

## **God bless the crisis**

*Life is full of uncertainties, which is why people want to believe in something. Faith gives us the feeling that we have some degree of control. So we believe in God, we believe in money, in the stock exchange, in Darwinism or creationism, we believe in certain political leaders, in the healthcare system, in technology.*

Faith seems to give us a sense of control, of being at the helm of our own lives. But, paradoxically, it makes us more vulnerable and dependent instead. What we do, in fact, is place our lives in someone else's hands. In the hands of God, in the hands of banks and stock brokers, of technology, of insurance companies, of political leaders, and of the healthcare system. We do this to try and gain some control, but it paralyses us instead.

## **House of cards**

This is becoming inescapably apparent now that one of our most important belief systems – our faith in financial markets – has collapsed. This is because the financial system can only stay afloat as long as it is buoyed up by faith. Faith that the numbers on your bank statement can be made real and tangible, in the form money. Faith that we can rely on our assets being in good hands. Consumers trust the bank, the bank trusts other banks, and so on. In this way, we have collectively placed our fates in the hands of others. We've sidestepped our responsibilities *en masse*. At some point, of course, this had to go wrong. The banking crisis has upset our faith in the financial system – and without faith, any belief system must come down like a house of cards.

## **Bubble**

But the financial system is not the only one affected. It is as if this feeling has spread like an oil stain to our sense of faith in general. The signs were there already, of course. Politics was in trouble, churches were in trouble, and brands too. But now that the biggest bubble has burst, the effects seem to resonate throughout our sense of faith. We wonder why we should believe at all. An example of this is the recent discussion on the origins of man. Even the Vatican is now wondering if they should not put more stock in Darwin's version, as opposed to a literal interpretation of the Bible.

Another trend is to call on people to stop believing anything and everything. Like the atheist billboard along the A4 highway that read, "There probably is no God. Dare to think for yourself. Enjoy this life".

And that, at the same time, is the reason why this crisis is also a blessing. The Chinese sign for crisis, significantly, means both "disaster" and "opportunity". Because now that the bubbles have burst, the air has also cleared. As a consequence, people, companies and brands have had to reinvent themselves. People are starting to think for themselves again, taking their destinies into their own hands.

We are being forced to let go of the familiar systems and to re-examine the building blocks of our lives. That brings clarity, and new energy. Because where we used to be dependent on belief systems, we are now discovering that we can do things ourselves. This is a source of renewed power and, well, even I have to concede... *Yes we can!*

### **Our own hands**

This is evidenced by the fact that now, with the world in crisis, we are seeing an enormous growth in the number of independent entrepreneurs. More and more, we are taking healthcare into our own hands. There are now even health department stores, where you can buy preventative products yourself, such as fitness equipment, nutritional supplements and medical aids like rollators and anti-bedsore mattresses. There are also vacation auctions where people make up their own minds how much they are prepared to pay for a trip. Restaurants are experimenting with the same mechanism: guests determine how much the food is worth to them. At the website [wijbouweneenwijk.nl](http://wijbouweneenwijk.nl) ([wearebuildinganeighbourhood.com](http://wearebuildinganeighbourhood.com)), people who live in a certain district are invited to take part in determining the design of their neighbourhood.

An increasing number of people want to have a say in how they end their lives. More and more senior citizens are requesting euthanasia. They would rather swallow a cocktail of pills than end up in a home for the elderly. And we now prefer to borrow money from each other, rather than going to the bank. There is even a website where private people can lend each other money: [boober.nl](http://boober.nl).

### **Creative solutions**

As soon as people start thinking for themselves again, creative solutions to our problems will start to emerge. We cannot pass the buck anymore, we cannot wait for the system to give us answers. We are being forced to think independently, and to see that there is something rotten in the current brand of system thinking. Perhaps this will open the way to fundamental solutions for problems like environmental pollution. Because we are now looking at these issues on a different level.

For brands, this may mean that they will have to rely on their own strengths for now, and create their own vision, because only strengths that are true to character are believable now. At a following stage, brands may also help people to fend for themselves. An example is FBTO's "Insurance. Do it yourself" campaign.

So here's the rub. If faith in systems paralysed us, then faith in our own strength will give us new energy and put us back in control. And that new strength is the current crisis's blessing in disguise.

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