

**St. Augustine College, South Africa:
Notes on incorporating Catholic social teaching in business ethics education**

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1 Introduction

St Augustine College in Johannesburg South Africa is less than a decade old. This new and very small tertiary institution is a centre of research and higher education seeking to promote intellectual and ethical leadership by contributing the resources of the Catholic intellectual tradition to the critical development and transformation of human culture.

Founded in July 1999 it is a higher education provider offering a critically grounded values-based education for the development and renewal of the southern region of Africa and for the whole continent of Africa.

This paper describes how the Applied Ethics Department has integrated Catholic social teaching into its work. There are perhaps two main foci entailed in any organizational development work. The first is the institutional work of establishing and running an organization, the second is the “business-end” in which the consumer or customer is served. The two foci need to be consistent with each other for any organization to be sustainable. In the context of a university we may see the twin demands for an efficient administration and an effective approach to teaching and research as crucial to the viability of any tertiary institution.

2 Contextual note

South Africa is in a position not far removed to what Cardinal Newman found in Ireland in the first half of the Nineteenth century. In South Africa, we too have a broad population which was previously legally excluded from quality tertiary education. We too have a powerful and well-endowed liberal tertiary establishment which, while offering excellent academic and intellectual stimulation, fails to inculcate values, ethics and moral guidance in their students.

St. Augustine College offers what we consider to be a judicious mix of quality intellectual stimulation with an emphasis upon the moral formation of the student as a person.

St. Augustine College has chosen to imbue its vision and mission with the principles of Catholic social teaching. To this end, this paper begins by surveying how Catholic social teaching has been incorporated into the “DNA” of the College.

3 Vision and Mission

A key document at the College is our manifesto, which among other things argues for social transformation:

“This emphasis on transformation entails forming agents who are equipped with the skills of life-long learning who will be prepared for citizenship, service and leadership in a global society and who will contribute to the ongoing construction of the truly human good.”

This focus on the human good involves the formation of enlightened citizens and leaders who have the reflective capacity and willingness to review prevailing ideas, policies and practice in light of a commitment to the common good and the dignity of the human person as well as an appreciation of diverse cultures.

The promotion of human dignity within Africa and southern Africa demands that we address these issues from the perspective of the local region noting the need for professional expertise in such fields as business, commerce, management, economics, information technology and environmental studies and the need for sustainable development” (St. Augustine College Manifesto).

The vision and values embodied in the manifesto are reflected in the College’s HR philosophy.

4 Human Resource Philosophy

The College has a written human resource philosophy in which Catholic social teaching is explicitly recognized:

“St. Augustine College has adopted a human resource philosophy that incorporates Catholic social teaching. Thus the human resource philosophy supports the principles of the social market economic system as a fundamental belief, grounded in the following principles of Catholic social teaching;

- *Solidarity*
- *Subsidiarity*
- *The common good*
- *Human dignity*
- *Justice*
- *The option for the poor*

This encompasses our belief in every individual's right to the freedom of choice. We oppose any action or agent that serves to prevent the attainment of such a system, particularly all forms of paternalism that serve to undermine the individual's rights and which lead to loss of human dignity....

... The explicit adoption of Catholic social teaching principles within the College’s human resource philosophy, leads to the explicit recognition of values. These values are based on the belief that optimal productivity will not be achieved unless relationships between people internally and externally are founded and sustained on both trust and contribution, a system of values has been developed to unite all employees in the achievement of the College objectives. The inter-related components of St Augustine College's value system are:-

- *a fundamental loyalty to the College as a whole,*
- *a deliberate and systematic effort to create an environment within which personal growth is encouraged and individuality accepted.*
- *a pre-occupation with process towards achieving agreed objectives, emphasising how rather than what is achieved.*
- *an encouragement of people to reach their full human potential.” (St. Augustine College Human Resource Philosophy)*

The college has stated its commitments to Catholic social teaching and incorporated these into its “DNA” and then modeled this commitment in its approach to human resources as assets. These institutional arrangements are, by themselves, not enough to give full effect to the principles of Catholic social teaching. The commitment to Catholic social teaching needs to be visible within the actual teaching modules at the College.

5 Catholic social teaching in applied ethics

As part of the College’s commitment to the twin values of academic excellence and Catholic social teaching, all students doing the M Phil in Applied Ethics must attend the two core modules “Dignity of the Human Person” and Foundations of Ethics. Students then study 5 other coursework modules and complete a research report. In addition all students attend 14 units on Research Methodology (unless they are exempted on the grounds of previous research expertise).

The module on the Dignity of the Human Person is the College’s unique feature, its “golden thread”. No other university or college in South Africa offers such a module although we have noted that a University in Germany has now adopted a similar module into its curriculum.

These two modules are compulsory core modules. After a departmental programme review in 2006, it was decided that students doing the M Phil in Applied Ethics should specialize either in Business Ethics or in Social and Political Ethics. At a later stage, a third specialization in gender and family ethics and bioethics will be introduced.

6 Teaching practice

The Department reflects the principles of Catholic social teaching both in theory and in practice as follows:

- Incorporating these principles into our teaching in the modules and developing an ethical framework based on these principles as a means to critique pertinent ethical issues both in the South African, African and global arenas.
- Using an ethical framework based on these principles as the ethical ‘tool’ in research
- Developing and teaching such courses as the Political Leadership Certificate and various short courses where the target audience is often, but not only, those who may have been previously disadvantaged. The content and methodology of such courses is aimed at empowering not only those who attend the course, but also those that they in turn will reach when they return to their respective communities.
- Reflecting these principles when entering into discussions at conferences and other such forums, particularly those which are not run by other Catholic organisations and institutions. It is possible to challenge commonly-taken-for-granted notions, assumptions, and methodologies on this basis and introduce another perspective to dealing with issues which are ethically problematic.

7 Research output

An emphasis on contextualising our research within the context of South Africa and of Africa, as well as the global environment. This is important as, for example, in the case of South Africa,

such contextualisation has led us to focus on such issues as economic justice/injustice both in taught modules and in research itself.

An effort to discuss and research and write about current and 'pressing' ethical issues particularly in the South African socio-economic and political environment. Such efforts have included challenging the status quo, which is part of our duty as a Catholic University and part of using the principles Catholic Social Thought to underpin our critique.

No specific African module is offered. However, teaching and research is contextualised in terms of the socio-economic and political contexts of South Africa and of Africa. In practice this is also done by trying to facilitate those who come from previously disadvantaged backgrounds where such persons are students in the department.