**Moral and ethical foundations for politics**

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In all what we human beings do, we want to have some broader foundations, not the least in politics. Often, religion and faith are behind moral and ethical foundations, either directly, as in Islamic states, or more indirectly, as in other states. In the West, religion, notably Christianity, is often referred to in formal ceremonies, when taking oath of office, and so on. In many countries, also in monarchies, the constitutional head of state is usually also head of the main religion in the country, but usually with religious freedom. When King Charles III recently was crowned to be head of state in the United Kingdom, basic aspects of the ceremony were religious as it took place in the cathedral of Westminster Abbey in London.
In the West, in our secular age, the role of religion is more as a reference than a concrete guideline, in many ways even in the Islamic states. But we don’t need to go very far back in history in the West to find direct reference to religion, and it was essential that laws and practices should not contradict religious dogmas and traditions. In the last couple of generations, the religious aspects of the superstructure of the state have been loosened and moral and ethical aspects, also ideologies, have become stronger.
In my article today, I would like to draw special attention to the importance of moral and ethical foundations in the West’s refugee and migration policies, and in development aid. I believe it is necessary to have a broad moral and ethical foundation for policies and politics in order to do things right. As for refugee and migration policies, I believe there are not yet any broader foundations making the policies acceptable and just for all. The same applies to the relations between rich and poor countries, and situation within countries where inequality is growing in our time, be they industrialised or developing countries.
Before I discuss these issues further, I would like to mention the several burnings of holy books, recently in Sweden, where the laws allow such acts under the cover of freedom of expression–but not being built on the right moral and ethical foundations. Alas, there are not good enough laws defending what is sacred to people. But in Sweden, as in most if not all other countries, the majority of people are against such acts. We should expect that he laws will be changed. This week, some emergency work begins when the Swedish parliament’s standing committee on foreign affairs will discuss the issues as per invitation by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. But the issues are more fundamental than being about international relations.
Let me add that those who are insulted by desecration of holy books, and that is the majority of people everywhere, should try to help the people and politicians in those countries that have such laws, in order to have positive development towards change. To express anger is one type of reaction, but dialogue and cooperation will go further; even an advanced country such as Sweden need to listen to others, and admit fault. Besides, Sweden is now a multi-cultural and multi-religious country, and opinion polls show that indigenous Swedes and newcomers would want cordial and respectful relations with all people at home and abroad, indeed not the burning of holy books.
Let us realise that also in the secular Western countries, religion is a referred to and a part of major official events. Last week, in Sweden’s neighbouring country, Norway, religion was part of the memorial events to mark the July 22, 2011, tragic terrorist attach when the right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik killed 77 innocent people at the government headquarters and at Utøya youth camp of the Labour Party. There was a religious service in the Oslo Cathedral. I mention this specifically because many people in foreign countries, including in Pakistan, are not quite aware of religion, notably Christianity, still playing a role in official events, if not directly than indirectly. In future, as the numbers of members of other religions grow, it is hoped that other religions, too, will hold services and prayer meetings at such occasions.
Let me now go back to what was to be the main topic of my article today, notably that there is a need for moral and ethical foundations for refugee and migration policies. I believe that until we have defined such foundations there will not be general agreement about the policies and practical politics, including better integration. Currently, the European Union has updated the policies, but not managed to give them overall moral and ethical foundations, only administrative foundations. In future, the policies must be made acceptable and seen as fair both to sending and recipient countries.
It is true that European and other countries in the West cannot accommodate all people who want tom come, from countries in conflict and poor countries. Yet, the refugees and migration systems must be made fair for all. Refugees and migrants must not be seen as a burden to the host countries. They must also be seen as an asset, remembering that the West also needs newcomers, both highly educated and also those with less education, and the next generations. Positive attitudes to them are important to success – and it is important for the hosts to do what is right and to save their soul. In earlier refugee crises in Europe and elsewhere, this was possible, at a time when the world was poorer. Also, we should remember the history of migrants going to USA.
I believe that it is essential that we find new ways of thinking and talking about refugees and migrants, including economic and climate change migrants, and finding new ways of regulating people movements, which have always been there and will be there. The current system, with the West having the upper hand, is morally and ethical wrong and unworthy, especially for sending countries, such as Africans crossing the Mediterranean Ocean trying to enter Europe, Mexicans and other Latin Americans trying to enter USA, mostly illegally, and Asians moving to Europe, again often smuggled, trying desperately to find temporary or permanent jobs, sending money home to support their families. The current system is also negative for the people in the recipient countries; it encourages negative attitudes to the newcomers, but they should be welcomed and helped to settle in, as was done more often after WWI and WWII.
We refer to the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. Alas, the rights seem not to be for everyone. If they were, we would have found moral and ethical ways of sharing resources and lives with people everywhere, refugees and other migrants, the relations between the rich and poor countries, the Global North and the Global South, and greater equality within countries. Instead of seeing worsening of conditions, we must work for betterment. Thus, when we have the foundations right, we can begin formulating policies and practical politics that aim at being just and fair for all. Politics must always be based on the right moral and ethical foundations to be right today and to be sustainable and durable in future.