

A COMPLEX MISSION

INTEGRATING THE CATHOLIC SOCIAL TRADITION WITHIN CATHOLIC BUSINESS EDUCATION

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Accepted for the Journal of Catholic Higher Education

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Abstract: With business education becoming more prominent in Catholic universities, this paper puts forth the proposition that the key to a mission-driven business education at Catholic universities rests in a proper understanding of the Catholic social tradition as an exercise in practical wisdom. This paper argues this position in three stages by examining the current faculty situation in relationship to Catholic social thought and Catholic business education; exploring the challenges concerning the relationship between the Catholic social tradition and business theory and practice and its relationship to practical wisdom; and offering a curricular guide for a more mission-driven Catholic business education informed by the Catholic social tradition. The hope of this paper is to foster a vibrant and intellectually serious conversation on this most important and complex task of business education at a Catholic university.

A Complex Mission

Integrating the Catholic Social Tradition within Business Education¹

In June 2008, the 7th International Conference on Catholic Social Thought and Management Education was held at the University of Notre Dame.² Whereas in the past, the conferences have focused on the relationship between Catholic social thought and a particular management issue such as the purpose of business, spirituality of work, wealth creation and distribution, vocation of business, corporate social responsibility, etc., this year the conference turned its attention exclusively to the meaning of business education itself and the practical curricular models and ideas that can be embodied within a Catholic university. This essay will draw on the insights of this conference and the larger conversation on the mission and identity of Catholic universities and address the importance of the Catholic social tradition in providing a business education that is uniquely and distinctively Catholic.

In the last 50 years, the role of business education in Catholic universities has become significant. In the US for example, of the approximately 200 Catholic universities (traditional 4 year programs with or without professional graduate programs), almost all of them (188) have some kind of business program, and for many schools it entails their largest professional degree program. As business education occupies an expanded role in Catholic colleges and universities, the future

¹ I am very grateful to Ernest Pierucci, John Fontana, Thomas Bausch, Robert Kennedy, Don Briel as well as many others who provided helpful suggestions on this essay. I am particularly grateful to the anonymous referee whose recommendations were particularly beneficial.

² Approximately 250 conference participants from 25 countries representing over 130 institutions attended the conference. They came from a wide variety of academic disciplines such as theology, finance, philosophy, accounting, psychology, marketing, engineering, human resources, etc. Participants included not only faculty, but also university presidents, deans of business schools, graduate students, as well as several business leaders. See www.stthomas.edu/becu (accessed 2/9/09) for complete papers at the conference.

of Catholic higher education is inseparable from how its mission and identity is appropriated within its business schools, and reciprocally, how business schools impact the understanding of the Catholic mission and identity of the larger university.

Key to this relationship between Catholic business education and the larger mission of its university is the role of the Catholic social tradition. In this essay, I explore this role by:

1. examining the current faculty situation in relationship to Catholic social thought and Catholic business education;
2. exploring the challenges between the Catholic social tradition and business theory and practice and its relationship to practical wisdom; and
3. offering a curricular guide for a more mission-driven Catholic business education informed by the Catholic social tradition.

I want to make it clear from the outset that this project of integrating the Catholic social tradition within business education is a complex one, and any attempt to underestimate this complexity will undermine the practical wisdom necessary to tap into the rich potential of Catholic business education in the wider academy and business itself. This complexity cuts in many ways, but it is important before we launch into this essay to highlight at least three of its dimensions.

The first complexity is the Catholic intellectual tradition, of which the Catholic social tradition plays an important role in its engagement with business. This tradition has a complexity that includes at least three elements. It is a theological tradition that engages faith and reason, that seeks a unity of knowledge and that challenges the modern split between religion and public life.³ It is a moral tradition that has a sophisticated form of practical reason and wisdom that both locates the good in the constantly changing situations and circumstances of the institution of

³ See *Gaudium et spes*, 43 and the U.S. Bishops, *Economic Justice for All*, 5 on the challenge of the divided life.

business and develops its own moral insights within the changing economic and political system. And it is a philosophical tradition that has the capacity to dialogue with other religious and philosophical traditions to seek commonality, as well as translate its principles and insights in a publicly accessible and intelligible way.⁴

Secondly, there is also the increasing complexity of managing and leading business institutions within a global environment and the growing specialization of various disciplines in business education. And thirdly, there is the complexity of the different Catholic universities from around the world with their own unique culture, history, geographic location, and their increasingly pluralistic environments.

Facing these three complexities and their interactions with the goal of providing a Catholic business education that effectively integrates the Catholic social tradition is a daunting task, and at times burdensome. Most scholars and teachers within Catholic universities have not been trained to deal with all of these complexities and their interactions. There is a temptation in the midst of these interactions to either despair or give up. At the Notre Dame conference for example, some participants wondered whether there really was anything uniquely Catholic about their universities. With a generic emphasis on ethics, service learning, and spirituality, they asked if Catholic universities were assimilating into non-distinct and ultimately secular universities with an ethical and spiritual foundation of sand.⁵ Others wondered whether the

⁴ See Michael Perry, *Love and Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 106. According to Perry, public intelligibility is “the habit of trying to elaborate one’s position in a manner intelligible or comprehensible to those who speak a different religious or moral language.” Public accessibility is “the habit of trying to defend one’s position in a manner neither sectarian nor authoritarian. . . . A defense of a disputed position is sectarian if (and to the extent) it relies on experiences or premises that have little if any authority beyond the confines of one’s own moral or religious community. A defense is authoritarian if it relies on persons or institutions that have little if any authority beyond the confines of one’s own community.” For examples of how this is translated into business see Helen Alford O.P. and Michael Naughton, *Managing as if Faith Mattered: Christian Social Principles within the Modern Organization* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), chapter 1.

⁵ For an interesting case study on the problem of generic values see

emphasis on the particularities of being uniquely Catholic are too exclusive, too sectarian, too preoccupied with internal ecclesial matters.⁶

As Catholic universities with business programs travel this road of being true to their mission, there are ditches on both sides of the proverbial road. Yet, as much as this search for a mission-driven business education is a burden, a powerful opportunity exists for Catholic business programs to give the wider academy what it currently lacks. One dimension of this opportunity is the unique possibility of providing a distinctive and important kind of business education that can humanize and provide greater solidarity in the global economy. A challenge of secular universities and their business schools is whether they can articulate a common ethical vision when increasingly they have no shared moral tradition as an institution besides a generic commitment to academic excellence.⁷ While individual faculty at these institutions may argue for business ethics, management as a profession, corporate social responsibility, etc., there is no

<http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2008/12/15/santafe>. The College of Santa Fe, a Catholic Lasallian school, is currently negotiating with a secular New Mexico University to be acquired. The College is in serious financial trouble and will not be able to survive without a buyer. When asked about the relationship of its Catholic identity in such a sale to a secular university, Stuart Kirk, Santa Fe's president, responded, "There is nothing that is part of this school that is uniquely Catholic. . . . We certainly have a long history of Lasallian traditions, which are things like being student-centered and having community involvement, and I think if you looked at those you would assume any honorable school adheres to those traditions." A Catholic college or university that severs itself from its uniquely theological and ecclesial roots and reduces its mission to generic but important qualities such as student centered, community involvement, values based, justice oriented, etc. may have distinctive elements of a Catholic college, but it will not be, as Kirk points out, uniquely Catholic.

⁶ Universities such as Ave Marie, Christendom, Steubenville, etc. were noted among some conference participants as those schools that were explicitly Catholic, models that they were hesitant to follow.

⁷ There have been a series of books and articles reevaluating and critiquing modern business education and its failure to adequately provide a moral formation. See Rakesh Khurana, *From Higher Aims to Hired Hands: The Social Transformation of American Business Schools and the Unfulfilled Promise of Management as a Profession* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Samuel Gregg and James R. Stoner, Jr., eds., *Rethinking Business Management: Examining the Foundations of Business Education* (Princeton: Witherspoon Institute, 2008); Warren Bennis and James O'Toole, "How Business Schools Lost Their Way," *Harvard Business Review* 83 (May 2005): 96-104; Jeffrey Pfeffer and Christina T. Fong, "The End of Business Schools? Less Success than Meets the Eye," *Academy of Management Learning and Education* (2002), <http://www.aomonline.org/Publications/Articles/BSchools.asp> (accessed 2/9/09); Sumantra Ghoshal, "Bad Management Theories are Destroying Good Management Practices," *Academy of Management Learning and Education* 4(1) (2005): 75-91; "MBAs and Ethics," <http://www.capital-flow-analysis.com/investment-essays/mba.html>.

institutional backing that supports and gives force to their claims. A Catholic business education, however, built upon a commitment to the Catholic social tradition can serve as an institutional force to educate students to become leaders who can contribute to the common good and foster time honored virtues of professionals.⁸

But a Catholic business education is not only a moral project, but an important theological and ecclesial one as well. Actually, once its moral orientation is severed from its theological and ecclesial commitments, it will eventually be either unhinged from its very commitment to moral leadership or it will drift into an understanding of the moral that is at odds with its fundamental commitments as a Catholic university.⁹ A business education embedded within a Catholic university is a way to help students to live out their vocation, and to draw upon the moral, spiritual, and theological resources that dispose them to become saints—men and women who humanize the world for God’s greater glory. While such theological and spiritual ends may not resonant within a secular academic environment, it is precisely such ends that have the best probability for the university to resist the forces of secularization, materialism, hyper specialization, individualism, instrumentalism, legalism, and other corrupting influences that burden the modern business school.

1. Current Situation of Catholic Business Education: The Role of Faculty

While there are many possible questions with which to begin this section, there is none more important than the following one: *Do Catholic universities and their business programs have the faculty to offer a distinctive kind of mission-driven business education informed and animated by*

⁸ For insights on management as a profession see Rakesh Khurana and Nitin Nohria, “It’s Time to Make Management a True Profession *Harvard Business Review* (October 2008): 70-77.

⁹ For a convincing argument and series of case studies on this point see James T. Burtchaell, *The Dying of the Light* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1998), see especially pp 819-851.

the Catholic social tradition? Concerning faculty in Catholic business schools, there are many positive contributions and trends to answer this question affirmatively. Let me highlight four of them:

- **Interdisciplinary:** Because most Catholic universities are not research universities, there tends to be a greater openness to interdisciplinary engagement within Catholic business schools. Catholic universities have strong departments in philosophy, theology, and literature, which provide the conditions for creating fruitful conversations between business and liberal education.
- **Business Ethics:** Catholic business schools have been leaders in developing the discipline of business ethics, helping the business community to see ethics as integral to running a business.¹⁰
- **Spirituality:** The language of vocation, calling, and spirituality has become increasingly incorporated in the curriculum and research of business faculty. This has been furthered by the recent series of Lilly grants on vocation, as well as the Management, Spirituality, and Religion interest group within the Academy of Management of which many faculty of Catholic universities have participated.¹¹
- **Institutional Mission:** Faculty within Catholic business schools tend to understand the importance of institutional mission and identity better than some of their liberal education colleagues, making them more open to the mission question of what it means to be a

¹⁰ There are several Catholic higher education networks fostering business ethics research and teaching. See the work of the Colleagues in Jesuit Business Education <http://globaljesuitbusinesseducation.org/cjbe/index.php>, accessed 2/9/09), the Annual International Vincentian Business Ethics as well as Catholic Social Thought and Management Education conferences <http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/conferences/default.html> (accessed 2/9/09).. Many Catholic universities have made serious resource commitments to business ethics. For example the University of St. Thomas (Minnesota) has the largest business ethics department in the US.

¹¹ See <http://group.aomonline.org/msr/> (accessed 2/9/09) for further background. For background on the *Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion* see <http://www.jmsr.com/volume-four.html> (accessed 2/9/09).

Catholic university. For example, in one study of Catholic business schools, there was a strong belief that students should engage the Catholic social tradition with business issues.¹²

While the trends above cannot and should not be dismissed, there are at least two factors that limit their positive contributions within Catholic universities. The first is that several of the positive trends mentioned above reflect the commitments of individuals rather than institutional strategies of Catholic business schools. As a matter of mission, policy or strategy, few schools of business in Catholic universities engage their courses with questions and issues within the Catholic social tradition and, in particular, a Catholic vision of the person and the just society. While some individual professors may do so as a matter of personal choice, few schools have taken the particular tradition on which their university was founded and strategically engaged this tradition with the business curriculum.

Secondly, even within these trends, movements toward interdisciplinary work, ethics, and spirituality are not always consistent with Catholic teaching. Students may receive a fine technical education as well as enlightenment rationalistic ethics and at times generic spiritual insights, but on the whole they often do not receive an education that engages the complexity of the Catholic intellectual, social, and spiritual tradition in relation to the demands and challenges of business management.

Behind these limitations are several serious problems concerning hiring patterns and the lack of faculty development programs on mission within Catholic universities and their business programs.

The majority of business faculty, Catholic or otherwise, come to Catholic business schools with

¹² The problem, however, was that only a minority of the business faculty felt they were familiar enough with the tradition to actually do it, and theology faculty, who tend to have more familiarity in Catholic social thought, are usually not interested in connecting it with business. See Michael Naughton, Thomas Bausch, and Ernest Pierucci, "Mission and Identity in Catholic Business Schools," *Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education* (Summer 1996): 29-48.

little formation in literature, history, philosophy, and theology required to give them a distinctively disciplined perspective on their own scholarly pursuits. A growing number of faculty have no experience in Catholic education. They often lack knowledge of the Catholic social tradition and increasingly, many of them have no experience of any kind of liberal education, Catholic or not. Faculty in Catholic business schools increasingly come out with a purely technical education, embark on a Ph.D. program that ignores moral and spiritual questions and reduce their research interests to empirical, quantitative, and so-called non-normative questions.¹³ With little engagement once they arrive at Catholic business schools, little progress is made in developing an understanding of the meaning of a mission-driven Catholic business education.

On top of this, or rather because of it, leaders within Catholic business schools have not adequately recognized the full dimension of mission drift within their own schools. While often optimistic and confident about their schools, there is serious doubt about whether the religious mission of Catholic business schools will survive, let alone thrive, if leaders fail to adequately grasp the gap between operation and aspiration.¹⁴ This stems both from the understated character of Catholic mission, and leaders' lack of understanding of the Catholic intellectual and social tradition.

Yet, despite these obstacles, it is important to explain that far from being marginal to the question of mission and identity of the Catholic university, faculty from Catholic business schools and programs can make a significant contribution to the fulfillment of a robust differentiated business education. If Catholic business schools can prevent themselves from being hijacked by an instrumental rationality that attempts to escape moral agency as well as

¹³ See Warren Bennis and James O'Toole, "How Business Schools Lost Their Way," *Harvard Business Review* 83 (May 2005): 96-104.

¹⁴ See Melanie Morey and John J. Piderit, S.J., *Catholic Higher Education: A Culture in Crisis* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), see chapter 12.

abdicated their custodial role of mission to theology and philosophy, business education can play an important role in advancing the mission and identity of Catholic universities.

But faculty within business schools are only part of the mission question. Faculty within liberal education departments, especially within theology and philosophy, play a crucial role in how they interact with business faculty and how they engage questions of work and business. Unfortunately, there is a divide in many Catholic universities between liberal and business education and their faculty that makes it difficult to provide a more integrated business education for business students. Philosophy and theology faculty often operate with a Platonic/Aristotelian bias against work and, in particular, business.¹⁵ They also have little interest in understanding the work of their business colleagues. While philosophy faculty have engaged with business ethics, although the relationship has been an uneasy one, theologians have tended to ignore the question of business, either focusing on the question of Catholic social thought abstractly and theoretically or focusing on its socio-political implications.¹⁶

This strained relationship creates a fragmented education for students. While Catholic universities provide a significant liberal education foundation for the student, too often this so-called foundational approach would be more accurately called an “along side of” approach where integration is left up to the students. When a gulf between liberal and business education occurs,

¹⁵ This bias and hostility toward business education is not consistent with a Catholic view of education that fosters a unity of knowledge. Don Briel, in articulating a Catholic understanding of the role of business education, explains for example that someone like John Henry Newman, “did not argue that a university ought not teach particular knowledge but rather that applied disciplines in themselves are not the end of a university education. He used the examples of law and medicine but we can easily extend the case to business education. Newman’s central concern was that professional schools, whether medicine or law, or in our own day, business, must participate in the university’s principal end, which is the teaching of universal knowledge as its own end, and so Newman contrasts the educational philosophy of autonomous professional schools existing independently of a university and those schools which are integrated into the university’s broader curriculum and mission” <http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/facdevelop/mecu/papers/briel.pdf> (accessed 2/9/09).

¹⁶ Business faculty often see liberal education as too theoretical and abstract and because of their more pragmatic and utilitarian outlook are not well versed in the liberal disciplines and its relationship to Catholic business education.

it creates the impression on students that they are receiving two types of education: one that makes them more human, and the other that makes them more money, but they are unclear about how the two fit together.

2. Challenges between the Catholic Social Tradition and Business Theory and Practice:

The Importance of Practical Wisdom

Key to overcoming this kind of fragmentation in a student's education is the Catholic social tradition and its ability to foster practical wisdom, since it is a religious and moral tradition that seeks the integration of the person who is both contemplative and active, body and soul, individual and social, physical and spiritual. However, if one would ask a dean or most faculty of a Catholic business school what characteristics of their education they find distinctively Catholic about their curriculum, one would hear little about the Catholic social tradition and practical wisdom. Instead, one would hear the following:¹⁷

- Business Ethics: We teach not just techniques and skills, but values and ethics.
- Corporate social responsibility: We focus on stakeholders not just shareholders.¹⁸
- Service Learning: We offer service learning, especially opportunities to serve the poor in our community.

If one would further ask such deans what makes these activities uniquely Catholic, their answers

¹⁷ See Joseph Phillips and Teresa Ling, "Mission Statements—Do They Matter?" <http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/conferences/becu/Finalpapers/PhillipsLingFianlpap1.pdf> (accessed 2/9/09). and Stephen Porth, John McCall, and Joseph DiAngelo, "Business Education at Catholic Universities: Current Status and Future Directions,"

<http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/conferences/becu/Finalpapers/PorthMcCallDiangeloF.pdf> (accessed 2/9/09).

¹⁸ See Helen Alford O.P., "Stakeholder Theory" where compares and contrast stakeholder theory and Catholic social thought <http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/conferences/thegoodcompany/Finalpapers/Alford%2007.10.06%209.00.pdf> (accessed 2/9/09).

for the most part would reflect more assertions than argument. If one felt bold enough to push this line of argument, one might take a further step and ask whether there is a tension between business ethics/corporate social responsibility/service learning as articulated by those in the academy and the Catholic social tradition.¹⁹ This question might end the conversation, but it should reveal the temptation of leaders to conflate a generic understanding of ethics to the particular Catholic mission of the university.

In a desire to be more inclusive on the mission of a Catholic business school, there is a danger of falling into a logical fallacy that looks something like this: Since ethics and values are elements to being Catholic, then business schools that are committed to ethics and values must be Catholic.²⁰ The logical problem here is that while Catholic business schools may focus on ethics and values, what makes them uniquely Catholic is the underlying understanding of these terms. All schools teach some form of ethics and values, the key question is what kind. This not only fails to comprehend the distinct and unique vision of what the Catholic social tradition has to offer, but it tends to imply that other universities are not ethical or values based.

When my university began to explore the possibility of starting a new law school, it initially argued that its distinctive mission would be characterized as a “values-based law school.” This so-called distinctive quality brought scorn from the other law schools in the area who sardonically responded, “so we are values-less law schools.” This exchange brought into clarity that “values-based” or “ethics-based” added little by itself to the discussion of mission, since every institution values something. To say that the distinctive quality of a Catholic business

¹⁹ For an excellent essay on the tensions as well as commonalities between mainstream understandings of corporate social responsibility and Catholic social thought see Helen Alford *et al.* “Philosophical Underpinnings and Basic Concepts for a Dialogue between CST and CSR on the ‘Good Company’” <http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/conferences/thegoodcompany/Papers/00POSITION.Paper.Fou.pdf> (accessed 2/9/09)..

²⁰ William George, “‘Social Justice’: A Faulty Default Marker for Catholic Identity?” unpublished

school is values or ethics is to say very little. One needs to take the step of defining whose ethics, and what tradition. If a Catholic business school is to take ethics and values seriously in regards to its mission, it seems that a logical place for it to explore would be its own Catholic moral, intellectual, and social tradition. If it does so, it will encounter the importance of the scriptures, natural law, the cardinal and theological virtues as well as the nature of a profession or a practice, which have some fundamental differences as well as some similarities with utilitarianism, deontology, consequentialism, and other ethical systems.

Unfortunately, the Catholic social tradition is not always portrayed in the most accessible and useful light by its proponents, especially in relation to business. Here one needs to be sympathetic with deans and business faculty who look to this tradition of thought but find little help to envision the role of this tradition, especially the articulation of its social principles within business education. All too often Catholic social thought is portrayed as an extrinsic moral vision to business, where the content of this tradition is perceived in terms of constraints, rather than an attempt to understand the intrinsic character of capital, property, labor, technology, contracts, communities, etc.²¹

The process of this extrinsicism with faculty, especially as it relates to Catholic social principles, usually goes something like this:

- Theologians and philosophers articulate an abstract list of principles, such as human dignity, common good, subsidiarity, solidarity, etc., which are often described universally as having no explicit connection to business.
- Business faculty look at the principles with a certain sense of good will, but unclear of

²¹ See Michael Buckley, "The Catholic University and the Promise Inherent in Its Identity" in *Catholic Universities in Church and Society*, ed. John Langan, S.J. (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1993).

their relationship to business. As one faculty member responded, “The principles look innocuous enough, who can be against them?”

- Theologians and philosophers, however, see more difficulty between the principles and business practice than their business colleagues, and insinuate that businesses, as they are presently constituted, are not living up to these principles. Their critiques verge on prophetic denunciations, yet, often failing to engage the principles with the specific technical complications of business.
- Business faculty start to get defensive and respond that such theologians and philosophers, and the church in general, do not understand business and the way markets work. Yet, business faculty continue to describe their discipline only in terms of empirical, quantitative, and technical terms, failing to engage their discipline with the demands of justice.
- And thus an unproductive cycle of bantering continues where theologians and philosophers fail to understand the complicated and technical demands of business, and business faculty fail to take seriously the social vision of Catholicism.

Of course there are many exceptions to this scenario, but it is very difficult for disciplines, especially theology and philosophy and business disciplines to communicate with each other. The lack of communication on a common understanding of the Catholic social tradition, however, is more serious than just specialized disciplines talking past each other, since such misunderstandings result in the failure of fulfilling the mission of the Catholic university and providing future business leaders a moral and spiritual vision of organizational life. It is imperative that faculty within a Catholic university think together on the role of the Catholic

social tradition and business education if such an education is to be mission-driven.²²

The rest of this section will examine the importance of what this “thinking together” would look like by connecting Catholic social principles, practical wisdom, and its relationship to business education as a way to avoid this extrinsic relationship between business and Catholic social thought.

If Catholic social principles within business are not to fall within the extrinsicism I have described above, they need to be placed within the larger task of the Catholic social tradition as a form of practical wisdom. Alasdair MacIntyre explains that a moral tradition is “an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition.”²³ The Catholic social tradition, at its best, expresses itself through an ongoing interplay between authoritative teachers (Catholic social teachings), insightful scholars (Catholic social thought), and effective practitioners (Catholic social practice). It serves as a dynamic tradition of interrelating different but complementary roles within the church.²⁴

The articulation of the Catholic social principles, then, are the result of a socially embodied argument of teaching, thought, and practice, which brought these principles into their current form. Lest these principles fall into a static, abstract, and ultimately irrelevant form, they will need to be developed as a form of practical wisdom that both enriches the end that is pursued and that engages the means that are necessary to express such ends. Let me highlight

²² See Maura Donahue and Kelly Johnson, “Lost in Translation . . . or in Cultural Differences,” where they examine what this “thinking together” between business and liberal education faculty can look like <http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/conferences/becu/Finalpapers/donahuejohnsonfinalp.pdf> (accessed 2/9/09).

²³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 222.

²⁴ Br. Ray Fitz explains that the this tradition is an exercise of practical wisdom “on important social questions by the Catholic community in dialogue with others and as well as a *set of basic principles* that have resulted from this reasoning and are used to guide and shape this reasoning in the future” See “Developing Capacity for Integrating the Catholic Social Tradition with Business Education” <http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/conferences/becu/Finalpapers/Fitzfinalpaper.pdf> (accessed 2/9/09); see also Steve Miles, Deborah Ruddy and Michael Naughton, “Educating Practically Wise Professionals: The Role of the Catholic Social Tradition in Catholic Universities,” *Journal for Catholic Social Thought* (Fall 2007): 437-457.

this ends/means relationship of this tradition as an expression of practical wisdom.

First, Catholic social principles have developed out of a rich and robust Catholic intellectual tradition that engages the ends of business. The principles point toward a vision of who the human person is and what human flourishing looks like in the business community. Drawing upon a unique religious vision [of the person and a meaningful life in society](#) presented by scripture, as well as theological and philosophical reflections upon the presence of grace and sinfulness within human experience, the Church has developed a language of principles, which help orient us toward human flourishing in everyday life.

The Catholic social principles define more clearly our end in human action. They function as signposts that point us toward authentic humanity through the discernment of an historical community. These principles help to develop a deeply social and spiritual understanding of business by being clear on the social and spiritual understanding of the person, work, the firm, property, community, and so forth.²⁵ The principles provide criteria of judgment that creates a detachment from the impatience of expediency, from the pressure of the system, from the weight of the technical instruments of productivity, and from the desire of self-interests.²⁶ Internalized by moral agents, these principles nourish the best inclinations *already* present within us, nurturing and fortifying their social and moral character so as to do the good within business.²⁷

Second, concerning the means, the Catholic social principles need to be engaged in the practical concerns (which are constantly changing) of our world today. This engagement takes a

²⁵ For one expression of what a description of these principles look like in relationship to business, see <http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/conferences/becu/becu/Z0.CBE.Highly.Princi.pdf> (accessed 2/9/09).

²⁶ I am grateful to Ernest Pierucci for this insight. At the University of St. Thomas, the Opus College of Business describes its vision as “educating highly principled global business leaders.”

²⁷ See Joseph Ratzinger’s discussion of *anamnesis* and its role in remembering the good that is within us “Conscience and Truth” <http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/RATZCONS.HTM> (accessed 2/9/09).

lot of thought for which Catholic universities and especially Catholic business schools are particularly well-suited. Unfortunately, this part of the Catholic social tradition is underdeveloped. Popes, bishops, and councils have spoken and continue to speak. Businesspeople, unionists and a variety of organizations have responded as they ought—according to their lights, out of their various and concrete concerns—and they continue to respond. Yet, the Catholic university—the place where the “Church does her thinking”—and, in particular, the business schools which have lately come to prominence within the contemporary Catholic university, have been relatively silent on questions which would seem to be peculiarly, concretely *theirs*.²⁸

In order to develop this part of the Catholic social tradition, Catholic universities and their business schools need to be more intentional in developing a form of practical reasoning that engage both the ends worth pursuing in business, (Catholic social principles articulate what ends bring into being real human goods) and the means most likely to achieve those goals (i.e., what means most efficiently and effectively achieve the goals without harming other goods along the way). For example, business has an accepted body of knowledge that it believes is necessary to practice business. Managing organizations takes a great deal of skill and technique. Business education, just like any other profession, must teach skills that are proper to itself: reading a balance sheet, calculating cost of capital, providing statistical analysis, targeting and segmenting markets, managing group dynamics, generating creative thinking, initiating problem solving techniques, mediating conflicts, and so forth. Such skills provide the *matter* of professional competence that has an important role in business education. Without such knowledge and skills

²⁸ Quoted in Richard McBrien, “What Is a Catholic University?” *The Challenge and Promise of Catholic University*, ed. Theodore M. Hesburgh, C.S.C. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 156. There are of course notable exceptions to this silence but it seems an indisputable fact that Catholic business schools as a whole have failed to engage Catholic social thought.

in finance, marketing, accounting, economics, and so forth, students would not only be unprepared for their respective job markets, but they would be unprepared as moral agents to live so that others can live better. A curriculum cannot promote a more just world without introducing students to the actual skills and knowledge necessary to function in their respective disciplines.

However, especially in light of the business scandals of late, most people agree that skills are not enough in a student's education. Universities and their business schools have been accused of producing "highly skilled barbarians." Technical education is never just technical because it is people who are performing the action. Techniques and skills always have an intrinsic moral or immoral quality when people are involved. Their education needs a moral vision to guide how they use their skills. While the skills provide the matter of business, they do not provide the *soul* of its professionalism. Skills and techniques are a necessary but insufficient dimension to business education. If business education is to be a form of practical reasoning and wisdom, then it must also engage students in ordering their skills and techniques toward the common good and human development. If business education fails to engage students in this process, it would be like law schools teaching their students all about the techniques of trying a case but nothing about justice, or medical schools teaching their students all about human anatomy but nothing about care.

Most faculty in Catholic business education, then, would agree upon the importance of providing a moral education for students. Moving into the moral realm raises many important questions as to which ethical tradition students are formed, as Alasdair MacIntyre provocatively entitled one of his books, *Whose Justice and Which Rationality?* Many finance classes, for example, indoctrinate their students with a strong dose of economic utilitarianism, and many international marketing classes frame ethical questions simply in a dogmatic relativism. Again, most faculty would agree, although certainly not all, that these ethical traditions are inadequate

for a Catholic business education. Thus, the moral and ethical education in business raise larger theological and philosophical questions, which, if are not addressed will lead to the eventual instrumentalization of the moral. Catholic business education needs to be clear and intentional on the kind of theological and philosophical foundations that situates business within the whole of life. It must address the fundamental questions of meaning, truth, goodness and beauty as they relate to the questions of knowledge, work, property, capital, firms, law, and so forth.

Practical wisdom, then, within the larger Catholic moral tradition, is the premier cardinal virtue for business professionals and their educators. It is the integration of moral ends which are articulated through the principles and their moral and spiritual foundation with the proper means of business. It enables the student to apply the broad and general truths of faith and reason to the concrete details of one's work within business.²⁹ None other than a practically wise person can be just, since to will the end of justice demands that one is able to recognize and will the proper means to attain such an end. The entrepreneur, for example, who wants to pay his employees a just wage must also find sustainable means to make it happen.

3. Curriculum Guide: Discovery, Applied and Integration

So what does this practical wisdom look like in the curriculum of a Catholic university?

Recognizing that the curriculum can and will be structured in various ways, I find Ernest Boyer's categorization for research a helpful way to understand the curriculum of a Catholic university, and in particular Catholic business education. Courses at a college or university can fit within three broad categories: *discovery*, *application*, and *integration*. While all courses at a university should have all three characteristics, each course will have its own particular focus. These three categories

²⁹ Aquinas argues that knowledge of universal moral truths is not sufficient by itself to enable the person to act well. See Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Questions on Virtue*, Trans. by Ralph McInerney (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 1999), Art. 6, ad 1; see also Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*. II-II.47.

can serve to organically support each other and thus strengthen the integration of the Catholic social tradition within the curriculum.³⁰

Discovery: Liberal Education.³¹ Because practical wisdom is based on good ends, and because liberal education explores the fundamental meaning of the person through a wondrous encounter with creation which informs our end, a liberal education serves as an excellent foundation to a Catholic business education. A liberal education should cultivate the capacity (both natural and grace-given) of the student to wonder and understand herself as a person who is a free and intelligent subject with the capacity to know the true, the good and the beautiful. Liberal education should be ordered to giving students opportunities to experience their own subjectivity—to discover themselves as knowing the truth and contemplating what that means in terms of their relationship with creation, other human beings, and God.

In many respects, this kind of vision of liberal education, which can serve as the soil on which business education can take root, is the most challenging curricular dimension of an authentic Catholic business education. Liberal education in too many Catholic universities has lost sight of an education that can provide an experience of

³⁰ See E.L. Boyer, *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate* (Princeton NJ: The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990). I am indebted to the insights of Ernest Pierucci for the following section.

³¹ Throughout this essay I use liberal education rather than liberal arts (grammar, logic, rhetoric, etc.), since it tends to be more accurate in today's universities and it tends to be more congruent with a Catholic understanding of the unity of knowledge. In his essay, "The Study of Business as a Liberal Art? Toward an Aristotelian Reconstruction," Wolfgang Grassl points out that the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching no longer uses the term "liberal arts" and instead uses the term "liberal education." He argues that Catholic universities should do the same. He explains that "'liberal arts' as a historical term must be distinguished from liberal education as a model of education that is timeless . . . Newman built on this idea when he claimed that no subjects are by their nature excluded from the academy, for it is its goal that defines liberal learning, not its subject matter. Some of the preeminent members of the Catholic intellectual tradition – Dawson, Maritain, Pieper, or MacIntyre – have all cherished liberal education because it best fits a Christian anthropology and a Catholic culture. The goal must be knowledge and understanding for its own sake. But then accounting and marketing can be taught liberally while history and English, if merely training archivists or journalists, can be taught in a "servile" manner. If directed towards the acquisition of knowledge, business administration can be a subject of liberal learning, particularly if it is well integrated into the edifice of all human knowledge"

<http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/conferences/becu/Finalpapers/Grasslfinalpaper.pdf>. (accessed 2/9/09).

wonder into the being of things, and instead it has become “a prescribed number of units in a prescribed distribution of disciplines” that provide a multicultural tourism of discrete and specialized forms of knowledge that are unconnected from each other.³² Without an understanding of liberal education based on a unity of knowledge and faith and reason, the reality of a moral and spiritual education within business becomes less hopeful.³³

A liberal education that can escape today’s disciplinary fragmentation, can open the student both to the truth expressed in the principles of the Catholic social tradition and to the possibility—the desirability—of a loving response to that truth.³⁴ A liberal education, especially one in our highly technical and global economy, ought to pose to the student the significant human relationship of the priority of the human over the technical.³⁵ Yves Simon explained that the person “is often dragged, by the sheer heaviness of his techniques, where he does not want to go,” where he becomes “crushed by the weight of his ideas, his systems, his experiences, his erudition, his constructs, his methods, and his

³² See Ernest Pierucci, “Restoring the Broken Image: The Centrality of the Subjective Dimension of Labor and Liberal Education in Catholic Business Education,” <http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/conferences/becu/becu/SUMMARYBOOKcopywithM.pdf> (accessed 2/9/09).

³³ The core of a liberal education within a Catholic undergraduate university will most likely be expressed, although not necessarily, through the disciplines of theology, philosophy, history, and literature. Again for the most part, these four disciplines should serve as an essential core of a student’s liberal education. This does not mean that the sciences, social sciences and the fine arts do not have a role in liberal education. They do, and a very important role, but these disciplines will have greater difficulty conveying the relationship of faith and reason and the unity of knowledge that is at the heart of a Catholic understanding of liberal education. Theology, philosophy, history, and literature have both the intellectual capacity in which to engage the pressing concerns of our larger culture, as well as the emotional imagination of seeing and experiencing with depth the human condition in both its glory and its corruption.

³⁴ See Wolfgang Grassl’s insightful essay, where he explains that the unity of knowledge is deeply entrenched in the Catholic intellectual tradition. “However, differently from the neopositivist variant, unity is not grounded in a common methodology of research but in a common ontology, i.e. in seeing reality as a structured and emergent whole that is in principle accessible to the human mind. No consilience needs to be brought about, contrary to recent suggestions (Wilson 1999), where there is a natural continuity within a hierarchical order (*ordo rerum* and *integritas*). Not only are the functional disciplines of business unified in their material object; they are continuous with, and emergent from, other sciences. The style of thought of the CIT applies equally to all fields of knowledge (*integratio*). In this perspective, then, management studies are naturally integrated into a university” <http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/conferences/becu/Finalpapers/Grasslfinalpaper.pdf>. (accessed 2/9/09).

³⁵ Yves Simon, *Practical Knowledge* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1991), 155.

postulations.”³⁶ A liberal or humanistic education within our technological, secular and materialistic culture must have the capacity to develop within the student a moral rationality and spiritual imagination that resists and frees the person from the ever increasing instrumental rationality of our culture. A series of disconnected courses of disciplinary introductions will not aid the student in this task.

A liberal education must provide, as John Henry Newman explains, “a knowledge worth possessing for what it is, and not merely for what it does.” It must help the student to discern that “though the useful is not always good, the good is always useful.” It must instill in students “the invaluable *habit of pushing things up to their first principles.*”³⁷ A liberal education, as Josef Pieper has argued, should create a realm of time that is not instrumentalized to that of utility or work, not so that it can escape work, but that it can understand its proper role in a well-ordered life. A liberal education should help students learn that they are more important for what they are than for what they have, and at the heart of their being is their need for community and a spirit of poverty.³⁸

Applied: Business Courses. The primary focus of business courses, unlike liberal education courses, will be on the practical and technical matters of a particular field of study, yet, it is precisely in the study of the practice of business that opportunities will open to faculty and students to explore the ethical and spiritual implications of business. While business faculty will rarely see themselves as experts in philosophical and theological matters, they should not see

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University* (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), see Discourse 7.

³⁸ Concerning this dimension of a spirit of poverty, Yves Simon poses the following question: “Can any general principles direct our effort to resolve . . . the conflict between the weight of our instruments and the law of instrumentality? The spirit of poverty supplies the answer. In the relation of the human to the technical, we keep our sentiments under control insofar as we remain free from attachment to things inferior to man.” This is why Simon argues that “a program of humanistic studies should not exclude the masterpieces of mystical literature” (Simon, *Practical Knowledge*, 155).

themselves as mere technicians free from introducing ethical, social, and spiritual aspects of their field into their courses. The engagement of ethical and spiritual matters with business will often be dealt with in more subtle as well as inductive and experiential ways in applied courses. The idea of a full-blown theoretical discussion on the difference between a Thomistic and utilitarian understanding of the common good will most likely not take place in a marketing or finance course. Yet failing to bring up the common good at the point in the class when, for example, the theory of the firm is discussed in finance, strategy or law, not only misses an opportunity for curricular integration, but also avoids the practical questions businesspeople ask themselves: “What is the social meaning of the firm?” A curriculum based within a departmental structure will always have certain tensions, but the failure to recognize those tensions and bring them into fuller conversation threatens not only a coherent curriculum but every attempt to educate the whole person.

All disciplines within business raise opportunities to engage the specific concerns within the Catholic social tradition. While a comprehensive list cannot be explored here, the following disciplines and issues provide a partial list of engagements that business students at Catholic universities should encounter in their business courses.

- **Finance:** In light of the financial theory of the firm, what are the tensions between property understood only privately vs. property understood socially? Is the financial theory of the firm the legal standard for proper operation of a corporation, and if not, how can managers think of different theories of the firm, especially one informed by the Catholic social tradition?³⁹ Another important topic in finance is investments. In light of the claim in the Catholic social tradition that investing is a moral act, what investment strategies

³⁹ For further resources on these questions see <http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/curriculum/finance.html> (accessed 2/9/09).. See also S.A. Cortright and Michael Naughton, eds., *Rethinking the Business of Business: Interdisciplinary Essays from the Catholic Social Tradition* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002).

would have a moral quality to them, e.g., social investing, diversification, etc.?⁴⁰

- **Marketing:** How does one understand the purpose of marketing in light of the Catholic social tradition, especially in light of the meaning of language and truth telling?⁴¹ How does one teach consumer behavior without falling into consumerism?
- **Accounting:** With the near total focus on the information needs of capital providers which constrains accounting's potential to serve other affected parties such as employees and the broader social community, how does accounting keep its professional stature? With the capital decision making focus and the related utilitarian values that are deeply embedded in accounting's self-image, how can accounting render visible the legitimate claims of marginalized parties?⁴²
- **Human Resources:** What constitutes a just wage in a modern market economy and how can human resource professionals design compensation systems that both meet principles within the Catholic social tradition and compete within the current market system? How does one fire or layoff someone in a humane and ethical way?

Other courses such as business ethics, economics, strategy, organizational behavior, information technology, etc. offer possibilities to raise important philosophical and theological dimensions of its discipline of which the Catholic social tradition can be explicitly or implicitly incorporated.

Integration: Bridge Courses. It might seem that if these discovery and applied courses are taught well, integrating courses would be redundant in the curriculum. Currently, however, most

⁴⁰ For creative curricular projects on this question, see Adrian Cowan, "Student Managed Portfolios in an Environment of Faith,"

<http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/conferences/becu/becu/SUMMARYBOOKcopywithM.pdf>.

⁴¹ See Ray MacKenzie's discussion between Augustine's notion of language and advertising "Selling Dreams: Catholicism and the Business Communicator,"

<http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/facdevelop/mecu/papers/mackenzie.pdf>

⁴² See Brian Shapiro, "Theological Perspectives on the Objective and Subjective Dimensions of the Good Accountant," <http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/conferences/becu/becu/SUMMARYBOOKcopywithM.pdf> (accessed 2/9/09)..

universities are struggling with what I called above the “along side approach” where liberal education and business programs have created, to an extent, two kinds of education rather than one. Because of the departmentalized structure of universities and the specialized training of faculty, the division of the curriculum has caused a fault line in a student's education. Not only does this cause intellectual fragmentation, but it also causes problems for the practitioner. In a letter I received from Clarence Walton, a Catholic pioneer in business ethics in the U.S., on the problem of the “along side approach” he stated: “A CEO cannot manage effectively if his own view is departmentalized.” A university that departmentalizes knowledge in an overly strict and rigid fashion creates for students a false outlook of the organizations for which they will work, replicating an overly departmentalized structure in a work organization.

Courses that I describe as “integrating courses” are by their nature interdisciplinary courses which foster a kind of “middle level thinking” where explicit linkages between theory and practice, contemplation and practice, faith and work, etc. are forged by synthesizing philosophical/theological insights and business theory and practice. While these integrating elements ought to pervade the whole curriculum, a certain number of courses ought to have these integrating experiences as their prime concern. A set of integrating courses can serve as *signature* courses for the university. For the business student, this kind of integrating experience can be manifested in various ways. I propose three:

- **An Undergraduate University Capstone Course on Faith and Business:** While some students already take capstone courses within their major, the course proposed here would provide a capstone experience for students whole education by relating their liberal education and in particular theology to their business major. It would seek to provide an interdisciplinary engagement of organizational thought and theological

resources so students can begin to participate in a powerful integrating experience of liberal and professional education. The course would also seek to apply philosophical and theological knowledge to business issues and problems by helping the student to think through first principles of human action in relation to organizational policies and practices.⁴³

- **A Graduate Spirituality and Work Course:** The way that the Catholic social tradition is handled on the graduate level of business will be different than on the undergraduate level. One of the interesting developments within the business academy has been the gradual acceptance of engaging business and spirituality. Spirituality of work courses have gained greater acceptability in business schools, and if they can avoid an overly therapeutic and syncretistic approach that tends to divorce religion and spirituality, they offer a creative way to engage questions of integration within an MBA program.⁴⁴
- **A Graduate Great Books Course:** Ken Goodpaster has developed an intensive one week, three-credit graduate business course based on the world-renowned Aspen Institute Executive Seminar. It uses selected writings of great classic and contemporary thinkers that include both secular and religious voices on universal human concerns as justice, rights, liberty, equality, power, leadership, democracy, and community and its relationship to business. Readings include selections from scripture, John Paul II, Martin Luther King, Malcom X as well as from Plato, Aristotle, Harriet Mill, John Locke, Milton Friedman, Aldo Leopold, Virginia Woolfe, etc. This unique mix of religious and secular text along with a seminar format of discussion provide a powerful experience for an intensive, focused

⁴³ For an example of such a course see <http://www.stthomas.edu/cathstudies/cst/curriculum/Syllabi/CS340.Entrepreneurship.2001.final.pdf>. (accessed 2/9/09).

⁴⁴ For one expression of this course see <http://www.contemplativemind.org/programs/academic/syllabi/delbecq.pdf> (accessed 2/9/09).

discussion with peers on the enduring ideas of civilization, the problems and opportunities of today and the issues to be faced in the years ahead.⁴⁵

These types of courses have a way sending students into the world with a deeper sense of vocation that helps them to situate the meaning of business within a larger moral and spiritual reality.

Conclusion:

The actualization of this mission of a Catholic business education is not only complex, but in light of current problems of careerism, consumerism, secularism, religious indifferentism, relativism, post-modernism, specialization of disciplines, financial pressures of students and universities, the corporatization of the university, distorted notions of pluralism, freedom, work, and so forth, it may at times seem like mission impossible. These pressures create significant obstacles to a “higher synthesis of knowledge.”⁴⁶ They privatize faith from work, separate virtue from technique, careerize vocation and marginalize the social character of business. To think that Catholic business education is an easy task is naïve and dangerous. It will take boldness and courage as well as a sophistication and prudence that many of us have not quite mastered. It will also take a great deal of honesty and humility to recognize our current gaps between operational reality and mission aspiration.

The hope of this essay is to foster a vibrant and intellectually serious conversation on this most important and complex task of business education at a Catholic university. My experience is that not enough has been done on this topic. While there has been much discussion on the state and nature of Catholic universities, business education has largely been absent from this conversation. This is unfortunate in light of the significance of business education at Catholic universities. I am hopeful, however, especially after the conference at Notre Dame, which I mentioned at the

⁴⁵ See <http://www.stthomas.edu/business/about/ethics/greatbooks.html> (accessed 2/9/09).

⁴⁶ John Paul II, *Ex corde ecclesiae*, 16.

beginning of this essay, that creative work is being done and that further work in this area will renew the mission and identity of Catholic universities.