

**A BUSINESS FACULTY PERSPECTIVE ON CATHOLIC MISSION,  
IDENTITY AND SOCIAL PRINCIPLES**  
**Jeanne Buckeye**

This paper reports on research conducted among and about business faculty at a Catholic university. Its purpose is to develop a better picture of the business faculty in its entirety, to learn what attracted individuals to the university and its business programs, and finally, to understand their thinking about the university's Catholic mission, its impact on them and their perception of how their work as business faculty serves that mission.

**Introduction**

Underlying the prospect of mission-driven business education is a central question: what role should faculty play in the enterprise? Is it sufficient for business professors to be committed to their disciplines, proficient in research, effective in teaching? Or is commitment to the mission necessary, too? The Catholic university that takes its Catholic mission seriously is seeking to inform and shape the educational experience for students in a particular way, to be more and to offer more than generic education in a Catholic wrapper. At the very heart of this work in the university is the teacher-scholar whose job it is to seek and to communicate knowledge, to seek an integration of knowledge, to inspire learning and to keep the content and process of education ever new. The teacher-scholar whose professional life is centered in a university with a Catholic mission, is asked to do still more: "It is essential that we be convinced of the priority of the ethical over the technical, of the primacy of the person over things, of the superiority of the spirit over matter." (*Ex corde ecclesiae*) This is the challenge for the business faculty in a Catholic university, no less than for faculty in any other discipline.

**Hiring and managing to mission.** Management literature, particularly in organizational behavior and strategy, emphasizes the value of the mission statement in ordering strategic choices and shaping organizational culture. Coupled with codes of ethics, statements of core values and vision statements, mission statements are tools for more than strategic differentiation and action; they also "profess" an organizational purpose that becomes the basis for a unique identity, or even brand. When an integrated package of statements and codes and expectations has clarity and substance, it can become the basis for recruiting and screening employees, for hiring decisions and training practices, for evaluative and formative employee feedback, promotions and for rewards. More than just "hiring to mission," the best organizations also "manage to mission." The practice accounts for a veritable army of former GE managers who for the past half-dozen years or so have scattered across the corporate landscape, often recruited and hired *because* they have the GE management brand. And GE is just one among many examples.

The practice of "hiring to mission" is used in universities too, though it may not be described as such. A candidate's perceived proficiency (e.g., publishing record) in the discipline and fit with the particular focus of the institution are common hiring criteria. Doctoral students with high research aspirations learn early which schools have research missions, with resources and performance expectations to match the candidates' own interests. In the early years of a faculty careers, the rank and tenure process is also used to "manage to mission," especially in

highly focused research and teaching schools. Tenure and promotion may depend on getting the right amount of work published in the right journals, thus rewarding performance that enhances a school's reputation for research leadership and supporting a research-focused mission – at least until the tenure decision is made.

Long-term emphasis on excellence in one area may come at the expense of other mission-critical qualities, organizational identity and even capacity change. Burtchaell and others have suggested that many religiously affiliated schools in the United States, Catholic schools included, have risked and even lost their faith-based identity for just this reason. When schools focus on hiring strictly for individual candidates' excellence in their discipline, or in research or teaching, they may unwittingly downplay qualities that enhance the makeup of the faculty as a whole. A desirable balance, integrating capability or institutional understanding that resides only in the faculty as a whole may be put at risk, and with it, organizational identity. For example, candidates' sympathy toward a school's faith affiliation, the liberal arts or other significant element of institutional identity could make a substantial contribution to institutional mission overall. So why not emphasize candidate qualities that serve the broader mission? It takes more time, for one thing, and it may test institutional patience to by-pass a candidate who excels on the discipline criterion, but lacks qualities consistent with other qualities of the school's mission. Supply and demand in the candidate pool, urgency of staffing needs, mission clarity and leadership in the search process also affect institutional patience. Faculty hiring necessarily shines a light on performance and specialization in a discipline, so all things considered, a hiring decision based on this characteristic looks like a failsafe position.

**Changing and adapting to mission.** Assume that a business school in a Catholic university undertakes the challenge to offer more than a good business education in a Catholic university, but instead to offer good business education that has a particularly "Catholic quality." What task would it be taking on? Of what would such an education consist? How would it be designed? Delivered? Assessed? Promoted among perspective students and explained to employers? The answer to every one of these questions has "faculty" written in its heart. Without their interest, engagement and support such an undertaking would be virtually impossible. Worse, without their full cooperation and participation, such an enterprise would violate the basic principles of subsidiarity and participation that are, or should be, core values in any Catholic institution.

Now ask, if the idea of delivering an authentically "Catholic business education" were proposed to business faculty in a Catholic university, how would they respond? At a minimum – variously. Enthusiasm, acceptance, curiosity, confusion, skepticism, resistance, disdain – it is easy to imagine all of these responses and more. To get beyond an initial response and into actual consideration of the idea, what would it take? Respect, listening, patience, of course: but also, knowledge of the faculty, individually and as a whole. Yet the very qualities and attitudes that might be most helpful to know about a faculty in anticipation of any such scenario are some of the things most difficult to ask about and easy to avoid, especially in an employment interview. Does it matter to you that this is a Catholic institution? What does that mean to you? Do you find yourself in sympathy with Catholic identity? Offended by it? Merely tolerant? Before starting the discussion it would be helpful to know enough about the faculty, at least in broad strokes, to assess realistically the dimensions of the task. Any dean who seriously

undertook the challenge of shaping a uniquely “Catholic business education,” or even engaging the question with faculty, would want to know who might be possible leaders in the project, to understand resistance and its sources, to assess the size and scope of the task before beginning.

**Getting to know the faculty.** Serious efforts to emphasize a mission-driven business education in a Catholic university depend on faculty acceptance. Hiring faculty who can contribute to the endeavor from the beginning is helpful. But for business programs that choose to re-envision their education in a particularly Catholic way, gaining the support of the existing faculty is crucial. Like any change it begins with awareness, but much lies between awareness and successful implementation rooted in acceptance: explanation and education about the idea and its purpose, authentic dialogue and participation, problem solving, negotiation and priority setting -- with faculty engaged every step of the way. In an institution that has hired business faculty primarily with attention to the discipline, research or teaching, and with less concern for a Catholic mission, chances are there will be no faculty profile that could shed light on the general openness to a Catholic mission. Developing such a profile would seem to be a respectful and necessary first step in the process. It is this necessary step that provides the context for the research described in this paper.

### **Overview of the Study**

As a participant in the year long conversations about the nature of business education in a Catholic university that were the genesis of this conference, the author of this study became interested in the question of how a pluralistic business faculty might react to a proposal to emphasize Catholic identity in business education. Convinced that getting to know more about the business faculty was a necessary first step for any such effort, the paper’s author sought and received permission from the business school dean to explore this question among his faculty. The paper reports findings from this research, and in particular, three areas:

1. What role University mission and identity play in attracting business faculty to a Catholic university.
2. How faculty view the University mission and identity in relation to their academic work once they have become part of the university community.
3. The extent to which business faculty are aware of mission-related ideas like Catholic Social Thought and how they might use these in their academic work.

The setting for this research is the school of business in a Catholic university in a Midwestern state. Students in the school’s graduate and undergraduate business programs, more than 2560 combined, account for about 42 percent of the university’s total enrollment.

Over a period of about four months in the spring of 2007, the author conducted individual structured interviews with 49 full time business faculty representing all eight departments, and more than half of all faculty in the business school. Designed to take approximately one hour each, the interview covered four primary areas: 1) interviewee’s demographic data relative to education and length of service at the university; 2) motivation for choosing to join the faculty; 3) reflections on the mission of a Catholic University (from *Ex*

*corde*), and on the specific missions of the university in question and its school of business; 4) reflections on Catholic Social Thought as an element of Catholic identity pertinent to economics and business.

### **Report and Discussion of Findings**

Each of the paper's three primary sections on the findings of this study offers basic quantitative data and descriptive statistics. While the interview design emphasized open-ended questions, interviewer also asked participants to respond to scaled some questions, e.g., "How important is this to you....?" Each section includes quotations from summary comments to illustrate a particular point or a perspective.

**Faculty Profile.** This part of the paper reports on demographic data provided by interviewees profiling their education in the profession, their discipline, faculty status and length of service at the university. It also reports on what factors were most important to them in their decision to join the university, the role of the university's mission in that decision, and any concerns or doubts they might have had about joining the university faculty.

**Mission.** Asked to focus first on the mission of a Catholic university, then on the university's mission and finally on the mission of the school of business, interviewees reflected on the perceived importance of the mission as a whole and on particular ideas it expressed. Follow-up questions focused on whether, or how, individual faculty members saw the mission as a guide or inspiration in their work at the university – in teaching, research or service. This section of the paper reports on overall awareness and personal understanding of mission, and its importance and application in the faculty member's work.

**Identity.** Comments about Catholic Social Thought in general, and particular principles of CST are the subject of this section. As a phrase that describes a body of papal and documents and reports from church leaders on social questions, CST is phrase that is widely used in the university, but perhaps not so well understood, even by Catholics. It does, however, have the advantage of being a specific example of a way of thinking and of moral judgment associated with a "Catholic" view of justice and economic issues. It also has the advantage of addressing decision making and action, i.e., guidance for living with one's faith in the broader culture. This section of the paper reports on interviewees' reflections about CST, about their understanding of specific principles, and about how they use – or could use – the principle in the context of teaching in their discipline.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

This section summarizes key findings and questions from the study, and offers reflections on the meaning of these findings, particularly for inviting faculty to explore the idea of a "Catholic business education. Interviewing 49 business faculty members, and hearing their reflections on professional life, personal reasons for being at the university and the meaning of work in relation to mission was a rich experience. While the details of individual questions and interviewee perspectives are illuminating, more important is a general observation. For many faculty "Catholic" itself is a vague and mysterious term; yet there is also an openness and curiosity to learning about it, especially with regard to its meaning for the mission and identity of a Catholic university and for business education.