

Teaching Note for
**Distinctive Imperatives for Teaching Marketing
in a Catholic Business School**

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Teaching Note #2

Cases. One common method used to discuss marketing principles in most introductory courses involves the utilization of actual business cases. Many cases dealing with ethical issues, corporate responsibility and sustainability could also be used to demonstrate CST principles. Two cases that would be of particular interest to students are mentioned here—Molson Canada and Abercrombie & Fitch.

Molson Canada (Social Media Marketing) is a 2008 case published by the Ivey School of Business at the University of Western Ontario. The case pertains to an effort by Molson to target college age students with the use of Facebook to increase brand awareness of Molson products in Canada to reach its target demographics in an efficient manner. Students were asked to post pictures of themselves in “full party mode” and the winning photo was to receive a free spring break trip. There was much criticism of the campaign regarding the party theme and privacy issues dealing with posting on Facebook. The case makes a point to discuss that Molson had portrayed itself as a responsible company that discouraged excessive drinking.

Although the case primarily focuses on a discussion of ethical issues relating to the use of the social media, this case could also be used to illustrate several of the key principles of CST. Students could be asked if they felt that the Canadian target market could be considered a “vulnerable” one. Why or why not? Also, the dignity of the person principle can be raised in the both the privacy questions concerning the use of Facebook as well as encouraging students to overuse alcohol. Students can be instructed to pay particular attention to CST principles in examining the case.

Abercrombie & Fitch (A&F) is a well known retailer and makes for a good discussion case since students are very aware of the firm and most have shopped there. Some of the problems associated with Abercrombie are advertising that demeans certain groups, the past publication of its nudity filled Quarterly magazine, hiring only Nordic looking sales clerks and product items of a shocking nature (e.g. thong underwear for 6-10 year old girls). The company also created a controversy in donating \$10 million for a new emergency department and trauma center on Columbus Children’s Hospital. (A&F is headquartered in Columbus, Ohio.) The Campaign for commercial-Free Childhood, made up of fifteen organizations and eighty individuals protested this donation. They “contend that naming the new center

after Abercrombie & Fitch—known for provocative advertising and revealing clothing—send a grievously wrong message” (Elliott 2008, C5). [Aside: We have written a couple cases on this company and will have a new one available by the time of the Portland meeting this summer.]

The A&F case can illustrate some of the same CST principles as the Molson one. In particular, the dignity of the person is at issue both related to the company’s hiring practices and its marketing and advertising campaigns. Furthermore, the question can be posed as to whether the youth market which A&F targets can be considered a vulnerable one.

Videos. Although there are many videos that can be used in marketing courses, a relatively new one on Nike (Swoosh! Inside Nike) was released by CNBC in the summer of 2009 that seems to speak directly to CST and its implications for marketing. The third (of four) segments of the video features a balanced discussion of Nike’s subcontractors. One of the first critics of the Nike subcontractors (sometimes called sweatshops) was a former soccer coach at St. John’s University, who indicated at the beginning of the 15 minute segment that he felt Nike was violating CST principles in the treatment that some of the workers received from these subcontractors. The video then discusses Nike’s eventually positive response to the critics. There are also problems that Nike has yet to resolve with these subcontractors and they are also spelled out in this short video.

The use of this video in marketing courses is especially appropriate since Nike is one of the best known consumer brands. Students can be asked whether their or friends’ purchasing behavior could be influenced these allegations against Nike. This video also allows the instructor to bring in the CST principle of “worker dignity.” Other than this link, students can be asked to explore further CST ideas.

Guest Speakers. For instructors who may not be comfortable raising CST concepts directly with students, there are other ways to introduce the material in their marketing class. Several types of guest speakers could be used. One is to utilize a member of the college’s Center for Social Concerns or Catholic Studies departments. These individuals deal with CST on a daily basis and are ready and willing to help students at Catholic business schools apply the Catholic intellectual tradition to their daily lives. The university’s alumni office or development office also may be able to pinpoint alumni who are articulate spokespersons for Catholic business leadership. In addition, others with the business school ties may be able to testify how their Catholic faith has informed their on-going business practices.

Projects. On virtually all Catholic campuses, service projects are regularly undertaken by students. Some instructors in upper level marketing classes have students undertake a research or marketing strategy project where the client may be a Catholic parochial school, church group or social service agency. Such projects not only help students to apply the concepts that they have learned in their marketing courses but also provide formative interactions with those who often represent or are advocates for the “poor and vulnerable” in the local community.

Student blogs. One of our colleagues gave an assignment to students to use the material in Exhibits Two and Three and discuss an ethical controversy/issue that they saw in marketing. Most students wrote two to three paragraphs about these issues and applied CST principles to them. A list of some of the topics is shown in Appendix A as well as four verbatim comments (Appendix B) by a few of the most thoughtful students. Rather than have the student just write about these issues, an instructor

might want to set up a debate or forum for discussion of several of the controversies. It is likely that some business students would take the company side rather than the consumers.

Term or Short Papers. For some marketing classes, term or short papers are required. This is not common in Principles courses, but they are sometimes assigned. In courses that deal with ethics, social responsibility and macro-marketing issues, term papers are frequently the culminating experience of the course. As part of the assignment, students can be asked to address CST principles and how they are either practiced, violated or apply to topics such as deceptive advertising, privacy and the Internet, cause related marketing and marketing to the impoverished. One potential topic for a short paper is: Do global advertising campaigns violate the CST principle of subsidiarity? Students could be asked to search for examples of campaigns that perhaps violate local autonomy or cultural norms.

Readings. Although the business press regularly contains a number of articles that can be used to demonstrate CST principles, the agile instructor must be on the “lookout” for them. We have given students an assignment of finding a recent article that demonstrates the marketing application of CST principles and to write a short paper analyzing possible motivations and effectiveness of the practice.

A particular reading that can be used is the Pontifical Council’s monograph on *Ethics in Advertising* published in 1997. There are similar documents on “ethics on the internet” and “ethics in communication” published during that activist time period. These publications represent the Church’s ethical position on areas that directly interface with marketing practices. Since all of them are only about thirty small pages, one class could be devoted to the discussion of each monograph.

Part of the latest encyclical, *Charity in Truth*, could also be very effectively used as a reading to stimulate class discussion in marketing principles courses especially by assigning paragraph 35 which speaks to “justice and the nature of markets,” paragraph 50 which focuses on responsible stewardship with nature and paragraph 66 that deals with the “ethical responsibility of consumers” in marketplace situations.

Websites. Many companies now include CSR or sustainability reports on their websites. The best illustration of a website (and company) focusing on the CST principle of the “common good” is Tom’s of Maine (www.tomsomaine.com) where themes are good partnerships, good matters blog and good business. CSR activities include Dental Health for All and Rivers Awareness Program.

Conclusion

Finally, it appears to us that there is little question that the ethical and social themes of the Catholic intellectual traditions *can be applied* to marketing courses being taught in Catholic business schools. Rather the key obstacles seems to focus on the level of extant instructor knowledge concerning these matters and whether there exists the “force of will” to conduct such implementation precisely because the integration of Catholic Social Teaching would be deemed as essential to the mission and promises of Catholic business school education.

References

Elliott, Stuart (2008), “When a Corporate Donation Raises Protests,” *New York Times*, (March 12), C5.

Laczniak, Gene R. (1999), "Distributive Justice, Catholic Social Teaching and the Moral Responsibility of Marketers," *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing*, Vol. 18 No. 1 (Spring), 125-129.