

# **Business Schools on Catholic Campuses: A Worthy Investment?**

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In a Wall Street Journal front page article, a Catholic executive educated at a Catholic university defended the firm's decision to close a plant and move production to Mexico by stating: My "religious upbringing has absolutely nothing to do with the basic economic decision of the company [Briggs and Stratton]" (8/1/96). The firm is now in the process of suing the National Catholic Reporter for invasion of privacy for revealing the executives' religion. So much for the incarnational premise of Christian faith. If this view of faith divorced from economic life is widespread among our alumni, we in business education at Catholic universities have failed to make the incarnational basis of Christianity operational for our graduates. With 235 Catholic universities and colleges in the United States, 163 have undergraduate and 93 graduate programs in business, we must call into question the investment Catholic universities have made in business education.

While Catholic business schools have been instrumental in moving an immigrant church into the mainstream of American commerce, we must face whether we have failed in terms of our greater institutional vision. Have Catholic schools of business contributed to a privatization of faith? Are our business schools contributing to a careerist mentality described by William F. May as a "glass-enwrapped privacy...where questions of public obligation and responsibility seem marginal and episodic at best, distracting and suicidal at worst?" If the attitudes of the executives of Briggs and Stratton are any indication of Catholic business education, we need serious reevaluation of our mission as Catholic business schools.

We argue that preparing students for careers in business is precisely one arena where Catholic universities should be today. Managers and others who practice the business disciplines create the environment in profit and not-for-profit organizations in which most of us spend one-half to one-third of our waking hours. Catholic business programs can play a critical role in modern corporations in educating managers who take as their primary responsibility the development of others. Yet, despite the great promise of our Catholic schools of business, they have not achieved their full potential. They have not fully integrated professional business education into the fullness of those qualities that make a Catholic university distinct and consistent with itself. All too often, the education creates the impression in students that they are receiving two types of education: one that makes them more human (liberal arts), and the other that makes them more money (business), but they are unclear about how the two fit together.

After surveying Catholic business schools and reflecting on the meaning of both liberal education and professional education, we see four integrating dimensions of education for

business. They are liberal learning, faith, profession, and service. These four means of integration specify and achieve the integrity (end) of a Catholic school of business and provide the conditions for students to address the integrity of their intellect, faith, profession and service as a manager. (For greater detail see our article in the California Management Review, Summer 1996. Survey data to support our concerns can be found in Current Issues in Catholic Higher Education, Winter, 1996.)

### ***1) Management as Liberal Learning: Integrating Liberal Arts and Management Education***

Most management educators, Catholic and otherwise, share a general acceptance of Newman's dictum: "Who has been trained to think upon one subject or for one subject only, will never be a good judge even in that one." They will argue that management education is incomplete without a broader foundation of the liberal arts. Yet this foundational view of liberal arts can be an obstacle to its integration with the business disciplines. The view of liberal arts as only a foundation for management education, with the compliance of the departmental and school structures of our universities, has caused a fault line creating two kinds of education rather than one.

As far back as 1959, the Carnegie and Ford Reports on management education stated "the work students do in liberal studies in business and economics and not infrequently consists of a certain number of courses to be gotten out of the way as quickly and painlessly as possible." Or if any integration has been made, it's purely technical and instrumental - English teaches one to write and be more productive. Liberal arts is reduced to skills in maximizing utility and productivity in a narrow sense, rather than skills in human development, more broadly understood.

Business education should not only be based on liberal arts education, business courses must themselves be taught liberally. All business theory and practice presupposes various first principles concerning the human person, motivation, community, work, property, authority, wealth, hierarchy and so forth. These first principles shape organizational practices that shape people and their societies. If business students do not understand the history and philosophy of their own profession, they not only become deficient in their professional understanding, but also in their self-understanding as future managers.

### ***2) Management as a Vocation: Integrating Faith and Work***

In their document on The Church and the Modern World, the bishops at the Second Vatican Council stated that one of the greatest errors of the modern world is the "split between faith which many profess and their daily lives." They explained that from a Christian perspective there could "be no false opposition between professional and social activities on the one hand, and religious life on the other." Yet, in one study of 2000 businesspersons, a majority of them claiming some sort of religious faith, only 2% of the managers surveyed considered their work as a vocation. The richness of the "universal call to holiness" is non-existent for most business persons. As the two of us

work with business persons we are troubled by many of the most devout who see their work as an activity to tolerate, and at best to support their family, rather than as service to the common good.

Many feel inferior to “those who have a vocation” to serve the poor or youth. They see service only in terms of spare- time volunteering. This is probably aggravated by some in the church who preach that real service is to the church as parish or institution, rather than to church as the people of God in and through daily work. It is here that Catholic universities have an opportunity to focus resources and energy toward understanding, in both theoretical and practical ways, the relationship between faith and professional life. Yet pressures exist in Catholic universities to reflect the modern American culture of individualism and of faith by equipping students for what Gustavo Gutierrez criticizes as “a peaceful coexistence of privatized faith within a secularized world.” If this privatization of faith is not to happen, the Catholic business schools must take serious the integration of Christian social thought and management theory and practice both in its curriculum and research.

### ***3) Management as a Profession: Integrating Principles and Techniques***

Joseph Ratzinger points out that “a morality that believes itself able to dispense with the technical knowledge of economic laws is not morality but moralism. As such, it is the antithesis of morality.” An illustration of this is found in the movie “Other People’s Money.” Danny DeVito plays the role of a mean buy-out artist determined to capture control of the local wire and cable manufacturer that is the economic source of life for a New England community. Gregory Peck plays the role of the concerned patriarch of the family that owns and manages the business. When one first views the film, Peck seems the hero and DeVito the villain. Upon reflection, however, the villain is Peck. Because of his incompetence, and probably that of the rest of the family, the firm no longer had the strength to serve the common good - the rights of its workers, stockholders or other stakeholders. In an era of fiber optics, they were still inefficient in the production of copper wire and cable. Catholic business schools cannot have an impact for good by educating the next generation of mediocre loyalists.

Yet there is another side to this story. As Ratzinger notes, any concept of economics or management “that believes itself capable of managing without an ethos misunderstands the reality of the person” and of the organization. Skills and techniques are the matter of any profession, but they do not provide the soul of professionalism. The soul of management as profession is a judgment or perspective regularly seeking the common good and human development of persons. Certainly the development of the maturity and prudence necessary to use tools to achieve the common good and development of the person is a life-long task. The foundation for this life-long process must be an essential part of management education on a Catholic campus or it is the biblical barren fig tree to be tossed aside.

The integration of principle and technique in management education presents a difficult challenge. Doctoral programs do not prepare scholars to do the integration. Catholic

universities must provide faculty the time and resources necessary for faculty to understand the professional ethic of their field and its integration into their teaching and research. The Catholic university must then expect and reward faculty for infusing a professional ethic into all of their work.

#### ***4) Management as Service: Integrating Management and Society***

With all the resources at the disposal of Catholic universities and their schools of management, a critical role can be played to help alleviate the sufferings of this world where economic, social and political problems have caused an unprecedented amount of human suffering both locally and globally. Universities, especially Catholic universities, must be actively involved in discerning the causes and solutions of these problems.

Every Catholic business school must take seriously the enduring duty of the Christian faith and ask: “How can a Catholic university, particularly in its management education, serve the community, especially those who are marginalized?” Catholic schools of business must face serious questions that get at the heart of their identity: Do they teach a “disciplined sensitivity” as a professional practice where those who suffer and are marginalized are given special consideration? Or rather do they teach a disciplinary sensitivity that simply maximizes wealth producing practices that, in the words of Jon Sobrino, “reinforces the social systems that do not benefit the poor majorities?”

One’s initial impulse here may be a generic call to volunteerism. This does not directly bring to bear the immense talent and skill of management. While business students are often asked to volunteer, they are not usually asked to bring their knowledge to alleviate poverty. Volunteerism draws students, in a very real and concrete way, out of their own particular interests and can have life-changing effects. Yet, for a university this is not enough for its role in the community. As Michael Buckley points out, “it is not enough—although it is marvelous—to have programs on the side, those open to the idealism and commitments of the young. But a disciplined concern for the suffering in the United States and the exploited throughout the world is still to become part of the basic education itself.” While volunteer requirements and opportunities should constantly be fostered, the danger is that students learn how to serve society in volunteerism but not how to serve society through their role as business professionals. Volunteer opportunities express the Catholicity of a university. But by themselves they may actually provide a disservice by not connecting service to the heart of the university, namely, curriculum and research. Volunteerism without a disciplined basis may send the message that goodness is performed in the private time of one’s life. Thomas Schaffer and Robert Rodes explain that “If you spend the day on corporate takeovers and plant closings without thinking about the people you put out of work, you cannot make up for the harm you do by giving a woman free legal advice in the evening when her unemployed husband takes out his frustration by beating her.”

#### ***Conclusion***

In a 1988 report on the condition of collegiate education for business in the United States, Porter and McKibbin found a “cookie cutter mentality” discouraging the diversity of approaches necessary to make progress in business education. Following this report, the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), the business accrediting association, reformulated their standards in 1991. The AACSB now demands a school of business to have a mission that is consistent with the mission of the university, and management processes that continually reflect on the mission and its implementation. A Catholic university could lose accreditation if not Catholic enough, rather than endanger accreditation by being too Catholic. John Paul’s call to make Catholicism “vitaly present and operative” in the university is also a challenge to have the courage to be a leader in improving education for US business programs. University presidents who have long suffered the demands of professional accreditation, can now use it to insist that their business schools reflect the Catholic character of the university. In the process, the courage to be Catholic could result in more distinguished business schools.