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Wirtenberger: Morality and Business

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In *Woman Enough* Mrs. Nakpil has succeeded in catching glimpses of Philippine life and manners. And if the average reader forgets some of the incidents or sketches he may have read in the collection, he will surely remember this much—the essays are well written and they are full of insight into Philippine culture. For the *Filipina*, however, the most striking thesis in the collection and one which she may well agree with is that being a woman is enough... for a woman.

MARIA TERESA COLAYCO

MORAL APPROACH TO BUSINESS

MORALITY AND BUSINESS. By Henry J. Wirtenberger, S.J.
Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1962. 307 pp.

For many years there has been a growing need for a textbook on business ethics from the Catholic point of view. The complaint has been that the treatment of the moral problems of businessmen found in general and special ethics and moral theology textbooks has been inadequate and has not been kept up to date with the new and multiple ethical situations which have arisen in the modern business world. Today it has become increasingly difficult to know what is right or wrong with a lot of business practices and businessmen themselves feel that moral theologians have not really come to grips with their concrete and specific problems. Fr. Wirtenberger's book, the fruit of ten years of teaching a course on morality and business in the School of Commerce, University of Detroit, is a modest attempt to fill the need of a Catholic textbook for business students and to remedy the lamentable failure of moral theologians in the past to provide a realistic consideration of modern business problems and adequate moral guidance for honest and sincere businessmen.

The moral approach Fr. Wirtenberger takes has the chief advantage of combining both the approach of moral theology and that of ethics into a hitherto much desired synthesis of moral principles based on both reason and revelation. In this respect the spiritual and ascetical dimension of business is also a noteworthy feature of the book. The main purpose of the book is to bridge the gap between general moral principles and actual business practice in the United States. No moral theologian should prescribe a priori moral norms for businessmen until he is sure of his facts. It is here on the level of facts about some actual American business practices that Fr. Wirtenberger makes a limited but fresh contribution. Since business is a very wide field, the book is understandably selective in its choice of topics. Part I and Part II review the fundamental and social moral

principles applicable to business in a more readable style than is usually found in moral theology treatises. Part III selects for extended treatment the moral aspects of buying and selling, labor relations, work, and management—all in an American setting. There is a special chapter on the theology of work. Probably the best part of the book, which teachers will find most helpful, is Part IV on fifty moral business cases and a few typical management cases. Other features of the book are the summary conclusions at the end of each chapter; the comprehensive list of the rights and duties of employees, employers, and the government with the basic reasons for these rights and duties (this list could very well serve as a good starting point for working out Codes of Ethics for the various business professions) and principles of business decision-making. There are also illustrative diagrams and statistical tables and charts.

Those who are engaged in teaching a course on morality in business will probably be disappointed with Fr. Wirtenberger's book. For he does not attempt to say anything new. What he has done is to compile into one book materials from manuals of moral theology, from business journals, books and monographs, and from articles and published speeches of business leaders, educators, and government officials. The omission of the ethical problems of other business professions like advertising, accounting, banking, real estate, etc. may be due to the limited scope of the book. If Fr. Wirtenberger's attempt to remedy a real need is not quite successful; if his book leaves much to be desired by way of a real contribution to business ethics, the reason is that it has only been meant, in the words of Fr. Wirtenberger himself, to be a "thought starter", a small beginning to stimulate further studies. It might not be too far from the truth to conjecture that the publication of more recent and satisfactory books on morality in business was stimulated, whether by way of criticism or not, in no small way by Fr. Wirtenberger's quasi-pioneer effort.

VITALIANO R. GOROSPE