

# Humanism in Management

Mgr. Javier Echevarría, Chancellor of the University of Navarra, visited IESE in May to deliver the inaugural speech at the International Symposium on Ethics, Business and Society. *IESE Alumni Magazine* has summarized his speech here.

I am delighted to be at IESE once again for the celebration of the school's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. I witnessed St. Josemaria Escrivá de Balaguer's interest and perseverance in fostering its first steps.

I have been requested to address the topic of Christian humanism in this International Symposium on Ethics, Business and Society. At the heart of Christian humanism is the quest for more human business management models.

This topic is, in fact, very relevant. Christian humanism has much to contribute so that business does not forget that "man is the source, the center and the purpose of all economic and social life,"<sup>1</sup> in the words of the Second Vatican Council, which added that "economic activity is to be carried out according to its own methods and laws within the limits of the moral order, so that God's plan for mankind may be accomplished."<sup>2</sup>

All forms of humanism underscore the centrality of man and encourage people to improve their own existence. However, many different types of humanism have emerged throughout history, and although the regard for the human component could be considered a loose common denominator, not all of these approaches are identical or equivalent from a moral and social standpoint. Some of them lead to extreme individualism. Others nullify or significantly dilute individual freedoms.

Christian humanism, in contrast, as it is presented in the social teachings of the Church,<sup>3</sup> offers a complete vision of the person. It is a vision that simultaneously takes into account individual and social facets, without reducing man to nothing more than a utilitarian or hedonistic being.

## Christian humanism in business leadership

Let us now consider humanism in business administration. As in any human enterprise, in this field there is also a certain underlying vision of the person, of the company itself and of its mission in society. By offering an elevated ideal of our human existence, Christian humanism lends a truly humanizing perspective, intent on serving others and broadening horizons.

This perspective includes specific principles and moral norms, but, ultimately, the works and teachings of Jesus Christ are the main reference point. He stands before us as our living, permanent example, as the essential norm of moral conduct. This is reflected,

very concretely, in his commandment to love our neighbors, for which Jesus himself is offered as an example and measure (Cf. John 15:12). True philanthropy (love for others, as the original Greek term suggests, a meaning sometimes deformed by the use and abuse of the word) leads us to value people for what they are, beyond any consideration of what they may produce or contribute to society.

Nowadays, the prevalent trend in various cultures, and also in international forums and conventions, is to acknowledge that each individual deserves recognition and respect. This is a very deeply rooted conviction — at least in theory — and it stems in large measure from the influence of Christianity. The Pope alluded to this in his recent speech at the United Nations, on the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>4</sup>

Christian humanism therefore requires us to overthrow the barrier of selfishness and utilitarianism, and replace it with reciprocity and generosity. It is granted that markets and strictly contractual relationships are based on exchange, but business dealings must lead to reciprocity with advantages for both parties when all is said and done.

In a company made up of people who work together in a common task, business leaders and workers form a community in which reciprocal relations will naturally emerge. But, as is true in any human relationship, these can and should be channels for mutual generosity, for service in the best sense of the word, as we see in the life of Jesus Christ.

## Systems of support

Such a high and absolute regard for every professional task requires an adequate business structure and specific labor conditions. It calls for executives to organize the company in such a way as to respect and support the dignity of people and human rights. It also calls for the proper participation of those involved in the business and the implementation of systems that will enhance their personal development.

This is what may be considered the structuring aspect of the executive mission. It is a real ethical obligation which should in no way interfere with the efficiency of products or the bottom line. Quite the contrary. Many experts claim that nurturing people and their integral development is the key to proper company operations.

Caring for others, each and every person, and giving them the respect they deserve requires finding the singularity of each individual: his or her needs, personality, skills and circumstances.

### Make an impact

Christian humanism must go beyond this structural dimension in management. It must, above all, make an impact on people. I am referring now to those who create and manage various companies. Their task requires education, experience, technical skills and — last but not least — the exercise of virtue.

The Christian faith teaches everyone these good operational habits and how to carry them out. This is true especially, and it can be claimed in all honesty, of those who hold executive positions. Virtues enrich them not only as people, but also as executives. The exercise of human virtues (which in Christians are all guided by charity) becomes very important in the context of management.

I will limit myself to a brief consideration of the need to love and serve others. Caring for others, each and every person, and giving them the respect they deserve requires finding the singularity of each individual: his or her needs, personality, skills and circumstances. They must never be thought of as mere resources, statistics or cogs in the design of a certain strategy.

For example, when entrusted with a task or mission, they always deserve respect and regard for their intelligence and initiative. No matter what their status — be they workers, clients, shareholders or suppliers — they should all be treated with kindness and understanding. We must follow the Lord's golden rule with all men: all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them (Matthew 7.12).

In this context, it is necessary to make room for individual concern and personal conversation. Business life affords constant opportunities to imitate Jesus Christ in this as well. He was always available for those who came to him in search of help. That personal touch, a channel for help and service, plays an important role in true humanism.

In the footsteps of the Son of Man, who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister (Matthew 20:28), Christian humanism has high regard for the spirit of service, the desire to work towards the good of others.

This spirit of service begins with solid career preparation in order to discover and do everything possible to meet the real needs of others. The company, like any organization or community, offers

continual opportunities to serve others. Not everything should be controlled — that would be inhuman — nor can the environment and proper function of the business be boiled down to a detailed list of rights and responsibilities.

As is the case of any society established for the good of others, the corporation grows and develops thanks to people who are happily and generously committed, empowered by a spirit of service. This should translate into collaboration with others by being available to provide timely advice and solidarity, share experiences and, in short, engage everyone.

### In words and deeds

Another characteristic that St. Josemaria loved and cultivated, an important feature of Christian humanism, is personal coherence. He explained it as "a simple and strong unity of life, in which all our actions mingle and bond."<sup>5</sup>

The unity of life stands for having one's relationship with God on the one hand, and on the other, independently, one's professional, family and social life. The business leader's Christian conduct should be evident in his executive role, without falling prey to materialistic attitudes or counterfeit forms of spirituality.

From the outset of his pastoral ministry, St. Josemaria told those who approached him as a priest that they should learn to materialize their spiritual life.<sup>6</sup> He asserted this, above all, from the standpoint of the Christian faith, which teaches the Incarnation of the Word of God. He did not hesitate to maintain the need for proposing, with all coherence, a Christian materialism in bold contrast to those forms of materialism which negate the spirit.<sup>7</sup> ■

1. Second Vatican Council, pastoral constitution *Gaudium et spes*, no. 63
2. *Ibid*, no. 64
3. See the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, USCCB Publishing, March 2005
4. See Benedict XVI, speech to the general assembly of the United Nations, April 18, 2008
5. St. Josemaria Escrivá de Balaguer, *Christ is Passing By*, no. 126
6. St. Josemaria Escrivá de Balaguer, "Passionately Loving the World," in *Conversations*, no. 114
7. *Ibid*, no. 115