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THE SPIRITUALITY OF SOLIDARITY AND TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT

I. INTRODUCTION

Nothing new is said when one notes the increasing popularity of Total Quality Management in American business. What is new, however, is the idea that TQM reflects a managerial recognition of and is productively maintained by the inculcation of a theology of work, particularly the principle of solidarity. I will argue that solidarity's understanding that the self is understood in terms of interconnectedness with others is a central moral wisdom that makes TQM effective. Such a broadened notion of self-interest has held that there is a direct connection between one's self-interest and one's obligations to the rest of society.

II. THE HEART OF TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Total Quality Management reached its fame through the successes of Japanese management after World War II. American military commanders taught the Japanese their techniques for quality management in order to restore basic industries such as communications. Two Americans, W. Edwards Deming and Joseph Juran, also gave influential lectures concerning the statistical methods necessary to control a quality system. These ideas were embraced by Japanese associations such as the Union of Japanese Scientists and Engineers as well as the business federation, Keidanren.

Japanese culture was amenable to these statistical methods and it had a cultural history of employee training and group meetings of workers to solve problems. The Japanese, in fact, refined the statistical processes and changed the emphasis of "quality circles" so that these small groups of employees became key components for workers participating in remedying problems encountered on the job. Moreover, Japanese culture did not share the American obsession with individualism. Instead, the individual was viewed as part of a community in which one's identity was intimately bound up with one's relationships with others.

Juran argues that establishing this kind of holistic-based workplace culture requires "managerial breakthrough":

The starting point is the attitude that a breakthrough is both desirable and feasible. In human organizations, there is no change unless there is first an advocate of change. If someone does want a change, there is still a long hard road before change is achieved. But the first step on that road is someone's belief that a change - a breakthrough - is desirable and feasible. That a change is desirable is mainly an act of faith or belief.

Another quality theorist - Philip Crosby - makes the same case when he argues that a change in managerial life-style is based on a change in attitude, "and attitude is what management understanding is all about." Mary Walton summarizes Deming's management and philosophy by saying "Quality must become the new religion."

The "conversion" that TQM seeks is to meet the requirements of the customer by reducing the number of errors in the production and delivery of a product or service. There are two key aspects: 1) Determining exactly the requirements of a customer and 2) Producing the item in such a way so that it meets those requirements each time. Clearly, the ultimate customer is the consumer and determining exactly what that customer wants is a basic first step which will be done through surveys, focus groups, and a variety of other marketing research techniques. TQM owes a significant portion of its success to the ability to statistically quantify customer demand and satisfaction so that management can identify its goals.

The more subtle, but equally important aspect, however, is that one's co-worker is also a customer. Any person with whom one deals is a customer. Thus, the secretary and the boss are each other's customer. To perform in a quality manner - that is in a manner that reduces defects - the secretary must understand precisely what the boss needs. Equally true, the boss must understand what the secretary needs. Thus, a key insight of TQM is that a quality product or service cannot be delivered to the ultimate consumer unless each employee in the process has properly serviced his or her internal customers. The conversion is an attitudinal - a spiritual - embrace of viewing work as a holistic experience held together by the concern for one's co-workers.

W. Edwards Deming explains the fulfilling aspect of this orientation in terms of individual pride.

He (the worker) will feel important to the job if he can take pride in his work and may have a part in improvement of the system. Absenteeism and mobility of the work force are largely the result of poor supervision and poor management...The possibility of pride of workmanship means more to the production worker than gymnasiums, tennis courts, and recreation areas.

What I am proposing is that underlying Deming's observations is a theological truth that we are fulfilled - even connected with God - because of a thousands-years-old insight that human beings must practice empathetic connections with others. This kind of fulfillment-through-attachment-with-others is solidarity. While philosophical clarity and legal constraints greatly benefit business ethics, the "thing" primarily required for business ethics is a "conversion" of spirituality that embraces a dialectical connectedness with others. John Paul's envisioned conversion creates a sense of interdependence among individuals and nations.

When independence becomes recognized in this way, the correlative response as a moral and social attitude as a "virtue," is solidarity. This then is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortune of so many people, both near and far.

On the contrary, it is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good; that is to say, to the good of all and of each individual, because we are all really responsible for all. This determination is based on the solid conviction that what is hindering full development is that desire for profit and that thirst for power already mentioned. These attitudes and "structures of sin" are only conquered - presupposing the help of divine grace - by a diametrically opposed attitude: a commitment to the good of one's neighbor with the readiness, in the Gospel sense, to "lose oneself," for the sake of the other, instead of exploiting him, and to "serve him" instead of oppressing him for one's own advantage.

Solidarity and TQM thus express a common wisdom: human fulfillment comes through an attitude - a spirituality developed from conversion - of individuals working together to solve the problems of fellow human beings. Solidarity provides the integrity for a sincere commitment of TQM proponents to the good of others. Solidarity is the "heart" of TQM.

Rather than viewing employees as meaningless cogs in a machine, TQM recognizes the importance of human workers by encouraging their participation in the process and by realizing that only by having workers who care about their work can each part of the quality process retain its integrity. As Richard Gillett has argued, quality circles are helpful because "workers begin to have a real say in the design of their work, in the value of it (i.e. their compensation) and in the shape of the productive process itself." The only way to have workers care about their work is to satisfy the needs of workers by providing them with the tools, training, and standards to allow them to accomplish their goals and make their lives meaningful. Without a deeper explanation of why individuals may think this way, there is a danger to create a manipulative (and therefore alienating) system rather than one that is authentically responding to a human desire for meaningful work. That is what Deming warns about when he writes:

In my experience, people can face almost any problem except the problems of people. They can work long hours, face declining business, face loss of jobs, but not the problems of people. Faced with problems of people (management included), management, in my experience, go into a state of paralysis, taking refuge in formation of QC-Circles and groups of EI, EP, and QWL (Employee Involvement, Employee Participation, and Quality of Work Life). These groups predictably disintegrate within a few months from frustration, finding themselves unwilling parties to a cruel hoax, unable to accomplish anything, for the simple reason that no one in management will take action on suggestions for improvement. These are devastatingly cruel devices to get rid of the problems of people. There are of course pleasing exceptions, where the management understands their responsibilities, where the management participates with advice and action on suggestions for removal of barriers to pride of workmanship.

Deming is essentially warning of the dangers of a TQM without its heart. Without a solidarity providing the integrity of a sincere commitment by management, TQM (and any other management system) becomes manipulative and alienating.

TQM, however, does not simply endorse the dignity of human beings unqualifiedly. It is more anthropologically sophisticated than that. Instead, it recognizes (almost Calvinistically) that human beings are also prone to laziness and cutting corners, which is why TQM places burdens on both management and workers to statistically control and document each phase of their job.

Traditionally, quality control has been thought of as the inspection of final products, but TQM proponents argue that such a process does nothing to prevent the cost of re-working materials, does not adequately uncover all the defects that could be delivered to the ultimate customer, and does not truly determine what step in the process caused the defect. Statistical tools simply recognize another theological insight - the weakness of humanity - by rigorous (almost Calvinist) regulation of the work process.

Pareto analysis, for instance, identifies those factors (through surveys and inspections) that create the most trouble. It then lists those factors and specifies what defects occur the most frequently. The work force can then concentrate on eliminating those things that most often go wrong (through, for instance employee participation sessions).

In addition to controlling human error (weakness), Juran points to another theological anticipation of TQM. He argues that the Pareto principle requires delegation of work, because only a few decisions need be made by top management. The others can be delegated to workers. Citing Moses' father-in-law Jethro as the first management consultant on record, Juran argues that three verses of the Book of Exodus (18:20-22) show Jethro advocating a contemporary Pareto principle (of delegation) to avoid decision-making bottle-necks.

Thus, theological understandings of the need to embrace holistic, dialectical organizational cultures and in guarding against the inherent weaknesses of human nature

anticipates TQM principles. They also suggest that a solidarity-based theology of work may provide an answer to what is required to sustain such an organizational culture.

II. THE ANSWERS PROVIDED BY A SPIRITUALITY OF WORK

The last thirty years have seen a recovery of a theology of work. The work of M.D. Chenu was one of the first since World War II to recover the spiritual nature of work. Chenu's work began a series of explorations designed to bring some meaning into the drudgery of everyday labor. The four key, resulting themes describe significant elements of TQM and are completed by solidarity.

First, the idea of human dignity has been universally prominent. This notion has been trumpeted in both Protestant and Catholic circles. It argues that each individual is a creation of God and that therefore the person is entitled to a significant level of respect and protection. Each individual thus has certain rights which cannot be violated by any other person or organization.

In this idea, work must be done so that it does not de-humanize the worker. As John Paul has argued, work (and the economy) were made for the worker, not the worker for the economy. Work that is physically or mentally abusive, working in conditions that are unsafe, and work that is alienating are all dehumanizing and must be rejected. This insight deepens the TQM respect for the individual employee. One respects the worker not simply because of long-term profit, nor because of psychological motivations, but also because of the divine image of God in human life. If this is believed, a manager has a profound reason for fostering the ethos in which TQM thrives.

A second theme of a theology of work is that of co-creator. Here, Genesis is used to demonstrate that humanity is called to create the world with God. This role also shares a good deal of responsibility, for the creator is responsible for what is created. A variation of it, as John Haughey notes, is stewardship. That is, one is responsible for the preservation of God's creation.

As co-creators, human beings fully develop their humanity by being creative. Work that is inherently stifling and alienating robs the worker of the ability to create through work. This theme requires some notion of ownership and participation, ideas that John Paul explicitly promotes and is practically implemented by TQM. If a worker is simply stamping a product in a factory line, it is difficult for the worker to identify with what has been created. One's labor is therefore stripped of its value and the worker gains no sense of having created something and has not had the opportunity to develop natural potential, an insight that Deming would endorse.

A related notion is to "inoculate" the economic with the political. This is Steven Dale's interpretation of Hannah Arendt's political philosophy. By "inoculating" (or introducing) political participation into the work place - the economic realm - the worker gains a say in what is created and how it is done. Dale's approach claims that freedom and human dignity require the ability to control one's environment through (internal) political

processes. By linking political participation in the governing structure of the corporation with work, one complements the other. Such a claim is a dialectical understanding that human life cannot be segmented into independent realms. The political, economic, and moral must all be present if freedom and dignity are to flourish.

The third idea is the very old pairing of sanctification and vocational calling. Particularly promoted by reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin, the idea of vocational calling is that one may serve God in one's station - one's calling - in work other than the priesthood. In working one has the opportunity to serve God. By obeying the law of God, one could sanctify life, even though one could not rely on one's own actions to justify one's salvation before God. Of course this idea has been greatly relied upon (and sometimes distorted) in the United States. James Autry puts this into contemporary (popular) management terms when in describing management as a calling, he writes

Management is, in fact, a sacred trust in which the well-being of other people is put in your care most of their waking hours. It is a trust placed upon you first by those who put you in the job, but more important than that, it is a trust placed upon you after you get the job by those whom you are to manage.

This is the theology perhaps most distant from TQM, although it also shares certain intersections. TQM calls for a pursuit of excellence and fulfillment. Sanctification does have affinities with excellence, but the two point in very different directions based largely on TQM's existential orientation. Similarly, vocation, like TQM, calls into consideration a view of explicit service to others (for vocation, that service ends with God) in one's work. Both sanctification and vocation can be consistent with TQM, but there is less commonality than with dignity, co-creation, and the next theme: charism. Yet, Calvin's and Luther's doctrines emanate from a thorough-going sense of human depravity that must be controlled. TQM does recognize this aspect of human nature (in the form of human error) in its statistical processes.

Miroslav Volf develops a fourth idea: the idea of charism. Volf reminds us that the Christian faith is primarily eschatological; work must therefore lead the present world to a promised and hoped-for transformation in a new creation. That transformation depends upon a variety of gifts. Volf argues that charisms belong to everyone and are an invitation to cooperate spiritually with God to accomplish a particular task. Thus, the calling from God supersedes other claims when there is a conflict between a demand of the world and a calling from God. Work becomes meaningful as the charisms attempt to humanize work. Further, since there are many spiritual gifts, individuals can express different gifts in the different jobs they have within their careers.

Although this theology may seem quite different from TQM, there are significant commonalities. As TQM humanizes work by allowing participation and responsibility (as well as implicitly tolerable working conditions) it participates, to use Volf's language, in the eschatological realization of a heavenly kingdom. The spiritual character of TQM is thus its humanization of work. Further, the TQM emphasis on humans - as opposed to

profits or objectives - mirrors Volf's criteria to value a humanizing "call" over "dehumanizing" effort.

Each of these theologies expresses a meaning for why TQM "works:" that there is a basic human affection for humane, participatory, dignified labor. Such an affection is a human characteristic that exists prior to any managerial endeavor. As such, they explain and ground psychological motivation and provide a criteria for the validity of the intent of management in implementing TQM.

IV. THE "ADDED-VALUE" OF SOLIDARITY

A. Solidarity and the Theologies of Work

These approaches to a theology of work are compelling because they stress the importance of the individual. None of them allow the individual to be abused or stripped of what is rightfully hers. But, of course, the focus on individuality runs liberalism's danger that the theological justification can too easily become ammunition for claims for what rightfully belongs to the "I" without understanding that one finds spirituality by focusing on the "thou." That is the spirituality embraced by solidarity and assumed by the other theologies of work.

Thus, the way to co-create, to respond to a calling, to utilize one's charismatic gifts, to fulfill one's dignity, is to link one's self with others: to practice solidarity by loving one's neighbor. Riches are problematic, not because money is bad, but because riches tend to dull the spiritual connectedness of ourselves with our neighbors. We become numb to the pain of our neighbor's plight; we lose the experience of solidarity.

Solidarity does not require that a business person neglect profit margins; it requires that in identifying a proper profit margin and in conducting business, the business person must be attentive to the human beings affected. As Dale argues, love of God and neighbor is the key to unravelling alienations and contradictions, a wisdom practiced by most of the major religions of the world.

Solidarity completes the importance of human dignity because it demonstrates the worthiness of all people. Not only are people worthy, but that worthiness is actualized through the practice of solidarity. For the giver, one becomes more God-like by celebrating the dignity in others; one thereby sees God-likeness in the other, a manifestation of God's creation of humanity in God's own image. This obviously enhances the dignity of recipients by verifying their essential worthiness. Finally, it completes an interconnectedness of a community's cultural ethos. Rather than a narrow entitlement to human rights which can become excessively individualistic, solidarity recognizes that a community in which concern for others is a reality will be more likely to fully protect human dignity.

Solidarity fulfills the idea of co-creation as well. The difficulty of co-creation is the hubris it can engender. Solidarity provides the criteria for creation: it is to be done to

enhance the welfare of others. This benefits the recipient because the things created are less likely to be abusive. For the community, it limits the dark side of humanity by creating a fuller notion of self-interest. The community becomes a place where work is done for the benefit of the individual and for others. Solidarity also completes the notions of sanctification and vocation. It reduces the alienation of a worker by giving that worker a way to express one's concern for others through one's work and be the beneficiary of the same concern. It provides a way for any worker to connect with co-workers and thereby begin the work of sanctifying life for others. This concern for others helps the recipients by providing a more caring work environment which again deepens the sense of self-interest for the community.

Finally, it completes the notion of charism in much the same way love completes spiritual gifts for Paul (1 Corinthians 13). It transforms a business's concern toward recipients of solidarity and forms a community in which spiritual gifts are used for the common good, not individual self-interest.

B. Solidarity and TQM

From this description, it should be apparent how solidarity is the expression of the natural principle that TQM recognizes: human beings have a central need to be responsible creators in participation with fulfilling the needs of others. It is authentic creation, responsibility, and service that defines solidarity, and makes TQM efficacious. Only a conversion breakthrough of faith re-orientes the person to pursue this kind of humane concern for others.

At those times when TQM (or any management system) is understood as manipulative and insincere, TQM's statistical processes are undermined. TQM's own theorists recognize that the quality effort is based on the managerial sincerity and commitment resulting from a conversion experience that views organizational duty in terms of solidaristic treatment of others. An authentic expression of solidarity within the company provides the integrity for the attitude of wanting to satisfy customer needs.

TQM calls for the individual worker to become fulfilled by fully participating in the creation of the work one does. That creation is done in the form of teams - of units connected with customers for the common good of the company. TQM implicitly embraces solidarity, but if TQM limits itself to narrow self-interest, it will lose the participatory dynamic that motivates people to want to create through teams. Solidarity energizes the dynamic and is its consequence.

Solidarity is a centuries-old (probably multi-cultural given the Japanese experience) wisdom of the goodness of understanding the self in terms of the self's dialectical relationships with others. TQM is a practical, contemporary, managerial articulation of that wisdom. Solidarity thus expresses an overlapping wisdom that grounds a spirituality of connectedness in all aspects of life, including business. Not only is the intersection of TQM and solidarity an interesting coincidence, but their overlapping wisdoms suggest the extent to which modern, strategic business practices may build upon ethical insights.

A mediating institutions foundation for corporations is built upon this notion of solidarity. Just as this foundation provides a completion of the moral elements of contemporary business ethics theory, so it also provides an answer to the reason why TQM is able to instill the kind of trust and commitment among internal constituents so that external constituents are satisfied with the product. The connection of this internal satisfaction and the external constituents is itself worth exploring in a paper or book geared more toward the social responsibilities of business, but even within an internal context, the lessons of this corporation-as-community foundation are worthwhile.