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A Crisis of Mistaken Identity: The Ethical Insufficiency of the Corporate University Model

Conor M. Kelly

ONE OF THE MAJOR ETHICAL CHALLENGES FACING universities in the United States today is a crisis of mistaken identity. Universities, and their administrators, increasingly see themselves through the eyes of a corporate model that defines the university as a business embedded in an industry that must serve market forces just like every other enterprise that sells a good or service to its customers. While there are arguably some benefits to utilizing this perspective as one tool among many in strategic planning, the model also has inherent limitations that amplify as its influence on campus increases. When it serves as both the defining metaphor and the guiding vision for an institution—as it often does uncritically at universities across the United States—the corporate model warps the identity of the university, orienting it to the ends of the market at the expense of the ends of education. This turns into an ethical problem because it undermines the very nature of the university, leading it to become what it is not and to neglect what it should be. In more philosophical terms, the corporate model creates a university with a frustrated telos, an institution that thinks it is one thing when in fact it is another. Like a personal identity crisis, this institutional case of mistaken identity leaves the university adrift, ultimately undermining the university's ability to fulfill its actual purpose in the world. Just as a lion that thinks it is a lamb will harm its intestines with the exclusively vegetarian diet of an ovine, so will the university that defines its identity in strictly corporate terms slowly deteriorate from the inside.¹ Although there are signs of this crisis across the higher education landscape, the problem is particularly acute at Catholic universities where the disconnect between what these schools ought to be, according to the tradition they inhabit, and what they actually become under a corporate model is quite severe.

¹ There are, of course, Thomistic elements to the claim that a frustrated telos represents an ethical problem in se. See Brian Davies, *The Thought of Thomas Aquinas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 94–95; ST I, q. 49, a. 1.

In light of these challenges, the purpose of this article is to articulate the ethical insufficiency of the corporate university model in a Catholic context, using the resources of the Catholic moral tradition to specify what a Catholic university sacrifices when it succumbs to this crisis of mistaken identity and what it can do to reclaim some of its higher ethical calling. The article pursues this analysis in three parts. The first discusses the nature of the corporate model, explaining its central features and briefly outlining its rise to prominence in the United States. The second provides an ethical analysis of this model, demonstrating the ways in which this narrowed identity frustrates the telos of an institution that shares in the mission of the universal church. Finally, the third section describes three strategies Catholic universities can take to overcome the limitations of the corporate model without having to disregard the genuine insights that an attention to economic concerns can provide for strategic planning. The result is a clearer sense of the limitations of the prevailing corporate model in Catholic higher education and a concrete proposal for an alternative vision that better honors the nature and purpose of any university rooted in the Catholic tradition.

THE CORPORATE UNIVERSITY MODEL: ITS NATURE AND ITS RISE TO PROMINENCE

Although the language of a “corporate university” can have multiple meanings depending on its use in context, the focus of this assessment is on nonprofit colleges and universities that have adopted the language, management strategies, business outlook, and operational assumptions of typical for-profit corporations in their day-to-day work and long-term planning.² Unlike some of the other “corporate universities” that can embrace money-making as their *raison d’être* without undermining their core identity, the traditional nonprofit university faces an inherent contradiction when it prioritizes the pursuit of profitability over its educational mission, creating an identity crisis that leads to a frustrated telos and that introduces a distinct set of ethical concerns.³ Consequently, in this article, the terms corporate university

² In other contexts, the term is variously used to describe training programs at large multinational firms (e.g., McDonald’s Hamburger University) or to denote for-profit universities in the United States. Notably, these institutions do not suffer from an identity crisis, for in neither case is there any disconnect between the daily operations of the institution and the end goal of making money, for that is in fact the original telos of each of these institutions.

³ The other types of corporate universities are hardly without ethical insufficiencies, but these are not the same as the problems that emerge from the frustrated telos of a nonprofit university that adopts the corporate university model. For an overview of the ethical issues surrounding for-profit universities, see James F. Keenan, *University Ethics: How Colleges Can Build and Benefit from a Culture of Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2015), 191–95.

and corporate university model will refer narrowly to the nonprofit institutions of higher education that are not under the auspices of any for-profit businesses but which nevertheless view and present themselves as though they were equivalent to any other type of business corporation.

At its core, the corporate university model is embodied in the belief that the university can be adequately understood according to the standard logic of a for-profit business, such that the tools and analyses that help business enterprises succeed in their pursuit of profits can be used to guide university operations with minimal translation. This model is well captured in the assertion of the acting provost at one Jesuit university, who reportedly informed faculty concerned about the administration's plans to "restructure" its college of education that "bottom line...the university is a business," intimating that this logic was sufficient to interpret the administration's thinking.⁴ While all universities need financial resources to survive, there is also something more than financial viability at stake, especially at Catholic institutions where a strong sense of mission and identity is rooted in a tradition that transcends profit maximization. The corporate university model, however, glosses over this reality in favor of a one-dimensional interpretation represented by three interrelated tendencies: the economic reductionism of students and faculty, the commodification of university life, and a deference to competition in internal operations.⁵ Together, these three tendencies serve as the defining characteristics of the corporate university model and understanding each is key to understanding the ethical insufficiencies of this mindset.

First, the economic reductionism of students and faculty involves interpreting these individuals and their relationships to the university according to their economic functions alone. Thus, students become consumers who are looking to buy a product that the university has to sell, and the crux of the relationship between these two entities is viewed as an economic transaction that is supposed to maximize utility for both sides.⁶ Similarly, the role of a faculty member is collapsed into that of an employee, which means that he or she is no longer a

⁴ Natallie St. Onge, "College of Education Faces Potential Merge, Structural Changes," *Marquette Wire*, September 17, 2019, marquettewire.org/4016684/news/college-of-education-faces-potential-merge-structural-changes/.

⁵ These three characteristics are based on my own observations about the features that universities employ to make themselves most like corporations and which create the greatest contrasts with the way universities traditionally proceeded. These characteristics have parallels with the features others have identified in their critiques of university corporatization, but I define them here in a particular fashion and for a unique application. Cf. Eric Gould, *The University in a Corporate Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 80–81.

⁶ Gould, *The University in a Corporate Culture*, 38–78.

necessary partner in the collaborative task of shared governance, but is instead an abstract and interchangeable part of the corporate project that is best understood, according to the typical analysis of business operations, as a liability line on the balance sheet.⁷ Admittedly, there is some degree of truth to each of these interpretations. Students are paying for something from the university, and as a result, the university has a moral responsibility to ensure that it is fulfilling its part of the exchange by offering an education that is worth the cost, otherwise the university will violate the equality of value that commutative justice demands (ST I-II, q. 61, a. 2). Faculty, meanwhile, are employees, who therefore enter into an economic relationship with the university that creates contractual obligations for both parties, and, in this context, salary payments are a major part of the university's duties that it ought to evaluate regularly. Nevertheless, the roles of consumer and employee do not constitute the totality of a student's or faculty member's identity and function in a university context. The significance of the economic reductionism of the corporate model, then, is not in its mere identification of students as consumers and faculty as employees, but in the operating assumption that these necessary roles are also sufficient for evaluating the work these human beings do in an educational environment.

Beyond this economic reductionism, the second defining characteristic of the corporate university is commodification, specifically the commodification of the various aspects of university life. Rooted in the ethos of "market triumphalism," wherein "the logic of buying and selling no longer applies to material goods alone but increasingly governs the whole of life," commodification is best represented in the conviction that everything at a university has a price for which it can be bought and sold.⁸ Although this might create some confusion given similarities with the conventional notion of economic reductionism,⁹ I am using both terms separately here in order to differentiate the way a corporate university approaches the human persons involved in the educational process (i.e., the economic reductionism *of students and faculty*) from the way it evaluates its goods and services (i.e., the commodification *of university life*). While they are both governed by similar impulses, the ethical implications are not the same because what

⁷ Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism, and the New Poor*, 2nd ed. (New York: Open University Press, 2005), 53.

⁸ Michael Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 6.

⁹ Indeed, in some critiques of university corporatization, commodification is used to denote economic reductionism in general. See Mark B. Brown, "Coercion, Corruption, and Politics in the Commodification of Academic Science," in *The Commodification of Academic Research: Science and the Modern University*, ed. Hans Radder (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010), 259–76, at 260.

is appropriate for persons is not always appropriate for inanimate things and vice versa, so it is important to note that alongside the economic reductionism of students and faculty, the corporate university model also involves the commodification of virtually everything else at the university. Significantly, the commodification involved in the corporate university model goes beyond the treatment of education or knowledge as a market commodity, for as James Keenan has helpfully elucidated, that is hardly a novel feature of higher education today.¹⁰ What sets the corporate university model apart, though, is the rapid expansion of this mindset to so many facets of campus life, because the corporate university model embraces an ethos of commodification that assumes that, in addition to tuition, virtually every aspect of the university experience ought also to be for sale. The result is a vision of the university that regards its services and functions as privileges reserved for those who are willing to pay a premium for them. The most egregious example in recent memory is the way some college employees allegedly colluded with a college admissions “consultant” to guarantee admission to students whose wealthy parents paid the requisite fee.¹¹ This particular case, of course, represents an exceptional and unethical abuse of the system, but as astute observers of the fraud noted, the system itself is not that far removed from its abuses because many admissions decisions are already influenced by, if not directly based upon, a family’s wealth and thus its potential for future university donations.¹² While there is not an outright market for admission to most schools—yet—there is nonetheless a process of commodification involved in this practice, which essentially says that something that is normally not for sale can actually be purchased for the right price.

In other areas of college life, a similar commodification plays out. For instance, colleges often build luxury housing for their students based on the well-documented observation that “wealthier students are much more willing to pay for consumption amenities” like nicer dormitories, which allows a school to raise tuition without losing students if it caters to this demographic.¹³ At a number of schools, this stratifies the housing stock, especially when universities choose to vary their

¹⁰ Keenan, *University Ethics*, 175. See also Derek Bok, *Universities in the Marketplace* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003), 2.

¹¹ Melissa Korn, Jennifer Levitz, and Erin Ailworth, “Federal Prosecutors Charge Dozens in College Admissions Cheating Scandal,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 12, 2019, http://www.wsj.com/articles/federal-prosecutors-charge-dozens-in-broad-college-admissions-fraud-scheme-11552403149?mod=article_inline.

¹² Sandel, *What Money Can’t Buy*, 108–10.

¹³ Brian Jacob, Brian McCall, and Kevin Stange, “College as Country Club: Do Colleges Cater to Students’ Preferences for Consumption?” *Journal of Labor Economics* 36, no. 2 (2018): 309–48, at 311.

room and board fees according to the quality or age of the building.¹⁴ While this graduated pricing might afford new “discount” opportunities for students who are willing to forgo luxuries in order to save money, it also sends a clear message that students can have access to better housing only if they are willing and able to pay for it, often generating a sense of entitlement in the process.¹⁵ Meanwhile, in strictly educational terms, universities often view certain programs as cash cows, pricing these schools or degrees in ways that make them least affordable to the people who might benefit from them most. Thus, continuing education programs are created to cater to corporate lawyers rather than public defenders, and the expectation of corporate money prompts universities to eliminate financial aid for these courses, effectively closing off this educational pathway for all but the privileged few.¹⁶ Like the admissions’ “back door” and the luxury dorm premium, this practice represents the commodification that enables corporate universities to view virtually every aspect of the college experience as an asset waiting to be “monetized” for the right price.¹⁷

Finally, the third defining characteristic of the corporate university is a deference to competition that is manifest in the uncritical conviction that open competition will allow free market forces to produce the best results. Notably, this is not the same as a university’s recognition that it is in competition with other universities in certain ways. In the context of recruiting students or hiring faculty, for instance, an acknowledgment of competition between institutions is simply a neutral statement of descriptive reality and not (necessarily) a reflection of the

¹⁴ For example, annual housing fees for the same type of room at Boston College for the 2019–2020 academic year varied by more than \$1,000 per student based on location, the age of the building, and the dorm’s amenities. See Office of Residential Life, “Room/Board Rates,” May 16, 2019 (accessed September 29, 2019), <http://www.bc.edu/offices/reslife/lifeinhalls/residencehalls/prices.html>.

¹⁵ Consider the students at Marquette University who found problems with a newly constructed dorm in its first year of operation, prompting one student to complain, “I am paying more for my dorm than the students in other dorms, and it’s really difficult to have all of these issues that come along with it.” Natallie St. Onge and Alex Garner, “Students Voice Frustrations of Faults in New Dorm,” *Marquette Wire*, September 11, 2018, <http://marquettewire.org/3995047/news/students-voice-frustrations-of-faults-in-new-dorm/>.

¹⁶ Bok, *Universities in the Marketplace*, 108–09.

¹⁷ On the admissions “back door,” the individual at the center of the recent admissions scandal was quoted as saying he offered a “side door” that was less expensive than the “back door where people go to institutional advancement and make large donations.” As quoted in Jennifer Medina, Katie Benner, and Kate Taylor, “Actresses, Business Leaders, Other Wealthy Parents Charged in U.S. College Entry Fraud,” *New York Times*, March 12, 2019, <http://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/12/us/college-admissions-cheating-scandal.html?rref=collection%2Fnewseventcollection%2Fcollege-admissions-scandal&action=click&contentCollection=us®ion=rank&module=package&version=highlights&contentPlacement=8&pgtype=collection>.

administration's normative beliefs about the value of competition as an incentive mechanism. Instead, the deference to competition that partially defines the corporate university model involves internal operations, where administrators use market incentives to pit different units or individuals against one another in order to produce the greatest returns for the lowest costs. For instance, in a recent book, Mark Roche, the former Dean of the College of Arts and Letters at the University of Notre Dame, outlined a number of strategies he employed to improve quality at Notre Dame, including a plan to approve more hiring ads than there were faculty lines based on the belief that departments which needed to compete for the chance to finish their hiring process would put forward the strongest possible candidates.¹⁸ To give another, more common example, administrators sometimes embrace this deference by tying funding for their university's different schools or departments to the majors they register rather than the students they serve or the number of courses they have to teach because the corporate university assumes that an internal competition for students will raise program quality on its own accord.¹⁹ According to the business logic of the corporate university, all of these strategies make perfect sense because markets are presumed to be innately ordered to efficiency.²⁰ Thus, a deference to competition is a visible manifestation of the corporate university's central credo, namely that the lens of the market is the most appropriate way to understand the university's nature and to direct its operations.

Today, the three key features of the corporate university model are easy to recognize on most college campuses. Indeed, few would dispute the ubiquity of a corporate mindset across higher education in the

¹⁸ Mark William Roche, *Realizing the Distinctive University: Vision and Values, Strategy and Culture* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2017), 167–168.

¹⁹ This is an outgrowth of the “responsibility centered management” strategy, “a decentralized budgeting process...under which different academic units are induced to compete for students.” John Douglas Wilson, “Tiebout Competition versus Political Competition on a University Campus,” in *Governing Academia: Who Is In Charge at the Modern University?*, ed. Ronald G. Ehrenberg (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016), 139–61, at 139. For information on its employment at one Catholic university, where it was initially received positively despite its emphasis on interdepartmental competition, see Kaustuv Basu, “Smart Management? Dominican Faculty Leaders Praise a Decentralized Approach to Administration,” *Inside Higher Ed*, November 14, 2011, <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2011/11/14/dominican-uses-new-budget-system-promote-shared-governance>.

²⁰ For one theoretical explanation of the inherent relationships between markets and efficiency in economics, see Maurice Allais, “The Concepts of Surplus and Loss and the Reformulation of the Theories of Stable General Economic Equilibrium and Maximum Efficiency,” in *Foundations of Economics: Structures of Inquiry and Economic Theory*, ed. Mauro Baranzini and Roberto Scazzieri, (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 135–74, at 154–56.

United States, especially at the administrative level.²¹ This prevalence is the result of developments that have been underway for more than a century, starting with the ways that the research universities born of the Morrill Land-Grant Acts ordered their work to business interests and opened their structures to the insights of Frederick Taylor's scientific management, which were transforming industry at the time.²² By the 1920s, the United States Bureau of Education (the precursor to today's Department of Education) had codified these ideas for academic institutions, borrowing insights from the private Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to encourage universities to create, among other things, "line-itemized budgets for stronger administrative governance of teaching, curriculum, and research; functionally differentiated hierarchical administrative structures with clear lines of authority....and administration by full-time professional managers."²³ These trends only intensified during the 1950s when "the GI Bill and the postwar technology boom, fueled in part by the Cold War," prompted "the creation of the 'megaversity,'" a giant institution characterized by large student bodies, large campuses encompassing numerous schools and departments, large faculties, and "a large and cumbersome administrative bureaucracy overseeing these complex operations."²⁴ This bureaucratization, which was necessary to maintain cohesion as universities grew, paved the way for the full-scale corporatization of higher education that has taken hold on many university campuses because the pool for administrators, especially at the highest levels, tends to parallel the pool for corporate executives and the training for professional university administrators is almost always oriented to business acumen (especially when corporate search firms are used in the recruitment process).²⁵ Consequently, the corporate university model has become the default mindset for most administrators and, by extension, the dominant force guiding contemporary universities in the United States.

²¹ In one telling example, debates about adding student fees to the typically gratis higher education system in the United Kingdom around the turn of the twenty-first century involved comparisons to the US university model that identified "an overly marketised system" as its hallmark. Joanna Williams, *Consuming Higher Education: Why Learning Can't Be Bought* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 5.

²² Clyde W. Barrow, *Universities and the Capitalist State: Corporate Liberalism and the Reconstruction of American Higher Education, 1894–1928* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 60–94. On the growth of the university from the Morrill Act, see Andrew Delbanco, *College: What It Was, Is, and Should Be* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 76–82.

²³ Barrow, *Universities and the Capitalist State*, 118.

²⁴ James Ottavio Castagnera, *Riding the Fifth Wave in Higher Education: A Survival Guide for the New Normal* (New York: Peter Lang, 2018), 6.

²⁵ Benjamin Ginsberg, *The Fall of the Faculty: The Rise of the All Administrative University and Why It Matters* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 65–66.

THE CORPORATE UNIVERSITY MODEL IN A CATHOLIC CONTEXT: INHERENT CONTRADICTIONS

Although there are undoubtedly assets to having greater business savvy among the leaders who are tasked with ensuring the long-term survival of their academic institutions, there are also significant liabilities to the increasingly common embrace of the corporate university model. Precisely because it is founded on the notion that business principles and business perspectives can interpret the work of higher education in its entirety, the corporate university model exerts a totalizing influence, turning what might be useful tools in isolation into a dangerous, albeit often unconscious, transformation of the nature and purpose of a university as an educational institution, precluding its pursuit of its proper telos. This problem is especially severe at Catholic universities, where the economic reductionism, commodification, and deference to competition that define the corporate university model all stand in stark contrast to the Catholic vision for how the church ought to be at work in the world. In more precise terms, there are inherent contradictions between each of these key features of the corporate university model and the theological claims of Catholic social teaching that undermine the Catholic university's ability to pursue its mission "to assure in an institutional manner a Christian presence in the university world" (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, no. 13).

Three Contradictions in Economic Reductionism

To begin with the issue of economic reductionism, the treatment of students as consumers and faculty as employees is not inherently problematic for the simple reason, as stated above, that it is true, at least to a degree. The corporate university model, however, foregrounds these elements of students' and faculty members' identities, overshadowing at best or denying at worst the other aspects of these individuals' roles on campus. When the corporate university model facilitates this reductionism, it creates contradictions with three presuppositions of Catholic social teaching concerning the nature of the human person in economic structures, the inherent value of education, and the proper theology of work.

First, narrowing the roles of students and faculty to their economic operations undermines Catholic social teaching's constant reminder that "in economic enterprises it is persons who are joined together, that is, free and independent human beings created to the image of God" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 68). Consequently, Catholic theology has long affirmed that humans are free to enter into economic exchanges for their mutual benefit (see ST II-II, q. 61, a. 2), but it has simultaneously cautioned, as Pope John Paul II insisted, that this "economic freedom is only one element of human freedom. When it becomes autonomous, when man is seen more as a producer or consumer of goods than as a

subject who produces and consumes in order to live, then economic freedom loses its necessary relationship to the human person and ends up by alienating and oppressing him” (*Centesimus Annus*, no. 39). When Catholic universities embrace the economic reductionism of the corporate university model, they fail to abide by this vision of the human person in economic life, pigeonholing students and faculty into the categories of consumers and producers in a way that ignores their more fundamental, and more comprehensive, identity as a “human person...created in God’s image, social and political by nature, and endowed with inviolable dignity and human rights.”²⁶ Since these convictions form the heart of Catholicism’s theological anthropology, Catholic universities have a particular obligation to view members of their community through this lens and to allow this hermeneutic to guide their interactions with individual members. Although it may not seem especially problematic to emphasize the economic elements of students’ and faculty members’ roles, this economic reductionism can have a dehumanizing effect, as it clearly did at Mount St. Mary’s just a few years ago when the university’s new president, a former business executive, encouraged faculty to push out underperforming students by asserting, “You just have to drown the bunnies.”²⁷ Of course, not every case of economic reductionism will lead to such a dramatic reinterpretation of students or faculty, but each instance still involves a rejection of the holistic vision of the human person that Catholic theology argues should be at the forefront of economic interactions so that they can remain at the service of people and not turn people into the means to purely economic ends (see *Economic Justice for All*, no. 13).

Second, the economic reductionism of the corporate university model also presents a stark contrast with the inherent value Catholic theology places on education as an essential part of human development. Insofar as this first defining feature of corporatization involves recasting students as consumers, economic reductionism presumes that knowledge is a market commodity. Although few administrators would assert that their tuition sticker price represents the complete value of the education their institutions offer, they are still quick to define this education as their “product” once they accept the corporate assumption that students are their consumers. They are then apt to

²⁶ Kristin E. Heyer, “Catholics in the Political Arena: How Should Faith Inform Catholic Voters and Politicians,” in *Catholics and Politics: The Dynamic Tension between Faith and Power*, ed. Kristin E. Heyer, Mark J. Rozell, and Michael A. Genovese (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 61–72, at 62.

²⁷ Susan Svrluga, “University President Allegedly Says Struggling Freshmen are Bunnies that Should Be Drowned,” *Washington Post*, January 19, 2016, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2016/01/19/university-president-allegedly-says-struggling-freshmen-are-bunnies-that-should-be-drowned-that-a-glock-should-be-put-to-their-heads/>.

characterize the value of this education in instrumental terms, promoting the wider job opportunities and increased earning potential of a college degree to prospective students and their parents. Naturally, these are legitimate ends, and they are even ones that the Catholic Church recognizes in its defense of education as a necessary resource that will allow people “to discharge the various tasks of economic and social life” (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 85). At the same time, however, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* also professed “the Church’s belief in the intrinsic value of knowledge and research” (no. 15) and encouraged Catholic universities to pursue truth for its own sake. Similarly, the Second Vatican Council’s “Declaration on Christian Education” insisted that in addition to its social benefits, “a true education aims at the formation of the human person in the pursuit of his ultimate end” (*Gravissimum Educationis*, no. 1). By trading on the commodification of knowledge, the economic reductionism that views students primarily as consumers contradicts this deeper vision for education, which sees in learning an inherent value that transcends an education’s contributions to a person’s or a society’s economic wellbeing. Catholic universities should therefore be wary of slipping into the language and mindset of the corporate university model, which easily eclipses this deeper purpose of education in a Catholic context.

Third, when the corporate university model’s economic reductionism redefines faculty members as employees almost exclusively, it creates an additional contradiction with the theology of work found in Catholic social teaching. At its core, the Catholic theology of work affirms the dignity of work and of workers. One element of this dignity lies in the human person’s ability to share in the work of God, by mirroring either God’s acts of creativity or of redemption (*Compendium*, no. 263). Consequently, as Thomas Massaro explains, “Human labor also carries theological significance.... This is why human work should never be treated as a mere commodity, something to be bought and sold in a cavalier way in impersonal markets.”²⁸ Pope John Paul II championed this perspective when he differentiated the objective and subjective dimensions of work, describing the former as the actual product of a person’s job or the task their work is meant to accomplish and the latter as the ways in which a human person comes to self-actualization and fulfillment through working on a project that can make a difference in the world (*Laborem Exercens*, nos. 5–6). The subjective meaning of work, he argued, must have “preeminence...over the objective one” (no. 6). Unfortunately, by emphasizing a faculty member’s identity as an employee, the economic reductionism of the corporate university model encourages administrators to view faculty’s work chiefly through its objective significance,

²⁸ Thomas Massaro, *Living Justice: Catholic Social Teaching in Action*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2012), 98

stressing what they do and ignoring who they are. In this way, the corporate university model represents one of the “various trends of *materialistic and economic* thought” that John Paul II asserted the Catholic theology of work must always oppose (no. 7).

Given its contradictions with Catholicism’s vision of the human person in economic interactions, the Second Vatican Council’s defense of the intrinsic value of education, and Catholic social teaching’s prioritization of the subjective dimension of work, the economic reductionism championed by the corporate university model cannot be sustained in a Catholic context without substantively compromising the Catholic university’s institutional identity. Everyone involved in Catholic higher education must therefore examine their assumptions more carefully and more critically to assess whether they are allowing the corporate university’s tendency toward economic reductionism to shape their interpretation of the work that goes on around them on campus. This does not mean that they need to eradicate every form of economic analysis, though, only that they must be on guard to avoid the absolutization of a narrowly quantitative evaluation so that the Catholic Church’s more holistic accounts of the nature of the human person, the value of education, and the purpose of work never lose their priority. At the same time, they must also be alert to the limitations of the other defining features of the corporate university model, which present additional contradictions in a Catholic context.

The Central Contradiction of Commodification

While the corporate university model’s economic reductionism creates three contradictions with the insights of Catholic social teaching, the limitations of its second characteristic, commodification, can be seen in one central contradiction: the gap between a system that presents certain goods as the exclusive luxury of the privileged few and a theological tradition that champions the preferential option for the poor. On its face, this contradiction is probably intuitive enough, but when the particular contours of the Catholic understanding of the preferential option for the poor are considered in greater detail, two specific issues emerge to illuminate the ethical insufficiency of treating every possible aspect of university life as a commodity to be bought and sold. The first concerns the corrosive effects of inequality on the common good and the second highlights the inherent problems of excluding the marginalized in an educational environment.

From the perspective of the preferential option for the poor, the first problem with commodification at the corporate university is the harm that stratification inflicts on the common good. The preferential option for the poor calls attention to this issue because, in Catholic theology, it provides the proper perspective to evaluate the common good as “the good of all and of each individual” (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 38), a notion that requires attending in a special way to those

who are least likely to have their good realized as a result of their marginalized status. According to this vantage point, the commodification that allows students with more resources to purchase better dorm rooms creates a problem because it encourages an individualistic mindset of self-sufficiency among richer students that counteracts the solidarity that the preferential option for the poor requires.²⁹ This harms the common good because it leads to disengagement from shared spaces as those with means see no reason to go to a common place they would have to share with everyone else when they could instead sequester themselves in private luxury. This disengagement, in turn, can also lead to resentment and an opposition to improvements in the shared spaces because those with the resources to pay for nicer private spaces see no reason to pay for something they will never use.³⁰ Given the Second Vatican Council's more elaborate definition of the common good as "the sum conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment" (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 26), this trend is a real threat to the common good precisely because of its disproportionate effects on the economically marginalized who would likely need more support from the commons to have thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment, particularly on a college campus.³¹ Because rampant commodification of the student experience can have this divisive effect within the student body, Catholic universities must recognize that this aspect of the corporate university model creates a real and significant tension with the Catholic tradition's strong defense of the preferential option for the poor as "a special form of *primacy* in the exercise of Christian charity" (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, no. 42, emphasis added).

Additionally, there is a further problem with commodification from the perspective of the preferential option for the poor because, in the Catholic understanding, an essential feature of education is its service to the poor. This is evident in the Magisterium's general reflections on education, which include Pope Paul VI's assertion "that basic education is the *first objective* for any nation seeking to develop itself" (*Populorum Progressio*, no. 35, emphasis added), by which he

²⁹ Jessie Bazan, "The Problem with Luxury Dorms," *US Catholic*, August 2017, <http://www.uscatholic.org/articles/201708/problem-luxury-dorms-31109>. On the centrality of solidarity in the preferential option for the poor (and vice versa), see Jon Sobrino, "Bearing with One Another in Faith," in Jon Sobrino and Juan Hernández Pico, *Theology of Christian Solidarity*, trans. Phillip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 5–6, 37.

³⁰ Kate Ward and Kenneth R. Himes, "'Growing Apart': The Rise of Inequality," *Theological Studies* 75, no. 1 (2014): 118–32, at 122.

³¹ Anthony Abraham Jack, "I Was a Low-Income College Student. Classes Weren't the Hard Part," *New York Times Magazine*, September 10, 2019, www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/09/10/magazine/college-inequality.html.

stressed the importance of access to education as the foundation of development for all. Given his focus in that encyclical on development as a tool for responding to poverty, his emphasis on basic education as the first objective reveals the Catholic Church's conception of the ways in which education, by its very nature, offers a genuine service to those in conditions of poverty. While Paul VI's analysis places the primary onus on society to ensure that everyone, including those in poverty, will have access to the benefits of education, this does not allow Catholic educational institutions, particularly colleges and universities, to assume that they have no responsibility to account for access. On the contrary, as John Paul II insisted, "Every Catholic university feels responsible to contribute concretely to the progress of the society within which it works: for example it will be capable of searching for ways to make university education accessible to all those who are able to benefit from it, especially the poor or members of minority groups who customarily have been deprived of it" (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, no. 34). Although public advocacy for increased access throughout society might be one avenue of pursuing this end, Catholic institutions also have a duty to examine their own direct role in facilitating access to the benefits of education for the poor, to the point that the USCCB's guidelines for the application of *Ex Corde Ecclesiae* in the United States characterize the "commitment to serve others, particularly the poor, underprivileged and vulnerable members of society" as one of the "essential elements of Catholic identity" that all Catholic colleges and universities must honor.³² A university that commodifies its services in order to raise its profits—or a university that puts a price tag on admissions—ignores this responsibility. In this sense, the fact that the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* presents the preferential option for the poor as an essential element of the church's teaching on the universal destination of goods (nos. 182–184) is particularly indicting because the sort of commodification that the corporate university model promotes is rooted in a rejection of that doctrine in favor of a very private view of private property. By constructing gates around certain university functions that are only opened to the privileged, this form of commodification excludes the very people that Catholic educational institutions are supposed to prioritize as a testament to God's own way of working in the world.³³

³² United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Application for Ex Corde Ecclesiae for the United States* (June 1, 2000), <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catholic-education/higher-education/the-application-for-ex-corde-ecclesiae-for-the-united-states.cfm>.

³³ As Gustavo Gutiérrez insists, the preferential option for the poor is first and foremost a claim about the nature of God. Gustavo Gutiérrez, "The Option for the Poor Arises from Faith in Christ," *Theological Studies* 70, no. 2 (2009): 317–26, at 319–20.

In both its negative implications for the common good and its exclusionary effects on people who experience poverty, the commodification that regards every aspect of university life as a potential asset to be monetized contradicts the Catholic commitment to the preferential option for the poor. Consequently, this second defining characteristic of the corporate university model reveals another reason that Catholic universities should resist the tendency to apply a corporate mindset to the work of higher education. The third defining characteristic, a deference to competition, similarly creates contradictions with the church's social teaching, illustrating one last insufficiency of the corporate university model at a Catholic university.

The Fundamental Contradiction of a Deference to Competition

Once again, the deference to competition that defines the corporate university model is not about recognizing a university's susceptibility to competitive market forces in the higher education landscape but is instead manifest in a university's internal structures. This essential distinction highlights the fact that the corporate university's deference to competition involves structures that are within a university's control. In practice, then, the deference to competition represents the university's decision to create a competitive market environment between various constituent parts. Such a competitive environment is therefore not a necessity, but a matter of preference. As a result, one can evaluate it in light of what could have been. From this perspective, the corporate university's deference to competition in its internal affairs betrays the Catholic tradition's promotion of a different model for economic cooperation that is, according to the church's social teaching, more consonant with the human person's moral obligations than unfettered market competition.

To be clear, Catholic theology has no intrinsic objection to free markets and competition. "It would appear," Pope John Paul II once granted, "that ... the *free market* is the most efficient instrument for utilizing resources and effectively responding to needs" (*Centesimus Annus*, no. 34, original emphasis). Likewise, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace has asserted that "*a truly competitive market is an effective instrument for attaining important objectives of justice*: moderating the excessive profits of individual businesses, responding to consumers' demands ... [and] rewarding entrepreneurship and innovation," among other ends (*Compendium*, no. 347, original emphasis). Consequently, some degree of competition, even in internal university structures, must not be regarded as an innately unethical operational decision. In the case of the corporate university model, though, the deference to competition that serves as one of its hallmarks involves two features that make it ethically insufficient in practice.

First, the deference to competition in the corporate university model creates a problem in a Catholic context because of what it subjects to the free market. Immediately after acknowledging the apparent benefits of the free market in *Centesimus Annus*, Pope John Paul II cautioned that its effectiveness at meeting needs “is true only for those needs which are ‘solvent,’ insofar as they are endowed with purchasing power, and for those resources which are ‘marketable,’ insofar as they are capable of obtaining a satisfactory price” (no. 34). Not everything should be opened to market forces, he argued. In particular, John Paul II pinpointed “fundamental human needs” as an exception to the market, which raises some challenges for the corporate university’s deference to competition because it involves exposing education itself to market forces, and Catholic social teaching regards education as a fundamental human right (*Gaudium et Spes*, no. 26). Just as importantly, John Paul II’s caveats have an additional, albeit analogical, application to the deference to competition at a corporate university because he specified “the possibility to survive and, at the same time, to make an active contribution to the common good” as something that must not, as a matter of justice, be subject to market forces (*Centesimus Annus*, no. 34). Oftentimes, the competition facilitated by the corporate university’s deference to the market serves to undermine a particular unit’s or a particular faculty member’s ability to survive in the context of the university and to contribute to the common good of the institution as a whole. Hence, for example, a competition for majors that determines department or college allocation levels pits the very survival of these programs and their work for the mission of the university at risk if they do not meet certain thresholds. While one might be tempted to argue that it is necessary, or even good, to use the market to eliminate programs that are not pulling their weight, this is not the kind of function the market is supposed to provide on its own in the Catholic vision.

The second problem with the corporate university’s deference to competition is related to this last observation about the appropriate purview of the market’s functions because, in addition to the flaws involved in *what* this deference subjects to competition, *how* the university opens itself to market forces is just as problematic. Specifically, an internal market inherently pits different elements of the university against one another, usually in a zero-sum game.³⁴ This creates a contradiction with the Catholic conviction that economic arrangements should be grounded in something more fulfilling than strict utility. Consider Pope Benedict XVI’s call for Catholics “to demonstrate, in thinking and behavior ... [that] the *principle of gratuitousness* and the logic of gift as an expression of fraternity can and must *find their*

³⁴ This is a risk Roche acknowledges in his own more positive assessment of the power of competition. Roche, *Realizing the Distinctive University*, 170–71.

place within normal economic activity” (*Caritas in Veritate*, no. 36, original emphasis). A Darwinian battle between departments or other university units for the survival of the fittest presents a stark contrast with this hopeful witness. Indeed, as Pope Francis has noted, the competitive opposition created by a full-fledged commitment to the logic of market forces in all areas leads innately to “an economy of exclusion and inequality” that asserts some should not even have a place at the table (*Evangelii Gaudium*, no. 53). An intrinsic danger of the corporate university’s deference to competition, then, is its willful embrace of structures that deny the logic of gift and instead presume the inevitability of opposition, placing the people who should be cooperating on a common project in an antagonistic relationship with each other that can ultimately yield successes for some only at the exclusion of others.

Like the economic reductionism of students and faculty and the commodification of university services, the deference to competition that provides the corporate university model with its third defining characteristic is in inherent tension with Catholic social teaching’s application of the church’s theological commitments to economic life. In fact, the substantial faith in free market forces that the corporate university reveals in its creation of internal structures of competition contradicts the Catholic assertions that some things ought to remain beyond the purview of the market and that markets ought to function in a less dominating way if they are to serve more human ends. As with the other features of the corporate university model, this third one demands contradictions in a Catholic context, demonstrating one more reason for Catholic universities to resist the totalizing influence of this model.

RESPONDING TO THE CRISIS OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY: FOUR STRATEGIES

Collectively, the contradictions between the three defining characteristics of the corporate university model and the Catholic vision for humanity’s proper participation in economic life point toward a crisis of identity at the Catholic institution that uncritically and completely accepts the business-based logic of the corporate model. This crisis arises because Catholic universities are institutions of the institutional church, a reality that entails sharing in the mission of the universal church, which universities (like all Catholic institutions) do “to the extent that they are oriented toward realizing...the practices and values associated with the reign of God.”³⁵ One way in which they can,

³⁵ Richard Gaillardetz, “Theology of Institutions,” in *Incarnate Grace: Perspectives of the Ministry of Catholic Health Care*, ed. Charles Bouchard (St. Louis: Catholic

and should, pursue this realization is by their witness to the theological commitments of the Catholic church, including the commitments articulated in the church's social teaching. As a matter of fact, these specific commitments must inform the daily operations of all Catholic universities, otherwise they will undermine the Catholic Church's primary mission to proclaim the reign of God (see *Lumen Gentium*, no. 5) and, in the process, frustrate their own telos as an integral part of that ecclesial community that shares in its larger mission. As the 1971 Synod of Bishops declared, "Anyone who ventures to speak to people about justice must be first just in their eyes" (*Iustitia in Mundo*, no. 40), a conviction that prompted the United States Catholic bishops to insist that "*all the moral principles that govern the just operation of any economic endeavor apply to the Church and its agencies and institutions; indeed the Church should be exemplary*" (*Economic Justice for All*, no. 347, original emphasis). Precisely because they are institutions of the universal Catholic Church, Catholic universities have no justification for adopting the exclusively economic logic of the corporate university model because it violates their obligation to, among other things, ensure justice in their regular operations according to the standards of the Catholic church and its social teaching. They cannot embrace the economic reductionism of students and faculty, the commodification of university life, and an overarching deference to competition without creating a crisis of mistaken identity that sacrifices their proper end.

Unfortunately, counteracting the pull of the corporate university model will not be easy, especially when Catholic universities have to hew to accreditation standards that will invariably compare them to "peer institutions" who do not have the same qualms about this administrative mindset. The sheer pervasiveness of economic reductionism, commodification, and a deference to competition across the higher education landscape reveals that the corporate university model commands great influence and will be challenging to reject. Meanwhile, these defining characteristics of the corporate university model are hardly foreign to Catholic universities at the moment, meaning that the task at hand is not simply one of *ex ante* resistance but more likely one of *ex post facto* conversion. Fortunately, there are a number of resources in the Catholic theological tradition for facilitating this kind of conversion, and to illustrate this claim I focus here on four concrete strategies that Catholic universities can take to respond to the crisis of mistaken identity that the corporate university model entails. To be clear, the aim is not to eradicate every element of economic thinking

Health Association USA, 2017), 251–267, at 263–264. For the application of this theology of institutions to the context of Catholic universities, see Conor M. Kelly, "The Necessity of the Humanities at a Catholic University: A Theological Defense," *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 38, no. 1 (2019): 37–54, at 39–44.

from university operations; rather it is to reject the totalizing influence of business logic on which the corporate university model is based, counteracting the corrosive effects of the economic reductionism of students and faculty, the commodification of university life, and the wholesale deference to competition so that Catholic universities operate as institutions that live by the economic vision of Catholic social teaching rather than Milton Friedman. After all, the real danger of the corporate university model—and the way in which it prompts a crisis of mistaken identity for Catholic universities—is its elision of the university with any other business enterprise. Thus, the practical question for Catholic universities looking to maintain their identity and to serve their true end is one of distinctiveness, so these four strategies are designed to carve out a unique way of operating that better coheres with the anthropological presuppositions and theological commitments of the Catholic tradition. The aim is not to eliminate every form of economic analysis (e.g., universities can and should still recognize their faculty as their employees, but they must combat the reductionistic impulse that assumes this connection defines the entirety of their relationship to their faculty), but rather to ensure that this analysis is only employed in ways that serve rather than detract from the holistic mission of Catholic higher education. Ultimately, this shift amounts to a rejection of the corporate university model, since that model absolutizes the value of economic thinking, inviting Catholic universities to see themselves as something more than just a business and to operate with this identity in mind.

The first strategy is for Catholic universities, and especially their administrators, to develop a concerted program for discernment rather than simply decision-making. There is functionally a twofold rationale for this approach. First, the pathway from the proper telos of the Catholic university to the mistaken identity of its corporate disfiguration is seldom a sudden leap off a steep cliff but is instead more typically the result of a gradual progression down one long slippery slope. As a result, most Catholic universities come to the corporate university model slowly and somewhat unconsciously. An intentional process for collective institutional discernment would allow the university community to be more aware of where it is headed and to assess more critically whether that is actually where it should go. One practical way to pursue this question is to ask whether the university has at least one significant strategic pursuit that is not defined by but instead transgresses economic logic. The image to keep in mind is one proposed by Greg Boyle, a Jesuit priest and founder of the gang rehabilitation ministry Homeboy Industries, who asserted in his memoir that “not much in my life makes any sense outside of God.”³⁶ What he conveys

³⁶ Gregory Boyle, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion* (New York: Free Press, 2010), 21.

in that admission is that his work defies the logic of the market and normal common sense because it is guided by a different set of standards. If a Catholic university is truly distinct because of its Catholic identity, it ought to be able to say something similar. Perhaps it will not be able to proclaim that nothing it does makes any sense apart from God, but ideally “not much” should, and certainly at least *something* should be defined by the logic of faith rather than the logic of economics. If a Catholic university cannot find clear examples of significant choices that make no sense except in light of its Catholic commitments and instead discovers that all of its decisions can be well explained by market dynamics and economic assessments, then it becomes quite clear that something other than God is guiding its identity. An intentional process of institutional discernment, like the Mission Priority Examen that the Association of Jesuit College and Universities has requested of its members, can help to answer this question and to re-direct priorities when necessary.³⁷

The second rationale for emphasizing discernment is that it offers an alternative to the narrow view of decision-making at the heart of the corporate university model. While economic reductionism is only one of three key features of the corporate university model, the model as a whole is based on the assumption that it is possible to run a university just as one would run any for-profit corporation, and therefore that it is best to make decisions based on the neatly quantified calculus of profits and losses. Of course, the acceptance of this assumption is often based on a realist conviction that universities need to do everything to survive, particularly given the current tumultuous state of higher education, which leads to an embrace of the corporate mindset out of a well-intentioned hope that it will translate business efficiencies to the university’s bottom line so that it can survive another year. Despite any good intentions, the functional effect is that the corporate university model encourages a numerical reduction in decision-making, disastrously obscuring other important factors, from the indispensable contributions that certain “costly” programs make to the university’s mission to the human costs of pushing for market wages instead of just ones, that Catholic universities in particular must acknowledge in any evaluation. By creating a clear practice of discernment, and expecting administrators to employ it for major decisions, Catholic universities can counteract this trend, because discernment is inherently more holistic than decision-making. In fact, discernment presumes that a decision is multifaceted and calls attention to all of its complexities at once, rather than reducing it to one (monetary) feature in isolation, based on the assumption that a “shallow” discernment is always

³⁷ “Jesuit Mission Priority Examen,” *Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities*, 2019, www.ajcunet.edu/missionexamen.

a faulty discernment.³⁸ While this may seem onerous or unrealistic for university leaders, it need not be. As Peter Folan and Robert Turner have explained, universities can institute a genuine practice of discernment among their boards of trustees, creating a unique way of proceeding that challenges the specialized business analysis with which trustees are typically most familiar.³⁹ Significantly, good discernment requires listening, so instituting and demanding an intentional process of discernment in decision-making can combat the extremes of the corporate university model not only by highlighting the multiple factors involved in any serious decision but also by reaffirming the importance of shared governance in university operations.⁴⁰ The whole point of discernment is to find the most fitting decision, not the easiest or most clear-cut one, and for this reason it provides the resources to challenge the corporate university model's tendency to define everything in narrowly economic terms.

In addition to a new formal process for discernment, a second strategy Catholic universities can employ to combat the strength of the corporate university model is to prioritize the unity of the university. One of the reasons competition looks so appealing in the corporate university model is because it works alongside the specialization that has become so common in higher education today. After all, Adam Smith's classic case for the economic value of competition in free markets was grounded on specialization.⁴¹ Now that universities are mainly a mishmash of a number of specialized departments and other units, competition is a coherent way of organizing these pieces because they are all effectively self-contained. This means that some can suffer while others succeed without doing direct damage to the university itself. Part of what is supposed to set the Catholic university apart from its secular peers, though, is its self-understanding as a united institution, one whose various disciplines and pieces all contribute to the common project of pursuing truth and understanding the world God has made (*Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, no. 16). In earlier iterations of this vision, like the Jesuits' *Ratio Studiorum* and John Henry New-

³⁸ James Martin, *The Jesuit Guide to (Almost) Everything: A Spirituality for Real Life* (New York: Harper Collins, 2010), 305.

³⁹ Peter Folan and Robert Turner, "Twenty-First Century Questions, Sixteenth Century Answers: St. Ignatius of Loyola Addresses the Board of Trustees," *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 38, no. 1 (2019): 3–20.

⁴⁰ As one discernment instructor explains, discernment—especially communal discernment—involves a "special way of listening." Pierre Wolff, *Discernment: The Art of Choosing Well Based on Ignatian Spirituality* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 2003), 96.

⁴¹ Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations Books I-III* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), 109–21.

man's *Idea of a University*, specific "architectonic" disciplines— theology and philosophy, respectively—provided the tools to bring these pieces together.⁴² While there might be good arguments to assert that Catholic universities ought to reembrace these curricular tools, when the aim is to convert from and resist the corporate university model, merely reclaiming a sense of unity would be a step in the right direction, however it is articulated. In fact, if a Catholic university understood itself as a true *university* and not what Alasdair MacIntyre derogatorily calls a "multiversity," then it will remove some of the raw resources for a deference to competition, creating an internal economy of cooperation, which is precisely the alternative that Catholic social teaching champions in the face of the economy of exclusion facilitated by unrestrained competition (*Caritas in Veritate*, nos. 46, 53).⁴³ In this way Catholic universities will more fully live into rather than frustrate their genuine telos.⁴⁴

The third strategy that Catholic universities can use to respond to the crisis of mistaken identity that the corporate university model provokes is to preserve an intentional differentiation of means and ends. By this I mean to convey that some things which are appropriate as means are not to become ends, and vice versa. This is especially important in the economic sphere, where Catholic social teaching stresses that "the inversion of the relationship between means and ends" is a real risk that can make economic activity, and especially a free market, "denigrate into an inhuman and alienating institution" (*Compendium*, no. 348). One of the central dangers of the corporate university model is that it encourages universities to identify their profitableness as the end in itself, when in fact the Catholic university must insist that it exists for a higher purpose. As a result, its profitability should be a means to its end, but unfortunately its educational work is often seen as the means to the end of profit generation. Granted, few administrators would want to articulate the relationship between means and ends in this way, but as the proverbial insight goes,

⁴² See Michael Buckley, *The Catholic University as Promise and Project*, 96; John Henry Newman, *The Idea of a University*, ed. Martin J. Svaglic (Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1982), 77.

⁴³ Alasdair MacIntyre, *God, Philosophy, Universities: A Selective History of the Catholic Intellectual Tradition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 174.

⁴⁴ Notably, Roche suggests that there are ways to achieve this emphasis on unity while also employing competition. I am less sanguine and think that Catholic universities are better served by employing market incentives in ways that promote cooperation more than competition, which Roche explains Notre Dame is often able to achieve because it has the resources to set certain "competitive" standards and then to reward everyone who achieves them. This is, in some ways, the exception that proves the rule, though, because in these cases, the university is designing a "competition" of sorts that is not a zero-sum game, creating what is effectively a Catholic alternative to the more common competition of an economy of exclusion. See Roche, *Realizing the Distinctive University*, 159–72, 176–77.

actions speak louder than words. By maintaining an intentional differentiation of means and ends, however, Catholic universities have a legitimate way to use the tools of corporate analysis and even some of the corporate management strategies without sacrificing their identity and transforming into corporatized universities. Provided these resources serve as means to the institution's stated identity and mission goals, they can have a role to play. After all, a university that constantly loses money will not survive, so business accountability is a good thing. The danger, however, is that these useful means often become ends when one is not careful about distinguishing these two categories, and the corporate university model essentially advocates treating profitability at least as a coequal end to any of an institution's other goals if not its sole purpose. By preserving the distinction between means and ends and ruthlessly protecting it, Catholic universities have the opportunity to reclaim their proper identity and to challenge the ethical insufficiencies of the corporate university model.

Finally, the fourth strategy that Catholic universities can employ is one that will greatly affect the success of the other three: Catholic universities must reevaluate the competencies they prioritize in the composition of their boards of trustees. As the structural decision-makers tasked with holding the university accountable to its overarching purpose in its day-to-day operations, the trustees are the ones who have the power to determine whether a university can embrace the strategies outlined above. The challenge, however, is that the majority of trustees are selected for their business acumen, with the assumption that their main function is to raise money and balance budgets with the exacting eyes of a corporate executive while leaving concerns about the Catholic identity of the institution to other members of the board, typically those representing the sponsoring religious order.⁴⁵ This emphasis on business training, and the assumptions about roles and responsibilities accompanying it, creates a dangerous myopia, facilitating the corporate university model's infiltration into Catholic higher education because the majority of the people tasked with governing the university have been both trained in the corporate world and told that the reason they have a place on the board is precisely so that they can use this specialized training. Rather than being steeped in a narrative that stresses the distinctiveness of Catholic universities as peculiar institutions that cannot be conflated with the average for-profit busi-

⁴⁵ This was very much the original vision of independent boards of trustees at Catholic universities, and while the division of labor has changed over time, as Bernard G. Prusak notes, "Old dynamics have not disappeared altogether." Bernard G. Prusak, "Independent Boards of Trustees at Catholic Colleges and Universities, Fifty Years Later: Findings and Reflections from Six Holy Cross Schools," *Journal of Catholic Higher Education* 37, no. 1 (2018): 3–27.

ness, these university decision-makers have been formed by a narrative that says there should not be any tensions between their corporate expertise and their oversight responsibilities, which leads them to mistake the true identity of the university. Additionally, many board members are selected based on their prospects as fundraisers, a strategy that overrepresents alumni who are chosen for successful careers more than institutional needs. Collectively, these trends mean that Catholic universities rarely have the boards they need for the multifaceted challenges they face, and they should therefore work to reconfigure their boards to emphasize directors with relevant experience in not just management but *university* management, in instruction and curricular design, and in mission integration, so that these boards can more genuinely hold the university accountable to its educational mission and institutional identity.⁴⁶ Unless Catholic universities tackle this disconnect, they will find themselves increasingly beholden to the corporate university model. If, however, they can correct the imbalance between the skills of their boards and the work of their institutions, they will have a real opportunity to transform discernment, prioritize unity, and differentiate means and ends. In this way, the fourth strategy can become the glue that binds the other three together.

CONCLUSION

As this article has demonstrated, the economic reductionism of students and faculty, the commodification of university services, and the deference to competition in internal operations that define the corporate university model all raise substantive contradictions with the theological interpretations of economic life advanced by Catholic social teaching. This creates a significant gap between what Catholic universities are supposed to be, as living witnesses to the value and validity of Catholic commitments in the world today, and what they become when they embrace the strategic instincts of the corporate university model. In the face of this crisis of identity, Catholic universities need to identify and pursue strategies that can make their day-to-day operations and their strategic planning more distinctly Catholic, which is precisely what they can achieve through the creation of intentional discernment processes, the reclamation of a united vision for the university itself, the preservation of a differentiation between means and ends, and the reevaluation of their priorities in the selection of trustees. Importantly, the aim is not to eradicate every last vestige of economic analysis or business logic on campus, but to buttress the Catholic university against the tendency to adopt these resources in an uncritical

⁴⁶ For more on the typical disconnect, see David Friedman and Ryan Craig, "The Problem with College Governance? Alumni," *Inside Higher Ed*, March 13, 2017, <https://www.insidehighered.com/views/2017/03/13/colleges-and-universities-should-recruit-more-nonalumni-and-donors-boards-essay>.

way that often leads to their totalizing influence over time. Each of these strategies allows some space for economic accountability but always in ways that put this tool at the service of greater institutional ends.

In this sense, I agree with Keenan's assertion that "the real problem is not using the market strategies; it is rather when mission is compromised by their use."⁴⁷ With its absolute reliance on business logic, the corporate university model compromises its mission because it subverts the identity of Catholic universities as institutions of the institutional church, allowing them to see themselves more as a business enterprise within a standard industry than as a school of holistic formation. The challenge for Catholic universities, then, is to sort out how they might better restrict their use of market strategies to areas where the benefits of economic insights do not undermine mission. In slightly different terms, Catholic universities—especially those that face the pressures of financial survival most acutely—must determine how to appropriate some corporate insights without becoming corporatized. On one level, the distinction rests on the quantity and weight of the market strategies employed, for there is a morally legitimate basis to "distinguish habitual use from intentional occasional use."⁴⁸ By using fewer economic tools in more restricted areas, Catholic universities can actively resist the totalizing influence at the heart of the corporate university model and combat the crisis of mistaken identity it prompts. At the same time, the four strategies outlined above will help Catholic universities to keep a clear picture of their distinctive mission front and center, so that they might approach business insights, strategies, and even techniques as curated add-ons to support their mission rather than essential features that dramatically transform the nature of their work. As with all human morality, the key to this ethical transformation lies in the recovery of intentionality, for unless an institution makes the pursuit of its mission and preservation of its identity an explicit emphasis, other factors and other pressures will always push the institution off course. In the case of the corporate university model, the contradictions with Catholic social teaching articulated here should at least give Catholic universities the resources to regard corporate practices with a hermeneutic of suspicion rather than an attitude of acquiescence, so that they can navigate the dangers that a genuine crisis of mistaken identity poses for their slow deterioration from the inside and instead reemerge with a clearer sense of their proper telos and a better vision for how to achieve it. **M**

⁴⁷ Keenan, *University Ethics*, 188.

⁴⁸ David Cloutier, "The Problem of Luxury in the Christian Life," *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 32, no. 1 (2012): 3–20, at 16.

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