

Response to Mark Bosco's "Shades of Greene"

Michael G. Pratt

My own research, as well as that of many others, suggests that our identity or identities shape how we make sense of the world. Thus, I want to start out by giving a little background about who I am (at least professionally) to explain what may be a nontraditional response. I was trained as an organizational psychologist but work in a business school. I do largely inductive, qualitative research. That is, my goal in research is to understand how the people I study view the world and then translate it back to academics. Some of the areas of research that I try to contribute to are identity, meaning, ambivalence and how people connect to their work, their occupations, and their professions. I have also contributed to and coedited a book on artifacts in organizations. What I am *not* is a theologian, an English professor, or an expert in modernity. As such, I decided to engage in a very unethnographic exercise of imagining how an organizational scholar might reinterpret the relationship between modernity and Catholicism depicted in Mark's essay. In particular, I picked five themes from Mark's essay that stood out from my own perspective. The first is general and the rest are about the relationship between Catholicism and modernity. In addition, I conclude each theme with a question—and since this is a Roundtable about Catholic education, I relate the questions to this domain.

1. In Catholicism, don't forget the physical.

Mark does a lovely job of tracing the dance between Catholicism, modernity, and Catholicism's response to modernity as it plays out in literature. In some ways, the themes he raises follow from Julian Bourg's historical treatment of modernity and the

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Catholic Church but with more literary phrasing.¹ Who doesn't love the phrase, "the appalling strangeness of the mercy of God"? He even throws in a little bit of sex. I was especially intrigued by his emphasis—using Greene's work—on the physical body in the Catholic faith and its role as a response to modernity. Part of what makes Catholicism powerful is its materiality. We eat and drink at communion. We burn incense. We often worship in buildings filled with stained glass, statues (even "hideous plaster ones" as Greene suggests), paintings, and more. Our servant leaders wear colorful vestments. We sit. We stand. We kneel. We refer to our Church as a "body." Our faith engages each of the senses. Building from Mark's use of paradoxes, our faith is spiritual and physical. The Word became Flesh. Research from my tradition would suggest that we should not take the physical for granted. Indeed, organizational scholarship has taken a "material turn" of late—re-remembering the critical role that the physical world around us plays on how we think, feel, and act in organizations. Some have even argued that our world is mediated through objects. This suggests that the physical elements of our faith are not "merely symbolic." As we think about the role of Catholic education, I wonder *In what ways do Catholic educational institutions utilize elements of the physical environment to engage the full range of senses to enhance and enrich how students think, feel, and act?*

2. The relationship between Catholicism and modernity is about meaning, or better put, meaningfulness.

In my own research on work, I differentiate between the meaning of work and meaningful work. The former just means I attach some understandings—positive or negative—to work. Meaningfulness, however, is more about what makes something worth doing. How does this relate to "Shades of Greene"? I think one could cast the story Mark is telling as a search for meaningfulness—as a quest for the answer to what makes life worth living? It is not clear that the answer to this existential question is readily available in modernism. In Mark's paper, the French authors were not finding fulfillment in modernist notions—but why not? What about the "reign of science" was not fulfilling? In a recent article with Doug Lepisto, a former doctoral student, we argue that extant theorizing on what makes work meaningful is largely about focusing on human needs (which resonates with our discussion of modernity)—it is all about *what* we want.² We suggest that a second, more hidden stream in this literature is based on the work of Victor Frankl (a Nazi concentration camp survivor), whose book *Man's Search for Meaning* suggests that meaningfulness comes from knowing *why*. We argue that one can have any job—from assembly line to highly professionalized—and still lack meaningfulness if one cannot answer the question why is this work worth doing? Returning to Mark's paper, science, philosophical positivism, and modernity more generally can answer questions about *what* happens in the world, but cannot ultimately answer *why*.

1 See Julian Bourg, "The Enduring Tensions Between Catholicism and Modernity," *Integritas* 6.1 (Fall 2015), 1–23.

2 D. Lepisto and M.G. Pratt, "Meaningful Work as Realization and Justification: Toward a Dual Conceptualization." Forthcoming in *Organizational Psychology Review*.

They provide meaning without meaningfulness. Catholicism, by contrast, is appealing because it does address why, it does address meaningfulness. My question to the group as we ponder the relationship between modernity and Catholicism in Catholic educational institutions is *What is it about Catholicism that speaks to issues of worth—that is, why are life, one’s schoolwork, and ultimately one’s vocation worth doing?*

3. The relationship between Catholicism and modernity is about resolving ambivalence.

What seems to make the relationship between modernity and Catholicism problematic is that they both have elements in them that we like and don’t like. If modernism was too distasteful or if Catholicism was too attractive, there wouldn’t be a problem. Catholicism responds to modernity not only because it is wrong, but because at least in some areas, it may be right. In Mark’s paper, as he talks about “the sinner at the heart of Christianity,” he implies that this is not just a response to modernity but also to the material excesses and professed moral superiority that may have characterized the premodern Church. This pull-push dynamic is at the heart of ambivalence. Ambivalence can also be the result of the paradoxes that Mark points out as being central to Catholicism. But the overall point is that both modernism and Catholicism have attractive and unattractive elements to them. Research suggests that people do not like ambivalence. However, we also know that ambivalence can lead to a wide range of outcomes including radicalism (taking one side of the ambivalent relationship and avoiding the other), vacillation (going back and forth), or paralysis. Recent work in organizational behavior also points to the potential benefits of being ambivalent and holding onto one’s ambivalence, including wisdom, deep commitments, flexibility, and openness to change. So my third question to the group is *How do Catholic educational institutions help students navigate ambivalence in ways that promote movement rather than paralysis? commitment and not fundamentalism?*

4. The relationship between Catholicism and modernity is one of identity.

Organizations cannot be anywhere else but in broader institutions. Thus, any given Catholic organization (including a Catholic college or university) cannot exist outside of a religious institution. However, organizations can, and often do, reside in multiple institutions at the same time. Thus, it seems inconceivable that Catholic organizations could exist entirely separate from other institutions, such as science, and thus separate from modernity. These institutions, however, can espouse beliefs that are antithetical to Catholicism (see Mark’s depiction of Catholicism being “antimodern”). However, beliefs from other organizations and other institutions that impinge upon the Church need not be oppositional—they can also just be different and unrelated.

For simplicity, let’s think about Catholic educational institutions that may have adopted some elements of Catholicism and some elements of modernity (e.g., science). When organizations are faced with conflicting or even different beliefs (especially when they are about “who we are” as an organization) four pure response types are possible:³

3 M.G. Pratt and P.O. Foreman, “Classifying Managerial Responses to Multiple Organizational Identities,” *Academy of Management Review* 25/1 (2000), 18–42.

- a. *Deletion* is trying to get rid of the offending sets of beliefs. We see in Julian's paper that this was an early response to both Catholicism and modernism. However, deletion only works when one of the parties who holds a particular set of beliefs is much less powerful than the other.
- b. *Compartmentalization* occurs when you adhere to both sets of beliefs but separate the two (e.g., at the individual level, I can be a scientist on Friday and a Catholic on Monday). For Catholic educational institutions, this might involve having separate science and theology departments. This is appropriate when the belief systems are incompatible and people have the resources (time, emotional energy) to keep both systems of belief going.
- c. *Integration* happens when you try to combine the two belief systems into something new (a Hegelian dialectic). Catholic literary modernism may be such an attempt in the literary domain. However, integration is most likely to occur when there is some synergy between the belief systems, not enough resources to continue both separately, and little concern that the uniqueness of either belief system is lost.
- d. *Aggregation* occurs when both belief systems are linked at a higher level of abstraction—indeed to call both Catholicism and modernity “worldviews” is to view their similarities while also retaining their distinctiveness.

My fourth question (or set of questions), therefore, are these: *Do we view modernity and Catholicism as things that can/should or must co-exist? If so, how synergistic or compatible are they?* By answering these questions, we can determine how to manage these competing “identities” not only for Catholic educational institutions but to help our students manage their potentially competing identities as well.

5. Finally, we can view the entire relationship between modernity and Catholicism as one needing vision or visionary leadership to move forward.

While Mark did not cast Greene or his French contemporaries this way, these authors were, in some ways, providing a vision for how Catholics can move forward in the face of modernity. Because I have probably written too much already, I will give you two insights from visionary leadership that may be helpful.

- a. You cannot construct a vision of “who you want to be” unless you first understand who you are. This was brought up in our Roundtable discussions that have been captured elsewhere, so I will move directly to the punch line: organizations that fail in their attempts to construct a vision often do so because they skip the first and most vital part of visioning—discovering who you (as an organization or people) are now. This is critical because it helps you understand what parts of your beliefs, practices, culture, and identity that you want to keep (i.e., what is core) and which can be discarded (i.e., what is peripheral) as you move into the future.
- b. You don't change by breaking with the past; you change by reinterpreting it. This is what the French Catholic modernists did—they did not make up new themes

about what it meant to be Catholic, they took themes from the past and helped them propel the Church forward. Indeed, to change people, it is not effective to tell them how wrong they have been. Rather, successful visionary leaders say to their people, “we are really this—and while we may have lost our way—we can again become who we are meant to be.” To me, Pope Francis is a master here. He is not changing much in the way of beliefs; rather he is reinterpreting our past as an institution that helps the poor—as a vision to move us forward.

So my last question for now (and one that we may continue to grapple with during the next Roundtable discussions) is *How do Catholic educational institutions provide a vision for moving their students (and the Church?) forward?*