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Globethics.net elements for responsible leadership : a result of the Globethics.net international conference, Bangkok, Thailand, 22-26 September, 2005

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GLOBETHICS.NET ELEMENTS FOR RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP

*A result of the Globethics.net International Conference
Bangkok, Thailand, 22-26 September 2005*

In today's globalised and interconnected world, most societies are challenged by a fast transition of structures and values. Therefore, former models, guidelines and practices of leadership are changing. The call for ethical orientation for responsible leadership is widespread.

'Responsible Leadership – Global and Contextual Ethical Challenges' was the topic addressed at the International Globethics.net Conference, 22-26 September 2005 in Bangkok, Thailand. The participants explored elements of principles for responsible leadership in five areas, namely family, education, religion, business and politics. The principles outlined in this paper represent the outcome of the Bangkok conference.

The participants, mostly ethicists, came from 22 countries in five continents in the South and North. They shared concerns and issues of crisis in leadership in various fields and different social, political, economic and religious contexts. Five keynote speeches and 25 papers were discussed in workshops and showed common concerns such as poverty and wealth, war and violence, lopsided development, the speed of transformation and its effects on family, education, religion, media in the light of the impact of globalisation on all spheres of life. Most of the contributors of Globethics.net came from a Christian background; however, the inclusion of interreligious perspectives is now increasing.

The elements of principles for responsible leadership outlined below do not form a closed list but rather a suggestion for ongoing debate both among participants of the conference and a wider public interested in the topic.

1. Responsible Family Leadership

The overall criterion in family leadership is love understood as action.

Responsible family leadership means:

- to respect the dignity, integrity and uniqueness of each person;
- to establish mutual trust [that upholds and affirms the other];
- to empower others;

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- to promote autonomy in the context of mutual dependence;
- to nurture, care and give life, seeking the wholeness of each member in their spiritual, intellectual, physical and emotional dimensions;
- to give space for differences and be open for mutual critique;
- to be mutually available for the other and willing to serve and sacrifice;
- to seek justice, peace and the common good;
- to promote participatory family management.

2. Responsible Educational Leadership

The impact of globalisation and the current trends in development show how dominant knowledge systems and paradigms have proliferated, in many cases resulting in alienating the poor from their traditional and culturally shaped educational resources. Whereas 'education' needs to be understood as a cultural process through which individuals are socialised to become responsible adults within the community and society, the dominant school systems often represent a type of 'schooling', which can lead to cultural alienation. Holistic education is a tool to liberate and transform people to be better human beings.

Responsible educational leadership means:

- first and above all; to warrant access to education;
- to focus on learning and teaching values that help people to mutually affirm their own and other cultures, religions and traditions and also respect the whole of creation;
- to develop a critical way of thinking among ordinary people, educators and ethicists about the implications of being schooled in the dominant institution and value systems;
- to search for alternative paradigms and patterns of education;
- to prevent the market from considering education as a business tool;
- to raise awareness about the inter-linkages between the oppressive socio-political-economic structures in society and the existing paradigms of education;
- to ensure that education is structured within the national cultural and religious framework;
- to lobby and to network as ethicists and educationists with people's organisations and movements to design and implement a holistic pattern of education.

3. Responsible Religious Leadership

Responsible religious leadership should take into account the particular contexts such as minority/majority situations of religions and currents within religions, the relation between religions and the State, the history of religions, the democratisation process of religious communities, the demographic reality (variety of membership, manipulation of statistics for political or other reasons), the relationship between ideology and theology in a pluralistic context, and the gender sensitivity.

The following paragraph looks at the issue mainly related to Christian churches.

Responsible religious leadership means:

within the church

- to be committed and faithful to the spiritual tasks of a religious leader;
- to promote mutual respect of believers of other religions and other churches;
- to sensitise against the abuse of religion for ideological and other interests;
- to ensure the full and active participation of women, men and young people in all aspects of church and life;
- to give priority to the most vulnerable individuals and communities under their care;
- to ensure that, in the training of personnel, the focus lie on looking after the most vulnerable and the weakest;
- to fight all forms of corruption in religious institutions and society;
- to fight all forms of discrimination based on race and ethnicity in religion and society;
- to be open to continuing theological re-interpretation and hermeneutics in order to avoid ideological abuse of the respective scriptures;
- the openness to build bridges between religions;
- transparency and accountability in the leading bodies;

in relation with the state and with the society

- to support legislation protecting religious rights within the state;
- to ensure mutual respect of religious and secular values;
- to support legislation against manipulation of society by quasi-religious cults;

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- to encourage the state to recognise the particular contexts of religious histories;
- to promote participation of citizens in the political and social life of the nation;
- to encourage constructive involvement in civil society;
- to avoid the temptation to exploit the demographic status of their respective religions and denominations for political interests.

4. Responsible Business Leadership

The agents of business leadership are understood as the members of the management on different levels and the shareholders represented by board members (explore and enlarge). In the broader sense they include the politicians, consumers, economic associations, etc. In general, the following paragraph speaks about the need to respect the core values of sustainability, justice, peace, participation, and human rights.

Responsible business leadership means:

in general

- to equally weigh the needs and interests of the different stakeholders such as employees, shareholders, the state, consumers, and nature, and being accountable to them;
- to enter into competition in a transparent, fair and honest way;

economically

- to work for financial stability and at least maintain the value of the borrowed and invested capital;
- to actively resist all kind of corruption while respecting the national laws and international anti-corruption conventions;
- to look at a fair distribution and redistribution of income within the company, but also of the added national value;
- to anticipate early enough and in a sound way, restructuring processes that are necessary to respond to changing situations;

socially

- to explore and respect the ethical values in the different contexts where business activities are done;
- to overcome double standards (in international activities) and implement the same ethical, social and environmental standards

in the different countries and to demand the same commitment from the suppliers;

- to pay for raw material and primary goods above the costs of production;
- to offer multi-stakeholder dialogues on sensitive issues or in fields of conflicts;
- to eradicate discriminations based on gender, ethnic origin, race, religion, disability and culture in the workplace;
- to support efforts for broader representation of women in leading positions;

politically

- to balance private and public interests;
- to be willing to fulfil the obligations towards the different stakeholders, especially consumers (quality of products and transparency/truth of product information) and the state (paying taxes, respecting legal requirements);
- to be willing to strengthen laws and regulations where necessary, in order to respect values based on human rights and achieve ethical goals;

environmentally

- to respect sustainability as a long-term environmental, economic and social commitment;
- to have a sense of accountability to the different stakeholders including nature.

5. Responsible Political Leadership

Responsible political leadership is not solely a matter of individual virtues but is closely linked to the community and the responsibility of those who elect political leaders.

Responsible political leadership means:

on the community/constituency level

- to empower people to become subjects and active citizens in organic union with the community;
- to act in solidarity with other life-affirming groups and movements that strive for recognition and political participation;

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- to promote and facilitate the emergence of agencies among the people and from below;
- to promote transparency as a regular institutional process that allows checks and balances of leadership;
- to be aware of the danger of corruption and to actively fight it;
- to promote a participatory political setting which allows the emergence of young leaders;
- to be accountable, beyond the patterns of democracy by delegation, by a binding representation;
- to promote peace, which presupposes a very careful use of the monopoly of organised violence as well as a commitment to eradicate the roots of non-peaceful states of affairs;
- to strengthen the autonomy of the social political reality, which implies the promotion of freedom;

on the level of the leader

- to have a sense of, and for, spirituality, which presupposes the acceptance of the limitation and of the decentralisation of all political power;
- to be self-critical (especially in a Christian perspective where human finitude is acknowledged in a basic way);
- to foster life-affirming aims expressed through social movements;
- to keep promises;
- to network between groups and movements.

6. Responsible Media Leadership

The media have a great potential to influence people's ideologies, interests and priorities in life. The use and misuse of the media is directly linked with the quality of life enjoyed by individuals in a civil society. Consumers must be equipped with the ability and the perspective to understand and use the media critically.

Responsible media leadership means:

- an interest to develop a critical holistic perspective to read, interpret and understand the media;
- to provide media education for people at all levels;
- to raise awareness about the role the media play in shaping people's lives;

- to provide education, support and training to journalists in order to enhance their skills and their commitment to defend the interests of the economically, socially, politically weak;
- to affirm the role and the significance of the whole range of media (including non-conventional media) for effective communication;
- to use mass media to connect peoples, cultures, traditions and religions and affirm human communities;
- to use computer-based communication technologies such as the internet to promote 'real', rather than 'virtual' human communities.