GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY: In Search of a New World Ethic
by Hans Kung

Will the 21st Century see the beginning of a new era of religious wars in the world? Some fear it may. Hans Kung does not predict that, but he fears that in the long run there can be no stable peace in the world unless and until there is peace between the world’s religions. And peace between religions cannot come, he says, unless there is dialogue among religions. The leadership and the peoples of the world’s religions must search for and must find that there is a common global ethic to which they can all subscribe, an ethic that calls for peace instead of conflict and war between them.

Some people suppose that ethics are merely a personal matter, a matter of subjective choice. Others suppose that ethics are culturally determined, perhaps by each religion. Different ethics sometimes lead to serious and even violent conflicts. Kung contends that society does not need a uniform religion or a uniform ideology, but it does need a common global ethic that leads not to wars but to reconciliation and peace among peoples of every faith and of no faith. Only then will wars of religion cease, after tragically marring human history for so long.

We need some common principles that bind us together as humans instead of tearing us apart and throwing us at each other’s throats. We need some common norms and values, some common ideals and goals so that we can all live together in peace whatever our other differences may be. The world’s religions have not yet really emphasized whatever in their respective traditions would lead us to build a better world together instead of fighting over our different views. To find that, to emphasize it, and so to build a world in which all can prosper peacefully is today’s and the future’s global responsibility of us all.

In past wars between nations, the religious leaders of each nation blessed the war and called on God to help their side win. The Fellowship of Reconciliation (usually referred to as the F.O.R.) was born when a few religious leaders of different countries refused to do that after World War One broke out. The F.O.R. still seeks peace everywhere.

War is not the only problem that requires a common global ethic. Kung reminds us that while nations spend billions on war instruments, thousands of children die of hunger-related causes and environmental deterioration proceeds apace. A global ethic would help this world deal with many of its problems.

A start on the dialog among world religions was made in the 1990s leading to an initial declaration of ethical principles by attendees at the 1993 Parliament of the World’s Religions in Chicago. This scholarly book by Kung argues in detail the case for continued dialogues among religious peoples & their leaders.