

Strengthening Values in Management: Imam Sadr - The Vision and The Foundation

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Introduction

'Religious teachings ought to be brought out of idealism into reality so that people have no arguments left before Allah.'

- Imam Moussa Sadr

Markets impose their values and rules on organizations, individuals and culture. There is ample evidence that living by market requirements is not necessarily conducive to human happiness, present and future. Therefore, there seems to be a dire need to vitalize and strengthen values in all structures and spheres. A principal source of these values is religion, which was essentially revealed to guarantee human happiness. Based on our understanding of religion we formulate an integrated vision to address the challenges of the era; a vision under which fall general principles and approaches, as well as rules and procedures for the administration of our organization to guarantee the wellbeing and dignity of individuals, the stability of society, and the prosperity of nations.

Against this background, many in the world today have laid the stakes on civil society organizations as the only hope for protecting humanity from the dangers of radical choices; the choices of intercultural clashes, of controlling

resources and destroying the ecosystem. This hope is justified given that civil society is the repository of human consciousness that offers a platform for free, multiparty dialogue which results in the neutralizing of extremists and in finding compromises that preserve human dignity and ensure the continuity of life.

The theme of the “99 German Catholic Convention” is, therefore, timely and will enlighten several dimensions of the contemporary issues and preoccupations. From the Islamic perspective, this paper will contribute by tackling the following aspects:

- The Muslim social vision;
- Social responsibility – pillars, values and implementation;
- Imam Moussa Sadr’s vision for people, religion and society; and
- An applied model of that vision, Imam Sadr Foundation.

The Social Muslim Vision

According to Islam, people are social beings; their perfection and evolution are practically and emotionally dependent on their fellows. Indeed, human perfection is a person’s ultimate purpose in life. Perfection is attained, in Islam, through righteous deeds in all walks of life, by enjoying honorable moral character and noble values in human society.

The conduit to perfection is religion; it is a guaranteed path to molding righteous people. Religion is a constellation of teachings and values for the education and perfection of the person. The person is religion’s aim; their education has been the purpose of prophets throughout the ages: *{Verily, I was sent to perfect good morals}*. Faith within the confines of one’s heart is not enough; faith must translate into action and moral character and be embodied in good deeds that benefit people. Not a single verse in the Quran that does not connect faith to good deeds; *Surat Al-Asr* warns: *{Indeed, mankind is in loss, except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience}*. Perhaps the shift of divine discourse from the individual/person to the human community indicated how that may be attained; the Quran stipulates collective action as a necessary condition for success.

Social Responsibility

Moving on to the concept of social responsibility, we find full compatibility between the Christian and Muslim perspectives. The social Muslim vision defines the value of a person’s actions based on their faith, moral character, good deeds, and their adherence to justice. The contemporary lifestyle seems to have turned into fast-paced consumption and a permanent panting after profit, even at the expense of familial happiness and mutual social responsibility.

The prophet of Islam Mohammad rejected such materialism over fourteen hundred years ago. This was clear in his confrontation of the Arabs of *jahiliya*

(literally 'the days of ignorance', i.e. pre-Islamic Arabia) who were sinking into unending warfare and the murder of innocents for spoils. The prophet spoke of compassion, forgiveness, love, empathy and sharing. He preached to the people through divine revelation which contained strong warning to those who devote their lives to amassing money: *{Woe to every scorner and mocker who collects wealth and continuously counts it. He thinks that his wealth will make him immortal. No! He will surely be thrown into the Crusher. And what do you suppose the Crusher is? It is the fire of Allah, eternally fueled}. (Surat Al-Humazah)*

The disciples of Mohammad have assumed the responsibility of building human societies throughout history; they disseminated religion, constructed its institutions and scattered abroad, helping enrich global culture. But soon a contemporary culture prevailed, characterized by scientific and technological development, sprawling urbanity and economic prosperity. Among the side-effects of this renaissance was the neglect and deterioration of the human dimension. Contemporary societies failed to give education due attention, some even saw in ethical conduct a weakness; fundamental and noble values dwindled. This produced widespread corruption, vice, crime, terrorism, exploitation and poverty, as disparities in income, standards of living and activity between people grew.

Contemporary humanity neglected values and religious teachings and was afflicted with misfortune and misery. With each crisis, people feel the need for change and start searching for the proper way to resolve problems. In order to achieve the desired change and build a virtuous society, mentalities and the value system must change: *{Indeed, Allah will not change the condition of a people until they change what is in them}*. Disciplining one's soul and acquiring moral character are critical priorities for a full rehabilitation of contemporary societies. History abounds with great scholars and educators, prophets and reformers and thinkers.

The reformist Imam Ali Bin Abi Taleb confronts people with their momentous social responsibilities: *{Allah Almighty prescribed in the property of the wealthy the sustenance of the poor; no poor man goes hungry unless a rich man withholds his food. And Allah Almighty will hold you accountable}*. Ali placed on the rich in the community the chief responsibility for the miserable condition of the poor. His master, Prophet Muhammad, held every person responsible for the group of people affected by them: *{Each of you is a shepherd and each is responsible for his flock}*. People should strive for equality among them: *{People are all equal like the teeth of the comb}*. Mohammad also encouraged people to cooperate and exchange amenities: *{All creatures are the dependents of Allah; the most beloved of them to Allah is he who is most beneficial to his dependents}*.

Such teachings cultivate the collective spirit, heighten the sense of social responsibility and promote solidarity among people. They call for injecting these values into our contemporary societies which have been torn apart by the hegemony of self-interest, profiteering and the exploitation of others.

This calls for the emergence of Muslim socio-intellectual currents to counter the dominion of market values and reinstitute the values of truth, justice and equality. Greed and excess are perhaps the worst products of consumer culture. Alongside its immediate complications in fueling discontent and resentment among individuals and communities, consumer culture threatens the resources of future generations and tampers with ecological balance and environmental sustainability.

So it appears that the absolute freedom enjoyed by the leaders of business and industry in unregulated markets has not been without consequence. These consequences, however, can be mitigated by serious controls and measures to bridle the greed of exploiters and profiteers. Put concisely, it means the exercise of responsible freedom. This requires genuine and transparent collaboration with a fair State, i.e. constructive interaction between market actors (business owners) and regulators (the State). It is worth noting that control policies are not new to human societies and that the prohibition of monopoly is a priority that has been implemented to protect the interests of the people. This was Imam Ali's directives to the *wali* (governor) whom he appointed in Egypt: *'Check on them yourself, your subjects. Know that, despite it all, many of them are capable of monstrous greed, ugly avarice, exploitation of amenities and monopoly in trade, and these undermine public interests and are a shame to governors. Prohibit monopolies as Allah's prophet (peace be upon him) has prohibited them.'*

If prohibiting monopoly and restraining greed are among the duties of a State if it is to rule fairly, building a sound society requires a favorable environment and long-term planning, indeed realistic policies. It is possible to curb people's vicious impulses – greed among them – with education and discipline, through ethics and vitalized human and religious values in educational and healthcare institutions, as well as the world of business and management.

On the other hand we find the mission to strengthen the values of love, compassion, collaboration and empathy. This mission is resisted by the leaders of positive change who know that vitalizing values in institutions, administrations and businesses is the true, sustainable change. Social responsibility in modern parlance has been the age-old heart of religion. In fact, true faith prescribes that one fulfill their duties towards others, especially the vulnerable, the poor, the disadvantaged and the needy. This was emphasized by the Prophet Mohammad when he said, *'He does not believe in me whoever sleeps with a full stomach knowing that his neighbor is hungry'*.

It has become clear how distortions in the distribution of wealth and how failing to meet the people's needs led to the disasters sweeping across modern societies; the successive financial crises should be a lesson to the wise. Delving into our roots, we recognize Imam Ali's eloquence in describing the repercussions of disparities: *{Those upon whom Allah's blessings have*

been abundant are most needed by the people. If they fulfill their responsibilities to the community, the community shall prosper and thrive; if they do not, the community shall be threatened by extinction}.

Perhaps the best solution lay in changing the logic that glorifies excessive profit, in order to transform money into a means for ensuring community wellbeing rather than an individualist goal to which a person devotes a lifetime! A few pioneers have endeavored to achieve this aim, having formulated an integrated vision for people and society.

Imam Moussa Sadr's Humanist Vision

Imam Moussa Sadr, in a statement in the 1960s, illuminated our major contemporary issues. He said, *'Among the manifestations of the hijacking of freedoms and the destruction of potentials: autocracy... pretending to be custodians over people and accusing them of lack of discernment... the policy of neglect to close off opportunities against people, and even to keep them from enjoying good health'.*

Imam Sadr drew on Islam as a fount of creed and thought, and a reference for governing relationships between people. By origin, birth and rearing, he is the product of a nurturing environment with a long tradition of employing religion for the service of humanity. He offered an integrated vision for people, religion and society, based on a fundamental verity weaved by his creative mind and which constituted the groundwork for his intellectual vision and social engagement: *'Faith in humanity is the earthly dimension of faith in Allah.'* It means that when one believes in human dignity and rights and when one's actions in life are guided by this principle, one is actually practicing one's faith in the divine, thus preventing the transformation of faith into mere ritual and ceremony which we witness among some. Human dignity in Islam is a fundamental value: *{And we have certainly honored the children of Adam}*. Allah honored humankind by making us His stewards on earth. Based on this vision, Imam Sadr worked relentlessly to instill the Messenger's values in the social and professional life of the world of business, markets and corporations so that people may live lovingly, compassionately and happily. He inevitably had to change certain prevalent perceptions first, and then remind people of the true doctrine and firmly establish the humanist vision in people's minds and hearts.

Imam Sadr began by introducing a new conception of religion which some had understood as worn-out traditions and customs and reduced to the jurisprudence of the recluse. The tangible substance of this conception to him was that Islam is a way of life where each good deed is an act of worship; reflection is necessary, where reflecting for an hour is worthier than seventy years of worship; seeking learning is a chief duty; endeavoring to gain a living is also *jihad* (holy war); nursing is an act of compassion; journalism is an instrument for worshipping Allah and serving humanity and is a field for *jihad*; as for politics, it is the art of serving people rather than a struggle for power.

In parallel with changing conceptions, Imam Sadr sought to reawaken a community torn by selfishness, discord, need, weakness and divisions. He fostered the spirit of enthusiasm and persisted in his determination to vitalize values in the community by stirring people to rise up to the divine mission entrusted to them. He founded a unique school of thought that refused to confine religion to temple, church or mosque, but required that people and clerics go into the world to work in different fields.

Based on his remarkable understanding of religion, where faith is inseparable from serving the people, Imam Sadr warned of the dangers of deprivation, observing that *'the problem is in disparities between regions, which are bound to cause an explosion'*. In order to remedy such structural and social threats, he established social and vocational institutions and charity foundations. He, moreover, sought with all his might to convince the authorities of the need for concerted efforts to bring about balanced and sustainable development in the underserved areas of Lebanon.

Imam Sadr Foundation – Lebanon: A Model for the Social Muslim Vision

None of us should expect the socially marginalized to care about others or to be preoccupied with environmental or legal considerations. It would be useful to remember what we mentioned in the introduction of this paper: the essential mission of civil society organizations is to expand the circle of beneficiaries from economic growth, integrate the marginalized and protect the vulnerable.

Between the threats of exclusion and poverty and the opportunities for justice and freedom, Imam Sadr Foundation has been working relentlessly for over fifty years in the rural outskirts of southern Lebanon. Given the sensitive nature of the area, the foundation's strategic decisions – to preserve the rural environment, help defend national identity, reduce rural migration and prevent poverty belts around cities – constitute proud and rewarding accomplishments.

Imam Sadr Foundation is a Lebanese non-profit organization that has been in operation since the early 1960s. Through its interventions, the foundation strives towards a just society free from ignorance, poverty and illness, with equal opportunities for all, in which there is growing coherence between the contributions of the privileged and the needs and expectations of the disadvantaged, in an atmosphere of participation that fosters confidence in oneself and others. The foundation is characterized by its full range of social, cultural and healthcare services in the underserved areas of South Lebanon, delivered in remote locations through a network of permanent healthcare and social centers and mobile clinics.

The foundation's vision stems from its core values, notably justice and empowerment. The foundation's guiding principles are:

- To empower vulnerable persons and groups;

- To be partial to the weakest members of the community in a bid to dispel the tyranny of the powerful; and
- To embrace a multidisciplinary approach (no ready-made recipe is viable for all circumstances and cases).

In the field, the foundation has developed its central activity as an orphanage, transforming the function into an ongoing, comprehensive care program. The program now serves orphaned girls together with girls in precarious social situations (dire poverty, broken homes, victims of domestic abuse, etc.). Given the growing and expanding needs of this group, the foundation sought to provide for these needs by creating a set of coherent services, notably nurseries, kindergartens, and primary and intermediate schools, in addition to miscellaneous cultural, social and recreational programs. Girls at the high-school and university levels are enrolled at institutes in the area at the expense and under the supervision of the foundation. Girls wishing to acquire vocational training can choose from the array of specializations offered through the foundation's technical programs, most prominent among which are the renowned nursing school whose graduates can quickly and easily find job placement and the accelerated vocational training programs to whose traditional specializations was added a leading division to train female social workers based on a curriculum approved by the national Ministry of Education. A photography division was inaugurated in 2010. It is worth mentioning that labor market demand for the selected fields is taken into account when developing vocational programs.

Organizational Structure

In terms of internal organizational structure, the foundation has built a well-rounded, multidisciplinary team where women are a central part of planning, administration and implementation, with special focus given to women's issues and their role in rebalancing the community through their active involvement in resource management and decision-making. In order to implement these programs, the foundation created dozens of institutes and centers throughout South Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs.

The foundation embraces lifelong learning as a means to keep up with new advances in the world of management, organization and effective performance. This orientation was translated into training programs and capacity building in which all administrators, staff members and volunteers participate. Upgrading and expansion run in parallel with our keenness to train the beneficiaries of educational and vocational services.

Examples from the Field

1- Strategy to Instill the Culture of Peace and Dialogue in Children

It can only be expected that numerous children suffer from low morale for reasons that are too numerous to list and explain. Indeed, there are cases of underlying fear as a result of recurrent conflicts, media content and poor capacities among some parents. Fear is often manifested through impairments such as speech disabilities, incontinence, aggression and attention deficit disorder.

The distress of some children takes the form of sleep disorders and nightmares; they experience fright, panic and screaming fits simply at hearing a loud sound or glimpsing an unsettling scene. Many children suffer from psychosomatic problems, including tics and involuntary movement of the arms, legs, shoulders, eyes, mouth or fingers, lack of appetite, introversion, lack of communication, an overwhelming urge to cry...

The danger lies in the effects of trauma going beyond the present into the unforeseeable future. Problems may extend into advanced stages of life and affect their social and professional functioning and their interactions with those around them, indeed with their own children later on.

Groups targeted by Imam Sadr Foundation programs range between the ages of 3 and 30 years (sometimes beyond). These are generally small and young girls who are most vulnerable or most at risk. Some are orphaned girls who join the foundation at three and stay on until they get married or complete their university studies.

Levels of Intervention

Based on the handled cases, intervention strategies can be classified under two main headings. We will concentrate on the second of these as it is closely and directly linked to the education of children – the first focus being the economic and psychological empowerment of adults to alleviate pressures and protect them from exploitation, as well as prepare them to raise their children wholesomely. The second focus is connected to the series of psychological and specialized measures and interventions to achieve personal balance with oneself and prepare one to enter into safe dialogue with others towards a healthy relationship.

- a) **Socio-economic intervention** through training programs, employment or assistance in job searches, empowerment, capacity building, raising awareness on women's rights and other issues, and development programs with direct economic benefit.
- b) **Psycho-spiritual intervention** by helping them recognize trauma and admit to their pain and grief in order to define who they are and foster self-respect. Here, moral/religious education plays an active part given the peace and quietude it brings and the willingness to forgive and empathize that it nurtures. This leads to full healing by facing and acknowledging oneself and others – i.e. admitting to one's mistakes and forgiving the mistakes of others, which means accepting compromises that mend relationships and institute the culture of peace.

2- Dialogue through Practice

This is implemented in partnership with Al-Mabarrat Charitable Organization, Dar Al-Aytam A-Islamiya, Al-Maqased Islamic Charitable Organization, Liqa' Al-Ithnayn, Nadi Aley, Bilad Jbeil Cultural Forum, among others. The initiative seeks to reconstitute a Lebanese citizenry that rises above primal and regional partisanship by creating a viable space for a unique form of rapprochement within the humanist frame and to help the present generation acquire an all-encompassing perspective that transcends their narrow environment. We hope that the proposed meetings succeed in achieving their goal in allowing target groups to discover, widen and build on the common ground between them – the meetings being, fundamentally, both a means and an end as they constitute an accessible and commendable way to bridge distances and change misguided assumptions.

Initially, the initiative addressed students starting at the intermediate level regardless of the sector they belong to (care, academic, vocational, health sciences students). During the first year, several activities were conducted, bringing together thousands of students from all regions around *iftar* (breaking the *Ramadan* fast) meals and during Independence Day celebrations. The second year saw the launch of a series of seminars across Lebanon, under the title 'The Role of Education in Promoting Good Citizenship'. The first such seminar was held in Harissa (prominent Maronite Shrine).

3- Common Terms' Conference

The conferences are produced by the Imam Moussa Sadr Center for Research and Studies. The expression *Common Terms* appeared in the Quran to emphasize the principle of equality in treating Christians and Muslims. Today, *Common Terms* brings together world-class researchers to discuss contemporary issues. In addition to the leaders of Lebanese religious denominations, the conference features scholars and researchers from Lebanon and abroad, leading figures in politics and the sciences, alongside academics, university students and research centers.

Perhaps the titles under which the conferences were held during the last two decades best reflect the nature, interests and purposes of the events:

- i. Muslim-Christian Dialogue: Imam Sadr and Dialogue (1996)
- ii. The Family: Facts and Aspirations (1997)
- iii. In Search of Human Rights on the 50th Anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 20th Anniversary of the Disappearance of Imam Moussa Sadr and His Two Companions (1998)
- iv. Cultural Identity: Exploring the Cultural Dimension of Imam Sadr's Career (1999)

- v. Resistance and the Resisting Society: Exploring the Life of Imam Moussa Sadr (2000)
- vi. Intercultural Dialogue.... 'We Have Come Together for Humanity' (2001)
- vii. The Self and Others in Modern Media (2002)
- viii. The Case of Imam Sadr and His Two Companions: Human, National and Legal Dimensions (2003)
- ix. The Role of Freedom in Reform and Modernization (2004)
- x. Human Development: Religious, Social and Intellectual Dimensions (2005)
- xi. 'We Have Come Together for Humanity': Humanity in Imam Sadr's Vision (2009)
- xii. Socio-Political Change and Imam Sadr (2011)

Conclusion

If we were to condense the present paper into three sentences, we would state that:

- Given the similarity between Christian and Muslim values, it is critical to highlight such congruence today to dispel the nonsense of interfaith warring and to apply these agreements in building society for the universal good;
- Human values outpace laws in their effective impacts on the building of societies and institutions; if laws and regulations are a structural framework for the constitution and proper operation of an institution, human and social values are the animating spirit and beating heart of any organization;
- It is also crucial to connect between the material and immaterial, i.e. to foreground and promote values in the charters, bylaws and internal regulations of public administrations and private institutions which reflect in their agendas, policies and codes of conduct.