



2017 Global Dialogue Proceedings

OUR WORLD IS IN TROUBLE: WHAT CAN WE DO?

SEEKING NEW
VOCATIONAL INSPIRATION
IN THE TRADITION OF
MARTIN LUTHER





Our World is in Trouble: What Can We Do? Seeking New Vocational Inspiration in the Tradition of Martin Luther

Caux Round Table for Moral Capitalism
2017 Global Dialogue

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Wittenberg, Germany

Camus once noted that, “A man without ethics is a wild beast loosed upon this world.” The same could be said for capitalism and, in fact, the Caux Round Table for Moral Capitalism (CRT) has been saying this very thing for nearly 30 years.

Over the course of 4 days in November, 2017, the CRT and the Wittenberg Center for Global Ethics came together, with special sponsorship provided by Unilever, to host the 2017 Global Dialogue. The event was entitled, “*Our World is in Trouble. What Can We Do? Seeking New Vocational Inspiration in the Tradition of Martin Luther.*”

We were honored to be hosted in the city of Wittenberg on the occasion of the 500th anniversary of Martin Luther posting his 95 Theses - in essence, marking the start of the Reformation. It is in this spirit that along with these proceedings, the CRT will be incorporating attendee inputs into a new document calling for a new Reformation of Capitalism.

The discussion over the course of the 4 days was lively and offered many insights on a variety of topics. As the title of the event might indicate, there was much concern for the state of our world. These concerns covered a variety of areas ranging from corporate malfeasance, individual ethical behavior, corruption of governance systems and the sustainability of our global environment.

The morning session of the first full day was highlighted with presentations from Jeffrey Sachs, Irene Plank and Klaus Leisinger.

(As the Dialogue began with individual presentations, those discussions and salient points are given appropriate attribution. However, as the Dialogue moved to our more traditional round table-style discussion, typical Chatham House rules have been applied to these proceedings.)

Jeff Sachs, Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, beseeched those in attendance to realize that we are the inheritors and creators of technology that is so remarkable we could end all hunger on the planet but we could also end all human life. Sachs urged the audience to take climate change and sustainable development seriously and warned against the dangers of playing politics with the planet. While some in the audience might have differing opinions on the cause and severity of climate change, no one could deny the passion with which Sachs described the potential dangers of unchecked capitalism.

Irene Plank of the German Federal Foreign Office described the process of creating the National Action Plan (NAP) required by the United Nation's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. The NAP is intended to clearly explain to businesses what their duties are if they want to respect human rights. This is part of a wider effort to have businesses identify the impacts of their own business practices.

Klaus Leisinger, Founder and President of the Global Values Alliance and former Chairman of the Board of the Novartis Foundation, noted the double-edged nature of modern capitalism. He noted that there is much that needs to be done in the world and that business can play a huge role in the process. However, he also believes there has been much talk about what business could – and perhaps should – do and, in many cases, very little action.

Prior to the Global Dialogue, it was identified that there was a specific need for tools to identify and measure how companies and individuals behave. During the afternoon session on the first day, several of these tools were presented.

Andreas Suchanek of the Wittenberg Center for Global Ethics presented his recently developed Ethical Compass for Responsible Leadership. Suchanek's compass revolves around the idea of embeddedness and the need to 'Do no harm.' We should all recognize that we are embedded in reality and that for each of our goals (and how we pursue those goals), there are side effects that affect those around us. Our goals and actions are dependent on incentives and are 'framed by our understanding of the rules of the game.'

Following Suchanek, Catherine Young of Oxford Analytica presented the recently developed Corporate Stewardship Compass. This tool was created to help companies move beyond 'Corporate Social Responsibility' to a more holistic approach to values and practice. Indeed, the end goal is to arrive at holistic accountability for a company's actions.

Finally, Steve Young, Global Executive Director of the CRT, presented the CRT's Decisions Styles Inventory (DSI) and Arcturus. Young began his presentation by focusing on Martin Luther's endearing legacy of calling for vocation and highlighting the role of individual impact. The CRT understands that our actions are energized by our values but it is difficult to measure values. The DSI is a tool designed to get at and measure values on an individual level.

The afternoon session deftly wove together the issues facing our society, presented in the morning session, with the necessary tools to measure and combat those problems both on an individual level and a company/cultural level.

The second day of the Dialogue featured presentations by Michele Bongiovanni, CEO and Founder of HealRWorld and Father Emmanuel Lemelson, Greek Orthodox priest and hedge fund manager.

HealRWorld works to bring socially conscious consumers together with businesses focused on sustainability. Bongiovanni has collected reams of data on 'values-based consumers' – consumers who care about ethical behavior from companies. Bongiovanni's company uses big data to increase transparency for consumers and to advocate for companies focused on sustainability. The presentation tied directly to the running theme of Luther and the empowerment of individuals to act in a capitalist system to advance the Sustainable Development Goals.

Father Emmanuel is a prolific author and public speaker devoted to his church and the importance of behaving ethically in the face of financial malfeasance. Lemelson stressed a need to be enterprising and the importance of speaking the language of the plutocracy. If there is malfeasance evidenced in a company's balance sheet, it should be noted, publicized and – when possible – a profit should be made. This was Lemelson's contribution to spiritual fulfillment. In another connection to Luther's long shadow and his concern for finding a vocation, Lemelson noted the need to use your individual talents – your calling – to help others and find spiritual fulfillment.

Following these presentations, Steve Young presented his recently developed Protestant Social Teachings, which then evolved into a lengthy discussion on the role of the individual and vocation.

The four principles of Protestant Social Teachings identified by Steve are:

1) Common Grace

The Kingdom of Heaven is all around us. We are privileged to live in a realm into which we are born which can nourish and sustain us all our lives. The Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven in bread – it permeates the loaf. There is no place where it cannot be. Common grace embraces all under God who "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matthew 5:45)

Common grace is God's care for the created world: "Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls?" (Luke 12:24)

As we live in the realm of common grace, we should be mindful of our heritage and our earthly opportunities as gifts for which humble gratitude is due.

2) Justified Personhood

By fate, we are born into the realm of common grace and its constraints; through passion, we are made willful; through faith and grace, we become better. The quality of our being within the realm of common grace becomes an immediate pursuit for us of excellence, separate from our hopes, to have and hold that grace which is eternal.

"Just as a mustard seed grows to great size, so too we are to grow and become."
(Matthew 13:32)

Jesus suggested that we are to be in the realm of common grace as salt – to fit our purpose, to do our proper work, we must not lose flavor. That means we are to "Live not by bread but by every word of God." (Matthew 4:9)

The rightful human person has virtues inspiring conduct with constructive idealism, empowering the self to act out of wisdom and purposing the will to do justice.

Living by virtues makes the soul happy. As Jesus asked, "For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Matthew 16:26)

3) The Moral Sense

We are naturally enabled to become justified persons. We have the capacity for faithful acceptance of that which cannot be seen today, of that which is not yet instantiated in the world. We have the capacity to provide grace, to give and receive love. We have the capacity to possess virtues.

Jesus affirmed the constructive use of free will when he said "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things." (Matthew 12:25)

We can always change our ways. Going astray does not preclude us from recovery of a good heart, as Jesus suggested in the parable of the prodigal son. (Luke 15:11-32)

Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God is within us and that through love of God and neighbor, we can come to a place "not far from the Kingdom of God." (Mark 13:34)

4) Vocation

Through service in our work inspired by grace and sustained by faith, we become justified as human persons. Whatever our standing is, we can be ministers of a higher good, a greater glory.

As Christ came to minister, so therefore does ministry uplift and sanctify a person. (Matthew 20:28; Mark 10:45). The vocation he assumed was that of a good shepherd. (John 10:11). He advised stewardship as the path to distinction in the realm of common grace. (Matthew 20:27). “The greatest among you will be your servant.” (Matthew 23:11)

Thus, in all our engagements with others, we have a calling to do right by them, just as they reciprocally are to do right by us. Whether among friends, within the family, in a trade or business or seeking to exercise a public office, we are to think of ourselves as seeking some worthiness greater than our own self-satisfaction. That we might put ourselves at odds with another should give us pause until we have reflected well on the circumstances and the goals of our respective vocations.

You can find the full statement of Protestant Social Teachings on the CRT website found at: www.cauxroundtable.org

Luther believed that all individuals have the capacity to change and improve themselves. However, we can become prisoner to our habits and vices, particularly if they have led to some success on an individual level. It is up to us to find our vocation, our calling and – when necessary – speak truth to power. This is what Luther did 500 years ago – spoke truth to power and brought the role of the individual back into focus in the power structure of the age. In our current system, the power structure undoubtedly revolves around capitalism.

The Reformation started by Luther provided cultural and intellectual space for the rise of faith in natural law and its use in modern science. Natural law and science, in turn, flowered in the Enlightenment, leading to modernity through institutionalized rationality in the economy, culture and politics. But Enlightenment faith in reason created space for the rise of a post-modern culture of narcissism where self-actualization, without respect for values and virtue, became the common wisdom for educated elites.

Post-modern cultures have severed power from justice and individual rights from responsibilities.

Reformation emphasis on the responsibility of individuals before God and humanity can be a constructive counter-balance to the meanness and nihilism of post-modern selfishness.

The core Reformation Principles for living a worthy life in the realm of common grace are:

- 1) Individuals are chosen of God to be responsible stewards in the use of earthly powers. Each individual is called to be a minister of God. As we receive grace from God, so we must reciprocate by giving grace back to his creation.
- 2) Each individual is to use their ministry in service of God's providence by finding their own unique vocation and giving their full loyalty to that work, taking due care in the execution of their trusts.
- 3) In this service, each individual must respect every aspect of God's creation, from their neighbors to the environment.

One of the most important aspects of Luther's thinking – if not the most important one – was the decisive importance of every individual human person: When making a judgment about the right thing to do, it comes to one acting in accord with what one thinks is the right thing to do and also with regard to accountability before God and any “neighbor,” it is the individual person who is called upon.

Recent data has shown that, more and more, people are turning against – or at the very least, are developing negative attitudes towards – capitalism as a system for improving life. Is this due to a failing of the system, a failure of individuals within the system...both? We need a balancing of environmental degradation and inequality with a cultivation of moral capitalism. In order to have capitalism on a sustainable level, we need to realize the dangers of compulsive consumerism and we need to seek integrative development of both personal and human progress.

In modern capitalism, there has been a destabilizing privileging of capital to focus, above all else, on the making of cash profits – in essence, turning capitalism into a tool of those who neglect their moral sense and so put themselves outside civilization.

The reformation of capitalism should work to re-incorporate capital into civilization. This would allow for the personalization of business ethics and responsible behavior within business. During the Dialogue, the point was raised that there is no other realm in civilization that allows the same level of unethical behavior – on such a grand scale – as in business. This is certainly not to say that all business is somehow unethical but, rather, that only in business are you so easily able to operate unethically and become so successful. By reincorporating capital back into civilization, we can work civilization – indeed, civility – back into the uses of capital.

Part of civilization is the role of the individual. Furthermore, of utmost importance in modern civilization is the freedom of the individual. Capital, private property and enterprise, in others words, work, provide individuals with the means to be fully human.

Truly free individuals have freedom but with freedom comes responsibilities. The essence of modernity – “We're the inheritors and creators of technology that is so remarkable we could end all hunger on the planet but also could end all human life,” as Sachs noted in his presentation, “We are responsible for this juggernaut.” Modern responsibilities have become globalized at the same time our society has become increasingly atomized.

It is precisely the new, globalized nature of responsibility that has increased the need for finding our own sense of vocation. As society becomes more fragmented, it is easy to lose the sense of your life as a whole having a meaning – that what we do here matters somewhere else. Globalization has impacted the sense of ‘place’ and community – indeed, in many cases, causing a complete loss of common ground – and has changed the relevancy of the social contract.

Luther showed the power of unleashing self-interest and the potential of the individual. Having an individual focus means that this process of change – or ‘reformation’ – can be both top-down and bottom-up. It needs to be felt throughout entire organizations and the corporate culture needs to reflect a respect for vocation and ethics. It is in that spirit that we see continuing efforts as not just making a list of corporate values, which can be easily ignored, but rather, a true empowering of the individual to embrace the vocational tradition of ethics through self-assessments and strategic goal-setting for organizations.

After several thought-provoking days in Wittenberg, Germany, we left energized around the project of a reformation of capitalism. We realized there is much that we, as individuals and together as a group, can ‘do.’ The power of individuals acting ethically, through their vocations, to impact change in the world – and the systems undergirding that world – should never be minimized.

Modern capitalism has strong, internal tendencies which can become a “beast loosed upon this world.” Through all of our individual efforts, we can minimize these tendencies and replace them with more constructive and noble ones which will make our world function more ethically, equitably and sustainably.

Stephen B. Young
Global Executive Director
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