

Catholic Business Education – the Missing link in the Transformation of Polish Economy

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Thesis/purpose: I would like to show in this paper how Catholic business education (CBE) could support and facilitate transition from centrally planned to free-market economy in Poland. It is also a good example of situation how professional and organizational style of life differs seriously from private sphere when CBE is barely present in the country which is often identified as Catholic.

Introduction

Living in Poland these days is a fascinating though challenging experience for many reasons. One of them is the fact that our country is in the time of transition. I called it in the title of my paper “the transformation of Polish economy” which in fact is just the piece of the whole picture. Though it is most spectacular sphere of change, it seems needless to say that Poland in fact is in the process of serious social - political, cultural and economical – transition. It is not simply linear - as the road from socialism to capitalism - but it is the whole complex of changes taking place at the same time. One has to consider not only internal factors and issues but also external changes and trends that have impact. To illustrate this we can say that building free market economy (almost from the foundations) after 1989 was accompanied not only by serious economic problems in Poland as a consequence of communist command economy but also by rapid changes in global market so the process of transforming our business reality was - and still is – arduous and difficult, often irrational and unpredictable. It wasn't so simply because life obviously brings problems and surprises. That is true, but one has to pay attention to the specific heritage after decades of communism which we have to deal with. Their impact must be described as devastating and holding back our contemporary development. The consequences are of all kinds – material, mental and spiritual. Let's take for example destroyed work ethos, lack of mutual trust (connected also with activity of secret police), passive attitude towards life (state was “taking care” of almost everything), prejudice against control, rules and authorities...

Fortunately there are reasons for satisfaction – I would say that the consequences that I described above could be even worse. When you compare in what shape different countries came out of communism, it is clear that Poland was one of these which weren't destroyed completely. Among different reasons for that I would certainly indicate (as the major one) Catholicism and the Church which became a sort of Noah's Ark in the midst of “red ocean”. Its existence, presence and faithful solidarity with Polish nation preserved and nurtured human dignity and spirit of initiative.

In my paper I want to analyze how our Polish situation proves that Catholic business education is a necessary tool for development and dissemination of Catholic social teaching (CST) - which in fact is the Gospel that contemporary society needs urgently to live and work as humans.

Catholic Nation and Communist State, Catholic Social Teaching and Secularized Command Economy – Polish Situation

In this part I would like to describe specific situation of our identity. It is important to see how modern history influenced over thousand years long Catholic tradition what results in paradoxes such as these mentioned above. Poland is still called a Catholic country though many aspects of everyday life are organized in a way very distant from the Catholic way. In this section I am going to show how it happened.

Last two hundred years (with few short exceptions) of our history can be described as the time of persecution of Polish state, nation and culture. It means that it was also the persecution of Polish Church and Catholicism as they have always had great impact on our identity and became natural part of it. No wonder then that after partition of Poland in the end of eighteenth century by Russia, Prussia and Austria it became one of the obstacles in transforming annexations into “natural” parts of these countries. In many different ways the conquerors tried to weaken Polish identity and impose their own culture. After the World War I Poland regained independence and was a free country only until the beginning of the World War II (1918-1939). Only then throughout these two centuries Poles could build their own state like other free nations. After 1945 – though officially we were on the map again – Poland was not free anymore. Our country became dependent on Soviet Union which meant that our policy was following the patterns realized in USSR. One of them was official atheism of the state and more or less open dislike for religion. Another characteristic of this system was its tendency to monopolize every sphere of society. All the free initiative and entrepreneurship that was private was treated with suspicion and of course not supported but very often attacked by different e.g. bureaucratic means.

We had just one Catholic university then and most of the business activity was reserved for state institutions. Other thing is that most of Church’s efforts were devoted – apart from sharing Gospel – to support and organize political resistance. Church structures were kept isolated from economy therefore we could hardly see results of implementing its social doctrine in practice. It was simply not allowed. The state machine tried to control and stop any attempt to implement Christian ideas outside of private life (where they were reluctantly allowed). Fortunately – and it must be said – with Holy Spirit assistance this anti-human project did not succeed. The seed planted by the Church’s teaching - watered and supported by laity - bore fruit. Its name is solidarity movement – phenomenon being – among others - a fruit of Church’s perseverance to speak up and remind of human dignity in all areas of social life.

When one asks question if Poland – as a Catholic country – had opportunity after 1989 to start building its new free market economy right from the beginning on Christian foundations (and free from the mistakes that capitalist systems make) the answer must be yes, but the chance was very small. I think it’s reasonable to say that the very spirit of solidarity and violence free transformation in its roots must have had the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless it came onto the ground which was very destroyed and devastated, so the unique chance of building new economy with proper understanding of what it should be – wasn’t possible.

Development of CBE in Poland

Another fact showing this paradoxical situation in Poland is that it is a country where most of citizens declare commitment to Catholicism and at the same time we are a country almost without Catholic universities. They couldn't be established during the communist era. The only exception was Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski (KUL) – the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin – its existence should be regarded from today's perspective as a great success, even miracle. KUL, established in 1918, is the oldest Catholic university in Middle and Eastern Europe. One of its professors was Karol Wojtyła – pope John Paul II whose name the university bears today.

This shortage of Catholic universities has its consequences. When Poland faced the political change which brought enormous possibilities there was not enough schools that could form and educate Catholic business leaders (also political and social) that could influence the direction of Polish transformation so that it could reflect the ideas of CST to a greater extent. This is why Polish economy starting again after 1989 was in a specific situation regarding personnel. Not only most of people able to work had their only experience from the command communist economy but there was no source of new graduates that would be prepared to embrace CST in their work. It doesn't mean that there's only problem with Catholic education but generally situation in this sphere was far from ideal. Under communism it was not a priority, but fortunately after 1989 the awareness of its necessity and importance – though slowly – is growing.

Regarding the number of Catholic colleges in Poland there are not many and when one considers if they teach business there are quite few. Of course Catholic University of Lublin has its departments of Economy and Management where CST is taught in a narrow scope as it is at all faculties there (only exception is the Institute of Sociology where they study full programme of CST). As far as I have found – there is one more college – Salesian School of Economy and Management in Łódź (Salesjańska Wyższa Szkoła Ekonomii i Zarządzania w Łodzi) – that educates strictly in business. They teach CST as a separate subject, Ethics and General Sociology (that includes issues from CST). Together these three make up from 6-8 % of the whole curriculum. There are two more Catholic colleges – in Warsaw and Toruń - that have majors in areas somehow connected with business.

A lot better (at least in quantitative aspect) situation is among primary and secondary schools. There are about four hundred Catholic schools educating on different levels from primary to secondary¹ (there is also growing number of kindergartens).

This shows that there is change and that awareness of what role can Catholic education play is constantly growing. At the same time it is sad that still there are so few Catholic universities and colleges...

Rediscovering Poland's Economic Identity Through CBE

¹ <http://ekai.pl/serwis/?print=1&MID=5701> (last access 18.07.2008).

In this section I want to give reasons why Catholic business education may be of great importance in Poland. First thing is restoring Polish identity and bringing back to light achievements of our economy in history. This rediscovering of identity is really needed - all the more it is founded to a great extent on Catholic tradition. From this point of view our “style of doing business” differs from this that dominates today and for too long Poles were simply unaware of it and unable to point more than few of the positive examples of our entrepreneurship and innovative actions. It doesn’t mean that our nation was and is better than others but simply that we too have a lot of reasons to be proud.

Respect for local tradition and culture that we find in CST is the best warranty that the identity of our economy will reflect true picture of the past and the present. What more the quest for truth and fundamental belief in its value seem to be the best incentives for proper research and teaching. It is especially important in these days when we have to deal with relativism or nihilism - from one side as a heritage after decades of communism, and from the other as a contemporary postmodern tendency.

This “coming back to roots” may be a healing experience for Polish society and economy which too often nowadays import uncritically ready-made patterns that very often don’t fit properly. Catholic business education may also play important role in rehabilitation of work ethics and values destroyed by communist mentality and propaganda. This reconstruction of natural relation – that communism had broken - between one’s efforts and results is vital for the recovery of every sphere of our social life. For generations the huge amount of time and resources were wasted and it’s high time to see how the potential of talents that we have contributes to the common good.

Another reason for serious engagement of CST into our daily activity – especially in the sphere of education - is that we really need witnesses to the Gospel in the business world. Problems we encounter prove that too often lay business education doesn’t give students concrete moral criteria and ability to distinguish what may be right and wrong in business. It’s true to say that in Poland “whole creation is waiting with eagerness for the children of God to be revealed” (Rm 8,19).

Role of CBS in Time of Transformation From Command Economy to Free Market

Every transformation is difficult even if all taking part in it want it and all the circumstances support it. In situation when there is not full agreement and will to change and at the same time one sees serious mental, material and spiritual obstacles, every transition must be twice as hard. Our transformation somehow reminds me of the exodus of Israel from Egypt – this history shows very well our human nature and that it certainly takes time to leave old ways of life. At the same time it’s like rebuilding of the sailing ship – it’s impossible to stop and fix what doesn’t work. That’s just the way it is.

In 1989 Poland chose to follow difficult path of return from command communist economy towards free-market and democratic system. CBS forming responsible leaders of business promoting common good would play crucial role in this difficult process. At the same time CBE would help to choose right direction as it opens the unique perspective for economy which is absent in other intellectual conceptions. It could remind of true – human-oriented - purpose and

nature of business and teach to see other results of economic activity besides financial profit. At the same time it could help people of business understand how useful tool CST may be in the process of understanding and recognizing what capitalism is and what it may become if let alone without values guarding it. This body of teaching also explains what is the proper perspective of perceiving reality – it proves that change needs time and there must be time, what more - it takes time to experience a real change. Finally it helps to believe that in fact we have time (and not that it has us) and that our destiny is not five, twenty, forty years ahead, but it is in eternity.

Another important role of CBE would be disproving myths and stereotypes present in economy and social image of this sphere of activity. To often people repeat without reflecting on it that the Church is against business and capitalism, that profit is unworthy, and economy is inhuman. Graduates of Catholic business schools would be these who would help others believe again that their work is important and can sanctify them, that economy is a social science, and that above all science there is true good of human being. This verifying function of CST could be realized through introducing it into scientific, public and practical discourse where it's barely present these days in Poland. What more Catholic business schools would naturally enter and explore these interdisciplinary fields of research where lay schools rarely take action.

Although almost absent in its educational dimension I think that it's reasonable to say that somehow – to some extent - CST is present in common awareness. Since its grounded in the Gospel it is transferred through religious education in primary and secondary schools and through preaching and priesthood. Nevertheless, it is certainly not enough to have a basic orientation in the assumptions of the Church's teaching – it needs to be as profound as possible, engaging faith and reason fully. That is why I think that CBE would be an invaluable support in transformation from communism to democracy and free market economy.

CBE as a Way of Implementing CST

In this last section I would like to show the potential of CBE as a tool for disseminating Catholic social thought. Presence of Catholics in business education is important testimony of Church's care for all spheres of social life. To form Catholic business leaders would mean exactly sending missionaries to the world of business to transform it and save it. It may be certainly helpful in Poland where – I'm afraid – CST is not very well known among laity and it's not often that the Church speaks on business matters. Catholic business schools would initiate and support this dialogue that would finally bring together worlds of faith and everyday work and integrate modern man who is often torn, because he doesn't understand how to be Catholic and employee, employer, entrepreneur or manager at the same time. Too often contemporary man suffers from moral schizophrenia that slowly kills all life that's within him.

Catholic education plays the role of a “householder who brings out from his storeroom new things as well as old” (Mt 13, 52). This vault is the teaching of the Church where many beautiful “pearls” are kept for making rich anyone who reaches for them. It also means that these schools play the role of missionaries by explaining how and why the Church is a gift for humanity – a gift that holds the most waited message for the world. The Good News translated by Catholic education into languages of different academic disciplines aims at integrating all human knowledge as a means to help contemporary man understand himself and the world around him. CBE works to prove that without faith business is hollow, that it has no end in itself and it needs

to understand how it can contribute to the salvation of all. This practical formation of business is right in the hands of Catholic business schools and without them and their faithful activity it becomes hard to sanctify contemporary economy.

Another part of the mission of CBE is to enter into discussion with theories and practical solutions and recognize what's there that truly serves human beings and what only uses them. It should serve as a training ground for CST wrestling with contemporary issues and looking for allies among other traditions and cultures. It should thoroughly examine how other religious or secular traditions try to cope with the problems we face today and whether we can learn something from them or maybe cooperate².

The phenomenon of globalization shouldn't be surprising for the Church because from the very beginning she was globally oriented. This makes the community of Catholics especially called to find ways for evangelization through globalization. CBE is – I believe – this important sphere where formation of Catholic businessmen takes place. And they are called to be nothing less than missionaries of Good News – invited by our Lord who said: “Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations (...)”. (Mt 28,19-20)

Conclusion

I believe that I managed to show how important Catholic business education is and that for a Catholic community it's a must to take care that such institutions come into being. Polish case also proves that free market doesn't automatically brings all the values that make society function properly. Underdeveloped and destroyed social ethics as a consequence after command economy will not become at once a fertile ground for sound human-oriented market economy – it can only support the development of a travesty of it. I also hope there will come the time when the words that “Poland is a Catholic country almost without Catholic business schools” will no longer be true.

As a graduate of lay business studies I see how much effort, and how hard it was to unite and find bridge connecting my faith and knowledge I possessed. (If I were to choose where to study once again, I would choose Catholic university. No doubt.) That is also why I understand that Catholic business education should from the very beginning of student's education fill this gap – explain and support this mutual relation. It is fundamental that young people from the very beginning learn how to be Catholics and professionals at the same time, understand their mission of living in this world, accompany and support others in their everyday toil, and share the Good News and help them see the light of redemption in their work.

I believe some of my intuitions have not only local sense but also universal for Catholic business schools. In our very economy-oriented world they seem to be necessary wombs that feed and springs of renewal for our economies of earthly horizon so they can become systems truly

² See M.J. Naughton, T. Bausch, J. Fontana, E. Pierucci, *Business Education at Catholic Universities: an Exploration of the Role of Mission-Driven Business Schools*, A Background Paper for The Seventh International Conference on Catholic Social Thought and Management Education, University of Notre dame, 11-13.06.2008, <http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/conferences/becu/becu/POSITION%20PAPER%20Bus%20E.pdf> (last access 18.07.2008), p. 13.

serving and supporting humanity in its pilgrimage towards eternity. We need them to help us understand CST potential to distinguish and evaluate different ideas through the lens of proper vision of human nature and understanding of common good. We need to hear its voice – it is the voice of one that cries in the desert: Prepare a way for the Lord. Make His paths straight! (J 1, 23) I hear this voice calling us today: make straight the path of the business!