

# Books that are noteworthy

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**The Pope and the CEO: John Paul's Leadership Lessons to a Young Swiss Guard by Andreas Widmer, Emmaus Road Publishing, 152 pages, 2011, ISBN 978-1931018760.**

This relatively thin and thoughtful book by a former member of the Swiss Guards (from 1986 to 1988) during the Papacy of Pope John Paul II brims with inspiring anecdotes, stories, ideas worth adopting and discussion questions (for individuals or student groups), following every chapter. The book offers also practical advice for anyone seeking larger truths and deeper answers. The book has highest possible - five star.

Widmer provides eyewitness insights into Pope John Paul II: the man, the pope, the saint, whom he calls „the most authentic human person I have ever met.” The author reveals how his two years of service left a powerful imprint on his life. Widmer's rich and intense experiences led him to examine his life, and he applied the lessons learned to his new career in the corporate world. He learned abundantly from his years of experience as a chief executive. He later moved into academia, serving and teaching the youth and would-be entrepreneurs. He now serves as Director of Entrepreneurship at the prestigious Catholic University of America in Washington, DC being one of the most popular professors according to students.

As a Swiss Guard, he spent considerable time with the Pope. At 6'9", the Pope could not miss him; he called Widmer, „my tallest guard.” When Widmer was leaving the Swiss Guards, John Paul II told him to „Go and bring Christ into the world; once you go back

and out into the world, it is understood that you will continue to shield Him, only this time with your persona, and how you live your life.”

Widmer did precisely that. He came to the United States to study international business. He worked in several software startups and led the Monitor OTF Group. Along the way, he lost the love for what he was doing and questioned his path. He has found a new path. He founded SEVEN (Social Equity VENTure Fund), which is a virtual nonprofit entity run by entrepreneurs whose strategy is to markedly increase the rate of innovation and diffusion of enterprise-based solutions to poverty. Each of the nine chapters draw on his innovative spirit, focuses on a critical learning of Widmer's and provokes reader to reflect on short, yet sharp questions in search for answers. Examples include Know Who You Are: The Importance of Vocation, Know What's Right: Ethics and the Human Person, and Life as a Witness: The Testimony of Right Action.

The power and principles of the Widmer's work can be summed up as follows: Life is vocational. We are called to care whenever we are playing our own role within the larger Divine plan. It would be the best if we would respond quickly, fully, and intently to God's creative, constructive, and cosmic purpose. Everything has a purpose, even if we can not discern it. It requires time, trials and tribulations to get understand. Non cada foglia che Dio non voglia, as an Italian ditty states: no single leaf falls without God's will. Nothing in our lives is an accident. Soren Kierkegaard advised wisely that life has to be lived forward, but it can only be understood looking backward. Looking this way, we would not suc-

cumb to the most prevalent and destructive of temptations: boredom. Widmer advises: „Don't ever settle for anything less than the spiritual and moral greatness the grace of God makes possible in your life. You will fail, we all do. Get up, dust yourself off, and keep trying. But do not settle for being less than the noble human being – leader and exemplar – you can be. Christians call this nobility sanctity.” True freedom isn't just a license, nor absence of restrictions from the outside. True freedom is more demanding, more complex and more magnificent: it is the freedom to love, to co-create, to give ourselves fully. *Nemo dat quod non habet*. We cannot create a responsible corporate culture unless we have modeled the best type of behaviors for employees. We cannot afford to become unfocused, undisciplined - we have to do the difficult tasks, to make hard choices, and at times exercise self denial. If we don't, we will remain only lower species, not full human beings, we are meant to become. Any business, company or firm exists to satisfy the needs, and/or wants of its customers. On the other hand, and equally importantly: to enable employers, investors earn reasonable profits. Profits are essentially and at times metaphorically called an „applause” for job well done. An intriguing, instructive and inspiring book.

Widmer narrates thus many interesting personal stories from his life as a Swiss Guard. He shares inspirational memories of his first Christmas while working for John Paul II. He describes his own struggles as a youth with so many conflicting goals, ideals. He considers in some detail, the corporate experience of his subsequent life, how he both managed and failed, and rediscovered how to live up to his true calling. He also describes how he moved to America, met a girl, studied International Business, how fell in love. He married soon after and with his wife's support took an unpaid internship at a small startup – a high tech company. The internship turned into a job, the passion to excell turned into a profitable venture. Riding on the then Internet bubble and

climbing the corporate ladder, he seemed to be experience the top of the world. By the time of the public offering, Widmer became a Vice President of the company. He moved dynamically to establish yet another and new company.

When it was acquired for more than half a billion dollars, the shares he was allotted became worth more than enough to become financially well-off and independent. But there's an interesting twist: while his wife wanted him to sell the shares, to purchase some real estate, he ignored her advice. By then, during those turbulent times many „dotcoms” became „dotgone” and many mergers and acquisitions went out of control. Widmer painfully discovered the company he worked for to be fraudulent. The shares dropped. His big, brief fortune disappeared. Exhausted and worn out from overworking, being betrayed by the new owners, he decided to re-examine life. Reflecting on what he had learned during his close contact with John Paul II Widmer began to apply it to marriage, work and in his own life.

The amazing little book is then in part pontiff's biography, in part author's autobiography, and in part a practical business primer. The book maintains a clear balance between all these three. For those who are in business - there are many good lessons to be gained. Viewed through the prism of our own spiritual growth as well as our desire to become the best version of ourselves - the principles presented by Widmer merit our full attention. For example, in chapter titled: Know Your Team, the author challenges the commonly accepted notion that work is ultimately about results. Some in business even call it „resultology”. Widmer clearly demonstrates that work, like all we do in our brief life - boils down to and - is actually about relationships. To get involved in business is to find a neighbor, your next of kin. Widmer admires John Paul II and aspires that we also look at exemplary life of the pontiff. The pontiff, who excelled in showing us how to become both stewards and saints, by being servants, serving others. The pontiff,

who himself went through this life, excelling and „doing good”. Many examples of behavior from the Pope we could and should model and emulate in both the business world and in our personal life.

Toward the end of his book, Widmer writes, “Over the years, I’ve heard a lot of great stories about John Paul II from friends at the Vatican and others who knew him personally. One of my favorites is this one from Scott Hahn [from his address to the Boston Catholic Men’s conference, March 4, 2006]. I repeat it here, because I can think of no greater testimony to the detachment we’re all called to possess.”

[Note: the following story is verbatim from *The Pope & The CEO*, pages 136-138.]

During the later years of John Paul II’s papacy, an American priest attended a conference in Rome. On the last day of the conference, he went to a church at midday to pray. As he walked in, he saw the ever-present beggars in front. He stopped, thought he recognized one of them, but dismissed the thought and walked inside. Still, he couldn’t help thinking about that beggar, so on his way out, he approached the man. “Excuse me,” he said. “Do I know you?” The man looked away, but answered, “Yes, we went to seminary together and were ordained together in Rome.” The beggar priest then told the American about how horrific life choices and bad mistakes had poisoned and destroyed his vocation. The priest was devastated, but didn’t know what to say and hurried back to the Vatican.

That afternoon, there was an audience with the pope for all the attendees of the conference. The priest could not resist the temptation. As he approached John Paul, he said, “Holy Father, you have to pray for this priest I just saw.” And he told him the story. After the audience, the American went back to that parish looking for the homeless priest. When he found him, he said, “The pope is praying for you. The beggar just stared at him with a look that said, “Well that’s great...whatever good that’ll do.”

But the priest continued. “That’s not all.

The pope and his secretary, Bishop Dziwisz, invited the two of us for dinner tonight.” The man protested. He was dirty. He had no decent clothes. But the priest persuaded him with an offer of a shower and the loan of one of his own suits. So they went. The Swiss Guard on duty let them in, and they were ushered up to the apartment where Bishop Dziwisz greeted them. He then led them into the dining room where the pope was already at table. Everyone exchanged greetings and the first course was served. Then the second course. At the end of the main course, the pope began moving his hand in a motion to Bishop Dziwisz. The American priest didn’t understand what the gesture meant, but the bishop did. He got up and said to him: “Please come with me for a moment.”

The two left and waited outside. One minute passed, then two, then five, then ten. Finally the bishop seemed to know it was time to go back in. They sat down just in time for dessert. At the end of the evening, farewells and blessings were exchanged and the two priests walked back down the marble stairs to St. Peter’s Square. The American priest, however, was dying of curiosity, so as soon as they came out into the open he turned and asked, “What went on in there?” The beggar said, “You wouldn’t believe it, even if I told you.” “You have to tell me. Try me!” was the American’s response. “Well, as soon as you left the room, John Paul turned to me and said ‘Father, would you please hear my confession?’ I said, ‘Holy Father, I’m not a priest, I’m a beggar.’ And the pope responded ‘So am I, I am just a beggar. You are a priest. Once a priest, always a priest.’

“But Holy Father,’ I told him, ‘I’m not in right standing with the Church!’ “As the bishop of Rome, I can reinstate you here and now,’ was his reply. ‘All you have to do is give me consent.’ “How could I withhold consent from the bishop of Rome?” the beggar concluded. After hearing the story, the American priest said “But we were out there for more than ten minutes. It couldn’t have taken that long for him to

confess his sins?” “No,” the beggar agreed. “It was over in a couple of minutes. That’s when I dropped to my knees and begged him to hear my confession. And he did. Right before you came back in, he asked me where you found me, and upon my telling him, he asked me to report to the pastor there tomorrow. I’ll be assigned to that church, and my mission will be reaching out to all of our fellow beggars in the neighborhood. Because that’s what all of us are.” Finally, he poses some simple questions:

**“Good business: Catholic Social Teaching at Work in the Marketplace” by Thomas O’Brien<sup>1</sup>, Elizabeth W. Collier and Patrick Flanagan; Anslem Academic Press, ISBN: 978-1-59982-169-6; 288 p., 2014.**

This book is written and destined to be an excellent ethics source and practical guide - and not only for business students. It is also designed as a practical textbook. This book is for everyone with the desire to learn more than just basic, secular corporate ethics theories. It is filled with more than generic business applications, prevalent in current multicultural, secular, global world. In the world filled with strong emphasis on individualism and powerful pursuit of profits, this textbook clearly, candidly and comprehensively employs classical Catholic Social Teaching (CST). The book is complemented by rich tradition of the church and its magisterium.

Catholic Social Teaching is based on the belief that our Creator has a plan for creation. A plan to build his kingdom of peace, love and justice. It holds that God has a special place in this story for each of us, whoever we are. Our part in this plan isn’t just limited to things

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas O’Brien is associate professor of religious studies at DePaul University, Chicago. Elizabeth W. Collier is associate professor of business ethics at Dominican University, River Forest, Ill. Patrick Flanagan is assistant professor in the department of theology and religious studies at St. John’s University, Jamaica, N.Y.

1) The beggar story touched me because it embodied a rare CEO quality: humility. Other accounts in this book may touch you differently. What did you learn about John Paul from this story? 2) In the chapter on living a balanced life, the author noted the pope’s zest for the outdoors and sports. When some questioned the cost of installing a swimming pool at the papal summer residence, the pope famously replied, “It’s cheaper than another conclave.” Wonder what did he mean by that?

‘spiritual’, or things we might do on Sundays, but that it involves every aspect of our lives, and how we live as a responsible global citizens. Our part in this story is a kind-of vocation for the common good. It is a call to treat everyone we encounter as brothers and sisters. It is something that we all share. Catholic Social Teaching is the tradition of reflection about how we live this vocation or the common good in our world. Catholic Social Teaching touches upon many different aspects of life, from the family to international development. How we think of those who are homeless to how we care for the environment, and from how we shop and consume to the rights of workers and the dignity of work. All the different areas that Catholic Social Teaching touches upon have developed from practical reflection on the realities of modern life in the light of the principles and themes of Catholic Social Teaching.

Each chapter assesses and presents timeless principles, with central themes of social thought, along with critical issues that arise in the global economy of today. There are actually powerful, real-life business cases that invite readers to place themselves into these situations and explore possible solutions that make practical and moral sense. Presented in the user friendly format, authors intend to inspire readers to broaden their critical thinking, apply moral and ethical standards regarding what a business should be, how it should operate within an increasingly disruptive yet



intensely interdependent global world.

“Good Business: Catholic Social Teaching at Work in the Marketplace” examines eight themes of social teaching: 1. Human dignity 2. Common good, 3. Stewardship, 4. Option for the poor, 5. Economic justice, 6. Subsidiarity, 7. Solidarity, and 8. Rights and responsibilities. It systematically shows how these issues apply to contemporary business practices and critical issues in today’s highly interrelated, interdependent global economy.

The book is addressed to and intended primarily for the undergraduate students. The textbook features rather short case studies followed by discussions. These questions guide apprentices toward practical application of the concepts in the real world. This book is highly timely and sorely needed textbook. Throughout the key eight chapters this book delves deeply and develops clearly key ethical arguments. It further applies the solid and rich themes of Catholic Social Teaching to the structure of current economic and social life. The authors bring together intriguing examples to contemporary concerns. The intricate issues, relevant theories and practice relate these problems in each chapter for better assessment of critical issues. The book also takes a fresh look at the emerging bio-tech inventions, new workplace ethical challenges and issues by incorporating the themes developed in that chapter.

In an introductory section, Thomas O’Brien summarizes very briefly the tradition of ethics. He commences with basic general categories: regarding decision-making systems and character-based systems. He then corresponds and correlates them to the key questions: 1) what should I do and 2) who should I be/become? Brief descriptive review of consequentialism, deontology, virtue ethics, justice, magisterium and tradition follows. The approach may strike some readers as perhaps overly detailed, or counterintuitive - especially when brought up to widely exposed ethical relativism. It is not. The current dominion of moral relativism, where mass media generally consider ethics

as a simply secular, or personal bias, is nothing more than a subjective preference. That is, what an individual considers right or wrong one may consider as a personal choice.

With rapid and continuous advancement of complex technological innovations and new ways how we, as humans, can conceive and perceive the world, these new advancements become invasive and pervasive in our daily life. They are affecting all spheres of our daily activities, whether we like it or not. Human dignity in a technological age is undergoing a significant strain, even testing limits of acceptance. Technological innovations and advancements may be considered ambivalent or neutral, at best. They however dominate our bias whenever they only deliver overwhelmingly positive (read: utilitarian) externalities.

As the authors in book make it very clear: “Many argue that advanced technology is at the critical crossroad, where its power to alter the environment and one’s very self is such that each new advance has a sort of ontological, or fundamental, potential to transform the definition of what it means to be human living on this planet in the context of a community of humans and other living creatures.” ( p.34)

The book clearly emphasizes that justice of markets is intricately connected to the preferential treatment of the poor and the disadvantaged in the market economy. While the principles of Catholic Social Teaching point to an implied moral imperative that markets should manifest greater protections for the vulnerable, particularly the poor, they do not provide an actionable framework to aid business decision-making in marketing to the poor. Present business models for marketing to the poor, though clothed in ‘Corporate Social Responsibility’ terminology, are mostly profit motivated, or inspired.

Just about only three years ago, in 2013, Thomas O’Brien (then associate professor in the Department of Religious Studies), started with colleagues a new publication, called the “Journal of Religion and Business Ethics.” The idea originated in conversations while they

were editing another book, “Religious Perspectives on Business Ethics.” They quickly realized that very few academics address the relationship between religion and business ethics. And even though business ethics is being taught by almost every major university all over the world, instructors use textbooks primarily with a secular perspective. The religious content is either completely removed or major portions are taken out.”

An insightful German Jesuit priest and economist, Heinrich Pesch, is still rather unknown in the U.S. Considered, as highly influential Catholic thinker by St. John Paul 2 and Pope Pius XI influenced highly key ideas embed in monumental encyclicals, such as *Quadragesimo Anno* and *Laborem Excerens*. It was from Pesch that John Paul II took many of the ideas of his own social encyclicals - including the idea of man as the subject of work, of man’s dominion over the world as founded on his exercise of work, and even the key term “solidarity”. Any thinker who has had such influence over more than one Supreme Pontiff is worth knowing much better. Since the publication of the *Wealth of Nations* in 1776, by A. Smith, the study of economics has moved in the direction of a deductive science. It became more and more divorced from ethics. However it did accept the hedonism of Thomas Hobbes and Jeremy Bentham -and even in modern times does not recognize an important contribution made by Michael Novak’s – regarding enlightened self-interest. Almost every beginning student of economics today is initiated into a system of analysis which uses a few simple but powerful tools to examine the economic transactions of producing, buying and selling, or savings. These tools treat economics as mechanical in its very nature. An eco-

omic actor seeks to maximize profits, rents or interest. Economic activities are often largely reduced to a mathematical expressions full of graphs, numbers and equations.

Catholic Social Teaching comprises conciliar and episcopal documents that deal with the Church’s response and commitment to the economic, political and social demands in the context of our world. The whole of CST develops from the principle of the dignity of the human person. Economic actions are to be evaluated then, on the basis of how much they uphold this dignity of the human person. The economy should serve people, not the other way around.

We have to start with human goal and see the goal through the human needs. What is it that really makes us humans happy? Why are we here? How we relate to others how we construct good business, are essential questions in today’s social order. The single greatest contributor to people’s wellbeing is what sort of relationships are they in. And we are rather hopeless at relationships. Think of Maslow’s famous pyramid of needs, at the bottom you’ve got material needs, as you climb up towards self- actualization, meaning, friendship, realizing highest goals, leaving a legacy. Is an unemployment a consequence of the wrong perception of what should be commercialized? There are so many needs which we haven’t yet learned to satisfy and a full economy will be one which properly delivers happiness across so many areas. We still have not managed to satisfy global basic material needs.

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