

June 2021

Fides et Ratio: Saint John Paul II on the Ground of Business Ethics

Jim Wishloff

University of Lethbridge, jim.wishloff@uleth.ca

Follow this and additional works at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/jrbe>

Recommended Citation

Wishloff, Jim (2021) "Fides et Ratio: Saint John Paul II on the Ground of Business Ethics," *Journal of Religion and Business Ethics*: Vol. 4, Article 3.

Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/jrbe/vol4/iss2/3>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the LAS Proceedings, Projects and Publications at Digital Commons@DePaul. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Religion and Business Ethics by an authorized editor of Digital Commons@DePaul. For more information, please contact digitalservices@depaul.edu.

Fides et Ratio: Saint John Paul II on the Ground of Business Ethics

Cover Page Footnote

Thank you to two anonymous reviewers for their very helpful and professional reviews.

INTRODUCTION

“Ideas control the destiny of the world, and the absence of ideas or the confusion of ideas can destroy the world.”¹

The beginning of contemporary Catholic social thought is generally identified as the publication of *Rerum Novarum*² by Pope Leo XIII in 1891. There is certainly good reason for this as successive Popes wrote encyclicals commemorating the release date of *Rerum Novarum*: Pope Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*,³ 1931; Pope John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra*,⁴ 1961; Pope John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*,⁵ 1981 and *Centesimus Annus*,⁶ 1991. A third encyclical, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*,⁷ 1987 is usually added to the two encyclicals by Pope John Paul II already cited to complete a listing of his social encyclicals.

It is the contention of this work that this somewhat arbitrary classification scheme is inadequate and that additional encyclicals from Saint John Paul II must be considered in conjunction with the three mentioned to properly understand the social teaching of his pontificate. Of note are the three encyclicals he wrote in a five-year span between 1993 and 1998: *Veritatis Splendor*,⁸ 1993; *Evangelium Vitae*,⁹ 1995; *Fides et Ratio*,¹⁰ 1998. The insights on how business ought to be conducted that Saint John Paul II wants to impart can only be grasped and properly applied if his writings are taken as an integral whole. This study undertakes an in-depth examination of *Fides et Ratio* to both ground the principles and practices of Catholic social thought and to acknowledge what the loss of a “*sapiential horizon*”¹¹ in philosophy necessarily means for business and the larger society that embeds the institution.

¹ Heinrich Pesch, *Lehrbuch de Nationalökomic/Teaching guide to Economics, vols. 1-5*, Trans. R. J. Erderer (Lewiston: Mellen Press, 1905-1926), 1926, Vol 1, 166.

² Leo XIII. *Rerum Novarum (On the Condition of the Working Classes)* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1891).

³ Pius XI. *Quadragesimo Anno (On Social Reconstruction)*. (Boston: Daughter of St. Paul, 1931).

⁴ John XXIII. *Mater et Magistra (On Christianity and Social Progress)*. (Vatican City: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 1961).

⁵ John Paul II. *Laborem Exercens (On Human Work)*. (Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1981).

⁶ John Paul II. *Centesimus Annus (On the Hundredth Anniversary of Rerum Novarum)*. (Boston: St. Paul Books & Media, 1991).

⁷ John Paul II. *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis (On Social Concern)*. (Boston: St. Paul books & Media, 1987).

⁸ John Paul II. *Veritatis Splendor (The Splendor of Truth)*. (Sherbrooke: Edition: Paulines, 1993).

⁹ John Paul II. *Evangelium Vitae (The Gospel of Life)*. (Sherbrooke: Mediaspaul, 1995).

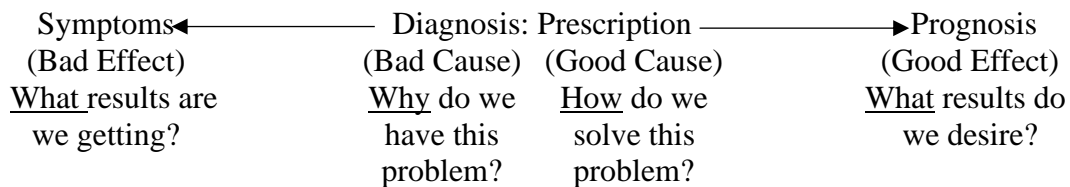
¹⁰ John Paul II. *Fides et Ratio (Faith and Reason)*. (Sherbrooke: Mediaspaul, 1998a).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, no. 106.

Fides et Ratio takes up the “theme of *truth* itself and its *foundation* in relation to *faith*”.¹² How can we know the truth about our existence? What does it mean to be human? How does this understanding shape cultural formation and business practice?

No one can avoid the questions the encyclical addresses, “neither the philosopher nor the ordinary person”.¹³ This includes, of course, the ordinary person engaged in business. The unreflective businessman or businesswoman is not bereft of a world view. It is impossible to live without foundational beliefs. What almost certainly happens in this case is that the person in question adopts the common mind of the culture he or she lives in. This is what makes our condition parlous. Modern philosophy has “taken wrong turns and fallen into error”.¹⁴ Such an “impoverishment of human thought”¹⁵ leads to a culture of nihilism, something simply untenable in human terms. Business decision-making cannot but be ethically impoverished as a result.

In trying to appropriate the vital wisdom found in *Fides et Ratio* a structure of diagnosis and prescription is adopted. In insisting that “diseases are properly treated only if rightly diagnosed”,¹⁶ the encyclical gets at the fundamental cause and effect dynamic at the heart of reality. It is presented here.



Utilizing this structure the article is laid out in four sections. Section I, an explorer’s tool kit, looks at the faculties human beings possess that make knowing possible and how these capacities can be used to achieve understanding. The key point given in the preamble of the encyclical is that divine revelation builds upon and perfects reason’s search for the truth. The human spirit rises to the contemplation of the truth on two wings, faith and reason. Section II, the Christian vision, uses these tools to set out the basic elements of the Christian world view. The key principle here is receptivity to a reality given by God not made by human beings. The close inspection of the ideas of *Fides et Ratio* in these first two sections sets the stage to examine business culture directly. Section III does this by looking at several fundamental dimensions of business

¹² Ibid., no. 6, emphasis in original.

¹³ Ibid., no. 27.

¹⁴ Ibid., no. 49.

¹⁵ Ibid., no. 88.

¹⁶ Ibid., no. 54.

practice—mission (purpose of enterprise), human work and human rest, marketing and promotion, obligations to promote the family, stewardship of the natural world—from the Christian perspective developed in sections I and II. Fuller use is made of the entire corpus of Catholic social thought to establish what constitutes good business conduct in each of these areas. Summative questions are presented to encourage reflection. These three sections should have succeeded in advancing a prescription for building an institutional world worthy of what we are as human beings. The modern mind, however, has rejected the synthesis of faith and reason, indeed, has rejected reason itself.¹⁷ This has resulted in the loss of a sound vision of human nature and society and with it the loss of any hope for ethical decision-making in business. Section IV, committing sophiocide, goes back into *Fides et Ratio* to detail the profound abasement of reason chronicled there and then to consider the business culture that necessarily falls out from erroneous philosophical thinking. The article concludes by drawing the contrast between Christian business culture informed by ancient wisdom and the contemporary commercial world which is nihilistic in its orientation.

AN EXPLORER’S TOOL KIT

“Truth himself speaks truly or there’s nothing true.”

-Thomas Aquinas, *Adoro te Devote*

“Seek wisdom, though it cost you all you have, get understanding.”¹⁸

Human beings are “wayfarers”,¹⁹ pilgrims on a journey. What is this trek and how are we equipped to complete it? What resources are available to us? Our journey is a journey of discovering the truth of our existence, of the ultimate meaning of our lives. Fundamental questions pervade every human life.

“Who am I? Where have I come from and where am I going?

Why is there evil? What is there after this life?”²⁰

¹⁷ In *Fides et Ratio* we have the extraordinary spectacle of Saint John Paul II defending reason against unreason. A century earlier in 1870 Vatican I had the challenge of defending the faith from the assault of naturalism. At the close of the millennium Saint John Paul II observed that even certain self-evident truths such as the principle of non-contradiction were no longer acknowledged. “Widespread esoteric superstition” (John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 37), “currents of irrationalism” (Ibid., no. 91) would have to be confronted.

¹⁸ Prov. 4:7.

¹⁹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, 5 volumes., Trans. Fathers of the English Dominican province (New York: Benzinger Brothers, 1948), II–II, q. 24, a 4.

²⁰ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 1.

These questions arise out of the quest for meaning that compels the human heart and the answers determine life's direction. In sum, we set out as "explorers"²¹ determined to "meet and engage truth more deeply".²² We have both "the desire and the duty to know the truth of our own destiny".²³

Our constitution as human beings sets us "apart from the rest of creation"²⁴ and gives us the capacity to fulfill our mission of discovery. What is it about our make up as human persons that distinguishes us from other beings? Saint John Paul II answers the question in this way.

Within visible creation, man is the only creature who not only is capable of knowing but who knows that he knows and is therefore interested in the real truth of what he perceives.²⁵

Thus, human beings are capable of self-knowledge and self-possession. Their intellectual faculties allow them to rise above the level of sensory particulars to achieve conceptual understanding. "All human beings have the desire to know".²⁶ This desire is fulfilled by using the mind to close down on truth. Indeed, the human being may be defined as "the one who seeks the truth".²⁷ Ignoring the thirst for truth rooted in the human heart casts human "existence into jeopardy".²⁸ Human nobility consists in taking up the task of using reason to explore truth.

"Human knowledge is a journey which allows no rest".²⁹ The journey commences or is sprung from a sense of wonder awakened by the stupendous fact of existence. "Human beings are astonished to discover themselves as part of the world, in a relationship with others like them, all sharing a common destiny".³⁰ Questions of metaphysical import naturally arise in the human mind: Why is there something rather than nothing? Why is what exists as it is and not somehow else? Thus, Saint John Paul II says "in a special way, the person constitutes a privileged locus for the encounter with being, and hence with metaphysical enquiry".³¹

Metaphysical questions are the province of philosophy. Therefore, it can be said that human beings are philosophers by nature—i.e., we naturally ask why things are as they are. Philosophy's proper concern is to investigate being, or the

²¹ Ibid., no. 21.

²² Ibid., no. 1.

²³ Ibid., no. 26.

²⁴ Ibid., no. 71.

²⁵ Ibid., no. 25.

²⁶ Aristotle, "Metaphysics" in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, vol. 2 The Revised Oxford Translation, Edited by Jonathan Barnes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), I, 1.

²⁷ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 28.

²⁸ Ibid., no. 29.

²⁹ Ibid., no. 18.

³⁰ Ibid., no. 4. It is worth noting that Saint John Paul II goes on to say that without wonder human beings would be "incapable of a life which is genuinely personal". A sense of wonder protects our very human personhood.

³¹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 83.

kinds of things that exist and their essences. Philosophy must be interested in “how things really are”.³²

Philosophy, when it retains a sapiential horizon, is an indispensable resource for gaining knowledge of truth. Philosophy is capable of sketching an answer to life’s meaning. Core philosophical insights—e.g., “principles of non-contradiction, finality and causality”³³ retain their permanent validity. Reason which successfully “intuits and formulates the first principles of being and correctly draws from them conclusions which are coherent both logically and ethically”³⁴ confirms our common sense understanding of reality. Reason can even reach the cause of the origin of the reality we perceive.³⁵

Philosophy’s search for truth in the natural order must always be incomplete. Saint John Paul II is adamant that no philosophical system, no matter how well worked out, “can legitimately claim to embrace the totality of truth nor to be the complete explanation of the human being, of the world and of the human being’s relationship with God”.³⁶ When reason remains open to the supernatural it discovers horizons it could not reach on its own.

When the why of things is explained in full harmony with the search for the ultimate answer, then human reason reaches its zenith and opens to the religious impulse. The religious impulse is the highest expression of the human person, because it is the highpoint of his rational nature. It springs from the profound human aspiration for the truth, and it is the basis of the human being’s free and personal search for the divine.³⁷

Philosophical wisdom is completed by theological wisdom, understanding God’s word in the light of faith. Thomas Aquinas begins his summary of theology by pointing out the need for revealed truth as well as the philosophical truth built up by human reason.

It was necessary for the salvation of man that certain truths which exceed human reason should be made known to him by divine revelation. Even as regards those truths about God which human reason could have discovered, it was necessary that man should be

³² Ibid., no. 25.

³³ Ibid., no. 4.

³⁴ Ibid., no. 4.

³⁵ Saint John Paul II makes this point in the encyclical, “In reasoning about nature, the human being can rise to God” (John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 19). This reiterates what St. Paul said in his letter to the Romans, “ever since the creation of the world his eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made” (Rom. 1:20). This is consistent with the book of wisdom, “From the greatness and beauty of things comes a corresponding perception of their creator” (Wis. 13:5).

³⁶ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 51.

³⁷ Ibid., no. 28.

taught by divine revelation; because the truth about God such as reason could discover, would only be known by a few, and that after a long time, and with the admixture of many errors, whereas man's whole salvation which is in God, depends upon the knowledge of this truth. Therefore, in order that the salvation of men might be brought about more fitly and surely, it was necessary that they should be taught divine truths by divine revelation.³⁸

There is a "fundamental harmony",³⁹ "a profound and indissoluble unity"⁴⁰ between the knowledge of faith and the knowledge of reason. The two modes of getting at the truth are mutually supportive. Faith is the advocate of reason because theology presupposes knowledge of truths which are philosophically knowable. Faith shows the way to reason in its search for truth. Revelation endows the truths which reason grasps "with their fullest meaning, directing them towards the richness of the revealed mystery in which they find their ultimate purpose"⁴¹. There can never be a true divergence between faith and reason. Truth, the consonance of the intellect with reality, "the equation of the mind to the thing"⁴² can only be one.⁴³

The infused virtue of charity also gives man the gift of wisdom. This is wisdom "descending from above",⁴⁴ a gift of the Holy Spirit, not the intellectual virtue acquired by human effort. This gift enables man to see things, judge things as God does. Wisdom "directs human acts according to Divine rules".⁴⁵

The encyclical holds up St. Thomas Aquinas as an "authentic model for all who seek the truth".⁴⁶ Personal holiness and a truly prodigious intellect allowed Aquinas to achieve the most elevated synthesis of faith and reason "ever attained

³⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 1, a. 1.

³⁹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 42.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 16.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, no. 67. This idea is repeated in the encyclical, "By virtue of the splendour emanating from subsistent Being itself, revealed truth offers the fullness of light and will therefore illumine the path of philosophical enquiry" (John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 79).

⁴² Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 21, a. 4.

⁴³ "God who reveals the mysteries and bestows the gift of faith has also placed in the human spirit the light of reason. This God could not deny himself, nor could the truth ever contradict the truth" (*Dei Filius*, 1870, IV).

⁴⁴ Jas.3:15.

⁴⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q. 45, a. 3.

⁴⁶ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 78.

by human thought”.⁴⁷ The “crystal rills of wisdom”⁴⁸ of this “apostle of the truth”⁴⁹ are commended as a sure map for all to follow.

In sum, the human person journeys to discover the truth about the meaning of his or her life. The expedition is demanded by the awareness of the inevitability of one’s own death. “*Does life have a meaning? Where is it going?*”.⁵⁰ A mere guess at the answers to these questions is not enough. People seek an absolute, “something ultimate, which might serve as a ground of all things . . . a final explanation, a supreme value which refers to nothing beyond itself”⁵¹. Faith and reason together provide the equipment needed to uncover this ultimate truth. “Faith asks that its object be understood with the help of reason; and at the summit of its searching reason acknowledges that it cannot do without what faith presents”.⁵²

Every person is tasked with pulling together a personal world view, a comprehensive and unified understanding of the meaning of life. No one proceeds without such a vision of life. This set of beliefs about reality regulates personal behaviour—i.e., we live by our beliefs. Since human beings are social beings by nature, we are also influenced by the cultural formation in which we are immersed. Culture is formed by the answers people give to life’s ultimate questions. Cultural understanding in turn shapes the individual. We are both “child and parent”⁵³ of the culture we are in. Business is, of course, an institution in society or a cultural institution. Conceptions about how those in business ought to act are inevitably influenced by the notions of ethics held in the broader culture.

Philosophy’s vocation is indeed profound. It directly tackles the question of life’s meaning and in doing so it forms culture. What is most important is that philosophy not “neglect or reject the truths of Revelation”.⁵⁴ Human life, and therefore culture, is ultimately grounded in the religious and moral sense. Created reason is “absolutely subject to uncreated truth”.⁵⁵

⁴⁷ Ibid., no. 78.

⁴⁸ Leo XIII. *Aeterni Patris (The Restoration of Christian Philosophy)* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1879), 18.

⁴⁹ Paul VI. *Lumen Ecclesiae*, no. 8. http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/it/letters/1974/documents/hf_p-vi_let_19741120_lumen-ecclesiae.html (accessed June 13, 2021).

⁵⁰ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 26.

⁵¹ Ibid., no. 27. “Personal existence must be anchored to a truth recognized as final, a truth which confers a certitude no longer open to doubt” (John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 27).

⁵² John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 42.

⁵³ Ibid., no. 71.

⁵⁴ Ibid., no. 100.

⁵⁵ First Vatican Council, Dogmatic constitution on the Catholic Faith, *Dei Filius*, 1870, III.

This section has sought to establish the fact that human beings are on a quest, a quest to understand the meaning of their lives. The search, while it can seem long and arduous, is not futile. The next section looks at what *Fides et Ratio* presents as the Christian vision of the truth of our being and our actual position in the order of existence. What does Christianity say about the meaning of man's pilgrimage through history?

THE CHRISTIAN VISION

“But who do you say I am?”⁵⁶

“Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”⁵⁷

Sacred scripture reveals God's wisdom. It is “not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age”,⁵⁸ not “the product nor the consummation of an argument devised by human reason”.⁵⁹ The knowledge of faith surpasses the “knowledge proper to human reason”⁶⁰ because it has a supernatural source.

Christian Revelation is a gift of God. God gratuitously reveals himself so that all people might come know the truth of their existence. “The knowledge which the human being has of God perfects all that the human mind can know of the meaning of life”.⁶¹ Since it comes from God, the truth of Revelation is “most certain”.⁶² God himself is the “guarantor”.⁶³ There can be no greater surety.

Revelation discloses that God is Trinity, three distinct divine Persons—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—united in one nature, “an infinite communion of love”.⁶⁴ It is also the case that God's Revelation is “immersed in time and history”.⁶⁵ God's love is at the heart of reality and as human beings living in time we take part in the rhythm of that divine love. What are the contours or the basic elements of the love story we find ourselves in?

⁵⁶ Mt. 16:15

⁵⁷ Phil. 4:8

⁵⁸ I Cor. 2:6.

⁵⁹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 15.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 8.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, no. 7.

⁶² *Ibid.*, no. 8.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, no. 13.

⁶⁴ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Cittadel Vaticano: Liberia Editrice Vaticana, 2004), no. 31.

⁶⁵ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 1.

Creation: The seminal point of God’s plan of love is creation. At the outset of sacred scripture God discloses himself as the creator of all that exists.⁶⁶ “God freely confers being and life on everything that exists”.⁶⁷ God also sustains his creation with his love. “Every creature—the human being included”⁶⁸ is essentially dependent on God.

Natural wonder at the mystery of existence points to an omnipotent God that is capable of bringing into being all that exists out of nothing since it is clear that the created world is not “self-sufficient”.⁶⁹ It is “neither uncreated nor self-generating”.⁷⁰ God alone has necessary existence. “God alone is the absolute”.⁷¹ God’s creation is intelligible because his mind is the ground of being. The natural order of things can be investigated and understood by reason because a creating intelligence is behind the evident design of the universe. God’s creating reason grounds human reason.

Beyond natural theology’s proofs of God’s existence Revelation brings out that God is all complete, existing with an inner Trinitarian life that needs nothing outside of itself. It is out of sheer goodness that God, infinitely perfect and blessed in himself, chose to create. All three divine Persons were there at the moment of creation. The evangelist brings out the integral part Jesus played. “All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being”.⁷² Saint Paul adds his voice to the apostle’s: “All things have been created through him and for him”.⁷³ The Holy Spirit was also present, “hovering over the waters”.⁷⁴

In the Genesis account of creation⁷⁵ human beings are the crowning glory of God’s creative work in the universe. In all his creation, God uniquely wills human beings into existence “for their own sake”.⁷⁶ We are “born of God’s creative love”,⁷⁷ formed in the very likeness of God and deliberately designed as

⁶⁶ “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen. 1:1).

⁶⁷ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 26.

⁶⁸ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 80.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Jn. 1:3.

⁷³ Col. 1:16.

⁷⁴ Gen. 1:1.

⁷⁵ Gen. 1-3.

⁷⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 24. http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_sp.html (accessed June 13, 2021).

⁷⁷ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate (On Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth)* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009), no. 76.

male and female. Every human person is an “image of God”.⁷⁸ This means that every human person possesses an irreducible God given dignity. The Christian vision of man as “*imago Dei*”⁷⁹ also brings to light the destiny proper to men and women.

What is unique about the human person is that the material and the spiritual are married in a single creature. The human body is animated by a spiritual soul, created not by the parents in the process of physical generation because the soul is immaterial but “immediately by God”.⁸⁰ The spiritual soul of every person survives bodily death and lives forever because the soul is independent of the corporeal world.

The human person is thus in possession of intellectual powers and free will. The vocation of being human is to come to the fullest development of those distinctive human faculties. The intellect is perfected by knowing truth and the will is fulfilled by loving goodness. The supreme truth is God and the supreme goodness is God. Therefore, the ultimate purpose in life “the supreme realization” of our true selves,⁸¹ is to know God and love God and, because our immortal soul destines us eternally, to enjoy God forever. God made human beings for loving fellowship with himself. Our supreme calling is “to share in the divine mystery of the life of the Trinity”.⁸² God created the whole universe to invite and take human beings “into communion with himself”.⁸³ The cosmos comes first in time but not in divine intention.

Redemption: If God was to relate to human beings in love, he had to leave them free to reject their divine destiny. Love cannot be coerced or compelled. It must be freely chosen. So God left human beings to their own counsel.⁸⁴

Human beings can accept God’s invitation of love or they can willfully exclude God from their lives. The doctrine of original sin says that Adam and Eve tragically decided to disobey God’s command to not eat of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil”⁸⁵ and that their fall from goodness has been transmitted to all subsequent generations. “The blindness of pride deceived our first parents into thinking themselves sovereign and autonomous and into the

⁷⁸ Gen. 1:27.

⁷⁹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 80.

⁸⁰ U. S. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), no. 366.

⁸¹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 107.

⁸² *Ibid.*, no. 13.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, no. 10.

⁸⁴ “It was he who created humankind in the beginning, and he left them in the power of their own free choice” (Sir. 15:14).

⁸⁵ Gen. 2:7.

thinking that they could ignore the knowledge which comes from God”.⁸⁶ The heart of sin is a denial of our creatureliness. Reason imprisons itself in “shackles”.⁸⁷ Human thinking becomes “futile”.⁸⁸

Pride turns human beings away from God, but God does not leave them in this lapsed state. The Christian story is ultimately ‘Good News’. There is also the wonder of God’s more than amazing grace. In another act of absolute love God provides the way by which human beings can reach the ultimate end for which they were created. God sends his son, the second Person of the Trinity, Jesus Christ to redeem us.⁸⁹ The essence of the Christian world view is summed up in the most sublime statement ever made. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life”.⁹⁰ This is the awesome mystery of the Incarnation. God steps into history as a man. “The Eternal enters time, the whole lies hidden in the part, God takes on a human face”.⁹¹

⁸⁶ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 22.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 22.

⁸⁸ Rom. 1:21.

⁸⁹ As might be expected because of his station in the papal office, Saint John Paul II emphasized the Person and mission of Jesus Christ. Saint John Paul II opened his pontificate with the encyclical, *Redemptoris Hominis*—The Redeemer of Man. In it he says that Jesus Christ “is the center of the universe and of history” (1979, no. 1). In *Veritatis Splendor* he feels the need to emphatically exclaim, “*Christ has redeemed us!*” (1993, no. 103, emphasis in original). Saint John Paul II continues this teaching throughout *Fides et Ratio*. Passages speaking to Christ’s saving work are found from the beginning of the encyclical to its ending articles.

- The Paschal Mystery reveals “the ultimate truth about human life” (John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 2), a truth “the human mind of itself could not even have imagined” (John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 12).
- “What human reason seeks ‘without knowing it’ (cf. Acts 17:23) can be found only through Christ: What is revealed in him is ‘the full truth’ (cf. Jn. 1:14-16) of everything which was created in him and through him and which therefore in him finds fulfilment (cf. Col. 1:17)” (John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 34).
- “The mystery of the Incarnation will always remain the central point of reference for an understanding of the enigma of human existence, the created world and God himself” (John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 80).
- Seen in any other terms than the mystery of the incarnate Word, “the mystery of personal existence remains an insoluble riddle” (John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 12).
- The Truth of Christ is “the one definitive answer to humanity’s problems” (John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio* no. 104).

The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church summarily says that “the key, the center and the purpose of the whole of man’s history is to be found” (no. 31) in Jesus Christ.

⁹⁰ Jn. 3:16.

⁹¹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 12.

In Jesus Christ, God puts himself into human hands and suffers a humiliating death on the cross to bear humanity's transgressions.⁹² Jesus' Passion and Death issue "into his glorious Resurrection and Ascension to the right hand of the father".⁹³ Jesus goes to the grave and rises from the dead three days later to complete God's saving plan. God's shocking response of love enduring to the end reveals his essence.

Everyone searching for the truth, every philosophy recognizing "the human being's ceaselessly self-transcendent orientation towards the truth",⁹⁴ must take these historical events into account. "Revelation has set within history a point of reference which cannot be ignored if the mystery of human life is to be known".⁹⁵ The truth is a Person. "Jesus Christ is the Truth".⁹⁶ The God who creates is the God who saves in Person. Jesus Christ "*is the eternal word* in whom all things were created and he is the *incarnate word* who in his entire person reveals the Father".⁹⁷

Sanctification: It remains for human beings to accept God's offer of salvation, now presented "universally",⁹⁸ "to every man and woman".⁹⁹ Jesus imparts supernatural life.¹⁰⁰ He promises the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁰¹ An act of faith is required for a person to avail himself or herself of this life and this power. There is "no more important act"¹⁰² in a human life than this assent to God. "It is here that freedom reaches the certainty of truth and chooses to live in that truth".¹⁰³

God is the author of the lives of human beings. As such he has Author's rights or "an all-embracing authority"¹⁰⁴ in those lives. Jesus Christ is both savior *and* Lord. Faith is "an obedient response to God".¹⁰⁵ It is the "full submission of

⁹² "Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross" (Phil. 2:5-8).

⁹³ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 93.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 23.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 14.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 33.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 34.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, no. 70.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 12.

¹⁰⁰ "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn. 10:10).

¹⁰¹ "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate, to be with you forever" (Jn. 14:16).

¹⁰² John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 13.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, no. 13.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 92.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 13.

intellect and will”¹⁰⁶ to God. A new creation results from this surrender. God gives the convert “a new heart and a new spirit”.¹⁰⁷ A new life of grace lived in intimacy with the Holy Spirit is born. The believer is immersed in “the order of grace”¹⁰⁸ and participates in the very being of God.¹⁰⁹

The key to grasp what human life is meant to be is to look above the level of the mundane to the divine to see what human personhood should be. “Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Word of God, is the perfect realization of human life.”¹¹⁰ Jesus Christ explains or “fully reveals man to himself”.¹¹¹ This is something human beings can’t do for themselves because they did not create themselves. The goal of Christian life to be nothing less than Christ-like becomes entirely understandable. Imitating Jesus brings the human person to the perfect freedom Jesus possessed essentially. “At this point the relationship between freedom and truth is complete, and we understand the full meaning of the Lord’s words: ‘You will know the truth [of the Gospel], and the truth will make you free’ (Jn. 8:32)”¹¹² The full potential of human existence is realized in friendship with Christ. Human beings are called to be children of God in the world.¹¹³

God commands his children to be holy. “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect”¹¹⁴ God provides the means to reach this state of being in the sacraments, particularly the Real Presence of Christ at communion.¹¹⁵

Beatific Vision: Human fulfilment is ultimately found in the vision and beatitude of God. Human beings thirst to see God, to see the fullness of truth. “Revealed truth is set within our history as an anticipation of the ultimate and definitive vision of God which is reserved for those who believe in him and seek him with a sincere heart”.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁶ *Dei Filius*, III.

¹⁰⁷ Exek. 36:26.

¹⁰⁸ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 33.

¹⁰⁹ “It is no longer I who live but it is Christ who lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).

¹¹⁰ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 108.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, no. 60.

¹¹² John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 15.

¹¹³ “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. And because you are children, God has sent the spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ so you are no longer a slave but a child, and if a child then also an heir, through God.” (Gal. 4:4-7).

¹¹⁴ Mt. 5:48.

¹¹⁵ “In the Eucharist, Christ is truly present and alive, working through his Spirit” (John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 13).

¹¹⁶ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 15.

Human Goodness: The Christian vision, if it is truly the living religion of a person, will serve as the “true lodestar”¹¹⁷ of that person’s life. It will provide a “unifying explanation”¹¹⁸ for all that he or she does in the world. A faith alive¹¹⁹ gets embodied in action. Since a distinctive mark of the human person is the requirement of choosing to do one thing instead of another, a “rightly tuned will”¹²⁰ is needed if these actions are to be ethical. The search for the truth extends to the moral field as well. “There exists a prior moral obligation, and a grave one at that, to seek the truth [of morality] and to adhere to it once it is known”.¹²¹ This means there is an obligation to form one’s conscience well so that one can make a good judgment about the right conduct to choose in a situation by applying the “universal knowledge of the good”.¹²²

The truth of how we ought to act is derived from or follows from our understanding of ultimate reality and what it means to be human. An ethics which looks to the truth of the good “implies and presupposes a philosophical anthropology and a metaphysics of the good”.¹²³ Metaphysical exploration grounds human dignity in the “spiritual nature”¹²⁴ of the human person. This spiritual core has its origins in “subsistent Being”.¹²⁵ The moral good has its “ultimate foundation in the Supreme Good, God himself”.¹²⁶ Divine law states that human beings have a moral law “written on their hearts”.¹²⁷ Aquinas explains how this natural law, the first principle of which is to do good and avoid evil, “is nothing less than the rational creature’s participation of the eternal law”,¹²⁸ the eternal nature or character of “God himself”.¹²⁹

Authentic liberty is found in adhering to this law, which is preserved in the Ten Commandments and is also reflected in the “human and supernatural virtues”.¹³⁰ The cardinal virtues, prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance are the qualities of character that enable the human person to reach the furthest potentialities of his or her nature. These moral habits ought to be cultivated because they perfect the distinctly human powers and protect against the harm that inordinate desire can do to the human personality. Human beings cannot

¹¹⁷ Ibid., no. 15.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., no. 81.

¹¹⁹ Jas. 2:17.

¹²⁰ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 25.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid., no. 98.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., no. 83.

¹²⁵ Ibid., no. 79.

¹²⁶ Ibid., no. 83.

¹²⁷ Rom. 2:15.

¹²⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I–II, q. 91, a. 2.

¹²⁹ Ibid., I–II, q. 91, a. 1, ad. 3.

¹³⁰ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 98.

prescind from their nature. The theological virtues, faith, hope and love are absolutely gratuitous gifts from God infused in our souls by God as a sign of his presence and as a means to make us holy. The cardinal virtues are not supplanted but neither do they remain just natural. “Grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it”.¹³¹ The theological virtues inform and give life to the natural virtues making them more than they could be without supernatural help.

Jesus teaches a twofold commandment to love which he says sums up the moral law. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself”.¹³² We are to imitate Jesus’ love to the point of laying down our lives for others.¹³³

The great truth of human existence is that we execute our agency in a divine order. Human institutions and human cultures only approximate that order. The challenge is to bring our human built world into accord with the ultimate reality we receive but do not make. Integral human development is predicated on receptivity.

Truth, and the love which it reveals, cannot be produced: they can only be received as gifts. Their ultimate source is not and cannot be, mankind, but only God, who is himself Truth and Love. This principal is extremely important for society and for development, since neither can be a purely human product; the vocation to development on the part of individuals and peoples is not based simply on human choice but is an intrinsic part of a plan that is prior to us and constitutes for all of us a duty to be freely accepted. That which is prior to us and constitutes us—subsistent Love and Truth—shows us what goodness is, and in what our true happiness consists. *It shows us the road to true development.*¹³⁴

The Christian vision exposes the gap that exists in a culture between what people think and what “objective truth is”.¹³⁵ In bringing the unchanging truth of God to culture, Christians bring out the disorders caused by sin that are present in the society. Genuine liberation and new ways to develop are also offered as a matter of course. The question is what would a business culture informed by Christian beliefs look like? What would it mean for business as an institution to be ordered to God’s plan of love?

Love must enliven the commercial sector no less than any other area of human endeavor. If business practices are to be fully human, they must be born

¹³¹ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 1, a. 8, ad. 2.

¹³² Mt. 22:37-39.

¹³³ Jn. 15:12,13.

¹³⁴ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 52.

¹³⁵ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 69.

of love and manifest love. If business relationships are to uphold human dignity, they must be permeated by love. Love guarantees the common good,¹³⁶ the justification of the institution.

The analysis to this point has prepared the ground to look at business practice directly. Several fundamental aspects—Sunday rest, mission, marketing, work, family, the natural world—will be considered from the Christian perspective just developed. Each area of practice will be explained and illustrated with an example. Questions are asked at the close of the investigation of each aspect to stress the seriousness of the inquiry. Thinking about right and proper conduct in business is not an abstract exercise but a practical matter. The interrogative form used summarizes the matter at hand and compels a response. The questions presented establish a checklist for ethical business leadership. Out of this a picture of [ethical] business culture emerges.

BUSINESS CULTURE: A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

“I appoint you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.”¹³⁷

Sunday Rest: The Decalogue is a “privileged expression of the natural law”.¹³⁸ The Ten Commandments “constitute the indispensable rules of all social life”.¹³⁹ The importance of observing these ten words cannot be overstated. They are the expression of the covenant God has established with humanity. They teach us our true humanity. The third commandment demands observance of rest in God. “Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy”.¹⁴⁰

The close link between the order of creation and the order of salvation in God’s plan can be seen in the underlying reasons he gives for the commandment. In the Exodus formulation¹⁴¹ the reason given is recalling the work of God in creation. In Deuteronomic instruction¹⁴² God grounds the precept in his work of liberation. Pope John Paul II in his profound meditation on the meaning and

¹³⁶ The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine* of the Church forcefully asserts the Christian understanding of the common good. “Jesus’ Passover sheds clear light on the attainment of humanity’s true common good. Our history—the personal and collective effort to elevate the human condition—begins and ends with Jesus: thanks to him, by means of him and in light of him, every reality, including human society, can be brought to its Supreme Good, to its fulfilment.” (no. 170).

¹³⁷ Jn. 15:16.

¹³⁸ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 22.

¹³⁹ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, no. 97.

¹⁴⁰ Ex. 20:8.

¹⁴¹ Ex. 20:8-11.

¹⁴² Dt. 5:12-15.

practice of the commandment in his Apostolic Letter *Dies Domini*, points out that which God accomplished in creation and wrought for his people in exodus is fulfilled definitively in the Paschal mystery of Jesus Christ. Christ's resurrection is the definitive liberation from sin and death. Pope John Paul II summarizes the movement from Sabbath to Sunday.

The Paschal Mystery of Christ is the full revelation of the mystery of the world's origin, the climax of the history of salvation and the anticipation of the eschatological fulfillment of the world.¹⁴³

Every Sunday is an Easter celebration. God gives Sunday, a day illumined by the triumph of the Risen Christ, to men and women for the same reason he gives them all his precepts—"for their full human and spiritual growth".¹⁴⁴ Rest in God is necessary for us to be who we are. "In celebrating Sunday . . . the Christian is led toward the goal of eternal life".¹⁴⁵ Essential actions designated to achieve the recollection of one's self as a child of God include joining a Eucharistic assembly in worship and communion, abstaining from work and making time for prayer and catechetical instruction, undertaking works of charity (directed especially at the vulnerable). Rest marked by grateful remembrance of God's saving work puts life into proper perspective. Every reality is referred to God. Joy is deepened and hope is renewed and nourished.

An ontological distinction exists between human beings and other creatures lacking self-awareness. Prayer also marks this difference in kind. Human beings can recognize that the whole of creation tells of the glory of God and they can understand that the proper response to this reality is worship of God. "The worship of God, his freedom, and his rest come first. Thus and only thus can the human being truly live".¹⁴⁶

First things must be kept first in Christian business culture. While business is an active not a contemplative pursuit, God must claim the Christian businessman's first allegiance. The fundamental obligation of every business practitioner is worship of God. "The first act to which the Church calls the Christian business leader is to receive the Sacraments, to accept the Scriptures, to honour the Sabbath, to pray, to participate in silence and the other disciplines of the spiritual life".¹⁴⁷

Despite the fact that Lord's Day Acts carving out a place for worship, reflection and rest have been struck down in jurisdiction after jurisdiction in North

¹⁴³ John Paul II, *Dies Domini (On Keeping the Lord's Day Holy)* (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 1998), no. 18.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, no. 58.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 26.

¹⁴⁶ Benedict XVI, *In the Beginning . . . A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1986), 32.

¹⁴⁷ Pontifical Council of Justice and Peace, *Vocation of the Business Leader*, 2012, no. 68.

America, there are examples of businesses upholding the third commandment. *Chick-fil-A*, the enormously successful food vendor, remains closed on Sunday. *Arrkann Trailers* ends all its advertisements with the statement, “we are closed on Sundays and we think you should be too”. *Question to ask: Have I put anything above service to God?*

Mission of the Enterprise: As corporeal beings, human persons must win their way in the world by provisioning for themselves as any organism does. The distinctive challenge human beings face in meeting this demand is that they must think themselves through it, they must employ their intelligence in exercising economic initiative. Human freedom is a burden because it means a person must exercise prudential judgment himself or herself and live with the consequences of these decisions. In the economic realm this freedom requires people to be enterprising in providing for themselves and their loved ones and neighbors. When this burden is not accepted, when individual initiative is lacking, political tyranny and stagnation prevail. The stakes are indeed high.

Human beings are also inherently social by nature. People could not come into existence unless other human beings procreated them, and they could not stay in existence unless human beings maintained them in it. Human beings enter the world in a state of utter helplessness and are literally loved into being. Throughout their lives they depend on others for their maturation just as others depend on them for their growth. Given these facts it is understandable that people come together to form institutions to tackle the provisioning “problem”. What is important about these social forms is that they are societies of persons even though natural, physical and monetary capital will be utilized. The subject and end of every social institution, including the business firm, is the human person. Institutions exist to elevate people because in the Christian world view, the human person is a high and holy mystery, made in God’s own image. As such, the human person is worth infinitely more than any material goods that might be produced or the organizational entities created to generate that production. Institutions and societies come and go but the soul of every unique human being lives forever. “The primary capital to be safeguarded and valued is man, the human person in his or her integrity”.¹⁴⁸

The legitimate *telos* or objective end of every work community is the common good understood as the social order that empowers or facilitates every person in it to attain, as closely as possible, his or her perfection. Enterprises that do not contribute to human flourishing have no warrant for being in business since they deflect from the common good.

¹⁴⁸ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 25.

Business serves the common good by producing useful goods and services. This is what the institution is uniquely situated to do. It must always be remembered that these pursuits are subsidiary. Particular economic aims must be linked with the universal teleological order.

The perfect order which the Church preaches ... places God as the first and supreme end of all created activity, and regards all created goods as mere instruments under God, to be used only in so far as they would help towards the attainment of our spiritual end.¹⁴⁹

A generic mission statement for business can be formulated as follows: *provisioning goods and services that contribute to integral human development*. The Christian vision must be consulted to fill out what it means to develop, to completely fulfill our God given nature as human beings. The dimensions of human development include material, emotional, mental, social and spiritual aspects of being. Integral human development means the development of the whole person, a complete maturation or activation of our humanity. Human beings are a body/soul unity which means they do not live by bread alone “but by every word that comes from the mouth of God”.¹⁵⁰ The spiritual destination of man is eternal happiness with God. Being more, specifically being a saint, is to be sought not having more. The French writer Leon Bloy makes it clear that holiness must be pursued.¹⁵¹ “The only real sadness, the only real failure, the only great tragedy in life is to not become a saint”.¹⁵²

If business is to be an agent of authentic human development then, it must respect or honour this teleological reality by what it produces and the production processes it uses to bring these products about. Economic production should not deflect people from achieving their properly human end of sharing the divine life but should assist in the process of sanctification. Material goods are a means in service of a human freedom which is at its core “religious and ethical”.¹⁵³

In sum, the goods and services provided by the economic sector should *really* be goods and services not bads and dis-services when human well-being in its totality is considered. The want structure encouraged by enterprise should serve good moral formation. Just because something can be made and sold doesn't mean that it should be.

¹⁴⁹ Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, no. 136.

¹⁵⁰ Mt. 4:4.

¹⁵¹ Mt. 5:48.

¹⁵² Rod Dreher, *The Benedict Option: A Strategy for Christians in a Post-Christian Nation* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2017), 76.

¹⁵³ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of The Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 355.

The second component of integral human development is that *all* people must develop fully.¹⁵⁴ While any one company will have limited power in ensuring this happens, every economic enterprise must still recognize it has a responsibility to help bring it about. Our deeply social nature makes the virtue of solidarity, at the heart of which is the recognition that we are “all really responsible for all”,¹⁵⁵ a moral requirement.

It is possible for a company to use the very goodness of the products it offers as a powerful motivational tool. Medtronic Inc., the world’s leading maker of medical devices is one such company. Each year they bring a group of people who have benefitted from the company’s stents and pacemakers to their Minneapolis headquarters. Medtronic scientists, engineers, factory workers and administrative staff meet these patients who owe their physical well-being and sometimes even their lives to the work these employees do every day in designing, developing, making and delivering Medtronic’s life-giving devices.

Questions to ask: Is what we are doing worth doing at all? What contribution to human flourishing can we point to?

Marketing and Promotion: Business can be a noble vocation and so can the job of sales if it is done ethically. After products are made, they still must find their way into people’s hands. The proper objective of marketing is to identify people who would benefit from the goods and services being supplied and provide them with the information they need to make prudent decisions in the marketplace. If the truth about these products cannot be communicated openly and honestly, then it is almost certain that the salespeople are treading on thin ice ethically.

Those engaged in selling have a product to sell. Because it is their product, they know how it functions. By listening they can uncover the needs of potential customers. They can come to grasp how the product may be of value to certain people. The *art* of sales is a *linking* up of the people who might be helped by the product being carried with that product on terms that uplift everyone.

Promotional efforts in a business culture shaped by Christian beliefs need to do even more than this. They need to encourage people to simplify their lives both to reduce the environmental impact of consumption and to help people find a place for leisure and prayer. Business should aid in the shift to lifestyles where consumer choices and financial decisions are determined by “the quest for truth,

¹⁵⁴ Pope John Paul II emphasizes this in his encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 17. “Development either becomes shared in common by every part of the world or it undergoes a process of regression even in zones marked by constant progress. This tells us a great deal about the nature of *authentic* development: either all nations of the world participate, or it will not be true development.”

¹⁵⁵ John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 38.

beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth”.¹⁵⁶ Wisdom is to be pursued not the satisfaction of hedonistic impulses.

How a company handles buyer’s remorse is a telling sign of how the job of sales is being configured within the company’s overarching purposes. Business firms like Costco and Lee Valley Tools have adopted a virtual no questions asked return policy. This makes sense if the aim is to serve the authentic needs of others and this ought to be the objective. Jesus came “as one that serves”.¹⁵⁷ If a product is not serving the other person, then you want to make it easy for him or her to undo the purchase. Love of the other person, willing his or her good, is the aim not financial gain for oneself at the expense of another’s well-being.

Questions to ask: How will this product (purchase) contribute to this potential customer’s well-being. How would I like my mother to be treated by a salesperson?

Meaning and Structure of Work: Work has a profound meaning in the Christian world view. God gives human beings a share in the governance of the world he has created. Human work is a collaboration with God in creation. God has placed his precious gift of creation under human dominion. Human beings have a God-given mandate to fulfill.

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them: male and female he created them. God blessed them and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.’¹⁵⁸

Thus, work is a duty. It is God’s will that human beings are to be his hands in the world continuing to create. This obligation to work is met by observing two inheritances. First, human beings are always starting with goods gifted by God. “At the beginning of man’s work is the mystery of Creation”.¹⁵⁹ The order discovered in creation is to be heeded by human beings. Second, the instruments human beings use at work are the result of work. To think rightly of work is to see it in the stream of the history of human labor. Human beings never work alone because they are always accessing, always dependent upon the work of others whose legacy of work preceded theirs.

¹⁵⁶ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 51.

¹⁵⁷ Lk. 22:27.

¹⁵⁸ Gen. 1:27–28.

¹⁵⁹ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, no. 12.

This objective sense of work, “the sum of activities, resources, instruments and technologies used by men and women to produce things”,¹⁶⁰ is always subordinated to the subjective sense of work, the human subject “capable of acting in a planned and rational way, capable of deciding about himself, and with the tendency to self-realization”,¹⁶¹ performing the work. Work has dignity because of the dignity of the human person doing the work—i.e., it is *human* work. The precedence of the subjective dimension of work over the objective means that “it is always man who is the purpose of work”.¹⁶² “Work is for man not man for work”.¹⁶³

Sanctity is achieved through work. Human work directed to God as its final goal becomes a prayer. It is a chance to imitate Jesus by carrying the cross in all of work’s activities. It is the chance to do the unique work God calls each person to do. In the words of Saint John Henry Newman, “God has created me to do Him some definite service. He has committed some work to me which he has not committed to another. I have my mission”.¹⁶⁴ Christians are to put themselves into their work “for the Lord”.¹⁶⁵ With this orientation to God, work becomes the medium of self-making.

Work is a good thing for man—a good thing for his humanity—because through work man *not only transforms nature*, adapting it to his own needs, but he also *achieves fulfillment* as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes ‘more of a human being.’¹⁶⁶

This deep understanding of human work has profound implications for how the workplace ought to be structured. Goods and services are produced by people using material means. Labour takes precedence over capital in the process because of every human being’s capacity for self-transcendence. Capital is to be used to enable work that facilitates the development of the human personality. The means of production “cannot be possessed against labor, they cannot even be possessed for possession’s sake”.¹⁶⁷ To look on human beings as another commodity to be bought and sold at the service of capital expansion is an inversion of means and ends that lacks the divine wisdom to see the immortal splendor of the human personality.

¹⁶⁰ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 270.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, no. 272.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ William P. Neville, *Meditations and Devotions of the Late Cardinal Newman* (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1893), 301.

¹⁶⁵ Col. 3:23.

¹⁶⁶ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, no. 9.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 14.

It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship. . . . There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations—these are mortal, and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, exploit . . . immortal horrors or everlasting splendors.¹⁶⁸

People would be given meaningful work that utilizes and develops their higher faculties. The magnificence of one's work would match the magnificence of the human personality and be perfective of the same. The subjective character of work entails the right to participate. Responsibility for managing the firm would be broadly diffused. Employees would rightly be seen as associates or partners in the venture. Each person would see himself as a "part-owner of the great workbench where he is working with everyone else".¹⁶⁹

Proper attention would be paid to the work practices in place. Respect for the inalienable human rights of workers would be shown. The hours of work required, the physical demands put on the workers, the safety conditions would be humane. Charity can never countenance work environments that are harmful to the physical health and the moral integrity of the people working in them. Love draws out the best in others and sets the workbench up as a place where virtue can be developed.

PCL Construction is one of North America's largest construction companies. The more than one hundred years old firm has been employee owned since 1977 and is an employer of choice in the markets it operates in. PCL's success is predicated on its ownership culture and its commitment to the safety and development of its people. It is not by chance that PCL's safety record is two or three times better than the industry average. People receive the orientation, training and equipment they need to perform their work safely. There is an attitude, deeply held throughout the organization, that the time and money needed to complete the job safely is always available. As one member of the executive team summed it up "Everybody has to go home from work unhurt and feel safe while they are working".¹⁷⁰ The leadership at PCL has an even more audacious goal than this, however. In setting for itself the target of zero accidents, PCL seeks to raise the bar on safety across the entire construction industry.

¹⁶⁸ Clive Staples Lewis, *The Weight of Glory, and Other Addresses* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1949).

¹⁶⁹ John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, no. 14.

¹⁷⁰ All quotes regarding PCL are taken from interviews of PCL executives done by the author.

PCL's learning culture has made it one of the most admired companies in Canada and one of the most stable. Turnover rates are negligible (<4%) and there is a history of long-term service in the company. People who are able to realize their dreams and aspirations stay. This reality too has not come about by accident but is an outworking of a managerial philosophy that understands the importance of people. In the words of a senior manager, "Anybody can buy a crane but when we are growing the best people, then we will be the best construction company". Each employee is given a yearly learning hour budget. The company has its own college of construction where the best practices from its regional offices across North America can be shared. When it came time to celebrate the company's centennial, the choice was to construct a new 30,000 square foot Learning Center. Comprehensive internal surveys are done every three years to target areas of corporate improvement. A competency development planning system is in place to ensure that succession needs are met but beyond the formalization, the continual development of people is ingrained in the way the company operates.

An executive describes the cultural reality at PCL in this way: "Our strength is that everybody views it as their responsibility to pay it forward because someone mentored them. We bring people along. We encourage people to ask questions. We do whatever we can to develop employees by teaching them what we know. It's just embedded".

Questions to ask: Are people being treated as ends in themselves, as persons, and not as a mere means, as things? Is the subjective dimension of work being given the priority warranted by the dignity of the human person? Are people being built up?

Marriage and Family: "Human beings are not made to live alone. They are born in a family and in a family they grow, eventually entering society through their activity".¹⁷¹ With this statement Saint John Paul II both exposes the false anthropological assumptions of social contract theorists beginning with Hobbes that men "suddenly (like mushrooms) come to full maturity without all kinds of engagement to each other"¹⁷² and opens up a reflection on the nature and significance of marriage and the family which he completes elsewhere, most notably in his Apostolic Exhortation, *Familiaris Consortio* (1981) and in his *Letter to Families* (1994). What is the Christian meaning of these realities? What are the implications of this understanding for the proper functioning of society and particularly of the economy?

Marriage and family are at the center of God's plan for humanity from the beginning. By inscribing the truth of conjugal union on the very natures of men

¹⁷¹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 31.

¹⁷² J. Warrender, Editor, *De Cive* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983) viii, 1. [originally published 1642; First English Translation, 1651].

and women God divinely disposes marriage. God is the author of marriage and its innate permanent characteristics of totality, unity, indissolubility, fidelity and fruitfulness. Marriage is the total gift of man and woman in their complementarity to each other. It is a permanent (till death do us part) and exclusive (forsaking all others) covenantal union ordered to the procreation and education of children and the good of the spouses—i.e., husbands and wives mutually help each other to holiness. Jesus Christ conferred the highest dignity on marriage making it a sacrament of the new covenant.

Have you not read that the one who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female’, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh’? So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.¹⁷³

In procreating men and women become co-workers with God the Creator. Conjugal love is by its nature open to the acceptance of life.

The family is born of the intimate communion of life and love founded on the marriage between one woman and one man. It is a natural society at the core of the social order, a fact acknowledged in the *United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (Article 16.3)

The family is the natural and fundamental group unit of society and is entitled to protection by society and the state.

The family makes a unique and irreplaceable contribution to society as the primary place of humanization of the developing child. Human beings are “made for love and cannot live without love”¹⁷⁴ and the family is the cradle of love. It is in the family that one learns what it means to love and to be loved and therefore what it means to be a person. Every child has a right to “be born in a real family”¹⁷⁵ a right “to be born of one mother and one father who are father and mother both from a biological and from a legal point of view”.¹⁷⁶ Any destabilization of the family threatens the whole of society so the responsibility of protecting the health and integrity of the family falls to the whole society.

The family takes priority over the State because the family in its procreative function is the condition for the State’s existence. Society and the State exist for the family and by the principle of subsidiarity should never absorb, substitute or reduce the social functions of the family.

¹⁷³ Mt. 19:4-6.

¹⁷⁴ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, no. 223.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 244.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 235.

Public authorities have a duty to “sustain the family”¹⁷⁷ and to “ensure that public opinion is not led to undervalue the importance of marriage and the family”.¹⁷⁸ Civil law must always be “conformed to the natural law”¹⁷⁹ where it is clear that sexual complementarity is the objective condition for forming a couple in marriage. Legislation must “never weaken the recognition of indissoluble monogamous marriage as the only authentic form of family”.¹⁸⁰ The family is antecedent to the State and has a right to assistance from the State. The family has an obligation to transform society into a civilization of love by its actions and its example.

All intermediary organizations, including business firms, also have an obligation to support the family, the first and vital cell of society. “The Church’s social doctrine insists on the need for business owners and management to structure work in such a way as to promote the family, especially mothers in the fulfilment of their duties”.¹⁸¹

Parental requests ought to be accommodated to the greatest extent possible. Management should work flexibly with each individual and family, fostering personal and professional relationships that make a good life for employees and their families possible, thereby contributing to the building up of the basic social structures of our existence. Love is to be expressed not only *in* our families but also *to* families. Management has an obligation to put in place policies under which the family can more easily fulfill in mission. Policies as simple as flexible work hours can help parents meet their obligations to their children. Corporate exemplars in this regard establish a personal hours budget for employees to meet any family exigencies that may arise.

Questions to ask: Do our policies uphold marriage and the family? Am I willing to suffer the loss of my business rather than abandon God’s teaching on marriage and the family, rather than deny Jesus Christ before society’s rulers?

Relationship to the Natural World: Christianity is theocentric. A triune God of infinite love is at the heart of the Christian world view. What relationship to the natural world follows from this reality? What does this mean for how businesses ought to operate?

Nature is a gift offered by the Creator to all humanity. The response to this gift, to the gift of our very lives, must essentially be one of gratitude and appreciation. Precisely because it is a gift of God the natural world should be

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., no. 214.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., no. 229.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., no. 224.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., no. 229.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., no. 345.

treated with the utmost respect and reverence. The gift should be cared for and treasured. How is this to be done?

i) *Responsibility*: God has entrusted the earth to human beings as a great entail. The natural world is given to us for our good but it is not ours to wheel and deal with as we please. Our dominion is not absolute. Creation is God's masterpiece. The Artist has let us use his work but he has not surrendered ownership of it to us. The great privilege of being stewards of God's creation is accompanied by the onerous responsibility of emulating God's providence, a providence where the fall of every sparrow has significance.

ii) *Prudence*: Despite the fantastical dreams of colonizing the cosmos being presented today, the Earth is our home place and since it is, wisdom dictates that we should care for it. This begins by acknowledging that nature has an "inbuilt order", a "grammar" of its own.¹⁸² Only then will our tinkering with that God-given order be intelligent.

iii) *Love*: Sharing in divine love moves the Christian disciple to love all that God loves. Followers of Christ will love themselves because God loves them. They will love their bodies because their bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit.¹⁸³ Man journeys to God who is his happiness in his body. Christians will love their neighbors because their neighbors too have been created by God to share in God's own life. They will love the world because everything that exists has been created by God out of love. Dostoevsky's¹⁸⁴ text put into the form of a poem, "Love of Creation," beautifully communicates this affection:

Love all of God's creation
The whole and every grain of sand in it.
Love every leaf, every ray of God's light.
Love the animals, love the plants, love everything.
If you love everything,
You will perceive the divine mystery in things.
Once you perceive it, you will begin to comprehend
It better every day.
And you will come at last to love the whole world
With an all-embracing love.

Human development requires the use of energy beyond what personal power provides. Obtaining these energy sources necessarily involves intervening in nature's processes and, in the case of the use of non-renewable resources, depletion results. More energy efficient processes will generally reduce the environmental footprint then. When the Mosaic Family of Companies decided to

¹⁸² Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, no. 48.

¹⁸³ 1 Cor. 6:20.

¹⁸⁴ F. Dostoevsky, *The Brothers Karamazov*, Trans. D. Magorshack (New York: Penguin Books, 1958), 375.

build a new headquarters they deliberately designed a net-zero energy structure (the building creates as much energy as it uses).

Questions to ask: Does our business activity contribute to humanity's fitting into the natural world's functioning? Are we protecting the integrity of the life-supporting systems of the planet? What condition are we leaving the campsite for future generations?

It is a good point to pause and summarize what has been discussed so far and to look ahead to what still needs to be covered. In *Fides et Ratio* Saint John Paul II returns to the perennial philosophy that gazes on being and seeks universal wisdom, that seeks the truth about personal existence and about God. Saint John Paul II states the goal of such inquiry as being “to acknowledge the full and ultimate meaning of life”.¹⁸⁵ It is his understanding that human beings are called to “direct their steps towards a truth which transcends them”.¹⁸⁶ Philosophy working in harmony with faith uncovers this truth.

Section I, an explorer's tool kit, and Section II, the Christian vision, went over *Fides et Ratio* in detail to capture the essential elements of John Paul II's ascertainment. Section III drew out the implications of the world view presented for the proper conduct of business.

This is not the business culture that exists today because the modern mind has abandoned the enduringly valid philosophical heritage sketched out by Saint John Paul II. Effects, unethical business practices, will only be altered by understanding and changing root causes. Saint John Paul II is well aware of the symptoms of the ethical failure of our institutions but he knows that diagnosing the reason for this breakdown in moral performance is what is crucial. He goes at this task directly. The most basic diagnosis is that reason lost its nerve and no longer dared to rise to the truth of being. The brilliant coherence of the medieval mind was set aside and in its place “a positivistic mentality took hold”¹⁸⁷ which “rejected every appeal to a metaphysical or moral vision”.¹⁸⁸ Saint John Paul II points out what philosophers have abandoned:

- “the search for truth itself”¹⁸⁹
- “metaphysical study of the ultimate human questions”¹⁹⁰
- “the Christian vision of the world”¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁵ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 56.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 5.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 46.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 47.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 61.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, no. 6.

He states quite bluntly, “those whose vocation it is to give cultural expression to their thinking no longer look to the truth”.¹⁹²

Losing the sapiential dimensions of philosophy effectively kills wisdom. The next section looks more closely at this act of sophiacide. What are the consequences of this momentous turn of human thought? What fills the philosophical void created by the neglect of being? What caused our philosophical presumption and what results from it? What vision now directs us? Where is our hope placed?

The implications for business practice are then drawn out. What does the commission of sophiacide mean for business culture?

COMMITTING SOPHIACIDE

“See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe and not according to Christ.”¹⁹³

Thinking about the world must start somewhere. If we don’t begin with things in reality we must set out from the ideas in our minds. A philosophy which shuns metaphysics, shuns being, gets “locked within the confines of its own immanence”,¹⁹⁴ which is to say that artistic vision supplants philosophical insight. The artist using his imagination can make his canvas conform to the picture he holds in his mind. In the absence of a real world, given not made, those working with ideas can do the same. They can will into being any concept they have about human beings and the universe they live in. When philosophy ceased to be true to its etymological roots, we were given over to schemas we invent whole cloth in our minds. We were bound to live by “systems of our own devising”.¹⁹⁵

The self, regarded as pure consciousness, is free to create its own reality. Thought becomes the warden of being. The only world left is the world we make with our ideas. Human beings take God’s place in determining value and the nature of being. There is no meaning not of our own making to discover.

This is a weight human beings simply cannot carry. A “crisis of meaning”¹⁹⁶ ensues as knowledge fragments and a maelstrom of data and facts overwhelms people’s lives. A “deep-seated distrust of reason”¹⁹⁷ sets in as

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Col. 2:8.

¹⁹⁴ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 81.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., no. 22.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., no. 81.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., no. 55.

“everything is reduced to opinion”.¹⁹⁸ “Widespread skepticism”¹⁹⁹ marks the day. How could it not? That the truth is subjective is a conviction so widespread that it has become “the common mind”.²⁰⁰ “All positions are equally valid”²⁰¹ even those devaluing “truths which had been judged certain”.²⁰² Saint John Paul II brings forward the ideologies—eclecticism, historicism, pragmatism, scientism—used ineffectually to cover over the abasement of reason.²⁰³

The quasi-religion of *scientism*²⁰⁴ bears particular scrutiny because of its dominance and its deadliness. Scientism is the philosophical notion “which refuses to admit the validity of forms of knowledge other than those of the positive sciences”.²⁰⁵ It is an incoherent world view which considers metaphysical statements to be meaningless all the time being a metaphysical claim itself. Religious, theological, aesthetic knowledge is relegated to the realm of mere fantasy. So too for ethics. Values are dismissed as “mere products of the emotions”.²⁰⁶ Practically, this leaves might to make right.

What brought us to this point where we allowed systems of thought “which espoused the cause of rational knowledge sundered from faith and meant to take the place of faith”²⁰⁷ to shatter the profound unity of faith and reason? What explains modern philosophy’s explicit “opposition”²⁰⁸ to Christian Revelation?

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., no. 5.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., no. 55.

²⁰¹ Ibid., no. 5.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ *Eclecticism* (John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 86), an approach that uses “individual ideas drawn from different philosophies, without concern for their internal coherence, their place within a system or their historical content” (Ibid., no. 86) runs the risk of “being unable to distinguish the part of truth of a given doctrine from elements of it which may be erroneous or ill-suited to the task at hand” (Ibid., no. 86). Also condemned here is the “rhetorical misuse of philosophical terms” (Ibid., no. 86). *Historicism* (Ibid., no. 87) implicitly denies the enduring validity of truth with its claim that the “truth of a philosophy is determined on the basis of its appropriateness to a certain period and a certain historical purpose” (Ibid., no. 87). Saint John Paul II goes on, “It should not be forgotten that, even if a formulation is bound in some way by time and culture, the truth or error which it expresses can invariably be identified and evaluated as such despite the distance of space and time” (Ibid., no. 87). *Pragmatism* (Ibid., no. 89), an approach to making decisions which “precludes theoretical considerations or judgment based on ethical principles (Ibid., no. 89) suffers from “a one-dimensional vision of the human being” (Ibid., no. 89). Deciding by majority rule whether a line of action is morally admissible is thoroughly inadequate.

²⁰⁴ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 88.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ibid.

²⁰⁷ Ibid., no. 45.

²⁰⁸ Ibid., no. 46.

The simple answer is that our pride got in the way. We fail to recognize God because our free will and our “sinfulness”²⁰⁹ place an impediment in our way. Our primal “disobedience by which man and woman chose to set themselves in full and absolute autonomy in relation to the One who had created them”²¹⁰ undermines philosophical speculation conceived in union with faith. Saint John Paul II says that “presumption”²¹¹ is the typical temptation of the philosopher. The theological virtue of faith is capable of liberating reason from this vice and from our turning in on ourselves where we misidentify the journey we are on. Our search for the truth is obscured and distorted by “the natural limitation of reason and the inconstancy of the heart”²¹² or a “welter of other concerns”²¹³ drowns it out. We run from the truth because we are “afraid of its demands”²¹⁴.

“Fools say in their hearts, ‘There is no God’. They are corrupt, they do abominable deeds”²¹⁵. Saint John Paul II explains why this foolishness is such a threat to life. “The fool thinks that he knows many things, but really he is incapable of fixing his gaze on things that truly matter. Therefore, he can neither order his mind (Prov. 1:7) [“the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom”]) nor assume a correct attitude to himself or the world around him”²¹⁶.

Our condition is indeed perilous, and Saint John Paul II unflinchingly brings home this point. There is a “sense of being adrift”²¹⁷. All valid points of reference have been lost and the possibility of discovering the real meaning of life has been cast into doubt. “Many people stumble through life to the very edge of the abyss”²¹⁸. Ignoring the thirst for truth “casts our existence into jeopardy”²¹⁹. The ground of human dignity has been lost placing “individuals at the mercy of caprice”²²⁰.

We end up in a state of *nihilism*.²²¹ This philosophy of nothingness negates all objective truth and denies all foundations. “Life is no more than an occasion for sensations and experiences in which the ephemeral has pride of place”²²². Nihilism is a “denial of the humanity and of the very identity of the

²⁰⁹ Ibid., no. 19.

²¹⁰ Ibid., no. 22.

²¹¹ Ibid., no. 76.

²¹² Ibid., no. 28.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

²¹⁵ Ps. 14:1.

²¹⁶ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 18.

²¹⁷ Ibid., no. 5.

²¹⁸ Ibid., no. 6.

²¹⁹ Ibid., no. 29.

²²⁰ Ibid., no. 5.

²²¹ Ibid., no. 90.

²²² Ibid., no. 46.

human being”.²²³ It erases from the “countenance of man and woman the marks of likeness to God”²²⁴ and leads them “either to a destructive will to power or to a solitude without hope”.²²⁵ We are told by postmodernist thinkers that we must now “learn to live in a horizon of total absence of meaning, where everything is provisional and ephemeral”.²²⁶

It is impossible to live in such a horizon. Fear, anxiety and despair mark our age because life cannot be grounded on doubt and uncertainty, on nothing. What is it then that upholds our society? Wherein does our hope lie?

The illusion that staves off despair is that “thanks to technological progress, men and women may live as a demi-urge, single-handedly and completely taking charge of their destiny”.²²⁷ In a word, it is a belief in the salvific potential of technology. Indeed, our “immanentist habit of mind”²²⁸ constricts us to a technocratic logic. The reigning ideology has “lured people into believing that they are their own absolute master, able to decide their own destiny and future in complete autonomy, trusting only in themselves and their own powers”.²²⁹

We might ask what happens to the human person in this scenario. Quite simply, humanity gets crushed under the weight of its own instruments.

The man of today seems ever to be under threat from what he produces, that is to say from the result of the work of his hands and, even more so of the work of his intellect and the tendencies of his will. All too soon, and often in an unforeseeable way, what this manifold activity of man yields is not only subject to ‘alienation’, in the sense that it is simply taken away from the person who produces it, but rather it turns against man himself, at least in part, through the indirect consequences of its effects returning on himself. It is or can be directed against him. This seems to make up the main chapter of the drama of present-day human existence in its broadest and universal dimension. Man therefore lives increasingly in fear. He is afraid of what he produces—not all of it, of course, or even most of it, but part of it and precisely that part that contains a special share of his genius and initiative—can radically turn against himself.²³⁰

²²³ Ibid., no. 90.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ Ibid., no. 91.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid., no. 15.

²²⁹ Ibid., no. 107.

²³⁰ Ibid., no. 47.

Dreaming of technology so good that we won't have to be good ourselves is the most futile of hopes because efficient causes can never substitute for final causes. Instrumental reason cannot prevail absolutely without abolishing the human person. The agenda of inevitable technological progress presses on, judging human beings "by pragmatic criteria based essentially upon experimental data, in the mistaken belief that technology must dominate all".²³¹ Sundered from transcendent truth ethical viewpoints which place the human person at the center of concern give way to "not only a market-based logic, but also the temptation of a quasi-divine power over nature and even over the human being".²³²

What does the secular age, a time when we are after God,²³³ this time of "atheistic humanism"²³⁴ mean for business culture? What does business see as its mission and what practices are used to fulfill this purpose?

First, in place of a fidelity to God there is now only a fidelity to self. Justice Kennedy definitively makes this point in his ruling in *Planned Parenthood vs. Casey* (1992). "At the heart of liberty is the right to define one's own concept of existence, of meaning, of the universe, and of the mystery of human life." The economic realm is not closed off from this nihilism. Profit becomes the exclusive norm and the ultimate end of economic activity. Milton Friedman unapologetically presents this as the moral ideal for business. People *ought* to set out in business "to make as much money as possible".²³⁵ Centuries of following through on this norm brings about a regime like social formation, capitalism,²³⁶

²³¹ *Ibid.*, no. 5.

²³² *Ibid.*, no. 36.

²³³ H. Tristram Englehart, Jr., *After God* (Yonkers: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2017).

²³⁴ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 46.

²³⁵ Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 20.

²³⁶ Definitional clarity of the term capitalism is of some importance. Here I am following the definition of capitalism and the level of analysis used by the great student of political economy, Robert L. Heilbroner, as found particularly in *The Nature and Logic of Capitalism* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1985). Michael Novak, in his book *Business as a Calling* (New York: Free Press, 1996, p. 81), stresses that capitalism is "the system oriented to the human mind: *caput* (L. "head") wit, invention, discovery, enterprise." Adopting different meanings of the term and emphasizing individual over structural characteristics or vice versa results in essentially different phenomenon being studied. In *Centesimus Annus*, Saint John Paul II acknowledges the positive role business can play in society but he goes to great lengths to say that the magisterium does not and cannot bless capitalism just as it can never hold for socialism because of its profoundly faulty anthropological underpinnings. Capitalism, an economic system that upholds "the absolute predominance of capital" (CA, no. 35), is to be struggled against. Freedom in the economic sector must be placed at the "service of human freedom in its totality and [must] see it[self] as a particular aspect of that freedom, the core of which is ethical and religious" (CA, no. 42). It is best to drop the term capitalism altogether as the name of the political economic system being aspired to and speak of a "*society of free work, of enterprise and of participation*" (CA, no. 35, emphasis in the original). I have referred to this as a responsible free enterprise system. (see: Jim

where the relentless pursuit of more engenders objectively unjust structures. All enterprises, indeed all social groupings, operate within these “structures of sin”.²³⁷ It is particularly important to note that the State is coerced by the power of commercial enterprises to do their bidding, to tailor their own practices and ideals to the aims and needs of business.

It bears repeating that what distinguishes capitalism as a ruling order is the place assigned to gain. Other regimes have been able to generate surpluses—that is, material goods over and above that required for the maintenance and the reproduction of society. In these regimes, the value of the surplus was seen in the use to which it could be put—for example, displaying the regime’s might, constructing religious edifices, consuming luxuries. In capitalism, the surplus is used to generate more surplus. Gain is sought as an end in itself. The means become the ultimate end. Money dislodges God as being of primary importance in men’s hearts.

Every single aspect of human life in society is examined for its potential as a profit-generating activity. Everything becomes a marketable commodity—even goods that by their nature ought never to be bought and sold. All the stops are pulled out to turn things that have always been received as gifts into items that must now be paid for.

Labor, too, is something to be bought and sold. The worker is a commodity like any other. Because the purpose of being in business is to maximize financial margins, however, and because labor is a cost against those margins, it becomes rational to reduce the money spent employing people to a bare minimum. This can be done by paying them as little as possible, a practice antithetical to the generosity of Jesus, or by reducing the need for a human presence through automation. This creates the intractable problem of technological unemployment. In the regime of capitalism, tens of millions of people lack access to productive resources or gainful employment. The technological system does not need them, indeed, it desires their absence. Even though unemployment causes personal suffering modern industry has no answer for the scourge.

If the human person is merely a factor of production, a mere tool in the profit-making process, then it is not surprising that work is designed for them without any thought to the welfare of their souls or their higher interests. Capitalism is humanly inadequate because it holds things to be of more importance than people. The aberration from right order is summarized by Pope Pius XI.

Wishloff, “Responsible Free Enterprise: What It Is and Why We Don’t Have It,” *Teaching Business Ethics* 7, (2003): 229–263.

²³⁷ John Paul II, *Dies Domini*, no. 73.

Bodily labour ... has everywhere been changed into an instrument of strange perversion: for dead matter leaves the factory ennobled and transformed, where men are corrupted and downgraded.²³⁸

The exploitation of the most vulnerable people in the world by corporate interests may be out of sight for many but it has not gone away. Indeed, it has reached new levels of cruelty since the time of Pope Pius XI. Shipping companies, those owning oil tankers, container ships, bulk carriers, general cargo ships, deep sea trawlers, send their exhausted fleets to decommissioning yards on the fouled beaches of Bangladesh where teenage boys break them apart in hellish conditions for a dollar a day. Hundreds of these workers are killed every year because of a lack of proper equipment and lax safety standards. Countless numbers make it through only to suffer long-term ill health effects.

Conflict is endemic in the regime. In what should be a harmonious endeavor, labour and ownership clash like rival armies over wages and working conditions. The envy systematically cultivated by the commercial world to keep people unsatisfied with what they have also disrupts social unity. Everyone's desire to have more runs into everyone else's desire for the same.

The key criterion in deciding what to bring to market is *whatever* will sell, or more accurately, *whatever* can be *made* to sell. This need not be something useful to, or uplifting of, the purchaser. The mission is profitability not answering real needs. More money can often be made by preying on human frailty, by exploiting human weakness, so the lowest human passions are intentionally aroused as a business strategy. Advertising bombards people with propaganda to keep them consuming what is produced. Objectively improper consumer attitudes and life styles are created. People are ensnared in a web of false and superficial gratifications. In our provisioning system the one solicitude people have is to obtain their daily bread in any way they can.

Much of our commercial world is simply noxious and must fall away. Here are some examples of enterprises that act in opposition to human well-being.

- Tobaccosis, all of the diseases resulting from smoking, chewing, snuffing of tobacco, and from the breathing of tobacco smoke, is a global epidemic, but unlike malaria, where the disease is borne by mosquitoes, the disease vector of tobaccosis is the tobacco industry. This actively malevolent industry has unleashed a golden holocaust²³⁹ on the world. Already 8 million deaths per year are attributable to tobaccosis, with 80 per cent occurring in low-to-middle-income countries. The cigarette is the deadliest artifact in human history.

²³⁸ Pius XI, *Quadragesimo Anno*, no. 135.

²³⁹ Robert N. Proctor, *Golden Holocaust: Origin of the Cigarette Catastrophe and the Case for Abolition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

- “Games of chance and wagers are not in themselves contrary to justice”.²⁴⁰ Nevertheless, gambling can easily become disordered. The knowledge that gambling can enslave has led societies to impose restrictions on the activity. In the last few decades, governments have set aside their solemn duty to uphold the common good and legalized even the most intense forms of gambling. Commercial enterprises were only too willing to take advantage of the situation. For the sake of maximum profitability, a gambling industry has arisen, characterized by its ruthless exploitation of the human propensity for addiction to gambling. In a remarkable ethnography of video gambling addiction, Natasha Schüll²⁴¹ lays bare the corporate callousness. The goal of the industry, stated out loud by its executives, is to bleed people dry. Successfully fulfilling this mission results in job loss, debt, family breakdown, divorce, poor health, and incarceration. Gambling addicts have the highest rate of suicide attempts among addicts of any kind.
- Business has made the production of pornography, the removal of “real or simulated sexual acts from the intimacy of the partners, in order to display them deliberately to third parties”²⁴² a \$100 billion per year unregulated industry. Strict standards exist in our society for the purity of our water, air, and food, but pornographic and violent images enter the soul unchecked. Furthermore, unlike foods that can be excreted, pornographic images are burned into the mind to remain forever in the human psyche. Addiction to pornography starts to permanently rewire the brain. Other devastating effects of pornography on individuals, families, and communities include: degrades, humiliates and enslaves its actors; drives human trafficking for pornography and prostitution; destroys families; teaches children and youth an image of sexuality that is hostile to women, marriage, and family; lowers the birth rate; prepares the way for sex crime.²⁴³ Gregg Forster sums up the gravity of the situation when he says, “pornography’s rise to power represents an eruption of evil in truly demonic proportions, as if hell itself were conducting a D-Day operation and had won a beachhead from which to stage a larger invasion”.²⁴⁴

²⁴⁰ U. S. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2413.

²⁴¹ Natasha Dow Schüll, *Addiction by Design: Machine Gambling in Las Vegas* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

²⁴² U. S. Catholic Church, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2354.

²⁴³ Gabriele Kubly, *The Global Sexual Revolution: The Destruction of Freedom in the Name of Freedom*, Trans. James Patrick Kirchner. (Kettering: Angelico Press, 2015), 136. [Original German Publication, 2012]

²⁴⁴ Jonathon Van Manen, *The Culture War* (Toronto: Life Cycle Books, 2016), 49.

- The United States of America is in the midst of a drug epidemic. In the last two decades, more than half a million Americans have died from overdosing opioids. The vast majority of them were in the prime of their lives when they passed away. This senseless loss need never have happened. It was initiated in good part by pharmaceutical companies in pursuit of ever greater profits. The biggest reason for this human tragedy was the fraudulent marketing by Purdue Pharmaceuticals of its opioid OxyContin. The use of compounds or drugs derived from the juice of the poppy flower dates back to the beginning of humanity. Opium has had its beneficial uses for human beings, but it has also been problematic in the course of history. The morphine molecule is the essential element in all opiates. It works to relieve pain and create pleasure by overwhelming the μ -opioid receptors in the human body. Unfortunately, opium-derived drugs are terribly addicting because the morphine molecule does not get turned into glucose but stays in the body. Enslavement to the drug is always a possibility, and, should it occur, is very difficult to break. Withdrawal symptoms include excruciating pain for days, ferocious diarrhea, and a week of sleeplessness. Addicts will do pretty much anything—steal, sell themselves, kill—to avoid going through this. People hooked on the morphine molecule are likely to be ruled by it for the rest of their lives. It was this knowledge that Purdue Pharmaceuticals should have considered when it released OxyContin, a time-released morphine pill, onto the market in 1996. Instead, the company aggressively marketed it as a treatment for all kinds of pain, not just battlefield injuries or terminal cancers where morphine had long been used in a prudent way, but now it was expected to be prescribed after shoulder surgeries or tooth extractions. Purdue coupled this fundamental change in pain management protocol with the lie that the risk of addiction with its new opioid delivery system was negligible. An army of highly incentivized sales representatives was sent out to *sell, sell, sell*.²⁴⁵ But the morphine molecule was not to be mocked. Flooding society with the opioid OxyContin released an immense scourge of addiction and drug abuse. Beyond the suffering and death there are incalculable and devastating social aftershocks.

All means of wealth acquisition—speculation, rent seeking, financial shadiness—are held to be good. Competitive advantage can be gained by not accepting responsibility for negative externalities generated by the firm. Genuine economic progress is distorted when this happens. Profits are privatized and costs

²⁴⁵ Patrick Radden Keefe, *Empire of Pain: The Secret History of the Sackler Dynasty* (Bond Street Books, 2021), 208.

are commonized. Playing the Double P-Double C game overstates legitimate financial success and is a direct affront to justice.

Another way the game is played is to dispose of costs onto future generations. When Royal Oak Mines abandoned its gold mine outside of Yellowknife, Northwest Territories in Canada, it left behind a \$250 million arsenic trioxide mess for the territorial government to clean up and an industrial wasteland that will scar the landscape and harm the health of humans and other living creatures for decades.²⁴⁶

In addition to this, the concentration of economic resources in gigantic corporations allows these economic entities to exclude others from entering the market in hopes of monopoly profits. Competitors are bought up. The profit margins of suppliers are squeezed to nullity. Vexatious lawsuits are filed against would-be entrants. Patents are taken out not to protect one's discoveries but to restrict the inventiveness of others. Yearly advertising budgets in the billions of dollars act as a significant barrier to entry.

All of this results in a moral ratcheting down. Those who pay the least heed to the dictates of conscience are able to crush more cautious competitors. The anonymity offered by the limited liability corporation dulls a sense of responsibility. People have to struggle to retain their virtue.

A devouring usury²⁴⁷ is at the heart of the struggle for profits. There is a commitment to an infinite expansion of production because the last money borrowed must be paid off. Unlimited economic growth consumes the resources of the earth in an excessive and disordered way. The natural world is senselessly destroyed.

In fact a great theft of the natural and biological capital of the planet from future generations is taking place. A sixth great extinction of life forms is being observed in real time. There are now 3,500 tigers left in the wild in the world. This is down from 100,000 a century ago. Their habitat is down to 7% of what it once was. This population collapse is not unique to tigers. Sixty percent of the world's largest herbivores are threatened with extinction.

²⁴⁶ CBC News, "Viceroy May Buy Royal Oak Mine" July 20, 1999. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/viceroy-may-buy-roal-oak-mine-1.194608> (accessed June 13, 2021).

²⁴⁷ Jim Wishloff, "Usury and the Common Good," *Journal of Vincentian Social Action*, 7, 2, Article 5, (2018).

CONCLUSION

*The slenderest knowledge that may be obtained of the highest things is more desirable than the most certain knowledge obtained of lesser things.*²⁴⁸

Political economy, and the business institutions it incorporates, is a proximate discipline resting on more foundational areas of enquiry. Specifically, political economy is grounded in the more encompassing disciplines of ethics and philosophical psychology (or anthropology). All areas of enquiry come to rest in metaphysics or ontology, the most universal branch of philosophy.

The in-depth examination of Saint John Paul II's encyclical *Fides et Ratio* undertaken here has surfaced the ground of Catholic social thought and the implications of this for business culture. It has also uncovered the form of our current nihilistic commercial world that results from profound intellectual errors in the ground of our thinking. Table -1- summarizes these findings.

Fundamental Dimension	Christian Business Culture	Nihilistic Commercial World
Ultimate commitment	Fidelity to God	Fidelity to self
Ethical Orientation	How can I conform my soul to reality?	How can I get what I want?
Enterprise Purpose	Provisioning goods that contribute to human flourishing	Making as much money as possible
Marketing and Promotion	A linking up for mutual benefit	Exploitation of human weaknesses
Human Work	Axis of Self-making	Commodity to be bought and sold
Marriage and Family	Natural (metaphysically demanded) group unit of society	Artificial human construct without ontological standing
Relationship to the Natural World	Dominion: Stewardship of God's creation	Quarry to be exploited

²⁴⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 1, reply to objection 1.

Restoring metaphysics is the great need and challenge today. *Fides et Ratio* is a document of profound importance because it devotes itself to this cause. The encyclical insists that there is more to reality than the factual and empirical and then shows how these transcendent dimensions can be known by a “philosophy of *genuinely metaphysical* range”.²⁴⁹

Authentic philosophy disarms those who wage war on truth. It is needed to “correct certain mistaken modes of behavior now widespread in our society”.²⁵⁰ This includes conduct in business that often fails to meet even basic standards of human decency. Authentic philosophy is needed if a “civilization of truth and love”²⁵¹ is ever going to be built. *Fides et Ratio* directs us to this work of rebuilding philosophy and in doing so it directs us to the work of operating business institutions for humanity’s true common good.

²⁴⁹ John Paul II, *Fides et Ratio*, no. 83, emphasis in original.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, no. 83.

²⁵¹ John Paul II, *Evangelium Vitae*, no. 6.