

Reconceiving the Business Enterprise: Organization for Internal Equity and Social Mission from the Standpoint of Catholic Social Teaching

Donna Adler

Introduction

Reconceiving the business enterprise for internal equity and social mission is a formidable task for the new millennium. It requires great imagination at the grass roots level above and beyond all else. But it is precisely the crisis of imagination characteristic of the postmodern world that makes the conceptual task so difficult. We seem unable to think beyond certain established kinds of organizational models for our social and economic institutions. However, even if the creative gap were less daunting, the imaginative task would be huge. There are many different kinds of business enterprises meeting a variety of needs. Further they are under manifold pressures, depending upon diverse geographical, demographical, environmental, and economic factors. So there cannot be just one way of reconceiving the business enterprise to achieve the indicated ends. And, then, one must think about what one means in speaking of the ends posited. What constitutes internal equity? How does this depend upon the type of business enterprise involved, the character of the work force, the physical location, the environmental scenario, and the state of the marketplace? And what does one suggest by putting "social mission" on the business agenda? To whom should the "social mission" of a business enterprise extend? Does "social mission" imply something above and beyond the notion, still radical for many concerns, that the work they do must eschew harm in the wider environment? Is "social mission" related to the normal work of an enterprise or can it be broader? Further, why should a business have a social mission?

I take a preliminary stab at some of these questions in this brief paper. The easiest entrée to the topic is the "why" question. Why ought a business enterprise be organized for internal equity and social mission? The answer to this question provides the theoretical framework within which many of the others can be treated. I handle it from a distinctively theological angle, given that the larger context within which we are all working is that of bringing our faith lives to the workplace. In part I of this paper, I propose that, in a Christian context, the impetus to internal equity and social mission derives from the Scriptural imperative to create beautiful community. And I give a brief account of how this imperative issues from Scripture. In part II, I flesh out this Scriptural mandate with guidance from the tradition of Catholic social thinking and articulate some general principles that might direct those who manage a broad range of business enterprises. I describe certain parameters for the ideas of "internal equity" and "social mission" using the notion of "beautiful community" as the key unifying theme and giving special attention to the functions of wealth creation and distribution. Part III of the paper examines a concrete business operation incarnating various elements within the contemplation of the obligation to create beautiful community. Concrete examples are useful because they aid the material conception of possibilities includable within an overall composite picture of ideal enterprise for some particular business environment. They thus provide food for thought and action for the next generation of business leaders.

Without further ado, then, let us see how the injunction to create beautiful community arises from Scripture and then explore what it might mean both conceptually and, in at least one of its aspects, concretely.

I. The *Acts of the Apostles* and the Obligation to Create Beautiful Community

There is, no doubt, more than one way to draw the obligation to create beautiful community from the Scriptures. I have chosen to illustrate it from the *Acts of the Apostles* because that text provides a particularly clear teaching.

The *Acts of the Apostles* is the story both of Christianity's beginnings in Judaism and of Christianity's emergence from Judaism. Two interrelated problems are the foci for this story: (a) the problem of convincing the Jewish community that Christ was a name of God and (b) the problem of convincing them that this name established a Way to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that superseded the Mosaic Law. Although the Jews were never wholly convinced on the first count, there were some who accepted the idea of "Christ" as a name of God. These Jewish-Christians constituted the first Christian communities. The second issue, regarding Christ as a superseding Way, was definitive for the emergence of Christianity from Judaism because it implied an end to the separate existence of a distinctively Jewish community apart from the Gentiles. Such an end entailed the sacrifice of all of the customs and ways associated with a dearly loved distinctive style of life for the sake of unity with Gentile Christians. This was ultimately not a sacrifice that the Jewish community could tolerate. And, so, Christianity was eventually renounced as a Jewish sect, and survived only among Gentile believers after a certain point.

Our own attachment to our native modes of operation allows us to understand the visceral experience that their renunciation for the sake of others would constitute. And we cannot claim that we would be any less reluctant than the Jews of ancient days to actualize such a repudiation. It is precisely on this point, however, that *Acts* is so relevant. Today's conference is probably not a little concerned with self-denial. Indeed, the need for sacrifice to effect socially progressive change and the resistance to that imperative by those called upon to sacrifice explains precisely why justice in community is so difficult to achieve. Few pause to consider that a systematic practice of short-term or even long-term self-denial by those with excess resources may produce long-term positive net benefits for everyone those resources could potentially affect, including those currently possessing them. In the business setting, generally, one might characterize the problem thus: how much income and prestige are the bosses, owners, and managers of an enterprise, having had the benefit of superior educations or opportunity willing to sacrifice for the sake of providing greater opportunity, security, and participation to the less privileged on the inside of the operation? And how much profit are they willing to sacrifice to promote the greater good externally? What will they do for the sake of making the business enterprise a true community internally and an ethical, responsible, generous contributor in a broader community externally? Further, how might they be

persuaded to practice self-denial? The capacity for such a praxis may stand in direct proportion to the possibilities for a harmonious peace that truly respects the dignity of other human beings in today's world. It must be considered both at the *macro* level of states and multi-national corporations and at the *micro* level of ordinary business enterprises, small political units, and individuals. We will want to keep in mind the connection between renunciation and beautiful community as we consider the genesis of the concept in *Acts*.

The obligation to create beautiful community emerges from *Acts* in its focus on the divine names. A juxtaposition of *Acts* 3:1-16 and *Acts* 4:12 makes the demonstration. *Acts* 3 finds Peter and John going up to the temple area for the three o'clock hour of prayer. A man crippled from birth had been carried and placed at the gate of the temple called "the Beautiful Gate." Indeed, he habitually prayed at the "Beautiful Gate." In the time of the apostles the various gates of the temple were apparently associated with different attributes or names of God, i.e., those things that we predicate of the God, such as God is good, God is wise, God is powerful, God is beautiful, *et cetera*.

The name of Christ is linked with the Beautiful name of God in *Acts* because Peter and John invoke the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean to heal the cripple at the Beautiful Gate. This kind of connection between a pillar of the tradition and an attribute of God was not foreign to Jewish praxis. Rabbi Avi Weinstein writes that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were themselves represented as attributes of the Holy One. *Acts* 4:12 takes the name of Christ far beyond the names of the patriarchs, in this respect, however, because, in its claim that there is no "other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved," it plainly associates Christ with the unknowable name of God, the redeeming name "I am that I am" given in the *Exodus* account. Christ, in other words, is at once the beautiful and redemptive name of God.

In Jewish tradition, names were vehicles for meditation on God. The power of prayer was directly dependent upon strength of one's understanding of God's names. Comprehension made one's prayer more focused and, so, more powerful. Real apprehension rested upon a certain degree of spiritual progress in becoming more like what these names represented. One came to understand "goodness" by the experience and practice of being "good." As one became "good," one became aware that one's concept of "goodness" was ever inadequate. So one attempted to aim higher still. The upward dynamic alone gave content to the idea of a goodness greater than could be conceived. And this inconceivable goodness was the only goodness adequate to God. And so it went with the other names appropriate to God.

The association of "Christ" with the Beautiful Name of God and Beautiful Gate of the Temple reminds us that living Christ's pattern leads ever more deeply into the vision of God as beautiful by producing a condition in the soul and in the community, assuming the joint action of souls similarly inclined, that mirrors but is not identical to God's beauty. The names of God in Jewish and Christian tradition, then, are not static. They become ways to God when one meditates upon them. Meditation entails not only thought but instantiating that thought in one's life. One lives the name by following the correct

paradigm and so allows its real though ever incomplete manifestation in the community. One's life itself becomes a prayer in praise of the beauty of the Lord.

Acts' implicit claim in associating the Beautiful Gate of the temple with the name of Christ is that Christ's pattern is the appropriate one to follow if one is to apprehend God's Beauty. God's highest beauty in line with Jewish tradition, is his Mercy. As Rabbi Weinstein, a scholar and translator of Jewish mystical texts explains, God is ultimately associated with a realm of absolute mercy. On a fair reading of the *Exodus* account, it is God's Mercy, associated with the highest name of God, "I am who I am," that redeems the Israelites from the oppression of their Egyptian captors. The same association between mercy and redemption is found in the *Magnificat* of *Luke* 1: 46-55. And certainly it is an act of God's mercy that redeems us through Christ's sacrifice. Therefore, in associating the name of Christ with the theme of redemption in *Acts* 4:12, the text of *Acts* not only aligns God's Beauty with his Mercy and his Saving Power but also, through these associations, intimately binds it to the theme of renunciation. As a consequence the latter theme is also integrally implicated in any human effort to live God's beauty in community.

Our consideration of the story of the cripple at the Beautiful Gate of the temple is almost complete. We have yet to consider the wisdom of the beggar. Regarding the wisdom of one who knows which name to invoke when making particular petitions, Rabbi Weinstein writes:

The one who knows which Name of God to petition for what he wishes is like one who has the proverbial keys to the kingdom. An undistracted prayer that is properly placed will reach its destination and flow beyond its designated place to the realm of absolute mercy. One's knowledge, one's deeds and one's thoughts are all essential aspects of keeping the lower world in harmony with the heavens.

Consistently with these sentiments *Acts* 3:15-16 explicitly gives the beggar some credit for his own healing for having had faith in the right name. For Peter says: "[b]y faith in his name [Christ's], this man, whom you see and know, his name has made strong, and the faith that comes through it has given him this perfect health, in the presence of all of you."

We are like the beggar. The state of our communities and accustomed economic *modus operandi* in today's world are like his crippled condition. Christian praxis is the healer; and we, like the beggar, are called upon to heal ourselves through its implementation. *Acts* 3 and 4 imply that Christian praxis is lived prayerful witness to Christ as the Beautiful Name of God. Such witness means that, through the imitation of Christ, we are to manifest God's beauty in the world.

The character of beautiful human community commensurate with Christian witness is reflected in communal images of Christian life such as we find in *Acts* 2:44-47 and *Acts* 4:32-35. *Acts* 2:44-47 state that all who believed were together and had all things in common. They sold their property and possessions and divided them among themselves according to each one's need. They met together in the temple daily and broke bread together in their homes. *Acts* 4:32-35 maintains that the community of believers was of one heart and mind, reiterating that no one claimed any of his possessions as his own but

shared everything in common. There was no needy person among them because those who owned property or houses would sell them, bringing the proceeds of the sale, and putting them at the feet of the apostles. They were distributed to each one according to need.

Acts 6:1-7, 11:1-3, 13:16-51, 15:5-29, 15:36-41, 17:1-9, 21:20-22, and 21:26 all exemplify, in stark contrast to the passages just mentioned, elements having no place in Christian community, e.g., discord, jealousy, and rivalry due, among other causes, to a lack of homogeneity. For example, in Acts 6:1-7, the Greek Christians complain of being cheated in the distribution by the Jewish Christians. And Acts 17:1-9 speaks of the jealousy of the Jews against the gentiles, when many gentiles flocked into the synagogue to hear Paul preach. The first letter to the Corinthians makes clear the inappropriateness of such developments, speaking specifically against discord and discrimination. In 1 Corinthians 1:10, for example, Paul urges all members of the community to agree in what they say and to allow no divisions among themselves. All are to be united in the same mind and purpose. In 1 Corinthians 12:12-30, he reminds us that the community is one body with many parts.

A key concept that arises from a comparison of these images is that beautiful human community is harmonious human community. Further, harmony is not achieved without the renunciation of special privilege. Indeed, it depends upon radical sharing. All members of the community must be equally valued as members of the community, members of the same body who are equally but differently necessary to its functioning. It follows that all must be accorded what they need to be fully participating members.

A business enterprise Christianally conceived is one kind of context for the realization of beautiful human community. Adapted to that setting the images from Acts appear to suggest the appropriateness of need-based compensation where compensation rooted in a differential evaluation of the worth of labor is insufficient to permit a worker to support himself and his dependants. The refusal to let a worker dwell in want is grounded in the recognition that all members of the community comprising the business concern ultimately contribute to its healthy, smooth, and profitable operation and so to its business success. The janitor, for instance, is as important to maintaining the professional image of a business as the company president. By attracting customers the scrupulously cultivated professional image serves the good of the concern. The basic reciprocity of relations required for harmonious human community would therefore seem to entail that the enterprise, in turn, promote the general well-being even of its most vulnerable members, setting aside its differential evaluation of the worth of labor as the occasion demands.

Whatever one may think of such a suggestion, one should be asking, in view of these reflections on *Acts*, how some particular business concern might embody the qualities both of being harmonious internally and of promoting harmony externally. Further, one should consider what specific forms of renunciation are necessary to foster beautiful community through an equitable creation and distribution of wealth by the enterprise. The Catholic social thinking transmitted through various clerical documents from the late

19th century to date provide some valuable guidelines on precisely these points. And so, we now turn to them.

II. The Harmony of Beautiful Community and the Organization of the Business Enterprise for Internal Equity and Social Mission in Catholic Social Thinking

The emphasis of *Acts* on harmonious human community is implicit in many of the clerical pronouncements embodying Catholic social thinking; but it manifests particularly strikingly in *Quadragesimo Anno*, a reflection after forty years on *Rerum Novarum*, the foundational document of Catholic social thought. There Pius XI maintains that human toil cannot produce good fruit unless all areas of human endeavor are united in mutual harmony and support. Speaking specifically of the individual and social character of labor, he writes:

69. The obvious truth is that in labor, especially wage labor, as in ownership, there is a social as well as a personal or individual aspect to be considered. For unless human society forms a truly social and organic body; unless labor be protected in the social and juridical order; unless the various forms of human endeavor, dependent one upon the other, are united in mutual harmony and mutual support; unless above all, intellect, capital and labor are brought together in a common effort, man's toil cannot produce due fruit. Hence, if the social and individual character of labor be overlooked, it can neither be equitably appraised nor properly recompensed according to strict justice.

He stresses further the duty of the state and all responsible citizens to eliminate class conflict and promote harmony among the various sectors of society. But he observes that only charity can ensure that all members of society will unite in harmonious striving for the common good.

Pius XI's introduction of "charity" and "the common good" help to define the parameters of harmonious community. Harmonious community is contingent upon cultivating the well-being of each and every member of the community in relation to the well-being of each and every other member. Furthermore, it depends crucially upon cultivating the charitable mind-set that will allow the well-being of one to be of common concern to all--indeed, to be part and parcel of each person's definition of his own well-being. In such a community, we will all be changed:

[T]he rich and others in power will change their former negligence of their poorer brethren into solicitous and effective regard; will listen with kindly feeling to their just complaints, and will readily forgive them the faults and mistakes they possibly make. Workingmen, too, will lay aside all feelings of hatred or envy, which the instigators of social strife arouse so skillfully. Not only will they cease to feel weary of the position allotted them by divine providence in human society; they will become proud of it, well aware that every man by doing his duty is working usefully and honorably for the common good, and is following in the footsteps of Him, who, being in the form of God, chose to become a Carpenter among men, and to be known as the Son of a Carpenter.

Clearly, a complete social program of reeducation and spiritual formation is needed before anything can come into being remotely resembling a community that respects the common good. Discourse about the common good has long lost currency in the West. The shape of the critical formation required is not our concern here but forms the subject

matter for another entire conference. Understanding the conception of common good that promotes harmonious human community within the contemplation of Catholic social thinking is within our purview, however, as it aids a consideration of the principles that should govern the creation and distribution of wealth by the business enterprise from the perspective of internal equity and social mission.

Specific recurring themes within the body of Catholic social teaching both help to define the "common good" and to assist the delineation of the principles that business enterprises should respect in their internal and external relations. We review some of the more important motifs here. Although there is a repeated strong affirmation of the right to private property as crucial for the power of self-determination and so written into the law of nature, there is also a firm underscoring of the universal destination of the goods of the earth. The right to private property is therefore not unimpeachable and absolute. It is subordinated to common use. It is subject to a social mortgage. No one is justified in keeping for his exclusive use what he does not need when others lack necessities. Extra resources must be rightly used to care for the indigent. Further, since the end of society is to make human beings better, the conditions of the workplace, itself a social setting, must be conducive to that end.

With respect to internal equity in the business employment setting, the above principles mean that it is wrong to use people as mere instruments for one's own money-making, as though one were hoarding as many goods of the earth as possible for one's private use. A person's labor belongs primarily to him. He himself is the purpose of his work. He has a natural stake in his work because his life is built up from his every day work; he strives to realize his humanity, becoming who he is to become, through his work in response to his particular calling. Further, he changes his environment by his work so that his work bears his particular mark. Because work belongs primarily to the worker the subjective dimension of work has preeminence over the objective dimension. Accordingly, the basis for determining the value of human work should not be the work done but the fact that the one doing it is a person. And provision must be made for a worker to know that even if his work is owned in common with others, he is a worker for himself.

Making such provision requires that maximum profit not be the overweening criterion for measuring the achievement of one's business objectives. Adequate remuneration for work done is an important element of justice between employer and employee. The worker's primary ownership of his own work requires that every employee receive a living wage, that is a wage that will permit him to feed, house, clothe, educate, and provide other basic necessities for himself and his family. He must receive a wage, in other words, that will permit him to maintain himself and his family in reasonable comfort. Further the universal destination of goods for common use and the rootedness of the right to private property in the power that it gives individuals for self-determination requires that there be joint ownership of the means of production as between employer and employee. This means that workers have a right to share in the management and profit of a business and entails that labor be associated with the ownership of capital as far as possible.

Woman is included in the right to private property for the sake of self-determination. One may reasonably infer that her right requires access to the flexible conditions of employment she needs to accommodate her family obligations. She should be permitted as far as possible to put her work hours where she can most conveniently arrange them during the day and to work from home insofar as it is possible and necessary for her. One might add that women who stay at home with their children should not, thereby, have their rights to self-determination and their future security compromised. The benefit that they provide for the welfare both of their own families and the larger society by sacrificing their own maximum development in the wider public arena to foster the spiritual, educational, and psychological-- not just material-- needs of children should be fully recognized on the societal plane. Not only, for example, should half a husband's paycheck, as well as half the marital property, be automatically allocated as her property after necessities, bills, and other family objectives are met, but in cases of single parenthood in which husbands evade their obligations, the society at large, should provide such a mother with a living wage for the work she does.

One might expand further upon the safeguards needed to protect families in the morally chaotic climate of modern life within the spirit if not the letter of Catholic social teaching. Whether or not both spouses are working, spouses who abandon their families without provision and thus do society a serious disservice should face stiff penalties and revocations of privilege. If working, their wages should be garnished. Businesses should readily encourage and cooperate with such measures for the sake of the common good and should further foster work environments that actively discourage unprofessional work relationships. Businesses that fail to cultivate suitable work environments should, perhaps, be subject to some kind of suit by injured spouses and children. Such considerations bring us to reflect upon a business' general obligation from the Catholic standpoint of making human beings better.

Business' obligation to reflect society's end of making human beings better implies a clear social mission internally. Businesses should foster the development among their employees of a larger cultural outlook that sees quality of "being" rather than quantity of "having" as the feature most essential to temporal human happiness. It follows that work conditions should be such that a worker has time in his life for other, equally important ends in life beyond work. He must have time for his spiritual and cultural development and conditions that permit his fulfilling his obligations to his family and the public sector, e.g., his citizenship obligations locally and nationally. Further, work conditions must not foster the corruption of morals and so endanger the integrity of any worker's human dignity. One may infer that workers should not be subjected to abuse, sexual harassment, or discrimination of any kind. The business enterprise, in short, has a social mission to foster the common good of the community consisting of the persons involved in the business enterprise, their immediate dependents, and their larger communities.

Catholic social teaching also addresses the external relations of a business enterprise. The seeds of "social mission" are present here, too. One may take for granted within the spirit of Catholic teaching that a business cannot harm the environment in which it operates. It should adhere to safety and anti-pollution requirements with the end of securing the well-

being of the entire community, rather than simply satisfying the minimum standards set by law. And it should willingly both clean up its own messes and provide adequate recompense to those whom it has injured with its mess. Even better, it should avoid making a mess in the first place. It should ensure that its operations do not produce an eyesore in the community and must do its best to beautify the environment around it. But the social mission of a business goes well beyond this very basic level of respect for others, extending to issues of wealth creation and distribution.

The idea that respect for the principle of common use, i.e., the universal destination of goods, rather than the profit motive, be the primary barometer of a business's success implies that prices be set reasonably in some given community, rather than at the maximum level that the market will bear. Businesses producing basic necessities and delivering vital services should be especially sensitive to strains on poor families in their allocation of scarce resources and take steps to ensure that no one goes without essentials. By lowering prices and narrowing their profit margins reasonably a business manages the distribution of wealth to invest in the community and to raise the standard of living for all. In line with the same idea that the primary purpose of a business is to render service to and foster community, a business should furnish as many opportunities for employment as is feasible, providing training and seeking new avenues for its operation to accomplish the task if necessary. It should, in other words, create as much wealth as possible.

Catholic social teaching recognizes the positive obligation of all persons, societies, and nations to foster the development of underdeveloped nations and peoples. With sensitivity to the global common good, then, those businesses that operate internationally should structure their business relations in developing nations so that they aid real economic development in those countries. This obligation precludes, among other things, operations that would use a nation's workers merely as a source of cheap labor. Rather, international businesses should invest in the work force of a developing country by providing opportunities for training and advancement. Further, they should help the communities in which they settle or gather around themselves to plan futures that will permit eventual import replacement of essential products and services connected with the production of the product or service the business offers. They will thus contribute to the growth of increasingly self-sufficient communities that can begin to engage in their own active and independent commerce with other communities.

The guidelines I have drawn out as implications from Catholic social teaching are only a few among those it would be possible to formulate. But they are sufficient for the task at hand. They begin to sketch an image of the business enterprise vastly different from the ones familiar to us in the current American mode of increasingly *laissez-faire* economics. The question is whether any business enterprise can plausibly become an animal of the different sort tentatively pointed at here. The answer is that one simply cannot know in the abstract. To discern the workability of the guidelines, one must examine concrete examples and also undertake some concrete business experiments. And so, we come to the next part of this paper. I cannot address all of the issues raised by the precepts I have stated or address every kind and size of enterprise and every problem each would face in

the attempt to implement a new socially conscious ideal of operations. But I will present a concrete example capturing one interesting possibility for the changed picture suggested.

III. One Aspect of Conducting Business Beautifully:

The Instantiation of Social Mission in A Concrete Enterprise.

The idea of a business having a social mission divorced from its apparently primary reason for being is sufficiently revolutionary to inspire skepticism about the possibility of finding any striking examples. But lunch at My Kha's, a Vietnamese restaurant in the affluent little community of Glen Ellyn, Illinois proved that there were grounds for hope. I was accompanied by Heidi Moll Schoedel, then-acting Executive Director of Exodus World Service, a refugee relief organization in the area. When I inquired about the pictures of Vietnamese children lining one wall of Trinh's restaurant as well as about the sweaters for sale on a bench against the same wall, Heidi told me the story behind the restaurant and its owner, Trinh, which I subsequently confirmed via some newspaper reports about the restaurant that have appeared from time to time in the Chicago Tribune under the authorship of Rachel Snyder and in an interview with Trinh in February of 2000.

Trinh My Kha, now 54, fled the Viet Cong from Phat Chi, the village in South Vietnam where she grew up, in 1975, taking her four children with her. They arrived in the United States by boat. She left behind her husband, a South Vietnamese soldier who had been taken prisoner by the North Vietnamese. A year later she heard that he was dead, although he had actually been removed to a "re-education camp," where he was detained for seven years. Upon his release he remained in Vietnam to begin a new family.

Trinh eventually settled in Carol Stream, Illinois, where she opened a small store, to support herself and her family, from which she prepared and sold Vietnamese food. Trinh had learned to cook from a grandmother in Phat Chi, who had taken care of her for the largest part of her childhood, so that her mother, widowed a year after Trinh was born, could work in the fields to support herself and her children. Trinh's father had been killed in a war when she was very small.

Trinh soon discovered that the neighborhood she had settled in had a large Hispanic population. Her Hispanic neighbors became well acquainted with her and her store. A real relationship began to blossom when several Hispanic workingmen made a special request that she prepare tortillas for them at lunchtime, as they could procure none nearby on their short lunch break. Trinh obliged and then went an extra mile. She learned about Mexican cooking, and began to mix Vietnamese and Mexican cuisine, an innovation to which My Kha's current menu bears witness. The experiment made her many friends in the community and opened the door to real interchange. People dropped by just to talk, and Trinh became a confidant of the youth in the community who would come to her

with their problems. Eventually, the escalating crime in Carol Stream caused Trinh to think about moving. She could not take her store or its clientele with her, however, so she began to consider what she might do next. The idea of opening a Vietnamese restaurant appealed to her. But she she did not have the money to finance her idea.

Nonetheless, she moved in 1983 to Villa Park, Illinois and after securing used equipment with the help of a friend and monetary help from her brother and sister, who were also in the U.S., she opened My Kha's as a sole proprietorship. Soon she was doing well enough to repay her siblings the money she had borrowed and to move to a bigger location. The restaurant relocated to Glen Ellyn in 1992 and has been there since. My Kha's began to be a very special kind of business in 1993.

In March 1993, Trinh visited her native village of Phat Chi for the first time in almost twenty years. The hungry children wandering on the streets there, with nowhere to go and nothing constructive to do, while both their parents worked in the fields to secure a pittance for family subsistence struck her unforgettably in the starkness of the contrast between their circumstances and the ones she had become accustomed to seeing for most children in the U.S. The phenomenal waste that characterizes a typical American usage of resources stood out in bold relief. With the monetary equivalent of the amount of paper that an average American wastes in a single day, she told me, she could feed a child in Vietnam for well over a week. She remembered her own childhood. And she determined to do something to help.

My Kha's became a business with a mission intrinsically tied into its reason for being. Trinh began setting aside a portion of her total business proceeds to open a day-care facility and orphanage in Phat Chi, pay its teachers, and fund other programs both to help the villagers individually and to aid the economic development of the village as a whole. My Kha's orphanage currently provides shelter and education to thirty children. They learn to read, sew, or farm. Other initiatives have included building a house for a family whose home collapsed; supplying rice for 300 families in the central highlands of Vietnam; hiring a teacher to show the village women how to sew, knit, and embroider; and delivering money to village women for the purchase of the yarn that they knit into the sweaters and the thread with which they embroider the napkins and tablecloths that sit on the bench against the wall at My Kha's. The sale of these items helps to support both the families of the women who make them and the orphanage that My Kha's has established. Trinh has paid for operations for handicapped and injured children and private school tuition for several older students. She has delivered computers, toys, clothes, sewing machines, and reading glasses to Phat Chi's villagers. And she has given families money to start their own businesses. Trinh's cousin, Nguyen Huu coordinates the administrative and distribution aspect of these efforts from the Vietnam end.

Trinh is the only full time employee in her small business. Students from Wheaton College raise money for their educations by working part-time at her restaurant. Her business is flourishing for the fourteen table restaurant that it is. Every one of her patrons knows about Phat Chi, its villagers, the orphanage, and the allocation of proceeds that fund Trinh's projects. Trinh's patrons love her idea. No where else is it possible to have so

certain and positive an international impact merely through the simple act of eating. My Kha's has created a very personal bond between the relatively wealthy community of Glen Ellyn, Illinois and the underdeveloped community of Phat Chi, South Vietnam through the instrumentality of her business. My Kha's patrons are aiding the development of a third world economy on a manageable basis. By eating locally they are having a global impact. My Kha has furnished them with the opportunity to do so. She is doing God's work in the world by the lights of our Catholic social thinking. She is living out a vocation in and through the operation of her business. She has a working knowledge of the concept that private property comes with a social mortgage. She shows us how to foster the international common good. She demonstrates that no business is too small to make a difference, and she reaffirms our faith that "the system" does not make the individual helpless. Her example is a living proof that one person moved by suffering can start the ball of effective positive change rolling for hundreds of other people. Small community partnerships to reallocate wealth like the one Trinh nourishes through My Kha's have possibly greater potential both for third world development around the globe and excellent diplomatic relations between nations than many other kinds of vehicles, including any amount of haggling at the level of international relationships between governments.

If the owners of larger and more complex business enterprises made comparable efforts to integrate social mission integrally into their business purpose, in a manner proportionate to the size and scope of their business operations, we would soon have a better world. Trinh shows us that the fear of losing out to the competition is a straw man. My Kha's builds customer good will and so attracts even more business by giving people a chance to contribute to something bigger than themselves. Trinh reaffirms our faith in a humanity that keeps one foot in the transcendental arena. She fosters the construction of harmonious social relations at a relatively small net cost through the renunciation of some of her profits. She has captured the essence of conducting business beautifully in some very important aspects.