



## Materialism vs. Moral Values: Essential Issues in Tertiary Teaching

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### I INTRODUCTION:

Just turn on the Television or Radio; read the Newspapers or the relevant statements on the Internet monitor and one notes the unethical deeds practiced by people holding important positions in society. At times it is a matter of stealing; most often, particularly in recent years, it is taking advantage of the status and the positions they hold. They abuse the trust their people have in them; intentionally mislead them and deprive their own people of their hard-earned savings, only to amass wealth, live the *lifestyles of the rich & famous*, make unnecessary personal purchases mainly to satisfy their inordinate greed and the sheer desire for dollars, at the expense of those less fortunate.

Issues like these are present everywhere. They appear to be the *modus vivendi* in corporations, communities, colleges and universities. This “**greed**” virus has taken on *pandemic* proportions. It masquerades as an Equal Opportunity virus. It affects academia, the affluent, and people of all classes in society i.<sup>ii</sup> The less fortunate want wealth, a matter of *social capillarity*; the rich want to get richer. Gender, geography, race, religion and age do not present barriers. No one is *immune*; all are potential victims of this *moral virus* called **greed**. Once afflicted, as the disease progresses and takes hold of the person, *therapy* will not be easy. Realizing this, we in the academic, business and corporate fields must make every effort to fight this *disease* together, as a **team**, before it is too late.

We believe that *prophylaxis is preferred over therapy*; hence it is imperative that we prepare our own brand of *antigen* and develop our own special *serum* that can be used successfully as an *antidote* or *prophylactic agent*. which in this case, is a well-planned ethical education for all, especially in Tertiary Teaching in Business.

The so-called leaders of today who have grabbed the headlines of the news media are certainly not the leaders of Quality and Integrity that we want our students, the Leaders of Tomorrow, to emulate today. We, their parents, presidents, professors, preachers, teachers and community leaders, must make every effort to give these young people the tools to do what is right when, years later, they hold important positions. As stated earlier, we must prepare a well-planned ethical education for all, especially for those in Tertiary studies in Business. It is our responsibility to prepare for the future in such a way, that we can give these young people the blueprint and tools to *do things right the first time*, and at *all times*, when they step into positions of Responsibility and Authority. We must admit that the so-called *successful seniors* of our generation have failed to inspire our youth and our society with the right goals and direction.

Several techniques have been proposed, considered and studied. Some deserve further discussion, while others could be classified as being impractical for our purpose. One way that appears to be practical, is a plan to list the names of some of the so-called leaders and corporations of today, note their *modus operandi* and their *modus vivendi*, with the sole objective of advising our students, to avoid the false values that the leaders of today’s society stand for, and also the lives of luxury that they live, using ill-gotten dollars that really belong to those in need. Many of the people who have *suffered at the hands* of unethical leaders, are senior citizens with almost no hope of landing any well-paying job to help make up for the amounts stolen over the years from pension reserves. Some effort must be made to make a note of the individuals and institutions, and the mistakes they made.

It would be wise to select them from different sectors of society, so that the final results will provide us with data that cannot be labeled as being biased, and not representative of the actual situation.<sup>iii</sup>

Citing the names of the unethical individuals and institutions at this point is not necessary. They are mentioned often, with much emphasis, in most of the news media; initially to celebrate, and later to



condemn. Many of them have already acquired notoriety; many more have not yet come forward. When their unethical situations were uncovered, and when the stolen amounts involved were found to be in the billions of dollars, mainly stolen from unsuspecting, trusting, middle class individuals, the faith that people had in the **system** and its powerful individuals, was shaken severely.<sup>iv</sup>

The resultant sad situation of these episodes is that all forms of the media, with their far-reaching influence and impact on individuals, had managed to lionize these individuals and institutions **prior** to the discovery of their unethical and criminal behavior. Society, specially our youth, *hero-worshipped* these individuals, and planned to pattern their lives on their so-called success stories. Changing impressions is not an easy task. It only makes the work ahead even more difficult. These issues were not confined to the United States of America; they spread globally to several other countries, almost like a *pandemic*.

What had a more serious impact of global proportions on society, were two subsequent issues: Our hard-earned tax money was given as a bail-out to these badly-managed banks and other companies.<sup>v</sup> Instead of using those dollars to help their customers who are citizens at the lower end of the financial spectrum, and whose taxed money helped to save them; in these institutions our cash was used for expensive personal purchases and for bonuses to their highly paid managers. This enraged the average American trying hard to make ends meet; who had to make a difficult choice to stretch their few dollars between the purchase of medicines or groceries to put food on the table for the family. The *last straw that broke the camel's back* is this *case of the green-eyed monster*. When people in the financial institutions saw the possibility of making **easy money**, even if it meant making it at the expense of poor people, *living at the brink of bankruptcy*, they rushed to grab all the cash they could, by *wrongly advising* them and giving loans to them. These people at the lower levels of our economic ladder were encouraged to purchase property/homes with **no collateral at all**. This was indeed the worst type of crime, as these poor people soon found themselves in possession of a house they just **could not afford**. Without realizing that they were not able to make the monthly payments, they launched out on the purchase of furniture, refrigerator, washing machine, car, etc. - all on credit, *to furnish their new home*. It is almost impossible to imagine the disappointment, disillusionment and despair these families experienced when they realized that after failing to make their initial monthly payments, they were officially informed that they would lose their *new home* and *all their recently purchased appliances and contents*. How easy it is to say to them that their *house and all its contents had to be confiscated*!

How difficult it was for those families to accept the fact that they had become homeless. We now have this family on the streets, with no home, no furniture, and no cash. The money they spent as small down-payments on their purchases had all gone. Also, the value of the houses dropped precipitously.

We all know who the beneficiaries were! People with money are tempted to purchase additional homes that are today available at auctions at a *tiny fraction* of the actual price. They are not the only ones who benefit from this *sub-prime loan* issue. The financial advisors who made their money at the expense of their clients **losing everything**, made even more money with *each deal they finalized*.

Also, relying on the fact that America was indeed the global financial leader for about a century, managers from all over the world jumped on the American band-wagon, and did what was done in the USA. Loans were given out freely, with no checks and no questions. The obvious result is a *global epidemic of financial instability*; commonly referred to as a *pandemic*: an epidemic of global proportions.

The resulting financial situation today is indeed the worst we have ever seen – far worse than that of the great depression of 1929. Most countries have been hit by this *man-made financial failure* that was brought on by **greed**. It is indeed very difficult to cure, once this disease has taken on the dimension of an *epidemic*. Our only hope is **prevention**, using a **practical program of moral and ethical education right from their early years, and particularly in Tertiary Teaching: just before our students make their formal entry into the corporate world**. This special program towards the end of their college/ university education, will give our youth the *active immunity* to this dreaded disease of **greed**.<sup>vi</sup>

## **II Our Evolving Value Systems:**



From the time a child is born, it craves the presence of its parents. In most cases today, because of the economic environment, and at times for reasons of self-gratification, the child is soon aware of the absence of its parents, particularly its mother; so it grabs a doll, a teddy bear or some inanimate object. It soon learns to see a substitute in those objects. Values are now *replacement* values.<sup>vii</sup>

Often a child is sent to an expensive Day Care Center or Playschool, with a small number of children. Here the attention received is excellent, but the financial set back must be considered too. In the average Day Care Centers and Playschools, with a larger number of children in attendance, individual attention is not possible. Because the child's first and best teacher, the parent, is not there during the day, the child learns to live with missing the constant presence of the parent, and as a result, it takes on the "*different*" values of those elders who are its constant companions.<sup>viii</sup>

For some inexplicable reason, parents who are out all day, working to enhance the family finances, experience an uncalled for feeling of guilt. To compensate for this feeling, they regularly shower their kids with very expensive gifts and with cash for the older children. [This also occurs in families that have gone through the painful process of separation and/or divorce. Children receive cash and gifts from **all** parties, wanting only to win their acceptance].<sup>ix</sup> Teenagers, who have no idea how to handle this new-found fiscal responsibility, fail to understand the importance of financial independence. Here is where the seeds of **materialism** are planted. Everything now has a dollar value – even family chores. Missing the presence of their parents, they meet and fraternize with other iconoclastic teenagers, with even more materialistic and less moral values.

For teens the pressures are many: peer pressure, group consciousness, the pressures of adolescence and poor self image,. As a substitute for family members, teens wait for endorsement from companions. Teens are easily manipulated by trend - setters. By this time, teens who have missed out on the values of their families, have adapted to the values of their surroundings: Materialism seems to be the way of life; it leads to success. The influence of society is obvious.

Teens are well aware that society admires and glamorizes people of wealth. They have a special place in society. The deeds that they perform, both good and bad, are treated differently. It is as though we have two distinct standards: Their good deeds are magnified; their faults, even their crimes, are minimized, even rationalized. Teens see very clearly that *different strokes for different folks*, is the name of the game, and they just can't wait to be part of that *successful* group. This is another reason that attracts them to these new values of *get rich quick* and be accepted as equals by the rich folk – a common case of *social capillarity*. Teens want to be *where the action is*, and who can blame them? <sup>x</sup>

This being the *Age of Marketing*, marketers must obtain factual, detailed data, especially in the Toy/Games sections, and the preferred styles in the Fashion industry. Marketing managers will **pay any price** to the young people they select as **models** to study their *likes and dislikes*, and also the *newer trends* among teens and other age groups. It is imperative that they collect live data and use it to pattern their new products for the next season. All this *extra money* makes our youth even more attracted to materialism, and so greed gradually creeps into the mental make-up of our young people.<sup>xi</sup>

In the recent past the United States and most developed countries experienced decades of affluence. We believed we had merited our success, and that we were on the top of the world. That success intoxicated us and we lost sight of our *core values*. We conveniently turned to *materialism*; it fit in with our new thinking and satisfied our egos. Our new objective seemed to be: *maximize profit at any cost, no matter who gets hurt in the process*. We forgot the God who helped us for decades; we worshipped at the altar of the *Almighty Dollar*; but we now find that *our idol has feet of clay*; with the devaluation of the dollar, and a major set back to the affluence to which we were accustomed. Sadly we now see rising unemployment and lay-offs; purchases are at an all time low, and Discount Stores are the beneficiaries. The *good old days* seem to be long gone.

Young people today are aware that the media praised leaders who were *seemingly successful*. As they stand at the crossroads of life, hoping to be *successful* like the people whose faces they saw on the cover pages of Business and other magazines and newspapers, our youth must make up their minds as to which



road they must choose. They are fortunate that at this precise point in time, these scandals have been spotted, studied and exposed. The names of the individuals and institutions of those *so-called success stories* are now known to us all. Making their choice as to which path they must choose, is now a no-brainer. But are we, their parents, professors, presidents and community leaders, prepared with the right programs planned for them? Are we ready with the right answers,<sup>xii</sup> the right direction, the right ideas, and the appropriate courses to train and prepare them to face the future with honesty, integrity, and with good moral values that will ultimately lead to academic success, coupled with success in any field that they choose? We must all – Parents, the Community, Corporate and Political leaders, College and University Faculty and Administrators – be prepared to do all we can to help our young people, our leaders of tomorrow.<sup>xiii</sup>

### **III Preparing the Leaders of Tomorrow with an Education Based on Moral Values:**

Parents are the first and the most influential teachers. This is a universally accepted fact. They prepare us and educate us on basic moral values that constitute the core of our character.<sup>xiv</sup> These values tenaciously stay with most of us all through life. In many instances our parents are the models we use to mold our character and establish our values on. Our *modus vivendi* of today manages to erase these ideas and ideals. One important issue is that young people look up to us, their elders. We are supposed to **set really good examples** that they can emulate; for it is often said that *the mind of a young person is like wax to receive, and like bronze to retain.*<sup>xv</sup>

In life, we have opportunities to prepare us for almost every career we select. There are courses to study to be: a medical doctor of different specialties, a musician of different instruments, a lawyer of different aspects of the law, an artist of different selections, a teacher/professor of different disciplines, and the list goes on and on. However, to become a parent who is by far, the most important and influential teacher in life, there are no courses; the preparation is left to the individual. With little or no preparation or specialized education, parents taking on this major responsibility, using the “*learn as you go*” system. Later, they often question the decisions they have made. This is almost a universal problem.<sup>xvi</sup> The responsibility is at times passed on to the care givers at day care centers, teachers at Kindergarten or Montessori classes, and later, teachers in Schools and High Schools, and professors in Colleges and Universities, hoping that their children get the best education the parents can afford. Perhaps this education is academically great, but is it equally great ethically? Can it be labeled as Moral or Value Education?<sup>xvii</sup> If we are to be proud of the leaders of tomorrow, the education they receive must also be ethical and socially responsible, with values that help them make sound moral judgments.<sup>xviii</sup>

For this reason we, as parents, presidents, preachers, or teachers, have a major responsibility. We are expected to *help* our youth as they want to be good ethical and moral leaders. We should never *hurt* them by bad example; as *example*, with its impact on individuals, *is preferred over precept.*<sup>xix</sup>

In our multicultural world, (to cite only a few), as noted in Edinburgh, we realize that this is indeed an international issue studied and discussed globally in academic, ethical and social seminars and conferences. Realizing that diversity and identity deserve special attention, topics like ‘cultural and social changes prompt the need for radical educational reforms’, and ‘the disjunctions between policy and practice’, all support the concept that ‘Education is a Moral Undertaking’,<sup>xx</sup> while concluding that values are essential elements in which the whole school must be involved. They need our continuing support. The Department of Education in Australia proves an important point, “A liberal democracy encompasses a high level of individual freedom..” which is believed to be the basis for success in Value Education: academic, ethical, social and political”<sup>xxi</sup>

People in Asia are aware of their multicultural mix. India’s many religions, languages, literature and other cultural considerations, has realized this early on; so giant strides were taken as India aimed at developing Value Education that must start at a very early age. The objective here is to raise the consciousness of parents, professors and politicians alike. In 2001 N. Vittal said that Value Education is the Need of the Hour. It is expected to get entire communities involved.<sup>xxii</sup>



We believe that at birth we take on the values of our parents. As we grow, we get our values from our peers, teachers and professors. Although it is true that religion exerts some influence on us, it is also true that we form our values by our interaction with individuals and with the environment. In the world of Business, as we plan to educate and develop students to be managers – the **leaders** of the future, to the point that they will be accepted anywhere, as **management material**; they must also be prepared to face successfully, the multicultural corporate, political or academic world into which they will step out.<sup>xxiii</sup>

Of all the essential functions of Management, Leadership is the most challenging...only because leadership involves the most unpredictable ingredient: *people*. We are all so different from one another, different too in different situations; and in different stages of history. If we add to this Concept, a change in our conventional culture, the task of leadership is rendered even more difficult, complex and challenging. Most of the mistakes made by leaders of today are the result of a lack of understanding of the *backstage culture*<sup>xxiv</sup> of the people of the country under consideration. As we note today the multicultural nature of the workforce, the customers, financial supporters, suppliers and the competition, this problem gets magnified many times over. This diversity in the workforce demands new recruiting initiatives in the private and public sectors too. Multiracial identifications might also affect government programs. Faced with all these obstacles one would tend to anticipate problems; however, we will notice that Value Education helps to diminish these problems considerably.<sup>xxv</sup>

Whereas we do believe in the importance and the need for Moral Values and Value Education, it presupposes that the *teachers* or *managers* themselves practice patience, humility, integrity, honesty, social responsibility and respect for all; and hold frequent and open communication with the young people in their charge. In recent years the concept of **Servant Leadership**<sup>xxvi</sup> seems to hold much promise. When used along with Value Education, it will help us achieve our objectives with less difficulty. Warren Bennis offers a recipe for the leaders of tomorrow. He believes that they must learn to create an environment that embraces **change**, including the acceptance of an increasing percentage of women at **all** levels in the workforce.<sup>xxvii</sup>

#### **IV Stepping out into the Future with New Hope:**

As our thoughts go back to those now familiar corrupt corporations and their many unscrupulous individuals, mentioned frequently in print and electronic media, we are naturally disappointed and disheartened to note the large numbers involved – especially as the names of some “*very successful financial institutions, businesses and business superstars*” are mentioned. How the mighty have fallen! However, we do have one sure way to forget these dark, depressing issues, by turning our attention to some all-time really great leaders like Jesus Christ, Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela and others. We must remember all that they have done for us, for society, and for the world. Their stellar lives are sufficient to neutralize the bad examples set by those other negative leaders. There are even more recent examples of individuals whose generosity and altruism deserve special mention: Bill Gates Jr. & Melinda, Warren Buffet, Aaron Feuerstein, Bono, Angelina Jolie, and this list gets longer with time.

These individuals started their lives in the *ordinary way*; but they succeeded in accomplishing *extraordinary* things, not just for themselves, but for others, and for the future too. They believe in themselves and in people who need help. They live lives of integrity, honesty, sincerity and humility; while greed, pride and prejudice are conspicuously absent. They seem to get satisfaction in sharing their successes and wealth with those less fortunate than they are, giving them hope and happiness as they look ahead to their otherwise bleak future. They set their objectives very high: hoping to help disadvantaged people by sharing their wealth with them. They believe that when *much has been given, much is expected of us*.<sup>xxviii</sup> Their generosity, coupled with enhancing the existing education system with the recommended Value Education, will result in priceless rewards.

Students should be encouraged to read about these philanthropic individuals who are the special success stories that will inspire the young people of today: the *Echo-boomers, Generation Y and the Millennial Generation*. They can all admire and attempt to emulate them. These wonderful human beings and their special services have had a major impact on us all.<sup>xxix</sup>





The distinction between the haves and the have-nots can then be blurred in the not too distant future. Young people can then aspire to be leaders in their fields of choice; leaders who are not materialistic, even though this is labeled as the Age of Materialism, the Age of Marketing.<sup>xxx</sup>

We are all aware that this is indeed the Age of Marketing, wherein we are expected to follow the Marketing Concept which involves three very important issues:

- Concern for the customer: our **students**. Do all we can to help them succeed in life..
- Total involvement – not just of one sector of society. We must **all** work together as a **TEAM**
- Profit optimization: not maximization, not extracting every ounce of profit for personal gain.

In the recent past, the developed countries, and the United States in particular, have experienced several decades of affluence that gave us the opportunity to purchase whatever we want, whenever we chose to do so. We believed we had merited our success, and that we were on top of the world. That success intoxicated us and we lost sight of our *core values*: our beliefs and our principles. We conveniently turned to materialism; it suited our new thinking and satisfied our egos. Our new objective seemed to be: maximize profit at any cost, no matter who gets hurt in the process. We forgot the good Lord who had helped us for decades. Worship at the altar of the almighty dollar was the new *mantra*; but we soon found that this *idol has feet of clay*: with the devaluation of the dollar.

With the unnecessary wars, the uncontrolled wastage and unaccounted missing millions of dollars lost by the “special” groups that were given *exclusive government contracts with no bids*, and the tax breaks to the wealthiest in our society, our **budget surplus** changed to a major **budget deficit**, resulting in the decline of the dollar, and an end to the affluence to which we were now accustomed.

Unemployment and lay-offs are a way of life today. Repairs now replace purchases which are at an all-time low. Many people now shop at Discount Stores, and avoid eating at expensive restaurants. This leads us to believe that this is indeed a bad situation. But, looking at the big picture, we now note that this is not completely correct. There is indeed a really bright and shining silver lining to this dark cloud:

People seem to remember the God they had forgotten; they attend their religious services more frequently, and they are more receptive to ethics in education, replacing materialism with moral values.

The climate today is more conducive to prepare our youth to be the moral Leaders of Tomorrow. It may be easier now to give them the very best education based on modern methods that will include the ideals *de jour*, the marketing concept, but replacing its *imagined* materialistic component with the necessary profit: *optimization*. (Here we do make a profit – but it is **never** at the expense of our subordinates or our customers). We can thus satisfy our objective of preparing the future leaders to be exemplary ethical executives who will do us proud when the baton is passed on to them.

This paper began by referring to wrong business practices and the false values those business leaders seemed to follow. As we come to the end, we begin to realize that if we are to make a difference, we must be prepared to become agents of change. Are we prepared to do just that? Do we want to make our contribution to creating a better tomorrow with a more genuine leadership? If so, let us make a start now: bring back the right values and see how a new type of leader will emerge: one concerned mainly about others. Only then will the 21<sup>st</sup> Century become the century that *dared to be different*. God Bless America!



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