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PETR CINCALA AND ERICH BAUMGARTNER A LIVING EXAMPLE OF ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

On August 8, 2017, David Maraga, a Seventh-day Adventist Christian and Chief Justice of Kenya's Supreme Court, made national news when he ruled that Kenya's reelection of President Uhuru Kenyatta had been corrupted by "irregularities and illegalities." Because of the tainted election and the subsequent overturning of the results, the Supreme Court ordered a new election within 60 days.

In Kenya, there is an overall low trust in the justice system. This country has a long history of corruption and because of that, many people view political leaders as dishonest. Many elected officials who hold positions of honor and trust abuse their power, using their influence for personal gain instead of for the betterment of the country. For example, during the 2017 election, even the president's opponent, Raila Odinga, did not have hope that the tainted election results would be retracted.

Maraga has a reputation of being just and fair; his countrymen know and acknowledge that he is not corrupt. Maraga (2019) calls this public opinion "the greatest thing I could ever have." Maraga also has a history of allowing his faith to guide his work. He is known to never preside over a case on the Sabbath; additionally, once, when he was accused of taking a bribe, he went on live television and swore on a Bible that it was not so.

Maraga's ruling regarding the 2017 election was the first of its kind in Africa. As such, many Kenyans celebrated what they perceived to be a victory for the country's institutions. Despite their own political values, many shared that they were more interested in the election being a clean, transparent process than they were in their candidate winning.

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“We’re heading towards the right direction,” said one Kenyatta supporter, David Kiema, who, despite the result negatively impacting his presidential pick, supported the court’s decision. Kiema viewed this election as a way for Kenya to set an example for other African countries. “They’ll say, ‘Kenya has done it, why not us?’” he said. “We’re one step ahead of others in Africa, and we’re proud of it” (de Freytas-Tamura, 2017).

Maraga’s faith clearly played a role in his decision regarding the national election. As he prepared to read the verdict, he began with these remarks: “The greatness of any nation is determined by its fidelity to the Constitution, adherence to the rule of law, and, above all, fear of God” (Mosoku, 2017).

The Sabbath following the ruling, Justice Maraga attended church as usual, with his wife, Yucabeth Nyaboke, by his side. Members of his local Seventh-day Adventist Church felt proud to be linked with such a man. Said one worshipper, “I am sure he (Maraga) slept peacefully last night bearing in mind that he made a judgment in accordance with what God had asked him and the law. I am a proud Adventist and happy to be associated with him” (Dietrich, 2017).

A Mother’s Influence

Maraga came from humble beginnings. His father died when he was very young, and as such, his mother struggled to bring up her children alone. One time, she was forced to borrow some money from a shopkeeper in her village to pay her children’s school fees. Her only income came from flowers that she grew and collected, for which she was paid at the end of each month.

This particular month, Maraga, just a boy, went with his mother to collect her earnings. The meager amount was paid to his mother, and she was given a slip showing the number of flowers she had brought in and her total payment amount. Immediately after being paid, his mother went to the shopkeeper who had lent her the money. While the amount she had earned was not enough to pay off the loan, she handed her full pay to the shopkeeper, along with her payment slip.

The shopkeeper said, “You can’t give me everything. You have to keep some money for your life and your provisions.” He took part of the money and gave the rest back to Maraga’s mother.

On the way home, Maraga asked his mother why she had handled the situation in the way she had. She told him, “If I did not give him the entire sum, he would have thought I earned more. I wanted him to trust that that was all I had. My son, if you want to live well with people and want them to trust you, be honest with them. To see the video of Maraga sharing his story, please visit our website” (Maraga, 2019).

This memory has stayed with Maraga for his entire life. Because of this

childhood experience and the influence of his mother, to this day, he maintains an open, honest persona; it is this way that he gains the trust of those around him.

Maraga's Reputation of Integrity

Before Maraga became a Supreme Court Justice, he had his own practice. In this work, he gained a reputation as being “unbribeable.” People asked him to handle their transactions (purchasing property, disputing property ownership, etc.); he always conducted the transactions with integrity and in his client's best interest. Eventually, he was contracted by people who had a lot of money. They would give him enormous freedom to conduct the transactions in his own way, fully trusting that Maraga would handle the case with integrity and honesty.

Maraga did not always aspire to be a high court judge; peers asked him to apply for the position. When he was interviewed, he was asked about holding court on the Sabbath; the interview committee knew that as an Adventist, this might pose a problem. Without hesitation, Maraga told the committee that he would not schedule court sessions on the Sabbath. He said that it was a matter of integrity and conscience.

Of course, Maraga realized that this might completely disqualify him from the position. However, the committee was impressed by his response; they realized that if someone is willing to risk de-nomination for the sake of a “conscience issue,” the integrity of that person must be built on a very strong foundation. Maraga's “handicap” turned out to be his strength.

Maraga's life story provides a living example of what it means to be an ethical leader.

Definition of an Ethical Leader

The Merriam Webster Dictionary (n.d.) defines “ethics” as “a set of moral principles; a theory or system of moral values.” The Oxford Learner's Dictionaries adds to this definition by explaining that ethics are “moral principles that control or influence a person's behavior” (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries, n.d.). Thus, an ethical leader acts according to his or her moral principles in day-to-day life and decision-making. These leaders, quite simply, do the right thing.

As Christians, our moral compass differs from that of the world—we are held to a higher standard. Although the Bible does not explicitly define an ethical leader, many verses set our path.

- “A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, but a just weight is his delight.” Proverbs 11:1 (ESV)

- “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.” Colossians 3:23–24 (ESV)
- “Better is a poor man who walks in his integrity than a rich man who is crooked in his ways.” Proverbs 28:6 (ESV)

Additionally, we are also admonished several times in the New Testament to live lives that are above reproach (Titus 1:7; 1 Tim. 3:2). As servants of God, we must employ ethics not only into our leadership style, but also into our entire lives. Ethics must be an intrinsic part of who we are, not just how we act.

Traits of Ethical Leaders

Aside from using the Bible as our measuring stick, how do we know if we are ethical leaders? Are there certain characteristics that ethical leaders possess, setting them apart from other leaders? While anyone is capable of being (or becoming) an ethical leader, researchers have determined three traits that are more commonly found in ethical leaders, as rated by their followers. These traits include conscientiousness, moral identity, and cognitive moral development.

Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness is defined as a person being meticulous or careful (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Conscientious leaders are known to be thorough and vigilant. Studies have shown that conscientiousness related positively to ethical leadership (Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & De Hoogh, 2011). Specifically, personality traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness were positively related to direct reports’ ratings of the leader’s ethical leadership (Walumabwa & Schaubroeck, 2009).

Moral Identity

Moral identity is the degree to which being a moral person is important to a person’s identity (Hardy & Carlo, 2011). “Moral identity may be the most important source of moral motivation; in fact, some argue that it could be the best predictor of moral actions and commitments” (Hardy & Carlo, 2011). The internalization of moral identity has been positively correlated with ethical leadership (Mayer, Aquino, Greenbaum, & Kuenzi, 2013).

Cognitive Moral Development

The last trait commonly found in ethical leaders is cognitive moral development, which refers to how sophisticated one’s thinking is regarding ethical issues. “Leaders who are more advanced ethical reasoners relative to their fol-

lowers are likely to stand out as salient ethical role models whose ethics-related communication and behavior attract followers' attention" (Jordan, Brown, Treviño, & Finkelstein, 2011).

Why Does Ethical Leadership Matter?

While ethical leadership is important, especially from a Christian perspective, one might question why it matters and how it impacts followers and/or employees. Followers who rate their leaders as ethical have more favorable attitudes about their job (including higher job satisfaction and commitment), are less likely to report intentions to leave the organization, and exhibit more helpful behaviors (Mayer, Muenzi, Greenbaum, Bardes, & Salvador, 2009).

Research has also shown that ethical leaders are role models, leading by example (Moore, Mayer, Chiang, Crossley, Karlesky, & Birtch, 2014). This is supported by the social learning theory. Social learning theorist Albert Bandura (1977) proposed that "most human behavior is learned observationally through modeling: from observing others, one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action." Thus, if a leader makes ethical decisions and demonstrates ethical behavior, it is likely that his or her followers will do the same.

Ethical leaders also impact other areas of follower/employee life. The more employees perceive their managers to be ethical, the lower their self-reported occurrences of self-reported deviance (Mayer et al., 2009; Mayer et al., 2013; Maloof, 2018). Additionally, followers of ethical leaders are more likely to report unethical acts (Mayer, Nurmohamed, Treviño, Shapiro, & Schminke, 2013).

Ethical leaders also can create ethical cultures, influencing their followers to behave more ethically (Schaubroeck, Hannah, Avolio, Kozlowski, Lord, Treviño, Dimotakis, & Peng, 2012). In the case of Maraga, we can see that his ethical leadership has not only impacted an entire country, but has also left its people inspired.

Conclusion

In a country worn down by political corruption, Chief Justice David Maraga is a beacon of hope. He offers a brighter today and the hope of a positive, more ethical future to Kenya. If ever there was a living example of ethical leadership, it can be found in this man.

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