

Solidarity of Business with the Community

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During the first two decades after the Second World War, Philippine business followed closely the U.S. model of an almost exclusive focus on profit maximization, with little concern for its social contribution to society. As the State adopted a mercantilistic approach to development, and the private business sector an extreme form of unbridled capitalism, there was a widening gap between the few rich and the numerous poor. Predictably, mass poverty became a fertile ground for leftist agitation of a class struggle.

Alarmed at the social unrest in Philippine society, Philippine business, inspired by the teachings of the Catholic Church, began to more actively work for the common good through various social projects. The first order of the day was the restoration of Philippine democracy. Through the Bishops-Businessmen's Conference for Human Development (BBC), those dissenting voices against the Marcos dictatorship were heard. Other fora that made way for the appeals of the business to government to widen the people's participation in planning and decision making were those of the Makati Business Club and the Philippine Business Conference of the Philippine Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PCCI). The aftermath of the assassination of Benigno Aquino in August 1983 marked the start of the vigorous role that business would play in restoring Philippine democracy.

The Makati Business Club arose from the efforts of a small group of business executives who received an intense formation in the social doctrine of the Catholic Church during the decade of the seventies in a top management course offered by the Center for Research and Communication, a professional undertaking where the doctrinal education is entrusted to Opus Dei. They became keenly aware of the principle of solidarity which business should exercise in promoting the good of the entire society as they endeavor to make their respective enterprises profitable. They were especially inspired by the doctrine contained in the Vatican II document *Gaudium et spes* which clearly states that people should not regard material goods as belonging exclusively to themselves. Goods, while being privately owned in most cases, must be used for the benefit of all. Private property must always have a social dimension.

Established in 1981, the Makati Business Club has now over 800 members from the business community. Clearly distinguished from the traditional business chamber of industry association that ordinarily works for the vested interests of sectoral groups, the MBC espouses causes for the common good, such as democratic reforms, eradication of poverty or good governance. For the past twenty years it has played a major role in raising the consciousness of business people in the Philippines about the responsibility to use their talents and resources to promote the common good.

Dr. Jesus Estanislao, former President of the Center for Research and Communication, which has now become the University of Asia and the Pacific, moved on to other positions, both in the government and the private sector. His current involvement is another demonstration of how Philippine business exercises its social responsibility even towards a wider community that goes beyond a national boundary. He is actively promoting the cause of good corporate governance in the entire Asia Pacific community.

In a written testimony, Dr. Estanislao makes a direct reference to the influence of the teachings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, Founder of Opus Dei, on his work of community building in the Asia Pacific region. «Blessed Josemaría used to say that we should have a universal outlook, carrying out our apostolate in our country and from our country (in the Philippines, and from the Philippines). This has special resonance to those of us in the Philippines because we are the only predominantly Catholic country in our part of the world». When I served as Dean of the Asian Development Bank Institute in Tokyo, I saw the enormous possibilities for doing precisely what Blessed Josemaría said. I could organize, with resources from a multilateral agency, various professional seminars and *workshops*, involving professionals and scholars from many countries, particularly those from East Asia.

After that one-year stint in Tokyo and my return to Manila, there was enough momentum to keep on building and strengthening the international networks that were initiated. Membership in regional organizations, such as those in the Asia Pacific region, and previous working relationship with the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank enabled me to continue to promote them.

The networks are of a professional character, with focus on specific professional issues. But they all stress the imperative for cooperation, working together, and mutual support in promoting broadly similar reforms in different economies. Thus, friendships are nurtured, exchange of views and values is facilitated. In the process, in the conversation between friends, many occasions present themselves to explain a point about the Catholic faith or about Christian values in life. Almost invariably, because of friendship, a deeper respect or even a new interest in our faith is excited in others who are not Catholic nor even a Christian. Surprisingly, one soon finds out that among those from other countries, a few in fact are already converts to the faith.

«While it is true that regionalism has been spreading in East Asia and in the Asia Pacific region, still the deep interest in promoting various facets of it within the professional sphere has been awakened and nurtured by the teachings of Blessed Josemaría. It is for this reason that with a mixture of aggressiveness and Asian reserve, I have never hesitated to give away as personal gifts a book written by Blessed Josemaría to selected friends and colleagues of mine in our international network».

Philippine business is also keenly aware of its responsibility to continuously upgrade the skills of Filipino workers and to make quality education accessible to them. One outstanding example is the Dualtech Training Center Foundation which is supported by numerous private enterprises. It introduced to the Philippines the famous “dualvoc” method perfected by the Germans in training technical workers through a dual system of classroom instruction and actual on-the-job training.

Mr. Enrique Ligot, Head of the Projects Office of the Dualtech Training Center Foundation, wrote a testimony on the influence of Christian principles on the work done by the Foundation: «In the eighteen years since the start of the Dualtech Training Center, we have been working under the inspiration of the teachings of Blessed Escrivá, especially in relation to the application of the social doctrine of the Church, the sanctification of ordinary work, and the respect for individual freedom of consciences. The applications of these teachings can be seen in the way many policies and programs have been developed and applied.

We help the poor by giving them opportunities for employment, training and education, formation in Christian values. We also don't give training for free. Each student is asked to contribute as much as he can. We also show a high

degree of trust to our students and our staff, but with the proper controls: policies, check and balance, norms of prudence, and decisive action.

We also talk to employers: train your workers, improve their qualifications, especially before you lay them off. In many cases, the companies decide to retain their workers after they are trained. In other cases when layoffs are inevitable, the workers who are trained get another job quite quickly.

Our training courses are open to anyone regardless of belief. We have students of various beliefs: Moslems, Protestants, etc., who are respectful and open to the Christian teachings on business ethics. Our students who are not Catholics or not even Christians (Hindus, Moslems, etc.) also get to appreciate what we aim to do: to help each one develop a religious sense and get insights on how they can live according to their beliefs so as to serve society and the common good.

We help teachers, staff, and students legitimize their marriage, if they are Christians.

We have also been involved in legislation, and getting from government what is just, like subsidies, tax incentives, and the right legal framework to operate. We don't seek privileges more than what is just, especially since we are performing a vital social service: the education and training of the poor to prepare them for gainful employment.

We are also helping companies apply the principle of solidarity: by getting them involved in training our poor students, they provide valuable help in solving a real social problem (poverty) but at the same time, they also get quantifiable benefits. In the process, we help these companies be more aware of their social responsibilities.

In line with Blessed Escrivá's teachings on fostering a universal outlook, we have assisted in the establishment of two schools: one in Cebu, following the inspiration of Bishop Alvaro del Portillo, Blessed Escrivá's successor, and another in Nigeria. We are also exploring possibilities to assist other Asian countries, especially the least developed like Vietnam, Myanmar, Laos PDR, and Cambodia to improve their vocational training system».

Another very clear evidence of Christian behavior in Philippine business is the refusal of the socially responsible business executive to depend entirely on the impersonal forces of the free market to resolve the problems of workers. In a dog-eat-dog society, employers will not hesitate to lay off workers summarily if business efficiency or cost effectiveness would require it. There would, of course, be the usual provision for retirement or unemployment compensation. But there would be no concern for what happens to the laid off worker in the long run. Mr. Raul Hernandez, a top Filipino executive, writes a testimony on how the appropriate doctrinal formation opened his eyes to the responsibility of a business to retrain or re-educate workers who are victims of "downsizing". These are his

words: «I attended some executive development programs at the University of Asia and the Pacific. Through my professors and co-participants, I learned about the message of Blessed Josemaría. Especially after my first closed retreat at the Makiling Conference Center, I became fully aware of the importance of living fully my Christian faith through the ordinary duties of my everyday life, most of all through the sanctification of my professional work.

When I first got in touch with Blessed Josemaría, I was the President of a packaging firm, a subsidiary of one of the largest manufacturing enterprises in the whole country. At that time, the business conglomerate was deep in the process of what is known as business re-engineering or “right-sizing.” For the group of companies I headed, it actually meant “downsizing” or cutting down significantly the size of the labor force in order to attain greater efficiency and productivity.

My contact with Opus Dei was very timely because it made me realize that I had to look for a solution to the loss of jobs of quite a number of managers and workers who would be declared redundant by the reengineering process. Through the teachings of Blessed Josemaría Escrivá, I was convinced that a professional work or occupation is not just a means of earning a livelihood. It is one of the “divine paths of the earth” through which the ordinary person encounters God. That is why I was not consoled by the fact that those who would be laid off would be receiving very generous separation or retirement pays. I had to find a way to make sure that those whose jobs would be terminated would be able to readily find new employment opportunities.

Working closely with some of the professors of the University of Asia and the Pacific, a team I organized in my company was able to formulate a program of retraining the potential retirees in new skills, the most important of which was how to organize and manage a small business enterprise. We were able to identify certain small and medium-scale businesses that could be established by those who would be separated from the companies I was managing. Many of these entrepreneurial ventures would actually be supplying products or services to the companies that used to employ them. Today, these small enterprises are doing very well, having survived the recent East-Asian financial crisis better than the larger businesses».

Corporate social responsibility has been institutionalized in a number of associations in the Philippines. When we speak of social development, the most prominent organization engaged in this area is the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) where the author and some other people that follow the message of Blessed Josemaría had the opportunity to participate. The PBSP, established during the turbulent seventies, aimed for a change in the society with its member-companies’ coordinated drive against poverty in response to the appalling social inequity. Its attack on poverty would be waged using the scientific

management tools with which business is naturally equipped. The foundation's efforts toward social development are by way of providing financial and technical support to social development projects and to generate community organization, initiative, and self-reliance that would pave the way for change in rural and in depressed urban areas. Aside from its management-related development programs, the PBSP later on included in its activities the literacy education, centralized marketing, appropriate technology, and assistance to small and medium scale firms. Moreover, in the early 1990s, the foundation had the following tasks as part of its programs: helping in the development of strong provincial economies; establishing local and non-traditional power structures on which rest province-led development; organizing poverty sectors into viable communities and giving them access to resources; using resources responsibly through appropriate technology; and providing alternative employment options.

Member companies of PBSP contribute a certain percentage of their annual net profit to a common fund which finances the social projects.

The Bishop-Businessmen's Conference or the BBC which started in the early seventies also has its poverty programs. Its focus is on the urban poor. Some of us found here the opportunity and the privilege of putting into practice the message of Josemaría Escrivá.

Its framework helped to create awareness among businessmen about their social obligations and the potentials of their involvement in fighting poverty. They also reject economic relationships contrary to human dignity, unbridled capitalism which reduces man to a mere commodity, communist class warfare which can destroy both the capitalist order and dignity of man, and undue government intervention among others. The idea articulated by the BBC that «the business of business is to build an enterprise on the total development of man» captured the minds of many Filipino businessmen.

Among its poverty programs, there have been training modules and seminars regarding the para-legal and leadership skills needed by the homeless poor. Aside from this, the BBC has notably advanced social development by being the nucleus for the Social Pact Alliances. By means of the Social Pact, it is hoped that the Philippine society, with the active participation of the business sector, can wage the fight against poverty and injustice, promote peace and development, open the economic system to the poor by means of strategic interventions that help make them productive, and reconstruct the social infrastructure in a way that benefits basic sectors.

In the field of education, some members of the BBC, along with representatives of the Church, drafted a code of business ethics which is being promoted and taught in graduate business schools. Through this educational campaign,

businessmen are seen as becoming more active in the exchange of ideas and in the debate about societal change.

In this light, institutions such as the Asian Institute of Management, which is a pacesetter in Philippine business education, should be noted since education is one of the most substantial contributions of business to society. AIM has been a promoter of Asian networking and management methods. As a major management resource for Asia, it serves governments, private non-profit groups, and the business community by organizing multi-sectorial *workshops*, assisting in the formation of training centers, setting up (with the alumni) conferences focused on Asian issues, and handing out awards for management excellence. AIM is the result of a partnership between two Catholic universities, the Ateneo University and De la Salle University.

The development of human persons and of society as a whole is a task that cannot be left solely to the state or to the market. Intermediate institutions must play their part. Clearly, through the efforts of the aforementioned organizations and institutions, the Philippine business sector, by doing its share in the area of social development and poverty alleviation, has manifested Christian-humanistic behavior. This Christian sense in business has actually been enshrined in the very fundamental law of the land, the Philippine Constitution, thanks to the efforts, among others, of some individuals who received their doctrinal education at the Center for Research and Communication. Section 6 of Article XII of the Philippine Constitution reads as follows: «The use of property bears a social function, and all economic agents shall contribute to the common good. Individuals and private groups, including corporations, cooperatives, and similar collective organizations, shall have the right to own, establish, and operate economic enterprises, subject to the duty of the State to promote distributive justice and to intervene when the common good so demands».