

**The Role of Catholic Social Teaching in a Business Program:  
A Student Perspective**

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**Abstract**

The inclusion of Catholic Social Teaching is extremely common in many Catholic liberal arts universities, especially in regards to students whose main course study focus is Catholic Studies or Theology. This type of course content relation is common across all types of courses of study at the university level. Students who plan to become a doctor or a nurse will study science. Students who plan to become lawyers will study criminal justice and law. The addition of Catholic Social Teaching in a business program is limited because of its uniqueness in relation of course content to real life application, or so some may think. This paper will examine the usefulness of Catholic Social Teaching in a business program in order to receive a complete business education and in the formation of a whole person. The uniqueness of this paper is that rather than hearing from what a professor or school administrator believes will benefit the students, this paper is from the perspective of a student. This paper will examine the four fundamental principles of Catholic Social Teaching, and present scenarios guiding readers on ways to act upon each of these principles.

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## Introduction

“To receive in truth the Body and Blood of Christ given up for us, we must recognize Christ in his poorest, his brethren” ~ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

Much of my understanding of this course content, and Catholic Social Teaching in general, has come from a number of different encyclicals that have been provided throughout this course, as well as a number of books that have been provided for us. The books served as a way to draw a connection between Catholic Social Teaching and a business setting. Each encyclical provided us different information on our commitment to the poor and how to address socioeconomic issues through Catholic Social Teaching. These types of attitudes would stay consistent from work, leisure, and integration.

Now the main question becomes, what makes up Catholic Social teaching, and how do each of the parts play a role in the formation of a student in a business curriculum? How does each student benefit from the addition of CST in their curriculum? How can each student use what they have learned and bring into their future careers and lives from now on? This paper will begin to dissect the four components of Catholic Social Teaching; Solidarity, Subsidiarity, The Common Good, and Human Dignity. Then, it will explain their application in the formation a business student as a whole person. In regards to my own student perspective, I will attempt to define this application in regards to how Catholic Social Teaching will assist me in my future as a business education professor.

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### The Principles of Catholic Social Teaching

Solidarity “Virtue enabling the human family to share fully the treasure of material and spiritual goods” ~ *Karen Shields Wright from Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice (pontifical foundation founded by Pope John Paul II)*

Solidarity is essential in building authentic human relationships. With solidarity comes unity between members of society because of the ideal of equality and respect for persons this ideal requires. These types of relationships reach beyond just family, but reach to friends, co-workers, and all members of society in which we are blessed enough to meet. These types of relationships are essential for members of business in order to run a business the most efficiently, and in a way which is best for all people. However, solidarity is not strictly addressed as a feeling or desire, but by action behind each feeling. Pope John Paul once wrote that solidarity is not “a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of others. It is a firm and persevering determination to commit oneself to the common good. Chapter seven of See, Act, Judge gives an example of a scenario which does not reflect solidarity, and a way in which we can combat these actions in order to try and reach this key principle.

This chapter defines environmental racism as environmental policies, practices, or directives that differentially affect or disadvantage (whether intentional or unintentional) individuals, groups, or communities based on race or color. One example of this is the Flint water crisis, where the majority of Flint’s residents are black and 40% live under the poverty line. I believe this idea stems from richer cities being the communities where the most pollution is created. “...to include the demand of resources and energy by richer nations caused by the dumping of these products into the atmosphere and sea by these same members of society. This

causes irreparable damage to these essential elements of life on earth, and would extend to the entirety of humanity.” This is a direct quote from See, Judge, Act. The call for creation explains how environmental degradation harms people, especially the poor.

One main idea CST’s call for creation offers in order to protect the dignity of human beings that will help prevent environmental racism includes eliminating materials and individualistic characteristics of a consumer driven culture. I think this is an interesting idea to go over in the current corona virus pandemic we are involved in. I believe we can partially take this pandemic as a lesson from God in regards to taking a step back, and reflecting on how we, as humans, go about our daily lives. Whether this reflection be to some as having too great of an individualistic mindset, or being too focused on material items, or other aspects of one’s self-driven life, it is a great time of reflection.

The main action that I believe that is aligned with CST’s call for creation that may help prevent environmental racism is to reduce overall consumption. Although ideas such as buying green does help prevent environmental racism, it does not reflect upon protecting the dignity of human beings. Focus on relationships, rather than material items. In all reality, what are people missing most in this worldwide pandemic? Do we hear society complaining about missing material items, or do we hear cries out over being alone and missing the community?

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Subsidiarity “Coordination of society’s activities in a way that supports the internal life of the local communities” ~ *Karen Shields Wright from Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice (pontifical foundation founded by Pope John Paul II)*

Subsidiarity is essential in coordinating social activities and social interests. This principle clarifies that making decisions is not about putting one human or a group of human’s needs over another, but rather doing what is best for the societal interest. With these interests, it is necessary for each member of society to be determined in doing their part, and fulfilling what they are physically and financially able to contribute. Subsidiarity is crucial in a business setting to combat monopolies or business members too overly obsessed with profit maximization. There is room for maximum achievement through subsidiarity. Chapter 5 of See, Judge, Act takes our current system of capitalism and addresses a few adjustments that would be beneficial for societal needs.

Chapter 5 of See, Judge, Act explains how the needs of people of poverty should be addressed, and the demand for change/adjustment in our current system of capitalism. A few major takeaways I drew from chapter 5 include the demand of putting the needs of those who are poor and vulnerable above the needs of others, the necessary participation of everyone in society, and a long-term plan rather than short-term solutions. Although I know there is no immediate solution for alleviating poverty in accordance with the common good, I do believe there are smaller plans people could put into place in order to take a step towards alleviating poverty.

For alleviating poverty, one idea that I had would be creating a non-profit or privately funded facility that is a type of breakfast & job integration for people of poverty. What the business would look like in my mind would be a service that provides breakfast 3-4 days a week,

and also provides job assistants that offer the ability to make known of available jobs and set up interviews for the people in need who come to the breakfast. The breakfast will help draw people in immediately, and then as people come in they can be persuading by some of the job assistants to a more long-term solution to their issue. Some people may not have the easy accessibility to computers or the internet which could provide these services. I think if people are provided the opportunity and the assistance, then they will take advantage.

I believe in order for an anti-poverty measure to work, there must be lots of employment opportunities that will provide the outcome of potential cash to the users of the measure. I think it is extremely helpful to provide meals and provide services to people of poverty, however, I do not believe this will change anything long-term. People of poverty must participate in helping themselves and earning cash in order to make any long-term changes in regards to helping the overall common good. The common good regards the flourishing of everyone, which requires equal desire from everyone to make a change and a difference in others or their own lives. Taking societal issues with a long-term approach is what best exemplifies subsidiarity and leads us towards the common good.

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The Common Good “The totality of social conditions allowing persons to achieve their communal and individual fulfillment” ~ *Karen Shields Wright from Centesimus Annus Pro*

*Pontifice (pontifical foundation founded by Pope John Paul II)*

The Common Good is what every member of society should be focused on reaching. We should be focused on living in a just society. In business, the common good would be a business



in which each member is being pushed to be their best selves, while getting the support and resources in order to do so. We should strive to be virtuous people in the work place. Violence is not a way to reach The Common Good in a community. Promoting peace and how it helps promote The Common Good is addressed in chapter 6 of See, Judge, Act.

Chapter 6 of See, Judge, Act explains deeply how violence can negatively impact communities and people within a community. It also explains that in order to obtain unity it is important to for people of all social classes to cooperate peacefully. Love, mutuality, and commitment creates these prosperous and peaceful relationships. I came up with a number of ideas that may help promote peace in community. However, these ideas, like all opinions, generate different points of view in addition.

My first idea to promote peace would be to control arm sales. In order to do so, I think it would be important for each arms owner to participate in a thorough background check and to obtain a permit no matter the gun or your age. Obviously, the belief of people's right to bear arms would be taken in question. People could take these restrictions as a type of over controlment, rather than a safety precaution.

My second idea would be to provide mental-health days and/or mental health awareness days. I believe this would help promote peace by keeping people at a more peaceful state of mind. The biggest issue with this would be employees taking advantage of the system, or businesses not being run as effectively with people taking these additional days off. However, I believe no matter the system, some people are bound to take advantage. This could help business owners build the right culture for their business.

My third idea and final idea would be educating early about equality and treating people right. I believe this could start in the public-school system at an extremely early age. Certain

classes could be provided by counselors or professors with a psychology background in order to help each age group understand this message. I think the biggest issue with this will be parents who do not want educators teaching their kids rights and wrongs, and want their children to solely be taught about educational aspects of learning at school. Although these three ideals may not be the solution to finding The Common Good, it is a step that societies could take in the right direction.

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Human Dignity “The intrinsic value of a person created in the image and likeness of God and redeemed by Christ” ~ *Karen Shields Wright from Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice (pontifical foundation founded by Pope John Paul II)*

Human Dignity is the most understood concept out of the four in Catholic Social Teaching because it is a concept we have been taught ever since we were young. It is a concept more generally accepted and acted upon than subsidiarity, solidarity, and the common good in a public setting. Pope Benedict writes according to The Linacre Quarterly,

“As one created in the image of God, each individual human being has the dignity of a person; he or she is not just something but someone, free, self-giving and entering into communion with others.”

Human dignity should be the most basic principle. In a business setting, we can demonstrate this principle by offering grace and understanding. Each and every person should be given the right to develop and have freedom to seek knowledge and truth. Chapter 8 of See, Act, Judge talks

about serving the needs of the poor and giving opportunity to humans who may not have the opportunity available. One of these types of opportunity is the God's Child project.

The God's Child Project cares for 5,000 orphaned, abandoned, and poverty-stricken boys and girls. This organization also provides health services for over nearly 9,000 widowed mothers and dependents in countries including Guatemala, India, and the United States. I believe this is a superb example of service-learning organization that helps the needs of the poor and whose efforts relate to economic globalization. According to Science Direct, economic globalization involves a wide variety of processes, opportunities, and problems related to the spread of economic activities among countries of the world. The God's Child Project based in Bismarck is able to provide education, healthcare, basic needs, disaster relief, human rights services, and family care to lower income countries.

I think the main problem caused by globalization that this organization is trying to find solutions for is finding ways to benefit the poor who may have been affected by globalization. As I listed previously, this organization helps provide healthcare and family care to families who may not have the ability financially to do so otherwise. Many of these opportunities include facilities such as orphanages, free medical, and free dental services that are located in Guatemala and India.

One benefit of economic globalization is that it provides poor countries, with infusions of foreign capital and technology, the chance to develop economically. This organizations, through services such as the Dreamer School and adult training centers, helps educate individuals of all ages in order to have opportunity for success. With foreign technology provided, I believe this organization takes advantage of the opportunity of potential economic success in these lower

income communities. Human dignity for each and every person is essential in providing these individuals with opportunity.

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This paper evaluates Catholic Social Teaching, and how it is beneficial in a business program and in the formation of a whole person. A unique feature of this paper is that it is directly from a student's perspective, rather than from faculty or administration. In addition, this paper examined the four characteristics of Catholic Social Teaching, and a number of scenarios from which we can act upon in our daily lives order to become more whole ourselves, and to form a more just society. Each and every person has influence. Catholic Social Teaching gives business leaders a tool kit in order to be the best versions of ourselves and thrive in service and equality.

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