

The Cardinal Virtues and Management

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At the beginning of the May 1968 students' riot in Paris, I witnessed one of the first confrontations between the police and the students. This event took place at the corner of Boulevard St. Michel and Boulevard St. Germain in the Latin Quarter, the neighborhood where so many universities have been traditionally located in Paris. What most of the police, who had not yet adopted the riot uniform and equipment fashionable all over the world today, and the screaming students did not know was that they were exactly at the main cross-roads of a Roman army camp.

The Roman army used to set up camps everywhere it went according to a standard plan; the design was rectangular and divided into four quadrants by two main intersecting arteries. The Roman army had at one time established a camp on the banks of the Seine river. The tents and military constructions of this camp eventually were replaced, but the thoroughfares have been kept intact to our day: they are the Boulevards St. Michel and St. Germain.

This story illustrates the lasting value of the Roman civilization that created in the world of antiquity a sort of stability and prosperity known as Pax Romana. The story is all the more interesting in that it also includes two of the main tools of this Pax Romana: the Roman army and the technical genius of the Romans, evidenced throughout their Empire by their building of roads, aqueducts, theaters, public baths, and other edifices whose ruins are still visible all over Europe. The Romans also built other lasting monuments in the fields of law and social engineering, including their design of the Roman legions and their special approaches to the management of their colonies.

Many superficial historians and anthropologists would limit their analyses to these outward manifestations of the long-lasting and flourishing Pax Romana. But management theorists are interested in linking the twofold significance of the Roman army and the building frenzy of the Roman empire to their special significance to the discipline of management.

Indeed, the Roman empire had a very strong and unique vision of itself and of the world that extended far beyond a well-disciplined army and a string of exuberant builders. This vision amounted to the firm conviction that Roman civilization was the best thing that ever happened to the world and that, therefore, Roman leaders had the obligation to bring this civilization to the rest of the discovered world. To do that, a two-fold operation was necessary: (1) impose Rome's presence on its neighbors by force of arms and (2) then get to work and remodel the occupied territory to Rome's image. This special vision entailed a specific value system and a code of ethics that are more fundamental

than all too-easily coined terms of today's management scholars, "organizational culture" or "organizational climate." In fact Roman management cannot be fully understood without reference to these underlying principles.

The Roman vision was not the brainchild of a person or of a group of persons. It was understood, appreciated, and practiced by the whole nation. Roman citizens not only subscribed to the vision, but embraced the values that underlay the vision. It is important to know and appreciate just how much the ancient Roman vision conformed to the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, especially his philosophical and theological development of the cardinal virtues: justice, prudence, fortitude (or courage), and temperance.

The taste for a normalization of Roman ways of operation, and the idealization of the human condition which constituted what we would call the "Roman way of life" and the purpose of spreading this way of life to the rest of humanity, can be seen as so many markers pointing to the extreme respect Romans had for rationality and things of the intellect.

Furthermore, the resolve to give form to their vision and to enhance the implementing of this vision, saw the advent of the "Roman citizen," a special category of people, which corresponded to a profound reality and was appreciated greatly by many, including our St. Paul—who was proud to state "I am a Roman citizen"—and the exporting of all these values to the barbarians, indicates that Romans had a tremendous sense and appreciation for the human will, the attachment to the good.

The intellect and the will are the two necessary elements on which to build a system of values, especially the development of the virtues. Virtues, being good stable dispositions for human acts, require an appreciation of the rational. To behave ethically, one has to have a model to which to conform, a behavior to imitate, a concept which seems to elude the tribe existing within the social scientists which calls itself behaviorist.

There is no doubt that the Romans had a very strong model of the ideal Roman or, simply, of the ideal human being.

All human experiences contribute to the observation that despite stable virtues, our sinful condition makes it impossible to conserve any virtue in the long run if we do not apply an effort of the will to resist forces leading to the violation of this virtue. Indeed, the temptations of the flesh, to which Romans eventually yielded as a society and which doomed the Roman empire when—too softened in their mores and bodies they could not stop the barbarian invasions of Rome—were felt individually by most Romans at the heyday of the Empire long before the collapse of their world. Each Roman who resisted these temptations had a strong insight as to how destructive of his person and of his society these temptations could be.

For Catholic scholars, values and virtues have a direct impact on managerial techniques. To begin with, coupled with the Thomistic dualism of intellect and will, the virtues greatly help the development of any established institution. Failure to appreciate the importance of the virtues has limited the insights of otherwise significant non-Catholic scholars. For example, management schol-

ars are concerned with the issue of Organizational Development. Some have even alluded to the core elements of what keeps an organization stable, for instance Igor H. Ansoff's *The Brain of the Organization*, and they could have attained a full understanding of the concept had they had the full Catholic vision. Indeed the key requirements of organizations, whether for profit or not for profit, are to ensure that the brain of the organization and the will of the organization be well defined and operational.

It is quite possible in an organization for the managerial structure to be such that the brain of the organization corresponds to the lowest possible set of human ideas available within the organization. It is the role of managers, on the contrary, to ensure that the brain of the organization, defined as the collective understanding and knowledge of its employees bearing on the formulation of key decisions, encompass the full knowledge of all the employees and not be reduced to the thinking of a single second-rate individual. The decision maker should be open to facts or items of information from a broad constituency before taking his decisions, since an autocratic leader may cause an organization to be brain-limited by refusing to get all the information available to him.

While Roman generals were strong-willed, the structure of the Roman army reflected the position of the Roman citizenry at its heyday, which encouraged both a great degree of delegation of tasks and the eliciting of information from a wide spectrum of the citizenry. Roman generals were not supposed to go beyond a certain point in the exercise of their authority; they were not supposed to cross the Rubicon, but to establish their camp before this little river and not go beyond and, literally as well as symbolically, enter Rome and the domain of civilian politics.

Catholic respect for the individual also requires that leaders of organizations consult those working at the lowest levels of the organization before giving shape to organizational plans, since it is often the case that a lower level employee, for example a market representative, will have direct communications with the outside world precisely at the level the corporation wishes to reach, the average consumer. Therefore, such lowly employees have very important insights as to how consumers or "clients" of the organization perceive the organization, its objectives and programs.

Organizational designers, through concepts such as the management decision-making process, are concerned that organizations make their decisions in the best possible fashion. Catholic management scholars would insist that organizations have a sound will, defined as the commitment of the organization first to noble social goals. The organization can only find social justification if it satisfies more than immediate basic needs. Corporations, for example, should understand that their principal social justification is that they provide products and services to satisfy the material needs of the population at large so that people can have the means of pursuing such higher goals as education, speculative thinking, growth in virtue, and the gaining of merit for eternal life.

I would be the first one to admit that very few modern corporations have this

understanding of their role. But, then, very few corporations are Christian.

Roman legionnaires and Roman bridge-builders had a very strong sense of their place in the whole scheme of things because they were repeatedly asked to look to the greater glory of Rome. Similarly Japanese businessmen are reminded daily that all they do is for the greater glory of Japan. In a more Christian time than our own, Christopher Columbus thought very naturally that his activities were to advance the territory in which men would render homage to Our Lord and work for the greater glory of God.

A sound organization also requires a clear sense of mission to fulfill higher social goals. Roman centurions had a great respect for their office and proud attachment to it. Christopher Columbus also had a keen sense of his exceptional abilities as a navigator and the validity of his most cherished insight about the rotundity of the earth and the knowledge that India could be reached by sailing due West.

A sound organizational "will" also demands that programs of putting into practice be well described and adhered to. Roman centurions had a great sense of the quality of their weapons and battle maneuvers, as well as the excellence of the design of the Roman camp and machinery of war. Christopher Columbus had a clear view that he should sail due west, trusting on the data of his astrolabe.

Some corporations have been re-organized effectively and have been made dramatically more efficient just by making it clear what their mission is: the Black & Decker corporation at some times was straying from its core mission and was really not very profitable. A new management restored the company mission of the manufacturing small home appliances, directing all the corporate energies, talents and knowledge in that direction, and the company was turned around. Black & Decker thus had a strengthening of its "will," although it was called something else like "corporate re-organization," "corporate re-design," or "re-establishment of the corporate mission."

Justice

Catholics also know that the perfection of the will is performed through a heightened level of the virtue of justice. Indeed, to have a strong attachment to a goal and a value is good in the strict sense because it is a positive attitude. It is better than no attachment to anything. However, this attachment may be misdirected. The corporation may be attached to a goal which is not a proper goal.

Justice teaches us to render to each his due. A corporation which practices justice should not ignore the legitimate rights of groups of people it deals with, such as employees and neighboring communities. But neither can a corporation ignore proper values in an abstract system of values. In other words, a corporation, or a non-profit organization, can appreciate greatly the concepts of tolerance and compassion for human beings, but it is wrong if it holds these concepts to the detriment of other, more fundamental values, such as the proper understanding of human sexuality and of human life.

A corporation indeed may be tolerant of homosexuals in its ranks but it must

not become an active promoter of the homosexual agenda. A corporation can be compassionate for mothers who have unplanned pregnancies, but such compassion must not be at the sacrifice of the budding human life that has appeared in their wombs.

Justice is not served in organizations which promote the homosexual agenda and the so-called pro-choice agenda. When business or not-for-profit organizations promote these movements for sexual liberation, they ultimately will destroy the corporation and the social order it is supposed to be serving. Levi-Strauss is the corporation perhaps most supportive of the homosexual agenda. Its leaders published a code of conduct on how to support homosexuals, and even how to treat homosexuals with AIDS. This code is so hospitable to the comparatively small number of homosexuals, that, as has been the case with large cities with very generous welfare programs to support the poor, the Levi-Strauss policy will draw homosexuals from all over the country to work for it and it will drain greatly their resources. Further, the understanding that they are the premier pro-homosexual organization will translate into a strong consumer boycott.

Corporation also have the obligation under justice to be constantly and keenly aware of changes in their environment which could have a bearing on the firm's profitability and even its existence. Technological development over the past few decades has developed more quickly than ever before. In management, the secular and non-Christian jargon employed to convey the necessity of exercising the virtue of justice in corporate governance towards the corporation's exterior environment is called: monitoring the threats and opportunities. Indeed, if the corporation does not look around constantly as to what is going on in its field, it will have missed threats which may turn out to be very dangerous, and it will have missed opportunities which also is very dangerous when its competitors are better organized to detect and benefit from these opportunities.

Prudence

Corporations may also see threats and opportunities but misjudge their impact and their consequences. Such misjudgment reflects imprudence. The old popular aphorism comes back to us which deals with one type of corporation which could not see the reality around them: the makers of buggy whips. Horse-drawn carriages did not disappear overnight. So manufacturers of buggy whips could have been correct in the short term not to worry too much about these newfangled horseless carriages. But the development of the automobile was irresistible, and if buggy-whip makers did not plan for another line of product to cater to the emerging market, they were sure to strategize themselves into bankruptcy.

Today the electronic branch of the communication industry is developing at break-neck speed. Different segments of this industry are developing at different rates. It remains that any organization, and it includes the different organizations in the teaching profession and in the apostolic community, which does

not try to make sense and to plan to establish its position in this confusing world is going to suffer setbacks. Analyzing such a difficult, new, and ever-changing reality as the Internet and the Worldwide Web may be daunting, but there is no doubt that it is the virtue of prudence which is at issue.

Courage

Organizations should also be courageous. It is not enough to have opened one's eyes to what is going on in one's environment and to have identified what needs being done, it also takes courage to engage it.

A friend of mine who worked at the well known and very reputable spice company in Baltimore, Maryland, told me how frustrated he was to see the management act so cowardly when it came to developing bold programs with the proper financing to make these programs work. This company, McCormick, is an old corporation which has the tendency of many old institutions to have a misconceived value of their own importance and tend to look within their own ranks for what is important and valuable in doing business. They have the tendency to be lacking strongly in the application of prudence and justice in strategic planning. But the company is large enough to have a few executives who have their eyes open and to know what is going on in their field. After difficult efforts these executives eventually gained top management's appreciation for what the corporation really is facing, including threats and opportunities. These executives, by sheer force of their arguments, force plans to be designed to face these threats and opportunities. However, top management at times refuses to back these programs with the necessary resources that would make them succeed. Top management lacks the courage to confront the "bonum arduum"—the difficult good—which they recognize by way of their intellect, but being weak-willed they do not pursue the "bonum arduum."

Temperance

To complete the set of the cardinal virtues, corporations will not be successful if they are not temperate. For human beings being temperate is to use the pleasures of the bed and the table within precisely understood moral conditions. But, more generally, temperance also precludes an undue attachment to some particular values.

Some corporations may hold too fast to established way of doing things, or a time-tested method of operations. The Limited company, which runs chains of clothing stores, has a policy of changing its total stock and the decoration of its stores very often in a matter of weeks. The purpose is not to change for the pleasure of changing but to offer new products to the consumer and to be more flexible to changes in consumer tastes. The company has been so successful that it has purchased two other quite successful companies, namely GAP stores and Banana Republic.

Temperate companies are also flexible enough to review the way they meet their market, and the way they handle their business. For example, many banks have decided to become more electronic, using Automated Teller Machines

(ATMs); previously human encounter with one's banker was deemed central to the business of banking. But all banks were not in as much of a hurry to adopt ATMs. Their operating costs soon became too high compared to the competition and they were bought out by better managed banks that knew that they could create some added value to their businesses just by setting up the ATMs for the convenience of their customers.

The cardinal virtues are very powerful concepts for the management and success of business organizations, non-profit organizations, and ultimately for the societies within which they operate. They are also powerful concepts for individual managers.

A manager who is imprudent will not last long in the competitive corporate world. He may not be prudent in relation to people working with him. This manager may not be able to assess the qualities of his supervisors or people working for him. This inability represents very real professional imprudence which will lead that manager to trust individuals with tasks beyond their capacities or, on the contrary, to misjudge the talents in some people who could make their whole department so much more successful. The manager may be imprudent in not understanding the reality of the business he works in, and this manager will be replaced with someone with a better understanding.

A manager needs to be just by not telling his people: "Do what I am ordering you to do, and I do not want you to tell me how you are going to do it!" This attitude is found often in areas of business where there is a strong pressure to achieve and where managers expect their people to cut some ethical corners without wanting to know details, so that they can, if there is any inquiry later, claim that they were not informed.

Courage is also an important quality for any manager, and managers appreciate this quality in their employees. Being able to work hard is a virtue under the general category of courage. The capacity of working hard is a concept very much researched by Industrial Psychologists who are paid for getting people to work harder. Ironically, the psychologists will never penetrate the reality of hard work if they ignore the reality of the virtues. Hard work can be demanding physically or mentally or in its dangers. It can be boring work. It can be a combination of the above. But all this hard work requires courage.

Temperance is required of all employees in an organization. Those who refuse to learn how to accomplish their work using computers, for example, and cling to their paper methods are in greater danger of losing their jobs. Top managers who, because of their age, are often the most computer illiterate. Therefore when departments are re-designed and private secretaries are abolished, these managers are left in very uncomfortable positions.

In conclusion, consider the words of Pope John XXIII in *Mater et Magistra*: "As often, therefore, as human activity and institutions having to do with the affairs of life, help toward spiritual perfection and everlasting beatitude, the more they are to be regarded as an efficacious way of obtaining the immediate end to which they are directed by their very nature. Thus valid for all times is that noteworthy sentence of the divine Master: "Seek first the kingdom of God

and His justice, and all these things will be given you besides” (Matt. 6:33).

But with respect to the building of civilization, seeking the Kingdom of God does not mean withdrawing from the world. Instead, it means that we have to absorb the teachings of Our Lord and to apply them to the least and most minute details of the most humble elements of our work. When we do that we have the confidence that we contribute to building the most powerful and effective civilization of the Pax Christiana.