Faith Values and Leadership

Deborah Robertson

*Australian Catholic University, Melbourne, Australia.*

Dr. Deborah Robertson, School of Educational Leadership, Australian Catholic University, Locked Bag 4115, Fitzroy, 3065, Victoria, Australia.

Phone: +61 3 9953 3730; +61 3 041 993 9864;

Email: deborah.robertson@acu.edu.au

Deborah Robertson is currently Senior Lecturer in the School of Educational Leadership, Australian Catholic University, Victoria. As part of the national ACU Educational Leadership team, she is involved in the development and teaching of Leadership units within the Master of Educational Leadership course, which include a religious, spiritual and faith dimension in the content. These units include Faith Leadership and Leadership Spirituality. Her research interests are connected with her teaching and research supervision work including faith leadership and social justice in education.
Faith Values and Leadership

While researching understandings of faith leadership by staff in a faith-based organization, the term ‘faith values’ was used by respondents a number of times. The purpose of this paper is to explore what is meant by ‘faith values’, both in the context of this research project, and also in wider literature on faith values and faith leadership.

Keywords: faith values; values; leadership; faith leadership; faith-based organisations; faith-based universities.

Introduction

Despite a decline in religious and faith affiliation (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012), the following statement holds true:

Most people identify themselves as religious and / or spiritual, and for many, their faiths call them to live in ways that respect and care for all life, present and future, and to focus on being more, not having more, after basic needs are met. (Clugston, 2012, p. 4)

Therefore, for at least 80% of the world population (Adherents.com, 2012), consideration of values and their connection with faith is relevant. For the 68% of the world’s population who indicate not just a religious affiliation but that their religion is important in their daily lives (Deiner, Tay and Myers, 2011), the consideration of values in connection with their faith can be said to be crucial to both their personal and professional lives.

This paper is structured around consideration of questions arising from responses in the research project ‘Understandings of faith leadership in a faith-based university’ (hereinafter referred to as the FBU project) recently undertaken by the author: ‘What are faith values?’ and ‘What has this got to do with leadership, specifically faith leadership?’
The discussion begins by exploring the meaning of faith values and then addresses the topics of faith values, faith leadership and faith values and leadership. It is argued that the value of ‘relationship with God and others’ underlies all faith values and has ramifications for thinking about leadership, particularly in faith-based organizations.

**Faith Values**

No definition of ‘faith values’ has been found, although there are many definitions both of faith and of values.

The basic definition of faith can be stated as ‘The capacity of human beings to believe in something that they can’t rationally prove’ (Eastman, 2009). This definition does not require a religious connection.

In religious and other spiritual and philosophical traditions, faith is used to refer to commitments to the basic principles and tenets of the belief system. However, in the theistic religions, this includes belief in God or gods and, in the Christian traditions, this includes belief in Jesus.

While acknowledging that faith can have a secular meaning, this paper uses faith as a religious term incorporating the dimensions of spiritual and philosophical.

With regard to the meaning of values, Begley refers to Hodgkinson’s definition of values as ‘a conception of the desirable with motivating force’ (2004, p. 6).
Differentiating between personal and organizational values is relevant for this discussion. Branson describes personal values as:

... the importance or worth we attach to particular activities, objects, or outcomes. They are principles and standards that we consider worthwhile and intrinsically desirable and, therefore, are conceptions of what is ultimately good, proper, or desirable in our life. Personal values are our individually selected preferences for achieving success and influence our behaviour in every aspect of our daily activities. (Branson, 2010, p. 7)

There are many definitions of organizational values that could be used but the following will provide the understanding for this discussion:

Organisational values are the standards to which reference is made for judging acceptable behaviour of relevance to the company, both the behaviour acceptable for the organisation as it interacts with its external environment, and the norms of behaviour for individuals within the organisation. Values are inherent in a firm’s mission and goals; its strategies and structure; allocation of resources; codes of practice, policies and procedures; and its actions. (Lawrence and Lawrence, 2009).

Organisational values have a role in differentiating organizations, as highlighted by Williams (2002). That is, the identity of an organization, particularly a faith-based organization, is connected to perceptions of the values it enacts.

The FBU project was designed to elicit initial understandings of faith leadership in a faith-based university via an anonymous online survey which included both closed and open-ended questions. Even though the questions in the survey did not contain any reference to ‘values’ or ‘faith values’, the participants referred to values, faith values, Christian values, and Gospel values, mostly when describing what the participants considered to be the tasks of faith leaders. The word ‘values’ was, in fact, the most
commonly occurring word\(^1\) in the responses of the participants. The values identified were, in order of number of references: respect, justice, relationship, dignity and care.

During the time period in which the FBU project was being conducted, *Exploring Synergies between faith values and education for sustainable development* (Clugston and Holt, 2012) was published by Earth Charter International\(^2\), in partnership with the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and the University for Peace\(^3\). It was developed from the responses of seventeen individuals representing almost as many religious traditions, and traditions within the traditions, including indigenous, Abrahamic and Asian, to the question ‘What are the most important values in your faith that connect to sustainability?’ (Clugston and Holt, 2012, p. 4). The writers of the articles characteristically identified the basic principles and beliefs of the religious tradition first, identified the faith values arising from them and then connected the values with sustainability. The discussions presented in the articles contained in the document therefore provide a valuable source of understanding about faith values from a number of religious perspectives that it has not been possible to access elsewhere.

\(^1\) Not including the key words of the question which were ‘faith’ and ‘leadership’.

\(^2\) ‘The Earth Charter is a universal expression of ethical principles to foster sustainable development. The Earth Charter Initiative is the global network that embraces, uses and integrates the Earth Charter principles.’ Retrieved from http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/

\(^3\) Website: http://upeace.org/
Earlier work by Earth Charter International in the area of faith traditions and the contribution they can make to the education for sustainability movement identified six core common values: reverence, respect, restraint, redistribution, responsibility, and renewal (Tucker, 2012, p. 1). Interestingly, they are referred to in the introduction to the *Exploring Synergies* document as religious values not faith values. However, there is no explanation as to why the phrase ‘faith values’ was chosen for the title of the document as opposed to ‘religious values’. The consistent interchangeability of the terms faith, religious and spiritual is a feature of any discussion in this area.

While very few of the writers use the phrase ‘faith values’ in the *Exploring Synergies* document, values are named as arising from the central principles and tenets of the faith under discussion. The values most commonly named are: harmony, balance, justice, respect, love, trust, community and compassion.

Based on this initial exploration, faith values can therefore be defined as values that are often referred to as religious values and share the nature of all human values in that they are ‘a conception of the desirable with motivating force’ (Hodgkinson, 2004, p. 6). They arise from reflection on the beliefs of the religious / faith / spiritual / philosophical traditions and provide guidelines for choices and actions. The personal and organizational nature of faith values will be discussed later.

**Relationship as the underlying faith value**

A theme arising from exploring faith values was that of the importance of relationship as exemplified in the following examples.
The metaphor of humans as ‘one body’ is referred to by both the Christian and Jewish traditions (Joseph, p. 51, Soetendorp, p. 14;) highlighting the notion of relationship between ‘the whole’ and ‘its parts’. This emphasis on ‘relationship’ occurs throughout Exploring Synergies.

The Buddhist philosophy arises from the understanding of the ‘relationships between causes and effects’ (Clugston, 2012, p. 5):

Buddhism teaches that we need to focus on achieving harmony in three categories of relationships: those between humans and nature, those between human beings, and the relationship with oneself, our “inner universe. (Asai, 2012, p. 67).

Liu and Constable further explain ‘To value harmony is to effectively avoid extreme attitudes and confrontational actions, to reduce the conflicts between people and promote stability. ... Buddhism advocates harmony through compassion for all sentient beings and non-violence.’ (2012, p.72) In indigenous religions, relationship with creation is at the core of its understanding (Terena, 2012, p. 9).

When discussing the Christian concept of God as Trinity, that is, three persons in one, Boff extends the Trinitarian concept to creation by saying:

This perspective is directly ecological because, from quantum physics, we know that everything is relationship and that nothing exists outside relationships. ... this is to say that the universe is a relationship just as God-Trinity is. The universe is more than just the sum of all beings. It is a set of relational networks that have intertwined, forming the complex and unique immensity of the universe (2012, p.23).
Boff continues by saying: ‘This leads us to understand ourselves within a complex and loving network of relationships, helping one another to continue existing and evolving.’ and ‘Ultimately, we all come from the heart of God and we must treat each other as brothers and sisters.’

The Catholic perspective on faith values is continued by Nagle who analyses Catholic Social Teaching and states with regard to the social justice principle of ‘common good and community’:

Our dignity and rights are in relationship with those of others. How we organize our society – in economics and politics, in law and policy - directly affects human dignity and the capacity of individuals to grow in community. (2012, p. 26)

Illustrating relationship as a faith value, and how it arises from theological reflection, Bishop Browning of Australia explains:

... the Christian faith is not primarily about individuals, but about communities and about relationships. Christian belief is belief in a relational God from whom we are blessed with a relational world. In expressing both his Christian belief as well as his cultural understanding of ‘Ubuntu’, Desmond Tutu is able to say; “a person is a person through other people”. He might as well have said, a person is a person in relationship: with God, other people, and the whole created order. ... A single human being is only blessed through others and especially through harmonious relationship with all living things. (Browning, 2012, p. 30)

Bishop Browning is one of the few writers in the Exploring Synergies document to use the word ‘values’ with a specifically religious adjective, in this case ‘Christian’. He goes on to describe:

The ultimate Christian value ... of a single community where the boundaries exaggerated by competition are eliminated and where all have equal access to the ‘common good’ or more specifically to ‘Common Wealth’. (2012, p. 30)
In giving an Islamic perspective on faith values, Matali (2012, p. 35) refers to the principles of justice, balance and mercy with the purpose of governing the treatment of human relationships.

Confucian thinking also emphasises relationship: ‘The self is never an isolated individual but a center of relationships. As a spiritual humanism, Confucianism’s project for human flourishing involves four dimensions: self, community, Earth, and Heaven.’ (Weiming, 2012, p. 78)

Although relationship is not itself named as a value in these multi-religious discussions, it is clear that relationship, that is, the developing and maintenance of good relationship with God and others, is the underlying value from which the other values arise. In their discussion about religion and values education, Carr and Mitchell have pointed out that ‘Naturalistic or anthropocentric answers to such questions [of morality and ethics] lead to quite different ethical foundations for behaviour than theistic ones.’ (2007, p. 295). They argue that the grounding of religious values in the understanding of God provides both the powerful motivation for action, as well as providing the power and support to engage in ethical action. This understanding can also be applied to faith values.

Other values connected to the idea of relationship are named throughout the Exploring Synergies document. Examples from a range of options are:

interconnectedness - ‘commit to deepening our sense of empathy and interconnection with all our brothers and sisters’ (Weiming, 2012, p. 8.)

Interdependence - ‘an organic change in the structure of society itself so as to
reflect fully the interdependence of the entire social body (Dahl, 2012, p. 44)

interaction - ‘the heart of the universe is not matter, it is interaction’
(Soetendorp, 2012, p. 15),

harmony - ‘The Christian values of harmony, wholeness, justice, and wellbeing are all interconnected’ (Browning, 2012, p. 30)

compassion - ‘Recognizing this Buddhists feel and enact a deep sense of compassion and loving-kindness towards all other beings and parts of the universe.’ (Clugston, 2012, p.5)

justice - ‘the call to “do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God”’ (Micah 6:8). (Nagle, 2012, p. 26)

community/
common good - ‘Confucianism states that personal achievement and learning is measured by his or her contribution to others (e.g. to family, community, society, the rest of nature and the universe). (Liu and Constable, 2012, p.75)
- ‘all members of the community have a sense of the common good.’ (Diallo, 2012, p. 54)

Respect /
human dignity - ‘If beings are born from God’s loving word, it means that we must embrace and respect them as real sacraments which speak of the love and power of God.’ (Boff, 2012, p. 21)
- ‘respecting and honoring humans’(Nouh, 2012, p.43)

The following diagram represents the centrality of relationship, and its connection to other named faith values, as elicited from the FBU project and the analysis of the Exploring Synergies document:
The faith values named in Figure 1 are also identified elsewhere as commonplace aspirational human values (e.g. Rokeach, 1979; Schwartz, 1992). However, there are dimensions to faith values that differentiate them from human values.

One difference between ‘values’ and ‘faith values’ is that alignment with the faith values of the tradition is intrinsically part of your identification with the organisation i.e. the faith community, in a way that defines membership more explicitly than that required for the aligning of personal with organisational values in a non faith-based organisation. Faith values can be described as essentially organisational values.
For those who have chosen to be part of the faith-based organisation, or have been inculcated into faith values through their upbringing within a faith community, it is reasonable to anticipate a strong expectation that leaders within the organization will also be committed to the same values. This is reflected in the FBU project in the emotive language of participants who speak of ‘empty rhetoric’ and ‘disconnection between professed values and principles’ on the part of leaders.

More importantly, because of the nature of faith values arising in relationship with both God and the community, a perceived lack of attention to the faith values in decision-making and actions has the potential to damage relationship in the minds of staff members. Because relationship is so fundamental to the identification of and reason for faith values, this factor needs to be a major consideration for leaders in faith-based organisations.

**Faith Leadership**

We have seen that the term ‘faith values’ is not often used and, when it is, there is not a great deal of clarity about its exact meaning, even though the values arising from the faith tradition are clearly identified. A similar situation exists with the term ‘faith leadership’ and it has been identified in the context of Catholic schools how neither principals identified as faith leaders, nor those who identify them as such, have a clear understanding of what this means (Neidhart and Lamb, 2010; Neidhart and Lamb 2011). Faith leadership is often equated with religious or spiritual leadership, particularly in the context of religious congregations or schools. Elsewhere, there is an assumption that leaders in faith-based organizations are therefore faith leaders (Buchanan, 2011).
In response to the question ‘how do you understand the term ‘faith leadership’?’, six of the nine respondents in the FBU project specifically connected faith leadership with a religious community, with three of these referring to the Christian tradition as may be expected in a Christian faith-based university. For the three respondents not connecting faith leadership to a religious tradition, faith leadership was perceived as being about facilitation, witness and vision.

When asked the purpose of faith leadership, the responses indicated both a personal and an organizational purpose for faith leadership. On an individual and personal level, there was an understanding that faith leadership needs to support people by providing guidance, direction, education in faith, modelling, relationship and respect. Faith leadership was also described as needing to provide the organisation with a sense of community and a commitment to social justice reflected in the structures and practices that reflect the values of equity, Catholic tradition, dignity and individual worth.

Although there was some acknowledgement that faith leaders can act in that role informally by their expressions of personal faith and positive interactions with others, there was a strong indication in the FBU project that those in designated leadership roles in the university are the faith leaders. However, it was not unanimous that all organisational leaders in a faith-based university are necessarily faith leaders.

A number of tasks expected of faith leaders were identified around the themes of service, social justice, teaching, worship and hospitality. It was clear from the responses
that faith leaders were perceived negatively when there was apparent dissonance between the espoused values of the organisation and the enacting of policies and procedures that were not seen to integrate faith values in the treatment of staff and students.

In the *Exploring Synergies* document, there are numerous mentions of leaders and their role in articulating the faith values identified. Reference is made to the moral authority of faith leaders that has contributed to many positive changes such as the abolition of slavery and the civil rights movements (Tucker, 2012, p. 2). The continuing role of leaders in communicating and promoting action based on the faith values is also referred to and best summarised in the following statement:

> Religious leaders must work ... to make sure that these values are being communicated. With consistent communication of these faith values, there is the possibility of a transition to a sustainable world. (Diallo, 2012, p. 56)

**Values and a faith-based university**

While referring specifically to Catholic Colleges and Universities rather than faith-based universities in general, Flanagan (2010, p. 135) makes the point that such universities are subject to the influences of three layers of values: those of the surrounding society; the values of academia; and the values of the faith tradition and heritage that was involved in the establishment of the university and is also a continuing part of the governance structure and culture. This latter layer of values fits the definition of faith values.
There has been ongoing debate about what constitutes Australian values, the society surrounding FBU. If we accept what is publicly stated as the key Australian values by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship\(^4\) and the Department of Education Employment and Work Relations\(^5\), respect and compassion are certainly core values.

A variety of academic cultures have been identified (Flanagan, 2010, p. 135) but the three consistent values identified within these cultures were dialogue, consensus and shared governance. Academic values with a more educational and disciplinary focus have been identified by Eaton (2012) as the following: institutional autonomy (independence and identity); collegiality and participation; faculty based academic stewardship; accreditation; education for life and for the benefit of society; community of learning.

\(^4\) In order to become an Australian citizen, a person needs to sign a statement saying that they will respect the following shared values as identified by the Department of Immigration and Citizenship: respect for the freedom and dignity of the individual; freedom of religion; commitment to the rule of law; Parliamentary democracy; equality of men and women; a spirit of egalitarianism that embraces mutual respect; tolerance, fair play and compassion for those in need and pursuit of the public good; equality of opportunity for individuals, regardless of their; race, religion or ethnic background. (Australian Government, 2012)

\(^5\) In Australia, all schools are required to teach the following nine values as part their values education programme: fair go; care and compassion; responsibility; honesty and trustworthiness; integrity; respect; freedom; doing your best; understanding, tolerance and inclusion. (Australian Government, 2012a)
The FBU puts forward the notion of ‘key values’ in its vision, mission, and strategic planning documents and these can be identified as: truth; Christian Church; common good; dignity of the human person; justice and equity; care - particularly of the weak, poor and vulnerable; social justice with particular emphasis on the common good and the dignity of the human person. These can be identified as faith values.

The values of ‘common good’ and ‘dignity of the human person’ receive most emphasis in the FBU documents. In the mission and values document there is more of an outward focus from the university towards the community than an inward focus on structures and staffing. There is no reference to leadership within the university although leadership is mentioned as one of the university’s tasks in the community.

Apart perhaps from the value of truth, all of the FBU values refer to relationship. They reflect the language of the faith values identified in this paper with the specific naming of commitment to the Christian church. This stated commitment to Church therefore explicitly incorporates the relationship with God and others into the organisational values.

The commitment to academic values at FBU is as clearly articulated as the commitment to the faith values named above. These academic values can be named as: freedom / free inquiry; truth; dialogue between faith and reason; Catholic intellectual tradition; quality teaching and research; fostering and advancing knowledge; academic integrity.
The three layers of values impacting on FBU do not appear to be in conflict. The dilemma for leaders in a faith-based university is that the added dimension of faith values, identified as relationship to God and others, needs to be taken into account. Although the language of ‘key values’ is used in FBU documents, the perceptions of many staff members, and indeed many people outside of FBU including stakeholders, understand these as ‘faith values’ and expect that the maintaining of good relationship with God and others will be part of leadership practice. Therefore, judgement about leader behaviour will be based on the implementation of faith values in structures and practices.

**Faith Values and Leadership**

The unsolicited responses of the participants in the FBU project connecting faith values with faith leadership in a faith-based university highlight the reality that when staff members feel that the values of the organisation are not being enacted in the actions and decision of the leaders, conflict can result (Flanagan, 2010, p. 133)

In the FBU project, the effectiveness of the practice of faith leadership is judged by the way that the faith leaders carry out and bear witness to the faith values of the organisation. Sorrow and frustration was expressed when the actions of the leaders of the faith-based organisation were seen to deny human dignity and break relationships through perceived unjust treatment of staff members. Leaders were considered effective when they enacted the faith values of care and respect.

Branson reminds us about the connection of faith values with the identity of the organisation:
If people within an organisation do not authentically support the Collective’s values, then the organisation cannot implement these values. (Branson, 2008, p. 382)

It is therefore not just a matter of the impact on staff members if leaders in a faith-based organisation are perceived as not enacting faith values. It has the potential to affect the identity and credibility of the organisation which could lead to a decline in support of the University from those traditionally most supportive of the faith values that gave rise to its existence.

**Conclusion**

Two questions have been addressed in this paper that arose from responses in the research project ‘Understandings of faith leadership in a faith-based university’ recently undertaken by the author: ‘What are faith values?’ and ‘What has this got to do with leadership, specifically faith leadership?’.

After investigating the responses from the FBU project, as well as the document *Exploring Synergies between faith values and education for sustainable development* (Clugston and Holt, 2012), it is hoped that the following conclusions have been established.

Faith values are often referred to as religious values and share the nature of all human values in that they are ‘a conception of the desirable with motivating force’ (Hodgkinson, 2004, p. 6). They arise from reflection on the beliefs of the religious / faith / spiritual / philosophical traditions and provide guidelines for choices and actions. However, there is another dimension to faith values connected with the underlying value of relationship. This value of relationship has significant power because it
includes an understanding arising from, and connected to, relationship with God and others.

Faith values are both personal and organisational. When members of a faith-based organisation, particularly leaders, do not act in accord with the faith values espoused by the organisation, it has the potential to cause even greater stress and conflict amongst staff members than with occasions of non-alignment of values in secular organisations. This is because actions not aligned with faith values are perceived as a break in the relationship with God and other people, a relationship within which the faith value is ultimately embedded.

There is an expectation that leaders within a faith-based university will act in accordance with the espoused faith values of the organisation, even though there is not an expectation that all of these leaders are ‘faith leaders’. Leaders in faith-based organisations need to understand the power of faith values in influencing expectations of leaders and their actions. They also need to realise that the identity of the organisation is connected to the practice of faith values.

It is important for leaders in a faith-based institution to be aware of the importance attached to faith values in order to appreciate the depth of the disappointment felt when staff members perceive these relationships to be undermined by actions that do not appear to be aligned with the espoused faith values of the organization. It is also important for leaders in faith-based organisation to understand that they will often be seen as faith leaders by staff members and their actions will be judged appropriately.
In any organisation, when leaders are not seen to enact the core values of the organisation in their daily decisions and actions, stress and conflict can arise amongst staff members. It is contended, however, that in a faith-based university, this stress is intensified because of the understanding that faith values arise from an underlying value of relationship, which not only includes relationship with the members of the organisation, but also with God and the wider community. An understanding of this concept could contribute to the effective practice of leadership in a faith-based organisation.
References


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