

**University of Western Hungary**

**Faculty of Economics**

**BIBLICAL AND QURANIC REPRESENTATIONS OF  
ECONOMY AND SOCIETY  
- A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE TWO  
SOURCES**

Theses of doctoral (PhD) dissertation

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in interactions with representatives of their own culture or other cultures.

**Further publications by the author relevant to the topic of this study:**

Journal publications:

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**THESES**

**Antecedents and objectives**

This study presents a sociological analysis of the Holy Books (the Bible and the Quran) of two world religions. The choice of subject is reasoned by the intensification of relations, confrontations between cultures and cults in the 21st century, in spite of the fact that not a new world religion has appeared since the AD7th century, only the modification of the existed ones that happened.

Considering the three historical monotheist churches, Muslim and Christianity manifest themselves as missionary religions, however Judaism does not. This kind of tendency has always been connected to political and economic efforts in the history of the world. It also must be taken into consideration that the Islam and the Christian world are not homogeneous as the fundament laid by the two founders of these religions was soon fragmented after their career ended in the Earth.

The author finds that the investigation of the Bible and the Quran is a relevant aspect in the 21st century since, according to prognoses and risk-analyses, the political, economic, cultural and religious confrontation between the world religions will be unavoidable. This question is expressed

rather sharply after 11th September 2001. The fundamentalists' relation to their sacred books must also be emphasised as their monism considers these books not only unailing but independent of historical time and situation as well. The unceasing contraction of the world cannot promote to solve this problem, however, the continuous pulsation of the world makes it possible to extend the 'hermeneutic circle', i.e. the circle of common thinking people since both Holy Books address all creatures of God. Therefore, the author highlights the necessity of academic and interdisciplinary dialogue between cultures and cults.

A special economic aspect also contributes to the up-to-datedness of the topic in the western democratic world; in fact, the economic crisis at the beginning of the 21st century as well as the difficulties of managing the crisis with traditional micro- and macroeconomic tools. These challenges have directed our attention to alternative economical solutions, including theories on ethic base or Christian attitudes. Economists, functioning on the basis of the Christian social education, primarily analyse the works of Christian philosophers, the encyclical letters, constitutions and apostolic exhortations of popes, announcements of episcopal synods and they go back to the original source, the Bible, only to a lesser degree. Therefore,

It would also be worth considering the introduction of a course into the curriculum of all university students to deal with the fundamental values of cultures and cults and their relations. As a result of globalized economic and social processes, a person with university education may end up in any continent of the world as an employee, investor or entrepreneur and, unless they have a sound knowledge of the cultural environment, they might find themselves in a cultural dead end.

As for the EU, a deeper and broader integration process is unthinkable without reconsidering and re-interpreting European identification given the fact that a population of more than ten million Muslims is living within the borders of the "Old Continent" or has been waiting for accession for decades as is the case with the predominantly Muslim Turkey. In such a context it seems evident that the concept of the Jewish-Christian-Islamic cultural domain and the relationship of its three components need clarification.

The leadership talent typology outlined in this study and the taxonomy behind it enables those members of the economic and social elites who follow the guidance of the Holy Books to preserve their identity and avoid the crisis involved in decision making or at least mitigate it by applying components of their own cultural attitude and religious habit in a comparative way

were defeated but only Samson experienced catharsis in his defeat. The Quranic counterpart of Samson is Saul, although he is judged ambivalently in the Bible all the more so because he committed military suicide.

Finally we would like to draw attention to the fact that this typology is very much like all other classifications: approximate and implicative. By no means do we want to give the impression that it has absolute relevance. According to the Thomistic approach, human beings are eventual, which also makes typologies contingent; still the classification outlined here has the potential of distinguishing the various types of leadership talents found in the Bible and the Quran.

### **Conclusions and suggestions**

The research highlights the necessity of dialogue between cultures and cults in an academic and interdisciplinary framework. The responsibility of “scribes” is significant enough not to shift this task to politics, diplomacy and churches. In order to strengthen intercultural relationships and mutual understanding, significantly more academic activity would be needed. This is not only true of social sciences but also of natural sciences.

the aim of the study has been to analyse how wealth and society appears in the primary sources.

### **Research topics, methods and aims**

In Judaism and Christianity the Bible is considered to be holy and inspired by God; in Islam the same attributes are given to the Quran. Followers of these religions believe that their respective Holy Books can serve as guidance in human life.

The Biblical and Quranic images of society and economy become relevant as research tasks in contexts where questions about man and society are raised. Revealing social-economic structure is clearly not one of the primary aims of the Bible; the same cannot necessarily be claimed about the Quran. However, the understanding of both books is enhanced if related tendencies in different text layers are pointed out by research. The most important texts are dialogical in nature and from a historical perspective it is surprising to see how the statements made about man, economy and society coincide despite changes in linguistic forms.

As a consequence of the above, the following methodological principles have been formulated:

- social and economic questions can be answered only by adopting an open attitude towards the Biblical and Quranic witness about God and not by excluding theology as an academic discipline.

- at the same time academic analysis makes it necessary to treat the Holy Books as historical documents even if such a treatment involves the risk of misinterpretation.

- it is one of our fundamental theses that social and economic processes cannot be interpreted without the study of the cultures based on the religious cults in question.

- although it is not directly relevant to the topic of the dissertation, it is important to point out that the Holy Books are not the only sources of either Christian or Islamic ideology but they are the most authentic and most relevant ones; therefore, they must be given priority over other sources.

- the basic approach taken in this study is the acknowledgement of the influence of personal values, goals, morality and religion on actions and private life of the individual as well as on social and economic behaviour.

- the discussion of the topic requires the application of both the historical-critical method (although many claim this framework to be outdated, it has obvious benefits pointed out by Beyme /1992/ ) and comparative methodology suggested by

Regarding the positive pole of the next pair it has to be said that some of these leaders might eventually have received talent from the Creator in all dimensions but in a certain period (or certain periods) of their life they failed morally. Then, due to various circumstances, they could restore their identity. Based on all these criteria the group was given the name “Type Moses” as a reference to the fact that Moses himself gave the wrong response to various challenges in a couple of brief periods in his life. The name of the category also serves as a reminder that the actors belonging here would not necessarily fulfil all requirements of talent: Moses, for example, was a man of impeded speech. The negative counterpart here is “Type Herod”. The name is meant to indicate the aspect of absolute amorality but also the fact that his rule showed instances of leadership skills which earned him his epithet of “the Great”. The Quran does not know about Herod, but describes leaders of other peoples who committed similar apostasy.

As for the final pair we chose the headings of the two groups so that they would represent individuals who showed strength in one specific area. The positive pole and the negative pole were named “Type Samson” and “Type Goliath” respectively. The primary feature that lifted both figures above their contemporaries was their physical strength. Both of them

be further divided into three subgroups based on the number of normal dimensions they possessed (all dimensions, the majority of dimensions, 1-2 dimensions only). It has to be pointed out again that according to the Biblical and Quranic concepts of talented leaders their leadership can promote the common good only on the condition that they fulfil the law of God.

In this spirit the first group of leaders was identified as “Type Messiah” or “divine excellence”. Members of this group are ethically unquestionable and perform prominently in all dimensions of talent. Due to transcendental requirements the ideal political leaders belonging here are Immanuel (Is 7,14) and Ebed-JHWH (Is 49,6); a flesh and blood representative of this category is Joseph, who could also take a high position in the social hierarchy of Egypt. The negative counterpart of this group is “Type Cain”, who is the example of an extremely antisocial talent. The same attributes are given to evil rulers of politically successful empires by the Prophet Nahum (3, 4-6), the Prophet Isaiah (14,3-21), in the Book of Revelations (17) or in the Quranic reference to the incarnations of Gog and Magog (18: 94). These politicians manifested themselves as gods or as ones possessing divine attributes and believed to have absolute influence over heaven and earth.

Hopkin (2002) and Beyme. The two methodologies strengthen and complement each other and together they enable the formulation of a taxonomy.

- in the case of the Holy Books, disregarding the historic context also entails that certain passages or verses gain universal sense thereby creating the possibility for an infinite number of interpretations.

The first chapter examines the representations of space, time and history in the Bible and the Quran in order to determine whether these sources view history as linear or cyclical. In what ways has the interpretation of time and space influenced economic and social structures? We seek to answer questions regarding the interpretation of past, present and future as well as their relevance and relationship to each other.

In the second chapter we introduce the special features of the social and economic structures that form the framework in which these chosen peoples have lived. Based on the findings we raise the question whether an optimal rule or economic system can exist and whether any social order can be preferred over the others. This issue of how to relate to empires is all the more important in the 21<sup>st</sup> century given the fact that European nations live in a unique social and economic structure (EU), which carries certain attributes of an empire.

In the third chapter we examine the relationship between religion, society and economy and state that this relationship becomes manifest in imperatives. Further questions discussed are the problem of loyalty, which emerges from the opposition of divine laws and state norms, the anomalies of obedience and the possibility of irreconcilable conflict between various imperatives.

The aim of the fourth chapter is to identify and outline a hypothesized leadership talent taking into consideration a number of legal, moral, social, economic and interpersonal aspects. The topic touches upon the relationship between absolute and relative values inasmuch as it involves the question of how much is required of each if the person in leading position wishes to preserve their identity.

## **Results**

The study of passages from the Holy Books reveals tendencies that can help to verify the proposed hypotheses.

*1. The first hypothesis (H1):* the structure emerging from the Holy Books is a universalistic and teleological one in both spatial and temporal sense.

According to our analyses the following *thesis (T1)* can be announced:

Times and the Middle Ages: among others we have listed moral, interpersonal, social, economic, intellectual and physical talent. These can be hierarchically ranked with regard to their prestige in society but the solutions required by the challenges of the various historical periods caused these categories to change constantly. The priority of moral talent is never disputed in the Bible and the Quran, more so by certain actors holding political or economic positions.

Finally we formulated a typology of talented public actors appearing in the Bible and the Quran. Talent was classified with the help of 5+1 dimensions. The extra (+1) dimension was termed as absolute morality or transcendent dimension. This category has compelling force and shows what ethical attitude and habit the given political or economic actor displays. In our case this simply means their relationship to the Creator. The five normal dimensions are intelligence, creative force, motivation and perseverance, physical strength and, finally, other characteristics and skills. Following Biblical and Quranic views and assessment mechanisms we could distinguish two groups of different polarity: the group of those outstandingly talented actors who gave a positive answer to the call of the transcendent dimension, that is, JHWH or Allah and the group of those who responded negatively. Both groups can



states should pursue theopolitics given that God has left space for human decisions. The divine norm enshrined in the Holy Books finds itself in irreconcilable conflict with other religious or profane laws whenever the occurring social or economic situations are regarded as intolerant. In such cases the gap between the two systems of norms cannot be bridged and may lead to social or economic upheaval.

The normative systems of the Holy Books have laid the foundation for thinkers and actors of all times to deduce their own answers relevant in their context.

4. The fourth hypothesis (H4): the comprehensive analysis of the Bible and the Quran enables the formulation of a novel typology to classify leadership talent.

According to our analyses the following thesis (T4) can be announced:

Modern academic discourse has recently started to direct research at leadership skills as acknowledged forms of talent. The concept of talent emerging from the Bible and Quran cannot be understood without its spiritual background. Against this background the definition of talent and its relationship to politics and society contains a sociocultural aspect, which is based on the public taste of the given era. We have showed that distinct fields of talent existed also in Ancient

As we have seen, the Bible portrays the history of mankind in a teleological way and gives witness about a metahistorical order of Salvation History. The idea that history is moving towards its final goal in space and time reflects a linear and universalistic view of history and rejects cyclical thinking which essentially takes recurring events in nature as its starting point.

Jesus and Muhammad proclaimed eschatological prophecies, which defined history as a *sui generis* phenomenon. Modern man is compelled to act in the same fullness of times until the end of history, when God's kingdom is finally realized on Earth.

Quranic texts suggest a dichotomy with regard to both universalism in space and interpretation of time. In the ayat originating from the Mecca Period the Islamic religion also affirms universal salvation history; in Medina, however, repristination of the Abrahamic religion brings about a return to the cyclical thinking of the nomadic world and the dominance of Arabic identity. At the same time the universalistic approach of the Quran is indisputable since Islam started to offer openness and the possibility of integration to all new components wishing to join as early as at the time of Muhammad's death (8<sup>th</sup> June, 632 AD).

In the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries the mainstream currents of the world religions discussed here are generally dominated by universalistic attitude and a linear view of time. Religious fundamentalism, however, is motivated by re-creation, that is, restoration to the origins and a return to authentic sources: the Bible and the Quran. In the case of Islam this means following the example of Muhammad, who returned to the Mother of the Book and Abraham in order to renew corrupted history. Modern-time Jihadist movements ignore the Prophet's tolerant attitude (2: 256) and justify their actions with the wide interpretation of the Verse of the Sword (9: 5). Similarly, Christian fundamentalists forget about the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5,3-12) and Christ's commandment to love the enemy (Mt 5,43-48). In these cases it is the cyclical view of history that prevails: there should be a return to the "Golden Age" and, as a consequence, the depraved present can be mended and social and economic organizing principles can be reinterpreted.

Both the Bible and the Quran reckon that in the spatial world there is a cosmic navel which is the centre or the "holy mountain" of the universe. Jews identify it with Jerusalem and Mount Tabor in Palestine (Judges 9:37), Christians with Golgotha and Muslims primarily with Mecca and the Kaaba,

According to our analyses the following *thesis (T3)* can be announced:

In optimal cases the Bible and the Quran do not regard law, ethics, economy and politics as separate fields and do not make a sharp semantic distinction between them. Members of society consider proper conduct in accordance with an absolute moral norm to be their primary value of life. The individual's judgement, decision, intention, will and action are directed at different objectives but are always defined by the binary code of just-unjust. A decision might be appropriate from an economic, cultural or international point of view but it only serves the interests of the politician, financial leader and the whole society if it is moral and just, that is, if it pleases God. According to the teachings of the Bible and the Quran it is not acceptable to live a seemingly pure life but ignore morals in favour of political and economic success.

The Holy Books require the state and economic actors to represent God's justice and remain loyal to God and divine norms at all times. It is not possible for human beings to turn absolute values and norms into relative and relative ones into absolute. A clash between political, economic and religious systems occurs when leaders forget about the existence of an infinite Creator. That is why the Bible and the Quran imply that

separation is possible because of its claim that the whole message of the Bible refers to Christ.

It follows from all this that there is a marked difference between Jesus' and Muhammad's attitude to social-economic structures: the teachings of Jesus remained radically eschatological in nature, whereas Muhammad's revelations took on worldly features. While the community of the New Testament continued to be described in religious terms, the community of the Quran has political and economic attributes. Muhammad did not define in the Quran what political or economic system should serve as a framework for the Islamic society but the main organizing principle is doubtlessly "*al-islam din vad aula*", that is, Islam is the symbiosis of religion and state. For Muslims any political or economic system can be legitimate only if it guarantees the attainment of Islamic goals.

3. The third hypothesis (H3): the divine norms in the Holy Books reflect a flexible but at the same time rigorous and dogmatic attitude towards the legislation controlling the economic and social life of the profane world as well as towards the sacral laws of other religions. This has a double effect: they provide certainty to actors of the Holy Books (as well as to postmodern individuals) but sound frightening in a "multicultural" world.

secondarily with Medina and Jerusalem. The relationship to holy places can generate both reciprocity and confrontational attitude. The 21<sup>st</sup> century relevance of these sites becomes apparent when we consider annual pilgrimages, which involve huge crowds and even realize economical profit. At the same time there is a difference to be pointed out: whereas the holy places of the Bible are open to all, the sacral centres of the Quran do not admit "non-believers".

2. The second hypothesis (H2): the Holy Books depict a range of various social and economic structures but we also presumed that the structures providing optimal functions take crystallized form in the texts.

According to our analyses the following thesis (T2) can be announced:

Biblical and Quranic faith in God constructs communities: first the political-economic structures of Judaism, then Jewish and Christian religious congregations as well the Islamic ummah. In pre-modern times differentiated and functionally structured systems were unknown, it was the heritage of tribal societies that survived instead. This also meant that professional economic and political subsystems showed a symbiosis and were hardly distinguished from each other.

In Old Testament times the chosen people experienced various forms of political-economic structure. It is apparent, however, that the Bible rejects the idea of an optimal rule or economic system. For the people of JHWH anti-state, egalitarian and segmented tribal structures provided equally valid frameworks of society and subsistence as the later institutions of state and kingdom. The story of Daniel clearly presents that political or economic size gives absolute power to no structures and no political system carries absolute values. This, however, does not automatically imply anti-empire attitude. The community formed after the captivity consciously sought to fit in the economic and political frameworks of prevalent empires. The idea of an individual state was born only in Maccabean and New Testament times.

Islam is clearly distinct from other world religions as far as its origins are concerned: it was not born within the frameworks of a strong political, military or economic system but constructed its own structure and later empire itself. In the ummah each person is an individual in a spiritual and legal sense but is realized as a member of the community from political and economic aspects. The Quran did not abolish stratification based on tribal affinity and kinship, only complemented it with the principle of redistribution on

religious grounds. This created a very strong sense of social sensitivity within the ummah, since in the Quran (2: 275) trade and charity are closely linked. The guiding principle is that positive economic activity is encouraged, whereas the possibility of making profit by charging usury or without taking a risk is rejected. Charity reduces the level of inequality in the society and helping the poor is blessed by God. The concept of charity is not limited to money and benefits in kind: those in need should also be provided with knowledge and experience. Nevertheless, the Quran does not wish to abolish the unequal distribution of wealth in society.

The methodology of Muhammad's understanding of society and economy is close to that of the Old Testament inasmuch as it is motivated by divine inspiration. The presumption that political and economic status originates from God leaves no place for compromise and the human component seems impotent. The restoration of the right cult also entails a change in social-economic relations. Relationship to God determines the way the individual relates to other human beings and to the social-economic environment. In the Quran and the Old Testament religion, economy and political aspects cannot be separated from each other; in the New Testament such a