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The Jesuit Business School

We Need A Statement of Principles

By Andre L. Delbecq

Business is a pivotal societal institution. Jesuit Universities enroll almost one third of their students in business studies. But more than 80 percent of their graduates will be employed in corporations. The business work place (department, division, laboratory, etc.) will be their locus of community throughout the day. Here graduates will serve their neighbors providing needed goods and services, find their talents embraced or underutilized, and experience a supportive or a destructive social environment. Through the surplus generated through corporate efforts wealth will be created to support self, family, governments, artistic organizations, churches, schools, social services, relief agencies, and the very universities in which they were educated.

If living in our time, given his "Rules for Discernment for Mission," I believe Ignatius of Loyola would certainly have included the modern corporation as a target. A number of criteria (where persons can be reached who can cause the good to spread, where there is impact on many people, where results can be durable, etc.) connect to this contemporary institution. Alongside the potential for good there are problems to wrestle with: work that does not provide dignity; mal-distribution of income; distortions of hubris and greed; destructive consequences of globalization and hyper-competition; environmental degradation and outright ethical violations. To accept a call to transform business is not a second rate path to holiness.

How would I assess Jesuit Business Education? Across the Jesuit network I find mission and values are a lively topic of conversation. Granted the dialog is frequently more focused on the university as a whole, but Jesuit character is also referenced within business schools. Mission-centric business school accreditation has made this mandatory. Attention to ethics is now a lodestone not simply in business

ethics courses, but also within disciplines such as marketing, finance, etc. By contrast, corporate social responsibility is unevenly referenced and often seen as one competing concept pitted against classical economic or shareholder models. Yet the "*Faith That Does Justice*" theme so central in campus dialog means human dignity, the common good, economic justice, stewardship of resources and environment, and solidarity with the poor are part of business school conversations. Immersion experiences and service learning are robust efforts.

There is pride in a liberal core curriculum, although fewer business faculty are involved in its teaching than I wish. Attention to "calling" (vocation) is part of faculty consciousness; more so since the Lilly Grant programs. Work place spirituality remains a nascent blossom but pioneer efforts inspired by the *Management, Spirituality and Religion* interest group within the Academy of Management are occasionally present.

Thus, Jesuit business education does not reside in a desert absent of Catholic intellectual and cultural influence. Business faculty members attach a positive value to the "Jesuit" ethos seen as humanistic and ethical. They appreciate a campus culture that is less harsh and self-serving than many academic or business cultures. Still, loyalties to disciplinary powers are usually a stronger influence on hiring, teaching, and scholarship than institutional character. These are concerns that need attention. You can compare your own institution's business school milieu to my description.

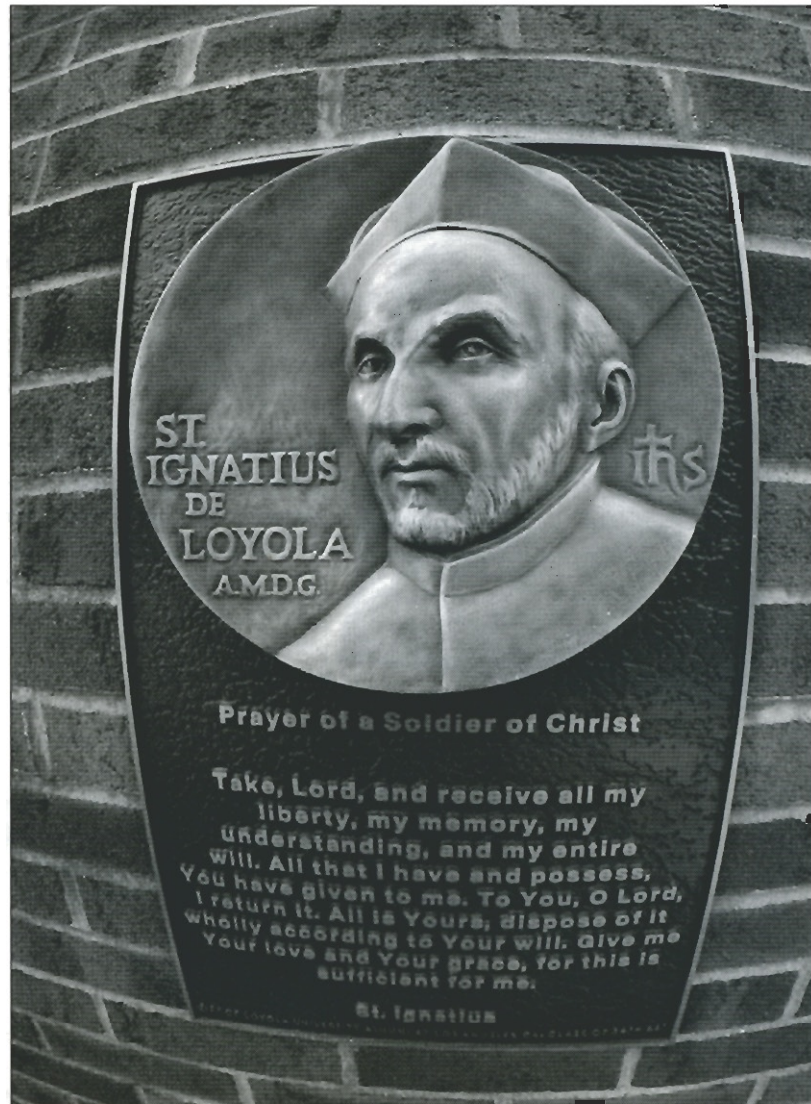
Here I want to address just one disquieting problem. Empathize with an undergraduate business major. The student learns of *religious man* in theology,

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political, psychological and social man in social sciences, and then progresses into business studies and *economic man* is the focus. Further, even in a business and society course the student again encounters a cacophony of voices competing with a dominant *Shareholder Model*, (e.g. the *The Caux Roundtable's* corporate responsibility model, or the *Business as an Agent of World Benefit* model from Case Western Reserve, the *Stakeholder Model*, etc.). Small wonder that some business students end up simply accepting profit maximization as the business norm. They are sometimes more opportunistic and focused on dollars than the executives we bring to speak in our classes. They lack a coherent holistic set of principles specific to business. I find executives discouraged when they discover business students' ethics shallower and inner compasses more poorly calibrated than expected.

What might be one practical remediation? I believe we need a blue ribbon *Association of Jesuit Colleges and Business Schools* position paper; a statement of principles. It should include a Christian anthropology of man and the nature of work, an understanding of organizational structures congruent with human nature, attention to justice in the context of both local and global challenges, take a clear position on the appropriate role of profits, elucidate discernment as a way of proceeding with complex strategic decision challenges and provide an understanding of business leadership as a noble vocation.

There are resources available addressing each issue for our contemporary context. It would be helpful if the primary authors are business faculty so that the language is "of business", and connections are made to positive complementary developments in management sciences and economics. Obviously, other disciplines must contribute to conceptualization and editing. Such a document, sifted and winnowed through the Jesuit charism, endorsed by deans, leading business scholars, university presidents, theologians, social scientists, philosophers, and business executives would provide a Jesuit benchmark. This effort, perhaps sponsored by a Jesuit institute such the Woodstock Center at Georgetown, would give both students and faculty a principled, holistic perspective at the beginning of this new century. Then alternative world views would at



A plaque in dedication to Saint Ignatius, Wheeling Jesuit University.

least be tested against this conceptualization.

To be broadly utilized, the document will need to be short. My estimate is a year of idea harvesting and drafting, then six months to obtain feedback modifications from potential endorsees, and a final editing effort would encompass a two year period. (A process paralleling the preparation of documents at the Jesuit General Congregation just concluded could be utilized).

We need a Jesuit Business School position paper framing principles as a stake in the dialog regarding business corporations that are a dominant force shaping the lives of a majority of our graduates as well as the world order. ■

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