

# Reexamining Thich Nhat Hanh's Concept in Creating World Peace

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## Abstrak

Pada era globalisasi, dunia dihadapkan dengan tantangan permasalahan baru yaitu arus teknologi, ideologi dan budaya yang semakin maju. Tak ayal, hal tersebut menciptakan benturan di kalangan masyarakat yang resistan terhadap arus perkembangan-perkembangan yang ada. Dari sini, masyarakat secara tidak langsung berperan sekaligus menjadi aktor budaya dan teknologi yang sedang mengglobal. Benturan-benturan tersebut telah diciptakan ketika fundamentalis berhadapan dengan konservatif yang tidak mampu menghindar dan terlibat dalam perkembangan dunia global. Pada puncaknya, perang kosmik pun dimulai dengan mengatasnamakan kebenaran dari satu sisi dan prasangka sebagai kejahatan di sisi lainnya. Agama seringkali dimengerti sebagai pemeran utama dalam benturan tersebut, semisal antara Yahudi dan Islam di Palestina, Hindu dan sih di Punjab, Katolik dan Protestan di Irlandia. Pemahaman tentang agama-agama bermanfaat untuk menghindari benturan tersebut dengan dialog dan pengaplikasian etika sebagai metode menciptakan perdamaian. Oleh karena itu, peran agama menjadi krusial selain sebagai petunjuk hidup namun juga sebagai cara kunci perdamaian bagi golongan yang berbeda. Untuk itu, Thich Nhat Hanh, sebagai master Zen dan Bisku Budha menawarkan ajaran kedamaian melalui pendekatan "*engaged buddhism*" dan susunan "*interbeing*" yang berorientasi pada metode penciptaan kedamaian dunia tidak hanya bagi orang Buddha tetapi juga semua orang dalam menghadapi perbedaan dan perdamaian.

**Kata Kunci:** Global, Clash, Ethic, World Peace, Thich Nhat Hanh.

## Introduction

In 1967, Thich Nhat Hanh has ever been nominated for a Nobel peace prize achiever because of his of concept peace in engaging Buddhism in social life although he did not win it. But he was awarded courage of conscience in 1991 from Peace Abbey organization.<sup>1</sup> Hanh's approach in building peace combines the various teaching of Zen (one of the Mahayana Buddhist tradition), the methods of Theravada Buddhism, and the psychological perspective of Western in order to give an offer on meditation on modern life.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, Thich Nhat Hanh offers fourteen percepts for Engaging Buddhism through order of "Interbeing" which can meditate the global conflict using horizontal and vertical approach as like modern Christianity approach. But the differences between Buddhism and Christian, Buddhism argue that horizontal connection with God and vertical connection with the social affair should be in one. If we act the horizontal, the vertical will come with in, and vice versa.<sup>3</sup> From those view, it can be concluded that Thich Nhat Hanh has offered a concept to face social problem in nowadays era.

If we connected with the problematic phenomenon in globalization era, we also remember about the "Global Ethic" response which was pointed out by Hans Kung. Specifically, He argue that the challenge of world religions today is to find the world peace because when we see about such conflict at the present days, religion has a significant role in inspiring people in hatred and hostility. Religion seems like as a true disturber of the peace but behind this phenomenon, religions also have a great solution in creating global ethic of the civilian riots.<sup>4</sup> It was true that religions were legitimated by some people as a

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<sup>1</sup> <http://plumvillage.org/about/thich-nhat-hanh/biography/>, accessed on 25 December 2015.

<sup>2</sup> David L. McMahan, *The Making of Buddhist Modernism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 158.

<sup>3</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1993), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Hans Kung, *A Global Ethic for Global Politics and Economics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 114.

reason to make a conflict. If we analyzed more about the war itself start when the religious value was lost in society, the riots seem like as a response of the privatization of religion because basically, the religion teach about the peaceful, kindness, tolerance, and appreciation among people perspective. Religions can be uses as an effective tool in facing such a conflict not only about the clash of the civilization but also environment and other social issues.

Therefore, in this paper, I would like to examine how religions can be used as a reconciliation tool in encountering those kinds of present problems especially in Buddhism perspective according to Thich Nhat Hanh approach due to creating a peace which started point out the concept of “engaged Buddhism” concept which was explicated by him at the first time. Because, as we know, often we see a religious Buddhist, a monk, has a little awareness in global conflict. The next discussion, I would like to describe the implication of Thich Nhat Hanh’s approach in creating world peace through analyzing his concept of *Interbeing* partly. At the last explanation, I will explicate how the implementation of the Hanh’s concept facing some conflict in this globalization era. In my opinion, Thich Nath Hanh concept of non-violence and peace is one of the ways in creating world peace as a religious challenge due to social, economic and political crises.

### **An “Engaged Buddhism” in Social Issues**

The word “Engaged Buddhism” originated from Thich Nhat Hanh as a response of Vietnamese war during 1960s when he was young monk feeling suffer because of the war. He was very eager to practice in the reality of the society although it was contradicted with the Buddhism tradition which does not engaged Buddhism in such phenomenon. In his interview with John Malkin, one of the radio presenters in Radio Santa Cruz which focuses on social change and spiritual growth, Thay (nick name of Thich Nhat Hanh) illustrated it with the bombs that can assassinated some peoples, the meditation should not be stay at the temple in all of the time but meditation itself should aware with not only in our body and feeling but also the condition around us. Buddhism

should have an action in daily life with the self-suffering or society. It was like a child that does not know anything still practicing mindful breathing. We have done meditation coinciding with action at the same time.<sup>5</sup> So it can be assumed that the rise of “Engaged Buddhism” movement of some Buddhists, including Thich Nhat Hanh, based the emergence of the situation around the monks and nuns in response of the people suffering not only in real suffering but also in the way how politically the civilian discriminated by the government.

Esposito has pointed out that the engagement of Vietnamese Buddhism in 1963 started in their action due to protested with the corruption in South Vietnam government and their failure in respecting Buddhism. They do a suicide through burning himself in the public which has a difference with the Buddhist ascetic who advocate renunciation of the household life and retrograde to Nirvana-seeking meditation. In this case, Thich Nhat Hanh give a guidance to the other side of those ascetic tradition to urge Buddhist Monks and nuns to put off individual practices in accommodating nonviolence confrontations with the government and other agencies to be responsible in human suffering. Inspired by those movements, the contemporary Buddhist activist has an empathy and responses to the environmental degradation, political corruption, and also global hunger as their action in “engaged Buddhism”.<sup>6</sup> The influence of Thich Nhat Hanh here has an effect of the contemporary Buddhist movement in respecting environment, political life, and global suffering.

In contrast, Sally B. King argue that Engaged Buddhism was not centralized movement, means that it does not begin with one personal charismatic leader, spread from the one place, or rise from one sect. It was not geographic way because it can be happened in everywhere because of crises which happen in these locations. Engaged Buddhism is also depended in one sect or belong to specific sect, it can be involved by Theravada, Mahayana, Vajrayana and other sectarian Buddhism.

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<sup>5</sup> <http://www.lionsroar.com/in-engaged-buddhism-peace-begins-with-you/>, accessed on 25 December 2012.

<sup>6</sup> John L. Esposito, Darrel B. Fasching, Todd Lewis, *World Religion Today*, Second Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 347.

Engaged Buddhist unified from the objective of Buddhists who try apply their learning and teaching in real social life through nonviolence way encountering social, economic, political, and ecological crises. The source of Engaged Buddhism roots from philosophical, spiritual, and ethical resonance of traditional Buddhism based on its philosophy and value applied in the contemporary problem. It is also modern phenomenon influenced by social, economic and political forms which is originated from Western.<sup>7</sup> From those view, I argue that the rise of Engaged Buddhism where not only from the charismatic leader but also from the basically philosophical, spiritual, and ethical response of traditional Buddhism with the social crises around Buddhism boundaries. I agree with King when he point out that Engaged Buddhism is kind of modern phenomenon which is influenced from the modernization of Western ideology of Enlightenment.

Philosophically, Buddhist believes in *karma* which it means action. *Karma* interpreted as cause an effect means that if we doing something bad in act, thought, and speech, we will get the negative response from this act because it was the law of the nature, it can happen in this life or in the next life because Buddhism recognize the stage of reincarnation.<sup>8</sup> On the other way, if we behave a positive action as like kindness, helpfulness, and philanthropies, it would be reply by positive way in the way of life. When we see a suffering around us, the empathy to help become such a motivation get a positive reply what we act today.

In the case of spirituality, there are two kinds of way which is connected with the engagement of the Buddhism in society challenge. It was Theravada, Fundamentalist Buddhism, and Mahayana as the conservative one. Theravada focused on monastic tradition which center on the self-enlightenment and on renunciation of the world. This type of the schools is far from worldly action oriented so they less on violence and conflict by doing this kinds of practice. Contrasting with Mahayana, this school is more likely active in social change from external world as their act in meditation. Mahayana's school believe that the task of our life

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<sup>7</sup> Sallie B. King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism* (Hawai: University of Hawai'i Press, 2009), 1-2.

<sup>8</sup> Esposito, Fasching, dan Lewis, *World Religion Today*, 282.

is not only for individual liberation but also for helping the other in finding the real peace of the life.<sup>9</sup> The difference between those two schools of Buddhism are visible in the way how spiritual approach among them. Although Theravada tries to avoid the social issue of the modern era as like environment, gender, politic and ideology, they cannot avoid their engagement of modernization issue. In fact, Theravada Buddhism, which has a huge population mass in Southeast Asia, have to face about gender in Indochina area, or in Malaysia which has Islamic revivalism perspective. Thus I argue that the difference of engagement between them located in tense they involve in social issue because this kind of issues cannot be avoided by Theravada Buddhism as a religious people in public space.

The last, the engagement of Buddhism ethically is our spiritual practice and our work in the world which commonly begin with an ethical commitment to help, and not to harm, ourselves and others so in this sense, ethic is the center of both spiritual practice and social transformation. We may think our ethical training is complete when we are not to do bad, killing and stealing but how we enjoy economic and social privileges by participating in a system in which some have been unfairly exploited? And how do we relate to a lack of honesty in our own organizations or in public places, whether originating from public officials, the media, or our educational systems?<sup>10</sup> Surely, ethic rise after the disputation of mind psychologically. The empathy of Buddhist come when they see some suffering around him because of basic characteristic of the human which has a kind attitude in responding inequality of human treatment including the subject itself which have discriminated by rule and authoritarian as a product of capitalism.

In the traditional ethical guideline, the Buddha established some of the rules in the *Vinaya* which it contains a hundred of rules and percepts which mostly relating with daily life in monastic. But Rothberg

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<sup>9</sup> Kathleen H. Dockett, G. Rita Dudley-Grant, C. Peter Bankart, *Psychology and Buddhism From Individual to Global Community* (New York: Kluwer Academic Publisher, 2004), 197.

<sup>10</sup> Donald Rothberg, *Engaged Spiritual Life: A Buddhist Approach to Transforming Ourselves and the World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 9-10.

has been emerged the five most basic ethical precepts are offered for lay practitioners living in the outside world. Which are:

1. For the sake of training, I undertake the precept to abstain from the taking of life.
2. For the sake of training, I undertake the precept not to take that which is not given.
3. For the sake of training, I undertake the precept to abstain from sexual misconduct.
4. For the sake of training, I undertake the precept to abstain from unwise speech.
5. For the sake of training, I undertake the precept to abstain from intoxicants that cause heedlessness.

Moreover, he divides those precepts into four main roles. the first precept is an antidote especially to hatred and inclines the mind and heart toward love. The second precept counters greed and grasping and helps us to develop generosity. The third and fifth precepts transform compulsive desire and self-centeredness, leading toward caring and at times renunciation. The fourth precept works particularly against grasping, aversion, and delusion as we cultivate kindness, wisdom, integrity, and skillfulness in action.<sup>11</sup> From those ancient text of Buddha, the engagement of Buddhist in society become clear. It can be seen from the word “*undertake*” means should do or have a responsibility in suffering of society. Those ancient text “seems” endorse the Buddhist to involve as a way of ethical Buddhism in practice.

Similarly, with Rothberg approach, Thich Nhat Hanh as an influential Mahayana monk in present day. Offer an optional perspective face suffering in society so “*Engaged Buddhism*” is one of the way to create a peace and harmony when see civilian suffering with offering guideline not only for himself but also for the society which agree with his perspective in involving Buddhist teaching practically in reality of society.

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<sup>11</sup> Rothberg, *Donald. Engaged Spiritual Life*, 11.

## Hanh's Concept in Problematizing such Problematic Issues

Thich Nath Hanh is Popular Zen monk leader in the world today, he is well known with his concept of the mindfulness and peace which has created a dozens of books about nonviolence, peace building, and the concept of mindful as well as poems, children's stories and commentaries of Buddhist's ancient text. Indeed, Martin Luther King Jr called him as an "Apostle of non-violence and peace" and media also entitled him as "The Father of Mindfulness" and "The Other Dalai Lama". In his path of life, although he has admitted as young monk in the age of sixteenth, Thay did not stop with those step by engaging Vietnamese Buddhist movement in year of 1950s then it is espoused with the birth of Engaged Buddhism during Vietnamese war era. At the beginning of the 1960s, He decided to study about comparative religion at Princeton University then become a lecturer in Columbia University. Finally, Thay, as a nonviolence and peace activist, established the "Order of *Interbeing*" as a new guideline in traditional Buddhist Bodhisattva percept in 1966.<sup>12</sup> So Order of *Interbeing* here as response of society suffering because of war at that time to engage Buddhism value in reality. But if we see more about order of *interbeing* concept was not only about response to the riots but also about communication with the nature, human attitude and the religious teaching surely. Therefore, in next discussion I would like to explain about *interbeing* partly because I argue that *interbeing* can be used as one of the tools to face some conflict and problems at the present day.

The order of *Interbeing* or "*Tiep Hien*". *Tiep* means "be in touch with" where *Hien* means "realizing", so *Tiep Hien* means be in touch with the reality.<sup>13</sup> Love and understanding not only in concept but also it need a practice in reality means that act in the reality of society. The so named of *Tiep Hien* is so difficult to find in English word so Thay take from *Avamtasaka Sutra* that convey a spirit which compound word having meaning "mutual" and "to be". The word "*Interbeing*" is a new word in

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<sup>12</sup> <http://plumvillage.org/about/thich-nhat-hanh/biography/>, accessed on 25 December 2015.

<sup>13</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Interbeing: Fourteen Guidelines for Engaged Buddhism* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1993), 2.



English that never be found and hoped it can be accepted by everyone. *Interbeing* has meaning about the one particle that have other thing in this particle as like in the one sheet of paper there will be thing about tree, forest, cloud and illegal logging. Similarly, the part of “I”, there will be part of “You” so seeing behind one part with the other part as a unity and has a connectivity. Thus the meaning of *Interbeing* that explicates “we *Interare*”.<sup>14</sup> Order of *interbeing* is a concept of analyzing thing from the deep perspectives, the lie of reality often makes people tricked in bad prejudicing without more thinking about reality behind the shape because everything has unity and connectivity each other.

This concept of *interbeing* contains fourteen guidelines for engaged Buddhism.<sup>15</sup> It can be divide those guidelines into some problematic issues which are tolerance, empathy, mindfulness, honesty and prohibition in greedy, killing, environmental and human exploitation, and harmony of body and soul.

#### 1. Finding Religious Tolerance

- a. Do not be idolatrous about or bound to any doctrine, theory or ideology, even Buddhist ones. All systems of thought are guiding means; they are not absolute truth.
- b. Do not think that the knowledge you presently possess is changeless, absolute truth. Avoid being narrow-minded and bound to present views. Learn and practice nonattachment from views in order to be open to receive others’ viewpoints. Truth is found in life and not merely in conceptual knowledge. Be ready to learn throughout your entire life and to observe reality in yourself and in the world at all times.
- c. Do not force others, including children, by any means whatsoever, to adopt your views, whether by authority, threat, money, propaganda, or even education. However, through compassionate dialogue, help other renounce fanaticism and narrowness.

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<sup>14</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 1987), 88

<sup>15</sup> Hanh, *Interbeing*, 18.

Idolatrous or too obsessive and bound in the theory often legitimate a clash in society when the fundamentalist tries to defend their ideology, the conservative try to follow the modern idea and prejudiced as an evil in a cosmic war. Those percepts encourage us to be tolerance and understand with the other ideology and open minded through share an ideology to find a truth in compassionate dialogue. It was like the case of Israelis and Palestinians, where Hanh try to find solution among them through inviting those people to come into Plum Village to practice mindfulness. To calming emotion, they share each other about their sufferings as a human not as an enemy by bringing the peace in ourselves first through mindful breathing, mindful walking and total relaxation in order to take care our anger, fear and suffer.<sup>16</sup> So the calming of the soul here located at the first time before they share suffering, because when the first time they meet, it will be suspicious each other and the debate cannot be avoided. So the communication among them can be start when their mind calm.

## 2. Growing Empathy Minded

- a. Do not avoid contact with suffering or close your eyes before suffering. Do not lose awareness of the existence of suffering in the life of the world. Find ways to be with those who are suffering by all means, including personal contact and visits, images, sound. By such means, awaken yourself and others to the reality of suffering in the world.
- b. Do not accumulate wealth while millions are hungry. Do not take as the aim of your life fame, profit, wealth, or sensual pleasure. Live simply and share time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need.

Those percepts seem advocate us to be aware with the suffering of the society without considering who are the victim to make your sense of sympathy come from your basic humanity and try to aware with the society when we are in happiness during the other still suffering. In Engaged Buddhism, those percept as a main role of humanity and

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<sup>16</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Peace Begin Here: Palestinian and Israelis Listening to Each Other* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2014), 15.

empathy with the society around Buddhism. “In time like this, when people suffer so much, the bodhisattvas don’t stay in the temple; They are out there”.<sup>17</sup>

### 3. Maintain the Mind or Mindfulness

- a. Do not maintain anger or hatred. Learn to penetrate and transform them when they are still seeds in your consciousness. As soon as they arise, turn your attention to your breath in order to see and understand the nature of your anger and hatred and the nature of the persons who have caused your anger and hatred.
- b. Do not lose yourself in dispersion and in your surroundings. Practice mindful breathing to come back to what is happening in the present moment. Be in touch with what is wondrous, refreshing, and healing both inside and around you. Plant seeds of joy, peace, and understanding in yourself in order to facilitate the work of transformation in the depths of your consciousness.

To handle an Anger, we must pay more attention to the biochemical aspect of anger itself because anger has its roots in our body as well as our mind. When we analyze our anger, we can see its physiological elements. We should look deeply at how we eat, how we drink, how we consume, and how we handle our body in our daily life.<sup>18</sup> So from this view, the source of anger comes from our selves. It was resonance of our body and soul. We often targeted an object as main cause of the problem. In such conflict, the anger of the violent actor often sees from the perspective of the object without considering the source of the anger. If we back in ourselves, we plant seriously and correctly, we will harvest a good result also.

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<sup>17</sup> Esposito, Fasching, dan Lewis, *World Religion Today*, 408.

<sup>18</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Anger: Wisdom for Cooling the Flame* (New York: Riverhead Book, 2001), 13.

#### 4. Awareness of Honesty and Hating Speech

- a. Do not utter words that can create discord and cause the community to break. Make every effort to reconcile all conflicts, however small.
- b. Do not say untruthful things for the sake of personal interest or to impress people. Do not utter words that cause division or hatred. Do not spread news that you do not know to be certain. Do not criticize or condemn things that you are not sure of. Always speak truthfully and constructively. Have the courage to speak out about situations of injustice, even when doing so may threaten your own safety.

This percept advises to keep word what should we say for not to become a conflict. in contrast, we should use or word to reconcile a conflict. The speech should contain a love, compassion and creating happiness to the people who heard our word. And be aware with our word, try to say honestly.

#### 5. Prohibition of Religious Exploitation and Greedy

- a. Do not use the Buddhist community for personal gain or transform your community into a political party. A religious community, however, should take a clear stand against oppression and injustice, and should strive to change the situation without engaging in partisan conflicts.
- b. Do not live with a vocation that is harmful to humans and nature. Do not invest in companies that deprive others of their chance to life. Select a vocation which helps realize your ideal of compassion.

The religion often brings into political party and create it as a potential tool in gathering mass for supporting individual affair. Indeed, religion often legitimate to break the society into partly because of the greedy on authority as well as in business which inflict a financial lost and capitalism. The vocation here should be considered which it can help the other or can destroy the environment.

## 6. Prevention of War with Non-violence Approach

- a. Do not kill. Do not let others kill. Find whatever means possible to protect life and to prevent war.

“Killing do not reply with the killing; violence does not reply because it will rise another violence. Compassion is the best way to prevent and reduce violence, compassion is not something soft. It takes a lot of courage” (Quoted from Thay’s interview in Santa Cruz radio). It is clear that killing is not best solution for the violence problem. This precept of interbeing become a solution when the world experienced a riots in everywhere, compassion could be cannot give a solution but it can reduce the other violence.

## 7. Notice of Environmental and Human Exploitation

- a. Possess nothing that should belong to others. Respect the property of others, but prevent others from enriching themselves from human suffering or the suffering of other species on Earth.

Based on Thich Nhat Hanh, mindful consumption is crucial to the continuity of the our own and planets. The continuity to consume thoughtlessly how will be the future of our children and children’s children.<sup>19</sup> Thus from this view, it can be argued that the ecological continuity of the earth is so important for the next in order to the next generation destiny.

## 8. Harmony of Body and Mind

- a. Do not mistreat your body. Learn to handle it with respect. Do not look on your body as only an instrument. Preserve vital energies (sexual, breath, spirit) for the realization of the Way. Sexual expression should not happen without love and commitment. In sexual relationships, be aware of future suffering that may be caused. To preserve the happiness of others, respect the rights and commitments of others. Be fully aware of the responsibility of bringing new lives into the world. Meditate on the world into which you are bringing new beings.

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<sup>19</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Blooming of the Lotus* (Berkeley: Parallax Press, 2009), 47.

The concept, body and mind are in one, is familiar to Buddhists.<sup>20</sup> So the harmony between body and mind should be controlled, we should aware with illness that could be come in the future which also causes suffering not only for ourselves but also for the society that could be effected.

From those percepts of *interbeing*, it can be concluded that the aims of Order of *interbeing* is to resolve a conflict through compassion and meditation. The dialogue and the calmness become a main role in solving such a problem. To *Engaged Buddhism*, resolution is very important thing through this resolution the realization can be begin and the armor is used understanding of *interbeing*.<sup>21</sup> This order of *interbeing* is a concept created by Thich Nhat as a guidance for *Engaged Buddhism* in order to emerge the awareness in social interaction.

## Conclusion

The term of Engaged Buddhism is a movement originated from Thich Nhat Hanh as an influential monk in nowadays. Thich Nhat Hanh is also called “Another Dalai Lama” by media because of this movement in creating world peace through mindfulness. Engaged Buddhism was only from the personal charismatic movement but also from the movement of the Buddhism seeing from such phenomena in society which is suffering. Philosophically, spiritually and ethically Buddhism “should” involve in this social issues because the practice of the Buddhism teaching should not be stagnant in shrine but need a practice of the monks and nuns in the society. “*Order of Interbeing*” or “*Tien Hien*” rises as a guide line for engaged Buddhism. It contains fourteen Percepts in facing such problematic issues that rise in surface of the society as like the ideological war, violence, environmental degradation, anger and maintaining mind. Order of *Interbeing* is one of the tools to create world peace through nonviolence and peace way. As like Hans Kung said

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<sup>20</sup> Hanh, *Being Peace*, 45.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.researchgate.net/publication/270904776>, accessed on 15 November 2015

“there will be peace on earth when there was a peace among the world religions”.

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