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THE "RERUM NOVARUM" AND MANAGEMENT THOUGHT

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Introduction

The *Rerum novarum*[1] encyclical by Pope Leo XIII is obviously not directly concerned with the principles of business management. However, in its pages, a number of general principles can be found regarding man and human society, along with some criteria and instructions for action, which are not unlike the theories applied and practiced in managing human organizations.

The doctrine contained in the *RN* encyclical and the thought processes applied to business management that started towards the late 19th and early 20th centuries[2] are related through the anthropological approach underlying their respective development. The question that therefore arises is: Up to what point does the doctrine contained in the *RN* encyclical influence the different theories elaborated and applied in business management throughout the 20th century? Or, at least, are those theories in agreement with Pope Leo XIII's doctrine? It is not difficult to see the enormous amount of interest – not only theoretical, but practical as well – that this question generates, given the influence that conceiving and managing a business has upon the people who work for it or who are affected by it.

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[1] Designated from here on as *RN*. The text and the numeration employed is taken from the St. Paul Edition. Boston, Mass. 1942.

[2] The thought processes applied in business management began in the first half of the 20th century, although their precursors can be found in the classical school of economy developed at the end of the 18th century and during the 19th century (Adam Smith, W.S. Jevons, James Mill, etc.), and in other 19th century authors such as Babbage, Boulton, Watt and Owen, who studied in an analytical and systematic fashion the work in the factories that appeared in the era of industrialization.

It is therefore logical to want to further investigate this question of whether or not the theories that govern business management are in accordance with the Gospel and with the teachings of the Church. We do not attempt to do that here to the extent that this subject would require. Our intention is limited to explaining the situation and presenting a few notes that may help to provide a more comprehensive answer in the near future.

The Anthropology of the "Rerum novarum"

The anthropological basis of Pope Leo XIII's, as well as all the social doctrines of the Church, comes from the Christian Revelation and from a realistic approximation to human nature. "Knowledge of the human condition is put forward as a premise for action" (n. 27). The *RN* refers to human nature, to its rationality and to its freedom, in various passages, stating that ..what makes man and distinguishes him generically from the brute, is the mind or reason." (n. 11)

Also, common experience reveals the capacity for abstraction in man, as well as for reason and for judgment, self-determination in his actions, with true – but not absolute and unconditioned – freedom, as well as control over his actions, which belong to him. "Since man," states the *RN,* "by his reason understands innumerable things, linking and combining the future with the present, and since he is master of his own actions, therefore, under the eternal law, and under the power of God most wisely ruling all things, he rules himself by the foresight of his own counsel. Wherefore it is in his power to choose the things which he considers best adapted to benefit him not only in the present but also in the future" (n. 12).

A key point in the anthropology of the *RN* is the conception of man as a corporal-spiritual being. The human being is capable of perfection and his Creator calls upon him to attain human fulfillment, but achieving this goal requires the satisfaction of material needs.

Leo XIII points out that, although the Church is primarily concerned with the spirit, "it must not be supposed that the Church so concentrates her energies on caring for souls as to overlook things which pertain to mortal and earthly life" (n. 42). In the *RN*, human needs are not forgotten. Thus, in attending to the labor problems of its time, it demands that workers are not given more work than they can handle with their strength, and that this work should not be of the type that does not agree with the worker's age or sex. In this same line, the *RN* emphasizes the importance, among the fundamental duties of the employer, of giving an appropriate salary to his workers (n. 32).

Throughout history it has been seen that, once his most peremptory needs are met, a human being also has other needs that are of a psychological and social order, but that these needs, at least implicitly, can be considered to be encompassed by the previous affirmations. However, Leo XIII did not limit himself to this type of needs: he demanded that "the spiritual well-being" (n. 31) also be taken into account. Even more, these spiritual goods are the first that must be protected, "for however good and desirable mortal life be, yet it is not the ultimate goal for which we are born, but a road only and a means for perfecting, through knowledge of truth and love of good, the life of the soul" (n. 57).

In other words, the development of human life requires external goods (wealth, prestige, etc.) and corporal goods (health, physical strength...) as a support, but human excellence or plenitude is not attained only by satisfying physical or psychical needs alone. "True dignity and excellence in men resides in moral living, that is, in virtue" (n. 37).

The rationality and the freedom of the human being grant him a dignity that is above the material universe. The Christian Revelation exalts to an even greater degree this human dignity, because of its origin, its constitution and its eternal destiny. "The soul" exclaims Leo XIII "bears the express image and likeness of God, and there resides in it that sovereignty through the medium of which man has been bidden to rule all created nature below him and to make all lands and all seas serve his interests." (n. 57). Human dignity, declares this same encyclical, is "ennobled as it has been through what we call the Christian character." (n. 31).

Respect for personal dignity is presented in the *RN* as a fundamental principle that should guide and instruct the life of a company and all human activity. The harsh words of this pontifical document towards those who treat people like things, considering them to be mere instruments of production, are therefore not surprising. "It is shameful and inhuman," states Leo XIII, "to use men as things for gain and to put no more value on them than what they are worth in muscle and energy" (n. 31).

In the same line, the *RN* condemns corporate situations in which workers "are conscious of being most inhumanly treated by greedy employers, that almost no greater value is being placed on them than the amount of gain they yield by their toil" (n. 81). Not only is this type of behavior reproachable, it should in fact be abolished. "Now as concerns the protection of corporeal and physical goods, the oppressed workers, above all, ought to be liberated from the savagery of greedy men, who inordinately use human beings as things for gain" (n. 59).

The Christian concept of man demands that business managers not only respect a person's dignity, but that they also organize the company and its work so that it does not impede, but instead favors, the integral development of each worker.

"No one may with impunity," the *RN* declares, "outrage the dignity of man, which God Himself treats with great reverence, nor impede his course to that level of perfection which accords with eternal life in heaven. Nay, more, in this connection a man cannot even by his own free choice allow himself to be treated in a way inconsistent with his nature, and suffer his soul to be enslaved; for there is no question here of rights belonging to man, but of duties owed to God, which are to be religiously observed." (n. 57.)

All of what has previously been stated, along with the idea that "men are by nature inclined to associate" (n. 72), leads us to the principle of cooperation in work and in capital, which goes beyond both individualism and class struggle. Work and capital are mutually dependent, since "neither capital can do without labor, nor labor without capital" (n. 28).

Leo XIII considers the systematic confrontation of classes, and in general, that of rich and poor, to be contrary to reason and to truth. "For just as in the human body the different members harmonize with one another, whence arises that disposition of parts and proportion in the human figure rightly called symmetry, so likewise nature has commanded in the case of the State that the two classes mentioned should agree harmoniously" (n. 28). Leo XIII's conception differs from the liberal vision of society as an aggregate of individuals linked together by nothing more than voluntary pacts, and differs also from the Marxist conception that the collective society absorbs the individual being. In a company, as in society, man creates social links with his fellow man, and these ties contribute to personal human development. Workers and holders of capital must live and act in harmony, because in a company, as in society, men create social links with their fellow men, and those have to contribute to personal human development.

In summary, the *RN* views man as a creature of God, created in his image and likeness; an autonomous subject who is intelligent, free, spiritual, sociable, transcendental and called to God

as the ultimate purpose of his life. This is the doctrine of the *RN* concerning man that should have been used as a point of reference in developing the theory and practice of business management. Let us see what happened.

Models of Man and Organizations in Management

Until the 1960s, the thought processes applied to business management and the theories concerning corporate organization that were most utilized corresponded to models that were mechanical and organic in nature, with a concept of man and of the company that was very different from the Christian concept applied by Leo XIII. We are now going to briefly analyze these two models.

a) Mechanistic Paradigm

This comes from the assumptions put forth by economics and engineering. Its vision of the organization is analogous to that of a machine – hence the name "mechanistic." In fact, all relationships among people are reduced to a relationship of roles, and the organization appears as a more or less complicated machine that produces something and consumes something. Consumption is determined by a system of incentives or compensation that is tightly linked to the operations system, in order to achieve the maximum from the production-consumption relationship.

This group includes the *administrative theories* and *scientific management theories* initiated by Fayol (1916) and Taylor (1911), respectively, and the *structuralist* and *contingency theories* (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967). The theory of Max Weber (1947) on *bureaucracy* and other theories based on *power* as a vital force that moves organizations could also be included in this group.

A more refined mechanistic focus can be found in the *cognitive theories*. Their greatest exponent is Herbert Simon (1945), whose approach is fervently positivist. His followers Cyert and March (1963) and March and Olsen (1976) work with this same approach. Despite the supposed profundity of this school of thought, its lack of an adequate anthropological model and of a complete theory of knowledge, along with its rationalist bias, prevent it from recognizing the depths of its own findings. Some works on *microeconomics* (Henderson and Quant, 1980) are also concerned with studying the form and dimensions of business organizations, as well as their reactions to their environment, leaving aside their human aspect.

The only goal of a company, according to the theories included in this model, is that of efficiency, the maximizing of profit, and the only motivating mechanism that it recognizes is the system of rewards and punishments, vulgarly known as the carrot and the stick. Theories about power and its use in bureaucracies are not capable of thoroughly examining the ultimate goal of power and the reasons for human behaviour in business organizations, which would require the development of an anthropological theory, which is lacking.

The mechanistic conception of the company implies a very partial vision. In reality, this looks only at the tip of the iceberg; that is, the formal organization (the roles, procedures and systems). Although interesting contributions have been made in some of these areas, the non-formalized aspects have been ignored, those aspects which are equally or more decisive for the good of the company (needs, motivations, interactions among the members of the organization, etc.).

The theories circumscribed in this paradigm consider the motivating factors of people to be a question of *what* they should be given and *how much*, so that they ultimately decide to do the work that the company asks them to do. The only motivating force that exists is money,

together with sanctions, and therefore the basic problem of personnel management is the quantity of incentives to offer. The perception of the person is reduced to the "*homo economicus.*" Human development is reduced to training people to increase productivity, and the work-capital collaboration is nothing more than an agreement for satisfying common interests (greater compensation, more profits).

Although much of the research that has been done and that is still being carried out today continues to be based on this paradigm of the company, it is not difficult to see that reality is much more complicated than the reduced vision that this model presents to us. What is also evident is the estrangement between this model and the Christian conception of the company as it was put forth by Leo XIII.

b) Organic or Psychosociological Paradigm

In opposition to the mechanistic conception appears, historically, a psychosociological conception of organizations that tends to see the company as a social organism in which people participate not only to achieve the incentives that the company offers them, but also to satisfy other kinds of needs through interacting with other people under the shelter of the company itself.

This conception appears in the United States in the now classic Hawthorne experiments of Elton Mayo, performed in the Western Electric Company in Chicago at the end of the 1920s. With these experiments it was proved that human behavior cannot be explained solely as a means to satisfy material needs, in contrast to what the mechanistic models supported, especially Taylorism. It was becoming more and more evident that more in-depth studies would have to be carried out on the reasons that compel man to work and, consequently, concerning the needs that a human being seeks to satisfy through his work.

In the subsequent studies done by this school (Mayo, 1933; Dickson and Roethlisberger, 1939) the company is defined as a social system whose objectives are, fundamentally, efficiency in production and the satisfaction of the needs of its members.

In the middle of the last century, the studies by Abraham H. Maslow (1954) on motivation appeared. This author begins with a broad vision of man, whom he perceives as a subject with unsatisfied needs which appear successively, according to the following hierarchy: physiological needs, the need for physical and psychological security, social needs or the need to belong to a group, the need for respect from himself and from others, and lastly, the need for self-realization, or to develop all of his creative and operative potential, along with the potential for knowledge that each human being possesses. The followers of this school of thought have been numerous,[3] but almost all of them, like Maslow, are based on a simplistic

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[3] This line of thought includes the work of McGregor (1960), with his management theory X and theory Y which represent two different models of man. Another study that made an impact on earlier works and that questioned the entire theoretical development of the human behavior sciences up to that time was that which resulted from the Herzberg, Mausner and Snyderman experiment (1959). Another theory that has been influential is Vroom's theory of expectations (1964), which states that the choice of one action over another will depend on the valence (satisfaction expected a priori of the result), on the instrumentality (the ability to provoke determined consequences), and on the expectation that the individual assigns to it (level of probability that a determined result will occur). Within this rational focus, strongly based on perceptional knowledge, another complementary theory can be found concerning human motivation: the theory of equity (Adams, 1965), which addresses the motivation or demotivation felt through interpersonal comparison.

and schematic vision of the human being that, at times, even forgets certain nuances in order to achieve greater practical usefulness.

More recently, several theories that are somewhat closer to reality have been developed through motivational parameters. For example, that of work enrichment (Ford, 1969) and later the theory which resulted from its being redesigned (Hackman & Oldham, 1980).[4]

According to the psychosociological paradigm, the ultimate goal of any organization is twofold: efficiency (economic results) and attractiveness (motivating personnel with an attractive job). This is a step towards a more complete vision of reality than that contemplated by the mechanistic model. However, this perception of the company is still incomplete and implies, in the end, a limited conception of man and society. When their application allows for psychological manipulation, even with good intentions, these theories can be more destructive than the search for simple efficiency based on a rigorous technical outline.

Within this paradigm, even in those theories that are based on serious sociology, that is, based on methodological individualism, according to which the individual is the real cause of the functioning of global systems and, therefore, is the logical element for analysis, human action is abstracted, and structures of interaction are emphasized (Boudon, 1981). Consequently, these actions are reduced to the spontaneous motivation of people, without entering into the study of their behavior in those cases where this behavior is not determined by spontaneous motivation but by the exercising of personal freedom led by reason.

Towards a Humanistic Management

The previously cited models lack, above all else, a unifying and complete vision of man, considered as a person, as a free and responsible subject who transcends himself and is called to plenitude. Viktor E. Frankl (1965), a well-known psychiatrist who survived the German concentration camps, states that it is not possible to make real progress in the scientific treatment of human needs, without a unifying vision of the human being. According to this author, each person is made up of three elements: the "soma," which seeks pleasure; the "psyche," which seeks to control; and the "spirit," which looks to find meaning in its actions. A partial perception of the human being would convert any subsequent study into one that is reductionist or incomplete. According to Frankl, the three dimensions are important but it is the third that leads man to find the meaning of human existence, that is, his finality.[5]

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[4] Also worth noting are the works of McClelland (1971), which analyze the development of organizations as a particular case of his general theory on the process of the development of nations. He puts great emphasis on the desire for achievement as a motivational force to be developed by means of appropriate educational processes. But achievement here is not so much related to human development as it is to obtaining certain objectives or goals within the organization.

[5] Frankl goes beyond Maslow's theory of the hierarchy of needs and its concept of self-realization. The most elevated request of the human personality is, to this author, "the desire for meaning," the desire for value, a value that exists outside of the individual and that appeals to a person like a duty to which he makes himself responsible. Since human phenomena are also spiritual, they seek meaning; a reason why. To the degree to which this is forgotten, a homeostatic vision of the person is arrived at (theory of self-satisfaction), according to which a human being would necessarily tend toward balance, losing a substantial part of his freedom. Frankl demonstrates with great skill the extent to which one can lose his way following the "self-realization" line of thinking. Self-realization can only be achieved "per effectum," not "per intentionem," that is, it cannot be achieved when it is considered an end in itself, but instead when it is taken as a product of its own transcendence. Focusing on oneself as a problem leads to a subjective vision of reality. Because of this, the only way to give meaning to human existence is to send the subject to its exterior world. Only an "I" that can tend towards a you is capable of integrating the "it."

The need to transcend the own "I" has also been recognized in studies concerning the different stages of the professional career.[6] In the works of Kotter on power (1985) and leadership (1988) in organizations, there are indications of this same idea.[7]

In the works of some classical authors we can now find slight indications or intuitions that point towards a more complete model of the human person, as a "*conditio sine qua non*" for understanding the functioning of organizations.[8] The first great qualitative advancement in the vision of human organizations appears in Chester I. Barnard (1938), the author who has probably made the greatest impact on earlier thought processes concerning the complex phenomena of human organizations. His concern for attaining a true degree of cooperation in the functioning of organizations led him to profoundly reflect on human and organizational reality. Barnard emphasizes the limitations of incentive programs in the process of inducing behavior, stating that a sense of responsibility can only be based on profound convictions that operate independently of any type of prize or sanction. He also states that material incentives, once psychological needs are met, have very little motivating force, and that the most intangible and subtle of incentives is that which is called "communion," that feeling of personal comfort in social relations that, at times, is also called "solidarity" or "social integration."

Two decades later, Philip Selznick (1957) proposed a new type of organization: the "institution." According to this author, a manager becomes a statesman when he makes the transition from a purely administrative style of management, governed by the principles of rationality and discipline, to the leadership of an institution.

According to this concept, an organization is an almost natural product that satisfies the needs of the external environment where it operates, and the needs of its social internal world, that is, of the different members that it comprises. The process of institutionalization, as a dynamic process, consists of endowing the organization with values and principles that go beyond the technical requirements of the jobs to be completed. It is a question of transforming a work of engineering into a living social organism. Once the organization acquires its own identity, it becomes an institution, assuming values and concrete ways of operating, and guided by its specific mission.

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[6] Thus, Erikson (1972) coins the phrase "generativity" to refer to a stage of old age in which the person becomes interested in helping and giving guidance to the next generation. Shein (1978) on the other hand, postulates that in certain advanced stages in a person's professional career, human beings seek to be mentors or guides for others, in order to be able to transmit to them what they have learned. But, in any case, these two latter contributions are based on partial empirical studies, for which they continue to be a step backward with respect to Frankl's vision, according to which the need to transcend the internal "I" is always present in a human being.

[7] According to Kotter, effective leadership requires a strong sense of moral justice, as well as the ability to discern which are the groups that are affected by the company's operations. It also requires the ability to understand what their interests are, not only within the narrow margins of the economy but also in a fuller sense, and to evaluate not only the first but the second, third and fourth consequences of the company's decisions concerning these people. According to this author, it is in this aspect that great leaders are differentiated from naive or cynical managers. At any rate, while the development of people becomes one of the most relevant points of Kotter's work, his vision of this development is limited to that which is related to their careers. In reality, he seems to be only concerned that the subject, in his role as mentor, guides the subordinate toward professional success, but not that the assists him in his development as a person. It seems as if Kotter were seeking the development of the organization's members, only to the degree that this contributed to improving the organization's efficiency.

[8] Thus, at the beginning of the 1930s, Mary Parker Follet (1933) asked herself questions such as the following: Is power "power over" or "power with"? Is authority a social status or an integrating force? Does it arise from the laws of the situation or is it conferred and made valuable from outside? (George, 1972).

Since the 1980s organizational culture has been emphasized. That is, that beliefs, values and behaviors share in the running of the organization. Furthermore, in some organizational cultures ethical values and the considerations of each person are going to become more and more important.

Juan Antonio Pérez-López (1991) proposes an "anthropological model" as a basis for understanding the functioning of organizations from the perspective of action and with an integrative focus. According to this author, a human being does not act as a stable or ultrastable system, but instead, because he is free, acts in another manner: as a *freely adaptive system*, that is, he reacts freely in response to external stimuli.[9] The human being is a dynamic reality that continues to develop or to degrade through his capacity to make decisions. This is what Aristotle was referring to when he spoke of acquiring virtues or vices. A human being can reason over the significance of his actions and of the consequences that these will have both for him and for others.[10] Thus, with each new decision a person will learn in either a positive or negative fashion, that is, he will have a more or less complete vision of the reality in which he operates and, therefore, will be more or less capable of acting with freedom in making his next decision.

According to some recent authors, it seems that the social sciences are leaving the era of modernism, characterized by the belief that separating facts from values, or truth from falsehoods is only a question of applying the appropriate method. This new movement, called "deconstruction," leans toward a postmodernist vision, according to which modernism is a philosophic posture that cannot be supported. This new wave of thinkers works in the field of literary criticism of academic texts from their own internal structure, calling for greater self-reflection (Arrington & Francis, 1988).

Lately there have been many articles published in academic journals and magazines calling attention to the pros and cons of the different perspectives in use, as a result of the existing conflicts between colleagues of the same business schools which, according to some authors, have reached the point of being visceral.[11] In summary, it seems that fissures continue to be found among these theories that are based on a mechanistic model of organizational reality that, due to their lack of profundity, cannot be patched except with contributions from more complete theories. Some try to overcome these cracks by appealing to psychosociological concepts. Others, less naively, point to the need for a new base model. For the moment, the effort is being focused on discovering a "holistic" paradigm that presupposes a complete vision of organizational reality – man and the business environment – including its not directly observable elements.

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[9] Pérez López points out that the mechanistic model amounts to a concept of man and of the organization as a stable system, taking into account the results of an action without considering how the action itself affects and influences the individual agent. On the other hand, those theories that are based on an organic vision of the organization, when they are scientifically precise – and they not always are – conceive the organization to be an ultra-stable system that is continually interacting with its environment, or, like a homeostatic system (see Roos Ashby, 1960), with each new interaction resulting in a positive learning experience, getting closer and closer to the state of equilibrium to which it naturally tends.

[10] By 1957, Argyris overcame the homeostatic temptation, although his work would later fall within the psychological concept of organizations, according to which these organizations behave as living organisms that adapt to their environment in order to achieve their objectives. According to Argyris, the system does not necessarily tend toward equilibrium, which means that individual and organizational learning can be positive as well as negative. This statement leaves the way open for studying organizations with a more profound focus: that of the anthropological paradigm, but until Pérez López, this model does not seem to have been developed.

[11] Hill (1990); Barney (1990); Donaldson (1990a, 1990b).

Conclusion

In the mechanistic vision, only the "things that the company does" are taken into consideration, while in the organic vision the things that it does and "how" it does them are considered. In an institution, apart from these two areas, the "why" they are done is also taken into account. It appears that a new tendency has developed among management theorists to consider these three dimensions together, drawing increasingly close to a more comprehensible vision of man, such as Leo XIII expressed a century ago.

Certainly, one cannot count on the Christian and metaphysical vision of man alone in managing companies: of course, the contributions from the experimental sciences must also be taken into account and the "art" of business management as well. However, any theory that does not begin with a Christian concept of man is ignoring the most essential aspect of reality. At best it will be incomplete and perhaps even false as well.

Our present challenge is to elaborate on or develop more fully the intermediate models that can assist and orient business managers in carrying out their professional duties, that is, in managing the people who work in their organizations in order to achieve the company's objective: to serve people, while obtaining profits. These models must be based on a vision of the human being as a rational, free, autonomous and responsible individual who is open to transcendence and called to plenitude. This implies conceiving the company as an institution that facilitates the development of people, with human and Christian values that must permeate all of its operations.

The aim of the company is not just to achieve efficiency and attractiveness, but also, and most importantly, to achieve common good, seeking to attain a unity of values and giving meaning to all human action that is coordinated and driven by management.

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