Faith-Based Accountability Mechanism Typology: The 2011 Interfaith Summit As Soft Power in Global Governance

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Abstract
The conditions associated with the stability of democratic global governance have been a leading concern of political sociology. Globalization, a situation of “governance without government,” has accountability gaps that International Nongovernmental Organizations—religious and secular—bridge with activism. They strengthen democratic norms by exercising soft power as accountability mechanisms in international relations. Religious and secular accountability mechanisms differ in structure and function. This article presents a Faith-Based Accountability Mechanism typology that outlines a set of attributes for an exercise of religious soft power that might strengthen the democratic process in global governance. A coalition service model that preserves the public trust in appropriate contexts is developed in contrast to monopolistic religious surveillance models. The typology is illustrated with case study data from the 2011 Interfaith Summit in Bordeaux, France.

Keywords
accountability, legitimacy, religious, soft power, global governance

The conditions associated with the stability of democratic governance have been a leading concern of political sociology. Nye (2004) describes a change in transnational relations where the “hard power” of coercion has given way to include the “soft power” influence of persuasion. We have left the “statist” period where countries are the strongest arbiters of power and entered an era of globalization characterized by “governance without government” (Mayntz, 2002). As the hegemonic nation states are characterized by democratic norms, there is a popular expectation that global governance be characterized by democratic norms despite huge accountability gaps in governance structures. International Nongovernmental Organizations (INGOs)—religious and secular—bridge this gap with soft power, augmenting statist politics with civic life politics, using knowledge to shape the debate through evolving norms that affect the legitimacy of governance structures (Banchoff, 2008; Fox, 2009; Haynes, 2009; Risse, 2002; Steiner, 2010). In political science, legitimacy refers to popular and/or influential elite’s acceptance of a regime as an authority, the loss of which results in political deadlock and collapse. The stability of democratic legitimacy is built on a value system that allows for the “peaceful ‘play’ of power—the adherence by the ‘outs’ to decisions made by ‘ins’ and the recognition by ‘ins’ of the rights of the ‘outs’ ” (Lipset, 1959, p. 71). In the absence of formal political offices and alternative contenders for those offices, the stability of global democratic governance requires effective dialogue with critical partners in an independent, yet complementary, relationship for the peaceful “play” of power. Hence, dialogue communicating ethical opposition may serve to strengthen democratic legitimacy if the intent is to negotiate consent by creating conditions favorable to peace. INGOs that challenge the state and maintain a “preferential option for the poor” represent “the conscience of the world” in their opposition as long as their efforts are part of a dialogue over the peaceful play of power.

The entry of religion into politics raises concerns that do not accompany secular accountability mechanisms regarding suspicion over the manufacture of consent in the service of political legitimacy. Boundaries regarding too much, or too little, religious involvement in public life are maintained over concern that religion not be appropriated to validate political oppression or economic exploitation. Hence, the legitimacy of democratic culture can only be strengthened where there is freedom to cultivate a dialogue of reasoned ethical opposition. With this use of the term legitimacy in mind, I propose 10 attributes of a Faith-Based Accountability Mechanism (FAM) addressing questions about when, where, how, and under what conditions religious soft power might strengthen the democratic legitimacy of global governance. I propose a coalition service model that preserves the public trust in appropriate contexts (in contrast to monopolistic religious surveillance.

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models) illustrated with data from the 2011 Interfaith Leaders’ Summit.

Introduction

To suggest that religious soft power might hold global politics to account conjures up images of inappropriate theocratic religious surveillance of political decision making. Although scholars are increasingly acknowledging that public religion is “here to stay” (e.g., Eberle, 2002, p. 6), the democratic principle separating church and state discourages religious involvement in politics to inhibit governmental establishment of religion and promote religious liberty (Bhargava, 1998; Shabani, 2011). The conventional liberal understanding is that religious discourse inappropriately employs restrictive comprehensive doctrines that are not equally accessible to all citizens (e.g., Locke, 1689/1983). Scholars such as John Rawls emphasize that legitimate political regimes demand the use of public reason as a source of justification open to all (Rawls, 1997). According to Rawls, the “zeal to embody the whole truth in politics is incompatible with an idea of public reasons that belongs with democratic citizenship” (Rawls, 1997, p. 767). It is the “duty of civility” (Rawls, 1997, p. 769) for citizens of faith to engage in the public forum “as if they were legislators” by presenting “proper political reasons”—and not reasons given solely by comprehensive doctrines (Rawls, 1997, p. 784) in the wider public political domain; citizens with a social conscience bear the responsibility to translate their concerns into secular language if they seek to influence public policy.

But scholars since Max Weber have recognized that too much church/state separation is equally problematic, creating a dual crisis of management and meaning: (a) The public crisis occurs when there is inadequate political will and ethical direction to publicly manage pressing social problems, even as (b) a private crisis occurs as people who seek to provide ethical direction about the pressing social problems are relegated to the private sector (Roth & Schluchter, 1979; Steiner-Aeschliman, 1999; Weber, 1922/1978). The liberal understanding has been critiqued overly restrictive (e.g., Waldron, 1993). Although citizens should provide public justification for their claims, argues Christopher Eberle (2002), they should not be required to exercise restraint in offering faith-based reasoning. Nicholas Wolterstorff contends that the liberal understanding unfairly impairs the “ethics of democratic citizenship” (Audi & Wolterstorff, 1997) by essentially excluding religious reasoning from public space—a principle that a growing number of scholars consider incompatible with the freedom of religion (Audi & Wolterstorff, 1997; Bader, 1999; Greenawalt, 1995; Parekh, 2000). As Shabani (2011) explains,

Many religious citizens cannot separate or recast their religious convictions from their political ideals as easily as the “principle of secular justification” demands. This would mean that citizens of faith cannot be expected to justify their political claims independently of their religious convictions. (p. 336)

Wolterstorff suggests that impartiality, rather than separation, is sufficient to meet the neutrality requirement for political engagement; restrictions pertinent to the ethics of citizenship relate to the positions taken and the manner of conduct.

In certain contexts, religion uniquely strengthens the democratic process. Jürgen Habermas’ describes how religion communicates meaning in ways philosophy and science cannot. To repress it, or attempt to replace it, would do more than unfairly exclude religion; it would deprive “secular society from important resources of meaning” (Habermas 2003, p. 109). Habermas validates a particular type of religious reasoning in the public sphere—one that is reflexive as well as communicative. Although Habermas would agree with the liberal position that fundamentalist expressions work against the democratic process, he believes requiring that citizens translate faith-based reasoning into public/secular reasons puts an “undue cognitive burden” that de facto restricts and separates religious reasoning—including the beneficial type—from public life (Habermas, 2006, p. 8). Instead, Habermas proposes an “institutional translation proviso” allowing a particular type of faith-based reasoning into the public sphere—one that has “the epistemic ability to consider one’s own faith reflexively from the outside and to relate it to secular views” (Habermas, 2006, pp. 9-10). According to Shabani (2011),

The difference between Habermas and Rawls is when proper political reasons (public reason) should be demanded from citizens and officials. For Rawls it is earlier in the public sphere and for Habermas it is later at the formal institutional level. (p. 337)

Habermas defense of the legitimacy of faith-based public debate replaces the one-way liberal model dialogue with a two-way public conversation between sacred and secular. “Habermas wants to alter the asymmetrical burden of reason-giving,” says Shabani, where the secular citizen shares in the responsibility to “recognize the continued existence of religious communities in diverse liberal democracies,” and “the conflict between secular and sacred as among ‘reasonably expected disagreement’” (2006, p. 15).

Roger Finke views the separation of church and state as a political act of religious deregulation aimed at protecting the free expression of religious minorities in the religious market, introducing a new era of religious diversity (Finke, 1990). In dismantling religious monopolies, democracy would move beyond tolerance to support the equal rights of religious subcultures (Finke, 1990). More than 90% of people in the world adhere to one of the major religions, and
Steiner

might mark the future of democracy.

Preserving the Public Trust

Weber considered the dual crisis of management and meaning a threat to the future sustainability of Western civilization; he was concerned that rationalization would result in bureaucratic governments incapable of generating the political will to resolve social problems (Steiner-Aeschliman, 1999).

INGOs generate political will in global governance operating as accountability mechanisms. The uncertainty associated with global politics requires a two-way model that significantly differs from the traditional one-way models typically associated with accountability (Whitaker, Altman-Sauer, & Henderson, 2004). Traditional one-way models of democratic accountability tend to be punitive, focusing on ways to catch and punish mistakes (Whitaker et al., 2004). Such an approach does not accurately describe how most nonprofits partner with government: contexts where program goals are broad, service conditions are highly variable, and government officials may not know exactly what they want or need the nonprofits to specifically do. In these types of partnering contexts, “government and nonprofit personnel may need to learn from each other (and from clients or others) to decide what needs to be done” (Whitaker et al., 2004, p. 115). Rather than understanding accountability as surveillance, Kerns (1996) suggests understanding accountability in terms of “preserving the public trust” (p. 27). Bardach (1998) views accountability as a “complement to the effort to improve quality and not merely as a substitute for it or a drag on it” (p. 144). Behn (2001) suggests rethinking the adversarial model to create “some new cooperative institutions that can promote accountability for performance” (p. 217). Whitaker et al. (2004) describe accountability as a relational process that addresses questions of responsibility, discretion, reporting, reviewing, and revising. “Who answers each of the questions and how those answers are developed in large part determine whether accountability is an adversarial process, focused on punishment, or a collaborative process, focused on improving the quality of public life” (Whitaker et al., 2004, p. 116). They suggest understanding accountability in terms of service (rather than politics, administration, or markets) where the source of control is rooted in mutual dialogue rather than in elections, law, or market discipline (see Table 1). Dialogue involves frank discussion with mutual respect and empathic listening “to probe their fundamental assumptions and world views” (Roberts, 2002, p. 660). Other models focus on maximizing one’s own position, winning the game, solving the problem, or making a deal, but the service model focuses on helping others (Whitaker et al., 2004). Governance as market or technique is incapable of offering a vision for human life; alternatively, governance as service can dare to address the social question posed by Winner (1986), “As we make things work, what kind of world are we making?”

Two-way mutual accountability service models are not always appropriate or cost-effective; they are time-consuming involving much deliberation and experimentation. Whitaker et al. (2004) suggest that service models become worthwhile in contexts where trust building is needed and “politics, administration, and markets fail to provide sufficient flexibility, creativity, sensitivity, and commitment to deliver effective public services” (p. 123). The service model does not substitute for other forms of accountability, say Whitaker et al. (2004); but they may become necessary, if not critical contributors, in specific contexts where the complex, messy interactions of well-intentioned actors working at cross-purposes have begun to destabilize evenhanded assessments and undermine the effectiveness of political institutions. The service model is appropriate for global politics that Vidal and Watts (2009) describe has having taken a “procedural turn” where “getting the process right” has become so overemphasized that “governance-by-disclosure” has become counterproductive. INGO accountability mechanisms—religious or secular—bring voice accountability in two-way dialogue with global governance whether they speak as the poor, with the poor, for the poor, or about the poor (Slim, 2002). Religious Nongovernmental Organizations (RNGOs) involved in global politics bring the added dimension of meaning to their voice accountability.

Method

Historical interpretation is appropriate when a bridge is needed between old and new ideas during times of paradigmatic shift (e.g., Murphy, 1994). The historical sociological method of individualizing comparisons (Tilly, 1984) was used to build theory (Freese & Sell, 1980) to identify theoretical and empirical distinctive of a concept. Comparison was used to grasp the peculiarities of this case with the twin goal of observing and explaining (Tilly, 1984). Following the approach of Ragin (1987), observational units are at the micro level and explanatory units are at the macro level of analysis. FAM is proposed as an ideal type using the methodology of Weber (1904/1949). Illustrative data from the 2011 Interfaith Summit were used as informative evidence to develop, not test, the theory.

For Weber, concepts are the heuristic means for the construction of social scientific knowledge. The concept represents a deliberate, constructed interpretation of reality that grasps only a limited segment or aspect of an object and which grasps, at best, its object for only a fleeting moment in history. The concept neither corresponds to nor accurately and exhaustively represents its object, but neither is the
concept an arbitrary nor an unbridled invention. The concept is twice interpreted: first, by the participants in the original context and, second, by the social scientist (Drysdale, 1996). Distinguishing interpretation from explanation, Weber said that interpretation without explanation is not yet knowledge, and explanation without interpretation is reification (Steiner-Aeschliman, 1999). Social scientific knowledge is only constructed when explanation is constructed with interpreted ideal types to avoid reification.

The Ideal Type

INGO accountability mechanisms contribute to global governance structure through a transnational civil society channel of accountability where reliable information gets used to assess fundamental goals of institutions in the pursuit of justice (Buchanan & Keohane, 2006). INGOs often tackle the most difficult accountability challenges of “global governance without government” (Willetts, 1996).

FAM was first introduced with the Interfaith Dialogue Mechanism (Figure 1) using data from the Interfaith Summit(s) of 2005-2010 (Steiner, 2010). World religions coming together in dialogue to voice global ethics is historically unprecedented (Armstrong, 2007; Kung, 1991). The emergence of a summit process where leaders of the world religions engage in serious and consistent credible conversation with the political leaders of the world is entirely new. The Summit process began in 2005 with the U.K. ecumenical conference that established three levels of dialogue:

Table 1. Four Perspectives on Decision Making

| Characteristic       | Service             | Politics                        | Administration      | Markets               |
|----------------------|---------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Source of control    | Mutuality           | Elections                       | Law (rules)         | Market discipline     |
| Activity             | Giving/serving      | Game                            | Problem solving     | Buying and selling    |
| Players              | Donors, helpers, and recipients | Game Representatives | Experts           | Producers and consumers |
| Focus                | Decisions in response to others’ needs | Collective political decisions | Bureaucratic administrative decisions | Individual decisions and transactions |
| Conversation         | “How can I help you?” “Are you better now?” (case histories) | “What do you hear?” (stories) | “What do you know?” (reports) | “What are you buying or selling?” (contracts) |
| Elements             | Tangible: Service activities, client changes | Intangible: Interests and symbols | Tangible: Money, information, people, things | Tangible: Goods, services, and contracts |
| Currency             | Trust/gratification from helping | Power (stories) | Knowledge (deeds) | Money, profit, gain |
| Dynamics             | Flexibility, interdependence, and cooperation | Conflict, compromise, and change | Stability, cooperation, and continuity | Flexibility, exchange |

Source: “Mutual accountability between governments and nonprofits: Moving beyond ‘surveillance’ to ‘service’” from Whitaker, Altman-Sauer, and Henderson (2004, p. 125).

Figure 1. The informal Interfaith Leaders’ Dialogue Mechanism among religious leaders, nationally between religious and political leaders, and internationally among the G8 politicians. The Interfaith Leaders’ Summit(s) have met as shadow summits to the G8 in the United Kingdom (2005), Russia (2006), Germany (2007), Japan (2008), Italy (2009), Canada (2010), and France (2011). The internal dialogue between religious leaders has generated areas of ethical consensus in service of the common good (Figure 1). The Millennium Development Goals vision was generated by politicians and adopted by religious leaders to guide dialogue as a standard agreed upon by all. Each statement has discussed global challenges such as climate change, the economic crisis, and extreme poverty. What has slowly evolved is an informal
dialogue mechanism between leaders of the religions of the world and leaders of the nations of the world, the theoretical validity of which has been explicated elsewhere (Steiner, 2011). The dialogue mechanism—a macro-level explanatory data—was theorized to demonstrate religious soft power functioning in international relations as an accountability mechanism to political power in global politics (Steiner, 2010). Micro-level data from the Interfaith Leaders’ Summits from 2005-2010 were used to illustrate “shadow summit” voice accountability. More than 90% of the world’s population adheres to the religions regularly represented at the summits since 2006 (Buddhist, Catholic, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Protestant, and Shinto). By 2010, summit participants reported a constituency summing to more than 800 million spanning as many as 128 nations (Steiner, 2010). In this research, I explored the political–religious nexus proposing FAM as an ideal type.

Data

Data from the 2011 Interfaith leaders’ summit were collected on May 23-24 at the summit meetings in Bordeaux, France. The 2011 Interfaith Summit was placed under the patronage of the Council of the Christian Churches in France. Religious representation included Religions for Peace and leaders from Buddhism, Baha’i, Islam, Judaism, Protestantism, Catholicism, the Russian Orthodox Church, the Anglican Communion, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Armenian Church, the Konko tradition, and the All Africa Conference of Churches. Mixed methods allowed for quantitative and qualitative data collection and analyses (Dillman, Smyth, & Christian, 2009). Twenty-seven questionnaires with 20 survey items were given to all summit attendees; nine individuals returned the completed questionnaires representing an acceptable response rate of 33%. Eight of the survey items were recorded on a Likert-type scale with values ranging from 1 to 5 (1 = unimportant to 5 = very important). Ten of the survey items were open-ended questions. Five additional interviews were conducted to probe responses and further differentiate various perspectives (Jewish, Muslim, Christian, and Konko traditions). Content analysis included summit presentations and the statement.

Results

Descriptive statistics for all questionnaire study items (Ms, SDs, sample size, and range of 1 = unimportant to 5 = very important) are provided in Table 2. Respondents considered collaboration with political leaders to meet the needs of the most vulnerable people in the world (Item 8) and offering words of challenge to the State (Item 8) as the most important issues (M = 4.78). These were also the items of strongest agreement (SD for challenging the state = 0.49; SD for political collaboration = 0.44). Although not as important an issue, the next strongest area of agreement among respondents was that they respected the integrity of the state (Item 1, M = 4.11, SD = 0.78).

The second most important issue with strong agreement (SD = 0.53) related to the democratic deficit in global governance; respondents thought it very important that people from the most vulnerable regions of the world be represented at the Interfaith Summits (M = 4.44). As one delegate put it, “I find it difficult to know who is accountable to the world and there is no forum to also ask them for accountability.” G8 leaders were sometimes described as “self-appointed” leaders in positions of influence simply “because of the power of the culture they represent. I wish they could have been elected by the majority, but that is not the case.” Delegates often spoke of the G8 leaders’ de facto responsibility to represent more than their own interests; they have a responsibility to “care for the rest of the world and make sure that the world doesn’t become a jungle.”

Of least importance was getting higher level religious representation at the Summits (M = 3.62) and developing a website for ongoing use (M = 3.44). Respondents felt it was more important to meet the needs of the most vulnerable people in the world (M = 4.40) than to influence their constituencies to lobby governmental officials (M = 4.11) after the summit, an indicator that the service focus was stronger than the political focus (see Table 1). The high standard deviations associated with organizational questions indicate that there was wide disagreement on this topic (e.g., SD for the website question = 1.33).

FAM Attributes

Attributes for 10 characteristics of a FAM ideal type are identified (see Table 3). Illustrative data are drawn from statements, questionnaires, interviews, and presentations.

1. **Broader social context**: FAMs are only cost-effective in contexts where other accountability mechanisms have become ineffective and political will is needed. The social problems addressed in Bordeaux—global governance, the macroeconomy, climate change, sustainable development, and peacemaking—are all intransigent social problems global in scope. Summit leaders spoke about cross-border externalities and referred to problems of political impasse where leaders have yet to forge effective consensus (Adamakis, et al., 2011 para. 18). One delegate became quite animated about global warming:

   Where is the political will? Where is the political vision? That is a question . . . Regional Ecumenical Organization’s General Secretaries . . . there are nine of us globally representing the different regions of the world. Several of us are here at the Summit. We meet and talk once a year. The one from the Pacific will just say, “If you ask me what’s
happening in my region, well, I tell you this many more islands have disappeared this year.” [slow whistle] Yeah. And unfortunately, he says it quite matter of factly because he is so used to it. But one should never be used to that. Never.

And what are we doing? Nothing. Nothing.

Underrepresentation of human rights and inadequate fulfillment of the millennium development goals were identified as important misplaced priorities of G8 leaders. Into this broad context, delegates emphasized broad shifts in perspective fostering political engagement. “The religious teaching is a view of the world. It is a cosmological question, not a moral question,” said one respondent.

The ideal is not how you cloister yourself away, but how does one live appropriately in the larger world . . . Once one is in that world, one can be informed by many values that come from that tradition. But the primary motivation is . . . that there is an obligation to be a part of that world.

2. Organizational focus: FAMs are service oriented rather than politically, market, or administratively driven. “Religious leaders need to enable people to see the world differently,” said Rev. Dr. John Chrysavgis. It is for religious leaders to urge the faithful “to move from what we want to what the world needs and communicate that message to our politicians.” The attempt to shift the G8 leaders’ focus from politics to service was explicitly evident when Rev. Rudiger Noll addressed delegates about the macroeconomic situation: “Religious leaders offer a long-term perspective to political leaders who have a short-term perspective.” But values need to be connected to specific applications, he said: “If we remain on the value level, we can be easily misused by politicians endorsing their behavior via dialogue. We need to explore with politicians what these values mean on a practical level”; he suggested that the

| Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Items (Range = 1.00-5.00) |
|-----------------|-----------------|--------|
| Item                         | M    | SD    | n   |
| 1. That faith involvement in public issues preserve and respect the integrity of a secular state | 4.11 | 0.78 | 9    |
| 2. That people from the most vulnerable regions of the world be represented at the World Religions Summits | 4.44 | 0.53 | 9    |
| 3. That religious leaders intervene in public debate on important social issues to challenge the state on moral issues | 4.78 | 0.49 | 9    |
| 4. For delegates to involve their religious constituencies after the summit to lobby their government about statement issues | 4.11 | 0.78 | 9    |
| 5. For delegations to have higher level representation at the summits (e.g., the Pope or the Dalai Lama) | 3.62 | 0.74 | 8    |
| 6. For development of the World Religions Summit website for ongoing use | 3.44 | 1.33 | 9    |
| 7. For religious organization to help meet the needs of the most vulnerable people in the world (e.g., social services) | 4.40 | 0.97 | 10   |
| 8. That religious and political leaders collaborate together to meet the needs of the most vulnerable people in the world | 4.78 | 0.44 | 9    |

| Table 3. Ten Attributes of a FAM |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Characteristic                  | Attribute                                |
| 1. Broader social context      | Need for political will, intransient social problems |
| 2. Organizational focus        | Service oriented (rather than political, market, or administrative oriented) |
| 3. Political partisanship      | Impartial (rather than endorsing or denying) |
| 4. Boundary of public reason   | Within the public sphere but outside the formal institutional level |
| 5. Organizational form         | Coalition (although the voice of localized monopolies may have a voice within the RNGO) |
| 6. Diversity                  | Attentive to the rights of minorities (including religious) |
| 7. Type of dialogue            | Two-way mutual dialogue (not one-way mechanisms) |
| 8. Manner of conduct           | Reflexive, frank, and empathic communication |
| 9. Language used               | Duty oriented emphasizing obligation, justice, responsibility, transformation, and reconciliation |
| 10. Positions taken            | Compatible with democracy |

Note: FAM = Faith-Based Accountability Mechanism; RNGO = Religious Nongovernmental Organizations.
G20 follow the European Union model that measures success by “how many people they lift out of poverty” rather than by throughput.

A service focus uses the currency of trust, a characteristic addressed by Rabbi Professor Richard Marker. “In the Talmud, the question is asked, ‘What is one going to be held accountable for at the end of his or her days?’” Rabbi Marker continues,

As representatives of religious traditions, we might be tempted to say one will answer to the depth or sincerity of his/her faith or the degree to which one was responsible for the rules of that tradition . . . . But in the Talmud, the first question asked is: Were you upstanding in your business dealings? . . . Why? It is precisely in the way we live our everyday in the economic discourse with others that provides the ability for a society to have trust. If we do not trust that the other person from whom we buy our bread . . . that they are reliable and on whom we can count, then on what basis does society exist? The rest is commentary.

Life should be lived engaged with the world, not removed from it, explained Rabbi Marker.

If we can’t find a way to bring sanctity to the everyday lives of those we lead, then we are violating the trust of those we lead. If a nation is not a reliable partner with the other, what does that say about the validity of their means of exchange? . . . What does it say if we have trade with them without confidence in their underlying values?

Respondents commonly focused on how to serve others when relating to power:

The G8/G20 are the most economically powerful countries of the world. Whether rightly or wrongly is in a sense not the issue . . . . Any conversation that involves ameliorating the conditions by which many live in the world must be had in concert with them.

I asked respondents, “Why do you respect the G8 leaders’ right to rule? What is the basis of their legitimacy?” When respondents answered, they often reframed the political power leaders possess in terms of service to others, saying “They have economic and therefore political power. They have the capacity to fulfill the Millennium Development Goals” and “They don’t have the right to rule. They have a responsibility to collaborate.” The very existence of the G8, said one respondent, “provides an opportunity to try to bring together the material and spiritual . . . in an effort to build a just society in which everyone is engaged and to which everyone can contribute.”

3. Political partisanship: FAMs are politically non-partisan, maintaining impartiality and reserving the right to critically assess political activities. Religious leaders were conditional in their commitment to work with the political entities only inasmuch as they affirmed specific values favoring the common good. Rabbi Professor Richard Marker said,

We understand that there are some governments that are corrupt. We also understand there are places that government does not know what role to play. But ultimately, we understand that we need government. If we do not have trust in these systems of government, we will only have anarchy. Religions are sometimes at fault in this. Religions play a crucial role. Over 50% of all education and close to 75% of social services are provided by faith-based institutions (UNESCO). So, we might be tempted to say we don’t need government. But we do so to our own peril. We play into an anarchist tendency that will come back to haunt us and render our own contributions null and void.

Respondents spoke of adopting a “disinterested” attitude toward politics:

There has been a tendency to see this group as the religious leaders validating everything the G8 does and not seeing this as an independent body . . . We are an independent body that wishes to be in dialogue but we are not a subsidiary giving validity . . . I find myself correcting people all the time . . . People will say, “The G8 religious leaders . . . ” I will go, “No, we are not the G8 religious leaders in the way that you mean. We are religious leaders in the G8 countries who have come together to speak to the current meeting of the G8 Summit in particular ways, but we are not a subsidiary in any way. We are a completely independent body that will say whatever it needs to say.” That is really important.

I asked a respondent from one of the world’s poorest regions if there were conditions under which people might oppose the G8 leadership:

I don’t believe in the approach of opposing. I believe in the possibility of people expressing and appreciating the divide, condemning the wrong . . . people need to get involved in politics and say “these mistakes have been done and we have to correct it and behave differently.”
4. **Boundary of public reason:** Habermas (2006) says, “[e]very citizen must know and accept that only secular reasons count beyond the institutional threshold that divides the informal public sphere from Parliaments, courts, ministries and administrations” (p. 9). Elsewhere, citizens could publicly utilize the “institutional translation proviso” that “allows citizens holding comprehensive doctrines to translate their reasons into political reasons that can reach citizens holding other worldviews” (Shabani, 2011, p. 338). In his comments on development, Bhai Sahib Bhai Mohinder Singh said,

People of faith have difficulty articulating in secular contexts our values because we don’t blow our own trumpets, but the time has come for us to articulate so there is a respect for faith. How do you value goodness? How do you value love? What is sacrifice? We need to articulate this so we can fuse secularity and sacredness for the common good. Rights and responsibilities go hand in hand. We have a universal declaration of rights. There is no universal declaration of responsibilities. We need one.

Cardinal Jean-Pierre Ricard said,

In France, there are trends of opinion that religion should be excluded from social space and reserved for the private space of individuals. I do not see things that way. Everything put aside may emerge in a violent manner where we least expect it. Forces can go through religion, but we will not solve it by pushing religion to the margins. We need to live together and be partners.

FAMs honor the boundary of public reason, but the level of analysis for this boundary should not be presumed to always be at a lower level than the nation-state. If leaders of nation-states do not claim to represent a global government and the issues under discussion with faith-based leaders involve global governance, then this discussion falls outside the formal institutional level. In this case, religious leaders legitimately approach G8/G20 leaders without violating the boundary of public reason when they address issues of global responsibility to a gathering of sovereign states. Delegates repeatedly showed awareness of this important distinction. “We don’t have a world government,” emphasized a delegate. When I asked if she or he respects the G8 political leaders’ right to rule, she or he said,

I don’t think they rule. They coordinate. I didn’t like that question. What do they rule? There are eight countries. They coordinate policy not for everybody, but for themselves. Because they’re powerful economies, their coordination of things does determine the policies that have an impact beyond them, but I think the word rule is a little unfair.

I asked another delegate if she or he sees any accountability gaps in global governance:

You could probably drive a truck through them. There are gaps, yes. But the trouble is, you can’t say that the G8 has failed or created gaps because there wasn’t any understanding of accountability in the first place. So, it’s not so much a gap as a missing piece of the process.

Delegates thought tension between national sovereignty and international responsibility should shape the dialogue:

Find ways of having the discussion with them saying, “If you are not going to deal with these issues, then how can we have them happen?” That is the discussion you have. You don’t say, “Why aren’t you doing it?” You put it in such a way that they take ownership. You don’t say, “Who failed?” You say, “Listen, let’s agree that we have a problem. I accept your starting point at least for now” . . . that you see this is not your problem. Then, “let’s talk together about how we solve the problem.” . . . You put it on the table and say, “Let’s take mutual ownership of saying there are problems that go beyond some things here. What things do we need to put in place to address these problems?”

Delimited political responsibility does not mean silence about global responsibility. “Would you ever oppose the G8 leadership?” I asked.

I would not have any problem disagreeing if there was something they said I thought was counter to values I care about. I would oppose it saying, “You are passing environmental policies that are counter to” . . . I’m going to go further. I think you have to be able to advocate for these things. Just because I don’t believe that they are the government doesn’t mean I can’t say something about what they say. I’m not saying therefore ignore them. Just don’t treat them as the government! They are a collection of governments.

5. **Organizational form:** FAM is organized as a loose coalition. Summit leaders maintain informal ties. A Muslim respondent said to “monopolize your own way and put your political agenda and use your religion . . . is just not what we are about in our politics.” Another respondent was very aware of the perspectives of other religious leaders, saying “We cannot claim to have a monopoly of ethical values. We could trust that there are other people . . . who have not lost their humanity.”
6. **Diversity**: FAMs champion religious diversity. An interviewee said,

In everyday reality there are those who take advantage of the weak to enjoy life knowing it is a cost to others who are oppressed . . . As religious leaders we need to challenge that and say wrong is wrong.

As Dr. Mario Marazziti said,

The test of faith consists of whether I can make room for the different. Can I recognize God in one who does not respond in my image? If I cannot, then I have made God in my likeness.

Dr. Mohammad Sammak of Syria also spoke about diversity:

Human identities are based on small symbols that make a difference. Freud called this the narcissism of minor differences. It does not matter how small the difference is, we can make it into the core of our identity. This is why the fundamental issue is how to promote the culture of accepting differences.

Dr. Sammak pointed out that “Christianity has become a religion mainly of the poor, the marginalized, the powerless—a religion of the oppressed”:

It is estimated that one third of the 1.5 billion Muslims live in non-Islamic countries among a majority of non-Muslims. There is no peace between peoples without peace between religions and there is no peace between religions without a culture of mutual respect where they do not yet realize that truth is not a commodity that can be monopolized.

One delegate’s primary reason for attending was for the defense of religious rights:

There is oppression everywhere around the world. Muslims in Christian countries . . . Christians in Muslim countries. One country’s majority becomes in the next country, the minority . . . It is the role of the religious leader to bring to the political leader this concern.

More than 15 references to diversity (religious and cultural) and human rights were made in the statement delivered to the G8/G20 leaders.

7. **Type of dialogue**: The social context where FAMs operate requires two-way dialogue to facilitate creative problem-solving collaboration between government and religion. The Interfaith Dialogue Mechanism is in the early stages of building two-way conversation with G8/G20 leaders. General Secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches Karen Hamilton said, “Politicians rightly push back.” They challenge her on climate change lifestyle issues asking, “Are you saying in your houses of worship that we need to cut back?” Because so many of the things we are saying that are needed involve sacrifice.” One respondent said that the “failure to acknowledge the helpful voice of religion/spirituality” is the most important misplaced priority of the G8 leadership. Another respondent was very positive about the emergent dialogue, saying

I wrote the G8 office before coming here. I told them that the Summit was continuing in France and that I would send them the statement as soon as it was finished. It was very well received . . . It’s about building relationships.

When I asked this respondent how she or he wished the G8 leadership would respond in an ideal world, she or he was quick to say, “That they would immediately call for a meeting of the senior G8 leaders, the prime ministers and the presidents, with the senior faith leaders of the world, and that this would be built into the G8 Summit.”

Two-way dialogue was not eclipsed by traditions of comprehensive truth claims. One respondent addressed this contrasting meaning with understanding:

I don’t do interreligious things from a defensive posture. I do them because it is a mandate. It is my view that you can get full essential meaning from within your own tradition, but you can never have full understanding unless it is in relationship to the other.

This respondent does not think the summit has yet resolved how to dialogue with the political leaders, but she or he is nevertheless committed to the process:

I am here because in the long run I think there is an important role, properly played . . . I don’t think it is easy. I don’t think we have figured out how to do that yet . . . You impact people because you sit and talk to them. You hear their reactions. They speak honestly. Is there a politician who doesn’t get statements and letters every minute? . . . In one sense, we are not serious about playing this role. If we are real leaders and we have credibility, then somebody there will want to meet with us. If we are not serious, then just because we call ourselves the summit of world religions, we are just playing games with titles . . . Statements essentially satisfies this group’s need, not theirs.
This same respondent suggested that if the religious summit would finish their meetings in the same city as the G8 political leaders, perhaps more of the faith traditions’ primary decision makers would be involved. She or he clearly showed commitment to serious process but was frank about the current approach. The G8 political leaders are not coming saying, “‘Oh look at this letter we got!’ The whole concept is naïve,” she or he said.

If you want to be able to have access, you build enough appointments ahead of time during the course of the year and say there are ways we can be helpful too. It is a long term cultivation process . . . You don’t impact public policy on the assumption that 2 days beforehand you have written a letter.

I responded that what I had been hearing was that the religious leaders don’t feel like they have access. The delegate said,

For someone to say, “There is not access” doesn’t tell me anything. It means that they are in the process of getting that access. So, go there . . . There can be status if you cultivate it. If you say, “What would be useful to you? What would be a way in which the religious communities can establish some sort of collaborative understanding with you so that there are things that we care about that address your needs?” That is something that can be cultivated and that is how you influence policy.

H. E. Faisal Bin Muammar from the King Abdullah International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue spoke to the delegates about Saudi Arabia’s extensive investment in cultivating a culture of dialogue:

The world is suffering a lack of moral values where terrorism and crime are on the rise . . . There are terrible challenges and we may have our differences in solving them. It is hard for any one religion to solve these problems without the help of the rest because our world is increasingly interrelated. We need to employ some mechanism to deal with these problems. One solution is dialogue, dialogue, dialogue.

8. Manner of conduct: Communication across the sacred–secular nexus requires that religious and political parties exhibit reflexive epistemic skills. Reflexivity involves the ability to consider one’s own views in a search for the best view to support the decisions that must be made at any given time (Whitaker et al., 2004). Frank disagreement is essential to dialogue, but the manner of conduct within which frank disagreement is communicated remains service oriented without succumbing to a blame-orientated, litigious approach. Respondents demonstrated an ability to distance themselves from their own position and place themselves in the position of others (reflexive). “In the real world,” said one delegate,

people have to make very difficult choices. When religious authorities come in knowing there are difficult choices to be made, weighing these difficult choices . . . that is what has long-term value. It is taken much more seriously than when you say, “We are the moral voices who believe in goodness and peace.” You make it much easier for a politician to take a longer view when you show them how they can articulate outcomes so they are not inconsistent with what they need to produce.

One interviewee expressed being a strong believer in the possibility of “acting on the basis of reflection.” When change happens quickly, we have a “reflex to resist change,” she or he said. If we are going to be a friend to change, she or he said, then people must be capable of acting on the basis of reflection, because if “we don’t want to change, then every time we change, it will change us.” The religious leader’s role is “to remind the world to remain grounded in moral and human qualities.” Another delegate pointed out that seven of the eight G8 political leaders are people of faith. “That’s not well known. Why is that not well known to the faith communities? We don’t take that seriously,” she or he said. “We can’t see it in what they do. We wish they would do something that reflects the moral values much more. But we also don’t live in their world of realpolitik.” Another delegate said,

If you are serious about playing in the real world, you do the things necessary to be able to allow the people who have to function in that world to be able to function in that world. You don’t pretend that the world is going to change because you want to be above it . . . and I don’t mean that you compromise or sacrifice your values! It does mean that you start from the recognition that somebody else is living from a different position.

At times, the conversation became frank. One delegate pointed out that when the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was written, “here, in Paris, the same country was occupying and humiliating and colonizing a big number of
human beings,” and they exempted themselves. “I think those who did it know that we know. But this mistake of the past cannot prevent the generation of now to correct those mistakes and not have a double standard.” Delegates cared that their manner of conduct “not be insulting, not take pot shots, and not just be critical all of the time.” I asked a delegate about a point during the conference when the dialogue took a negative turn in a side discussion:

Oh yes, goodness me. I was going to shoot that conversation down so fast if it was going anywhere . . . The thing to me is how do we foster effective dialogue? How do we become for the G8 leaders so trustworthy and seen as both credible and having the integrity to have a conversation that is both open and honest? That doesn’t mean we are not going to disagree.

Another delegate said, “It’s not about getting close to political leaders, but about being courteous, appropriately supportive and, when necessary, confrontative.”

9. Language used: Faith-based language appeals to religious reasoning rooted in duty, obligation, justice, responsibility, transformation, and reconciliation. Many delegates understood their role in terms of making the G8 leaders aware of the “positive religious dimension.” “We have a duty to reflect the perspective of religious communities and convey this message to the leaders of the entire world community,” expressed Rev. Hegumen Philaret Bulekov of the Moscow Patriarchate. Delegates consistently expressed that political leaders have a responsibility to “serve the most vulnerable, the most poor, the most marginalized, and the most oppressed.” “We gather to speak out of the depths of our religious tradition; to speak out of our truths to challenge the G8 leaders and to recommit ourselves to address the needs of dire poverty,” said Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton, general secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches—truths that were put into the (Adamakis, et al., 2011) statement:

At the heart of our reflections are principles and values common to our religions and universally upheld: the essential and irrevocable dignity of all human beings; accountability for the goodness of creation; the ultimate value of reconciliation and forgiveness; the centrality of freedom and justice. (para. 4)

When I asked a delegate what brings them to Bordeaux, she or he quoted a sacred text saying,

True religion is to look after the orphans and widows. It is written in Isaiah 58 that the kind of fasting acceptable to God loosens the chains of injustice, sets the oppressed free, shares food with the hungry, provides shelter and clothes.

In his summit address, Cardinal Jean-Pierre Ricard said,

Undoubtedly, as religious leaders we are not financial experts. We are not even politicians. But still we are convinced that the decisions the heads of state make demand from all citizens an open mind and openness through solidarity which demands a real engagement by avoiding closing off within ourselves. We are here to avoid the cynicism and fatalism that might exist in people as a consequence of globalization marked by the financial crisis. By addressing the G8 leaders and submitting our statement, we are not neglecting our responsibilities.

Dr. William F. Vendley, the secretary general for Religions for Peace, said,

We are here to honor the deepest specificity of our respective faiths. At the same time, and we feel no contradiction, we come together in a spirit of partnership that reaches out to governments and to all other stakeholders linked to service in the spirit of the common good. We recognize that in our particularities of faith we are also citizens of the world, united.

Speakers often used religious imagery full of promise and transformation. In remarks on climate change, Rev. Dr. John Chryssavgis said,

The way we view the world affects how we treat it. We treat it in a godless manner because we view it as godforsaken. Unless we change how we see it, we won’t change how we treat it . . . And if the world is an image that reflects the presence of God, then nothing whatsoever can lack sacredness. If God cannot be worshiped here, then God cannot be seen in heaven, either.

“We must learn to see the world through the eyes of God,” he said.

If God saw the world as very good, we too must learn to see the promise of beauty and see the world in its interrelatedness. All things look to God and when God sends forth his breath, all creation happens all over again and the face of the earth is renewed.

10. Positions taken: FAMs seek outcomes compatible with the values, norms, and principles of democratic governance. Democratic principles of governance—serving the common good, respecting human rights, encouraging accountability and
transparency, attention to diversity—were common themes woven throughout the Interfaith Summit. One delegate came specifically “to assist the G8/G20 leadership in reframing the issues consistent with our being one people.” Metropolitan Emmanuel said,

The religious perspective and the dialogue that inspires our work is important. We want to relieve human suffering in our world. You are here because you are interested in solutions . . . How much better for the earth and those who dwell in it if we embrace change in government structures that advance human rights? This will require a new way of seeing things. Let us take measures to preserve our own home, but also our neighbor’s.

Cardinal Jean-Pierre Ricard echoed these sentiments:

We want to be contributors of peace to all people of all faiths from the spirituality that lives within us. We want to promote the well-being of all people, justice and solidarity between peoples . . . We understand that globalization promotes inequalities and creates problems of injustice . . . We should try to correct the inequities that might cause disquiet.

Pasteur Claude Baty, Co-President of the Council of the Christian Churches in France, said, “I think this conference is a sure sign that the faithful religious people not only think of how to disagree with each other, but also how to work together and how to be exemplary citizens.” M. Mohammed Moussaouit, representing the Muslim communities of France, emphasized the importance of showing mutual respect and sharing common values despite religious differences, so that leaders can “accompany those who are traumatized by life and put in them a little flame of hope for their future.” Bishop Marc Stenger spoke about governmental reform: “Global governance should not just be in the hands of those with political and economic power. It should involve all of us.” He called for frank and open dialogue between the G8/G20 and the global village through greater geographic representation, civic involvement, and interfaith contributions. Rev. Dr. Andrew Carmine, General Secretary of the All Africa Conference of Churches, addressed the issue of greater bioregional representation for Africa in global governance, saying, “We are tired of having others doing things for us, instead of with us.” Africa, he said, should participate in the G8. But more than that, “We should be able to ask for Africa’s marginalization to stop . . . If there is a crisis, let us resolve the crisis.” Susanne Tamas, Bahá’í delegate from Canada, commented that

the legitimacy of governance depends in large part on the engagement of the voice of people . . . Systems of global governance must likewise evolve to reflect the fundamental oneness of humanity distinguished by fair representation in collective deliberation and decision-making processes.

The positions taken in the statement (Adamakis, et al., 2011) delivered to the G8/G20 leaders reflected democratic principles such as ensuring “political self-determination” (para. 7), supplementing rather than undermining the “UN General Assembly and other UN processes” (para. 9), incorporating the voice of “low income countries” (para. 10), and making the G8/G20 process “more transparent” so that the civil society and religious bodies can help ensure “substantively enhanced compliance of the G8 with its own commitments” (para. 11).

Conclusion

Weberian concepts are assessed according to adequacy in terms of meaning, significance, and use because of their interpretive partial representation of reality. In this article, I explored the theoretical “black box” associated with the political–religious nexus using existing theory to identify a FAM framed as service rather than surveillance. I illustrated 10 attributes of this typology using data from the 2011 Interfaith Summit. But Weber’s constant point in using the ideal-type method was that there is a difference and distance between concept and reality (Drysdale, 1996). To avoid reification, it is worthwhile to consider the extent to which the 2011 summit process reflects the ideal type put forward (see Table 4). The data indicated strong support for attributes (1), (3), (4), (5), (6), and (9). All of the topics addressed at the summit are intransigent global social problems where there is an associated lack of global political will (1). Delegates were nonpartisan, aware that disagreement with political leaders should never devolve into disengagement (3). All of the major issues addressed by the delegates related to intransigent social problems that operate at the global level of analysis. Sessions consistently focused on accepting global responsibility for reforming global governance, responding to the macroeconomic situation, North and South partnering for development, investing in peace, and fostering multireligious cooperation. Delegates were consistently careful in pointing out that G8 political leaders were formally responsible to national electorates but were ethically responsible to dialogue with Interfaith leaders about how to problem solve global issues. Data strongly indicate that delegates are convinced that dialogue with people of faith about the common good is warranted by the pressing need (4). Delegates were so wary of becoming formally organized that their infrastructure is fragile, they are underfunded, and their future is in doubt. I was unable to find any attempts to fuse the various faith traditions into a single religion. In cases where delegates represented faith traditions that made comprehensive truth claims, they were careful to clarify that such
claims do not close them off to dialogue with “the other” for purposes of deeper understanding and service to the common good (5). Attention to diversity was a consistent theme running through the presentations, questionnaires, interviews, and the statement (6). Delegates were unapologetic in their use of faith-based language (9), speaking to one another using the deep language within each of their traditions in presentations, around the dinner table, in interviews, and ultimately in the public statement; this was remarkable given that the host was France, one of the strongest G8 proponents of the “principle of secularity.”

The data indicated medium support for attributes (2) and (10). Although delegates consistently expressed a commitment within their own faith tradition to serve the vulnerable in society, when the conversation was directed to political leaders, initial statement drafts sometimes used the language of surveillance. This is where dialogue between religious leaders becomes an important aspect of the process. During the summit, surveillance language converted to a service focus. Ample data strongly reinforced delegates’ personal sense of responsibility toward serving the global community (2). Although all of the recommendations made by the delegates were compatible with democracy, delegates displayed mixed perspectives on what types of governance structures might address global responsibilities. Most delegates neither advocated for nor believed that a world government is currently feasible, but delegates favored strengthening the United Nations framework. Strengthening human rights, and increasing the transparency and accountability of global governance were consistent themes. The delegates were very aware that they were there to address global issues in conversation with political leaders representing nation-states. But several delegates were cautious about encouraging the G8 leaders to exercise stronger leadership, wary of what that might mean for countries such as Russia. Delegates favored stronger transnationalism for Africa and upheld the European Union’s transnational macroeconomic model. Delegate support for a stronger United Nations indicated mixed perspectives as to whether state sovereignty could, or should, be diminished (or strengthened in some cases) to enable the coalition of nation-states to accept greater responsibility for increased global governance and support emergent structures such as the International Criminal Court (10).

The data indicated weak support for attributes (7) and (8). The interviews clearly indicated that the dialogue mechanism is in the early stages of a long process. Although there is growing interaction between religious and political leaders within several of the host countries, the Interfaith Leaders have yet to have a face-to-face meeting with the G8 politicians. Delegates put into the statement their intention to be at the next two meetings, but the dialogue process with the G8 group is still primarily a one-way conversation (7). Data indicate that delegates are finding their footing, increasingly able to articulate appropriate, and inappropriate, manner of conduct when speaking in the political realm. Data strongly indicate that delegates are reflexive and capable of empathically putting themselves outside of their own worldview and within the worldview of politicians who answer to national electorates. Perhaps this contributes to delegates’ strong commitment to being a coalition. They are hypersensitive to anything that might give the appearance of a religious grab for power. To the extent that a continuance committee even exists, the members have been hesitant to take much initiative between meetings, relying heavily on cajoling people to take on responsibility as national hosts. The organization has functioned on short-term grant money, most of which ended with the May 2011 Summit. Consequently, with each new summit, local “first timer” hosts have to be socialized by long-term delegates about how the dialogue process works (8).

Given these strengths and weaknesses, it is reasonable to conclude that the Interfaith Dialogue Mechanism adequately represents the FAM typology in meaning, significance, and use. As an organization, the future is fragile. As an idea, its time has come. As a legitimate entity, the need for it has never been greater. In the end, I am reminded of Jacques Ellul (1985) who reasoned that the bearer of truths must be the most vulnerable of agents so that the listener remains free.

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