



The Role of Faith in regard to lasting security, economic development and sustainable leadership

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Executive Summary

There is hardly a day that goes by without the mention of religion or faith issues in the news – positive or negative. No matter how we are personally linked to faith issues it is obviously a societal phenomenon and dominant driver in different areas of public discussions.

Although, primarily in the Western hemisphere, there is this ongoing debate on whether the world would be a better one without faith we can't neglect the incredible influence that faith has had on society for many centuries.

Regardless of the importance of the various religious groups and movements and their local or global influence, this article will focus on the Christian faith as the driving force and foundation of Western civilisation.

Be it science, health care, literature, learning or liberty, the biblical worldview touched and transformed entire societies¹. The medieval monasteries were for example a seed bed of great Western universities. Education in the past was quite often Church education.

After having experienced the 20th century as a time of various ideologies, the Western society has meanwhile entered the postmodern time and lacks a single normative value set. Given this background, the following question is increasingly asked: *How could the best of faith contribute towards global issues?*

This article aims to transform perspectives on faith in government and business leadership, specifically in nations experiencing dramatic changes (i.e. immigration dynamics, internal conflicts, emerging market challenges and freedom of beliefs).

¹ Vishal Mangalwadi, *The Book that made your World*, 2011.



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About the Author of this Issue

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Analysis

1. Faith & Security

Research confirms that faith plays a crucial role in issues related to human rights, peace-making and developing values. Less religious freedom leads to less women's empowerment, less economic development and less political stability which means increasing conflicts and the risk of terrorism².

Faith is considered to be a constructive force for good and can have a positive influence in promoting social change. A strong split in opinions can be seen concerning the role of faith in issues of conflict prevention. Some believe that faith is not identified as a constructive conflict-prevention force, while others consider it as a key factor for conflict resolution and peace making. This expresses the controversial duality of the perceived role of faith and religion when it comes to conflict and security. Religion in general can of course be part of the problem, but it also can be leveraged as a powerful tool for achieving peaceful solutions and agreements. In other words, faith and religion can be both positive and negative forces in issues of political stability and security at regional and national level.

It is true, that faith permeates the world while providing a moral and ethical compass for the vast majority of people. While 84% of people are religiously affiliated, 75% now live with government restrictions on their individual freedom of conscience or belief³.

Given the heritage of Christian faith and its important impact like forgiveness and the "Golden Rule" of reciprocity and respect⁴ it lays a foundation and practical basis for how to cooperate with the "other" – the individual or institution whose perspective and interests are different from one's own.

Arbitration alone does not offer a moral imperative to forgive and seek the other party's good, and a conflict not resolved is a conflict just postponed. It needs the strength of faith and belief to change somebody's mind in order to provide forgiveness rather than just a rational conflict management of arbitration. Someone's attitude built on a solid value set is crucial and will make the difference in all kind of conflicts. So far lasting security seems to be a result of changed minds and faith could play a significant role in this process. The legal framework is just a condition and not a guarantee for sustainability. Any legal framework and any political system can be compromised if people's attitudes aren't changed in the desired direction.

Also regarding the engagement for marginalised people and prevention of social disorder, faith is a driving force and important factor of social cohesion. The Christian belief that man is a creation by God implicates the equal treatment of any human being on earth.

Faith communities – as longstanding networks of belonging, trust and engagement – are major and durable sources of "social capital", which is disproportionately important to the poor and marginalised who lack other forms of capital. As such, faith communities are, and have historically been, a key motor of civil society.

Unfortunately, on a macro level, the international situation of the early 21st century is still set by numerous inter-state and intra-state conflicts which the end of the Cold War has not been able to remove. Indeed, conflicts and tensions previously submerged or frozen by the super-power rivalry of that era have now come to

² World Economic Forum, Global Agenda Council on the Role of Faith, "Why Care about Faith?", 2014.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Luke 6:31



the surface, particularly in the consciousness of the West following the destruction of the World Trade Center in New York on September 11th 2001.

The ensuing international interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq have brought many tensions to the forefront, not least as the ethical and legal basis for intervention – especially in Iraq – has been fiercely debated. Much less attention, however, seems to have been paid by those involved to the question of how exactly the sort of society hoped for could emerge and then be nurtured and supported.

Unless the underlying relational issues can be addressed and dealt with, any intervention is simply likely to foster instability and continuing conflict. It is also likely to store up hatred and resentment not simply within the conflict situation but also against the intervening parties.

Good human relations are, thus, not an optional extra. The restoration of right relationships is the only basis on which peace and lasting security can be established. Peace in turn is the basis from which all other objectives can be achieved. In order to restore relationships, there again needs to be a process of forgiveness, a relational process which involves a transaction between two or more parties (be they individuals, communities or national groups).

In accordance with the New Testament (Romans 12:18) Christians especially are called to seek peace with one another, and in turn between their respective communities. This command to create a world filled with a holistic sense of peace – *shalom* – does not mean turning a blind eye to injustice, be it personal or structural. Indeed, another imperative, that of justice requires all people, as bearers of God's image, to work for the restoration of the shattered and distorted social order in which we live.

A Christian view of the world is based on the concept of covenant. While the covenant relates primarily to God's relationship with humanity, it is obvious that it also provides us with a critique of present injustices giving us an outline on how a transformed social order should look. This vision can then be applied to a conflict situation in an informed and carefully considered way.

The aim of peace-building is to sow seeds for a peace which includes all people and communities within a just and workable framework for the future – unique to each conflict situation – by finding common ground and then setting clearly defined and realistic goals.

Peacemakers need to gain the trust of all the principal players and have to be guided by an agenda that takes its bearings from the basic principles of justice itself. The peacemakers must attentively listen to all disputants, showing concern to each of them, even to those with whom they disagree. Faith with its implicit acceptance by an eternal God could be a major help in this very process.

The perspective of peace-building – whether in Iraq, Afghanistan, Israel, Palestine or elsewhere – is one of well-informed hope. Without the God-given possibility of seeing beyond the immediate struggle for power and position, and beyond the self-perpetuating cycle of injury and revenge, it is difficult to foster the process of restoration towards a lasting security. The substance needs to be based on values beyond the calculus of immediate self-interest. The irony, indeed the divine irony in this, is, that having abandoned the struggle for ascendancy at the cost of others, the true basis for prosperity in concrete terms is laid.



2. Faith & Economy

Beyond the impact towards lasting security, the role of faith is also highly considered in issues related to anti-corruption and business ethics. Similar to the previous chapter it is again true that changing the mindset in the case of market players (consumer, producer, supplier, etc.) will guarantee a changed behaviour and economic development.

Focusing on the Western hemisphere there are a couple of economic paradigms which could be questioned by a faith-based and biblical worldview.

One of the most destroying paradigms is “More is More”. It increasingly seems to be a strong trend to “live fast” while always being busy – or at least giving the impression to be very busy. But time is the currency of relationship, and Christians believe in a relational God. The role of faith is to remind people that God made the 7th day as a day of rest, to protect families and low-income workers. The Old Testament confirms that God has commanded that the land should rest every 7th year and he arranged rest for every 50th year, too⁵.

A further economic paradigm is to accept debts as a normal part of buying a house, buying cars and running a company. And why not? To be part of a market-based consumer culture is not wrong. But isn't the Christian faith convinced that we should not owe anybody anything? Isn't the relationship between a lender and a borrower toxic? The Old Testament states that the borrower is “the slave of the lender”?⁶

A next paradigm – or at least common sense – is to build up savings through pension funds over which we have little knowledge and no control. After all, there is no time spent to track every investment but to spread it vastly. But the New Testament teaches that to take a return without responsibility is the same as “reaping where we haven't sown” declared as the sign of a ‘hard’ or ‘disengaged’ person.⁷ From a Christian point of view it is hard to justify letting money be used in a way that somebody does not know what is happening with it.

Furthermore, flexibility has become one of the major business paradigms in the Western world. A significant job promotion is only possible by leaving town or city, uprooting spouse, children, parents. But Christian faith is constantly reminding people to think and act long-term, being committed to relationships which involve a commitment to family, neighbours and communities. It is hardly possible to honour parents adequately while moving away and living nowhere near them anymore. As a consequence of such an individualistic culture people trust in insurance policies and government provision to look after elderly parents. But the Christian faith is based on strong families providing primarily for the immediate relatives which can't be substituted by any (social-minded) government.

Furthermore nowadays economy accepts pay differentials between the highest and lowest paid employees in a company of 500 to 1 so that an employee has to work 500 years to earn the pay of their boss. Surely this is a reflection of the labor market where wages are set through supply and demand. The “invisible hand” of the market ensures that justice is done. That is the underlying belief.

But Christian faith reminds people that God has created all people equal before him and such wage differentials deny the underlying equality in the value of every person. While it is of course difficult to draw the line in

⁵ Lev. 25:8-13

⁶ Proverbs 22:7

⁷ Matt. 25:26-27



any particular place, the constraint on wealth differentials in biblical Israel was regulated e.g. through the ban on interest⁸, the system of land distribution⁹ and the Jubilee provision¹⁰.

Modern economy teaches people to look first and foremost for the financial benefit of an investment. It is of course right to make as much money as possible from the capital somebody has invested, but Christian faith emphasises to ensure that both the social and environmental impacts of investments will benefit the community and future generations.

The American Revolutionaries back in the 18th century had a slogan in their fight against Britain: “No taxation without representation”. A Christian maxim for business life today might be summed up in a new slogan: “No reward without responsibility, no investment without involvement and no profit without participation.” (M. Schluter)

In summary, the role of faith can of course be part of the solution regarding economic growth and social inclusion while faith will remind and focus on:

- Social and ethical capital, hospitality and engagement for the local society
- Urban networks for social cohesion
- Teaching on caring for others
- Global communities and solidarity
- Countering economic fundamentalism by asking critical questions: What are the true indicators of economic growth? How does it affect the lives of poor people? What are the costs of ecosystems?
- Countering the marketisation of human society by a reminder of higher values
- Strong ethics of work

All in all Christian faith provides a critique of unlimited growth emphasising justice, equality, long-term memory and a creation-oriented worldview.

4. Faith & Leadership

While having talked to various people about good leadership, the following terms and characteristics were highlighted the most: Teamwork, self-esteem, holistic thinking, accepting emotional realities, led by values and ethics, authenticity, trust ability, credibility, honesty, openness, sharpened conscience, ability to love, showing compassion, kindness, courage, vision, willingness to communicate, graceful handling of himself, inner peace, encourage others without fear of competition, sovereignty, inner maturity, wisdom, responsibility for people, service-oriented, integrity, loyalty, inner independence, stability, fairness.

Beyond some kind of management skills and competencies it is obvious that there is a strong emphasis on inner values and character abilities.

⁸ Deut. 23:19-20

⁹ Josh. 18:8-10

¹⁰ Lev. 5:8-13



This shows that somebody who wants to lead others must firstly work on his or her own character and inner strengths. Leaders are, in this regard, permanently learning. And the role of faith is crucial as it is based upon the reflection of one's own actions and the relationship with God and others.

As a consequence, the position no longer dictates the personality of a leader, rather it is the personality of a leader that dictates the position. Someone who is followed by the people even though they do not have a powerful position has leadership skills. But if someone is only obeyed by the people because of their powerful position, they are far from being a strong leader.

As the founder of the Christian faith, Jesus proved that no title or public office is necessary in order to be a good leader. In business, it is possible that people only follow managers or CEOs because they are under their authority. That doesn't mean that they voluntarily follow them. And as long as this person of authority is not being followed voluntarily, they are by far no leader. People follow a leader because they want to, not because they have to. A good manager never abuses his power in order to lead people, but rather earns the right to be their leader.

Businesses which implement this approach of natural leadership permit every employee to summon a meeting and to invite people to it. For people who succeed in this art of persuasion (that others invest their time and energy in such a meeting) it is likely that results will be achieved which will further the business. On the other hand, no-one is obligated to attend such a meeting if the aim and meaning of this meeting could not be conveyed.

This is surely a revolutionary approach which isn't feasible everywhere but which indicates an interesting and recommendable direction. In the Old Testament, the wise king Solomon said: "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another." (Psalm 27:17)

A leader constantly looks for people for "the inner circle" who help to further their character.

Characteristics of good leadership are:

- a genuine interest in people and their worries
- selfless dedication for their employees
- rejection of every kind of favouritism
- helping others to achieve success
- having a charisma and enthusiasm for an objective
- keeping promises
- not misusing their position for their own benefit

In questions of leadership, it is the role of the Christian faith, to always remember what Jesus said in his speeches: "... whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave ..." (Matthew 20:25-28). An extremely important principle of leadership is found here. It is the duty of a leader to take into account the needs of others so that they will be successful. A leader must invest the whole energy into making the team successful because the failure of an employee is the failure of the leader.



Indicators of a vivid faith especially in leadership roles include the following expressions of behaviour:

- In accordance with the forgiveness of sin by God, the leader is also able to forgive others and handles mistakes with patience. As already mentioned, that is also a consequence of seeing others as a creature of God – like oneself.
- The responsible leader functions as a champion and protégé of the disenfranchised, helpless and disadvantaged people.
- He deals with resources wisely knowing that this lifetime is limited but has an eternal perspective in mind.
- The faith-based leader is used to give accountability for his life but also works to always keep it in balance.
- Finally he is based upon an ethical set of values such as honesty, trust, love, goodwill, etc.

In order to integrate an employee responsibly and to let him or her become successful, it is essential to delegate responsibilities. This makes the task of the leader easier and at the same time helps to increase the productivity of individuals and the group. This principle of delegation is already recommended in the Old Testament. In Exodus 18:13-26, the story of Moses and his father-in-law Jethro is told. He watches as Moses suffers under the multitude of tasks he has been given. Jethro's comment to Moses is: "... You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you; you cannot handle it alone." Here, Jethro states what happens when leaders don't understand how to delegate decision-making powers and decentralise power: all those involved become weary and tired - the employees because they have to wait too long and the leader because they alone are making all decisions.

5. Results

The heritage of Christian faith and its emphasis of personal responsibility has in many circumstances produced an increase of morality, creativity, hard work, honest trade, a modest lifestyle, public responsibility and societal good. The result was the modernisation of the world, impacting not only countries in Western Europe and North America but most countries around the world. This influence also has changed the approach regarding security, economy and leadership issues.

As a result, the role of faith is that of a critical companion of political, economic and scientific developments. The technical imperative implies: "That which is technically possible, should be done!". The economic imperative says: "That which makes a profit, should not be prevented!" Both the technical and the economic imperative involve the risk of ethically controversial developments, such as genetic engineering, therapeutic cloning, human avatars and much more.

In the long run, no system can merely regulate everything by the law and forget the morals of the decency of the acting person. Wilhelm Röpke, one of the most prominent advocates of a free market economy in the 20th century, said: "The ultimate source of our civilisation's disease is the spiritual and religious crisis which has overtaken all of us and which each must master for himself".¹¹

¹¹ Wilhelm Röpke, A Humane Economy. The Social Framework of a Free Market. Henry Regnery: 1960.



For a century, the Western World (although mankind is above all “Homo-religious”) has made the increasingly desperate attempt to consider man, its science, its art, its technology and its government as self-explanatory without reference to God and faith. And with this it has ultimately created an ideological vacuum which hasn’t yet been refilled.

Given this, the role of faith must again be brought into focus in questions of political stability and security, economic development and principles of sustainable leadership.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author.