Response to “The Institutionalization of Conscience: Some Philosophical and Theological Reflections”

Kenneth E. Goodpastor

Respondent: Ed Mosel

Ken begins his paper with a verse from Genesis that says (in the New Revised Standard Version) when God created humankind, God said “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness.” Interestingly, for the last few months I have been engaged in study and reflection with one of my colleagues using a book entitled “From Image to Likeness: A Jungian Path in the Gospel Journey”. The authors suggest that the process of moving from image to likeness is a lifelong journey, and I can’t help but see the parallels with both individuals in institutions and institutions themselves as you raise them in your paper.

However, I am going to set that aside for the moment, and begin my response by reframing an outline of the paper.

- Organizations/Institutions play a critical role in human history, and institution making is one primary form of humankind’s sharing in the work of creation
- Organizations are projections of us as individuals, and we as individuals are called to plant conscience in our institutional co-creations
- Institutional leadership is an extraordinary vocation rooted in co-creation, and it is the responsibility of leaders to give shape to corporate conscience
- Ethical leadership must orient the organization toward and then institutionalize core values, and then sustain them by passing them on to future leaders and to the wider community
- Ethical leadership must wrestle with the question “whom & what our business is for?” Are we making a profit to do something more and better while appreciating human dignity and advancing the common good
Fashioning the golden calf is a way to describe the “sin” of corporations. Is there a way to reduce the sins of leaders and corporations while finding and forming leaders who can help us reveal the greater purpose of the trip?

I will respond to each of these. (Usually moving quickly to the practical!)

- **Organizations/Institutions play a critical role in human history, and institution making is one primary form of humankind’s sharing in the work of creation**
  - Your quotations that “man is an institution making animal”, along with Drucker’s quotation “a society of organizations” both struck a chord with me. While there is no doubt that humankind has created a myriad of organizations, it is likely only a small minority of the population sees the institution as part of creation and God’s plan. I think additional development of this premise would be helpful to bridge this gap for the reader.

- **Organizations are projections of us as individuals, and we as individuals are called to plant conscience in our institutional co-creations**
  - The first part of the statement is true if the organization is a place where individuals can express themselves and discussion of conscience, values or morality is something that is embraced. It would be helpful to have examples of organizations who exemplify this trait and how they facilitate this kind of discussion.

- **Institutional leadership is an extraordinary vocation rooted in co-creation, and it is the responsibility of leaders to give shape to corporate conscience**
  - I would again hazard a guess that very few institutional leaders view their role as a vocation rooted in co-creation, even if they embrace that theological concept. Here I think it is vitally important to highlight leaders who live this out in their daily lives. I appreciated the openness in your paper to what Prabhu Guptara; an economist with UBS uses the term “transcendental values”, as a way to embrace everyone from many faiths and no faith traditions. At Seeing Things Whole, which began with Christian roots, we are continually challenged to embrace entire organizations, drawing the best moral imagination from every individual. Throughout your paper, you keep the door open to the broad sweep of
transcendental values. This is critical in shaping a broadly represented and active corporate conscience.

- **Ethical leadership must orient the organization toward and then institutionalize core values, and then sustain them by passing them on to future leaders and to the wider community**
  - In my experience as an organizational leader, the task of defining core values for an institution is not easy. It would be helpful in the paper to describe one organization’s journey in this development work, including the pitfalls encountered. Again in my experience, institutionalizing them and passing them on requires the leadership to actively use the organization’s core values when confronting major challenges and making key decisions. Another example here would be very helpful.
  - While when we think of ethics, we are often drawn to the big stories, the ones that dominate the news. I think that it is important to remember that ethical decisions are being made every day, up and down the organization, from the lab testing on new products, to promises made to customers, to the internal audits done within a business. Organizations that celebrate their core values by highlighting ethical decisions let the organization know they are important and can be openly discussed. This activity sustains core values.

- **Ethical leadership must wrestle with the question “whom & what our business is for?” Are we making a profit to do something more and better while appreciating human dignity and advancing the common good**
  - These may be the most important questions that thoughtful leadership can and should answer. I would also extend the definition of leadership to include the board of directors. In my opinion, although not in my experience, a dynamic, open, robust conversation between the leadership of the business and the board of directors can lead to thoughtful answers to these very large questions. Again, an example here would be very instructive.
  - In a recent case study seminar in Rome, I presented a case on a company engaged in the automotive industry. Sr. Helen Alford, who some of you know, made a very insightful comment. After listening to my recounting of the deterioration of the industry, she said that it was clear to her that the entire industry had marched
down a path of destroying the common good. I think of all of the trade associations in this industry, and none were capable of stepping forward to a leadership position to discuss the common good. We see the devastating results today. Are there current examples of industries that are advancing the common good? How are they doing it?

- **Fashioning the golden calf is a way to describe the “sin” of corporations. Is there a way to reduce the sins of leaders and corporations while finding and forming leaders who can help us reveal the greater purpose of the trip?**
  
    o This is another area that the organizational leadership and the board of directors need to be in open dialogue. Additionally, the process of selecting candidates for these positions needs to be one that is clear on what is acceptable and what is not. This however, may not be enough. One of our most important activities in Seeing Things Whole (and one of our core competences) is holding organizations in trust. This means leaders from other organizations will gather as temporary trustees for a particular organization and a real world challenge that they are facing. Unlike the board/leadership dynamic that includes financial reward, politics and government regulation, the temporary trustee environment simply offers perspective while promoting accountability. In order to reduce the sins of corporations will need to have all of these elements. Is there an example of this today?

**General Comment:**

My thanks to Ken Goodpastor for a very thoughtful exploration of this very complex and intriguing topic. In my opinion, he has developed a framework from which one can springboard into many rich sub topics. These can range from deeper theological reflection on the role of individuals and institutions in co-creation to the practical exploration of best practices in core value work, ethical behavior and board/leadership relationships and the role that they play in reducing “corporate sin”.

Further, many examples in the paper such as the story about Jim Harrison highlight negative behavior. I think that it would be helpful to change this perspective by presenting the challenge of negative behavior and then highlighting positive examples that illustrate how organizations are successfully creating ethical cultures.
Finally, to return to where I began; from Image to Likeness is a life long journey. This is true for both individuals and for institutions. I hope that we are at a redefining time in our world, one that will move us closer to Likeness. This will take the combined efforts of educational institutions, businesses, boards of directors, etc. so each of us has the opportunity to play our role in this process which is a lifetime challenge. My gratitude to Dick Broholm who provides us with a real life example.