

WORLD RELIGIONS AND GLOBAL RESPONSIBILITY:  
THE LEGACY OF HANS KÜNG – SELECTED SESSION

Topic: World Religions and Global Responsibility: The Legacy of Hans Küng  
 Convener: Martin Madar, Xavier University  
 Moderator: William Madges, Xavier University  
 Presenters: Hille Haker, Loyola University Chicago  
 David Hollenbach, S.J., Georgetown University

Hans Küng was one of the most influential and controversial Catholic theologians of the twentieth century. He passed on April 6, 2021. This selected session was convened as an opportunity to reflect on his contribution to theology, and in this way to honor his memory. Küng wrote on a vast array of topics, but the session focused on his work in the area of interreligious dialogue in keeping with the theme of this year's convention, Being Catholic Interreligiously.

After a word of welcome from the convener, William Madges opened the session with a short introduction to Küng's life, focusing on how he became engaged in the study of world religions and interreligious dialogue. Madges also reminisced about his personal encounters with Küng at the University of Tübingen in the early 1980s while doing research for his dissertation.

Then Hille Haker and David Hollenbach delivered their presentations, which addressed Küng's project of a global ethic.

Haker, who is the Richard McCormick Endowed Chair in Ethics at Loyola University in Chicago and holds a PhD and Habilitation in ethics from Tübingen, titled her presentation as "Global Responsibility and the Call for Change in the Catholic Church: The Legacy of Hans Küng." She started with autobiographical remarks about her experience as an undergraduate student in Tübingen in the early 1980s. She remarked that she appreciated Küng for several reasons: for his fight against authoritarianism in the church, for being a pioneer in Tübingen in promoting the scholarship of women and feminist theology, and for making a case for faith that is not afraid of modernity. She then discussed Küng's project of a global ethic and critiqued it from the perspective of a critical political ethics rooted in the work of Johann Baptist Metz. She portrayed the difference between Küng and Metz in terms of a difference between a public and a political theologian. Haker sketched an alternative to Küng's approach. She argued that the fundamental principle of a global ethic ought to be suffering, not shared values as it is in the case of Küng. She also argued for the importance of vulnerability and diatopical hermeneutics. Overall, Haker appreciated parts of Küng's global ethic project, but also found it lacking, especially from a decolonial perspective.

Hollenbach, who is the Pedro Arrupe Distinguished Research Professor at Georgetown University, presented a paper titled "Religious Nationalism, a Global Ethic and the Culture of Encounter." In the first part he sketched the overall shape of the global ethic that Küng proposed. He then discussed how religious nationalism impedes the development of a global ethic and illustrated it in two examples. The first example was the current war that Russia is waging against Ukraine, and how it is legitimated in part by appeals to religious tradition. The second example was the United

States, where close to half of all Americans support a fusion of Christianity with American civic life and national identity. He also gave examples of how religious communities reject the currents of religious nationalism. Hollenbach pointed out that Küng is right when he finds the global ethic already embodied in the religions of the world. Hollenbach then noted that religious traditions also contain grounds for the ethical relevance of the national, cultural, and religious differences among peoples. He suggested that an adequate approach to a global ethic ought to offer guidance on whether the local or the global should take priority in concrete circumstances, a point that Küng's global ethic lacks. Lastly, Hollenbach discussed how Pope Francis's call to a culture of encounter in his encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti*, reinforces Küng's call for a global ethic. Hollenbach noted that the convergence of the work of Küng and Francis is ironic, due to Küng's earlier conflicts with the papacy. Yet it is also a source of hope for the church and for the larger world.

The session concluded with an insightful discussion between the members of the audience, the presenters, and the moderator.

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