
Pro Rege

Volume 21 | Number 1

Article 4

September 1992

Business Through the Eyes of Faith (Book Review)

Tracy Miller
Dordt College

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege

Recommended Citation

Miller, Tracy (1992) "Business Through the Eyes of Faith (Book Review)," *Pro Rege*: Vol. 21: No. 1, 18 - 20.
Available at: http://digitalcollections.dordt.edu/pro_rege/vol21/iss1/4

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the College Publications at Digital Collections @ Dordt. It has been accepted for inclusion in Pro Rege by an authorized administrator of Digital Collections @ Dordt. For more information, please contact ingrid.mulder@dordt.edu.



A quarterly faculty publication of
Dordt College, Sioux Center, Iowa

Book Reviews

Ignatius Loyola: A Biography of the Founder of the Jesuits, by Philip Caraman, S. J. (San Francisco, Harper & Row) 1990. 222 pages, \$22.95. Reviewed by Arnold Koekkoek, Associate Professor of History.

One would expect a biography of Loyola written by a Jesuit to be admiring. It is. The eminent British historian A. L. Rowse is quoted on the dust jacket as saying that "this book is not hagiography." While this is probably true, it is undeniable that Caraman holds Loyola in the highest regard. The author does not ignore certain events or actions in Ignatius' life, but the interpretation placed on those actions is complimentary throughout. Thus the picture of Loyola that emerges is not that of a militant ascetic or an anti-Protestant soldier but of a Spirit-consumed, almost mystic devotee of the Roman Catholic Church. Caraman's Loyola is dedicated to his Church, but he is not motivated by any spirit of anti-Lutheranism. The Jesuit order, established by Loyola, argues Caraman, was very loosely organized and directed rather than militaristic or autocratic in character. This presents us with a different kind of person, nobler and far less rigid, than the one traditionally pictured in most history books.

One would expect, however, that even a laudatory work published by so reputable a firm as Harper & Row would nonetheless have to be scholarly. It is. The bibliography of both primary and secondary works is lengthy, and especially the frequent references to primary sources demonstrate clearly that Caraman knows his subject well. One very knowledgeable reviewer has pointed out some gaps in that knowledge, but the fact remains that Caraman does not have to apologize for the quality of his scholarship and the depth of his knowledge of Loyola or writings about him.

Business Through the Eyes of Faith by Richard C. Chewning, John W. Eby and Shirley J. Roels. (San Francisco: Harper and Row) 1990. 266 pages, paperback. \$9.95. Reviewed by Tracy Miller, Associate Professor of Economics.

St. Jerome claimed that "a merchant can seldom if ever please God." We counter by asserting that "all of life is religion," and that this has implications for how Christians conduct themselves in business. The authors of *Business Through the Eyes of Faith* agree. They recognize that business is a necessary part of life and that here, as in all other areas of life, Christians must "integrate the tenets of faith with the practice of business" (xi).

It should be obvious, though, that this is not *the* definitive biography of Loyola. How could it be, in less than 200 pages of text? But the book serves its intended purpose, which is "to present Ignatius to English readers as he can now reveal himself on the occasion of the fifth centenary of his birth" in 1591 (p. viii). It is a scholarly work, but it is not aimed first of all at scholars.

One would expect, therefore, that a book thus aimed, especially about a character as intrinsically interesting and influential as Loyola, must be written in a style that appeals to non-specialists. For the most part, it is. There are spots where one feels a bit "bogged down," but in general the writing is clear. One need not be an expert in Reformation history to "get into" the book.

My main problem with the book is that Loyola never comes fully alive in it, never comes across as a real, flesh-and-blood, actual human being. Perhaps Caraman makes him too other-worldly, too spiritual. Human foibles and failings are almost unseen, with the result that even Ignatius' pains and sufferings—and there were many of them—seem less than real. I would not go so far as to call this a hagiography, but I never felt I was getting in touch with a man who had really been alive.

This caveat notwithstanding, I recommend the book for profitable reading, especially because it shows facets of Loyola's character and work that are not normally recognized.

This book was written primarily for college students. It is divided into four parts beginning with an overview of what it means to view business from a Christian perspective. Following this there are sections on work, leadership, and business as an agent for shalom. The book is addressed both to workers and managers and should be of interest to owners of businesses as well.

The first chapter develops the case for approaching business from a Christian perspective, while the second

discusses and defines success biblically. The authors seek to convince the reader that all decisions "embody faith in something." Our faith in Jesus Christ motivates us to place a high value on those things that are pleasing to God and to make our decisions accordingly.

Chapter three discusses God's requirements for the business person. Chapter four discusses human nature, focusing on the tension between humans as image bearers and as creatures subject to sin. Chapter five considers how personal identity and business behavior are influenced by the quest to satisfy three central psychological needs—needs for acceptance, competence, and belonging.

The section on work includes two chapters about justice in relationships between firms and workers, one chapter on human development in the workplace, and one on rights and obligations. The final chapter of this section deals with the importance of planning and organizing in the light of an uncertain future.

The third section includes chapters on the characteristics of good leaders and followers, the use of power, accountability, motivation, and communication.

The last four chapters focus on the relationship between business and society. Beginning in chapter 16, the notion of a social contract between business and society is stressed. Chapter 17 discusses the responsibility of business to its various constituencies in society. Chapter 18 considers issues of economic justice and how business and society can contribute to equity within a firm, in the community, between generations, and between nations. The book concludes with a chapter emphasizing the importance of decision-making in the light of the commands of God in scripture.

The authors repeatedly refer to sinful attitudes and practices that are common in contemporary society, such as the emphasis on personal autonomy, seeking power, status, and wealth as measures of success, and using politics to manipulate people. They also encourage positive attitudes and relationships, such as the importance of equity of power in business and society, the need for humility and a servant attitude on the part of leaders, and the importance of kindness, respect, and courtesy in dealing with problems.

Frequent examples show how Christians manage businesses and behave in the workplace. The authors include a good mixture of positive and negative examples. The examples are realistic in showing that ethical behavior is not always rewarded, nor do those who demonstrate love in the workplace always see the fruit of their efforts. The book repeatedly warns against

a simplistic application of biblical texts to complex business problems.

Many of the chapters include lists of principles for the reader to remember and put into practice. There are guidelines for the following: how well a given economic system serves the purposes God intended (ch. 1), economic justice (ch. 3), responding to inappropriate behavior in the workplace (ch. 4), testing the quality of leadership (ch. 11), and the use of power by leaders (ch. 12).

The book includes a combination of fairly specific concrete principles along with some that are more general and open to interpretation. It also combines a concern for a just economic system with a recognition of the importance of ethical behavior of individuals within the system. Although the book is addressed to Christians, it recognizes that non-Christians sometimes demonstrate attitudes and behavior consistent with Christian principles, while Christians sometimes fail. There is a repeated emphasis on the need for "a strong, growing, vital relationship to Jesus Christ" if the reader is to develop the strength and wisdom necessary to do "business in a way that reflects the righteousness of God."

A number of contemporary issues are discussed, some repeatedly in different contexts. Among the important issues are discrimination, with particular emphasis on pay equity between men and women, environmental problems, product safety, safety in the workplace, and the distribution of wealth. The authors recognize that business people need wisdom in dealing with these issues. They avoid recommending simplistic solutions to these complex problems, such as greater competition or more government regulation.

The text recognizes a number of tensions that must be maintained by managers, such as the tension between caring for workers and dealing honestly with their failures and shortcomings; the tension between internal motivation and the need for rewards and punishments; the tension between allowing workers freedom to develop their talents and maintaining control over them. It also recognizes tensions between work and family relationships and the importance of policies that enable workers to meet family responsibilities.

For the most part, the book reflects a thorough understanding of the theory and practice of business and related disciplines. As an economist, I notice a tendency for the authors to ignore at times the unintended consequences and tradeoffs associated with some of the policies and practices that they recommend. Minimum wages, labor unions, and pay equity

laws may appear to promote economic justice by raising living standards of some workers. However, greater injustice may result from setting wages above market clearing levels if firms cannot afford to pay minimum wages or union wages to the least skilled and experienced workers.

This book has much to offer any Christian involved or

A Thousand Acres by Jane Smiley (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991). 371 pages, hardcover, \$23. *The Bridges of Madison County* by Robert James Waller (New York: Warner, 1992). 171 pages, hardcover, \$14.45. Reviewed by James C. Schaap, Professor of English.

Literarily at least, Iowans have reason to celebrate this summer—and reason for concern. Two novels by Iowa writers, their textures and settings distinctively Iowan, have risen to prominence in the book world. One of them, *A Thousand Acres* by Jane Smiley, was recently awarded the Pulitzer Prize. The other, *The Bridges of Madison County*, a first novel by essayist Robert Waller, a frequent and popular contributor to *Des Moines Sunday Register's* Op-ed pages, was also released. Time-Warner, the book's publisher, thought so highly of it that it gave the book a full-page advertisement in a June issue of *Time*. *Newsweek*, in its September 7 issue, featured *Bridges* as one of those novels whose sales have been surprisingly good because the book has lovingly "hand-sold" by admiring bookstore owners. In September, *Bridges* had risen to number seven on the *New York Times* best-seller list.

Iowans, who often suffer from a kind of second-city mentality with respect to most other states of the union, should take pride in the achievement of these novels, both of which are worth reading.

Jane Smiley's *A Thousand Acres* offers more of a taste of rural life than a week of judging hogs at the State Fair. What is remarkable about this novel, Smiley's ninth book, is that she is able to evoke the nuances of rural life in such detail and with such authenticity that even born-and-bred Iowans will shake their heads in disbelief upon being told that she is not, in fact, a native. Reared in St. Louis, Smiley has spent many years, however, in Iowa, some of them teaching at Iowa State University, and a year or so living in the kind of rural hamlet featured in *Acres*.

If a reader is even remotely interested in a tour of small-town minutiae, *Acres* will undoubtedly please, not only because it offers such wonderful side road passages as an explanation of varying friendly waves one receives from pick-up drivers met randomly on country roads, but also because of the accuracy of manners only implied in the narrative. Women are told, for instance, that nothing really fancy should be packed

interested in business. Some of the suggestions made by the authors are controversial and provide a good stimulus for a discussion to alternative viewpoints. Questions at the end of each chapter encourage discussion of controversial issues. For a balanced, scriptural treatment of business accessible to the nonspecialist, I highly recommend *Business Through the Eyes of Faith*.

along to a pot-luck supper; when they arrive and set down their dishes, they discover none of them has heeded the advice.

This is a long book, not just an afternoon's leisure reading; but the Garrison Keilor factor, the recognition of characteristic rural mannerisms, is strong. There is much to smile at in *A Thousand Acres*, much to shake one's head about, much to feel familiarly embarrassed by. Smiley has obviously done her homework, and the result—as always in good fiction—is authenticity that creates authority, not only for the author, but more importantly for the book itself. Even if Iowa readers don't like the material of the novel, they have to love its texture.

While Ms. Smiley, having achieved the Pulitzer, is undoubtedly staying busy on the lecture circuit, it's unlikely that she'll be nominated for any major awards by the *Farm Journal*. There is as much to lament in this novel as there is to praise, for the image it presents of Iowa life is nothing the state tourist bureau would want promulgated.

Review after review have already alluded to the link between Shakespeare's tragedy of filial regression, *King Lear*, and Smiley's *Acres*. In both works, a well-established father gives up the authority of his reign to his three daughters. In both, dissolution follows relentlessly and pitilessly. *A Thousand Acres* is not quick reading, neither is it easy.

At the center of the novel is Larry Cook, a highly successful farmer who has given all of himself to the establishment and operation of a sprawling farm in a fictional county of north-central Iowa. What is likeable about the man is his indefatigable strength. He has devoted all of his life to the operation he has created, every bit of it; and he is highly respected in the community. He is, in fact, a master farmer. As a human being, however, he is despicable, reminding one of the old Thoreauvian catechism, a man who has become "a tool of his tools." Larry Cook is no longer Man-Farming, Emerson might say, but simply and incorrigibly, farmer.