

READING THE PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS' *DECLARATION TOWARD A GLOBAL ETHIC AS A DEVELOPMENT TEXT*¹

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Abstract

In recent development studies a positive, yet critical reappraisal of the potential contribution of religion has emerged. Commentators like Galtung, as well as Edwards and Sen, seem to be moving development discourse beyond its habitual economic and technological biases. Development theorists have also called upon religious actors to recast their usual welfare activities. The Declaration Toward a Global Ethic implicitly commits the world's religions to a mode of engagement that complies with expectations in development studies. When read within an explicitly "development" perspective, the Declaration holds strategic significance for self-critical religious actors and for reflexive development theorists.

Key Concepts: Development studies, global ethic, Parliament of World Religions

1. Introduction

The recent positive reappraisal in development studies of religion as a transformative force may indeed herald the dawn of a post-secular phase in the social sciences (see e.g. Belshaw, Calderisi and Sudgen 2001; Daly and Cobb 1990; Edwards and Sen 2000; Engel and Engel 1990; Galtung 1996; Goulet 1995; Jameson and Wilber 1980; Lehmann 1990; Little 1995; Ryan 1995; Tyndale 2000; Ver Beek 2000). Such positive re-evaluation proceeds from the expectation held by development theorists of religious actors: that they engage in a mode of involvement quite different from traditional works of charity and welfare (cf. Elliot 1987). Religious actors are now asked to make an ethical, behavioral and relational impact in line with their self-identity as "faith" and "value" institutions *par excellence* (cf. Swart 2000:8-9). They are expected to make a structural contribution to strengthen the new global discourses on social justice and peace. David Korten (1990:223), for instance, writes:

Development has long been treated as primarily a financial and technical problem. The importance of values has been generally neglected. This neglect contributes to many of the current global crises, in particular a high incidence of communal violence, the destructive use of natural resources, drug abuse, and social injustice. Religiously oriented NGOs have commonly defined their roles as instruments of charity engaged in transferring material resources to those in need. Few have asked basic questions about the larger role of religion in dealing with issues of social justice and conflict that are substantial contributors to the conditions of human suffering that most NGOs seek to relieve.

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The positive revision of religion's development potential clearly relates to the challenge that development theorists should include social dimensions in "development" as a corrective to the economic and technological biases that skew its meaning. Manuel Castells (2000a:390) notes that:

The dream of the Enlightenment, that reason and science would solve the problems of humankind, is within reach. Yet there is an extraordinary gap between our technological overdevelopment and our social underdevelopment.

Given the new appraisal of religious actors in development studies, the document *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* by the Parliament of the World's Religions achieves a particular significance. This socio-ethical and religious text was endorsed by prominent religious leaders in Chicago in 1993 (see Küng 1993a:72). The Declaration has become "the basis for an extensive process of discussion and acceptance" in the domains of religion, politics and culture (Küng 1997:108-9, 231-4; 1996b:3-4; see also 1993b:8).

Through the Declaration the world's religions implicitly commit their affiliates to a mode of engagement that complies greatly with the expectations of development theorists. The Declaration modestly acknowledges that the religions cannot solve the complex economic, political and social problems of the world. Yet the text claims that religion could "provide what obviously cannot be attained by economic plans, political programmes or legal regulations alone". Religion could effect "**a change in the inner orientation, the whole mentality, the 'hearts' of people**, and a conversion from a false path to a new orientation for life".

Humankind urgently needs social and ecological reforms, but it needs **spiritual renewal** just as urgently. As religious or spiritual persons we commit ourselves to this task. The spiritual powers of the religions can offer a fundamental sense of trust, a ground of meaning, ultimate standards, and a spiritual home (Parliament 1993:22; original bold).

Our aim in what follows is to attach a more explicit "development" meaning to the Declaration so as to increase its strategic significance in this respect for religious scholars and actors. In sections 2 and 3 we explore two recent contributions to the secular development debate that are uniquely relevant to our purpose. Our selection of the works of Johan Galtung (1996) on social development and Michael Edwards and Gita Sen (2000) on social change obviously does not exhaust the availability of significant material on these subjects, nor on religion and development. Yet their contributions contain arguments that challenge secular and religious understandings of development and help to interpret the *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* in such terms. In section 4 we examine the Declaration as a meaningful document in its own right, extracting its essential aspects in isolation from development discourse. This is followed by an explicit reading of the Declaration as a "development" text in section 5, in which we synthesise insights from our discussion of Galtung, Edwards and Sen, and the Declaration and draw some pertinent conclusions with regard to the prevailing challenges faced by the Declaration and its associated project on the level of strategy and implementation.

2. Galtung on the Social Dimensions of Development

In the expanding volume of academic publications on social development a recent contribution by the Norwegian development and peace scholar Johan Galtung stands out. Many scholars today want to broaden the development paradigm by including long-term, inclusive (egalitarian) economic development and social welfare (see e.g. Booth 1994; Castells 2000b; Midgley 1995). While this in itself is not an unworthy cause, Galtung

(1996) has gone still further. He derives his understanding of social development from a comprehensive theory of “social disintegration”. By also introducing non-economic categories, Galtung in a very important way reveals the deficiency of the mainstream social development debate. A comprehensive statement on “negative social development” in the form of large-scale social disintegration constitutes his starting point (see Galtung 1996:379-85). Galtung claims that “many human societies (perhaps most) are in a state of advanced social disintegration at the close of the twentieth century” (Galtung 1996:379).

Figure 1: Galtung’s perception of global problems of development

Space	Global problem	
	<i>Recognised dimensions</i>	<i>Neglected dimensions</i>
Nature	ecological degradation, over-population	
Human	poverty/misery, repression,	spiritual alienation
Society	economic underdevelopment	social disintegration
World	massive violence, war (inter-state /intra-state)	
Time	non-sustainability	
Culture		inadequacy

Source: Galtung 1996: 389, 395

Figure 1 explains Galtung’s theory, in which social disintegration is portrayed as a global problem of development “spaces”, which are related to recognised and neglected dimensions. Nature, Human, Society and World represent the four “Spaces” in which development unfolds. The entities on the right indicate the corresponding global problems of development. Those listed first indicate the problems that are today recognised by the mainstream to the extent that they have become “the basic foci of the many endeavors of the United Nations under the headings ‘environment’ (for nature), ‘human rights’ and ‘development’ (for society) and ‘peace’ (for the world)”. In addition to these categories of development a time dimension (left-hand column) has also importantly been added in recent times. The problem of non-sustainability is now also increasingly recognised as a major concern.

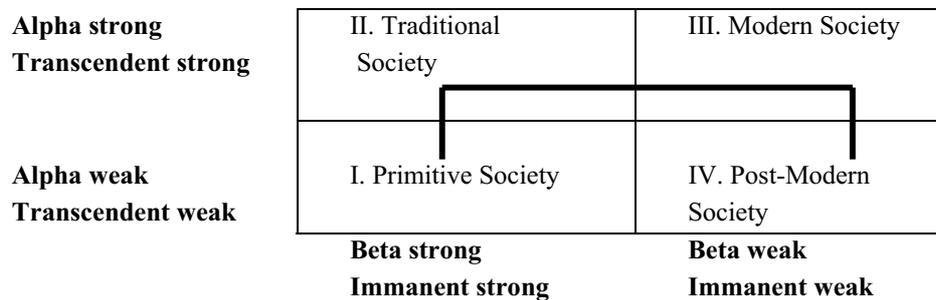
The three problems listed second are the ones that are still neglected today. They “have not yet entered the general discourse”. The obvious reason for this state of affairs is that the three neglected problems require new expertise. Religionists and psychologists are required as experts on “spiritual alienation”. Social scientists in general and sociologists in particular are needed as experts on “social disintegration”. Finally, religionists again, as well as cultural anthropologists and philosophers, are necessary as experts on the “inadequacy” of mainstream (Western) culture. But these problems and the specialists to address them remain sidelined by mainstream theorists. “These concerns do not carry the same weight as the natural sciences, economics and security studies, which are assumed adequate for the problems discussed” (Galtung 1996:380-1).

The relevance of Galtung for our own discussion is clearly that his contribution broadens and challenges the mainstream, economically biased concept of social development. He enters cultural and religious categories into the theoretical framework. Religionists become important role players in development and in countering social disintegration (Galtung 1996:412).

Galtung deepens his theory of disintegration by placing the three neglected categories at the core of the current social problematic. "Lives lived without meaning, societies disintegrating, culture without answers are serious problems *sui generis*", not merely "side-effects or side-causes of the problems of eco-breakdown, misery and war" (Galtung 1996:381-2). By implication, the continual neglect of the additional three problems will worsen the social crisis.

Galtung argues that the current large-scale social disintegration involves a twin process of destructuration and deculturation, which advances structurelessness ("atomie") and culturelessness ("anomie"). The latter two notions capture the essence of the problem for Galtung: a future social formation based on complete individualisation (Galtung 1996:382-3). Galtung further elaborates on the notions of destructuration and deculturation by including both in a macro-historical perspective on structural transformations and on cultural transformations (see Galtung 1996:385-97). He sees a post-modern society emerging at the end of history – by and large the current epoch – that is "essentially chaotic and anarchic", basically devoid of any structural and cultural meaning (Galtung 1996:385). Figure 2 amalgamates two of Galtung's figures in order to explain his argument.

Figure 2: Human social (trans)formations: structural and cultural macro-history



Source: Galtung, 1996: 389, 395

Human interaction structures, according to Galtung, consist of two modes: thin-and-big structures, Alpha, and thick-and-small structures, Beta. A primary example of Alpha is the three pillars of modern society: state, capital and civil society. These structures are typically manifested in huge bureaucracies, corporations and people's organisations. Inside Alpha, however, small informal Beta structures of people with primary relations (such as colleagues who become friends) are also to be found. Alpha furthermore tends to be vertical, while Beta can be both horizontal and vertical (e.g. the tribal hierarchy as opposed to the neighborhood, kinship) (Galtung 1996:387-9).

In a similar way the notions of immanent and transcendent religion can describe culture, in the sense of a binding normative cultural formation, best. Immanent religion (or culture) tends to be more horizontal. Immanent religion also tends to be particularistic rather than universalistic, which can become its negative side. The strong in-group norms in primitive society are a primary example of immanent religion. To be accepted, outsiders must prove themselves, "not by submitting to the same Father Sky, but by relating co-operatively". Modern society, again, represents the opposite extreme: transcendent religion (culture), which tends to be more vertical. "There has to be an authority beyond the apex of the Alpha pyramid as there is so much power to legitimise. Father Sky supplies the authority, not Mother Earth – she is too close to everybody" (Galtung 1996:395-6).

As summarised in Figure 2 above, in the final epoch of human structural and cultural history, i.e. post-modern society, all modes of structure and culture have become weak. Whereas various varieties of “strong” and “weak” could be found in previous epochs, the last epoch can be characterised as a period of very little structural and cultural meaning:

Read this way, formation IV, replete with atomie and anomie, is a rather adequate image of world society: vertical with symbolic, abstract relations rather than direct interaction, short on binding norms and altruistic orientation and long on egoistic cost-benefit orientation. There are some Beta structures, as among the Nordic, the European Union and the ASEAN countries. But the formation IV structure is very evident, and the consequence is obvious: instead of efforts at peaceful conflict solution, violence is used, respecting neither common values nor any inner voice of conscience (Galtung 1996:401).

The preceding notions inform Galtung’s definition of social development as the antidote to social disintegration. The retrieval of (positive) social development ought to be based on the following: Thesis one: Create strong Alpha and strong Beta structures to encourage structuration and reverse destructure. Thesis two: Promote immanent and transcendent religion to promote cultururation and reverse decultururation (Galtung 1996:408).

Thus, there is a particular important (indispensable) social development role for religion to play in Galtung’s theory: to promote cultururation and to reverse decultururation. The notions of “hard” and “soft” are furthermore introduced to define this role. These notions describe the two images of religion, i.e. its soft and hard circles. The soft circle is religion’s inner circle and defines its deepest essence. There one discovers religion’s enduring unifying potential to link, connect, unify with the outside (whether with God or fellow humans). The central message becomes that of compassion. The hard circle is its outer circle. There one finds “hard religion”. The focus changes to what divides, rather than what unifies. “Other religions are denounced as pagan, or even worse, as heresy. The sinners are in for very harsh treatment”. Religion becomes instrumental in “the struggle among states in world politics” (Galtung 1996:411).

Religion’s role in social development more precisely becomes “the inner struggle between the unifying and the divisive forces” within its own ranks. This must be the foremost religious project, “to promote the softer aspects of the religions and try to demote the harder (harsher) aspects” (Galtung 1996:411).

Can a more direct connection between religion and Galtung’s first thesis be made? We would argue that this is possible, using an indirect interpretation of Galtung as well as what others have written on religion’s actual potential in this regard (see Duchrow 1995:278-315). According to Galtung (1996:409) a project of (re)structuration (Thesis one) must be twofold: recreating Beta and rehumanising Alpha. Humanity needs (a strong but humanised) Alpha because “some big is necessary”. It also needs Beta for the obvious reason that “small is beautiful” (Galtung 1996:408).

Galtung’s requirements for a project of restructuring (Thesis one) are in many regards very similar to the imperatives of the second project (Thesis two): humanisation, softer approaches/soft culture, binding norms/ethics, community, sharing, compassion (see Galtung 1996:409-12). Could a project on cultururation therefore not provide the basis for a successful project on structuration? Does (“soft”) religion not have an indispensable contribution to make in this regard? What other forces could be relied on? These issues highlight the weak elements of Galtung’s otherwise outstanding contribution. In the case of a project on cultururation, he relies on religion as a potentially major force. Yet in the first project the discussion lacks a similar kind of identification. Instead, Galtung pins the hope for success on a loose connection between isolated examples and actors. We would argue

that a more explicit link between Galtung's two theses on social development needs to be made.

3. Edwards and Sen on the personal dimensions of social-change-as-development

In the secular development literature a sub-debate on non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and development constitutes a potential source for a concurrent religion and development debate (see Swart and Venter 2001; Swart 2000:100-7). This is clearly illustrated in a recent contribution by development writers Michael Edwards and Gita Sen (2000) to a special issue on "NGO Futures". While Edwards and Sen's paper privileges NGOs as special actors of development, they raise issues that are of direct relevance to religion's own interests and make direct reference to religion. The overlap between the issues they raise and those expressed in the *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* will become clearer later in our discussion. In what follows we summarise the essence of Edwards and Sen's argument by taking the key notion of "personal change" in their paper as point of departure.

Edwards and Sen's argument returns to an appreciation of the importance of personal change for realising the objectives of positive large-scale social transformation. Indeed, their contribution represents a unique attempt in the NGO development debate to narrow the religious-secular divide which has become such a feature among NGOs as well as development thinkers in general (see Landim 1987; Tyndale 2000; Ver Beek 2000).

Like Galtung, Edwards and Sen also start from a critical and pessimistic understanding of society at large, although their view is rooted in critical globalisation. Edwards and Sen propose that the shift in the distribution of power and authority from public to private interests under globalisation has resulted in a deeper and more complex process. Consequently economic, social and political forces work to the benefit of a small section of the world's population (Edwards and Sen 2000:605). This state of affairs should now prompt critically minded NGOs "to try something different". Merely enabling people to be "more competitive" and strengthening their political voice are no longer sufficient strategies. At the core of the problem, from the point of view of a sustainable development approach, is the individualistic and materialistic culture of "globalising capitalism". Deeper changes are needed that will bring people to use their powers in ways that are less selfish and less self-centered. Edwards and Sen conclude that this necessity should make the notions of "values" and "personal change" fundamental to a strategic framework for sustainable development:

We cannot compete ourselves into a co-operative future, and if the future of the world depends on co-operation then clearly we must try something different... Our argument in this paper is simple:

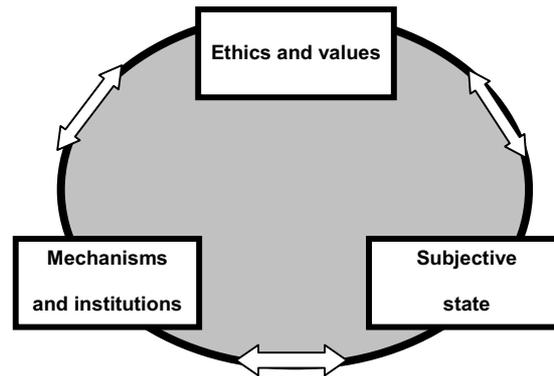
- "something different" requires a fundamental shift in values;
- to be sustainable that shift must be freely chosen;
- that choice is more likely to be made by human beings who have experienced a transformation of the heart... (Edwards and Sen 2000:606).

Edwards and Sen's perception of personal change becomes much more complicated in the rest of their discussion. For them personal change can only be understood properly within a comprehensive perspective on social change. From such a perspective, they argue, all social systems rest on three bases: (a) a set of principles that forms an axiomatic basis of ethics and values; (b) a set of processes comprising the functioning mechanisms and institutions that undergird the social system; and (c) the subjective states that constitute our inner

being – our personal feelings and institutions in the deepest sense (Edwards and Sen 2000:606). In essence, they argue that social change requires a recognition and conscious integration of all three bases of change (illustrated by Figure 3 below) and, by implication, the systems of power that the various bases produce. For example, any strategy aimed at long-term sustainable change in the current capitalist order will be partial and unsuccessful if it focuses exclusively on the institutional basis of change. Such a strategy neglects the subjective states (personal interests) and value base (general worldview, principles) that produce and sustain the institutions that should be changed (see Edwards and Sen 2000:607). As stated positively by Edwards and Sen (2000:608):

[I]t is clear that social change requires us to adopt an integrated approach that looks for positive synergies between different bases of change and different systems of power. When change in one area supports change in another, there is more of a chance that the outcome will be positive.

Figure 3: *Interaction of the three bases of change*



In Edwards and Sen’s argument a particular “creative” tension between a twofold emphasis on personal change and social integration unfolds. On the one hand, they criticise the lack of integration in reigning approaches to social change; on the other, they renew an emphasis on the imperative of personal change (see Edwards and Sen 2000:606-11). They refer specifically to religion as a foremost example of the “opposite extreme” whereby the subjective state is absolutised at the cost of other bases of change. The tendency of the world’s religions, by and large, to “attach less importance to the institutional basis of social change is just as bad as the social sciences” narrow-minded emphasis of the axiomatic and institutional aspects of social change (Edwards and Sen 2000: 607-8).

However, they do not only criticise religion but, with reference to integration of all bases of change, Edwards and Sen confirm that the missing ingredient remains “personal change, which acts as the wellspring of change in all other areas” (Edwards and Sen 2000:609). In an integrated approach the question is what kind of personal change will foster authentic transformation?

What kind of personal changes could energise the move towards an economic order which re-balances competitive and co-operative rationalities, a politics of dialogue rather than unrepresentative democracy, and a social policy that works against marginalisation and values the care and nurture of all human beings? (Edwards and Sen 2000:610).

For Edwards and Sen the quest for such change lies at the core of religious teaching, in the first principle taught by all the great religions (Galtung’s inner circle!), that one should

love your neighbor as yourself (Judaean-Christian), that one should see God in each other (Sanskrit). In this principle they recognise a statement that is profoundly social as much as it is profoundly personal. The potential embedded here is that of self-discovery, the capability to give and receive love, a new "unity consciousness" (Hindu *Vedanta*) whereby the other person matters as much as the self, and personal behaviour becomes "more expansive and less damaging to others" (Edwards and Sen 2000:610).

We may therefore conclude that Edwards and Sen's problem does not lie with an emphasis on the personal dimension as such; spirituality matters. But this spirituality ought to be different from – and must be far more profound than – the inward, self-centered and otherworldly kind of personal emphasis found in many cases (such as in conservative Christian evangelism). It also stands in sharp contrast to the social conservatism of fundamentalist religion (Edwards and Sen 2000:611). It is characterised by a deeper awareness, by a more profound transformation of the "self", by a kind of consciousness that is in a very specific sense socially aware, by a kind of awareness that will lead to definite interaction with the other bases of change and will challenge power.

Yet, in the final analysis questions remain about whether Edwards and Sen's argument fully settles the issue. In closing, they ask what role NGOs – the privileged actors in their vision of change – could play to promote social change. In the process they draw quite a distinct line between religion and NGOs. NGOs, they conclude, "are unlikely vehicles for the direct transformation of the individual". Consequently, they see a different role for NGOs in the personal sphere, something more "indirect" by which NGOs will encourage the transformation of people's subjective states. But at the same time this role of NGOs should translate into a more direct interaction with the axiomatic and institutional bases of change. NGOs are summoned to promote personal change through the ways in which they innovate and offer alternatives in their program of activities, in their constituency-building activities, and in their own organisational praxis (Edwards and Sen 2000:612-5).

Edwards and Sen's discussion of religion and NGOs thus appears to sustain a familiar (modernist) dichotomy. Religion's task is primarily – if not exclusively – spiritual and personal, even though they recognise some role for religion in constituency building (Edwards and Sen 2000:613). NGOs, on the other hand, should be directly involved in the structural sphere, in the offering of organisational and institutional alternatives. Indeed, a problem similar to the one that was raised at the end of the previous section surfaces here. Should religion be restricted to Edwards and Sen's vision? What is the position of religiously-based NGOs in this regard? Does an innovative public religion have something more to offer? (see Swart 2000:248-56). Has the potential of alternative social and economic practices based on religious values been sufficiently explored and recognised? (see Ver Beek 2000:31). These are only a few of the questions that should challenge Edwards and Sen's otherwise very valuable contribution.

4. Essential Aspects of *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*

Since the historical meeting of the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago in 1993, a number of scholars have reflected on the content and significance of the Declaration. The main contribution has come from Hans Küng, the distinguished German theologian and main architect of the Declaration (see Küng 1997; 1996b; 1996c; 1993a; 1993b). The commentaries of a group of high-profile political, cultural and religious leaders were also published in the book, *Yes to a Global Ethic* (see Küng 1996a).

In this section our aim is not to discuss these reflections, but to highlight the essential aspects and meaning of the Declaration. In addition, we also selectively use the work of K ng as a resource.

A social critique

The Declaration can be viewed as a social critique, a prophetic declaration in the strongest sense of the word. It speaks about the current world condition predominantly in pessimistic and condemning terms. The world is in agony, in a state of increasing disintegration. "The agony is so pervasive and urgent that we are compelled to name its manifestations so that the depth of this pain may be made clear" (Parliament 1993:13). This critical perspective, which introduces the Declaration, is elaborated upon at a number of places in the text.

In the Declaration a lack of binding norms and values is held responsible for the current state of affairs. K ng points out in this regard that the Declaration's critique has a global emphasis. "This crisis of orientation is certainly a problem not only for Europe but also for America, and especially also for the area of the former Soviet Union and for China; in other words, it is a global problem" (K ng 1993a:75).

The Declaration envisions a global crisis whose all-embracing features include the global economy, global ecology and global politics. Specific laments highlight the escalation of unemployment, poverty and hunger; the diminishing prospects for peace among nations; the tension between the sexes and generations; the large-scale killings and deaths of children; the corruption in politics and business; the destructive impact of social, racial and ethnic conflicts, drug abuse, organised crime and anarchy on life in the world's cities; and the ongoing plundering of the planet (Parliament 1993:17). These social plagues deeply disturb the religious consciousness:

We condemn the abuses of Earth's ecosystems.

We condemn the poverty that stifles life's potential; the hunger that weakens the human body; the economic disparities that threaten so many families with ruin.

We condemn the social disarray of the nations; the disregard for justice which pushes citizens to the margin; the anarchy overtaking our communities; and the insane death of children from violence. In particular we condemn aggression and hatred in the name of religion (Parliament 1993:13).

A religious self-critique

As the last sentence in the above quote suggests, the Declaration intends to be a religious self-critique as much as a social critique. The Declaration's social critique includes a confession of religion's share in the current social crisis. In this regard K ng singles out self-criticism as one of the "positive pointers" that determined the content of the Declaration. The Declaration not only addresses the "world", but also – and primarily – religions themselves. Their part in inciting aggression, fanaticism, hate and xenophobia, in inspiring and legitimating violence and bloody conflicts (Parliament 1993:17) has indeed been substantial and had to be stated unequivocally (K ng 1993a:58-9).

Thus, the Declaration does not accept out of hand the notion of religion as a positive vehicle for peace and transformation (cf. K ng 1996c:271-2). Because of religion's substantial part in the current social crisis, any prospect for positive change in society at large will have to start with an ecumenical understanding between the religions (Parliament 1993:22). A new relationship of peace and respect among the world's religions is the prerequisite for peace among peoples and nations (Parliament 1993:19-20, 22; see K ng 1997:92).

An ethical imperative

In the Declaration the conviction that there will be no new world order without a global ethic determines the perspective on change in a fundamental way (Parliament 1993:18-21; see Küng 1997:92; cf. 1996b:277). Any vision or endeavour to transform society for the better, to achieve lasting peace, to reverse the contemporary social crisis, ought to begin with the ethical. This ethical imperative becomes and is absolute foundational.

The question about the source of a global ethic is important in the Declaration, which problematises a reliance on the instruments of law and politics to achieve order and change (cf. Küng 1997:99-105). While these instruments are not unimportant, “a better global order cannot be created or enforced by laws, prescriptions, and conventions alone” (Parliament 1993:20). True visions and strivings for change need to “penetrate to a deeper *ethical level*, the level of *binding values, irrevocable criteria and inner basic attitudes*” (original italics; Küng 1993a:58) – something that falls outside the competence of law and politics. The realisation of peace, justice and sustainability depends on the insight and readiness of human beings to act justly, which, in turn, relies on people’s changed consciousness (Parliament 1993:20, 21, 34-6). The fundamental overlap with the religious demand for spiritual renewal, “for a conversion of the heart”, is obvious (Parliament 1993:22, 34-6).

An ethical consensus

The Declaration is a statement about the indispensability of religion in the realisation of a global ethic, defined as “a minimal fundamental consensus concerning binding values, irrevocable standards, and fundamental moral attitudes” (Parliament 1993:18). An ethical consensus already exists among the world’s religions as the basis for a global ethic, in the principle for right human conduct known as the “Golden Rule”. This rule or principle has for centuries been preserved in many religious ethical traditions and is positively expressed in the words: “What you wish done to yourself, do also to others” (Küng 1996c:277-8; Parliament 1993:23; see Küng 1997:98-9). It should become the basis of a global “irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations and religions” (Parliament 1993:23-4). In the teaching of the majority of the world’s religions it becomes further concretised and actualised through four broad, ancient directives for human behaviour (Küng 1996c:278; Parliament 1993:24):

- a. “You shall not kill”, which captures the commitment of the religious person and community of religions to a culture of non-violence and reverence for all life (Parliament 1993:24-6);
- b. “You shall not steal”, which captures the commitment of the religious person and community of religions to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order (Parliament 1993:26-9);
- c. “You shall not lie”, which captures the commitment of the religious person and community of religions to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness (Parliament 1993:29-32);
- d. “You shall not engage in fornication”, which captures the commitment of the religious person and community of religions to a culture of equality and partnership between men and women (Küng 1997:110-1; 1996c:278; Parliament 1993:32-4).

A worldly consciousness

A trademark of the Declaration is clearly its worldly consciousness, already suggested under the first aspect of “social critique” above. The Declaration is nothing but a call for a

global transformation of the world, for a new world order (Parliament 1993:18-21). As the four directives for human behaviour suggest, in the Declaration inner transformation needs to translate into new interpersonal and inter-group relationships in every sphere of life. However, a new ethical sensibility also needs to translate into a new economic world order in which “the intrinsic dignity” of every human person on earth can be fully realised (Parliament 1993:20). Thus, there is also a structural dimension to a global ethic.

In the Declaration interpersonal and structural transformation constitute two sides of the same coin. Such transformation should lead individuals, groups and institutions to be severely dissatisfied with the current economic order. People should want to actively work for a new and just economic order, to counter:

- economic institutions and structures currently responsible for world-wide hunger, deficiency and need;
- an economic dispensation in which millions of people are without work, exploited through poor wages and forced to the edges of society with few prospects for a better future;
- large-scale inequalities in many countries of the world, between the poor and the rich, the powerful and the powerless;
- unbridled capitalism, which has destroyed many ethical and spiritual values;
- a materialistic mentality with its endless desire for profit and plunder;
- economic corruption that is thriving in today’s developing and developed countries alike (Parliament 1993:27):

A cultural alternative

As emphasised both by the Declaration and its foremost spokesperson, Hans Küng, *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* does not aspire to and cannot be more than a minimal ethic (see Küng 1996c:277; 1993a:73; Parliament 1993:18-21, 35-6). The Declaration “should not and cannot strive to be a world ideology or a unitary world religion beyond all existing religions, nor a mixture of all religions” (Küng 1993a:73; see also 1997:92; 1996c:277). Yet, as Küng also qualifies, this does not mean that society as a whole is not challenged. The minimal ethic of a global ethic should not be equated with “an ethical minimalism” (Küng 1993a:73-4).

The minimal ethic of a global ethic – by implication, of the ethical consensus of the four ancient directives that should constitute the basis of a global ethic – implies nothing less than a vision of a totally transformed society. Specifically, if realised, the minima of common values, criteria and basic attitudes will lead to a completely transformed human culture beyond a “worldly consciousness” (see Küng 1993a:73). In a comprehensive way the emphasis now falls on the relational dimensions of life, on the overall (transformed) behaviours, attitudes and interactions of people. A human and non-human dimension is implied. In a transformed, collective consciousness the “inalienable and untouchable dignity” of every human being, “without distinction of age, sex, race, skin color, physical or mental ability, language, religion, political view, or national or social origin”, will be acknowledged (Parliament 1993:23; see also Küng 1997:110). A further trademark will be a newly found sensibility for caring, protecting and preserving animal and plant life, a new sense of planetary care, “especially with a view to future generations – for Earth and the cosmos, for the air, water, and soil” (Parliament 1993:26).

A global ethic comes to stand for nothing less than an alternative society, characterised by a softer culture, by “softer” and “gentler” ways of relating, behaving and being. In the

Declaration this meaning is suggested by a wide range of terms: “compassion, care, respect, consideration, moderation, modesty, honesty, truthfulness, partnership, trustworthiness, support, appreciation, concern, understanding, tolerance, reconciliation” (Parliament 1993:29, 32-4).

A declaration of hope

The Declaration ultimately strives to be “a counterpoint of hope” (Küng 1996b:2). It is a forceful statement about the possibility of a constructive religious alternative (with reference to its own self-critique), but also about the possibility of enduring peace in world society. The Declaration is a living example of a new recognition among the world's religions of what they have in common; an ethical heritage (see Parliament 1993:21-2). This common heritage is what the religions want to offer as a minimal but essential contribution to a global ethic and to peace (see Küng 1996c:277). As Küng states, in the Declaration “men and women from every possible religious and ethical tradition on this globe have expressed their readiness to change conditions on this earth out of religious conviction. In so doing they have established a sign of hope that a global change of consciousness is possible” (Küng 1996b:3). They have accepted as their “special task” keeping a sense of ethical responsibility alive in this world, to deepen it and pass it on to future generations (Parliament 1993:35).

As Küng concludes, the Declaration now forms the basis for discussion and acceptance that hopefully will “set off a process which changes the behavior of men and women in the religions in the direction of understanding, respect and cooperation” (Küng 1993b:8). As “an expression of actualized plurality” the Declaration is also acceptable to non-religious people. The Declaration explicitly seeks cooperation between believers and non-believers (Küng 1997:91-3; 1996c:281). All “persons with ethical convictions” can affirm it (Parliament, 1993:19). In this sense the Declaration even aspires to become instrumental in a wider dynamic beyond its own confinement to a minimal religious ethic. The goal is to bring about with other ethical actors an informed global ethic that is “common to all humankind” (see Parliament 1993:35; Küng 1993b:9).

5. The Declaration in Development Perspective: A Critical Reading

Our analysis shows that the *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* has meaning and significance even without the notion of “development” being superimposed upon it. It is indeed a remarkable text, a social manifesto in its own right. Representing a high point in the ecumenical history of religions, it represents a forceful counterpart to a pessimistic view of religion. As such the Declaration will have a “development” effect through the realisation of its ethical ideal, even if it is not explicitly a “development” text. As Küng (1996c:277) notes, a realised global ethic could be the contribution of the world's religions to peace. Peace, in turn, is the absolute condition for meaningful local and global development. Juan Somavia (1996:58), a prominent commentator on the Declaration, meaningfully adds to this perspective when he comments:

I take from this Declaration the vision of a banner into which religious believers of all stripes can weave their hopes, dreams and ideals. The banner, and the ethical message it conveys, embroiders the basic precepts of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, securing them with a holistic respect for the human person, the inalienable character of liberty, and the fundamental equality and interdependence of all human beings. It incorporates the many threads of the Declaration and Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development – inspired, as these documents are, by the vibrant expression of civil society – worldwide.

But although the *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* contains its own sufficient meaning, we want to go further and spell out its significance for scholars interested in conceptualising a more explicit link between religion and development. We have already highlighted in sections 2 and 3 the new appreciation of religion that is emerging in secular development studies. A new interest in personal change and positive religious values has become visible. Personal change, spirituality and culture (i.e. in the sense of binding norms) now matter in development; at the very least, there are promising signs that this is beginning to happen. Sections 2 and 3 clearly illustrated how scholars of religion may become enriched in social theory by exploring secular development discourse. We have touched upon development theories that complicate, inform and deepen our understanding and appreciation of the Declaration. From the perspectives of social development and social change, the Declaration indeed captures a religious project that will be of great significance to positive global development and transformation.

Our exploration presented a remarkable “fusion of horizons”, with a great deal of overlapping of interests and perspectives between the Declaration and development literature that confirms the importance of the former for the latter.

The similarities between the development texts of Galtung, Edwards and Sen, and the Declaration can broadly be summarised with reference to (a) the nature of the problem, (b) the need for a global ethic to underpin development, (c) the role of religion in establishing such an ethic, (d) the importance of integrating personal and structural change, and (e) culture as relational metaphor. We now examine these overlaps in more detail.

All the texts share a pessimistic, critical view of contemporary society. They all agree that a moral or ethical vacuum is at the heart of the problem. As the vacuum is global, an appropriate global orientation is called for. All the texts incorporate a critique of the destructive aspect of religion as an anti-development force. Religions need to first of all get their own houses in order. Combating religious fundamentalism and a new interfaith relationship of mutual respect and understanding is the precondition for religion to contribute towards positive transformation. Given the absence of a global ethic, the quest for positive social change requires a concomitant emphasis on ethics, principles, values and inner transformation. There can be no new world order without a global ethic; there can also be no development without ethics, values, binding normative culture and personal change.

In line with the positive reappraisal of religion in development discourse, religion is presented as a fundamental source for realising the ethical imperative. The Declaration confirms the kind of religion that is asked for in the development writings of Galtung, Edwards and Sen. All three texts suggest that religion’s fundamental contribution is to be found in the shared ethical heritage held in common by the various religious traditions. The Declaration details the common minimal ethic shared by the world’s religions that potentially provide the basis for a new relationship of peace and cooperation between religions, cultures and – by implication – whole societies. In this sense the Declaration also illustrates how religion informs and is able to inform the development scholar.

None of the texts reviewed here absolutises the subjective basis of social change. To achieve social integration, the project of cultivating a global ethic needs to impact on both the personal and institutional or structural bases of change. Personal transformation in accordance with the ethical values that religion promotes should translate into an active struggle for institutional and structural renewal, especially of economics and in the economic sphere of life.

Finally, “culture” is presented in the texts as the ultimate metaphor both for portraying the ideal of an alternative society and for viewing religion’s essential role in realising that ideal. Religion’s essential task is to promote the “soft” values, the binding norms (or culture), and the new relational orientation that will inform the collective consciousness in the alternative society.

In conclusion, in our synthesis the Declaration represents an elaborated positive religious response to the quests for cultururation/social development and for integrated personal change in the selected development literature. As such, the Declaration acquires important strategic significance for religious actors in development. By mobilising around and investing in the project *Toward a Global Ethic*, they could make an authentic contribution to development, in line with what is expected of them in the new appraisal of religion in development literature.

Yet, having drawn such a positive conclusion, we need to ask whether our appreciation of the Declaration sufficiently settles the critical points that we have raised. Our criticism of the writings of Johan Galtung, Michael Edwards and Gita Sen concerns their neglect of the potential contribution of religion to the structural and institutional dimension of social change. We argued that Galtung confines religion to a project of reculturation and fails to make a more satisfactory link between cultururation and structuration in general. Similarly we argued that Edwards and Sen confine religion to the subjective basis of personal change vis-à-vis NGOs’ more direct engagement in the social and structural sphere. We concluded that Edwards and Sen’s analysis sustains a familiar modernist dichotomy with regard to the social appreciation of religion. Our own understanding is that the Declaration does not impose the same limitations on religion’s potential and actual role in effecting social change.

We also disagree with a recent South African critique that the Declaration tends to be an “individual” rather than a “social” ethic (Mothlabi 2001:129). Our analysis in section four of this article clearly reflects another view. In the Declaration we encounter a deliberate attempt to overcome the individual-social dichotomy. In our opinion the document contains an ethical imperative that ought to relate to and impact on inter-group relationships, social structure and the global economic order. Indeed, for us the Declaration aspires to be a social ethic, as it appeals predominantly to the collective consciousness of the world’s religious traditions (in contrast to an appeal merely to religious individuals). In the Declaration “collective consciousness” has the potential to make a structural and cultural difference, and so to provide the normative basis for an alternative society and social order.

In terms of a newly recognised “actor-oriented paradigm” of development, which emphasises the central role of human action and consciousness in social and structural change (Long and Van der Ploeg 1994:64), the Declaration’s structural claim cannot be dismissed as mere religious idealism. We argue that numerous examples in contemporary societies testify to religion’s actual contribution to social and structural change, and to its ability to inform alternative social and economic practices (see e.g. Bacon 2002; Duchrow 1995:212-315; Engel 1990; Falk 1988; Hoeber Rudolph 1996; Richard 1988; Tyndale 2000; Ver Beek 2000). Instances of actual religious influence greatly support the Declaration’s own aspirations to achieve social and structural change. Religious organisations and traditions, on the basis of the collective consciousness that they are able to mobilise, may be more effective agents of change than secular development-oriented NGOs. By comparison, the latter have a latent inability to mobilise the same level of collective mass consciousness.

But our positive reading of *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* as a strategic text in development should not undermine the prevailing challenges of strategy and implementation that the project and its proponents face. Such a challenge is also underplayed – if not completely neglected – by Galtung and by Edwards and Sen. In its current format and status the Declaration remains largely an abstract text devoid of any clear perspective on actual strategic implementation. In this respect we agree with Mothlabi that the Declaration, like its associated project, is currently too confined to the international structure of the Parliament of the World's Religions. The project should not only become internalised in the collective consciousness, struggles and programs of local and national religious bodies (cf. Raiser 1996:124). It should lead religious people and their organisations to engage in wider processes of social activism “for the sake of influencing social policy and its implementation” (Mothlabi 2001:132-3).

In other words, to become effective, the project *Toward a Global Ethic* will need to become a “politicised ethic” (cf. Falk 1988). In strategic development terms we find this challenge nowhere better articulated than in the concept of fourth generation development action (see Korten 1990:123-8; Swart 2000; Swart and Venter 2001; 2002a; 2002b), which challenges the Declaration's ethical agenda to take root in the issue-specific discourses and strategic activities of the new civil society (or social) movements (peace, human rights, women/gender, environment, democracy, indigenous, farmer's, culture, new economics, and so on) (cf. Duchrow 1995:278-315; Duchrow and Hinkelammert 2004:204-24; Falk 1988). Indeed, the Declaration importantly and rightly admits that the religions cannot solve the world's problems, but only provide the minimal ethic fundamental to this endeavour. For this reason it requires religious actors and traditions that are serious about a global ethic to engage in wider solidarity relationships with those other normative actors of global civil society who are today at the forefront of the struggles for human emancipation and social change (see Castells 1997; Falk 1987; George 2002; Touraine 2001).

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