"I now live in Switzerland, but I was born and raised in this country, where I have many fond memories of my life as a child. I am very moved as I am planting this tree because just the other day, I found my exercise book where as a schoolboy I had written on the values of trees."

*Christoph Stueckelberger*, Globethics.net

"There is great significance in the ethics of planting trees."

*Mutebo Kasongo*, Africa

"The campus where I live and work in the Democratic Republic of Congo is surrounded by trees, which we are making a point in not cutting. The more compassionate we feel about trees, the more we do about life. If we cut trees, we cut our life."

*Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar*, Asia

"Asia is the greatest continent. Rich and poor people live in Asia. I plant this tree on behalf of all of them."

*Jack Hill*, North America, planted a tree on behalf of *Maricel Mena López*, South America, absent from the ceremony.

*Ingrid H. Shafer*, North America

"You know that our new American president has Kenyan origins. I hope this will help bridge the world. In many years, it is the first time I am proud to be an American, even if I am Austrian by birth."

*Gerold K. Becker*, Europe

"I am deeply moved and humbled to represent Europe, who left deep and painful marks in Africa. May this tree be a token of understanding in the future, through dialogue for peace."

*Pragati Sabni*, Asia

"Asia is defined by interconnectedness. This tree is a token for the beginning of life, cooperation, and understanding."

*Judy Warubuu*, Fellowship of Christian Councils and Churches in the Great Lakes and the Horn of Africa (FECCLAHA), Africa

“I appreciate the value of environment in our programme on women in armed conflicts is very significant. These women depend on the soil for their survival.”

### 3.3 Music and stories

During the opening evening, participants listened to the Moipei Sisters, a formation of four young Kenyan sisters who sang modern and traditional songs, some of them of Christian inspiration. It was touching and inspiring to listen to the sundry titles as an illustration of the sources of an African culture. The sisters, triplets Magdalene, Mary, and Martha, and their younger sister Seraphine are Unicef Kenya child ambassadors.

There was another opportunity to sense some African culture at Tuesday’s dinner in the bush. Kayamba Africa presented a mix of modern and traditional music. This vocal based traditional and ethnic inclined six-member music group strives to create a balance between traditional Africa music. Their rhythm is mainly Kenyan with a mixture of danceable beats to create a fusion combination called ‘Neo-traditional’ music. With a heavy leaning towards *a cappella*, the group’s unique and versatile combination has won them great admiration from audiences around Kenya and Africa. Kayamba Africa stands among the most prolific bands in Kenya, who played all over the nation and internationally.

Aidan Msafiri from Tanzania presented a riddle in the African style .

Obiora Ike from Nigeria told three stories from Nigeria, one of them about Adam and Eve.

*Obiora Ike*

“In Nigeria, my people in Eboland country have it that God used to live on Earth and interacted with the people. The most enchanted man and woman, Adam and Eve, lived in great satisfaction. Yet one morning, Adam came to God complaining about Eve. Interrogated by God, Eve in turn complained about Adam, and when asked by God to stop, pointed her broom at Him. God as a reaction took the sun and moon with him and disappeared!”

John Mbiti from Nigeria and Christoph Stueckelberger also shared stories from their homeland.

The night finished with an all-round dance with everybody. The next morning, all reported to have had the soundest night of sleep!

### 3.4 Meeting the realities of Kenya

We cannot talk about ethics, and global ethics for that matter, without having at least some concrete idea of the various realities of the human conditions throughout the world. The organisers wanted to expose participants to Kenyan initiatives in the fields of environmental, social, and civic action to enable them to confront their reflection to ‘real-life’ endeavours aimed at bettering people’s life conditions. On Wednesday morning, participants embarked on one of three visits according to their personal interest.

*Utooni Self-Help Community Group*

About 90 km south east of Nairobi, this community was started with some 130 families living in extreme poverty. As one staff of the National Council Churches of Kenya wanted to help his sick mother but could not because of the lack of water. He decided to mobilize his community to build dams. As a result they have achieved local ecology improvement during the past thirty years through responsible community leadership taking into account cultural, religious and survival concerns. Participants followed a guided tour of the project and met with the community.

*Ecumenical Centre for Justice and Peace*

The Ecumenical Centre for Justice and Peace (ECJP) based in Nairobi has been involved from 1991 in civic education during the past four years in collaboration with the Programme of Ethics in East

Africa. ECJP is a programme of the Ecumenical Trust, which comprises inter-religious groups committed to working for peace through justice. It seeks to provide a forum for men and women of all walks of life to come together and bring about a just and peaceful society. The Centre believes in peaceful co-existence of all faiths. Its mission is to provide efficient and effective civic education in Kenya, as well as to evolve a politically informed citizenry through civic education. It seeks to empower all citizens to participate fully in the socioeconomic and political affairs of their country. During the visit, emphasis was put on responsible community leadership.

#### *Line Saba, Kibera*

Within Africa's third-largest slum district, a community of 300 families living in Line Saba have improved the local ecology despite great constraints in infrastructure. They have access to reticulated water and have improved sanitation through collaborative efforts across cultures and religions. Participants visited the sanitation project and interacted with the leaders as well as with the numerous volunteers involved.

The impact of the visit to Line Saba seemed to be the strongest on the visitors, who repeatedly referred to it during the latter part of the conference. The visit and the interaction with the Line Saba volunteers appear to have achieved the organizers' objectives to put reflection on (global) ethics into perspective, and highlight the need to link it to the human experience, which necessarily starts with its local dimension and the need to first confront survival concerns before turning to more abstract moral issues.

#### **4. Drafting the Globethics.net Principles for Sharing Values**

At Thursday's morning plenary, Christoph Stueckelberger and Shanta Premawardhana presented the results of their overnight work (see Appendices).

They had been drafting a digest of all group results so far, identifying common ideas, major trends in the groups' outlook on the subject, and streamlining them into one single document.

At the plenary session, participants were asked by the presenter to form group of two to three participants from different workgroups to discuss the document. These newly-formed groups were assigned to analyze and critique the structure of the document, check if some important topics were missing or if some unresolved questions were presented as if they had been solved, and analyze and critique the principles that have been taken out of the workgroup's reflections. They were informed that notes taken in these groups would be taken into account when revising the document. Each group was asked to elect one subject, to submit to the assembly for discussion.

As a matter of fact, participants spontaneously formed five groups – as if returning to their week-long configuration – and discussed the synthesis. Some of the insights and comments brought back by the reporters triggered exchanges between participants.

The first reporter raised the question of the impact of shock on values. The group had recognized the necessity of exposure to reality before a dialogue is started. In this sense, information and experience are fundamental for developing such values as care and compassion.

The second reporter tackled the issue of the constructive *vs.* destructive nature of values. A value, when it is applied, can indeed have the opposite effect of that expected. To this comment, other participants replied that:

- 'it is a question of methodology, the question being not the nature of the value itself, but how it has been applied.'
- 'we should be careful with this statement, because methods already encapsulate values.'

- 'it is in fact not a question of methodology, but a question of definition: intention of doing good does not equal doing good itself.'
- 'we had better think about how a value can become an action rather than how a value can destroy itself.'
- 'values are just words. Only acts are real. What these acts mean in a particular context is what matters. Values can help interpret acts that we think are valuable. We should think about acts that are really helping and only then, think about words that may express them.'
- 'methods should be developed in action and not in theory. The way we worked together in this conference is an example of a possible way of doing. It should now be analyzed and critiqued so that a methodology can come out of this.'

The third reporter mentioned the concern about the provision of livelihood, to which a participant replied by asking whether 'provision of livelihood is a value or a precondition for human life?'

The fourth reporter mentioned the dialectics of global *vs.* contextual ethics. Are they presented in the document as two separates? Could there be a global ethics that is not contextual at all? Following this seminal question, participants engaged in a heated debate. Here are some of their reflections:

- 'The question is more about how we manage values coming from the top and values coming from below.'
- 'All ethics are fundamentally contextual. But we can find something common. Global ethics is a kind of movement, fundamentally contextual, informed by more and more diversity.'
- 'The link made between particular and contextual, and then between universal and global is wrong. Globality is actually itself a context: global ethics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not the same as global ethics in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The 'global context' is still a context, and one should avoid the dichotomy, which is confusing.'
- 'This problem is actually the fundamental problem of philosophy opposing Plato and Aristotle. We are certainly not going to solve it now. But it still expresses his point of view: there is no universal, since universal is nothing else but the summation of all the particulars. If it is understood in another way, the universality can directly be bounded with the dominant culture. There are always contradictions between particulars and in our world, where there are such balance of power, it is always the dominant culture that imposes its views on conflicting values. Having multiple local ethics become a global ethics would be the only legitimate way of getting a global ethics.'
- 'Dichotomies should not be avoided, but should be dealt with. Universal is not cumulation, but convergence.'
- 'Football can be a nice analogy to better think this opposition between global and contextual. The position of the ball on the field determines the focus of the observer. If the ball is in a particularly significant area of the field, i.e. the goal, then all the attention is focused on this particular area and on the ball. If the ball is in the middle of the field, the focus will enlarge to the game and the positions of the players, etc. The focus of the observer can be either local or global, depending on the issue, the context, etc.'
- 'The process of defining global ethics is at the level of principles. It has to be based on convergences.'
- 'We should stop with these discussions and be interested in the real problems people are facing. If one applies values with sincerity, and without power, it will automatically be good and helpful.'

The fifth reporter observed that the document does not take into account the methodology of this conference. One should make something out of the processes that have taken place in the conference itself. The points discussed included:

- ‘There is confusion between methods and methodology. Methods are the practical steps of a process, and methodology is the presumptions that are behind these methods, and thus is also a value.’
- ‘One should maybe just tell the story of this conference. It could be 10 times more useful than coming up with guidelines.’
- ‘Methodology of the conference has two major problems and they were the use of the computer and the English language.’
- ‘In the same time it is ethical to work with the internet before meeting. It prevents us from taking to many times the plane.’
- ‘The problems that have occurred with the use of the internet are not only obstacles. They make it possible to be aware of some gaps, that we just don’t see if we are face-to-face. Obstacles should be taken as hermeneutical tools.’ Many participants agreed there to say that the combination Internet plus face-to-face encounter was a very good combination.

The drafters agreed to add a point on action in the document’s section on the principles of sharing values, and also a section on methodology. They also agreed to point out that the provision of livelihood is a precondition to any value-based action.

## 5. Conclusions

In the afternoon, Shanta Premawardhana, Ariane Hentsch Cisneros, and Christoph Stueckelberger gave a few words of evaluation and conclusion.

*Shanta Premawardhana*

“One question that inhabited me throughout the conference was: ‘How to come here and be truly Indian, African, etc.?’ As far as the group process was concerned, we’ve learned tremendously, developed friendships. I observed a good share of story-telling during this conference, as well as others ways of thinking, songs, and spiritual moments. I think this helped expressing our various identities and thoughts. Still, as in any meeting, we did it as the organizers ask us to. Thus, it was not an African conference. Western academic thinking was very present even amongst the African participants conditioned by the colonial experience, which has pushed aside the African categories. How can we be truly African in a conference like this? An African conference with international audience would have been different. It needs the right environment, define how to retain originality, and take a significant place in the global world. The ownership and initiation must come from the ground up.

There was also an imbalance in this conference in terms of gender and religious representation. English as the main language of exchange also created some imbalance among those who master it perfectly and those who don’t.

Also, sometimes we lost time talking about minor issues. I think we need to try and not go so high and intellectualise, but be simpler. We need to move from one world to another, experience other persons’ world. We don’t know another person’s reality until we are in his shoes. Critical moments of this conference included the excursions, which reflected something of the real life in the Kenyan context. How do we as scholars translate our views, ideas, and exchanges from the academic life to real life? The example of Kibera, the slums, is very telling in this sense. The ideal scholar is two-headed... We need to go out and live with people and experience their life, and at the same time see this context from a global viewpoint.”

*Some participants' feedback*

Feedback from participants included the following:

- 'It was a European conference with European categories. Organizers need to give the hand to the local organizers. How can we be human together, with all our different backgrounds?'
- 'How do we empty ourselves from European categories and become Africans again?'
- 'I didn't anything was African in this conference, but I benefited immensely from it, especially the thought that an alternative methodology is possible. Sometimes the methodology serves oppression and undemocratic processes.'
- 'Intellectual arrogance can be avoided by communicating simply. We've learned a lot here in this respect.'
- 'This conference was unique in the sense that we didn't bring papers, but what we are and what we know.'

*Ariane Hentsch Cisneros*

"From my point of view one of the main achievements of this conference, and one I am particularly sensitive to, is the trust and the hospitality our Kenyan partners have shown to us. Given the mutual history of our continents, I am all the more appreciative of, and humbled by your welcoming this conference in your homeland. My hopes after this gathering are manifold: to keep in touch as friends; that projects get initiated according to the guidelines; to bring these guidelines to the grassroots – our commitment should indeed exceed the limits of this conference lest it remain dead letter. Finally, as some participants have expressed or hinted, reflect on the possibility to give a free-hand to the local partners in the organisation process, should another conference be co-organised on this model."

*Christoph Stückelberger*

"To react to some of your remarks and comments, I would like to acknowledge that this group of participants stems indeed mostly from the academia, with lots of knowledge and expertise. I admit that we need both approaches, from the bottom up and from the top down. We need the grassroots, we need leaders, and everyone in-between. It's a question of efficiency in our work. We were privileged here to share in each other's spiritual moments, and new modes of working together, as friends, which allow us to operate in a fluid way.

About the African context, I didn't have the feeling that Africa was not represented. Yet as organisers, maybe we need indeed to change our vision and understanding of Africa. But in my view, the issue is not whether the conference is or isn't an African one, but whether we can achieve our mission together.

The framework which we just presented to you is to some extent a usual conference document, and as such it is a reflection of the exchanges we had. I would like you to consider other ways of spreading the information and the results of this conference, such as posters, which are an important working method in Africa, or comics, etc. You can also create new workgroups on the Globethics.net website. Feel free to connect to our network as often as you can."

*Jesse Mugambi*

"The visit in Kibera raised a question within many of you: who represents Africa? It is paramount that most of you as non-Africans try your best and avoid Africanist views and stereotypes of our continent. I can say that our workgroup on Sharing Values in the Kenyan and East-African contexts represents Africa as it stands far and away from stereotypes. Eunice Kamaara, Hassan Omari, and others are the real young generation. You also need to be aware that today Africana is not available to

Africans themselves, which keeps them away from managing their own cultural and intellectual heritage. Please refrain from instructing us how to conduct our business; we know how to do it.”

## **6. Next Steps**

At the final plenary, the Globethics.net Secretariat with various partners proposed to take some follow-up actions:

- a DVD on ‘Sharing Values across Cultures and Religions’ (Globethics.net & PEEA)
- a focus section of the Journal of Religious Ethics
- a volume in the Globethics.net Series
- a volume by the Kenyan group on ‘Interreligious dialogue on ethics: A Kenyan perspective’
- a Programme on ‘Sharing Values across Cultures and Religions’ at the next edition of the Parliament of the World’s Religion (Melbourne, December 2009)

## 7. Appendices

### **Globethics.net Draft Principles towards Sharing Values across Cultures and Religions**

#### **Introduction**

Globethics.net third international conference gathered about sixty ethicists, religious scholars and economists. Participants invested significant time and energy on the question of determining a methodology for sharing values across cultures and religions. While most agreed that religion can substantially contribute to global ethics, some felt that religion itself is the problem. Particularly since many conflicts are in some way related to religious differences, special attention needed to be given to religions.

Held in Nairobi, Kenya, the conference acknowledged the need to view the issues from the African perspective. We cannot talk about African values without talking about religion, said the report presented by the group working on African perspectives; while there is a tendency to view the questions of global ethics through the eyes of the Western intellectual traditions, that should not be the norm.

There are different types of interreligious and intercultural dialogue in ethics. Among them are grassroots dialogue, institutional dialogue and academic dialogue. Each of these have specific objectives and methodologies.

Much of the work of the conference was done in five workgroups: 'Defining Global Ethics', 'Ensuring a Successful Interreligious Dialogue on Ethics', 'Integrating Means and Methods of Sharing Values, in a Human-to-Human Approach', 'Balancing Power Relations, Inducing a Real Transformation' and 'Sharing Values in the Kenyan and East-African Contexts'. All but the first one used Care and compassion as a support theme. Participants expressed the hope that these guidelines can be helpful to both religious and non-religious persons who engage in dialogue. This report contains areas of general consensus of the conference participants, even if in some areas that consensus was unstable.

#### **Global and contextual ethics**

*Global ethics* provides the conceptual basis for an inclusive approach towards common values and principles grounded in the ethical vision of human dignity, personal and social responsibility and justice. Global ethics acknowledges the interdependence of all beings and extends the basic moral attitudes of care and compassion to our world. Global ethics identifies transboundary problems and contributes to their solution.

Global ethics promotes public awareness of the sensibility for those fundamental values and principles. They are the foundation on which the universal consensus on human rights is built. Human rights are the most tangible and legally binding expression of this ethical vision. Global ethics fosters trust among human beings and strengthens caring and action for global environmental protection.

*Contextual ethics* affirms the identity of persons and institutions in their local, cultural, religious, economic and political contexts. Global ethics needs to be local and contextual in order to have an impact on individual action and societal structures. Contextual ethics becomes isolationist, if it remains local and is not linked to global ethics.

Contextual ethics appreciates diversity in its different forms as social, political, cultural, religious, and bio-diversity. There is an enormous richness in diversity. It may decrease vulnerability and be a source of sustainability.

Contextual ethics contributes to global ethics. It can lead to unity in diversity. All cultures and religions can contribute to global values. For example, the contribution of African values to global values includes, that all of reality is a continuum, from the spiritual to the human to fauna, flora, and the inanimate world. Therefore, injuring nature is unethical. This implies responsibilities towards non-human living beings and the inanimate universe as well as the continuum between generations that have gone before and that come after us.

Global and contextual ethics have to consider power structures. Global ethics can be abused for domination. Contextual ethics can be abused to defend traditional privileges or power. On global as well as on local level, 'power over others' tends to be oppressive, 'power with and for others' tends to be empowering and nurturing. The legitimation of power as 'power delegated from' may be abused or used responsibly.

### **Values and norms**

Global and contextual ethics are based on values and norms. Values are fundamental, long term benchmarks of orientation, rooted in and justified by specific worldviews. Norms are mid-term applications of values to specific contexts.

Some values are commonly accepted across cultures. Participants spent a great deal of time considering those common values and acknowledged that in general they have religious justifications. They also acknowledged that values are not necessarily generated by religion but may have non-religious origins.

Agreeing on values that are common across cultures and religions and norms that may be different in specific contexts requires dialogue across cultures and religions. When through dialogue common values can be affirmed, they provide a foundation from which communities can engage in common action towards reconciliation and peace.

This work is particularly urgent at times of conflict and violence, but more difficult to accomplish once a conflict has started. Therefore it is best if dialogues are set up and functioning before a conflict occurs, first for the purpose of sharing values that provides a foundation, and second for engaging in common action.

From dialogues that have already occurred in a variety of contexts the participants affirmed that the following are examples of values that are shared across religions and cultures:

- *Care and compassion* is the ability for empathy, respect and support of the other. All religions emphasize the centrality of this value.
- *Sharing* leads to, enables, and sustains relationships between human beings and strengthens communities. Sharing power leads to a responsible, community-oriented use of power..
- *Inclusivity in participation*, for example, in decision making is an expression of respecting human dignity and strengthening communities. Sharing values in dialogue is a participatory process.
- *Justice/equity* based on the inalienable human dignity of every human being often arises when people cultivate a deep respect towards each other The Golden Rule is the basic norm of equity. It grounds solidarity and fairness. All known religious traditions commend some version of the Golden Rule to their followers, the operation of which is based on reciprocity,

empathy, enlightened self-interest, and some notion of moral autonomy, and which is used to facilitate cooperation not only within the in-group but also between members of that group and strangers.

- *Peace* is the condition of justice and at the same time, its fruit. Aiming at peace and security is a motivation for and goal of sharing values.
- *Responsibility* is accountability for one's own actions. The level of responsibility has to correspond to the level of power, capacity and capability. Those with more resources bear greater responsibility for resolving problems.

The participants affirmed that there are significant differences in the interpretation of values and value systems. Sometimes these differences are expressions of distortions and instrumentalisation, but at other times they are expressions of real differences. Accordingly, differences have to be treated in different ways.

### **Principles for sharing values across cultures and religions**

Sharing values can be done in various forms, such as interreligious and intercultural dialogue, research partnership projects and common action. Sharing of values also happens in schools, work places, neighbourhoods, in sporting and cultural events. In some cultures opening houses of worship to other religious communities facilitates the sharing of values.

One specific form of such sharing is through dialogue. The following principles concentrate on dialogue even if they are relevant for the other forms of sharing. While there are many kinds of dialogues, such sharing can be fruitful when dialogue is transformative. Transformative dialogue is a dialogue which nudges and even pushes participants beyond where they are to a new, richer and more inclusive understanding of who they are and what they should do.

### **Sharing values in transformative dialogues**

Organizers of, and participants to a successful transformative dialogue shall:

- clarify the expectations, and define the goals of dialogue
- acknowledge and clarify the various levels of power involved
- submit themselves to a prior interrogation of their own self-understandings
- accept the assumption that we do not exist for ourselves alone, but that we exist in relation to one another
- build trust by stressing the need for openness and transparency
- include as many diverse voices as is practically feasible and appropriate
- presuppose participants' accountability to one another
- include the political, economic contexts in which the dialogue partners live as a content of dialogue
- seriously take into account histories, especially of oppression, while not being entrapped or circumscribed by them
- be encouraged to think as a minority
- seek to walk in the others' shoes
- emphasize the need to understand the other's values from their perspective as well as from one's own
- consider both theory and praxis when trying to understand the values of the other
- consider the webs of relationships and identities of the other
- anticipate new insights emerging from the centre of the group

Open-ended and hopeful, such dialogues are contextually sensitive and have the greatest potential for undergirding and sustaining the development and education of a global ethics of responsibility. They also provide opportunities for problems to be addressed cooperatively, equitably and urgently.

### **Means of sharing values**

There are a variety of other means of sharing values than transformative dialogue. Dialogue involves a range of activities far beyond the verbal (spoken or written language): music, the visual arts, touch, common meals etc. can be understood as meaning-bearing 'languages.'

Art can be used to understand values attached to a context, values behind the intention of the artist or of the producer/sponsor, values behind the specific meaning carried by the expression, and the efficacy of the artefact itself in carrying or unveiling these, or other values. Examples are music, literature, story-telling, film, theatre, dance, comedy/humour/irony, folklore. Artists-in-residence can be suggested to improve opportunities to share values.

Intermarriage is another opportunity to share values across cultures and religions. An intercultural or interreligious couple will need to negotiate a new set of values as they set up their family and raise children.

### **Settings for sharing values**

In order to ensure a successful dialogue the following principles on settings are important:

- provide a safe zone that does not threaten participants even when addressing such controversial issues as religious beliefs, race relations or political and economic prerogatives.
- explore the self understanding of the other, in order to eliminate the possibility of prejudices and stereotyping
- encourage dialogue between secular ethics and religious ethics
- consider dialogue partners in their multiple identities, as 'whole' persons. In interreligious dialogue there is a tendency to look at people only as religious people
- privilege globalization from below
- involve representatives of the multiple stakeholders in order to resolve problems
- involve participatory interaction and decision-making
- be intentional about being gender diverse
- be in a listening attitude to the dialogical need of the other before inviting the other to dialogue. Consider the other (and understanding her value) as necessary to understand our own values.

Drafted by:

*Christoph Stückelberger, Founder and Executive Director, Globetics.net*

*Shanta Premawardhana, Director, World Council of Churches Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation*

## Final group reports

### Report of Group 1: Defining Global Ethics

#### Participants

Prof. Dr Gerhold K. Becker, Germany (moderator)

Prof. Sumner B. Twiss, USA (moderator)

Dr Kiarash Aramesh, Iran

Dr Jonathan K. L. Chan, China (*not travelling*)

Prof. Dr Abhik Gupta, India

Prof. John Hooker, USA (*not travelling*)

Prof. John M. Itty, India

Prof. Eunice Karanja Kamaara, Kenya

Prof. Dr Thomas Kesselring, Switzerland (*not travelling*)

Prof. Kim Yersu, South Korea (*not travelling*)

Rev. Dr Richard Ondji'i Toung, Cameroon

Prof. Deon Rossouw, South Africa

#### Group process

After the initial call from the group conveners to all participants, outlining the charge to the group and emphasizing process and results, participants emailed statements on the meaning of global ethics, most of which were responsive, either directly or indirectly, to the views of other participants. Participants also circulated papers, most being authored by themselves, on definitions of global ethics and on the substantive moral practical issues needing to be addressed by the group. An outline (precursor to the present document) of group perceptions collated by the conveners was circulated prior to the conference and sent to all participants, which received a few responses (silence may or may not have signified assent). At the conference, the outline was discussed within the group.

#### Use of the expression 'global ethics'

One significant point that emerged in our discussion was the relevance and appropriate use of the expression 'global ethics'.

Participants in disfavour of the expression argued that:

- As with the term 'universal' (as in universal ethics), the use of the term 'global' leads to suspicions of attempted hegemony or domination by the powerful.
- The phrase 'global ethics' embeds the appearance of a presumption against moral diversity or pluralism.
- Moreover, using the term 'global' conjures up, at least for some, globalization in the economic sense and is associated with capitalism, neo-liberal economics, and Western economic hegemony.
- As a contextual observation, participants from Europe and the U.S. tended to embrace a universalistic and global language, while those from Africa, Asia, and South America tended to be wary of such language. While all participants were critical of neo-liberal economic policies, those from Asia, African, and South America extended this critical view to Western cultural, political, and moral values more generally.

Participants in favour of the expression argued that:

- Using the term 'global' helps us to identify a rather unique set of problems that cut across national boundaries and that need to be addressed holistically and cooperatively.

- With respect to conjuring up ‘globalization,’ we need to note that globalization is not a recent phenomenon (though its intensification is) and further that it can be understood to apply to all sectors of human activity (economic, cultural, political, moral, religious, legal), thus indicating the permeability of cultures to one another.
- We can draw an important distinction between global (or globalization) perspectives: ‘globalization from-above,’ indicating (e.g.) international agents and transnational corporations, on the one hand, and ‘globalization from-below,’ indicating the majority of the peoples of the world at a grass-roots or local level, on the other.

Those holding an intermediate position thought that:

- We use ‘global’ (as in global ethics) as a way to identify transboundary problems affecting human and non-human welfare and needing holistic, ecological, and cooperative redress.
- We privilege the globalization from-below perspective (the people’s perspective) over elite agents not representative of people’s interests.
- We accept moral diversity and pluralism as a fact and then ask what is common or shared in terms of not only problems and challenges but also possible normative standards of human behaviour in addressing these problems (e.g., a common morality).

### **Practical orientation**

Members of the workgroup thought it was important to start with, and typologise practical problems or challenges, while also recognizing that they are not mutually exclusive and do overlap at points.

Human-oriented issues:

- Poverty, starvation, low and unfair wages, malnutrition
- Disparity of rich and poor populations within and across countries
- Disproportionate population growth rates
- Growth and spread of threatening technologies (e.g., nuclear)
- International criminal activity (e.g., human trafficking, weapons trade)
- Discrimination of the basis of status, including nationality, ethnicity, gender, and other markers
- Threats to (world) peace and human flourishing due to military conflict, war, oppression, and acts of terrorism
- Health-concerns (disease prevention and disease treatment, healthcare provision) and the implications of biotechnology and genetics for humanity

Environment-oriented issues:

- Pollution in various forms
- Environmental degradation
- Climate imbalance
- Decreasing biodiversity
- Ecosystem destruction

Comments:

- These problems are interdependent, bear on human and non-human survival, and are flourishing both in the present and the future.
- They need to be addressed cooperatively, equitably, and aggressively.
- The perspective of globalization from below strongly suggests that the ‘haves’ (i.e. resources and power) bear greater causal responsibility for the problems’ production and consequently have a greater moral responsibility for their redress or alleviation.

- Implicit in these problems are the systemic themes of sustainable human development, poverty eradication, technology control, redress of inequalities among nations, and a holistic understanding of the human relationship to nature.

### **Towards Normative Solutions**

One of the main points of morality is to enable human cooperation in the solution of practical problems, and one initial step toward a normative ethical strategy is to ask what we, the peoples of the world, already share in order to help us do this? We do in fact share a number of things pointing to important moral norms, even if they might be contested in some of their specifics:

- All societies share analogous rules regulating (e.g.) indiscriminate violence within the in-group, sexual activity, deception and truth-telling, theft (or arbitrary deprivation of property), and dispute-settlement.
- All known moral traditions embed some version of the Golden Rule, the operation of which is based on reciprocity, empathy, enlightened self-interest, and some notion of moral autonomy, and which is used to facilitate cooperation not only within the in-group but also between members of that group and strangers.
- We regularly encounter, both within and across societies, rather fundamental moral responses (emotions) of indignation or resentment at perceived unjust treatment and of empathy (sympathy, compassion) for others when they are treated badly.
- We already have a cross-cultural consensus on basic human rights norms bearing on physical and civil security, socio-economic necessities for human survival and flourishing, and the importance of special protections for vulnerable populations and persons (e.g., minority and ethnic groups, women, children, the sick and elderly).
- Practically speaking, therefore, we have much to work with in developing a global ethic.

Since some might regard the preceding as constituting an unstable consensus based on empirical normative observations, we might press further and ask whether there is any deeper justification for this consensus, for example:

- A notion of intrinsic or inherent human dignity and inviolability that more deeply grounds the consensus.
- A capacity to universalisation or generalisation inherent in the concept of morality that serves as a test for what is properly ethical or unethical.
- The presupposition of equal respect for persons that may undergird any sincere human communication about cooperative problem-solving.
- An exegesis of the Golden Rule that demonstrates it as a foundational norm that further grounds solidarity, fairness, equality, and human rights.
- And intermingled, or even independent of these appeals, the metaphysical or ontological commitments of various religious and philosophical worldviews.

Our working group reached no agreement on how to argue this ‘meta-case,’ but it is significant that all were aware of the first-level consensus above and were committed to working on the second-level with the expectation that whatever emerges – even simple recognition of final divergences in justification – will not undermine the first-level consensus but in fact deepen and extend it to help solve the practical problems identified. Some of the reasons for this meta-disagreement were:

- In appealing to an over-lapping consensus on moral norms, there was concern about the contingency and therefore instability of an empirically-based consensus claim.
- Even in appealing to and using a normative consensus, there was concern to emphasize local cultural interpretations and embodiments of norms (e.g., ‘local-in-global-in-local’ framework accommodating commonalities and variations among different cultures).

- Scepticism that all attempted universalistic justifications are question-begging at some deep level, smuggling in (e.g.) essentialist claims about human nature or distinctive Western moral norms.
- Notion that a global synthesis of moral values and practices dealing with survival and flourishing is better understood as an aspirational, regulative ideal rather than an accomplished reality, with that reality always being evolving and never static.
- Resistance to the justificatory endeavour itself as being a diversion, along with the view that it is better to focus on and emphasize real-world practical cooperation in solving shared, common social and environmental problems.

### **A Global Ethics**

Given that the problems identified earlier clearly thwart a good, flourishing life for all, humanly and environmentally, and for present and future generations, any global ethic (or common morality) worth its salt must work to rectify these problems.

Drawing from the normative consensus attained so far, and deepened by the exigent need for practical rectification, we propose a global ethic with the following features:

- The normative goal of a good life for all that meets minimal material requirements regarding nutrition, shelter, education, physical security, employment with decent and fair wages, and the like.
- The development of national civil environments that secure respect for life, liberty, justice, equality, equal access to opportunities for self-development, and political participation in all decision-making that bears on the commonweal.
- The development of an international civil environment (or global civic ethic) that aims at economic equity among nations, their equal access to the global commons, and their active cooperation in combating shared problems that threaten not only the peace of the world but also environmental well-being in the present and future.

Implicit in these features are the ideas that:

- As a species, we ought to live in solidarity and strive for constructing and sustaining authentic communities at various levels – communities that coordinate and balance individuality and sociality, self-realization and the common good, and that resist all attempts at political domination by a few at the expense of all others.
- Some peoples and communities have a greater responsibility than others to contribute to redressing past injustices and inequities due not only to their causal role in facilitating and continuing these injustices but also to their greater power to redress them effectively.
- While the notions of care and compassion are significant orienting moral values, it is important that they be interpreted and employed with reference to participatory decision-making in authentic community built on relational understandings of the person and social and natural environments, rather than being interpreted as benevolent charity (which appears to instantiate an asymmetrical power relationship between benefactor and recipient).
- It is important to view all the problems and norms ecologically or holistically since what happens at one end of the world affects others throughout our interdependent relations, which, turns, means that all of us bear responsibility for all and must participate in the ongoing process of continuing to develop, refine, adjust, and extend (to the degree required) our common moral norms and their application to our shared practical problems.

### **Towards a Global Ethics**

Pragmatically speaking, a global ethics is needed in order to address and redress transboundary practical problems – e.g., regarding social justice, the environment, and war – that threaten the very survival of humanity and the planet itself.

In order to be as inclusive as possible, the working group wished to avoid imposing contestable metaphysical assumptions in its reflections. We did, however, collectively share in a conception of the person as having dignity that ought to be respected by others, and we affirm the importance of having a sense of responsibility for the common good.

There are important angles of orientation and commitment in the contemporary world that guide our thinking regarding exigent practical problems. These are provided by, on the one hand, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent human rights declarations, legal conventions, and regulation, and, on the other, the Stockholm Declaration and subsequent environmental declarations, conventions, and regulation. Both types of development enjoy significant international consensus.

Both of these regimes, however, need to be supplemented considerably by an ethics of respect and responsibility with regard to human beings, societies, and natural systems, for all three are too easily violated or otherwise deleteriously affected by short-sighted (or even perverse) social, economic, and cultural practices.

The question is how to create or prompt the effective development of both individual conscience and social-cultural ethos that express and sustain a sense of active moral responsibility in both the short- and long- term, bearing on survival, well-being, and flourishing in both the present and the future.

We propose that such respect and responsibility can be most effectively developed and maintained through dialogues that:

- focus on urgent transboundary social and environmental problems;
- are undertaken by affected communities at the local, national, and/or regional levels;
- involve representatives of all the multiple stakeholders in the resolution of these problems;
- make sincere, respectful, and reasonable efforts to deliberate and make decisions about the solutions to the problems.

We believe (or such is our intent) that these practical dialogues would have the following features and/or effects: be contextually sensitive, involve participatory interaction and decision-making, and have the greatest potential for undergirding and sustaining the development and education of a global ethic of responsibility.

### **In conclusion**

Global ethics provides the conceptual basis for an inclusive approach towards common moral values and principles grounded in the moral vision of human dignity, personal and social responsibility, and justice. These values and principles are the foundation on which the universal consensus on human rights has been built and human rights are the most tangible and legally binding expression of this moral vision.

Global ethics acknowledges the interdependence of all beings and extends to the basic moral attitudes of care and compassion for our world. It promotes public awareness of and sensibility for those fundamental moral values and principles as a prerequisite for the effective implementation of human rights and environmental protections.

## **Report of Group 2: Care and Compassion. Ensuring a Successful Interreligious Dialogue on Ethics**

### **Participants**

Dr Asghar Ali Engineer, India (moderator)  
Prof. John Raymaker, Germany/USA (co-moderator)  
Dr Nikolaos Dimitriadis, Greece  
Rabbi Dr Alon Goshen-Gottstein, Israel (*not travelling*)  
Dr Simon Kouvon, Togo  
Mr Souaibou Marafa, Cameroon (*not travelling*)  
Dr Kamrad Mofid, United Kingdom  
Dr Pragati Sahn, India  
Mrs Lilian Siwila, South Africa (*not travelling*)  
Ass. Prof. Dr Parichart Suwanbubbha, Thailand  
Dr Yahya Wijaya, Indonesia

### **Initial assumptions**

Participants in group 2 argued that there are common values in approaches to defining global ethics but there are differences in how these are understood and applied. In order to deal with such complexity, they examined the problem on three levels, namely the grassroots level, the institutional level and the academic level.

### **Grassroots level**

Participants distinguished between two approaches on this level. In some traditional societies interfaith dialogue has often been part of life in practice and theory. However in many societies which have been subject to an increase of new migrants, many challenges have arisen to harmonious living in the short term. Well informed and/or economically secure individuals tend to agree more readily that there are common ethical values than do less informed or less economically stable persons, who are observed to be more sensitive to fear, ignorance, bias, insecurity, racial stereotyping, etc. Such negative realities can be manifest or remain latent, but will always hinder the process of dialogue and engagement.

Dialogue within oneself (which can lead to inner conversion) may be helpful – even needed – in removing hindrances to dialogue. Is there such a thing as multiple religious identities which can be helped through a process of inner conversion? Dialogue means to learn about different values, and to grow in compassion. We reckon there are common values, but they can be distorted by the discourse of institutions, including the media.

### **Institutional level**

Religious doctrines and traditions rooted in the past were based on less pluralistic societies than are most modern societies. Some problems that arise today on the institutional level are that religious texts and teachings are used selectively and not holistically. For instance, the Christian story of the Good Samaritan or Mohammed's inclusive Medina Charter are either ignored or misunderstood.

Political and/or religious leaders *can* and often *do* abuse, manipulate, and control teachings and/or concepts to promote their own ends. For instance, there was a case where a government from Southeast Asia discouraged the Buddhist teaching of being content with a simple life on the account it impeded the emergence of a materialistic life style.

### **Academic level**

Theologian approaches notably differ among themselves and from religious studies approaches. The lack of inter-disciplinary cooperation – even of adequate intra-disciplinary consultations – leads to a

lack of accountability. Theologians and religious studies departments should be partners as much as competitors if we are to do justice to both value-laden teachings and allegedly value-free research. Similarly, dialogue and interaction between economic and theology departments are missing. As a result, both religious and secular ethics remain unaddressed or without due application. An ethics of human rights, for example, can be based on both religious and/or secular values, implying that religious as well as secular values/ traditions can be resources of ethics today.

### **Proposals and possibilities**

As global ethics embraces different disciplines, subjects, cultures, religions, civilizations, it needs dialogue. In turn, dialogue needs a safe zone that does not threaten participants even when addressing such controversial issues as religious beliefs, race relations or political prerogatives. Dialogue is more fruitful when people feel their values from the heart, and can respond while respecting the feelings of others. South Africa is one example where relative security was provided within a historically and culturally complex state. On the other hand, there exists in some nations a process of (re-)writing laws to the detriment of minorities. The role of a global ethics is to foster trust among humans based on values. There can be legitimate forms of cooperation based on enlightened understandings and on accepting differences. The following examples mean to clarify this.

Religious teachings and ideas have been sources of inspiration for ethical reforms (e.g., abolition of slavery, justice and peace). Reforms best occurs when religious traditions are able to adapt to present circumstances. Religious traditions and their power of continuity can indeed be fortified by revisiting (i.e. 'updating') the original formulation of their teachings, as well as the modalities of their application in our modern, pluralistic societies.

Hopefully, it can be shown that humanistic, secular ethics do not conflict in principle with the various religious ethics of the world. Doing so would foster human understanding. Granted that one cannot compromise with destructive tendencies, there is always need for a deeper appreciation of other people. On such a view, one's religious convictions underlie and reinforce values. This means that dialogue is that of life in action.

Dialogue between secular ethics and religious ethics should be encouraged. We leave open the hermeneutical processes that can deepen our understanding of, and respect for human rights and ulterior motives. It is sometimes said that in Africa everything a person does is religious. People should know where the other person is coming from. Instead of pointing to the differences, one must respect context.

NGOs and civil societies are increasingly drawing attention to issues that are all too often ignored by the powers that be. Such NGOs might have to be provocative to start a dialogue.

## **Report of Group 3: Care and Compassion. Integrating Means and Methods to Share Values, in a Human-to-Human Approach**

### **Participants**

Prof. Ingrid H. Shafer, USA (moderator)  
Rev. Dr Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar, India  
Prof. Ram-Prasad Chakravarthi, United Kingdom  
Dr Padmasiri de Silva, Australia (*not travelling*)  
Prof. Darrell J. Fasching, USA (*not travelling*)  
Mrs Ariane Hentsch Cisneros, Switzerland  
Mr Elias Metri Kasrine El-Halabi, Lebanon (*not travelling*)  
Mr Kurt Lussi, Switzerland  
Dr Micheal Mawa, Uganda  
Dr Jayandra Soni, Germany  
Prof. Dr Gerhard Wegner, Germany

### **Emergence process**

Members of this group declared that, as they were concerned that something in the human relationships is unsatisfying, in particular that care and compassion are more than often missing in dialogues between cultures and religions, they felt a pressing need to bring these dimensions by suggesting relevant approaches and means to share values in a satisfying and fulfilling way. They have reflected collectively on such possible means and methods to share values as well as on the hermeneutical and epistemological guidelines needed to build such dialogues. Given the wide diversity in the backgrounds of potential dialogue partners with regard to the many dynamic ways, such as the geographic, cultural, ideological, linguistic, economic, social, educational, in which human beings interact, learn, and communicate, they decided to use a very wide spectrum of approaches to take maximum advantage of all these ways. In other words, they thought of 'dialogue' as involving a range of activities far beyond the discursive (spoken or written language): music, visual arts, touch, etc., can also be understood as meaning-bearing 'languages.' They presupposed that these should be directed to a non-negotiable commitment to human equality (in terms of, e.g., gender, voice, economic power), humans being holistic and defined by a fundamental desire to understand the other and to be understood.

### **Hermeneutical and epistemological approaches**

A number of hermeneutical and epistemological guidelines emerged in the course of our collective reflection which we feel as relevant instruments to build an efficient, satisfying and fulfilling interreligious dialogue on ethics.

In any such dialogue, partners should generally

- consider human beings as being multi-dimensional and, therefore, that we need to distinguish elements of stability and flux in the human experience,
- consider the other and ourselves as a nexus at the intersection of various webs of relationships and identities, implying that there will be times when we will need to see that person as standing for these collectivities, and there will be times when we will not,
- shun destructive extremism, fundamentalism, fanaticism as well as dogmatism and bigotry, and consider our understanding of ultimate reality as being beyond the many facets that we can grasp,
- make a shift of paradigm: the other comes first. We need to be in a listening attitude to the dialogical need of the other before inviting the other to participate in a dialogue. Consider the other (and understanding her value) as necessary to understanding our own values,

and in particular,

- share both similarities and differences; see both what we have in common *and* the differences that might motivate us to engage in dialogue.
- consider both beliefs and practices when trying to understand the values of the other.
- shift perspectives: as far as possible, to start the engagement with the other's perspective, being aware of our own expectations vis-à-vis dialogue
- think as a minority, being aware that we each are a minority, and vulnerable in this respect (who is a majority, and a minority and where? There are various hegemonies, of which each of us is a nexus. We are others all the time),
- challenge dominant presuppositions,
- distinguish situations where conflict resolution is a prelude to dialogue, and where it is the purpose,
- consider ways in which mutually incompatible positions may coexist in a common reality, be it through resolution, dissolution, transcendence or setting them aside.

### **Means of sharing**

When we share values we should consider sharing them at various levels and be interdisciplinary, taking into consideration the people and institutions in interaction. A wide range of individual or collective media, including discursive and non-discursive, can help conduct a meaningful dialogue on values. The following list includes examples but has no pretense of being exhaustive.

Education. A primary and universal venue for the transmission of values, education requires great care and continuous appraisal on the adequacy to its task.

- Education should be more than schooling – it should include moral values, through school and parents, and not only the learning of facts and figures, and the appropriation of certain epistemological postures.
- Through education patterns of domination should be deconstructed and reconstructed in a more equalitarian way. There is a value in subverting mortiferous, domesticating education. A colonially-imposed schooling imparts alienating but also liberating values.
- Teachers and students should learn from each other in a mutual learning process.

Publications. Academic publications are a traditional means of expressing ideas and opinions, as well as of sharing values. Either collective or individual, their increasing number contributes to forming a body of primarily intellectual knowledge, a tradition which is sometimes carried on untouched, sometimes re-interpreted and challenged through the ages. Co-authoring is a specific way of exchanging and sharing values about one specific topic

Speeches. Live speeches are a livelier means of communicating a message, or values, as it leaves space for interaction between the speaker and the auditors. Oral communication allows for a more comprehensive style than written communication, involving body language, humour, etc. In this sense, communication technologies such as the written media or telecommunications may undermine the fullness of an expression.

Stories and narratives. We need a complete shift in the way we conceive mainstream organized dialogue about values. From cold, dogmatic or philosophical exchanges, we should move on to include other 'warmer' ways of expression, such as telling stories and narratives, which has been the norm on the oral traditions around the world.

- narrative forms are equally relevant when reports are being written about events involving an exchange about values. When recounted in the form of a story, an event can yield information that may not seem directly relevant to its overall purpose or objective, but

informs the readers or listeners in a way that calls to their own personal experience and ability to picture an event far richer than if they only read the conclusion of the gathering.

Art. Classical and popular artistic expressions including fine and performing arts such as music, film, theatre, song, stories/ narratives, dancing, folklore, comedy/ humour/ irony, the visual arts, etc. all are valid ways to express, share, and understand values attached to a context.

- We should consider the symbolic dimensions of art as well as its efficacy to elevate us through to a dimension closer to the divine, or to the truth.
- Art should be suggested, proposed – not imposed. Artistic means of sharing values have indeed been used positively but also negatively; imperialistic powers are known to use art as a means of cultural domination, for instance. We need to distinguish the conditions of creation (the intentions) from the efficiency of art pieces to convey values (reception), and distinguish cases where freedom has been undermined to promote positive values. Also, art is often spontaneous, it bursts out of the artist as a response to a pressing need, but then the piece of art starts a life of its own. Art is versatile, one should be aware of it; the artist wants to communicate, but the audience might get another message. Values behind the intention of the artist or of the producer/ patron, values behind the specific meaning carried by the expression, and the efficacy of the artefact itself in carrying or unveiling these or other values need to be appraised case by case.
- When approaching artistic dialogue, one should be cautious that modern Western art tends to be exclusive, highly individualistic, and elitist. Can there be a more inclusive ‘counter-art’ to transmit values? We can also learn values through ‘foreign’ art, so we should be allowed to appropriate foreign art. Some art forms have already become common heritage.
- From a pro-active perspective, artists in residence can be suggested as a way to improved opportunities to share values.

Film, drama, and video.

- One could use ‘Second Life’ (a web-based virtual world) to teach. Most online games are violent war-games, but games to demonstrate values of mutual support and respect could be developed.
- In drama, also, how to be authentic to ourselves and to our characters? Role-playing is effective in conflict resolution.

Multidisciplinary exhibitions are a rich way of informing about issues in a way that calls to various human communication skills. The senses as well as the intellect are put to contribution, and when such exhibitions are interactive, their pedagogical strength is yet reinforced.

Trade of consumer goods, foreign foods and clothing. The history, modalities and rules of trade (exchange of products) can be explored in order to understand the values of another community. Much can also be learned through the way consumer goods are produced and exchanged, and by the consumption of the goods themselves.

Work. Physical work done in common has proved in certain instances to be a successful way of sharing values, as long as there is equality in the relationships of co-workers. To be fruitful, intercultural team work in any professional context requires awareness and respect of the other’s values.

Games, humour. Humour is a powerful tool of communication and understanding, which not only permits to ease tense situations, but also to give clear indication of the frontier between the acceptable and the non-acceptable in the non-conventional. Shared humour often shows the degree

of tightness ('high-context') in cultural understanding and relationships. Games are another way of expressing deep values associated to different cultures.

Bodily movement. The brain is not the only place where memory is stored. The human body as a whole is a great receptor of information where it is stored, yet very often neglected. Since this memory can have serious effects on our physical and mental health, it is crucial that we treat it with the same care as the more 'mental' types of memory. Imprinting positive impressions of other, different cultures and values through bodily reception can be a way to increased respect, understanding, and even appropriation of foreign cultures.

- Somatic mimesis and learning: playing sports can help understand values behind the culture attached to a particular sport. Examples: football, cricket, etc.
- Dancing: certain beliefs are common all over the world, for instance, carnivals in Switzerland, with their masks and strange dances, resemble shamanic ceremonies.
- Rituals (religious or secular), etiquette, existing or emerging, can be shared in order to understand other cultures or religions.

Interpersonal contacts. Human-to-human love is a firm ground on which individuals can learn from each other in trust.

## **Report of Group 4: Care and Compassion. Balancing Power Relations, Inducing a Real Transformation**

### **Participants**

Prof. Maricel Mena López, Colombia (moderator)  
Dr Jack A. Hill, USA (co-moderator)  
Prof. Dr Bernard Adeney-Risakotta, Indonesia  
Mr Peter Alexander Egom, Nigeria  
Prof. Muteho Kasongo, Democratic Republic of Congo  
Rev. Prof. Christoph Stueckelberger, Switzerland

### **Prologue**

Members of this group have deliberated on the theme of 'balancing power relations: inducing a real transformation' by formulating three critical questions: (1) 'How are power relations experienced from our perspectives?'; (2) 'How are power and authority to be understood, particularly with respect to interreligious dialogue?'; and (3) 'What ethical and sustainable ways of dealing with power imbalances can induce transformative dialogue?' It is helpful to begin by defining key terms that are central to discussing these questions, at least in a provisional way. 'Power' is understood as the capacity to decide and implement a goal. It entails a capability to persuade others. 'Authority' refers to a position or a function that is related to power. On an institutional level, there may be a 'formal authority' – such as the authority that resides in the office of a religious or secular leader – but the individual who occupies such a position may not have the competence to exercise power effectively. On an individual or non-institutional level, there may be an 'informal authority' – such as the moral authority that is expressed by a protestor in a street demonstration against an unjust political leader – and the possessor of such authority may act in powerful ways, exhibiting a great deal of competence. In other words, it is important to note at the outset that one might have power, but not formal authority; and, one might have a position of formal authority but not have competence where exercising power is concerned.

### **Power dynamics in our specific contexts**

Power relations are pervasive in all our experiences of life. There are many different kinds of power and powerlessness which we experience differently in different contexts. Some of us are powerful in some contexts, but feel powerless in other contexts. Within our group we discussed many kinds of power and powerlessness that are specific to particular contexts or to particular groups of people within our contexts. We focused especially on how the dynamics of power relations affect interreligious dialogue especially in relation to values and ethical concerns. We agreed to start by looking at our experiences of power and then move to generalizations and theory intended to find commonalities and explanations, rather than beginning with theories about power and then move to specific examples. Either approach is valid, but we appreciate the advantages of moving from the specific to the general, rather than vice versa.

We agreed that we all experience power both negatively and positively in our different contexts. There appeared to be a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' at work in which all of us were suspicious of imbalances of power. Interreligious dialogue is distorted by huge differentials in the power wielded by different parties to the dialogue. However since power is diverse, we also saw that one party may be powerful in one area, while another party is powerful in a different way. For example, a corporate executive from an oil company may control almost unlimited financial resources and can hire 1,000 Public Relations Officers ('Reputation Management Experts'), but s/he may tremble before a rag tag Greenpeace activist. The oil company needs to be legitimized and have community support in order to do business.

Nevertheless, the group was very conscious of how often wealth and poverty distorts or even prevents interreligious dialogue. Interreligious dialogue may be a very low priority for people who are just struggling to survive. The group was especially concerned about the oppression of women in conditions of conflict and/or poverty. For example, many poor women in Columbia (and many other countries), have to walk many kilometres just to bring precious water for their most basic needs. Their water sources may be contaminated by industrial pollution and they often lack access to basic health care, for example when giving birth. As a result, their whole family's life expectancy may be very low. For people struggling to survive, interreligious dialogue may seem irrelevant unless it is focused on how to discern and meet their basic needs. In conditions of poverty and suffering, those who are interested in dialogue need to consider first the most fundamental needs of the participants so that the dialogue addresses their needs. In Nigeria, for example, the lack of a social safety net and basic services makes life 'cruel, nasty, brutal and short' (Hobbes) for both men and women. Interreligious dialogue may be an essential means for addressing basic needs and finding ways for different religious communities to address such needs cooperatively.

The need for interreligious dialogue may be even more urgent in situations of conflict and violence, particularly where religious sentiments are manipulated to sharpen the conflict and polarize communities from one another. Once again, patriarchal social, economic, cultural and political structures often lead to extreme suffering on the part of women and children. Rape and sexual assault are common in contexts of war and mass violence. In the Congo, one of our member cited examples of how rape is almost routinely ignored by the press, even though it is an ongoing phenomena that devastates the lives of thousands of women. However when one or two men were castrated, it caused a huge uproar of indignation at the brutality. Interreligious dialogue needs to keep in mind the social structures that subordinate some parties to the interests of those in power.

On the one hand, interreligious dialogue might be thought ideal if the parties to the dialogue are all on an equal level. However in circumstances of oppression, it is often the most oppressed who need to dialogue the most. They may need to force or goad the powerful to listen to their voice. In Java, Indonesia there is an old traditional practice whereby poor and powerless people who experience extreme injustice and oppression, stand before the house or office of the powerful and 'dry themselves in the sun'. This is a kind of dialogue by suffering. By standing in the full glare of the tropical sun for hours or even days, they risk serious injury or even death by sunstroke and dehydration. Their suffering is a way of forcing the powerful to listen to their plight. Our group discussed ways in which the 'mouse' can force the 'elephant' to listen to her. The elephant might normally not care, even if he tramples the mouse to death. But a human 'mouse' may force a human 'elephant' to take notice by creative and dramatic means. Surprising coalitions between powerful and weak groups may also be a means of attracting the attention of powerful groups that need to listen to the weak.

Our group was very conscious that imbalances of power occur and may thwart true dialogue, not just on the level of economic or political power, but also in terms of religious power. In many countries, religious leaders refuse to allow their exercise of power to be scrutinized or criticized. Religious leaders in all faiths sometimes defend their power in undemocratic ways. They claim divine authority and/or religious or educational privilege because of their holy office. One example cited was of micro-finance schemes where poor people are forced to repay their loans on time, but bishops refuse to repay and the organizers are afraid to challenge them because of their religious authority. Leaders who abuse their power and refuse accountability or transparency in the use of funds, are poor candidates for interreligious dialogue.

We were aware that sometimes interreligious dialogue is a cover for oppression and may be manipulated in accordance with the interests of the powerful. For example, the authoritarian government of President Suharto in Indonesia frequently sponsored interreligious dialogue to

promote harmony and ensure coordinated religious support and legitimation for government development projects. In this case dialogue was intended to support the status quo. It is a ritual practice intended to strengthen a *habitus* (Bourdieu) of social inequality.

In some contexts, dialogue is very difficult because the social and cultural practices of the people do not permit any criticism of religious authority. Religious authorities do not accept public criticism. For example, in Indonesian *pesantren* (Islamic boarding schools), the *Kiyai* (guru or religious leader), has almost absolute power over his (there are no women Kiyai) disciples. The Kiyai is an absolute monarch within the context of his pesantren. But even here there is a kind of dialogue at work. The Kiyai are meant to lead and teach without self interest. Many are in fact very progressive and serve their disciples with great virtue. However if they do not, if they are seen to abuse their power or oppress their followers, the disciples and community will 'vote with their feet'. They will simply go to another pesantren to find a more virtuous Kiyai to teach them. Many pesantren in Indonesia are good places for dialogue because they accept visitors from other faiths to come and learn and share their ideas. Nevertheless dialogue of this sort must be very polite and never criticize the Kiyai in front of others.

One power dynamic which many of us experience is the difference of position between leaders of the majority or dominant religious group, and leaders or member of minority groups. For example, Muslims in the United States are a minority who experience various types of discrimination or even threats to their physical safety. If they dialogue with Jews and Christians in New York, they are more like the mouse, dialoguing with the elephant. Similarly some Muslims in India may experience serious threats against their very existence that makes dialogue with some Hindu groups both necessary and dangerous. On the other hand, Muslims in Pakistan, Indonesia or Bangladesh are in the powerful position of the elephant while minority groups are more like the mouse.

Powerful groups, not only religious but also economic, often control the public space of contexts where they form a large majority. French secularists may forbid the wearing of Muslim dress in publicly supported institutions, because they are a majority. Conversely, Muslims may require the wearing of Muslim dress, even by non-Muslims, in areas that institute Islamic law (*syari'ah*). It is important for all religious groups to remember the principle of reciprocity (see Abdullahi an-Naim), or more simply put, the golden rule, when determining the ground rules for dialogue in public.

Interreligious dialogue includes many different types of communication, both verbal and symbolic. But in all types of communication, power realities play a part. Who speaks to whom, and in what tone of voice or language is an inescapable part of dialogue. In further parts of this paper, we will elaborate on our understanding of power and propose ways of inducing transformative dialogue in the light of our experiences and understandings of power.

### **Different understandings of power relations**

Power is a complex concept with both positive and negative aspects. When many of us first talk about power we think in terms of 'power over others.' This power is hierarchical in nature, and is associated with dominating, anthropocentric, patriarchal and other oppressive systems of advantage where language, gender, race and/or religion are used by one group to manipulate or otherwise exert unjust control over others. When conceiving of power in this way, we are thinking in terms of an imbalance of power relations that is 'excluding' in nature.

But power can also be viewed positively as 'power with and for others.' This power may also be hierarchical in nature, but it is associated with empowering rather than dominating others. It is a power which is associated with sharing, serving and even sacrificing on behalf of others. It may involve delegating responsibilities or delicately balancing differentials in power. For example, while the 'good chief' in Polynesian societies has a great deal of authority, and exercises control over

others, she or he does so by discerning and acting to promote the common good, rather than private self-interest. The good chief takes care to hear all points of view, such that 'no one is left out.' When speaking of power in this way, we are talking about an imbalance of power that is 'inclusive' in nature.

Power can also be viewed in terms of its source or origins, as 'power from' outside of or beyond ourselves, as in power from God, or power from the spirit world, or power from the community, or even power in terms of capabilities or capacities that reside within each of us as individuals. Because power in this sense is a 'gift' or something 'received' it implies an element of responsibility. However, while religious adherents often refer to power received from a transcendent being in positive, redemptive ways; this 'power from' can also have decidedly negative connotations. Religious leaders of all stripes may use power to hurt others, defend their own interests at the expense of the interests of others, or inhibit harmony and a spirit of trust and well-being in the community. And we are mindful that these different senses of 'power from' may not be reconcilable with one another.

It is important, further, to be mindful of cultural context when reflecting on these three understandings of power. For example, in the African worldview, power is not only associated with human beings and human institutions, but inhabits everything in the universe as a real substance, while at the same time it is also manifest in specific familial, social and cultural structures. And it is also important to avoid simple generalizations about various types of power, such as economic power. Many of us are concerned about the global reach of the power of transnational corporations and the widespread use of advertising to create consumer demand for more and more products. Consequently, the whole concept of the power of the market can be viewed in a negative light. And yet, among the Ibo in Nigeria, each child born on one of the four market days of the week is given a name of the respective market day on which she or he was born. The 'market' is in this way part of one's sense of identity.

Finally, when thinking of power in relation to interreligious dialogue, it is necessary to acknowledge the fact of various forms of power imbalances that may be a factor in decisions and strategies about how we engage in such dialogue, including the language utilized, the degrees of formal education of participants and differentials in economic class. For example, imagine that participants are seated in a circle on chairs, but that the height of each chair reflects the economic assets or wealth of the person seated in that chair (depending on who is in the circle, some chairs may be very high indeed!). Imagine further that a poor person with no prior experience in formal debating is asked to participate in a debate with a professor who holds a Ph.D. and has participated in many debates. Other factors that may contribute to imbalances of power include political, racial, ethnic, gender and sexual orientation. A person's health status – for example, if people are infected with HIV – may predispose them to be stigmatized or discounted. Some persons may also be perceived by others to have an intimidating degree of moral power. For example, theologians, teachers of ethics and religious leaders are sometimes not aware of how their own positions are perceived as having an inordinate amount of moral authority.

### **Towards inducing transformative dialogue that takes power relations and care and compassion seriously**

Given the reality of power imbalances, what is an ethical, sustainable way of inducing transformative dialogue? Ethics implies that we must do something with the power we have. Transformative ethics entails a genuine encounter with the other who has different moral values and principles than we do. In fact, we could say that we only begin to engage in transformative ethics when our moral world collides with the moral world of the person who stands in a different moral tradition than we do.

Transformative dialogue is dialogue which nudges and even pushes us beyond where we are to a new, richer understanding of who we are and what we should do. Such dialogue has the following aspects:

- It takes care to define the goals of the dialogue at the outset. For instance, the aim of the dialogue may be exploratory in nature. Perhaps there is an attempt to learn about religious practices. It may be geared toward giving and listening to testimonies. It might be structured as a revealing dialogue in which participants bring uncomfortable truths to light. It could be a dialectical exercise focused on confronting injustices or social problems, where there is an intent to challenge certain positions. Or, perhaps there is a concern to negotiate a settlement of some kind.
- It acknowledges and clarifies the different levels of power which are present at the onset of a dialogue. It is mindful of where the difficulties may come from and how different imbalances of power can influence the dialogue. It may require the building of a 'counter power' which lessens the impact of power differentials and allows for a fairer dialogue. For example, persons of similar educational backgrounds or individuals who occupy similar places in social and economic hierarchies might be enlisted as participants for a particular dialogue. We may have to go more slowly than we would like – to take 'baby steps' toward achieving transformative dialogue.
- It presupposes a prior interrogation of our own self-understandings. It necessitates a capacity to be self-critical or what the Latin American sociologist of religion, Otto Maduro, refers to as 'autocriticality.' For example, the good teacher knows her or his limitations. According to an ancient Chinese story, Confucius had an excellent student that knew Confucianism perfectly. But one day Confucius said to the student, 'You are not my follower.' In response the student asked, 'Why?', to which Confucius replied, 'Because you never criticize me.' Participants in transformative dialogue know that they need criticism. Thus, transformative dialogue assumes a level of humility about our own moral power – an awareness of our own predispositions toward selfishness or lack of concern for the well-being of the other.
- It proceeds on the assumption that we do not exist for ourselves alone, but that we exist in relation to one another. It presupposes, in the words of the Asian American theologian, Rita Nakashima Brock, that we are 'relationship-seeking beings.' We are ready to engage in transformative dialogue when we can truly respond to the question, 'Who am I?' to quote John Mbiti, with words such as, 'I am because we are.' It is mindful that the 'we' is not limited to fellow human beings, but includes flora and fauna, indeed all of nature. And for religious adherents, it includes a covenantal relationship with transcendent power – with the creative source of all that is. It does not question the other's definition of her or his faith or culture.
- It builds trust by stressing a need for openness and transparency. It assumes that participants approach and engage one another in a non-defensive way. It is a quality of dialogue in which everyone senses that she or he will get a fair hearing.
- It includes as many diverse voices as is practically feasible and appropriate to the nature of the particular dialogue. For example, it creates ways to include women in settings where women have been excluded from such participation. It recognizes that the greater the diversity, the greater the possibility for arriving at truth.
- It assumes that participants are accountable to one another, but is aware that different cultures have different mechanisms for holding one another accountable, especially their leaders. Participants may be held accountable to one another in both direct and indirect ways. Leaders with a high degree of moral authority should encourage the contributions of persons who are normally voiceless.
- It takes histories seriously, especially histories of oppression, while not being entrapped or circumscribed by those histories. On the one hand, while it acknowledges that healing is

important, it seeks to move beyond healing processes toward new levels of caring and compassion in the future. Thus, while transformative dialogue assumes an acute awareness of legacies of colonialism or neo-colonialism – for the need to remember the injustices of the past – it also constitutes an empowering exercise in which participants strive toward a new heaven and a new earth. It seeks to transcend differing viewpoints about controversial issues in the past and present in order to encourage contributions toward dialogue in the future. It honours the other's definition of her or his faith or culture. It represents an invitation to an ongoing process that constitutes the building up of enduring relationships.

- As interreligious dialogue, it may or may not focus on expressly religious themes, doctrines or philosophies. Indeed, transformative dialogue may focus on specific social problems or practical needs for survival in everyday life that are not specifically religious in nature. It may issue in surprising coalitions, creating an opportunity for new openings.
- It is an open-ended, hopeful process – a flow of dialogue in response to 'the gift' of our very being. It unfolds in the hope and expectation of introducing a change, and even inducing the breaking forth of a *kairos* moment.
- Transformative dialogue is not confined to analytic or propositional discussion. It also includes sharing of stories, myths, and non-verbal artistic expressions. Such dialogue requires attention to forms of expression and symbolic dialogue that may be more common to marginalized groups. Sharing of food and other forms of sustenance is an almost universal form of dialogue.

## **Report of Group 5: Care and Compassion. Sharing Values in the African Context**

### **Participants**

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Mr Mohammed M. Jeizan, Kenya  
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Mr Richard Kibirige, Uganda  
Mr Joseph King'ori, Kenya  
Dr. David Maillu, Kenya  
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### **Preliminary remarks**

The concepts of care and compassion not only are common to all human cultures and religions, but also are constant desires of the human person. All great religious leaders have emphasized the centrality of care and compassion. Jesus Christ, for example, did so in the Beatitudes and the Parable of the Prodigal Son. We should avoid addressing the themes of care and compassion too superficially or narrowly. There is a need to explore their inner dynamics and problematics, both positive and negative.

We can distinguish two types of care and compassion:

- Formative-transformative care and compassion is the authentic and absolutely needful empathy and action that holistically and humbly helps both the giver and the receiver. It neither undermines the dignity of the receiver nor paralyzes his/her potentiality and responsibility to develop as a rational and creative being. Moreover, it respects both the emotions and the socio-cultural and human identity of the sufferer. In short, it does not homogenize itself. True compassion is essentially and necessarily respectful and dignifying. It does not overlook the fundamental human values cherished by others.
- Destructive-paralyzing care and compassion is indifferent and overlooks the dignity of the human person. It paralyzes the potentialities of the human person and renders him/her dependent. Certain acts of compassion may become obstacles to the integral development and transformation of the receiver, who becomes simply a passive and inactive partner and develops 'dependency syndrome.' Worse still, some acts of compassion may result from the giver's 'helping syndrome', which helps neither the sufferer nor the giver. It hinders the holistic development and actualization of the receiver.

Viewed holistically, the suffering person carries not only material needs or wants, but also personal desires and the responsibility of integral growth and transformation. Consequently, care and compassion should avoid the potential dangers of the mal-development of the human person. Any act of care and compassion should not only facilitate the empowerment of the sufferer, but also promote human creativity and personal fulfilment.

### **Defining global ethics**

Although cultures and religions are diverse, ethics is universal. Therefore, it is possible to work toward a global ethic. But being human is expressed in many ways. Universal ethics must be particular in order to be relevant.

We could attempt to validate global ethics either from the top down (deductively) or from the bottom up (inductively). If we start from the universal, what will actually happen is that the particular of those in power will be universalized. They will tailor the rules to suit themselves. Universal values that are imposed from above will not be accepted from below. When the powerful universalize their particular, the ethic of the powerless goes underground, to await an opportunity to resurface. It may erupt either constructively or destructively.

A global ethics will be an imposition, from above or from outside, if ordinary people cannot identify themselves with the values and virtues associated with it. On the other hand, it will be an affirmation of self-identity, if its values and virtues resonate with a people's self-perception and self-evaluation within their own cultural and national context. Yet, if it is local and remains local, it will be isolationist.

We should avoid imperialism by beginning with the particular and working toward the universal. The universal must not supersede the particular. People must see that they are part of a bigger whole, without losing what is their own. Our approach to defining global ethics should be like drops forming a body of water, not like a lake from which we permit streams to flow. But we should also examine the sources of the water and distinguish between pure and polluted water.

We must not let science or technology or the market or the media be the custodian of global ethics; for behind them always stand certain persons, with certain agendas.

Africa has much to offer to global ethics. Although African cultures differ from one another, these differences are in detail, not in essence. Certain elements are common to all:

- African ethics is communal, not individualist. This does not mean that the individual is unimportant, but rather that the individual is important as a member of the community.
- All of reality is a continuum, from the spiritual to the human to fauna, flora, and the inanimate world. Therefore, injuring nature is unethical. This implies that we have responsibilities towards non-human living beings and the universe.
- The spiritual dimension is particularly important in the African world view. Accordingly, God is the creator of all things. This has significant implications for our lives.
- There is a relationship of continuity between generations. We occupy a specific generational space. Others come before us and others will come after us. There is a series of rites of passage (not only the one from adolescence to adulthood), which complete the continuity of generations. There are intergenerational handovers; when these break down, community breaks down. After someone passes through a rite of passage, certain behaviour is expected of him/her.
- We should take care of the weak and the poor, not as objects of pity, but with empathy.

Global ethics is human ethics. If African values were merely African values, Africa would have little to offer to global ethics. If, on the contrary, some African values are in fact human values, then Africa does indeed have something significant to offer to the rest of the world: values that are genuinely human. At the same time, Africa can also learn from the rest of the world.

A global ethic should be based on covenantal rather than contractual relationships. Care and compassion are voluntary, covenantal acts, extended by one person or group to another. A contract cannot compel someone to be caring or compassionate. Contracts are for protection of self-interests.

Covenants are commitments towards other people. Covenants increase social goodwill. Contracts are based on the fear that one party may not keep the promise over a particular consideration. Covenants are based on the trust that each party will keep the promise.

Sir Jonathan Sacks makes the following distinction between contracts and covenants:

A contract is made for a limited period, for a specific purpose, between two or more parties, each seeking their own benefit. A covenant is made open-endedly by two or more parties who come together in a bond of loyalty and trust to achieve together what none can achieve alone. A contract is like a deal; a covenant is like a marriage. Contracts belong to the market and to the state, to economics and politics, both of which are arenas of competition. Covenants belong to families, communities, charities, which are arenas of cooperation. A contract is between me and you – separate selves – but a covenant is about us – collective belonging. A contract is about interests: a covenant is about identity. And hence the vital distinction not made clearly enough in European politics between a social contract and a social covenant. *A social contract creates a state; a social covenant creates a society* (Address to the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 19 November 2008).

The distinction between contracts and covenants is not one of mutual exclusivity; some relationships properly possess both contractual and covenantal properties. Nevertheless, it is a distinction that can be applied fruitfully in many contexts. For example, the slow pace of progress in interreligious dialogue can be explained partially by the fact that it is often conducted with the characteristics of a contract, rather than with those of a covenant. Additionally, a partial explanation of the disintegration of the institution of the family in some modern societies is that marriage has come to be regarded as merely a contract.

### **Ensuring a successful interreligious dialogue on ethics**

Religions do not dialogue; people dialogue – but only if they respect one another. In order for interreligious dialogue to take place, people from different religions must respect each other.

Religion at its best is a corrective to abuse of power; religion at its worst involves abuse of power. Religions have sometimes been abused by the powerful. Therefore, religions cannot automatically become instruments of promoting peace. The power of religion may be seized by those who want to misuse it, e.g., as an instrument of war.

The approach of some (but not all) missionaries in Africa was top-down. Those who knew told those who did not know. In contrast, in interreligious dialogue, instead of thinking we know more than others, we should listen to others. Religion cannot be an instrument of peace if it is my religion to the exclusion of others.

We should keep in mind that the religions are themselves divided internally, and ask who within each of them should participate in interreligious dialogue. We should also keep in mind that participants in interfaith discourse represent not only their religions, but also their societies. Religions are the custodians of the ethics of the societies in which they are dominant.

### **Integrating means and methods of sharing values, in a human-to-human approach**

There are many means and methods of sharing values other than academic discourse. Going beyond academic discourse means that we move from idealism to realism, from theory to practice. In the practical sharing of values, we need to take into consideration the various existential components of human life. Some obvious examples are theatre, music, dancing, poetry, art, etc. A less obvious example is intermarriage. The political climate must permit these different means and methods of sharing values.

In some cultures, opening places of worship to members of other religious communities may facilitate the sharing of values. Being there for the global other is another key to sharing. In whatever means and method one uses, a premium should be placed on the independent investigation of truth, since it eliminates prejudices that hinder the sharing of human values. Ethics does not exist in isolation from concrete human situations; therefore, in all human interactions – political, economic, religious, etc. – means and methods should be crafted in order to promote human values.

### **Balancing power relations, inducing a real transformation**

It is important to understand that there are many different kinds of power. In thinking about balancing power relations, it may be helpful to consider the work of African female theologians who are investigating ‘power over’ vs. ‘enabling power’, oppressive power vs. nurturing power.

There are two dominant models of power, both of which are unsatisfactory: the leader-follower or ruler-ruled model and the centre-periphery model. Are rulers more important than those who are ruled? The shepherd leads the sheep by walking behind them, not in front of them, in order not to lose the last sheep. And what is so good about being at the centre? It would be better to think of everyone at the periphery, in a circle. Then everyone could see everyone and no one would be more powerful than anyone else. Although these metaphors are imperfect, they suggest alternatives to the dominant models of power.

We should understand power as influence. Influence should be shared, not dispensed. There are different focal points of social influence: political, religious, business, artistic, intellectual, moral, kinship-group leadership, etc.

In order to induce a real transformation, we need to bring global ethics down from the theoretical to the practical level. Global ethics should not exist only in the mind. We need institutions consistent with global ethics. The institutions that govern human activities need to be in harmony at the global level for global ethics to be in place. Global ethics needs to be local in order to be relevant.

The current global economic crisis, which is affecting the major economies and melting down on the poor within both ‘developed’ and ‘developing’ countries, as well as on the natural environment, shows that the present model of unbridled liberal markets, with a capitalist and materialist financial system, is not sustainable. Existing paradigms have failed. People around the world have lost jobs, families are uncertain of their futures, and governments have introduced panic measures to bail out failing banks and corporations, whose management promoted the domination of short-term profits and personal interests above those of humanity in the first place. It is time for new thinking and action in the economy field, founded on moral and spiritual values and universal ethical principles. We need inclusive, just international partnerships to promote people above profits and to empower local communities by a revision of the current unethical world economic system. We need coordination of efforts by all countries, founded on the principles of efficiency and equity. We need to understand the business firm as a covenantal community, rather than merely a collection of individuals related to one another by a network of contracts.

\* \* \*

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*Please note that some participants decided to participate in online group work without travelling to Nairobi. A few last minutes cancellations also occurred for visa, professional, or health reasons.*

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