

# 1997 Conference Opening Address

**Dr. Michael Naughton**

**University of St. Thomas**

On behalf of the advisory committee and the institutional sponsors of this conference, it is a great honor to welcome you to the Second International Symposium on Catholic Social Thought and Management Education. My name is Michael Naughton and I am the director of the Institute for Christian Social Thought and Management of the Center for Catholic Studies at the University of St. Thomas.

The purpose of this Conference is to enhance the Catholic character of business schools by examining the interdisciplinary relationships of Catholic social thought and management practice and theory. In one sense your presence here today is a sign that we are already on our way to tackling this task. Participants of this conference are scholars and practitioners from more than 22 countries from the areas of law, theology, finance, philosophy, engineering, management, economics, and marketing. While we come from diverse disciplines and cultures, we are united to examine and engage Catholic Social Thought and Management Education. We do this to strengthen and renew the Integrity of the Catholic university as well as to deepen our own understanding of the human person and the human enterprise of work.

As we gather from different disciplines, we realize that truth is not the monopoly of one academic department, but an ever present encounter of various disciplines that provides a further deepening of our own area of thought and practice. Every university, and especially a Catholic university, must resist the temptation of overspecialization that fragments not only knowledge but also the student. All too often, for example, business students think they are in the mere realm of application with no theory or principles informing their actions. Their focus on financial and productive techniques clouds the possible discovery and engagement of first principles. As educators, we must help our students to develop, in the words of John Henry Newman, the philosophical habit "of pushing things up to their first principles." For this to be effective in management education, it must be interdisciplinary.

In a Catholic university, this interdisciplinary practice must take seriously the Catholic social tradition broadly understood. Another temptation in universities, and Catholic universities are not immune from it, is the exclusion of religious knowledge and tradition from the curriculum outside the discipline of theology. We no doubt live in a pluralistic world; yet, it is precisely because of such pluralism, and in particular the institutional pluralism of universities, that Catholic universities should guarantee the articulation and exploration of Catholic social thought as it is related to business theory and practice. As Alasdair MacIntyre explained "If we do not recover and identify with the particularities

of our own community [and tradition], then we shall lose what it is that we have to contribute to the common culture. We shall have nothing to bring, nothing to give." Yet, he warns that "if each of us dwells too much, or even exclusively, upon his or her own ethnic [or religious] particularity, then we are in danger of fragmenting and even destroying the common life."

As we have organized this symposium, our hope has been that it would be animated by several complementary qualities which would bring the richness of the Catholic social tradition into contact with management theory and practice. These complementary qualities are: Catholic and ecumenical; interdisciplinary and specialized; international and cultural; theoretical and practical. The integration of such qualities will demand hard work and is riddled with misunderstandings as different disciplines and cultures attempt to dialogue and understand each other. But if we do it with humility as well as with courage to encounter areas of knowledge not in our own specialization, then we can contribute to a management education that is consistent with the Catholic character of its institution. By taking seriously the unique institutional Catholic context many of us find ourselves in, we can avoid the "cookie cutter mentality" that Lyman Porter and Lawrence McKibbin found in their study of many US schools of management. We can both fulfill our institutional mission as a Catholic university and contribute to a richer and deeper understanding of business and management education.

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