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THE FORMATION OF BUSINESS LEADERS

Integrating Knowledge

*Where is the WISDOM we have lost in our KNOWLEDGE.
Where is the KNOWLEDGE we have lost in our INFORMATION.*
T.S. Eliot

Over the past 100 years, professionals have been initiated into their disciplines within a university setting. More recently with the shift from an industrial and manufacturing economy to an informational and knowledge based economy, higher education has become an increasingly crucial institution for those wishing to participate in the business sector. And when things go wrong in business, people are increasingly looking to business educators as part of the problem. In the aftermath of Enron, Amitai Etzioni wrote that “business schools—the training grounds for corporate tycoons—have been forced to face the fact that they have failed

to produce honest brokers.”¹ Increasingly, universities themselves have begun to question what they are teaching and how effectively they are doing it.

An important question for all universities, but especially for those who are religiously inspired is the following: If we understand each student as a whole person, what kind of curriculum do universities provide for students that avoids the “ethical schizophrenia,” the divided life, the split between private and public morality that characterizes modern day professional life and that simultaneously enables them to understand their life and work as a vocation? Or, put in another way, what will it take to form honest brokers, compassionate social workers, just lawyers, trustworthy journalists, good doctors, holy priests?

While we need to be careful about unrealistic expectations of universities to shape the moral and spiritual character of professionals, they do have a distinct cultural vocation that goes well beyond training students for technical competence. University curricula, particularly at Catholic and Protestant institutions, must consider the pressing need for students to think in moral and spiritual terms about their lives as a whole. Alasdair MacIntyre has argued that universities too often educate students in “mere assemblages of assorted disciplines,”² providing no way of integrating these disciplines and considering their moral and spiritual dimensions. The way out of this fragmentation and over-specialization lies in fostering the intellectual habits of integration: of “seeing the whole,” of examining “first principles,” of “making connections,” of being “practically wise.” Universities, MacIntyre goes on to write, “must strive to fit those specialized findings into an integrated understanding of the order of things and must equip students to make adequate, rationally justifiable choices about how to live.”³

The following essays provide for the reader some powerful resources for an integration in the curriculum of business education.

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¹ Etzioni explains that Harvard Business School was given \$20 million to support the teaching of ethics. At a meeting among the faculty to discuss the gift and how to implement an ethics curriculum, reactions “ranged from distrust to outright hostility. One economist argued that ‘we are here to teach science.’ Another faculty member wanted to know, ‘Whose ethics, what values, are we going to teach?’ And a third pointed out that the students were adults who got their ethics education at home and at church. By meeting's end, the project had been sent back to the drawing board.”

² Alasdair MacIntyre, “Catholic Universities: Dangers, Hopes, Choices,” Erasmus Institute’s conference on “Higher Education and Catholic Traditions,” October, 1999 (call to confirm this info).

³ Ibid.