

IN HIS SERMON ON LEO TOLSTOY'S *THE DEATH of Ivan Ilyich*, the Rev. Scotty McLennan asks a tough question. If the title character is respected as a government official, if he is fair as a prosecutor and dutiful as a husband and father, why as he lies dying at age 43 does he feel like a failure, that his life hasn't been "real"? The congregation pondering that question isn't necessarily seated in pews, for the Rev. McLennan is a theologian not only to the faithful but to students of business. On the faculty at Stanford Business School, he lectures on ethics and spirituality, exploring how to reconcile the pursuits of prosperity and spiritual growth. As evidenced by Tolstoy's 19th century masterpiece, these aren't new questions. Nor is the Rev. McLennan new to examining them in a business-class setting. Back in the 1980s he joined the faculty of Harvard Business School, where he helped develop and teach classes on ethics and spirituality.

The conclusion of the Rev. McLennan's sermon on *Ivan Ilych* offers a hint of what students may hear in his class: "Ivan had lived his whole life without ever truly learning how to love. Finally, at the end he was taught how to do so by his servant Gerasim and by his schoolboy son, Vasya."

As an undergraduate at Yale in the 1960s, the Rev. McLennan had in mind a less-privileged flock, and the underprivileged remain a focus of his ministry. His roommate at Yale, Garry Trudeau, creator of the comic strip "Doodlesbury," has said he used the Rev. McLennan as a model for a Doodlesbury character named the Rev. Scot Sloane, a streetwise priest.

In an interview with Brunswick Review Editor Kevin Helliker, the Rev. McLennan talks about how and why he teaches business classes on ethics and spirituality.

How did you, as a lawyer and theologian, come to be a lecturer at Harvard Business School?

For 10 years out of law school and divinity school I ran a legal ministry in a low-income neighborhood in Boston. Then I served as the university chaplain at Tufts from 1984 to 2000.

In the late 1980s, Harvard Business School started or rejuvenated its business ethics program. I was invited to help.

In 1988, I began working at the Harvard Business School as a lecturer in a required new module developed for first-year MBAs. That course, which has been renamed over the years, was called "Decision Making and Ethical Values." Then I taught an elective course called "The Business World: Moral and Spiritual Inquiry Through Literature."

In using literature to discuss ethics in business, which authors and works do you study?

Some American works would include F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* and *The Last Tycoon*, Flannery O'Connor's *The Displaced Person* and *A Good Man is Hard to Find*, Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*, Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!*, Saul Bellow's *Seize the Day*, and the Norwegian writer Henrik Ibsen's *An Enemy of the People*.

I also was interested in helping people think about how to do business around the world, in different cultural settings and with different religions than Christianity and Judaism. So, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. A well-known Arabic language novelist, Naguib Mahfouz, wrote a book called *Mi-ramar* about a hotel in Alexandria, Egypt, and business relations there from the owner of the hotel, to employees, to guests, in an Islamic context.

Shusaku Endo's *Deep River* is about Japanese business people on a trip together to India. That book helped us not only understand Japanese business orientation, but also a good bit about India.

I've taught Hermann Hesse's *Siddhartha*, which helps people understand Hinduism and India. *Jasmine* by the Indian American Bharati Mukherjee has a woman immigrating from India to the US.

Mohsin Hamid's *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which helps people understand the religion of



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somebody who worked in an American Wall Street business context, then ended up back in Pakistan.

Why fiction?

I've really come to believe that great novels, plays and short stories give you insights that are much deeper and much longer lasting than a business case study would, or a biography of a great business leader.

What classes do you teach at Stanford Business School?

Since the late '80s, either at Harvard or Stanford, I've been teaching "The Business World: Moral and Spiritual Inquiry Through Literature."

Another course I teach is called, "Finding Spiritual Meaning at Work: Business Exemplars." There we study various business leaders who've been very

open about that. In many cases, I'm able to bring them into the classroom. The founder of Noah's Bagels, Noah Alper, comes in and talks about Judaism and business. He can describe how he got to where he's gotten in his business life, and how it relates to his spiritual life.

Jeff Weiner, CEO of LinkedIn, comes in and talks about how he grew up Jewish, but really is agnostic in terms of his understanding of whether there's a God or not, but has been very influenced by the Dalai Lama and Buddhism, and tries to run his company on principles of compassionate management.

An evangelical Christian named Ken Eldred comes in and describes how to live as an evangelical Protestant Christian in your work context, and actually goes to the point of saying that it's possible and proper to proselytize within your business con-

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text. Charles Geschke, who was one of the founders of Adobe, and who is an active practicing Roman Catholic, talks about how to do that in your business life. I use a case study by a now-deceased businessperson from Boston named Samina Qureshi, who was Muslim, and how she saw herself responsible for the spiritual as well as business life of employees of her design and architectural firm.

A third course I teach is called "Global Business, Religion, and National Culture." If you're going to do business in India, it behooves you to know something about Hinduism, and in the UAE, Islam, in Japan, Shinto and Buddhist origins, in China, Confucianism, and in Mexico, Roman Catholic Christianity.

Do you have counterparts at other business schools?

A few. For instance, David Miller runs a program at Princeton on business and spirituality.

Are business leaders today any more or less concerned with ethics than in the past?

It's always been a growth industry. But it also comes in waves. Harvard Business School did quite a good job of it in the '40s and '50s, then slowed down a bit until it developed its newest incarnation of ethics classes in the 1980s. There were a lot of business scandals, and people going up to federal penitentiary in the 1980s.

Actually my MBA students these days are more sensitive than ever to ethical issues and the kinds of cultural issues that I'm describing.

As an ethics lecturer in the heart of Silicon Valley, do you think the tech industry is any more or less concerned with ethics than any other industry?

The short answer is, no. All industries have concerns about ethics, but don't necessarily do well as they struggle with those issues. The issues do tend to be somewhat industry unique, for example, with the privacy issues that have arisen in Silicon Valley.

But it is sort of episodic. A company that looks like it's doing very well, with ethically related mottos about not doing any evil, can be blindsided by issues they hadn't thought about. Or maybe it hasn't spent enough time really developing an approach that will work ethically.

All industries have their ups and downs, as do individuals. At one moment in time, they can look like great ethical leaders, and at another they get bitten by human failings. ♦

By **KEVIN HELLIKER**, a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and Editor in Chief of the Brunswick Review.