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Business educators meet, focus on Ignatian values

by Thomas C. Fox



Father Robert Spitzer

KANSAS CITY, MO.

Speaking before business school educators at Rockhurst University July 16, Jesuit Fr. Robert Spitzer repeatedly affirmed that Jesuit education involves much more than grooming excellent business technicians.

"We do not want our students to be merely excellent managers, accountants, marketers, investors, financiers [and] economists," he said. "We want them to be excellent leaders who have expertise in management, accounting, marketing, investments, finance [and] economics."

In the eyes of 75 or so Ignatian-inspired clergy and lay business educators who gathered in Kansas City this past weekend to share ideas, listen to talks and spend many hours huddled in round table discussions, leadership and proper values matter in business education.

For them infusing fresh values into Jesuit business school curricula is an urgent priority and if done well

will give Jesuit business education a clear leg up in a competitive environment.

Essentially the case they argued was this: Having the great business technicians of Wall Street lacking commitments to fairness, justice, service and some transcendent vision or purpose is like a ship at sea in stormy weather without a rudder.

And with the lingering winds of the hurricane level 2008 global economic storm at their backs, these educators, though representing a relatively small percentage of the business faculties of the nation's 26 Jesuit business schools, seemed well positioned to make their case.

Spitzer and others spoke about the pressing need to groom leadership in the business faculties and student bodies of the Jesuit business schools. There was little disagreement that Ignatian spirituality has plenty to offer, though most seemed to agree chipping away at the apparent division between technical business education and mission education represents a hearty challenge.

Spitzer, who stepped down after more than a decade as president of Gonzaga University in Spokane, Wash., said, in an interview, the "mission movement" was growing and he looks forward to playing a role in moving the agenda forward.

This was the 12th annual gathering of the Colleagues in Jesuit Business Education Conference, hosted this year by the Rockhurst Helzberg School of Management, and the clear and timely theme was leadership. Jesuit-inspired leadership has long been a goal of the conference. Years back the conference was formed to foster certain values in Jesuit business education, including faith, spirituality, service, social justice and business ethics.

Jesuit Fr. William J. Byron, professor of Business and Society at St. Joseph's University in Pa., also addressed the need to infuse Ignatian values student curriculum.

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"Jesuit spirituality is countercultural," he told the gathering. "We should be encouraging our students to live under the standard of Christ, which, at a minimum, means not being possessed by our possessions."

Byron, author of *Jesuit Saturdays: Sharing the Ignatian Spirit with Friends and Colleagues*, concluded his remarks by speaking about decision-making using Ignatian spirituality. The Jesuit approach, he said, asks, "How do I feel about the about the issue? What is the origin of that particular feeling? Is it from God, or not from God?"

Asking rhetorically if there is room for the transcendent in corporate America, he answered: "I would never concede that there is no place for faith based, decision making in corporate America today. Indeed, more of this sort of thing may be precisely what corporate America needs."

For his part, Spitzer emphasized that faith and spirituality are key to empowering successful leaders because they instill within them a larger, less self-centered vision.

He told his audience: "Most professors of leadership and management are well aware of the synergy between empathy and effective leadership. Empathy conveys genuine concern, and therefore evokes trust and good will. Empathy begins with looking for the good news in others, and this can be galvanized by focusing on their transcendental dignity."

In an interview, he said there is no substitute for having a transcendent vision. Such a vision can, properly nourished, energize leadership as nothing else can.

Spitzer spoke of four levels of identity in leaders: external-material, ego-comparative, contributive, and the transcendent. He said that the "ego-comparative" is the most common in American institutions,



representing some 70 percent of our leaders.

It is at this level, he explained, that one asks questions such as "Who's achieving more? Who's achieving less? Who's making more progress? Who's making less? Who's winning? Who's losing? Who's got more status? Who's got less status? Who's more popular? Who's less popular? Who's got more control? Who's got less control? Who is more admired? Who is less admired?"

"Notice, he said, "that these questions are not linked to a pursuit of the truth or to a contributive mentality, or even to an ultimate meaning."

The goal, he said, is to motivate people to move beyond level two to three and four where one looks beyond self to something larger like contributing to a better society or world. Level three, he said, achieves purpose in life by making a positive difference.

Spitzer called level four identity "faith/transcendent," saying Jesuit institutions are properly equipped to help form students who can operate at this level.

Having a service teaching component in a curriculum, he said, can help students to form bonds of empathy with people they would ordinarily not meet and see in them "intrinsic and transcendent" qualities they otherwise might never see.

While most of those in attendance were U.S. educators, two graduate students, studying at Wheeling Jesuit University, were Basque nationals. The students, Yoseba Urquijo and Urko Fernandez, were proud to note that Ignatius of Loyola, the founder of the Jesuits, was also from the Basque Country.

The two men talked about an international "incubator" model they are working on, one that links businesses and educational institutions. Their work is supported by Wheeling Jesuit and Jesuit Deusto University in Bilbao, Spain, which have been collaborating in this emerging arena of value-driven business leadership.

The students said their incubator model is especially suited to a global network of Jesuit schools interested in influencing businesses and emerging business leaders.

Tom Fox is NCR editor.

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