

**TEACHING BUSINESS ETHICS IN EUROPEAN CATHOLIC BUSINESS SCHOOLS. HOW
CHRISTIAN VALUES MAY INTEREST STUDENTS IF NOT ANNOUNCED AS SUCH
Geert Demuijnck**

The situation in the European business schools which are part of catholic universities or institutions of higher education is rather different from the American Catholic Business Schools. European culture nowadays is much more secular in general. It is, for a business school, not obvious to announce publicly to be or to belong to a Catholic institution. Consequently, its religious anchorage is sometimes not openly mentioned, neither in the name of the institution, nor in its presentation on its website, or in advertisements. More surprisingly, and although this is far from always the case, students may sometimes graduate from Catholic business schools without being aware of their Catholic background. This is especially the case in France, Belgium and the Netherlands, less so in e.g. Spain. In other countries, with the exceptions of Poland and, to some extent, Ireland, Catholic universities and business schools are exceptions.

Let us face it: the reason why the situation has evolved in this way is that in the competitive environment of business schools, the label 'Catholic' is not considered to be an attractive one. Against the general background of the a-religious contemporary liberal culture, the Catholic Church is mainly perceived and criticized for its positions about sexuality and, to a lesser extent, criticized for its sexism. The liberal media contribute to this, admittedly, sometimes one-sided perception. Still, even among the remaining Catholics, the official message about, say, contraception is almost generally considered to be disconnected with reality, not to say wrong (figures of opinion polls abound). Other issues, such as the refusal of access to priesthood for women and, more recently, the official rejection of 'altar girls' deeply troubled many people, among which the more progressive part of Catholics.

Against this background, referring to Catholic Social Teaching (CST) in, e.g., courses of business ethics, is more or less surrealistic. Students do not have the slightest idea of what the lecturer is talking about. However, this does not mean that students are totally rejecting the set of values related to CST. It is the vocabulary more than the content which is problematic. The same problem may be present elsewhere as well, but in Europe, students are on the average rather hostile to religious references, also in Catholic business schools. Still, all this does not imply that students would be indifferent to important lessons that can be derived from or related to CST.

In my paper, I illustrate, according to two topics, how the set of values of Catholic Social Teaching may, despite its untimely character, be presented as a surprisingly interesting source of criticism on the vision which is transmitted in most courses that are taught in business schools in general.

The first topic is rather obvious. Business students are nowadays very much interested in questions related to topics such as sustainable development and corporate social responsibility. Students reject in general companies or business sectors which are famous for weak records on these issues. A large minority of students is much interested in even more militant topics such as fair trade, and underlying issues such as economic development, international inequality and economic migration. In how far the interest in these topics may be related to the Christian background of the students (or their parents) has, to my knowledge, not been examined. Be that as it may, these topics are usually discussed in a standard economical and philosophical vocabulary.

The currently in Europe much defended vision is the one of selective economic migration, i.e. wealthy countries have the right to select immigration candidates on the basis of their productive capacity. On the other hand, people who want to get into the country for reasons related to family relations, or people who want to flee misery, are flown back to their country of origin.

It is interesting to examine what the long-term effects are of this selective immigration policy. Economists have examined the effect on the development of human capital of the countries which will most likely be victims of the 'brain drain' (Morocco, Algeria, Sub Saharan Africa etc.): not only will this policy widen the gap between rich and poor countries; the policy also undermines those countries' efforts to develop economically (Defoort & Docquier 2007). Subsequently, one may examine the contemporary philosophical debate on global justice and migration (Rawls, Pogge, Carens, Miller, etc.). It turns out to be the case the nationalistic arguments seem quite weak to justify. In fact, very few authors clearly condemn protectionist labour market policies (I will spell out this some more in my paper)

I have read a lot of authors on this issue over the past years and the most radical text I came across was, surprisingly, *Pacem in terris* by John XXIII. Comparing recent philosophical debates with the quite radical points advanced by Pope John XXIII in *Pacem in Terris* comes as a total surprise.

This is indeed a very challenging text. Paragraph 25 says: "Every human being has the right to freedom of movement and of residence within the confines of his own country; and, when there are just reasons for it, the right to migrate to other countries and take up residence there." In paragraph 29 it goes on to say that everyone has "... the right to a decent standard of living..." Correspondingly, the text mentions the obligation for governments "to safeguard the inviolable rights of the human person, and to facilitate the performance of his duties..." I consider that in contemporary Western countries, any political party that would put this encyclical high on its agenda would commit political suicide.

Of course, one should qualify and distinguish between a prophetic verb and a politically feasible measure here and now. Still, as a prophetic verb, the text undermines many currently defended ideas.

On the basis of this ideal, we may ask which policy can be defended, taking the currently known facts and feasibility constraints into account. It quickly becomes clear that, e.g. the statement of the French bishops made before last year's elections in France points exactly to the weaknesses of the widely accepted discourse on immigration.

Other references to CST have the same surprising effect. The Catholic Church, in Europe at least, is considered by most students as obviously condoning capitalism. The critical position of the Church, quite easily compatible with current issues of sustainable development, is mostly unknown.

A more fundamental, and less obvious, issue is related to legal positivism. Business students receive an education in law (commercial law mostly, but not exclusively) that is deeply rooted in legal positivism. Questions of whether rights are morally well-founded are discarded. This legal positivist attitude leads to an instrumental, not to say cynical view on law. The legal and

judiciary system are considered to be merely 'constraints' which should be taken into account in the process of maximizing profit. Condemnation by the tribunal is just another risk. This attitude, largely reflected in the lectures and publications of the business law lecturers, rejects the intrinsic value of the law and, consequently, its underlying moral basis. In the paper, I illustrate how legal positivism is omnipresent in current business education.

Just one example here: the French company l'Oréal created a new brand of perfume some time ago called 'Champagne'. Of course, Champagne is a trade mark and is as such protected. It is obvious that the legal advisers of l'Oréal were perfectly aware of this. Nevertheless, they decided to commercialize the 'Champagne perfume'. A few months later, they were judged by the court and obliged to withdraw the Champagne perfume from the market. Despite the compensation l'Oréal had to pay, the brand turned out to have been very profitable. The lesson drawn from this story is that the legal advisers were right: one should violate the law whenever the sanction one risks is less costly than the estimated benefice. This cynical way of considering the law is common especially in classes of trade law. Underlying is of course the fundamental vision of legal positivism.

Discussing the intrinsically problematic consequences of the paradigm of legal positivism leads to fundamental questions of the moral foundations of the law and the tradition of natural law, at the opposite of legal positivism. One may spell out the slippery slope argument of applying legal positivism to social or even human rights. But more fundamentally, we may apply the same questions of intrinsic value to other topics: discussions of the legitimacy of property rights according to, say, Thomas Aquinas again sounds quite exotic. However, against the usually unquestioned background of legal positivism, this exoticism is a delight, also for students.

Especially interesting in the French context of secularity (laïcité) is to go back to some texts by Jacques Maritain. Skipping the question of whether faith is necessary to judge whether some action or decision is intrinsically right or wrong, the very step to ask questions in terms of intrinsic value (independently of the legal context) seems, against the background of legal positivism, almost subvert.

Of course one may push the discussion to a more fundamental level and underline the problematic aspect of an intercultural compromise on which everyone agrees provided no one explicates the underlying reasons. For most business students, though, this becomes quickly too abstract.

The main purpose of my paper is to argue that it is part of the mission of Catholic Business Schools to develop a critical analysis of the underlying value system of at least some particular visions on business, and that, surprisingly, CST may supply interesting arguments for such an analysis. It seems absolutely useless to proselytize, but to base your reflections on a mostly neglected tradition usually has a surprising, and therefore, stimulating effect. It is a pity, especially in Catholic business schools, not to exploit this mostly neglected reflective potential of the own tradition.