

Global Ethic or Global Hegemony? Reflections on Religion, Human Dignity and Civilisational Interaction. By Chandra Muzaffar. London: Asean Academic Press, 2005, pp. 198. ISBN:1901919501.

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The book under review is a collection of fourteen insightful essays by the distinguished activist scholar and a practising Muslim, Chandra Muzaffar, who is President of the International Movement for a Just World (JUST) in Malaysia. These essays were written at different times but, despite repetitions, they are threaded together to the theme reflected in the book's title. There are also two epilogues linked to two halves of the title of this book. In general, the book considers the impact of global hegemony on global peace. It argues that global dominance and control by a small body of elites has caused contemporary wars and conflicts in Iraq, Israel, Palestine and other places and has given rise to global tensions.

Chandra Muzaffar asserts that global hegemony rooted in Washington's overwhelming power is a challenge to equitable and egalitarian inter-civilisational interaction. It negates all efforts at creating a just world for the humanity at large. Chandra Muzaffar makes a strong case for a meaningful Global ethics—a set of core spiritual and moral values which the human family can identify with—to replace the hegemony of the United States. He calls for the Global Parliament with a common “Shared Value” or Universal ethic that is in harmony with, and yet transcends, specific religious teachings. This he calls “the Golden Rule of Life: do not do to others what you do not want others do to you” or “*do to others what you want others do to you*” (p. 1, emphasis original). This golden rule is found in all belief systems. It demands a reciprocal relationship of trust between communities and between “governor and governed.” The same rule should be applicable in international politics and in multi-lateral institutions. The International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, the United Nations and other international

organizations should be transformed in such a manner that nations, big and small, would be able to relate to one another in a spirit of egalitarian fraternity.

Chandra Muzaffar reminds his readers the three dimensions of contemporary capitalism—3C capitalism: the corporate dimension with huge enterprises, the casino dimension that emphasizes speculation, and the consumer dimension that is predicated on unending consumption. 3C capitalism has failed humankind (p. 7). It has led to the weakening of spiritual and moral values, the rapid depletion of scarce resources, the serious degradation of the environment, and the gap between rich and poor that is widening at an alarming rate. The 3C capitalism allows mega mergers of mega corporations and unending accumulation. The acquisition and accumulation in Capitalist culture is driven by greed and selfishness.

The only challenge to this capitalist system, Chandra Muzaffar affirms, is the values and principles embodied in religion. Religions must be made attractive in today's world to reshape a new world order that is just, humane and compassionate. Religions should persuade their adherents to treat "the religious other" with respect. If each and every human being adhered to this golden rule, there would be no transgression of the dignity of the other human being. Chandra Muzaffar argues that Islam is a religion with a strong universal dimension expressed in its recognition of the oneness of the human family and in its acknowledgement of the dignity of all human beings. Islam will be able to help shape this Global Ethic. For this to happen, a segment of the Muslim community will have to jettison its exclusive, sectarian outlook, and strengthen the principle and practice of universal justice and compassion within the Muslim community and indeed among all people.

Chandra Muzaffar contends that spiritual awareness and awakening of the soul has, through historical records, transformed individuals and communities. The religious resurgence is taking place in various parts of the World today and there is a gradual move towards spiritual consciousness expressing itself through a new-found attachment to the Transcendent and the Sacred. There is an awareness about the Global Ethic. The moral principle of the Golden Rule of Life is concretized in the broad guidelines of the Parliament of the World's Religions for human behaviour. These are:

1. Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life.
2. Commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order.
3. Commitment to a culture of tolerance and life of truthfulness.
4. Commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women (p. 28).

The Global Ethic as a concept is in harmony with Islamic philosophy. Likewise, the Golden Rule of Life is a vital dimension of Islam. Muslims should, therefore, respond positively and actively to these ideas.

In this search for a just world, Chandra Muzaffar believes that the non-state actors, which he calls “Global Civil Society,” can play a major role. These non-state actors cut across the globe and are committed to specific or general public causes. Its diversity is not just ethnic, religious, cultural or linguistic. Rather it varies in terms of orientation and commitment. Chandra Muzaffar identifies environmental groups, Human Rights Outfits, Women Caucuses, Indigenous groups, and the like as part and parcel of the Global Civil Society. He cautions, however, about their inability to develop a holistic, integrated philosophy that will serve as a guiding principle in their collective quest for a just world.

Thus, Civil Society should take cognisance of its fundamental flaw which was partly responsible for its ideological decline in the last two decades. This ideological flaw was imminent in the prescription of Socialism for transformation of the social order based on skewed, distorted understanding of human beings. Socialism denied human being’s perennial quest for the transcendent and sacred, which are the most powerful impulse for human and social transformation. Therefore, global civil society actors should avoid the flawed vision of human beings or else, their dream of achieving a just world will come to grief. He recommends that the Global Civil Society should absorb the spiritual and moral Worldview that lies at the heart of all the World great religions in a creative manner. It is the Worldview which offers a more wholistic understanding of the human beings than any secular philosophy.

He concludes that the new spiritual ethos will provide the greatest moral principle of all and that “Do to others what you want others

do to you” will give birth to a new international politics. So, the meaning of Global Ethic proposed by the author is considered as a “fundamental consensus on binding values, irrevocable standards and personal attitudes” found in the teachings of most of the world’s religions (p. 27). To date, most discussions about global ethic have centered around the secular, legal language of human rights. Chandra Muzaffar provides key concepts from various religious traditions to provide grounding for an ethics of globalization. Chandra Muzaffar’s list includes concepts like distributive justice, unity, the household of God, the interdependence of all life, reciprocity, restraint and compassion.

The book is a must read for all interested in a just and humane world order. Chandra Muzaffar has presented his ideas in clear and easily understandable terms. It deserves to be popularised and promoted globally to let a global ethic emerge and replace the crass global hegemony presided by Washington.