

Business as a Calling in Korea

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I. Introductory Remarks

The purpose of this paper is to examine the attitude of the Catholic businessmen/women toward the business and management. It is based on the Survey on the Attitude of the Catholic Businessmen/women in Korea that has been conducted in June 2003 by the present author. This survey aimed at analyzing the sense of vocation and mission as they feel as a Catholic called to consecrate the world to God by engaging in their business and ordering it according to the plan of God.

To this end this survey investigated mainly the following aspects of the business management of the Catholic businessmen/women in Korea:

What is their perception of a business?

What is their attitude toward labor?

What is their attitude toward the public?

How far are they inspired in their business by the Catholic social teachings?

How many of them do really know the Catholic social teachings and put them into practice?

What are the problematic issues?

II. Characteristics of Respondents

1. Faith Life

All of the respondents are practicing Catholics: they regularly attend the Sunday Mass (Tab. 24). More than half of them have been baptized more than twenty years (Tab. 26). Almost all of them have a keen sense of their identity as a Catholic: they live their daily life in the awareness that they are Catholics (Tab. 23). More than half of them attend retreats, seminars, courses, etc. organized by the Church (Tab. 25). Most of them know the Church's teachings on social matters at least to some extent (Tab. 20).

2. Other Facts

Their positions vary: CEO (33.0%), professional manager (15.5%), owner of a business (19.4%), and self-employer (24.3%). Most of them are engaged in small/medium-sized enterprises (Tab. 22). Most of them are in the age bracket 60-69 (48.5%) and 50-59 (34.0%) (Tab. 27). Almost all of them (97.1%) are male.

III. Perception of the Business

Almost all the respondents perceive the business as instrument of fulfilling their vocation and mission to continue God's work of creation (Tab. 2). As the business activity of producing goods and services is essential to better the circumstances of the lives of human beings, they perceive the management of a business as accomplishment of the mandate they received from God to serve one's neighbor and society by providing jobs for working people and producing goods and services of good quality at a low price (Tab.15) as well as to provide the substance of life for themselves and their families (Tab. 3). To manage a business is, thus, perceived as to work as God's steward (Tab. 14). And this idea leads them to think that their businesses, albeit their own, are God's property entrusted to their stewardship that has to be managed to benefit common good (Tab. 18). They can justly consider that by their business activity "they are unfolding the Creator's work, consulting the advantages of their fellow men, and are contributing by their personal industry to the realization in history of the divine plan."¹ And it follows from this: Christians should manage their businesses in a way different from what many others do, although this entails various difficulties (Tab. 16).

IV. Attitude Toward Labor

Almost all the respondents recognize that managers and workers in a company are collaborators in a common enterprise (Tab. 4). They are well aware that "capital cannot do without labor, nor labor without capital"² and that "capital cannot be separated from labor; in no way can labor be opposed to capital or capital to labor, and still less can the actual people behind these concepts be opposed to each other"³

Thus, almost all the respondents recognize duties of capital toward labor such as providing a fair wage and humane working conditions for the workers (Tab. 5), and respecting the workers' right to association, collective bargaining, and collective action (Tab. 6). They even think it desirable to share the ownership with the workers in one way or another (Tab. 12).

V. Attitude Toward the Public

Management must seek the common good, as well as proper relationships with its workers. This survey shows that they are aware of this aspect: to manage a business is to serve one's neighbor by providing jobs for working people and producing goods and services of good quality at a low price (Tab. 15). In harmony with this attitude, all the respondents believe that one should never engage in ethically

¹ *Gaudium et Spes*, 34.

² *Rerum Novarum*, 15.

³ *Laborem Execlens*, 13.

indefensible enterprises, albeit profitable (Tab. 7). The saying “business is business” is not valid to them.

Almost all the respondents are opposed to the Hobbesian idea of competition and accepts the idea of coexistence of competitors in the capitalist market economy (Tab. 17). However, it is to be noted that no small proportion of respondents (35%) embraces this Hobbesian idea (Tab. 9).

In addition to this, one of the great needs in the society is a genuine concern for the fight against corruption. In this regard, it is interesting to note that they also consider it desirable to make business management public in a transparent way (Tab. 13). Transparency in the business management is one of the essential elements in the anti-corruption campaign, leading to prevent a back-scratching alliance of government and business.

However, it is to be noted that no small proportion of respondents (26.2%) is so strongly goal-oriented as to compete with their rivals in business by fair means or foul (Tab. 8). It is in contradiction with their affirmation that Christians should manage their businesses in a way different from what many others do, although this entails various difficulties (Tab. 16).

VI. Problematic Issues

Although a majority of respondents (77.7%) affirm that they have a certain extent of knowledge of the Church’s social teachings, a large number of them (68.9%) are in opposition to the Church’s pronouncement on matters like labor-management relations, business management, etc. (Tab. 19). It is safe to say that it shows the tendency for them to understand the Church’s social teachings in an egoistic way or to turn away from the Church’s teachings that contradict their own interests. Such a tendency can be observed in some issues such as follow.

Almost half of respondents (43.7%) affirm that after the failure of Communism, capitalism is the victorious system that needs no particular reform (Tab. 1). Although capitalist “system itself is not to be condemned,”⁴ it needs a thorough and constant reform. For “the realities of marginalization and exploitation remain in the world.”⁵

While most of respondents (88.4%) accept the idea of sharing ownership with workers, suggestions for sharing management usually provoke violent reactions from business. They are acutely sensitive to the

⁴ *Quadragesimo Anno*, 109.

⁵ *Laborem Exercens*, 42.

“prerogatives of management”. They insist that responsibility ought to be centralized, meaning that it should rest in the hands of owners or their representatives (Tab.10). It is true that they recognize the workers as their day-by-day partners in the production process. However, it is likewise true that owners/managers, who are influenced by the Confucian culture, hardly recognize the workers as their partners with equal rights.

Such attitude is clearly in contradiction with the Church’s teaching: “In economic enterprises it is persons who are joined together, that is, free and independent human beings created to the image of God. Therefore, with attention to the functions of each — owners or employers, management or labor — and without doing harm to the necessary unity of management, the active sharing of all in the administration and profits of these enterprises in ways to be properly determined is to be promoted.”⁶

Another problematic issue is the attitude of respondents toward foreign workers. Almost half of them (47.6%) draw a sharp line the native workers and foreign ones, thereby discriminating them with regard to wages and other working conditions (Tab. 11). This attitude is in sharp contradiction with the Church’s teaching: “The most important thing is that the person working away from his native land, whether as a permanent emigrant or as a seasonal worker, should not be placed at a disadvantage in comparison with the other workers in that society in the matter of working rights. Emigration in search of work must in no way become an opportunity for financial or social exploitation. As regards the work relationship, the same criteria should be applied to immigrant workers as to all other workers in that society concerned. The value of work should be measured by the same standard and not according to the difference in nationality, religion or race.”⁷

VII. Concluding Remarks

What stands out from this survey is the cleavage between faith and life, between the Church’s social teachings and its implementation in the area of business management. This survey confirms the need for conversion of businessmen/women to their vocation and mission as God’s steward in the business community. Every effort must be made to ensure that the enterprise is indeed a true human community, concerned about the needs, the activities, and the standing of each of its members. And thorough formation on the Church’s social teachings is imperative for this effort to bear any meaningful fruit.

⁶ *Gaudium et Spes*, 68. Cf. *Mater et Magistra*, 91-96.

⁷ *Laborem Exercens*, 23. Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 66.

Survey on the Attitude of the Catholic Businessmen/women in Korea

TABLE 1

The collapse of Communism tells us that capitalism is the victorious system that needs no particular reform.

	%
(1) I very much agree	10.7
(2) I somewhat agree	33.0
(3) I don't very much agree	20.4
(4) I don't agree at all	33.0
(5) I don't know	2.9
TOTAL	100

TABLE 2

To manage a business is to participate in God's work of creation by producing goods and services.

	%
(1) I very much agree	45.6
(2) I somewhat agree	47.6
(3) I don't very much agree	4.9
(4) I don't agree at all	1.0
(5) I don't know	1.0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 3

To manage a business is to provide the manager and his/her sons and daughters a rich life.

	%
(1) I very much agree	16.5
(2) I somewhat agree	67.0
(3) I don't very much agree	9.7
(4) I don't agree at all	6.8
(5) I don't know	0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 4*Managers and workers in a company are collaborators in a common enterprise.*

	%
(1) I very much agree	64.1
(2) I somewhat agree	34.0
(3) I don't very much agree	1.0
(4) I don't agree at all	1.0
(5) I don't know	0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 5*Employers must respect the workers by providing a fair wage and humane working conditions for them.*

	%
(1) I very much agree	78.6
(2) I somewhat agree	20.4
(3) I don't very much agree	1.0
(4) I don't agree at all	0
(5) I don't know	0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 6*Employer should respect the workers' right to association, collective bargaining, and collective action as long as these rights are exercised in a lawful way.*

	%
(1) I very much agree	32.0
(2) I somewhat agree	56.3
(3) I don't very much agree	11.7
(4) I don't agree at all	0
(5) I don't know	0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 7*There are some enterprises we should not engage in even if we can make money in them.*

	%
(1) I very much agree	75.7
(2) I somewhat agree	24.3
(3) I don't very much agree	0
(4) I don't agree at all	0
(5) I don't know	100

TABLE 8*I have no other choice but to manage a business as many others do, in a way that transgresses the law, if necessary.*

	%
(1) I very much agree	1.0
(2) I somewhat agree	25.2
(3) I don't very much agree	30.1
(4) I don't agree at all	43.7
(5) I don't know	0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 9*I can survive in the capitalist market economy only if I eliminate my competitors.*

	%
(1) I very much agree	0
(2) I somewhat agree	35.0
(3) I don't very much agree	35.0
(4) I don't agree at all	30.1
(5) I don't know	0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 10

Since the responsibility of managing a business rests completely with the entrepreneur, it is unthinkable that the workers participate in the management of the business.

	%
(1) I very much agree	34.0
(2) I somewhat agree	38.8
(3) I don't very much agree	17.5
(4) I don't agree at all	8.7
(5) I don't know	1.0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 11

A foreign worker cannot receive the same treatment a native worker receives simply because he/she is a foreigner.

	%
(1) I very much agree	7.8
(2) I somewhat agree	39.8
(3) I don't very much agree	31.1
(4) I don't agree at all	21.4
(5) I don't know	0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 12

It is desirable for the worker to participate in the ownership of an enterprise by owning its stocks, etc.

	%
(1) I very much agree	31.1
(2) I somewhat agree	57.3
(3) I don't very much agree	9.7
(4) I don't agree at all	1.0
(5) I don't know	1.0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 13*It is desirable to make business management public in a transparent way.*

	%
(1) I very much agree	65.0
(2) I somewhat agree	33.0
(3) I don't very much agree	1.9
(4) I don't agree at all	0
(5) I don't know	0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 14*To manage a business is to work as God's steward.*

	%
(1) I very much agree	40.8
(2) I somewhat agree	48.5
(3) I don't very much agree	5.8
(4) I don't agree at all	1.9
(5) I don't know	2.9
TOTAL	100

TABLE 15*To manage a business is to serve one's neighbor and society by providing jobs for working people and producing goods and services of good quality at a low price.*

	%
(1) I very much agree	48.5
(2) I somewhat agree	46.6
(3) I don't very much agree	3.9
(4) I don't agree at all	0
(5) I don't know	1.0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 16

Christians should manage their businesses in a way different from what many others do, although this entails various difficulties.

	%
(1) I very much agree	30.1
(2) I somewhat agree	55.3
(3) I don't very much agree	11.7
(4) I don't agree at all	2.9
(5) I don't know	0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 17

In the capitalist market economy there is also a way to make a good living both for myself and for my competitors.

	%
(1) I very much agree	39.8
(2) I somewhat agree	58.3
(3) I don't very much agree	1.9
(4) I don't agree at all	0
(5) I don't know	0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 18

Even if a company belongs to me, it is God's property that has been entrusted to my stewardship. Therefore, I should manage it in the service of my neighbor and society.

	%
(1) I very much agree	46.6
(2) I somewhat agree	47.6
(3) I don't very much agree	2.9
(4) I don't agree at all	1.9
(5) I don't know	1.0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 19

The Church should not argue pro and con about matters like labor-management relations, business management, etc.

	%
(1) I very much agree	26.2
(2) I somewhat agree	42.7
(3) I don't very much agree	18.4
(4) I don't agree at all	11.7
(5) I don't know	1.0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 20

In regard to the Church's teachings on social matters (or social doctrine),

	%
(1) I know rather well	16.5
(2) I know a little	61.2
(3) I don't know well	20.4
(4) I don't know at all	1.9
TOTAL	100

TABLE 21

Choose one of the following?

	%
(1) CEO	33.0
(2) professional manager	15.5
(3) owner of a business	19.4
(4) self-employer	24.
(5) others	7.8
TOTAL	100

TABLE 22*How many people are employed in your company?*

	%
(1) ≥ 300	11.7
(2) 21-299	35.9
(3) 6-20	35.0
(4) ≤ 5	16.5
(5) others	1.0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 23*Do you live your daily life in the awareness that you are a Catholic?*

	%
(1) I very much agree	54.4
(2) I somewhat agree	43.7
(3) I don't very much agree	1.9
(4) I don't agree at all	0
(5) I don't know	0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 24*How often do you attend the Mass?*

	%
(1) almost every day	11.7
(2) 2 or 3 times a week	21.4
(3) once a week	54.4
(4) 1 or 2 times a month	11.7
(5) 3 or 4 times a year	1.0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 25*How often do you attend retreats, seminars, courses, etc. organized by the Church?*

	%
(1) very often	20.4
(2) often	43.7
(3) seldom	33.0
(4) never	2.9
TOTAL	100

TABLE 26*How long have you been baptized?*

	%
(1) <10 years	6.8
(2) 10-19	29.1
(3) 20-29	21.4
(4) 30-40	13.6
(5)>40	29.1
TOTAL	100

TABLE 27*Your age?*

	%
(1) ≥ 70	6.8
(2) 60-69	48.5
(3) 50-59	34.0
(4) 40-49	10.7
(5)<40	0
TOTAL	100

TABLE 28*You are?*

	%
(1) male	97.1
(2) female	2.9
TOTAL	100