

The Judeo-Christian Ethics of Human Rights

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Abstract: The project of human right has become relevant in this century as that which promotes unhindered human freedom and liberty of humankind regardless of a person's socio-culture, economic or religious background. This article focuses on the influence of the moral ethics in the Judeo-Christian religion as a foundation for modern human rights. The idea is influenced by Jewish Rabbi Jonathan Magonet (b.1942), who considers the impact of early the Torah or Talmudic laws in the Judeo-Christian in today's global human right ethics. Magonet's theology unveils the relationship between a global human right ethics and Biblical-Jewish laws of the Torah or Talmudic laws.

Keywords: Ten Commandments, moral, human rights, freedom, ethics.

1. INTRODUCTION

The origin of Judeo-Christianity relates to numerous moral covenants in the Old Testaments of the Bible. The relevance of the Ten Commandments influenced the moral approach to the rights and obligations of man in the Judeo-Christian history. For example, of the Ten Commandments love is an essential focus for the global ethics and respect for freedom worldwide. That is Deuteronomy 6: 4, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength". And Mark 12:30-31, "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these".¹

2. THE GLOBAL ETHICS OF JUDEO-CHRISTIAN IN THE PROJECT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Magonet's idea of global ethics focuses on human dignity focuses, strengthening of universal unity and love for one another. The project of human rights must focus on religious tolerance and cooperation of all faiths in the world.² For instance, the Holy Land of Jerusalem is now a sacred home for both the Jews and Christians who daily visit the sites for regular holy pilgrimage. Religious tolerance is an essential part of human rights advocacy in the United Nations 1948 Human Rights Charter in articles 1, 16, 18.³ To this, there is a need for mutual acceptance of each other's rights to believe and ways of worship. The focus of religious teachings should be void of hate sermons and doctrinal bigotry leading to intolerance against people of other religion. The need for a moral ethics at a global has become necessary in helping to give religion an identity for fostering peace and world unity. This religious ethics is not aimed at creating religious imperialism by imposing Christian, Islamic, or Jewish doctrines above all other religions for human dignity. But for Magonet, religious tolerance should avoid rivalry and selfless or any form of monolithic agenda that threatens human freedom. However, the project of religious tolerance helps to deepen the desirable global ethic of love and peace coexistence of humanity.⁴

¹ New King James Bible (Deuteronomy 6: 4, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength". And Mark 12:30-31, "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these

²Magonet, Jonathan (Judaism and a Global Ethics Pp89-95): Hans Kung (1996) Yes to Global Ethics, SCM Press Ltd, Chicago 1993

³ United Nations 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Articles 1, 16, 18), http://www.un.org/en/udhrbook/pdf/udhr_booklet_en_web.pdf

⁴ Ibid

Furthermore, the Judeo-Christian ethics gives reference to the Decalogue for its clarity on God as the spiritual judge of humans and that who appoints kings as regents on the earth. For instance, God expects us to obey the laws of the state and love one another, just like his relationship with the Jewish people through Moses, Joshua, and the prophets. The notion of global human rights ethics has benefitted from the influence of the Jewish Talmudic and Torah justice system. Hence, God's expectations for humankind in the Torah were for us to act with tolerance and fairness to one another. By doing this, we have fulfilled the great commandment of love. That is, "but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord" (Holy Bible, Leviticus 19:18).⁵ The Torah also emphasizes the concept of peace 'Shalom' which is necessary for tolerance and respect for human dignity. Apart from this, the Jewish Talmudic customary laws were elaborate about the need to consider the poor, care of sick, burial of the dead and comfort of the bereaved, restoration of lost goods amongst others.⁶ Also, the Jewish legal codes and oral laws date back to the Torah or the Old Testament which guided the early Jewish society and helped the people to live in tolerance, humility, and equality as God's people.⁷ Thus, it is evident that God's expectation of humanity in the Torah is for us to act with tolerance and fairness to one another. By doing this, we have fulfilled the great commandment of love. For instance, "you shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. But you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord (Leviticus 19:17-18)".⁸

The conceptualization of human rights as a global ethics is a collective responsibility of all religions, socio-cultural groups and all citizens of the world for the sustenance and protection of human dignity. So, therefore, all world religions must cooperate on the ethics of brotherliness and avoid intolerance regardless of the mode of worship. Hence, there should be an interfaith dialogue aimed at strengthening both the spiritual and human ties for the sake of human freedom and equality. Also, the need for world peace and tolerance should be more urgent than ever due the ongoing of religious conflicts and terrorism happening all over the world. For example, the ongoing Israeli-Palestine crises in Gaza and East Jerusalem must embrace the ethics of human dignity and not only on military intervention to end the tension in the region. Both the nation of Israel and Palestine have free rights to life, property, worship and to coexist peacefully as neighbours. Similarly, all human rights violations by Islamic terrorists like Islamic States, Al-Qaeda, Taliban, Al-Shabaab, Boko Haram, etc., must stop because it has painted Islamic as a violent religion in the eyes of other religions. Also, the Islamic world can emulate the concept of religious freedom and rights in Judeo-Christian ethics to educate its followers on rights to equality and freedom, tolerance, and peace. However, this will be essential in restoring the stability of peace in the Islamic nations just like in the Euro-American society.

3. IN CONCLUSION

The task of world peace should not only be neglected only to the United Nations, but religion must play a more active role in defending human rights and world peace. That is, " religion and human rights are to affirm that a direct and powerful relationship between the Ten Commandments and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The claims of human rights are ultimate, but the law itself cannot make such claims. Thus, for Christians, the claims for human rights are founded upon religious claims, as they are for Jews".⁹ To this, the mandate of ensuring human rights in the United Nations 1948 Human Rights Charters has played a vital role in world peace and advocacy for freedom and equality of persons, nevertheless there must be a global ethics which must comprise of state law, moral ethics and cultural norms to molded the moral, political and social life of humankind just as it was in the Judeo-Christian moral law. The society must embrace the attributes of love and tolerance in the Torah for the actualization of global human dignity to humanity. For example, God instructed the people of Israel during the era of Prophet Jeremiah to seek peace and respect for the rights of others while in exile in the land of Babylon , (Jeremiah 29:7 " And seek the peace of the city whither I have caused you to

⁵ Holy Bible (Leviticus 19: 17-18, 'You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. ¹⁸You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD)

⁶ Magonet, Jonathan (Judaism and a Global Ethics Pp89-95): Hans Kung (1996) Yes to Global Ethics, SCM Press Ltd, Chicago 1993

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Holy Bible (Leviticus 19: 17-18, 'You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. ¹⁸You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD)

⁹ Tarer, Robert: Faith in Human Rights (1991): Support in Religious Traditions for a Global Struggle, Page 214. Georgetown University Press, Washington, D.C

be carried away captives, and pray unto the LORD for it: for in the peace thereof shall ye have peace").¹⁰ The relevance of peace in the Judeo-Christian doctrine has encouraged world peace and equality over the years despite the aggression by some religions and violence caused by cultural and ethnic clashes in some societies of the world.

REFERENCES

Note: This article is inspired by the work of **Magonet, Jonathan** on Judaism and a Global Ethics, Pages 89-95 (Hans Kung , 1996 : Yes, to Global Ethics), SCM Press Ltd, Chicago 1993.

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- [4] New King James Bible (Deuteronomy 6: 4, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength". And Mark 12:30-31, "And you shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. This is the first commandment. And the second, like it, is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these
- [5] New King James Bible (Jeremiah 29: 7: And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace.)
- [6] Holy Bible (Leviticus 19: 17-18, 'You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbor, and not bear sin because of him. ¹⁸You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD)

¹⁰ New King James Bible (Jeremiah 29: 7: And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive and pray to the LORD for it; for in its peace you will have peace.)