"EVERYTHING HAS BEEN LOANED TO YOU"

"Everything Has Been Loaned to You"

THE BIOGRAPHY OF A TRANSFORMATIONAL CEO

J.-Robert Ouimet
in conversation with Yves Semen

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PREFACE A

In its Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, the Second Vatican Council reminds all Christians of the need to get involved in matters of the modern world to transform it according to the divine plan. The lay faithful, united in the mystery of God's children, discern anew their stewardship obligations towards the world, the world given to man as the means to salvation, that is, to unity with God and life in love.

J.-Robert Ouimet's book, *"Everything Has Been Loaned to You": The Biography of a Transformational CEO,* is an extraordinary account of a man who undertakes to make good use of his intellectual abilities and transform this world with a Christian spirit. Fascinated with the Gospel, and in particular with the dialogue between Jesus and a young man wherein Jesus tells him: "Sell everything you have and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me" (Luke 18:22), Ouimet courageously responds to the challenge. Inspired by his meeting with Blessed Mother Teresa of Calcutta and her poor, Ouimet decides to share his material and spiritual wealth and transform the family enterprise by governing it in the spirit of the Church's teaching on social justice.

With disarming frankness, J.-Robert Ouimet reveals to the reader a mystery of his own painful spiritual struggle over the sense of human existence that he experienced after his meeting with Mother Teresa and his subsequent personal transformation. He shares the whole truth about his life: the ups and downs of his youthful years, his discovery of God present in the human heart and his courageous response to God's calling to carry out the mission of

becoming a Christian entrepreneur in the world of business. The author expresses his joy in following the path outlined by Christ in the Church. He experiences the beauty of the Cross and discovers the joy of remaining with Mary at Christ's side.

This entrepreneur from Canada teaches us to trust the Church and her teachings by pointing out that the principles of social justice invoked in the encyclicals of Leo XIII (*Rerum Novarum*), Paul VI (*Populorum Progressio*) and John Paul II (*Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*) are not merely wishful thinking, but are rooted in the Gospel. Man can achieve those principles in the spirit of good will and through unwavering acceptance of God as the highest authority in personal and social matters. J.-Robert Ouimet proposes the establishment of an organization, grounded in the social doctrine of the Church, consisting in the personal involvement of its executive management. The employees are also invited to participate and to share this philosophy, whatever their religion. Invoking the Benedictine principle *Ora et Labora*, he appeals for the balance between physical and emotional efforts. The ensuing successful economic development and employees' satisfaction constitute a justification of the project.

J.-Robert Ouimet's readers will undoubtedly be drawn to deeply reflect on personal issues related to employment, promotion and professional advancement. They are also presented with tools for spiritual development. I am happy that the author was willing to convey his personal experiences to the homeland of John Paul II whose entire pontificate was dedicated to the development of the social doctrine of the Faith while simultaneously encouraging all disciples of Christ to "go out into the deep" and courageously follow the Master.

Stanislaw Cardinal Dziwisz
Metropolitan Archbishop of Cracow
The Feast of the Presentation of the Lord
Cracow, February 2, 2010

PREFACE B

Ora et labora. "Work and prayer," the medieval Benedictines taught, as do modern Benedictines along with their sisters and brothers in other world religions. All aspects of one's life can be lived as a prayer. Spirituality and religion are not discreet and separable parts of one's life, like a section of *Time* magazine, but essential dimensions of a complete life, like the story line that ties together even the most disparate and varied items in a single weekly issue.

Over the past few decades, J.-Robert Ouimet has been implementing an experimental model, an "Integrated System of Management Activities" (ISMA), which seeks to incorporate these essential dimensions of life with everyday work. His achievement is the triumph of a considerable effort of abandonment of self over self-direction, of serenity amid activism, of listening to the small, still voice of the soul instead of rushing off behind the steeds of aggressiveness. Such triumphs can be very fruitful as a means in the life of a company with many people of diverse backgrounds and skills, spiritualities, religions, and expectations. But they are also good goals in themselves.

Ouimet's company, Ouimet-Cordon Bleu Inc., Canada, is a medium-sized and well-established food processing company founded in 1933. This private, family-owned business of more than two generations employs over 400 people and has annual sales in the nine figure range. Not all the officers and employees in the company participate in the activities of ISMA. Although everyone

at the company is invited to take part in the program, none of its activities is compulsory.

Leaders in all business sectors may draw immense benefit from studying the principles, practices, and results of years of self-study worked out by the wise and thoughtful Ouimet, who has learned to measure his own passionate, decisive, and determined nature, in order to go slowly and calmly, letting God and his colleagues show the way.

Ouimet's ISMA bears watching, for one can easily imagine that there is a large, unmet demand for similar programs in other companies worldwide. Considerable evidence shows significant numbers of managers and employees around the world find their work rather dull, to say the least, and often find that their working environments inhibit their personal development and general well-being. Depression and burn-out are seemingly universal problems. Many more people than we might imagine are searching for a working environment where they will not only earn wages, but also have the opportunity to foster their human and spiritual well-being. Many more persons than we might think would love to experience, like the Benedictines, the integration of their spirituality and their work.

Some would appreciate a quiet area in the workplace, such as the room available at Ouimet-Cordon Bleu, to which they could repair for a few moments of meditation, rededication, or quiet prayer during the day, or to have the opportunity to share a community meal, a monthly spiritual support-group, or small group sessions with the president of their organization. Many might like to have a chance to volunteer on a regular basis, during working hours, to serve in a soup kitchen or to mentor a disadvantaged child.

Spiritual and religious hunger is a universal and permanent part of human nature, and when it is satisfied, it operates like yeast in dough, lifting what was previously inert, creating more than what was previously imagined. So there ought to be a special, recognized place for it in as many workplaces as possible. To be sure,

even though a love of music may be just as universal as spiritual sensibility, there remain many who have no ear for music, cannot carry a tune, and are just as content to let others make and listen to it. The distribution of interests in spiritual matters can hardly be different. Many seem to live quite well (at least apparently so) without spirituality and religion.

But those for whom life without the ever-present God is empty, dull, and even wasteful, can blossom and thrive in workplaces that make space for their inner lives in modest and unobtrusive ways. Christians, Jews, Protestants, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and others have long enjoyed working in environments rich with the symbols, associations, and reminders of their particular spiritual and religious sensibilities. In such environments their lives feel more complete, less denuded, more nourished.

Ouimet's success derives from an earnest commitment to personal liberty, without any hint of coercion, and calm patience and foresight, along with openness to employees' concerns and suggestions. In this sort of enterprise, a low-key and gentle approach is not only best but absolutely necessary. The atmosphere must have the crystal clear air of freedom and personal choice. And, perhaps most important, the authentic desire, on the part of the business leadership who implement this innovative program, to respect, serve, and promote human dignity above all other things.

J.-Robert Ouimet is to be commended for his unique and pioneering style of leadership, for his grace and willingness to remain silent at times, thereby empowering others to take the lead. He has shown great wisdom, patience, and breadth of vision. He has honored the sensibilities and the liberty of all who work at his company, and has provided a worthy model for other business leaders to emulate. He has put all of us in his debt.

Dr. Michael Novak
American Enterprise Institute

PREFACE C

I met Robert Ouimet many years ago at a UNIAPAC Congress. My first meeting with him was very special inasmuch as within the first few minutes I felt a common bond between us. I think that my appreciation and admiration for Canada and, in particular for the city of Montreal where I had spent several years during my youth, made me consider Robert, recently met, as a companion and friend.

It did not take very long for me to realize that both of us shared a profound interest regarding matters of social responsibility and that Robert was living intensely those business principles which a short time earlier he had acquired from his father.

Nor did it take me long to realize that I was face-to-face with a person of very deep spirituality.

With the passage of time our relationship as friends, along with our mutual business concerns and our interests in society, merged.

Robert invited me – I should rather say prodded me – into giving a talk at McGill University in 1999 and two years later at the Business School HEC of Montreal University.

Distance and the many occupations we both had did not permit our contacts to be as frequent as we might have liked, however, our spiritual communion remained strong.

I thought I knew Robert pretty well; however, it was in reading his book, whose Preface I have been honored to write, that I gained a much better perspective on a business colleague profoundly immersed, not only in the area of business ethics, but

who also placed profound emphasis, something rarely seen, on the spiritual landscape.

I believe that it would be to sell him short to say that we are dealing here with someone who is highly unusual; I should rather say that Robert is truly exceptional and that God was pleased to call him in a very special way.

He himself, in the chapter of this book in which he names the CEOs and leaders of various enterprises, says in one of his paragraphs: "I think I make them afraid, even those that are the most Christian. They feel that I've gone too far, that I'm a little crazy."

As a veteran business leader, having spent more than sixty years in my business and as a manager committed to our Christian values, I nonetheless have to say that, yes, I understand, admire and envy the fortitude and the decision that Robert made to begin "Our Project." I also have to agree that it would be very hard to consider replicating it in any kind of way. This has led me to think and to reach the conclusion that Robert had been right, as Mother Teresa and Pope John Paul II had been right; however, in this world of ours there are very few persons who can reach their height.

I would like to draw a certain parallel between what I have experienced in comparison with Ouimet-Cordon Bleu.

Our group, to which I have belonged since its foundation and of which I have the honor to lead, is a transnational business, the largest in the world in the area of baking, operating in more than 18 countries and employing more than 108,000 people.

This group has the honor of being considered a model in the area of social responsibility, with the reputation of being a fully human undertaking in which the highest values of Christian social doctrine are practiced. It is also known for its efforts over many decades to spread the fullness of this philosophy in all those places in which we are able to by means of our participation in UNIAPAC, through courses and conferences at business and university events, in Mexico and abroad.

And this parallel to which I refer includes the fact that a large

number of persons, business people, academics at universities, intellectuals and the like, question us saying that what we are doing is not common nor is it easy to replicate.

Likewise, from my deeply held credentials as a Christian business man with a clear vocation to serve, I must say that what Ouimet-Cordon Bleu has done is indeed not common nor is it easy to repeat.

Without a doubt, I find many other parallels, some of them very good such as the zeal to spread our values, and others a bit sad such as the little support that we encounter within the Catholic hierarchy.

At the same time we also find that the system of free trade, the market economy, notwithstanding its great faults and limitations, is the best for society.

Likewise with respect to the human person, it is the most important and stands head and shoulders above the rest.

Also with respect to work it is very important and prayer is indispensable.

I cannot conclude this Preface without extending my admiration and appreciation for a business colleague who has had the courage, the fortitude to live his faith in an intense way, providing a difficult example to follow to all business people who call themselves Christian.

In His generous providence, God gives us models to help us follow His ways. Robert is without a doubt one of these.

I am thankful that this book has been published in Mexico! We have before us here a living example of how a business can be more successful and more worthy of man when a good dose of spirituality exists therein.

Mexico is a land traditionally religious and Catholic and certainly able to appreciate the testimony of a businessman who is profoundly Christian.

Roberto Servitje S.
President of the Administrative Council of the Bimbo Group

PREFACE D

When I first met J.-Robert Ouimet and heard him speak about the importance of reconciling human well-being with productivity and profits, I applauded his thinking. However, such a conviction, while commendable, was not in my view rare in the business world. After all, business leaders in most parts of the world have embraced the concept of social responsibility.

However, as I got to know J.-Robert better, I discovered a man who had turned his conviction into something deeper. Profoundly influenced by a meeting with Mother Teresa of Calcutta, he made a decision that would change his entire life: to practice a new kind of business leadership that would encompass love, solidarity, equity and justice and, at the same time, maintain the pursuit of productivity and competitive profits.

The means J.-Robert has chosen to implement these convictions make him exceptional. While tending to the family business, founded by his father in 1933, he sought answers through his day-to-day experiences as a business manager. This restless individual went beyond simply carrying out his business responsibilities and pursued serious academic studies. In 1997, he successfully defended his doctoral thesis at the University of Fribourg, Switzerland, and graduated *magna cum laude*. In June 2009, Laval University in Quebec City awarded him an honorary doctorate for his work.

By applying the core ideas contained in his thesis and by continually experimenting with them in his own company, he developed a new approach to business management. This approach

has been presented at more than two hundred conferences in North America, Europe and the Middle East. It has also captured the hearts and minds of business colleagues, government leaders, social activists and academics. In 2010, he addressed four different business schools in China.

There will be those, especially within the business community, who will turn away from J.-Robert's ideas, which draw their inspiration from the God of love. They will say that these ideas are too unconventional or personal. Indeed, I was among those skeptics at first. He responds to such charges by reminding us of what many who operate in the business world believe instinctively: respect, human dignity, equity and justice have a central place in our enterprises, from the factory floor to the boardroom.

To reinforce his point that capitalism is no stranger to these precepts, J.-Robert refers to Adam Smith, who in 1759 wrote in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*: "What reward is most proper for promoting the practice of truth, justice, and humanity? The confidence, the esteem, and love of those we live with. Humanity does not desire to be great, but to be beloved. It is not in being rich that truth and justice would rejoice, but in being trusted and believed."

J.-Robert has incorporated his beliefs and management principles into his own enterprises through a series of practical applications that hold at their core the idea of personal freedom. Employees and managers are encouraged to work hard, create profits and, at the same time, recognize the vital importance of transcendental principles. And should that awareness encompass the spiritual beliefs of Muslims, Jews, Christians, Hindus or Buddhists, so be it.

In his attempt to explain his ideas, J.-Robert never resorts to proselytizing. The experimental business applications he has developed will continue to provoke skepticism and discomfort within business communities in Canada and globally. However, I would argue that his fundamental precepts are in large measure

unassailable and should be embraced by business leaders wherever they may reside. These precepts leave no doubt that respect, human dignity, equity, justice and personal freedom are indispensable components as we seek to create a more human and responsible form of capitalism in the 21st century.

Thomas Paul d'Aquino
Ex-President and CEO
of Canadian Council of Chief Executives
September 28, 2009

FOREWORD

Spirituality is no longer an estranged topic when juxtaposed with contemporary business. Books and articles addressing spirituality and business have blossomed since the end of the last century. This new attention ended fifty years in which a secular lens was arguably not only the dominant perspective, but often seen as the only allowable and socially accepted perspective in business literature.

There are many reasons, but two stand out: *First*, the great demands of intellectual work have evoked a renewed search for personal meaning. If work now requires us to bring our whole self to the task, including intellect, imagination, physical and emotional energies, then this extraordinary effort has to have ontological meaning. Otherwise, we are cast into a dualism where our deep inner desires remain separated from our intense work life occupying the largest portion of each waking day. *Second*, the evident failure of business leaders as manifested by distorted hubris and greed (thus psychologically separated from the common good), challenges the narrow secular understanding of business leadership.

To date, the primary focus has concerned an individual business leader's requirement for spiritual and ethical development as a precondition for transformational leadership. There is robust evidence showing how the absence of spiritual and moral development leads to situational narcissism, fear, anxiety, careerism, and defensive interpersonal hyper-competitiveness, an inability to listen to non-confirming feedback and to opportunistic short range decisions. In short, it requires spiritual maturity to involve

and listen to stakeholder voices, pool judgments, and arrive at a commonly acceptable and effective solution to complex problems. Spiritual disciplines such as meditation are shown to offset negative entrapments of ego-driven immaturity. Thus, the exploration of the inner life of the leader and the journey toward higher stages of spiritual development is increasingly discussed in both the professional business and academic literature.

By contrast, the examination of how a corporation as an organization can structure its culture to support and inspire a spiritual orientation is much less developed. The recent scandals of disgraced organizations (e.g., Enron) and whole industrial sectors (e.g., financial services) not only has accelerated the interest in leadership spirituality, but also created an interest in the reexamination of the business culture. Not understanding how spirituality can be reinforced within the culture of an organization leaves many business leaders in a seeming bind. They personally aspire to a higher level of spiritual expression at work but feel they must function within a corporate culture alienated from things spiritual. Indeed, even faith-based higher education or health systems struggle with how to express organizational spirituality concomitant with legitimate secular performance requirements.

Prophetically in advance of this recent interest, Robert Ouimet was a pioneer who responded with spiritual imagination and depth to his own calling as an organizational leader. By means of a disciplined intellectual exploration of social teachings within his Roman Catholic tradition and a long personal spiritual pilgrimage he struggled to fuse spiritual insight and business practice. He called his effort *Our Project*. Doggedly, over many years, he fashioned a unique corporate culture within an international corporation. Explicit practices anchored his company's culture in those spiritual principles that he held to be central.

As is true of all human endeavors that truly matter, his efforts constituted a difficult personal odyssey. There were moments of consolation, but also long period of rejection and setbacks. And

even now the outcome rests on the fragile realities of all human efforts of institutionalization. This book, then, is a form of spiritual autobiography. It is of interest because it is a story of human courage inspired by a noble vision to show how a dominant societal institution might be changed. Such change involves a kind of living martyrdom both because of the complexity of such endeavors and also because countercultural change threatens the world-view of the status quo. In this sense the book can be read as a Christian pilgrim's inspiring personal journey.

There is, however, another level of analysis in which the reader can engage. What might "spirituality" mean as expressed in business practices? This is a seminal and timely question. We stand at a tipping point in history. There have been other such periods that called for exceptional organizational responses (e.g., the beginning of the industrial revolution, the struggle with fascism, the beginning of the information age, etc.). But unique to our present time is that we are simultaneously threatened with the destruction of our planet's ecology just as our market based business system is crumbling, a victim of greed and superstitious optimism. The business sector that once was thought to be capable of automatically responding to new challenges has been found rotted from within. We need both a new generation of business leaders and a new model of corporate culture incorporating spiritual wisdom.

Robert Ouimet's experiment offers one important prophetic model of how to conceive, lead, and construct a business culture in a spiritually integrated manner. We need such inspiration if we are to reconstruct our fragile business sector capable of responding to the global challenges of our perilous age.

André L. Delbecq
J. Thomas and Kathleen McCarthy University Professor
Santa Clara University
Santa Clara, California, USA

Introduction

BETWEEN FRIBOURG AND GENEVA

One evening in October 2005, J.-Robert Ouimet and I were driving on the highway between Fribourg and Geneva on the way to the airport. He had just completed a two-day seminar, titled *Human Values and Spirituality in Management*, at the Institut Philanthropos in Fribourg.

The Institut Philanthropos holds a unique and special position in a world marked by secularism; it does not equivocate about its identity as a Christian institute of anthropology. The students, who begin their day with the Eucharist, come from all over Europe and dedicate a year of their lives to deepening their understanding of man's true nature.

The presentation that day seemed to me to have been like many of the other 170 lectures he had given previously to various groups of business leaders and in numerous renowned management schools and universities worldwide. And yet, it was obvious that in those two days Ouimet had lived through an unusual experience that had shaken him to his very core. In his wonderful Canadian accent, he made this admission to me: "I swear to you that this was the first time I didn't hold anything back. It was the first time I was able to express everything I wanted to say. I've never before been able to explain to that extent what, following my father's lead during the past 75 years, we've tried to bring about in our company."

I left him to his emotions – he was on the verge of tears – and

to his meditation, which I guessed was a silent act of thanksgiving for what he had just experienced. I remember being profoundly impressed by this man, who could radiate both great power and great vulnerability.

After lapsing into silence for a moment, Ouimet continued: "The young people of our day, the generation of Pope John Paul the Great, are quite exceptional. They are not afraid. They do not put up self-imposed barriers to their spiritual aspirations. That gives me such hope. And what a privilege it has been for me to have shared these last two days with them."

I had been thinking about something and, in that moment, decided to take the chance of asking him a somewhat delicate question. "Robert, you've often spoken to business leaders, many of them Christians, about your successful experiment with your own business and how you're trying to reconcile personal human development and economic profitability. How many have you convinced to imitate the gamble you've taken?"

The answer was prompt, clear and painful: "It's very simple because it's not hard to remember. None! Not a single one."

Sensing my surprise, he explained: "It's quite clear to me that CEOs hold the belief that spiritual values have no place in business and no role to play in management."

This response sparked my interest to write this book.

Ouimet has been a respected business leader and the CEO of a large company for more than 45 years. As CEO, he has been very successful in the fiercely competitive area of high-consumption frozen and canned foods. But many business leaders around the world have attained the same achievement. Ouimet also holds a doctorate in economics and social science. This is not exceptional either as many business leaders have advanced university degrees. What is less common, however, is that his doctoral thesis – which he defended after more than nine years of hard work at the age of 63 – is a bold experiment in management philosophy that he carried out in his own business for more than forty years. His goal was

to perfect human management tools that could integrate sound, economic performance with the well-being of workers.

Ouimet built his companies on two key factors – corporate profitability and the personal development of his employees. These companies, which include Ouimet-Cordon Bleu and Ouimet-Tomasso, were founded in 1933 and are very successful in the Canadian food industry. His corporate view of human resources reflects a totally innovative management theory, called *Our Project*, based on Ouimet's Christian values. Never a man who believed in doing things in half measures, he has always lived these values in an uncompromising way.

It can be stated unequivocally that Ouimet's public and business life is coherent with his Christian faith. He does not cast his Christian convictions aside when carrying out his duties as a business leader. On the contrary, his Christian convictions inform and guide him in his business dealings. This coherence is the fruit of years of hard work and commitment to his faith. However, it can become feeble at times and must be reasserted continuously.

If he has succeeded in developing a management system that makes people happier, it is because his company's management is actively working to achieve that exact goal: the unity of the human person. Ouimet first brought about this unity in himself. And it is this quality, which is indeed rare to find, that makes him so appealing. His hard-won inner unity is what gave rise to his unique management model. This model is the practical application of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church and it allows people to live out authentic human and spiritual values at work.

The goal of this book is to bear witness to the life of this one man who, knowing his limitations, has always wanted to grow in his commitment to Love. He has helped thousands of people attain self-actualization through ordinary daily work. The fruits of his lifelong work are both humbling and magnificent.

In my modest role as a writer, I feel compelled to let people know of Ouimet's work and the principles to which he has com-

mitted his life. As a board member of a French-language management school and a teacher of the social doctrine of the Catholic Church and of business ethics, I believe these principles deserve to be taught everywhere.

Ouimet is a rare type of business leader. His insights into the human struggle are deeply touching. He has succeeded in reconciling what many believe to be irreconcilable: the legitimate quest for profit and the concerns of working men and women.

I have read and studied Ouimet's 1,500 page doctoral thesis and I must admit that it is not easy reading. I have also listened to him and questioned him for long periods of time. I have visited his companies in Montreal and I have met with some of the members of his board, managers and other personnel, including those holding the most menial jobs. I did this because I wanted to see how his theory plays out in the real world.

I can therefore attest that Ouimet is a business leader who has succeeded in putting into practice what the Catholic Church has taught for more than a century through various papal and social encyclicals. As summarized in the *Compendium of Social Doctrine*, published by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in 2005, the Church's central concern is the promotion of human dignity in the necessary activity of work. Though many Christian business leaders know of the pontifical council's doctrine, they question its operational applicability to their own business. Even more reject them outright when they consider the constraints of the increasingly competitive and harsh marketplace.

And here is what is so interesting about Ouimet's 45-year project: he scientifically proves that it is possible to put the teachings of the Catholic Church with regards to respect for people's freedom into practice on a daily basis and in a real business environment. He has also proven that this principle is perfectly compatible with a company's legitimate and necessary quest for profitability. However, this lofty goal can only be achieved if an important condition is met: one must have the courage to make the radical choice of

affirming one's Christian identity. What is more, one must have total confidence in Jesus Christ so as "to manage the business with Him, and in His way, for it is His business."

For me, Ouimet is the Christian business leader who, while recognizing his human frailty, tries to be consistent with his faith. He rejects half measures and "worldly compromises." His only imperative is to march forward each day, with Christ at his side, always striving for holiness.

I have seen the impact of his thoughts and words on my students. It is the same impact he has had on his businesses. I can state with confidence that I have met a very different kind of business leader; one who is a Christian to the core of his being; one who has followed that path ever since the day in April 1983 that he decided to receive God each day in the Eucharist.

This book will have achieved its goal if it is able to convince a few decision makers that no domain, even the riskiest and most marked by the spirit of the world, is ever out of reach to Christ's true disciples. And it will be a resounding success if it persuades those decision makers to carry the light into these areas and to try their best to be faithful to Him, with whom and in whom they can do everything.

Yves Semen, Ph.D.
Ex-Director of the Philanthropos European Institute
for Anthropological Studies in Fribourg, Switzerland

"EVERYTHING HAS BEEN LOANED TO YOU"

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MOTHER TERESA

Beginning a book about a business leader with Mother Teresa of Calcutta may be somewhat surprising. And yet, as improbable as it sounds, it was a meeting with the foundress of the Missionaries of Charity that served as the turning point in J.-Robert Ouimet's life as a man, a husband, a father and a business leader.

The question of a whole life

Since his childhood, J.-Robert Ouimet has been plagued with a nagging sense of guilt about living a privileged life. He was raised in financial security due to his father's success in business. His intellectual gifts permitted him to pursue higher education, first at the HEC in Montreal, then at Columbia University in New York City, and later at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland, where he earned a doctorate in economics and social studies. Furthermore, he never doubted his Christian faith. Still today, he questions why he was granted this privilege over others, and his questioning is rooted in a well-known Gospel parable.

> As far back as I can remember, I've always been obsessed with a sense of guilt about wealth, and not just material wealth but also the moral and spiritual kind. One parable has always dominated my thoughts, the Parable of the Talents: "What have you done with the gifts I have loaned you?" As time passed, and I saw my

privileges multiply, I began asking myself the question: "To where, O God, is all this leading me? How am I going to be able to give You an answer to the Parable of the Talents?"

When I began my studies at the HEC* in Montreal at the age of 18, I was struck by the sight of homeless people milling about in the neighboring parks. They made me question even more the privileges that I had been born into, and I asked myself: "Why am I not in their place and they in mine?" Later, while working in a factory one summer – an experience that I enjoyed very much – I experienced the same sort of soul-searching. I remember asking myself: "Why is it that I live in a big house on a hill in front of a park? There's no reason why I should live there and not other people." I always felt more comfortable being around those who had less than I did. This came naturally and there was certainly no hypocrisy on my part. It was almost selfish and it certainly wasn't an act of charity. In some way, I always knew that few of my acquaintances were as well off as I was, and I considered that almost unjust.

This is why the Parable of the Talents has always resonated in my heart: "What have you done, Ouimet, with the gifts I have given you?"

This basic question of an almost metaphysical nature, which he had been asking himself for years, is what drove Ouimet to seek out one of the major witnesses of our time, Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Why her? Well, the answer remains somewhat of a mystery, though perhaps we can hazard a guess. It may have to do with her decision to devote her life to the service of the poorest of the poor – that same segment of society to which Ouimet's heart

* The *Hautes Études Commerciales*, the renowned business school of the University of Montreal.

had always been especially sensitive. Though he admits that poverty, particularly absolute poverty, frightens him.

> Her smile and joy and her contact with the most vulnerable of people always struck me with wonder. I found that she loved precisely the people that I myself was striving to love to the best of my ability. And she was doing that while living the same great poverty in her personal life, something that I have never done on that material level. Something stirred deep inside me and I asked her the question that had haunted me since I was a little boy, the question that always led to the Parable of the Talents: "Why me and not someone else?"
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> I was convinced that she alone would be able to give me the answer for which I had been searching. I remember saying to myself, "She is taking care of the poorest of the poor; she must have answers that others cannot give."

Three requests at a meeting

With his usual drive and determination, Ouimet wrote to Mother Teresa. He told her who he was and described his life's journey and situation at the time. He closed the letter with several requests.

> I asked her three things in this order. The first was if I could participate in the daily Eucharist with her sisters at their central convent in Calcutta. The second request was if I could visit her projects, perhaps accompanied by one of her sisters, and see the work they were doing in Calcutta. The last was a request to speak to Mother Teresa in private, for I had a question to ask her. I set down these requests in a particular order, in the priority that I had given them in my mind.

> I did not receive an immediate answer, but some two and a half months later, my office in Montreal received a letter that had been sent by boat from Calcutta. I was in Tokyo at the time and my secretary read the letter to me over the phone. No. 1: the sisters will receive you; you can attend the Eucharist every day with them. No. 2: you can visit their work with a sister. No. 3: Mother Teresa will not be there.
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> I asked my secretary to immediately send out a telegram with the following reply: "I'll be there! No. 1: thank you. No. 2: thank you. Though Mother Teresa will not be there, I shall come anyway!"

Ouimet's flight from Tokyo arrived in Calcutta at night. The giant 747 circled the city, a vast area of black, lit only by a few lights. Despite the city's size and enormous population of some 15 million inhabitants, poverty had left the city practically engulfed in darkness.

He deplaned at 2 a.m. The airport was nearly deserted. The taxi he had wisely arranged drove him to a comfortable hotel. He asked the driver to return to pick him up three hours later, so that he could attend the 6 a.m. Mass at the convent of the Missionaries of Charity.

> In the horrifying noise that pervades Calcutta, even at the earliest hours of the morning, I drove across the city. The streets were dilapidated and teeming with throngs of people. The air was foul and polluted. I arrived at the convent and was pleasantly surprised to find a peaceful oasis. There were some two hundred sisters there; their average age was about thirty. They were seated on the ground, barefoot, in prayer before the Eucharist. I went in and, as is the custom in the East when entering holy places, I took off my shoes. The Mass started shortly

thereafter. It was phenomenal, truly beautiful, and I felt a deep contentment. Then came Communion, and it was only then that I caught sight of her as she stood up. I had been told that she would be absent. I was actually trembling with surprise and joy.

I took Communion and then, at the end of the Mass, I decided to stay in the chapel for a while longer. Afterwards, I went down to the waiting room and I decided that I'd just wait there. I would do nothing. I would ask for nothing. I'd just simply wait. Time passed and some thirty minutes later, a wonderful Missionary of Charity came up to me and asked: "Are you Mr. Ouimet? Mother Teresa would like to see you!"

The sister took me into a parlor that had a ceiling fan. Except for the sacristy, that was the only room in the convent that had one. I waited there, standing next to a very ordinary table covered with a plastic cloth. Then, abruptly, the door opened and she came in, a little woman, all bent over. But what an extraordinary smile she had! She said: "You wanted to see me?"

"Yes!" I answered.

"You said you had a question to ask me?"

"Yes," I said. And then went straight to the point.

"You can't give away everything you have.
It's only been loaned to you."

This is precisely how the conversation began. It is a conversation that Ouimet can hardly recount without experiencing great emotion, even though it took place more than 25 years ago. Such emotions seem incongruent with the cold rationalism expected from a successful business leader.

Ouimet pursued his conversation with Mother Teresa in a manner that is typical of the man. He was straightforward and un-

erring in his sense of the absolute and in his refusal of half measures and doubt. He spoke without hesitation or preambles.

> I simply said to Mother Teresa: "I have one question to ask you. Should I give away everything I have, Mother?"
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> She answered me clearly: "You can't give anything away. Nothing belongs to you. It has only been loaned to you. However, if you wish it, you can try to manage what the Lord has loaned to you... in His way... with Him. And if you attempt to do that, you will have to follow His order in your own life, an order where Love comes first. You're married; I am not. If you want to follow His hierarchy of Love, you must start with your married life and manage what He has loaned to you. You must place your wife as your first priority. She doesn't belong to you; she's been loaned to you by the Lord. And after your wife come your four children; they don't belong to you either, just loaned to you. And after your four children come the men and women you work with. They too are loaned to you, and you will have to account for them!"
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> She never spoke about the community, the city or the country, but only about "the men and women you work with," which at that time numbered nearly 400 people.
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> "And slowly, very slowly," Mother Teresa added, "You'll enlarge the circle of Love because the further you go, the easier it is to love."
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> Those words suited me just fine! I finally had my answer, the one I'd been searching for since I was a boy, watching my father develop his business and growing wealthier by the day.

> As for the Parable of the Talents, I finally had a clearer view of everything: "Loaned to you." Everything was in those words. "You can't give anything away; it's been loaned to you." That was the answer to my question. "Must I give away all that I have?" If she had said yes, I would have gone back to Montreal and done precisely that! There is no doubt about it, and she must have guessed as much.

In the end, what Mother Teresa proposed was a profound revolution, not one that required him to abandon everything, walk away from his responsibilities as the head of a company, and give up his material comfort.

It was a revolution in the etymological sense – a turnaround of one's point of view. Her proposal would entail a radical change in his priorities: "Your wife, your children, the people you work with." All that in the name of just one imperative: Christ's hierarchy of Love. But in order for this love to hold true, it would have to be orderly. And the order that it must obey is not a worldly order.

In accordance with this hierarchy of Love, what could be more natural than to immerse oneself in the service of others? As a business leader, what could be more honorable than to devote oneself to one's economic and social responsibilities, even to the extent of sacrificing all of one's free time and the quality of one's family life? Are the honors of the world not given precisely to those whose lives manifest such sacrifices? The logic of the Kingdom of God is not, however, that of this world.

> In April 1983, my wife, Myriam, was very far from being at the top of my priorities, and my children were even farther down the list. On the other hand, those with whom I worked were more or less at the top. Everything was upside down!

In that moment, everything for Ouimet had been placed right side up. Mother Teresa had spoken the essential. She then proposed to Ouimet that he come along with her to visit some of the projects of the Missionaries of Charity, just as he had requested. They began by visiting the house of the dying. This was always the first place Mother Teresa brought visitors because it was the first project she had founded in Calcutta. It was a "place to die," a refuge, where those who lived in the streets could spend the last moments of their lives.

> Then I saw this woman – with my own eyes – kiss the dying people in front of me. She kissed them and hugged them tightly. This was not for show; it was authentic love. And I saw the looks those people gave her, the raw emotions on their faces. Most of them were Hindus or Muslims; she was Catholic, but love transcended all the differences.

Then, they visited the lepers. It was a terrible and frightening experience and paradoxically, also a beautiful one. Some of those men and women were missing parts of their faces, or their limbs had been reduced to formless, rotting stumps. Despite their illness, they worked every day on weaving looms, retaining some of their dignity and contributing a little to the cost of their existence. Ouimet went with Mother Teresa to visit the lepers three times over a few days. Each time, he was so overpowered by the experience that he could not stay for the entire visit. They went to the house of the handicapped, an immense building housing several hundred people whose autonomy had been severely impaired.

> And each and every time I saw the same thing: the unconditional love, the hugging. I saw Christ's authentic welcoming. As she herself said, it was "in live action!" She was right there, in front of me. And her sisters did the same thing, nothing artificial, no condescen-

> sion, not trying to convert anyone. They simply loved those people. Love was the air they breathed. It was extraordinary.

One day they visited the "house of the prisoners." Authorized by the Indian government and run by the Missionaries of Charity, it is a house for women condemned to life imprisonment. Its purpose is to rehabilitate them without any police supervision or involvement. The project is a wonderful reflection of the confidence that the Ministry of Justice had in Mother Teresa. The confidence placed in the sisters is justified as not one woman has ever escaped. There are no guards around the house or inside it, just Mother Teresa's sisters.

> Now I was really afraid, more than I had been in any of the places that Mother Teresa had taken me. I was hiding behind the sisters! These women, who had committed murder and the worst atrocities imaginable! One could see their whole lives etched on their faces, and frankly, they scared me to death. It was in that moment that I experienced my frailty.

The final stop was at a center for little children who had been abandoned – some were pulled out from the garbage cans of Calcutta – and for whom the sisters manage to find adoptive families. The center emanates the simple joy of the children, their innocent faces, the sisters' affection.

> Mother Teresa told me: "We have many requests for adoption; we can handle more than 50,000!" She always said: "Bring us the children, and you will see; we will find places for them; there will be people to love them." The day was absolutely extraordinary, very tiring but one of the most memorable days of my entire life. It was Thursday, April 14, 1983.

"Don't try to manage, even with God, without praying a lot!"

After his experience with the women prisoners, Ouimet spent most of the days that followed in the convent, preferring its calm and serenity. Sensing his need for peace, Mother Teresa left him alone. He read the books she loaned him, but more often than not, he remained in the chapel for hours at a time, in silence. That was quite the feat, considering the incessant din of Calcutta, which even the convent walls could not keep out. Mother Teresa had his meals taken to him in the sacristy. He remained at the motherhouse from six in the morning until six at night.

> For a while, I simply watched the activities of the sisters. I soaked up their life. I experienced a sort of mysterious transmission, an osmosis of grace, a spiritual transfusion. I needed this for I was bone dry. I realized, in the end, that that was the reason I had come.
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> Once, Mother Teresa came to see me when I was alone in the chapel. I was sitting on the ground. She looked at me and said: "Are you not tired of being here?"
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> "I need this badly, Mother," I replied. "I cannot think of a better place to be. And I want to thank you so much for the privilege."

And it was an extraordinary privilege, especially watching the sisters at prayer. More than two hundred nuns, coming together five or six times a day, for ten to twenty minutes, filling the chapel with joyful hymns and songs. Another experience that filled Ouimet with happiness was the hour of adoration of the Blessed Sacrament, which began each evening at 5 p.m. Mother Teresa told him how this hour of adoration came to be.

During the first ten years of Mother Teresa's work in Calcutta, many of her fellow sisters suffered burnouts (to borrow a term from the business world). Constantly on the go, picking up

the castoffs of society and bringing them to the "dying house", the rhythm of life was beyond their human ability to cope. Too few in number and always overwhelmed by the scope of their mission of helping those dying in the streets, the sisters began succumbing one after the other to emotional collapse. Mother Teresa knew that something needed to be done. Should she reduce the workday by an hour? Perhaps let the sisters sleep more? Or could the answer be something else?

In the end, Mother Teresa finally decided the solution was to reduce their work in the street by one hour a day and to devote that time to adoration. That decision greatly inspired Ouimet.

> I said to myself that the Lord must have been moved by the choice the sisters made. If they had simply added an hour to their sleep, I do not think the Lord would have looked upon them quite so favorably. I think there would probably have been more burnouts.

Oddly enough, it was exactly at the time that Mother Teresa began devoting an hour to daily adoration that the number of new entrants to the Missionaries of Charity began to rise dramatically. This outcome, beyond all logic and human rationale, had to be the mysterious and undeniable fruit of adoration. When the end of his visit came, Mother Teresa accompanied Ouimet to the door of the convent. The door had a little sign, which indicated "Mother in" or "Mother out." Just before embracing him and bidding him farewell, she gave him a last piece of advice: "Do not try to manage with God without praying a lot; you won't be able to do it."

> The truth of her words struck me with tremendous force. I knew my human frailties all too well and, in the counsel she gave me, I grasped the size and scope of the mission she had laid out for me in just that one sentence. As a business leader, I must admit that I loved

its brevity and clarity. She had told me what my priorities of love had to be: my wife, my four children and my colleagues. And, if that wasn't enough, she left me with other truths by which to live my life. "You can't give anything away; it was never yours. It was loaned to you." And, "Don't try to manage in His way, with Him, without praying a lot. You will not be able to!" I left the convent at the end of that first trip, feeling like I had been extraordinarily blessed.

He went to the airport and boarded a plane back to Canada, sitting in first class, as usual. But something had changed within him. As the jet sped down the runway, he looked out the window and solemnly resolved that, from that moment on he would change the direction of his life.

Since she told me not to try setting my new course without praying, I went right to it. I said, "Lord, Mother told me to pray a lot; that without it I will not be able to manage what You have loaned me. I do not take issue with that, for I know myself too well. Lord, I know that I will have to make some monumental changes in my life in order to follow the three priorities of love that Mother spoke of. So, I want to tell You, Lord, that from this moment on, I shall go to Your Eucharist every day of my life. I commit myself to it." I didn't say, "I promise You," because I have broken so many promises to Him in the past. Instead I said, "I commit myself."

I'm certain that if I hadn't made that decision that day, and of course, had I not kept my word, I would never have tried to do what I have done. Since 1983, I have rarely missed the daily Eucharist and I can't remember a single time when I stayed in bed because I was tired. Not a single time! Today, I can state without

> equivocation that there is nothing more beautiful in my life than His Eucharist. And sometimes with, but often despite myself, it has made love blossom in my life. Everything else is secondary and pales in comparison.

Mother Teresa's management lesson

Since Ouimet's meeting with Mother Teresa in 1983, the motto, "Pray to manage with God," has appeared on all of the stationery and business documents of the Ouimet Group of companies. This motto sometimes surprises or causes consternation among the people who read it. Perhaps this is not surprising in the current culture, which is increasingly influenced by secularism and relativism. Nevertheless, Ouimet has remained committed to this motto and has not given in to the temptation to change it despite the hostility and criticism it provokes.

The motto makes it impossible to misunderstand the central mission Ouimet has set for his companies. It also accurately represents the unique business project that began with Ouimet's father, J.-René Ouimet.

Ouimet's father was the founder of the Ouimet Group and devoted himself to his thriving business. However, he was also a true Christian, fully committed to his faith.

Yet, the motto is only the tip of the iceberg. Beneath the surface is an elaborate management model and practice, based on Christian principles and Catholic social doctrine.

Ouimet's quest to integrate Christian ideals with the demanding requirements of the business world has driven him to adopt behavior which some might consider irrational.

There are people in positions of power who fail to achieve harmony in their lives. To justify themselves, they invoke Max Weber's philosophical argument – fallacious but so convenient – on the ethics of conviction and the ethics of responsibility. It goes something like this: there are certain values that I hold personally

(ethics of conviction) but the reality of exercising my responsibilities requires me to profess, in practice, other values (ethics of responsibility) even if they are opposed to the first.

Ouimet is not that kind of man. He did not hesitate to travel halfway around the world to ask a fundamental and existential question to the woman he knew was on the path to truth: how would she define a good Christian businessman? In a letter preserved in the company's small museum, Mother Teresa provides the answer in a perfect and clear simplicity that allows for no ambiguity: "You will be a good manager if you let Him use you, without consulting you!"

This is the radical proposition that Ouimet follows.

> I bear witness today, almost a quarter of a century later, that the Three: Father, Son and Spirit, have complete freedom to do what They will, without consulting me. I want to live everything with Them, without expecting Them to consult me in anything. That is the great lesson of Christian management that I received from Mother Teresa.

Mother Teresa's mark

One cannot overstate the effect that the Mother of Calcutta's poor has had on Ouimet and the businesses he directs. Every facet of these businesses carries Mother Teresa's mark, especially the "keystone," and several key human management tools, such as the testimonials, the prayer room, moments of silence before meetings and monthly support groups.*

* The different human management tools correspond to activities that occur in the workplace during work hours. They are described in Chapter 9.

> Mother Teresa's greatest impact on my poor, fragile life is an increasing almost visceral need for calm and inner silence. I now know through experience that this is the only way by which I can let the Lord come into me. It is the strength, the irreplaceable ingredient, the primacy of inner silence that leads to prayer, as Mother Teresa said, and not the reverse. Prayer doesn't lead to inner silence; inner silence leads to prayer.
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> All spiritual life, what I understand of it, begins with silence, calm, and serenity. God is the friend of silence, and silence leads to prayer. Prayer leads to faith; faith leads to love, compassion and the gift of self-awareness. Love leads to peace. And peace leads to silence. That is what I discovered with Mother Teresa in her convent in Calcutta. And that is what I've retained of her: the power, the distinct character of silence and prayer in the life of a human being.

Audiences attending Ouimet's lectures are always surprised because he begins with a prolonged silence. This practice, at first unsettling, elicits from the audience an unusual quality of listening. This is not a communicator's trick, for one feels that this silence is unquestionably full of meaning. The same holds true when you meet Ouimet in person. He most probably will invite you, as a prelude to conversation, to join him in a moment of silence and meditation. There is no doubt that the words exchanged afterward take on a special lucid intensity, as if you were invited to preside over the conversation with all your being, to be really present in it.

2

THE GIFTS RECEIVED

People both define and understand themselves by what they have received. In 1 Corinthians, St. Paul asks: "What do you have that you've not received?"

Ouimet is acutely aware of that question, and the answer is that he has received a great deal. He therefore feels that he owes very much. He has inherited material wealth, certainly, but also – and more importantly – moral, intellectual, and spiritual gifts, from his parents, teachers and professors and various spiritual advisers. To understand the man, we need to look first at the different aspects of this inheritance.

The only way to manage

Briefly stated, Ouimet owes his wealth to his parents, J.-René and Thérèse. He is not the founder of his business; he bought it from his father in 1965, the year he married. Perhaps this partially explains the embarrassment he admits he has always felt about the material comforts he enjoys. Because he did not, in fact, create wealth; he only inherited it. He cannot attribute his fortune, at least in the beginning, to any personal merit. Credit must go to the courage and determination of his hardworking father, who was willing to take the risks in founding the business that carries his name.

J.-René Ouimet studied commerce and began his career as an accountant in a cheese company. After five years, he asked the

managers to allow him to distribute their products as a subcontractor. Thus, in 1933, J.-René Ouimet Ltd. was born. He was a hard worker. He was thoughtful in his decisions and he was endowed with a great, natural authority. He was demanding, disciplined and a perfectionist. At the same time, he had a warm personality and possessed good skills as a communicator. He taught his son, by example, to always put human dignity first, to do his work well and to reach for excellence.

Being the beneficiary of such good fortune made a deep impression on the young J.-Robert Ouimet. It made him very aware that he was carrying a burden of debt and that awareness would forever shape his attitude about his wealth.

> From my father, I learned the values of courage, determination and wisdom; from my mother, faith and hope. I should also add gentleness, though I need to do more work in that area. My parents instilled these values in me, not by what they said, but by what they did. They were strong role models for me, very Christ-like, and I found it challenging to follow in their footsteps.

His mother also passed on to her son her love of prayer and silence.

> My mother was a woman of prayer and, though she never felt the need to talk about it, she had a deep inner life. To me, she radiated the presence of God, the presence of Christ. One story best illustrates this. There was a big snowstorm in the 1950s, and all the streets were completely blocked by snow. I remember her putting on skis to go to church. It wasn't even Sunday; it was a weekday. I asked her if I could go along with her and she said that I could. So I, too, put on my skis. We then went out into the snowstorm to St. Germain Parish in

> Outremont. When we got there, we found that we were the only ones in the church, along with the priest, of course. Looking back, it was for me proof of her need to receive the Lord. I believe that the most powerful inspiration comes not from people's words but from their actions. There is no doubt in my mind that my mother planted in me the need for silence, prayer and the Eucharist. What a gift!

Ouimet remembers that his parents usually attended Mass together on weekdays as well as on Sundays. This was especially true in the ten years prior to his mother's death. His parents also received the sacrament of Reconciliation regularly. His mother maintained a tradition brought over by the first immigrants from Brittany who, four centuries earlier, had settled in Quebec City and in Montreal. Every night, she blessed each of her three children by tracing a cross on their foreheads with her thumb. This silent ritual remains engraved in his memory. In the end, Ouimet considers that the greatest lesson his parents taught was that, as a business leader, teaching by example is the best and only way to manage your employees and your business.

The fundamentals of his father's business culture

Ouimet's father was a great inspiration to him. As the founder of the company, his father was a true entrepreneur. He had vision and drive. He was daring and took risks when opportunity knocked. For instance, during the 1930s, at the height of the Great Depression, he borrowed $2,000 to start a business. He was more than a good businessman. He was also a good man, generous, forthright and respectful of others.

> My father had a unique way in dealing with the people he worked with, which was authentically human, and it made a strong impression on me. That quality is what

> I remember most about him. I think other people recognized it in him as well. If J.-René told them, "I hold you in high regard," they didn't ask themselves what he meant by that; they knew exactly what he meant. There was also no ambiguity when he told them, "You're not doing your work well. I've already mentioned this to you. Things may get more complicated if this continues." As you can see, he didn't mince his words.

This is what the company's business culture was built on: human warmth, straight talk, integrity and pride in work well done. These same qualities formed the foundation which J.-Robert Ouimet would later build upon to develop his bold, innovative business model.

> There was a unifying theme in the culture of the organization founded by my father and that is still the bedrock of our business today. It is a business culture where human dignity comes first. Mind you, we didn't use these words back then – too scholarly, you see – but everyone would say: "People are important, not for productivity, but because each person is intrinsically valuable and precious." Once that had been said and affirmed, productivity took care of itself; it just naturally followed. People felt there was a concern for fairness and justice built into the company's very fiber. It wasn't there to safeguard the company or its officers against the law, in the sense that, "We must be honest because if we aren't, the law will come for us." There was never an official code of ethics written down anywhere but, in all of the years I worked during my father's time, I knew there was an unwritten code of ethics we had to follow, which sprung naturally from the founder, my father.

The miracle of confidence

J.-René Ouimet was a very understanding father. He encouraged his son to pursue higher studies in economics and management, a goal that he himself had been unable to realize. He could have been jealous or unsympathetic toward his son's tendency to study. Instead, he was just the opposite; he had total confidence in and support for his son.

> I always felt that from my father, even if he didn't verbalize it very often. I always felt his support, even in the darkest of times.

His father's confidence in him never wavered, especially during the two years young J.-Robert spent in the family business after his studies at the HEC.

> Most of my time there was spent in the sales and marketing department. I found the entire process of marketing food products very interesting. I made many mistakes at first, but my father never reproached me for them. Neither did he criticize my choice of the areas in the company that I was interested in learning about. On the contrary, he showed great wisdom by letting me choose my own path.

At the end of the two years, J.-Robert told his father that he wanted to return to the university and to pursue study in social and political science so as to better understand the human dimension of business management. His father, far from criticizing the idea, was most encouraging, even when he learned his son wanted to attend the University of Fribourg in Switzerland.

> My father was very surprised. He obviously realized that Fribourg wasn't just around the corner and that I'd be

> gone for a long while. Later, he confessed that he had been really afraid that I wouldn't come back to the family business; that I would become a professor or a priest instead. Nonetheless, he put his trust in me. He gave me a credit card and some money, and with it I bought a little convertible. Then, I went off and I worked really hard at the university. I can't take much credit for that, however, because I loved the entire experience.

Even though Ouimet turned out to be a brilliant student, he got off to a rather shaky start. When he was young, he was difficult and undisciplined and earned rather poor grades. He was expelled from several schools and colleges. Psychologists were at their wits' end to solve his case.

> I remember my parents' patience. I don't ever recall my father saying, "Listen, Robert, we need to sit down and discuss your behavior. This is very serious. It has to stop." At the time, I didn't have any ambitions or dreams. I suppose I was trying to find myself. I was aware that the psychologists were trying to understand me. Things in my life weren't working out the way they were supposed to. I also knew that my mother and father were concerned. I saw the terrible report cards come in one after the other. And I was served detentions nearly every Saturday and sometimes on Sunday for bad grades and breaking the rules. Nothing worked. I didn't correct my behavior. I was searching for my identity, and I wasn't finding anything. I had no values. That's what I lacked; I didn't know my reason for existing. I didn't see why I should work for anything at all. In short, I was a rebel.

This situation lasted until he was 16, when he was admitted to the Académie Querbes in Outremont, run by the Saint-Viateur

Brothers. There, he met an exceptional educator with a strange name – Brother Dieumegarde, which translates into English as "May God Keep Me." He taught the two final grades of high school at the academy. In him, Ouimet finally found a teacher who understood him and believed in him.

> Brother Dieumegarde was the catalyst for the change in my life. He had a welcoming spirit. I felt that he genuinely cared for me and had confidence in me. He told me: "Robert, you're capable of achieving anything, you really are." He was in authority and had absolute power, but he used the power gently, with love. Seeing that I wanted to study management at the HEC, he told me: "Of course you can do it." He spent a lot of time with me, asking me good questions that challenged me. He encouraged me to find good, solid answers. He was my guide. In my 11th year of studies, he told me: "I believe you can be the first in the class this year." I thought he was crazy. But it was during that 11th year that I began to do my homework regularly, hand it in on time, listen to the teachers, take notes and not get any more detentions. It was an incredible transformation, a 180-degree turnaround. I began to feel confident. I discovered that I was intelligent. In the 12th year, I graduated second in my class. It was really Brother Dieumegarde who made it possible for me to start down that long, winding road that led to today. Every day now, I pray for Brother Dieumegarde.

That is the miracle of believing in someone: love, when given unconditionally, can bring about a moment of self-revelation in a person's life and put them on a path that will lead them to their calling.

The Church, an expert in humanity

During his studies at the HEC and at Columbia University's Business School, Ouimet discovered that he was most influenced by certain professors with strong ideas. First, there was Roger Charbonneau, a business leader, management professor and the dean of the HEC. He was one of the first French-speaking Quebecers to receive a degree from Harvard University. He was spiritual and reflective; the very image of the business leader Ouimet aspired to be. He also made a strong argument that it was possible to be an efficient manager and at the same time strive for the well-being of one's employees. Charbonneau served on the board of directors of the Ouimet companies for ten years. During this time, he often encouraged Ouimet to develop his doctoral thesis.

> Roger Charbonneau was able to convince us that it was possible to run an organization in a more efficient manner, from a productivity point of view, while aiming for the personal development of the employees. He was the embodiment of that principle. By his handshake, his authenticity, his smile, his humanity, he communicated to us, his students, the extraordinary possibility of doing good by helping people become more and more efficient, including, if necessary, kicking some of them in the pants to stimulate them, to force them to reach beyond their comfort level. He was also a religious man, a man of prayer.
>
> Then, there was Frenchman Marcel Clément, a professor of Catholic social doctrine. He was a great friend of Marthe Robin, the founder of the Foyers de Charité in Chateau-neuf-de-Galaure in the French province of Drôme. After his time in Canada, having become the friend of Charles De Koninck and Bishop Maurice Dionne, both great Thomistic philosophers at the University of Laval, Clément returned to France in

the beginning of the 1960s to run the bimonthly journal *L'Homme Nouveau*. He later became known as one of the top scholars of the Catholic Church's social doctrine. When his brother André founded the Free Faculty of Comparative Philosophy at Paris, Marcel occupied the chair of moral and political philosophy.

His was the only course at HEC in which I received an A. I believe that the Lord touched me through Marcel Clément. He had a powerful intellect. He was a philosopher, economist, theologian, writer, management professor and a great witness to the Catholic faith. He communicated the belief that it is possible to manage an organization while using Catholic social doctrine. I was getting ready to take over my father's business, at his request, when in Professor Clément's course on the primacy of human dignity as the basis of social doctrine, I began to see the importance of authenticity in human communication as well as the primacy of prayer in people's lives so that, rather than becoming dehumanized, they could develop their spiritual nature. In the course, I discovered that it was possible to be an efficient administrator and manager and, at the same time, be true to the teachings of Jesus Christ.

In a certain sense, this course set the framework for me to understand what Mother Teresa would later tell me in April 1983 in answer to my question about whether I should give away everything I have.

Two professors, Buchi and Swartzfischer, who both taught courses about integrating management principles with Catholic social doctrine at the University of Fribourg, strongly influenced Ouimet's education. And finally, there is Charles Summer, the great professor of management at Columbia University's Business School, who Ouimet credits with having had the strongest

influence on him to become the manager he is today. It was the combined teachings of these professors that instilled in Ouimet the notion that it was possible to earn money, provide useful services to consumers, and give meaning to people's lives at work simultaneously. In brief, it was possible to be both a business leader, who is focused on developing his company and increasing its value for shareholders, and a true Christian who is dedicated to loving and serving the company's personnel and customers, whom he recognizes as his brothers and sisters.

His eminent professors taught him that Catholic social doctrine could help him to unite the two ideals. In the words of Pope Paul VI to the 1965 General Assembly of the United Nations, the Church is unique as "an expert in humanity." This "expertise" is what gives the Church the authority to propose principles for social and economic organization. They are principles that serve the advancement of humanity, in general, and the personal development of each person, in particular.

Acquiring a heart of flesh

Ouimet has always felt the need for the support and advice of spiritual advisers. In 1951, at the age of 17, he began his search for a priest that could advise him on how to live a more genuine Christian life.

> I've always felt the need for spiritual guidance, even as a little boy. That feeling came naturally to me. I always sought someone who could give me wise counsel. When we seek, we find. But in my case, it took a long time. In my 55 years of receiving spiritual guidance, I have seen four different priests who have spent time walking with me and counseling me. These meetings were often very challenging, for I felt that my progress was very slow. Even so, I was never discouraged. What is

> more, this inability to progress, except very gradually and over many years, succeeded in purifying me of my pride in being a successful business leader who could master many things. This spiritual guidance allowed me to realize that, at some deep and fundamental level, I needed the Lord.

As class president in 1953 at the HEC, Ouimet organized a retreat for his fellow students at the Benedictine Abbey in Saint-Benoît-du-Lac, Que. There, he met a priest named Dom Vidal, who would eventually help him "change his heart of stone into a heart of flesh." For the next thirty years, he would take a weekend retreat every two months or so. He would also meet with his spiritual advisers every month.

> I would see a priest and I'd tell him what was going on in my life, the good and the bad, on the human plane, but especially on the moral and spiritual planes. I would talk with him and ask him questions, and he would offer suggestions. We would discuss things, and then together, make a plan of action. We would see each other again in 15 days, sometimes a month or two months later, and then we would evaluate how the plan was working out.

He admits there was one aspect of the experience that he found trying.

> It's not easy to be constantly under spiritual supervision, because one's freedom is at stake. When you regularly see someone who is bound by secrecy, someone to whom you have to tell everything in regular, closely spaced intervals, it's both difficult and somewhat mortifying. But it burns away your pride. If you see this person once

a year, there's not much of a problem, because after a year, you'll probably forget almost everything you've discussed. But when you see your spiritual adviser every month or two, for three, four or five hours, one has a tendency to remember quite a lot.

I've tried to change many things in my life, in both the private and public arenas, in order to improve myself in things relating to faith and love and personal values. I've never succeeded – too much pride, greed, impurity, envy, gluttony, anger, laziness. Everyone has a thorn in their side, as St. Paul says in his letter. But I didn't have just one thorn, I had several. Certain ones are still with me today. It's difficult to talk about them again and again with your spiritual adviser. When you admit having fallen again and not succeeding, it's humbling. But this experience bears extraordinary fruit. When you say hundreds of times, "I didn't succeed," you realize that you alone cannot save yourself. It is indeed quite humiliating and difficult to admit one's failings to a priest in the secrecy of the sacrament of Reconciliation. It is also, however, quite beautiful to accept the truth. But there is no doubt that having a spiritual adviser forces you to a level of rigor that is particularly purifying for your sense of pride. The fruit of your labor is naturally commensurate with the degree of difficulty of the task, and I can bear witness to that, for it's taken me 55 years to discover that I'm really quite helpless without Christ Jesus.

My second spiritual adviser, Father Marc Roy, made me see that I can't save myself "with the strength of my own hands." I had to come to that realization gradually, little by little, and it purified me of pride. I discovered that you need Him by your side to achieve anything. I have found my more than fifty years of spiritual guid-

> ance a very challenging experience to live. However, as with everything in life, the things that take the longest to develop, to build up, to bring to fruition, are the most beautiful and the longest lasting. So the experience was both hard and beautiful.

Even today, as a septuagenarian, Ouimet meets regularly with his spiritual adviser, his fourth, Bishop André Gazaille, the auxiliary bishop of Montreal. Every few weeks, Ouimet receives the sacrament of Reconciliation. That is how, little by little, he is trying to develop a heart that is made "more of flesh and less of stone."

3

ONE VOCATION: BUSINESS LEADER, HUSBAND, FATHER

All of his life, Ouimet has been trying to answer as faithfully as he can the call that he feels deep in his heart, which is the mysterious and discreet sanctuary where God speaks to man. His call – his vocation in the truest meaning of the word – is to be a layman, a husband, a father and a business leader. Some consider it to be an abuse of the language to speak of a vocation when a person's life mission is non-priestly or non-monastic in nature. Or, if we accept the reality of a lay vocation, we view it as a pale shadow to a religious vocation, which some think is the only one that fully merits being called "a vocation." A lay vocation in the public sphere is often considered to be a second-class calling. The exceptions are those blessed with exceptional talents in the arts and politics. This is perhaps why if someone has even the slightest longing for a personal, spiritual life, it is immediately identified as a religious calling. This is what seems to have happened to Ouimet.

A boy many saw as a priest, a monk or a professor

> Many people, including my parents, thought I would become a priest one day. My maternal grandmother, from the Drouin side of the family, once told me she thought I was destined to become a priest and she fervently prayed for that. But I was certain this was

> not my calling. I knew I was supposed to be a father, a family man.

Many of his friends also thought he would join a religious order some day, and they had good reason. As a student at the HEC, he already had the unusual habit of spending a weekend, once every two months or so, in retreat at a monastery. The contemplative life of the Benedictine monks held a great deal of appeal for him, and he especially liked Saint-Benoît-du-Lac Abbey on Lake Memphremagog, which was a sister abbey of the great Saint Wandrille Abbey in France.

> I've been going to Saint-Benoît-du-Lac Abbey regularly since about the age of ten. One of my uncles had a house on the lake and he took me to the abbey to attend Mass whenever I visited him. Ever since 1953, when I was 19, I've been going to the abbey at least every two months or so. Even as a little boy, I was fascinated by and attracted to the life of the men I saw filing into the pews of the chapel; meditative, joyful, their faces serene as they sang those harmonious hymns. Those experiences sparked the rhythm of God in me, the pressing need that I feel more and more each day for the calm and inner silence that leads to prayer.

He spent his days at the monastery meditating on the Benedictine motto, *Ora et labora*, and reflecting on *The Rule of St. Benedict*, which was placed in each guest room. The book of precepts was frequently the subject of conversation with Dom Vidal, a monk and guest master of the abbey and Ouimet's first spiritual adviser.

> Pray and work; work and pray. As I gradually became aware that I would one day be called upon to take over from my father as CEO, the question of how to con-

> duct myself in business to avoid splitting my spiritual life from my work life weighed on me more and more heavily. I began to realize that work could and should be a form of silent prayer: *Ora et labora.*

Nonetheless, when anyone asked him if he ever thought of becoming a Benedictine monk, the answer always came back clearly, without a moment's hesitation.

> Never. I knew that monastic life was not for me. Ever since I was 15 or so, after two or three days at the Saint-Benoît-du-Lac Abbey, I always realized that it was not for me to stay there longer.

Ouimet's vocation is to be a man of action, but a man of action who is also passionate about wanting to live a spiritually meaningful and contemplative life. It is a striking paradox, but characteristic of this uncommon personality. Many also imagined him as a professor, starting with his father, who took notice of how much his son loved studying.

> After studying at the HEC, I worked two years at the factory with my father, not in production but in an administrative capacity. That was a wonderful time in my life. I would send reports to my father and we'd discuss them. He always gave me carte blanche, showing complete and wonderful confidence in me. At the end of the two years, I went to see him and told him that I was seriously thinking about going back to school. He wasn't surprised. So I went off to Fribourg and had the most wonderful time there. I worked hard and rarely went back home to Canada, even during the summers. During my time in Switzerland, I never went skiing once! Before returning home with my degree in social

and political science in hand, magna cum laude, I wrote to my father and told him that I wanted to speak with him about something important. He sent me a message in Switzerland, telling me to come home and that we'd go fishing in the Laurentians, north of Montreal, and discuss things. I hate fishing but I went anyway, and one evening at the fishing camp I told him: "During the two years I worked with you, I encountered challenges for which I had no answers. I feel that I need to pursue my studies further and find some of those answers. I just heard that I've been accepted into Columbia University in New York for an MBA. I've also been accepted at Harvard, but I prefer Columbia because it is in New York and that's the center for business and great companies. If you agree to give me another 18 months, I can start my studies in September."

It was the end of July. He looked at me, then he started to cry. "My son," he said, "I'm crying because I really thought you would become a priest or a professor, but if you want to do an MBA, that means you really want to be part of the business." To that I answered: "I've never wanted to do anything else. I've never felt the calling to be a priest. I feel I've been called upon to become a father, but of a family, not of a parish. I would consider it a privilege to come back to the business after Columbia and maybe I'll be better equipped than I am right now."

He was still crying and said: "I am so happy! Of course, you can go."

This is why those next 18 months of study were amazing. I was looking for answers to concrete problems I had encountered with organizational management, problems that were begging for solutions.

At the core of Ouimet's vocation was a desire to find fresh answers about the fundamental meaning of work and of man's place in the business environment. He felt the call to be a man of action, with a significant amount of time for introspection. Indeed, his action was nourished by reflection.

"I was born a leader."

Ouimet realized early in his studies at the HEC that his destiny was to head a company. During Holy Week 1953, at the age of 19, he made the somewhat unusual proposal to his peers that they all go on a retreat at Saint-Benoît-du-Lac Abbey. To his surprise, about 12 of his peers agreed.

The young Ouimet organized everything, down to the smallest detail, save one thing: he forgot to advise the guest master of the abbey. This proved to be only a momentary setback for the resourceful Ouimet. He resolved the lack of accommodations by gaining access to his uncle's house, which was located close to the abbey, by breaking one of the windows. He then proceeded to invite his friends to stay there.

The next day, Good Friday, Ouimet proposed to his friends that they go to the abbey to receive Confession from Dom Vidal, before attending the Good Friday service. They all agreed.

At the end of the day, Ouimet asked Dom Vidal if he could come back and see him on a regular basis. Dom Vidal agreed and he became Ouimet's first spiritual adviser.

> That retreat at Saint-Benoît-du-Lac was the first time I was able to organize people around a project. I saw that they liked the retreat and that they had no problem letting me run things. It gave me the confidence to be a leader. That exercise in managerial responsibilities was the beginning of a whole process of personal development for me.

An early vocation to marriage

Ouimet never once doubted that his calling was to marry and to have a family. This feeling was not based on a desire to marry, but rather on a spiritual certainty that this was his calling.

> Ever since I was ten or twelve years old, I knew that I would one day marry and that I should prepare myself for the role of a family man. I remember very well that right from that age, I began to say a Hail Mary each night, just one, not forty, faithfully, each night – asking the Virgin Mary to help and guide me, so that I would one day find the woman who was destined to be my wife. I was married about twenty years later, at the age of thirty.

These were not the thoughts and dreams of a pious child. It was rather a deep certainty that he had been called upon to marry and to have a family. Later, his choice of women companions was influenced by the awareness that one day he would have to fulfill many roles, including that of the CEO of a company. Knowing the destiny that awaited him, he spent time thinking about what he wanted in a life partner. It was clear that the woman with whom he would share his life would have to possess spiritual qualities, which he deemed necessary in order to face the challenges of being a CEO's wife.

> When I went out with a young woman, from about the second or third date on, I asked myself if she was the right one for me. And if the answer was unclear, or if I saw that there was some sort of problem – that she didn't have the spiritual qualities I needed, she wasn't maternal enough, she was too intellectual, she had too great an ego, she seemed too proud or vain, she liked material comfort too much – then I would stop seeing her. I didn't want to waste time. But the real reason

was that I wanted to be as honest and forthright with her as I could. And, no doubt, thanks to my daily Hail Mary and to my desire to be rigorously honest in my relationships with women, I never had sexual relations with any woman prior to being married.

"She's the woman for me!"

In 1965, Ouimet married Myriam Maes, a young woman born in 1935 in Tielt, Belgium, a small town 30 km southwest of Bruges. She was the daughter of a textile manufacturer, who was himself the son of an industrialist. Myriam's mother was also the daughter of an industrialist. As a child, Myriam lived in the family chateau and received a deeply Christian education from both her parents. She later attended the Faithful Virgin Institute in Brussels, a highly regarded Catholic school for Belgian girls from bourgeois and aristocratic backgrounds.

Early on, her father introduced her to the family business and she worked in various positions that allowed her to learn about the world of commerce and the complexity of organizations. She was, therefore, well prepared to study business management at the University of Louvain, where she completed a bachelor's degree in commerce and administration.

After graduation, she went to work for a Belgian ministry dealing with the Common Market, later to become the European Community. She first met Ouimet in 1962 at a meeting of the International Congress of Catholic Business Executives (UNIAPAC)* in Santiago, Chile. Myriam's father was initially scheduled to make a presentation. At the last moment, he fell ill and he asked his daughter to go in his place.

* UNIAPAC was the name for l'Union internationale des associations patronales chrétiennes, which is now called International Christian Union of Business Executives.

I arrived in Santiago, a few days after some of the other members of the congress. A chaplain of UNIAPAC, whom I knew, came to speak to me. "I've met a very fine young woman named Myriam Maes. She's with the Belgian delegation. I think you might do well to meet her."

Since I never really minded meeting a pretty young woman, I readily agreed. I asked him to introduce us if and when the opportunity presented itself. We eventually met and we saw each other at various times during conferences in Santiago and Buenos Aires. Finally, on our way home, during a flight from Rio to New York, a trip that took 12 hours, I asked a lady in the seat next to Myriam if she would mind changing places with me. The young lady agreed and, during the flight, Myriam and I talked together almost the entire time. By the time we reached New York, I knew that I had found the woman I had been searching for all my life. It was a case of spiritual intuition and rational conviction. All I knew was that she was the woman for me. We saw each other many times after that, and eventually we met each other's families in Canada and in Belgium. Finally, in the fall of 1964, Myriam, along with her spiritual adviser, Fr. X. Froidure, came with me to Saint-Benoît-du-Lac. Our two spiritual guides spoke together and I found it a fascinating experience. Five months afterwards, at Easter, we were engaged at Saint-Benoît-du-Lac. A few weeks later, we were married in Belgium. A short time afterwards, I bought my father's business. Then Myriam and I left on our memorable trip to the Holy Land. It was 1965, the year of great events.

Normally, people do not say much about the wives of company heads, unless the wives themselves are CEOs. It's the same with

the wives of politicians; people do not speak about them much unless they themselves are politicians. Upon reflection, this is a great injustice. Just think about the sacrifices and the self-denial required of the wife of a CEO, whose demanding schedule and myriad of responsibilities keep him quite unreasonably away from his family. Consider as well the benefits to a business that a wife's advice and support bring. Ouimet has seen for himself how difficult the demands on a CEO's wife have been on Myriam, and he is fully aware of the debt of gratitude he owes her.

> We've been married for more than forty years now and I have to admit that during the first twenty of those years, I did a rather poor job of reconciling my life as a CEO and my life as a husband and family man. I have to give all the credit to my wife. During those years, she assumed the tasks of running our home and attending to the education of our four children, who were born one after another over five years. I was often absent. And even when I was physically present, I was absorbed with thoughts about business. Today, when I ask my children about those early years, they tell me: "You were there, but you weren't really there." They recall that it was their mother who provided them with the emotional support and moral guidance they needed. That makes me feel badly, but it also purifies me of my pride and confirms my conviction that Myriam is the heart of both our marriage and our family. She holds everything together. She's really lived a life of sacrifice. She left Europe, her family, her friends; she gave up her professional life that was showing great promise. She devoted herself to my career and to our children's education. What a gift of love!

Though Myriam devoted herself primarily to managing the home and their children's education, she also found time to involve

herself with the family business. For instance, she was on the board of directors for nearly 15 years. During that time, she posed many good questions that challenged assumptions and generally had a positive input through her keen sense of management and economic issues. She put to good use her significant talent for social relations with the community by organizing important events that had a positive effect on the company's reputation. She also participated in the final interviews when hiring top-level managers; her remarkable intuition always proved to be correct. She was the perfect wife of a CEO – interested and helpful with the day-to-day operation of the business, while at the same time remaining perfectly discreet.

The grandeur of human love

Myriam and J.-Robert's successful marriage can be credited to their mutual belief in the absolute need for a man's unconditional respect for his wife and the woman's acceptance of her vocation as wife and mother. Ouimet took this ideal of human love from the famous work entitled *What God Has Joined Together*, by French author Gustave Thibon, whom he met in Montreal in the 1950s at one of his conferences. This book shaped the minds of generations of readers.

> I've almost memorized the entire book. What marvelous clarity. Gustave Thibon writes about everything that a couple needs for their relationship to work: absolute faithfulness, ever flowing mutual forgiveness, and especially, praying together. Without shared prayer, a couple won't last very long. Love, just by itself, won't endure through time.

Also influential in his life was the periodical *L'Anneau d'or* (The Golden Ring), edited by Fr. Henri Caffarel, founder of Équipes-Notre-Dame (Teams of Our Lady). The periodical reflects

the thoughts and ideas of the marriage movement that developed in Europe after World War II. Aside from his role as editor, Fr. Caffarel also founded a school of prayer, which he directed until his death.

Ouimet took his ideas about the grandeur and responsibilities of human love from these sources. These beliefs served as the foundation of his relationship with Myriam and helped them weather all the inevitable challenges of married and family life. When he and Myriam celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary and renewed their wedding vows, it was also a declaration of faith in the love they both share.

> It's not sexual or physical compatibility that makes a relationship successful. Making love can and must become an act of prayer; one of the most beautiful prayers there is, because from that prayer, life can spring forth. A human body is made to be offered to someone: a woman, a man or God. God lives in me and even though I'm a sinner, if I ask for His forgiveness, His presence will fill me even more. So my body is His body. He is my body; I am He. This is the fundamental truth of why we must respect our bodies. Sexual life before marriage makes us blind. It is probably the major reason why there is so much divorce. There is less resistance, less loyalty, less courage, less fidelity and, above all, less forgiveness. I'm convinced, independently of what the Catholic Church teaches, but with which I agree totally, even if it is demanding and difficult to follow, that the strength of love between two people is not based on sex. Sexual compatibility is beautiful and necessary, of course, but that's not what makes a marriage survive over the years. What make a marriage last are the human, moral and spiritual values that each person in the couple brings to

the relationship. Each partner decides in total freedom to treat the other with compassion, openness, attentive listening, courage, determination, faithfulness, and especially forgiveness. The core of marriage and of human love is the ability to forgive. That is the only thing that will make a marriage last through the years. The basis of human love is to truly love the other, to place the other's need before your own. It is not, "I love you because you are my type" or "I love you because you give me what I need." It's not that loving someone who gives you what you need is bad in itself. But true love is much more than that; it is the desire to make the other person happy.

Despite my limitations and my innumerable failings, even if our relationship, like every other human relationship, is imperfect, I believe that Myriam would say I've succeeded in making her happy, though probably more during the last 15 years than during the time before that. I can also state without hesitation that Myriam has made me happy. Such steadfast love, such an unconditional commitment of two people to each other, two people who have kept themselves separate from the other and yet, who have never stopped forgiving and praying together, that is what is so beautiful. It's what God wants.

Myriam's unconditional love

Even though he has always known that his wife supported him in his struggle, she never said so in many words. Gradually, the reason became clear. It was his wife, more than he, who had to endure the consequences of his convictions. His critics did not dare tell him to his face, so they subtly made their opinions known to his wife.

> It's true that she never thought it appropriate to say to me, "Do you know what you're trying to do in your public lectures is just fantastic?" or "Do you know that your project of incorporating Catholic social doctrine in the company is really wonderful?" That would've been great for my ego but I think I understand her reason now. Ever since we've been married, Myriam and I have been in contact with powerful political and business people. In those worlds, everyone knows that I'm a Christian and a practicing Catholic, and that I'm not afraid to make my convictions known. They know *Our Project* has a strong spiritual and religious dimension and that, when I'm attacked, I'm not one to mince my words. So Myriam often has to bear the brunt of the criticism, the aloof distance, the skepticism and elegant cynicism, and the acid comments. She became estranged from those who thought I was excessive or too committed or too eccentric. Those reactions are even stronger today, but the economic success of our companies has "sealed the lips" of those people. However, all that deeply hurt Myriam, and they continue to hurt her. She rarely complains, but that silent suffering over the years explains why she always kept her distance from what I was trying to do with *Our Project*, and so we didn't talk much about it.

Ouimet considers Myriam to be the most important gift the Lord has loaned him. She gave up her promising career and devoted her life to him and their four children, and he is profoundly aware of her sacrifice.

> Myriam, in a moment of discouragement, once told me, "I gave up my life for you and our children; I didn't think about myself." To that I replied, "Yes, that is true."

I, too, gave my life for Myriam and the children, but I had the rewards. She stayed in the shadows, suffering the backlash of *Our Project.*

Of all the heartfelt moments that he has known with Myriam, the one that still touches him the most deeply, and which he considers the proof of her great love, occurred at a time when he was caught in a downhill spiral of social drinking.

It was at the end of 1987. We had driven to our house on the lake near Magog for the weekend – Myriam, the four children, the maid, the dog, the cat and myself. When we got there on Friday night, I was still hung over from a bout of drinking the night before. After a few moments, I asked Myriam, "Would you come for a walk with me?" I wasn't thinking straight because my head was aching too much. The fact is that it was very cold, about 20° below. After ten minutes of walking, we began to get very cold. All of a sudden, Myriam stopped and took me by the arm. I fully expected her to take me to task. I knew I deserved it. Instead, she said to me, "Robert, I love you. I love you so very much."

That was all she said, but that was enough. I told myself that if she could still love me in my present state, then I owed it to her to get my act together.

A few days later, Myriam told me, "I recently met a specialist who deals with alcohol problems. If you want to go, he's willing to take you." She had told me that she loved me, without any conditions. What would have happened if she had not told me that? I really felt that Christ was speaking through her to me when she said "I love you!" So I called up the doctor and saw him six or seven times during a period of three months. He became a father and a brother to me, gentle and scientifically

rational. We analyzed my alcohol consumption and my social milieu. In the end, he told me, "In my opinion, the only solution for you is to stop drinking altogether."

That was January 14, 1988. When I left his office, I made the resolution to stop drinking. I have not consumed another drop of alcohol since then. If Myriam hadn't said, "I love you," I'm sure I wouldn't have been able to stop.

The sudden and radical elimination of alcohol may have contributed to a serious heart attack three months later, on Holy Saturday. It required quintuple bypass surgery. Again, Ouimet experienced his wife's unconditional love. During this period of crisis, Myriam was a model of devotion and generosity. "I really felt that she loved me and that she was afraid of losing me. It remains a very important and precious period of our married life."

4

CEO AND PH.D.

The doctoral thesis that Ouimet presented to the Faculty of Economics and Social Science at the University of Fribourg is an impressive work of more than 1,500 pages. He started writing it at the age of 54, and it took him nine and a half years of hard work to finish. His two co-directors and mentors, both from the University of Fribourg, were Maurice Villet, a graduate of Harvard University and a professor of economics, and Fr. Roger Berthouzoz, a professor of theology and ethics. It is hard to imagine how Ouimet found the time and energy to complete this monumental task while managing his companies. Considering the many responsibilities that weigh on a CEO's shoulders and the scholarly requirements of his doctoral thesis, the accomplishment is quite astonishing. Of course, his thesis, *New Management Tools for Companies: A Contribution to Human Happiness and Profitability. Practicing Humanization and Spiritualization Values in the Market Economy*, sprung from his experience as CEO. All the innovations he systematically carried out in the Ouimet companies since 1961 provided the scientific groundwork for the thesis. But beyond its scientific value, the work also shows that, with passion and determination, a business can successfully carry out the social doctrine of the Catholic Church in today's competitive market economy.

Ora et labora in the business world

The main ideas for Ouimet's thesis came from his lifelong association with the Benedictine monks. Ouimet estimates he has visited Saint-Benoît-du-Lac Monastery about 350 times since he first met Dom Vidal while on a retreat with his classmates during Holy Week 1953. He has always felt a special affinity for Benedictine life and spirituality, which seem to him to have the perfect balance between work and prayer. This ideal was wonderfully stated by the founder, St. Benedict – *Ora et labora* – pray and work. Over the years, this motto has been a constant source of reflection for Ouimet. If a Benedictine monk can achieve balance in a life organized around work and prayer so that these two facets, while remaining distinct, can intimately come together and become the core of his inner unity, is it not possible – mutatis mutandis – to live this ideal in the business world?

> As I visited the Benedictines and at the same time carried out my duties as CEO, the same niggling questions, intriguing and unrelenting, kept coming back to me: "How can we who are running companies, with all that it requires of us, keep ourselves from being torn between work and prayer? What can we do to make work part of our spiritual life?" These questions, imbedded deeply in my poor, fragile heart, led me to the decision to undertake a doctoral thesis on the subject: "How to live *Ora et labora* as a CEO in the arena of economic competition?" Or more precisely: "How to make one's work a prayer?"

In the shadow of the monks' prayer

During the numerous trips to Fribourg to meet with his two thesis directors, Ouimet took advantage of the opportunity to stay with the Cistercian monks at the Hauterive Monastery. The Cister-

cians – sometimes called the White Benedictines – take their name from the monastery of Cîteaux in France where, in the 11th century, a group of Benedictine monks decided to create a new community and live in even greater poverty. There, Ouimet felt right at home among the members of the great Benedictine family.

The monastery is located in a peaceful setting, on the banks of the Sarine River, some miles from Fribourg. These stays provided him with a calm and prayerful atmosphere that was imbued with the essence of the Benedictine motto. And it was precisely the spirit of this motto that he wanted to breathe into his businesses.

> I met with Professor Villet and Fr. Berthouzoz some 35 times at Hauterive Monastery. I had asked them if it was all right to meet at the monastery because I felt I could work better there. I always had the same room. I had my meals there. I went with the monks to Vespers and Compline and I joined them every day in the Eucharist. Occasionally, I would take a break to clear my head and I would walk along the banks of the Sarine River. Beyond that, I worked hard, day and night, and what's more, I loved it.

Two nights for an outline

The involvement of the two professors in his thesis was quite exceptional. During the nine and a half years that it took Ouimet to complete his thesis, Villet came to Montreal nine times. He visited the factories, met with the people in the company to get information, and he verified all the data. Fr. Berthouzoz was brought in at Villet's request, when it quickly became evident to him that the thesis did not just deal with economic matters but also with moral, philosophical and theological issues that required someone competent in those areas. And so it was that Fr. Berthouzoz also came to Montreal five times.

> I insisted that they come to Montreal because I wanted them to see with their own eyes that what I was telling them wasn't just a dream, but a reality. Over nine years, they saw for themselves the evolution and growth of human happiness in the company. They also saw the contradictions that faced us and understood the inherent problems in trying to implement a new program of management activities. Both of them became keenly interested in the adventure. That's why my thesis, little by little, became theirs as well. Perhaps that's why they both invested such an enormous amount of time, something quite out of the ordinary. With them, the work became much more than an act of intellectual cooperation. It took on a life of its own. We walked together like brothers. And at the end of each meeting, we meditated and prayed.

But the deep empathy that existed between Ouimet and his two thesis directors in no way kept the two professors from being extremely strict with their doctoral student. On the contrary, they were rather hard on him.

> I remember the day when Professor Villet and Fr. Roger completely demolished the thesis outline that I'd almost finished. We were in a monastery on Lake Geneva. We'd spent four days there working together. They were both very critical of the outline, but I felt they were acting out of affection, with their hearts as well as their minds. In one night, I rewrote the whole thesis outline and sent it to Montreal by fax to have it typed out and returned. The next morning I gave them the revised version. Once again, they blew it out of the water, turning it upside down. I wasn't discouraged but it was a terrible experience. I really took an intellectual

beating. Once again, I rewrote everything during the night. They liked the second version, finally.

Values in a feedback loop

An important turning point in the development of the thesis took place when Villet and Ouimet discovered the feedback loop of values, which became the paper's major scientific contribution. This system allowed the movement between the values and counter-values that are active in the workplace to be expressed according to a model.

> The breakthrough happened in Boston Harbor, when I was working with Professor Villet. We had been measuring the impact of several management activities in terms of value. We'd seen that these activities fostered different values. Some were complementary, others fostered values nearly identical to those of other activities. At the same time, we noticed that there were counter-values showing up in the workplace that were simply the consequences of the original sin that had damaged people's hearts and pushed them toward pride, greed, envy, anger, laziness, etc. But we couldn't integrate all that into a working model, into a coherent system. It must've been 2 a.m., and we'd been working since the previous morning, without interruption, except for meals. Both of us were exhausted. Then, Professor Villet took out a piece of white paper and drew a circle on it, then another one. He thought for a moment and then said, "Robert, it's a living whole. The values are in constant flux. They affect each other, reinforce each other, and complement each other. There are positive and negative values, and they are in opposition and collide. Then, new values appear, generated by other man-

> agement activities. All of these function in a feedback loop." It was a revelation. We had finally found a way to represent coherently and systematically the activity of the values fostered by the different management tools. These values collided with the counter values and those arising out of the contradictions and breakdowns.

In that moment of shared insight, everything became clear, and they saw an order emerging from the patterns. After having searched and agonized so much, they both felt a thrill of joy when the pieces of the puzzle finally fell into place. Ouimet and Villet had formed an indestructible and lifelong bond of heart and mind as the result of having overcome such a significant intellectual challenge together.

Ouimet relived those same emotions when, ten years after having defended his thesis, he returned to Fribourg to present his research and findings to the students of the Philanthropos Institute. As he began to speak, he caught sight of Villet walking into the hall and taking a seat in the last row. The man who had come to attend a lecture by his former student was the one who had so often said to Ouimet during those long years of research: "Don't give up, Robert! This management model is revolutionary. It can save the market economy."

From the rising of the sun

When he had completed the research and the fine-tuning of his thesis outline, Ouimet got set to write his dissertation, a fearful ordeal known to all doctoral candidates. In order to accomplish the task, he set himself a punishing schedule.

> I lived the last 18 months of writing the thesis, during the final corrections, at a hellish pace. Each day, six days a week, I went to the Opus Dei Center in Montreal. I've never been a member, but it was very close to the house

I was living in at the time. The people in charge gave me a very quiet room that looked out onto the forest, and there I worked without interruption from sunrise to about two in the afternoon. After that, I would go to my office, then afterwards to the tennis court. Let me tell you, did those balls ever fly! Then I went to Eucharist at 5 p.m. Afterwards, I returned to my office and continued to work until about eight or nine o'clock. The only things that allowed me to keep going at that pace were the sports and daily Eucharist, and the fact that Myriam never gave up on me during all that time. Even when I was at home, I was there only physically. During all those difficult years, even though I wasn't easy to be with, she never once gave up on me.

The consecration

This veritable saga finally came to a head in 1997, with the defense of his thesis before a review board at the University of Fribourg. Ouimet had asked for it to take place in the chamber closest to the university chapel. Ouimet defended his thesis successfully and obtained his doctorate, *magna cum laude.*

The thesis was well written and contained many good, innovative ideas. It described in detail a management system that made it possible for competitive businesses to incorporate the ideals of *Ora et labora.* It was a management system that had the power to transform all human work in any organization, with visionary leadership, into something beautiful. It could make us more human and nourish our spirits with higher values. It could help us to love and to respect each other a little more while enabling management to carry out their duties and fiscal responsibilities more efficiently. I knew it

> was possible that managers would ignore my ideas for twenty, fifty, or one hundred years, but I didn't care. My thesis established once and for all that a new and better business system was possible, even if it remained difficult to implement.

Therein lies the essential idea of Ouimet's doctoral thesis. He was not just content to incorporate the social doctrine of the Church into his companies; he also wanted to structure the experiment in such a way that it could be reproduced in any other business. This is what makes his thesis so important. The university's approval of his thesis did not simply grant him additional authority to talk about his project, as he had done so often already. It provided hard evidence that could be used to convince business leaders, whether they be Christian or not, that the principles of *Our Project* can work in their own companies.

The Ph.D. also legitimized his business model. The charge that it was just the crazy idea of some fanatic Catholic CEO could no longer be used to dismiss him. His management system was valid and verifiable. It could be applied to any business or organization that wanted their workers to realize their deepest aspirations. The title Doctor of Economics and Social Science, which is printed on his business cards and professional correspondence (not out of vanity, this we understand; it is not in his makeup), validates this central idea. The title of "Doctor" is meant to convey that the management system he devised, which can bring work more in line with the essential requirements of humanity, has been academically validated. And then – not for revenge against his critics but as a response – the title is also proof that someone can be a business leader and a practicing Catholic.

5

CROSSES AND JOYFUL MOMENTS

Ouimet's campaign to establish and to experiment patiently with the various components of human management, resulting in *Our Project*, strangely resembles the Way of the Cross. But a Way of the Cross lived with Christian faith and hope, is also a way of joy, as paradoxical as it seems.

CEOs and business leaders

His first ordeal was dealing with the way his peers perceived him. At best, they saw him as an idealist; at worst he was a religious crackpot. There were many seemingly good reasons to dismiss the validity of *Our Project*. Managing all the economic facets of a company is a terribly taxing experience that requires a lot of time and effort. So why impose more constraints by introducing new management activities that will have to be organized and managed?

> For the company directors, managers and stockholders, who attempt to live out their lives with a heart of flesh rather than a heart of stone, choosing between the two columns of *Our Project* (human well-being vs. economic efficiency) is often a challenging and wrenching task. They have to make decisions that will improve their workers' well-being and respect the demands of the market economy. This task requires from them an

uncompromising discipline. This discipline often has detrimental consequences that affect people's lives: factory closings, reorganizing, restructuring, and layoffs.

Balancing the needs of the two columns (human ISMA and economic ISMA)* therefore requires intelligence, wisdom and a lot of courage. The permanent tension between the two is extremely difficult to manage and quite exhausting. Even when the decisions have been made with intelligence, reflection, goodwill and prayer, you can never be sure that no mistakes have been made.

The bottom line is this: *Our Project* requires a great deal of confidence, faith and constant spiritual renewal in order to be able to accept the inherent risks. You must be able to say, "I have confidence in this. I believe in it and, therefore, I'm willing to take the risk." And the risks are real: not being understood and worse, and being legitimately accused of acting in contradiction to the values you profess. In brief, you have to be willing to become vulnerable. But few business leaders are capable of taking that risk.

The greatest requirement of *Our Project*, and the one that stops the best-intentioned business leader in his tracks, is acting counter to what has become the established social dogma today – secularism. This is why most economic and political leaders believe they cannot voice publicly their most deeply held personal convictions, especially if they are spiritual or religious in nature. In the end, *Our Project* calls into question this secular orthodoxy and it is the main reason that most business leaders and managers reproach Ouimet.

* ISMA = Integrated Systems of Management Activities. See pages 108-110 for a more detailed discussion.

> What they tell me – when they bring themselves to say it – is that faith and spiritual values have no place in the business world. It's not my role as CEO, so they say, to be involved in such matters. I should just be happy to live out these values in my private life. I should respect people and not interfere. They say I can be generous with my money and contribute to charitable causes but that's all. I think I make them afraid, even those that are the most Christian. They feel that I've gone too far, that I'm a little crazy. And yet, to succeed in establishing *Our Project* in a business or an organization, there have to be two or three loonies at the head of the organization who, without forgetting the unavoidable necessity of competitive profitability, decide together to take the risk for the love of people, not just counting on their own human strength, but on God's.

Foolishness! In the end are not all Christians exposed to that same accusation; especially those who want to live their lives in a radical and authentic Christian manner? Did not St. Paul declare in 1 Corinthians: "What in the eyes of the world is viewed as foolishness is what God has chosen to confuse the wise"?

Ouimet willingly accepts, both as a man and as a business leader, that what is considered foolishness in the eyes of men is really the wisdom of love for God. He remembers the enthusiasm that he and his team of directors and managers had when they embarked on the adventure of *Our Project*; they all shared that same "foolishness."

> During the first 15 years of implementing *Our Project*, our team used to go every month to the Dominicans on Côte-Sainte-Catherine Road for the Eucharist and to hear the wonderful sermons that only they can give. The experience gave our team a sense of brotherhood.

> It was a time of great tensions and conflict. Yet, at the same time, we saw many wonderful things take shape. We shared together; we prayed together. It was fantastic. If they hadn't been there with me, I don't think I would have had the strength to make it. What a wonderful sustenance and grace the Lord gave me to keep me from being discouraged. Since 2004, we get together every year. We're sort of a brotherhood now, like the disciples on the road to Emmaus. This monthly Eucharist at work is still going strong, right up to this very day.

Professors and management school students

There are numerous university professors who are afraid to teach spiritual values in their business management courses. The absence of such instruction contributes to the suffering in our society. The following story illustrates this.

> I once told the dean of a major Catholic business school in the United States, "If there is one business school anywhere in the United States that should be offering a course on spirituality in management, it's here, in your school." To that he answered, "That's quite impossible, Robert. We would lose students, and some professors would oppose it."
>
> I found his reply strange and I told to him, "Are you the dean of a major Catholic business school or not? If the school is really Catholic, why don't you offer your students what no other university presently does?" He did not answer. Ever since then, he hasn't wanted to speak to me. Perhaps I went too far.

There is another painful story about a field trip by a group of master's degree students in human resources from a major Parisian university, which demonstrates some of the same deep-rooted

skepticism that is so prevalent today. They had come to Montreal in 2007 to do a "case study" of the Ouimet businesses.

> Everything had been carefully organized for their arrival; the visit to our two factories and afterwards a reception at the Saint-Denis Club, with a buffet that cost us thousands of dollars. There were 130 students, along with their president. I perhaps might have stated some things too strongly. In any case, they reacted in a manner that was close to revolt, close to hatred, and perhaps showed too much pride. They were virulently critical of us. They said in France our numerous management activities would be considered a direct attack on the secular structure of their society and people's freedom. They said spiritual values have no place in the workplace; that people should be free to be whatever they want to be. They thought it was scandalous that we wanted to organize a spiritual system of human management and so on. The next day, no more than sixty students showed up. They were the ones who hadn't said anything the day before. The others, who didn't come, didn't even inform the president that they wouldn't show up. I found the experience both very painful and purifying. But the Lord had a joyful surprise waiting for me. At the end of that second day, some 15 students asked to speak with me individually in private. That's when I understood that something powerful had happened to them. Even if there had just been five or even two, it would have been enough since, according to Christ, one single person is worth the price of the whole universe. Just for them alone, the anguish I had experienced was worth it.

Despite the scorn and skepticism from some, the experiment carried out in the Ouimet Group of companies is now a

case study for students in several major universities and business schools: the IESE in Barcelona, the Opus Dei Business School, the George Washington Business School, the Fordham Business School in New York, St. Thomas University in Minneapolis, the Ivey Business School, with campuses in Toronto and London, Ontario, etc.

The list shows the growing interest of university management professors in the company's experiment to establish the principles of Catholic social doctrine in the workplace. If for nothing else, the experiment is exceptional because of its duration – nearly forty consecutive years – and also for the variety of activities that were tried and evaluated. George Enderley, a professor of business management at Notre Dame University Business School, said the experiment carried out in the Ouimet Group has no known equivalent today. This uniqueness is what is drawing the world's interest. Many business, political and university leaders, as well as organized groups (more than eighty so far) have requested to visit the Ouimet companies. As well, numerous invitations continue to be extended to Ouimet from universities, business schools, union and management organizations and businesses, especially in India, to speak about his management model.

Since he finished his doctoral studies, Ouimet has given 170 lectures in Europe, North America, the Middle East and Asia.* The lectures and the thousands of people he has met are a great joy to him, a joy that largely compensates for his anguish caused by the criticisms he has had to endure as a result of *Our Project*.

> When I see the look on their faces and how my words touch not only their minds but their hearts, I know

* J.-Robert Ouimet has given conferences in a number of universities and business schools in the United States, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, Quebec and Canada, as well as in numerous associations, institutions and companies throughout the world. (See list in Annex)

> they feel that there's truth in what I say. When I tell them that what's at stake in *Our Project* is the love and well-being of people through the authentic living out of human and spiritual values, then I feel joy and fulfillment as a business leader. I see in their faces the best confirmation that what we're trying to do is both true and just. And then nothing can stop me. I feel energized and focused. I feel ten years younger every time. My wife, Myriam, tells me more and more often that she can see that these lectures are doing me a lot of good. When I get back from a tour, instead of being exhausted, I'm bubbling with energy. My capacity for work is ten times greater!

In 2007, in what he considers a joyful and important vindication of his life's work, the MBA students at HEC in Montreal voted Ouimet the Mentor of the Century. The award was part of the festivities planned for the 100th anniversary of the founding of the prestigious business school. Prior to the vote, the students' association had asked its members to name a business leader who could best exemplify the school's ideal of entrepreneurship and to whom they looked for inspiration. Ouimet was given the award at an official ceremony at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal. The election was organized by the students, not the administration.

> I can't really say why they chose me. They could've picked the CEO of a large conglomerate, but instead they chose the head of a midsized company. I felt the award was a great honor, but the media took little notice of it. I could be wrong, but I think the reason for that was because of the special way I live my Catholic faith.

The attitude of the Church

A source of sadness for him is the apparent indifference of the Catholic Church in Canada to his company's innovative approach to its employees. This is hard to understand since *Our Project* is striving to apply what the Church has been inviting business leaders to put into practice for more than a century. It would certainly make more sense for the Church's leaders to show at least a little interest in this very uncommon experiment, which, by and large, promotes the same principles that the Church puts forth in its social doctrine.

> Cardinal Marc Ouellet is the only one who has ever asked about *Our Project*. I made the presentation to him and his staff. Afterwards, I never heard from him again. Three years ago, I had the opportunity of discussing *Our Project* with Cardinal Martino of the Justice and Peace Commission in Rome. At the end of our meeting, he very kindly signed and gave me a copy of the most recent edition of the Compendium on the social doctrine of the Church. Once again, there was no further contact or follow-up.
>
> I suppose I understand that these issues go over the heads of most bishops. It's simply not in the sphere of their immediate priorities. They are overwhelmed with other matters: world suffering and poverty, the steady erosion of church attendance, a considerably reduced number of young candidates for the priesthood, etc. I never had the privilege of presenting our management project to Pope John Paul II, but I'm certain that he would have understood, in less than five minutes, the complementary and cumulative effect of the activities of the human ISMA on the workplace, because he had worked in a factory and he had seen people living in

> misery. He would've immediately seen that what we were attempting to do was necessary. Cardinal Dziwisz, today the archbishop of Krakow, but formerly John Paul's personal secretary, confirmed that impression when I had the good fortune to meet him in 2008.

Aside from all that, there is great joy, comfort and strength in knowing that he can count on the spiritual cooperation of certain contemplative communities: Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta, the Benedictine Sisters at Sainte-Marie-des-Deux-Montagnes Monastery, north of Montreal, the Alliance in Trois-Rivières, and Marie Jeunesse in Sherbrooke. These communities are allies; they support *Our Project* through their prayers; they are present in spirit with the members of the board and management who celebrate the monthly Eucharist. Every member in this circle prays for each other.

The people working in the companies

Perhaps the most painful thing Ouimet endured was the mistrust and suspicion of the people in his companies. "Why's he doing that? What's his hidden agenda? Are we being had? Is he really impartial? Isn't he trying to get us involved with his Catholic faith?"

Admittedly, some errors were made. The lack of forethought in setting up the first prayer room near Ouimet's office, without consulting the employees, is discussed on pages 76 and 124. It took patience and perseverance to calm and reassure personnel that there was no hidden agenda to convert them and that the only objective was to help them to be happier at work.

> Let's look at our introduction of Testimonials, the first activity we put in place. It was inspired by prayer breakfasts and Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. It took eight

years of patience to convince the workers that they were really free to attend or not. They were afraid of being manipulated. They suspected us of wanting to "suck them in." If we weren't prayerful people, we would've given up because overcoming that resistance was really very hard.

Regardless, throughout the ordeal, Ouimet experienced some wonderful events, which felt like gifts from heaven.

It was a great joy when a board member said to me at the end of a meeting that had started with a moment of meditation and prayer, "Robert," he said, "that did me a lot of good!" Or when a woman who had a lot of responsibility in the organization told me, "Mr. Ouimet, you don't come to the factory very often; you should come." I asked her why, and she replied, "Well, because we love you." That was the only time in my life I had ever heard that. And that's just as well because pride is a dangerous thing. Another time, an upper level manager told me one day, "Mr. Ouimet, I'm not the same man I was five years ago when I first joined the company. I've become a better person and a happier one. I've grown in humanity, and in humility, and I owe it all to you."

I told him it wasn't because of me, but I cannot deny that it was a moment of joy and, like the others, it did me a lot of good, and I accepted them all with gratitude. It was like a wink from God, telling me not to give up. Then, there was another gift from heaven that I consider to be one of the most precious in my life. It was a handwritten letter from Mother Teresa addressed to Myriam and me, from Moscow, at the end of 1988, some months after her visit to our companies. She wrote, "I was so happy to be with you in your place of work.

The people I met, I could see their joy in loving each other, which comes from pure hearts in love with God. May you all preserve the joy of loving God within you and may you share that joy with everyone you meet."

The Lord was not obliged to send me those joyful gifts. So I just thank Him because it proves that we are trying to live and manage with Him. It shows that our efforts produce the fruit of love, that He is there, and that what we're doing is His business as well. When love grows at work, it's because God is present and interested in what we're doing. When love doesn't grow, it means that God is no longer there.

Rare but profoundly joyful moments

Has he had more difficult moments in his life than joyful ones? The answer is probably yes. But when Ouimet speaks about these challenging times, he points to the life of Christ.

It's true that the joyful moments are rare, but I don't complain. The Lord has always been so generous with me. I've often thought that Christ didn't have much joy in His earthly life. So I say to myself that if He didn't have much joy, He who was truth, generosity and absolute compassion, who am I to complain? Among the ten lepers He healed, there was only one who came back to thank Him. I pray to that leper every day because I'm certain that he gave Christ one of the most joyful moments in His life. In the Gospels, it's the only case I can remember where someone came back to thank Him. The joyful moments I've known in my life as a business leader have been rare, it's true; but I've not asked for any either. So I just thank the Lord for the ones I get, and since those moments have been so powerful,

when I consider them all together, I feel nothing can discourage me.

Jesus Christ is, now as always, Ouimet's only point of reference, his model, his daily companion and faithful friend, regardless of the adversities that life may throw his way.

6

A MAN WHO BELIEVES THE DEVIL EXISTS

Ouimet is a man who likes to cultivate paradoxes, even to the point of provocation. Standing out from the crowd does not scare him. On the contrary, he hates conformity with a passion. Perhaps that is why he is not afraid to let it be known that he believes that the devil, Satan, whom he calls "the loathsome one," exists. Ouimet believes this primarily because, at various times in his life, he has experienced the evil one's presence and activity. This is why the devil's existence to him is so obvious.

"He doesn't lie outright, but he doesn't tell everything!"

> Anything beautiful in my life comes from God. I freely accept that, and I experience it. We all have the ever-present freedom of choice, of going right when we know we should go left. We are free, not robots or slaves. But that freedom which God has given us has privileges and responsibilities. Exercising freedom means we can be tricked and blinded by things that go against God. For me, the devil exists.

One of the tricks the devil uses is to reveal only a part of the truth to us. That is his supreme cunning against which man's intelligence has no chance.

> The archenemy of God-Love always suggests a partial truth. It's in this manner that he tries to seduce us. Since

he's very cunning, he doesn't lie outright, but he doesn't tell the whole truth either; and it's by the "partial truth" that he deceives us.

"Pray less and be at home more"

When his wife reproached him for spending all of his time in prayer instead of being at home with his family, the ruse was all the more subtle because it was expressed by a voice that he trusted.

> Between 1980 and 1985, we experienced some marriage problems. Once or twice Myriam told me, "Pray less and stay at home more." That seemed to be quite reasonable to me. I was spending a lot of time in prayer, and I wasn't at home with those whom I should've loved above everything. I felt my prayer wasn't accomplishing much because it wasn't bearing any fruit. So the conclusion was that I just had to pray less. That was really a trick of the devil who used Myriam without her knowing it. I was being tempted to save myself without God's help. What was right about Myriam's reaction was that if my prayers were just, it would've produced the visible fruit of love, and she wasn't seeing any such fruit. Her conclusion, however, wasn't the correct one. Praying less wasn't the answer; praying better may have been, or praying for strength to remain at home more and to love those who needed to know that I cared for them. And there's the loathsome subtlety of God's adversary, the devil. He's hateful. He shows us the most horrible things, but wraps them up in such a seductive way that, without prayer, he'll fool us every time. Today, I don't hesitate for one second to say that if I had prayed less, not only would I have been away from home more, but I would not have stopped drinking. And I would've

definitely thrown myself into other things that were destructive to my marriage and to my life.

"Do you think you're God?"

The father of lies is also the father of pride and that is far more subtle than simple vanity. Vanity is a sort of swollen ego that people too often wrongly confuse with pride. In its most elaborate and pernicious forms, pride can easily disguise itself as humility. This is what Ouimet experienced in dealing with the sacrament of Reconciliation, until the day Fr. Marc Roy, his spiritual adviser at the time and one of the great Quebec theological figures of the 20th century, lovingly and firmly opened his eyes.

> From 1985 to 1990, I often asked to receive the sacrament of Reconciliation from Fr. Marc. I often laid on Christ's heart the very same failures to love. One day, at the end of a Confession, Fr. Marc asked me, "When you confess your sins to the Lord, are you absolutely certain that He'll forgive all your sins, especially the ones you repeat most often?"
>
> "Yes, Father," I answered without any hesitation. Fr. Marc went on, "Mr. Ouimet, how do you feel when you receive Christ's forgiveness in the sacrament?"
>
> I answered, "Father, I know that I've been forgiven, but deep down, I'm not happy with myself; I feel sad about having committed the same sins and suffering again the same inability to love."
>
> Fr. Marc answered me, "But you just said that Christ has forgiven you and that you're convinced that He has. So why do you still feel bad? Is it just because you've once again hurt the Lord?"
>
> That last question made me feel very uneasy. I felt that it was important that I answer him truthfully, so I

asked him if I could think about it until our next meeting. Three weeks later I told him, "Father, I found the reason why I feel guilty and ill at ease. I'm unhappy about not being able to control myself, of not being able to change. I can muster a lot of willpower towards many things but on this, I'm weak, and I don't like that. That's why I still feel guilty. It's very hard for me to admit it, but to a certain degree, I want to be able to save myself and eliminate by my own efforts my worst sins and my failures to love."

And then, Fr. Marc made himself very clear. "You've told me that you believed that the Lord forgave your repeated failures to love, and yet you still feel guilty. It must be that you don't really believe you've been forgiven. Who do you think you are? Is He the one who decides to forgive you, or are you the one who decides to forgive yourself? Are you the creator or the creature?"

At once, I understood the subtle truth of his words. Under the pretext of moving closer to perfection, I had been acting as if I were God. I had wanted to save myself on my own, and I was irritated that I wasn't succeeding. I understood that God had forgiven me, but I hadn't forgiven myself. Fr. Marc helped me to discover that pride in myself. This is how the devil works. Pride is the mark of "the loathsome one." Fr. Marc made me aware of it and helped me through an important stage of my life. The great lesson that I learned from him was that we don't save ourselves with the strength of our own hands.

Power is his kingdom

Ouimet is a man of power. He knows that and loves having power. He has always loved it, just as he has always known it.

However, he knows the fundamental ambiguity of power and the radical choices that confront everyone who has it: use it to serve others or use it to dominate and manipulate them.

> I know myself. I love power. Moreover, I don't believe there's anyone who doesn't like power. This is the way it has always been. The temptation in the Garden of Eden was the temptation of power. The devil's kingdom is most firmly established where there is the most concentration of power, in whatever form it takes. It can be economic or political, but also spiritual. Power is his kingdom.

As the sole stockholder, Ouimet wields absolute power in his companies. He knows that he is particularly vulnerable to the temptations to abuse that power, and he is very conscious of the entrapment of pride.

> I was born into a privileged life of power. I've never known what it means to be a subordinate. I had power because I was the only son. I have power now because I am the sole stockholder. In the end, it's a rather pleasant place to be. Anyone placed in this position has the luxury of being democratic, of consulting everyone, because there's no danger of being laid off. I'm speaking for myself, but I'm sure that what I'm saying goes for any human being. Power, especially absolute power, over time seduces you and gives you the impression of absolute invulnerability. Little by little, without even being aware of it, power makes you arrogant, overbearing, dominating, and finally, extremely self-centered.
>
> Power is the devil's favorite playground. Some people have a million dollars in a personal account. These new millionaires may tell themselves that there could be a

big crisis, and maybe it's prudent to have two million in reserve. They say that to themselves for the best of reasons. For example, they could be in a better position to protect the people they're responsible for. And "the loathsome one" subtly suggests, "Two million? Well, that's not really enough. You should try for five, because with that you could buy out one or the other of your competitors."

As you are reflecting on this, he suggests again, "But a $15 million reserve wouldn't be bad either because... and then 30 million." It's rare that what he suggests is not true. It is the most powerful temptation that produces blindness. And then power attracts flatterers. It's very difficult to resist the words of those who are always telling you that you're right, that you're doing just fine, because in the end it's very pleasant to hear that. Not seeing things clearly is one of the greatest risks of power. It took a lot of effort to find board directors that were able to resist me, to contradict me, to stand up to me, but with the Lord's help, I was successful. It's absolutely crucial, especially in a private business like ours, to have board members that are strong and independent people, concerned about the primacy of human dignity and with the various aspects of *Our Project*. What's more, on the economic level, this forces us to renew ourselves and to never think that we have a monopoly on wisdom. And this is one of the main reasons why, after seventy-five years, *Our Project* continues to be better and better and why our companies are financially and competitively on very solid ground.

The father of doubt and lies

During all the years of experimenting with the human management tools of *Our Project*, Ouimet has run across many of the enemy's underhanded tricks.

> In the moments of silence and prayer at the beginning and at the end of the meetings with the board or management committees, I found that I was the only one leading the meditation and that no one wanted to take over from me. I often asked myself if I was crazy; if I just wasn't trying to impose this practice on them; if my insistence wasn't just a subtly disguised form of pride; if I should just drop the practice or have it less frequently. I really felt that slowing down the pace was a wise and reasonable idea. "Let's slow it down a little. Let's wait. Do it at every other meeting in order to allow them time to...."
>
> Now on reflection, I'm sure that these thoughts came from the enemy, from "the loathsome one." Today, I'm absolutely convinced that if I had slowed down the process, I would have in the end abandoned it completely. The same thing can be said for the company motto that comes from Mother Teresa: "Pray to manage in God." It appears on the letterheads of all our companies' stationery. But at the beginning, it was only written in Latin, *Orare ad Gerendum in Deo*. The advantage was that most people did not understand what it meant. But several years later, no longer wanting to hide the meaning, I had it printed in French and in English. Then I had to deal with the reactions. "You're going too far.... We're talking too much about it.... We ought to go slower."
>
> I knew that it was the devil talking, and I am certain that I was right. Had we slowed down, we would have

given up, and that's what he wanted. For the prayer room, it was the opposite. I probably did go too fast with that. As Mother Teresa had told me to do, I installed the room two weeks after I returned from Calcutta. But I set up the room in the wrong place, and I did it without consultation or any sort of consensus, in an impulsive and heavy-handed manner. In that particular case, it's not impossible that the devil tricked me and pushed me into imprudent haste. Though we later corrected that faux pas, it took seven to ten years to correct the swarm of false interpretations that I described in detail in my doctoral thesis. This just shows that the devil is very cunning and intelligent. We can't hold our own against him with just our own human strength. I'm certain that he did everything possible to bring down *Our Project.* But so far, he hasn't succeeded.

The only way to beat the "loathsome one"

The only way to resist the devil is through an ever deepening spiritual life, seeking enlightenment through the help of spiritual guides, partaking every day the nourishment of the Eucharist, and the purification that comes from the sacrament of Reconciliation.

I know that if I'd prayed less, I would have increasingly become more and more loathsome. I would have become more and more self-centered, more and more manipulative. The more intelligent you are, the more you can subtly mask your manipulation. The answer is in the keystone, in the warning that Mother Teresa gave me in Calcutta in 1983: "Don't try to manage in God's way without praying a lot; you won't be able to."

In hindsight, when he looks back over all the years of struggling, he believes with increasing certainty that a force that was not his own lived inside him, a force that helped him, often despite himself, to fearlessly fight the enemy.

> The only thing in my life that has allowed me to resist the devil and to sniff out his traps was practicing the sacrament of Reconciliation regularly as well as receiving the Eucharist daily. It's the only way to break the back of that vile creature. The Eucharist is supported by the humility of the sacrament of Reconciliation, for the enemy of God understands nothing about humility. He stands completely on the side of pride. If the vile creature has not come to possess my life, if he has been unable to wreck the company's project, it's only because of the combined power of Confession and the Eucharist. I've only been a willing instrument for these two extraordinary sacraments.

7

THE EUCHARIST AND RECONCILIATION

Ouimet has never hesitated to identify himself as a Christian or to proclaim that fact publicly, even if it meant ruffling some feathers. But being a Christian for him is more than merely accepting the truths of his faith and defending them, though he has always done that, both when it was fashionable and easy to do and when it was not. He is a staunch believer in the ethical values that flow from this faith, especially those that are the underpinnings of the Church's social doctrine. These are the same values that *Our Project* has put into concrete practice.

Being a Christian, however, is much more and, at the same time, much simpler than that. It means believing in a person, Jesus Christ, the being who has always been the center of his life. The Jesus whose path he passionately followed during his numerous trips to the Holy Land, to the Sea of Galilee, to the Mount of the Beatitudes in Jerusalem, to the Mount of Olives on the way to the cross and to the resurrection.

> I've always had a need to know Him, to get close to Him, to find ways to better understand His life. What was He trying to tell us by His life, by His speeches, by His Beatitudes? How did He live His life, especially the three years when He chose a public role? For leaders and especially for me, His life from beginning to end is an example of humility. I've always felt deep down inside a need to know Him better. I can take no credit for that,

> for I consider it to be a grace that I've been receiving since my baptism. Still, today, I want to know Him better, to open my poor heart to Him even wider, so He'll come even more and become my best friend. I want to feel in my heart the same joy and profound peace that the disciples on the road to Emmaus experienced. That grace is a fabulous loan that I don't have the slightest chance of ever being able to repay.

Ouimet looks forward to receiving Jesus Christ each day in what he calls, using Mother Teresa's words, the "meal with Him." He lives the words posted in the sacristies of the Missionaries of Charity throughout the world: "Celebrate each Eucharist as if it were the first time, as if it were the last time, as if it were the only time."

It is through the sacrament of Reconciliation that Ouimet attempts to heal his wounded friendship with the Lord Jesus. His life of faith revolves around three axes: the guidance of a spiritual mentor, the partaking of the Eucharist on a daily basis, and the frequent and regular participation in the sacrament of Reconciliation. His faith, which is above all love, brings him an intimate closeness with the Three of the Divine Trinity. It is from this well of love that he draws his energy and strength.

A long love story

Ouimet's love of the Eucharist goes back a long way. He took his First Communion at the age of seven. The Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus and Mary showed him how to properly receive Jesus and explained to him the sanctifying grace of Communion. Since then, the Eucharist has always seemed natural to him, a matter of simple faith. For him, Christ's presence in the Eucharist was never an issue that needed to be rationally examined or questioned. He had the example of his mother, who received Communion daily,

and of Brother Dieumegarde, whose devotion to the Eucharist had impressed him so deeply. He also had the example of his first spiritual father, Dom Vidal, and the other monks of Saint-Benoît-du-Lac Monastery, whose daily lives revolved around the Mass. The great care and joy exhibited by the monks during the Mass would mark him forever.

Ouimet has only missed Sunday Mass two or three times in his life. It has never been an obligation for him, but rather a longing for an intimate privileged experience with God made flesh. During his studies at the University of Fribourg, and then at Columbia University, his participation in the Eucharist increased to two or three times a week. The more he received the Body of Christ, the greater was his need to receive it.

> I rarely went to the Eucharist on Sunday because I had to. I believe I can count on one hand the number of times I went because the Church made it obligatory. On the contrary, I always liked going to Mass because I felt that it was an important meeting with the Lord and I would hear His Word. And it is crucial to hear His Word over and over again, because in time, it begins to sink in. This is my experience: we absorb the Word of God little by little. So, quietly, through the exercise of my freedom, precisely because I didn't go to Mass because I had to, God's Word sank in.

From the Upper Room to Calcutta

Two events marked Ouimet profoundly, changing his view of the Eucharist.

> The first, the one that started me on the path of what I would call the slow growth of intimacy, occurred when I visited the Upper Room in Jerusalem during my first

> trip to the Holy Land. When I saw where the sacrament of the Eucharist first took place, and when I read the texts for Holy Thursday, I experienced the reality of the Eucharist as a real and intimate meeting with Jesus, my best friend.

His growth continued, plunging him ever deeper into the mystery of love that is revealed through the Eucharist. This growth process prepared him for the next moment of exceptional grace, a kind of spiritual electric shock, which occurred when he saw Mother Teresa and her sisters commune with the Body of Christ in Calcutta, during their first meeting in 1983.

> It was as if an electric switch had been turned on, lighting up my perception of the Eucharist, allowing me to see the sacred grandeur of what was happening. It came when I saw Mother Teresa praying at the Eucharist. It was a very solemn event for her. When for the first time I saw her pray, go to Communion, and then come back with her head bent over in the shape of a question mark, I knew that she was totally concentrating on Him. And the two hundred sisters, from twenty-five to thirty years of age, were all doing the same thing, with the same phenomenal respect, in total simplicity, without any big gestures or complicated movements, just sitting on the ground, barefoot. That was a very intense experience. It was obvious that for each sister, this was the most important moment of the day, the moment of complete intimacy with Christ.

A founding act of faith

Ouimet first experienced the full force of the Eucharist while he was president of the Montreal Prayer Breakfasts. These meetings would later become the inspiration for the meetings of inner silence and prayer that he would introduce in his company.

Prayer Breakfasts first began in the 1950s during the Korean War, when General Eisenhower was president of the United States. Senators, state representatives, diplomats and various American political and economic leaders would gather once a year in the Washington Hilton Hotel to hear a speech from a guest speaker. Since that time, the idea has spread around the world. Today, Prayer Breakfasts take place in hundreds of cities on every continent. There is usually a lot of pomp and ceremony surrounding them. Prestigious venues, a table of honor, eloquent introductions, music – everything is choreographed.

Several years after becoming president of the Montreal Prayer Breakfasts, Ouimet proposed a change to the other two people who were in charge of the event: Jacques Dupuis, his father's former business partner, and Jean Drapeau, then mayor of Montreal.

> I asked them this question: "If we put aside the past and what is valid and beautiful in other places where the Prayer Breakfasts take place, do you think that perhaps here in Montreal, the whole affair needs more humility?"
>
> They answered "yes" and so we decided to do away with the table of honor, the introductions and the applause. We also lowered the lights during the event so as to encourage a calm and relaxing atmosphere among the participants. And then I felt that, even though there was a prayer at the beginning and at the end of the meetings, something crucial was missing. So I asked them what they thought of having the Eucharist at the beginning of the meetings. They thought if we introduced Mass

> some people would not want to come anymore. But we decided to go ahead with the idea anyway, for the Eucharist was really the pinnacle of the Church's prayer. If these were intended to be prayer meetings, they would have to include the Eucharist. So we had Eucharist at the beginning of the meetings at 6:30 a.m. We lost some people who were afraid, and that was understandable. Others were happy to come at 7:30 a.m., after the Eucharist, and they were free, of course, to do so. And then, some who hadn't come before began to come.

During his thirty years as president of the Montreal Prayer and Inner Silence Meetings, no fewer than 22,000 people participated at the breakfasts, held at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel. They came to pray and to hear numerous authentic witnesses of faith. Among the attendees were Jean Vanier, the founder of L'Arche; Jeanne Sauvé, a Governor General of Canada; Abbé Pierre, the founder of the Emmaus Communities; Martin Gray, André Frossard, Jacques le Breton, many important business leaders, politicians, university rectors, faculty deans, and, of course, Mother Teresa of Calcutta. More than 2,200 people showed up that day to hear her.

> It was phenomenal. I remember it like it was yesterday. There were probably twenty-five TV, radio and newspaper journalists present. They hadn't been invited but they had obviously heard about Mother Teresa coming to speak, and so they came anyway. I really didn't know what to do because normally journalists aren't invited to Prayer Breakfasts, wherever they take place in the world. So I said to them: "I'm speaking to the journalists who are here and who are our good friends. Of course, you're free to do whatever you want. We welcome you to stay for the whole conference if you want to, but we

> ask you – we even plead with you – not to publish anything. Keep what you hear in your heart and do with it what you want. You have a choice. You can stay and publish; we will not stop you. Or you can stay and not publish and we'll be very grateful. Or you can leave the hall before it begins. We thank you very much for your understanding." Nothing was published, and, as far as I know, no one left.

Ouimet is convinced that the success of the Montreal Prayer and Inner Silence Meetings, as well as the benefits accrued from them, were due to the introduction of the Eucharist. This is something he has often said to the board of directors of the Prayer Meetings.

> I've told them at least twenty times: "You know, as founder of the Prayer Meetings, I feel I can tell you this, if we're still going strong today, I want you to know that it has nothing to do with me, even if I have devoted a lot of time and effort to the meetings. Furthermore, I do not believe that it has anything to do with you either, even if you're all doing wonderful things. The reason is the Eucharist, which each of us wanted to include at the beginning of the meetings. The Eucharist at the Prayer and Inner Silence Meetings has been a source of constant strength for all of us. We've worked very hard, but it's the Trinity in the Eucharist that has really been the motor and our one constant support. Since the beginning of *Our Project*, the Eucharist has been its heart, its one and only foundation. The credit cannot be given to my father, the founder, or to me or to our management teams. That has to go exclusively to the Eucharist and to the Three. They had no other choice than to act and to indicate if they agreed with the project. If they

> didn't agree with it, they had all the power to kill it, and that can still happen at any moment. But it hasn't yet happened, not so far. On the contrary."

"Deep down inside, I need it!"

The striking thing about Ouimet is his strong love of the Eucharist, a love that can even be described as "carnal," a kind of vital need.

> People often say to me, "It's very good of you to go to the Eucharist every day." To that I answer: "Don't tell me that. It's not wonderful. I simply need it; it's a deep-seated need for me. I can't say anything more or say it any better. It's a calling. I feel that He's waiting for me all the time. I feel Him, and I have nothing to do with it. And if I answer the call, I still have nothing to do with it because I need it. I need Him; I need to receive Him in my poor heart. So for me, it's not an effort to go to the Eucharist every day. It would be an effort not to go."

Following that first meeting with Mother Teresa, Ouimet made a decision to receive Jesus through the Eucharist every day of his life. Since then, it's been a moment of daily intimacy with Him, becoming truer and more intense by the day.

> For twenty-five years now, I've not missed the daily Eucharist unless circumstances made it impossible for me to go. Even if I was tired, exhausted, distracted, occupied with business affairs, good weather or bad, none of it made a difference, I went just the same. And when I missed a time, it was because it was either absolutely impossible for me to go or because it was an

act of love toward a loved one that I felt I had to make. In doing so, I acted according to the advice my spiritual father Fr. Marc Roy gave me. "At those moments, never hesitate. You'll see the person who needs you as your daily Eucharist." So today, I can testify to the fact that almost despite myself, but always with my willingness, my intimacy with the Lord has grown greatly. It is now constant. I do everything with the Three. It's simply marvelous. Nonetheless, I still regularly check with my spiritual father on the authenticity of this constant intimacy so as to avoid the traps of pride and illusion.

Intimacy with "the Three"

Ouimet speaks quite freely about the sense of intimacy he feels with the divine Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – when he recites his daily prayer, a prayer that manifests his total commitment as well as his absolute confidence.

> Thank You, Father Lord. Thank You, Abba. Thank You, Dad. What a privilege. Thank You, Lord Jesus. Thank You, Lord our Brother. Thank You, Lord my Brother. What a privilege. Thank You, Spirit of Love. Thank You, Holy Spirit. Thank You, Spirit of the Father and the Son. Thank You, all Three of You, between the present moment and eternity, for accepting that everything I look at, I look at with You Three, as a foursome. Everything that I listen to, may I listen to it with You Three, as a foursome. Everything I feel, may I feel it with You Three. Everything that I touch, may I touch it with You Three. Everything I say or don't say, may it be said or not said with You Three. Everything I think or write, may it be with You Three. Everything that I live, may it be with You Three. The only thing

> I want to do is continue to do my best to make all the unimaginable gifts You have loaned me bear fruit, but with You Three, as a foursome. And know, the Three of You, that I'm not asking You for anything. You have loaned me much too much. Also, I'm not asking You for anything because I have total confidence in You Three. So why should I ask for anything at all? I only want to thank You for letting me live everything with You Three. I'll do my best for You Three. I will, almost certainly, fall occasionally but with You Three, I will get up. You can add whatever You want or take back whatever You want, without restrictions: life, health, intelligence, Myriam, the four children, material, intellectual, moral or spiritual wealth. I do not set any limits on You, for I have confidence in You Three. If there's anyone in creation who is only seeking what is good for me, it is You Three. So, after You have added this or taken back that, I know that I'll learn from You Three how to live in the new, unknown and unforeseeable situation. Yes, I have an absolute confidence in You Three. Thank You, thank You, and thank You again for giving me this total confidence in You Three, which can only be an exceptional grace.

For Ouimet, the Eucharist leads to intimacy with the Trinity. As the Three Persons of the Trinity are united together in a total communion of love and together form one single God, receiving Christ in the Eucharist is like being absorbed into the very intimacy of the divine Trinity. Little by little, it is no longer we who act, but God in us. St. Paul says it wonderfully: "I live, but it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

> It works and it's fantastic and, as a good manager, I think I can tell you why. Being a manager means del-

egating tasks to a person or to groups of people, either because you don't have the time to do them yourself or because the people involved are more competent than you are. So as a good manager, that is what I do with the Three. Since They are more competent that I am, I don't need to ask Them anything. They will choose what's best for me. These days I don't ask Them for anything anymore. I'm happy to thank Them for everything, even for the painful times. More and more, I see what the Eucharist truly is: living everything with Them, together as a foursome. More and more, I see myself say or do things, and I know very well that it didn't come from me because it's not like me. Most of the time, it's too beautiful. It's me but not me. It's me but with the Three. In any case, I no longer want to do anything without the Three. Even my sins, I want to commit them with the Three. I don't want to associate Them with my sins, of course, but since I want to live everything with the Three of Them, absolutely everything, so, well, I'm committing fewer sins than before.

From forgiveness received to forgiveness requested

Just as he has always been devoted to the Eucharist, Ouimet has always been a faithful participant in the sacrament of Reconciliation. And even when it went against the spirit and practices of the times, he does not hesitate to profess the deep link between Reconciliation and the Eucharist.

I've always been convinced that I personally encounter Christ in the sacrament of Reconciliation. He's the one I go to meet when I go to Confession; He's the one I talk to. Even if I speak to the priest, I am speaking through him to Christ. I've always been filled with the

unshakable certainty that if I meet Him, He'll forgive me. I've never doubted that for a single second, even in those rare times when I really didn't feel like going. Even during the blackest years of my life, when I seriously failed to love, over and over again, I was sure that He'd forgive me, if I made a new effort "to get over it." I never waited to go to Confession after a serious failure to love. Since the first time I went to receive this sacrament at Mont-Jésus-Marie School before my first Communion, I must've received it more than 1,000 times. And Christ has never gotten tired of forgiving me. In my heart, I say to Him, "Lord Jesus, you know what I did. Do you forgive again, even if it's been just two weeks since I told you the same thing? Even if it was only five days ago? Can I have a fresh start with you?"

He sees the poor person that I am, bowed low, knowing that I'm fragile. I know that His answer will always be unconditionally "yes." It's like Peter who wept and wept after his three betrayals. Christ not only forgave him but five weeks later, after His resurrection, He confirmed Peter as the head of His Church. I find Christ's action so hopeful. The Lord is never discouraged. There's no end to His forgiveness, that is, as long as one repents his sin and is sorry for his failures to love. One needs to want to try again, to love better. The intrinsic duality of Reconciliation and the Eucharist is for me obvious. I'm no theologian and I don't understand much about theology, but I'm sure that the two things go together; asking Him to embrace me in His forgiveness and then receiving Him. And what have I gotten out of it? A constant intimacy with Him, one that has not been of my own making. And what a gift that has been! What an extraordinary privilege! I do not care why He's given more to me than to others. That's

His concern, not mine. Though I do feel unworthy, I nonetheless accept the gift with joy.

Today I've come to realize that my weaknesses are my strengths. My sins and failures to love have systematically and regularly pounded my pride into dust. That awareness has convinced me that I can't save myself by the strength of my own hands.

Receiving forgiveness from God, forgiving others and asking forgiveness of others are only small steps. But they represent a spiritual breakthrough that allowed God to enact in Ouimet's companies what some judged to be bold and others insanely imprudent innovations. These actions demonstrate Ouimet's gung-ho temperament, his no-half-measures personality.

Washing someone's feet, as Christ did with His disciples on Holy Thursday, means forgiving and loving unconditionally. This act is especially meaningful when one realizes that Christ knew that one of His disciples was about to betray Him and that the rest of them would run away. In 2003, I wanted to announce something very important to the company's personnel. On that occasion, I wanted to wash the feet of the three most senior people in the company. I asked for advice and was told, "It's too much. It'll scare them."

But I sort of like things that are "too much." I prayed over the matter and had an inspiration. I asked the three most senior people to come to the front of the room with me, and I said to everyone: "I've been with you since January 1961. You've put up with me. I've made a lot of mistakes but I've done my best. I've hurt many people, often without intending to, but they were hurt just the same. So I'm going to ask forgiveness from the three people among you who have the most seniority,

and through them, I'll ask forgiveness from each one of you for anything I ever done to cause you pain."

I took each of the three, one by one, not all together. That would've been too easy. No, one by one. I looked them straight in the eye, but I didn't use the familiar form of address:* "I ask your forgiveness, your personal forgiveness, and through you, the forgiveness of all those who are here with us now and those who've left us, forgiveness for the numerous times since January 1961 when I've caused you pain. I'd like to try to make things up to you, and I need your forgiveness. Will you forgive me?"

They answered "yes" in a solemn voice and I felt it was a total reconciliation, like Holy Thursday. This is a fruit of work with the Three. Was it hard to do? In truth, not really. The Three helped me through the experience. Besides, I loved each of the people there that day very much, even if my love for them was imperfect. I needed them to forgive me, the same way the Lord always forgives me.

But, in the end, asking forgiveness from our close relations is most difficult because it is the most humbling. It is often easier to love our brothers and sisters who are far away, than to love people very close to us. It is also easier to ask for forgiveness from those with whom we are less intimate with than from those who know everything about us. And yet, precisely because they are the people closest to us, the wounds that we inflict on them are deeper, and that is why their forgiveness is all the more necessary.

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* *"Je les ai regardés dans les yeux, je ne les ai pas tutoyés et je leur ai dit:..."* French, like German, Spanish, and other languages, but not like English, has two forms for *you*. One is formal and respectful, for more distant, professional relationships, *vous*, and the other is familiar and folksy, for more intimate, family relationships, *tu*. Here the author addresses the three workers with the formal and respectful *vous*.

I've asked Myriam to forgive me about a dozen times in the last ten years, for one thing or another. I've also asked for forgiveness from my four children, individually, for pain I've caused them. I just said to them: "Some weeks or months ago, on such and such an occasion, I caused you pain. I need your forgiveness. I'm going to try to do better and not make the same mistake again. I will try never to inflict on you the same suffering and pain."

Each time, to my immense joy, Myriam and my four children gave me their forgiveness. It's an extraordinary experience, but one that is very difficult to live through. Only Christ, who is by my side, can share with me the difficult moment of asking for the forgiveness of people close to me. But the experience is also wonderful in that it is very much like the forgiveness we receive from Christ in the sacrament of Reconciliation. It's an experience that moves us a little closer to the humility and unconditional love of Christ, who, in the Eucharist, decided madly enough, to enter into the hearts and bodies of people by offering His own flesh and blood. I, for one, am wild with joy that Christ, along with His Father and Their Spirit, made that decision.

Following the little Thérèse

The result of this increasingly deeper and ever-constant closeness with the Divine Trinity is trust in Them. It also creates a peace in Ouimet that is quite different from his naturally energetic and forceful character.

I increasingly feel a constant inner peace, and it doesn't come from me because I don't have a peaceful spirit. My temperament is such that I always find that things don't

> move fast enough, that one must always move forward and change things. So the peace that I feel can only come from Them. "I leave you my peace. I give you my peace." What is this peace? To be in a state of inner calm under the volcano! I am a volcano and I believe that I will remain so until the day He calls me back to Him. It's in my nature, but despite my darn character, I'm at peace. I feel a confidence and an inner calm that is today constant, except in very rare and exceptional circumstances. I've always been careful to check this out with my spiritual father – for fifteen years, Fr. Jacques Leclerc, a saintly priest that the Lord recently called back to Himself – and now with Bishop Gazaille, to make sure I haven't "lost my senses" or been suffering from brilliantly disguised pride.

He also believes strongly in the inner peace that Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, his most important spiritual guide, invites people to embrace. He has absolute confidence in that peace, which is the key to the "little path" to saintliness about which the Little Flower of Jesus spoke. He draws the core elements of his spiritual meditation from her. He also relies on a short book by Fr. Jean Lafrance, *My Vocation Is Love*. Fr. Marc Roy recommended it to him one day, and Ouimet has always packed it in his suitcase when he travels ever since.

> I say that the best way to manage my life is to delegate everything to Them, while doing my best, of course, but with Them. And because I know that They are more capable than I am, I say to Them, "Add what You want. Take away what You want. I'm confident, but I want to do my best with You Three. And even my errors, I want to make them with You Three. For You will transform them. I want to live everything with You Three. Ev-

erything, everything, everything, and for all eternity. If You so desire."

I wish I could say like Saint Thérèse, "I want to spend my Heaven doing good on earth." But I'm not saintly enough for that. All I can say is, "I want to live every moment with You Three, until the end of eternity. I'll gladly do whatever You Three want. Anything." The Three choose everything so well, even the times of suffering. Someone once asked me, "When you say you're willing to completely accept God's will in everything, if you lost all your earthly wealth, would you really accept that?" My answer is that the only thing I'm certain about is that the Three will never mislead me. If They take away everything that I have, that means They have something else in mind for me. So, I'll be glad to live through that suffering with Them. Of course, I don't know what it means to have nothing, but with Them, I could learn. Am I afraid of that? No, I'm not afraid. I can't be scared when I know that They are ready to do everything and to live everything with me. I'm probably crazy but I've always had confidence in Them, total and unconditional confidence. And it works very well. The fruit of this confidence is peace, inner calm and joy.





Exceptional moment: J.-Robert Ouimet receives personal greetings and the Benediction from Pope Benedict XVI, Wednesday, October 3, 2012 in St. Peter's Square.





Renowned Saint-Benoît-du-Lac Benedictine Monastery on the edge of Memphremagog Lake in Quebec, Canada. J.-Robert Ouimet started to visit regularly the monastery in 1953.



J.-Robert Ouimet and Mother Teresa.



Dr. J.-Robert Ouimet receives an honorary doctorate on June 13, 2009, at Laval University in Quebec City.
First row, from left to right: Mrs. Monique Richer, General Secretary; Mr. Michel L'Espérance, General Secretary of the University of Montreal; Dr. J.-Robert Ouimet and Mrs. Myriam Ouimet, his wife; Dr. Denis Brière, Rector of Laval University.
Second row: Dom Minier of Saint-Benoît-du-Lac Monastery; Mr. Jacques Racine of the Theology Faculty, Laval University; and Mr. Marc Pelchat, Dean of Laval University.

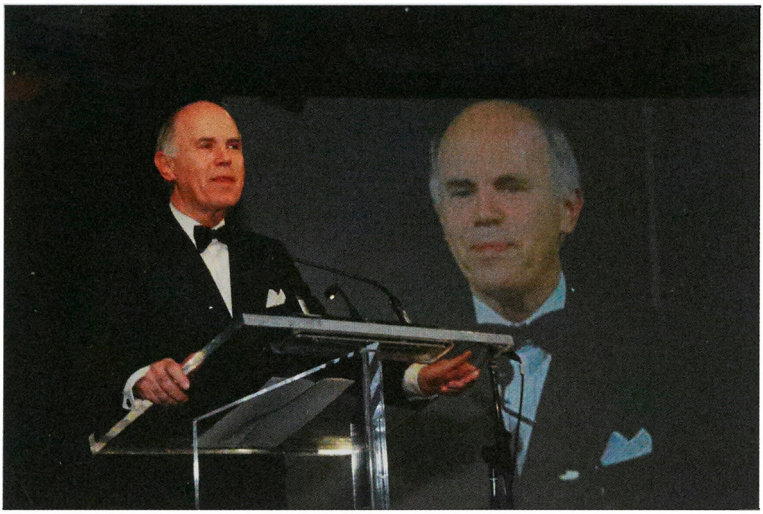


During the ceremony, June 13, 2009, at Laval University in Quebec City, from left to right: Mrs. Monique Richer, General Secretary; Cardinal Marc Ouellet, Archbishop of Quebec City; Dr. J.-Robert Ouimet and Dr. Denis Brière, Rector of Laval University.

Gala - Paix et Joie - Peace and Joy - in Montreal on October 2, 2008.
Celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the Ouimet-Cordon Bleu-Paris Pâté-Clark Foods Group.



Mrs. Myriam Ouimet and Mr. J.-Robert Ouimet, C.M., C.Q., Ph.D., Ph.h.c., MBA, B.Com., M.Pol.Sc.



Mr. Tom P. D'Aquino, O.C., LLB, Former President and Chief Executive of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives (CCCO) at the time of the 75th Anniversary.

Gala - Paix et Joie - Peace and Joy - in Montreal on October 2, 2008.
Celebration of the 75th Anniversary of the Ouimet-Cordon Bleu-Paris Pâté-Clark Foods Group.



His Imperial and Royal Highness
Archduke Rudolf of Austria



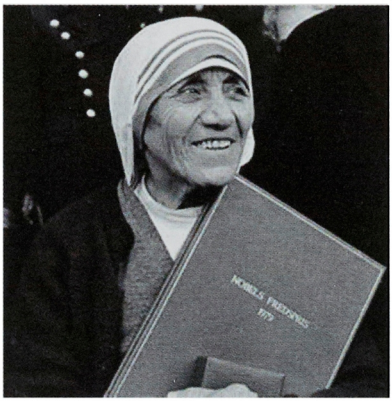
J.-Robert Ouimet was invited to visit, with Mother Teresa, the House of the Dying while he was in Calcutta in April 1983, and on two more occasions.



Encounter of Mother Teresa with J.-Robert Ouimet and his daughter Marie-Diane at Laval University.



Mother Teresa visits the employees of the Cordon Bleu plant in Anjou, Montreal in 1986. She saw the first silence room, which she had suggested to Ouimet in 1985 in Calcutta. At the left of the photograph is Mr. J.-Robert Ouimet. She also met Mr. Émile Chiz, Vice President of Research and Development, and Quality Control, and Mr. Bernard Fortin, Corporate Vice President of Finance and Investment.



Mother Teresa receiving the Nobel Prize in 1979.

8

THE SOURCES OF *OUR PROJECT*

In business circles, the concept of a *company project* is well known. Often it is used as a simple, external communications device intended to promote the company's image to future partners. Sometimes, it is an internal communications tool aimed at increasing employee motivation by instilling in them a common objective. In rare instances, however, it is intended to express the company's ultimate *raison d'être* and thus to show its true identity. In the Ouimet Group of companies, the company project is in this latter category.

A Code Name

In the Ouimet companies, *Our Project* is the code name given in 1990 to the original and continually updated document that defines the various responsibilities of the company and its personnel. In the beginning, in the mid-1970s, this document was originally entitled *Our Mission*, but there were some who thought that the name had too much of a "missionary" flavor and they decided to change it. The document stated that the company had responsibilities to God, the creator of the universe, as well as to society, including the company personnel and their families, customers, suppliers, managers and directors, the union, members of the board and shareholders.

More than just a simple charter, this document recognizes that the first priority of working people is to earn money for their

livelihood, thus bringing security and happiness to their families and friends. The second priority, however, is to contribute to the company's economic well-being, for it is only by being profitable that the business can provide job security and financial support for all employees. Beyond these two items, *Our Project* sets down an ultimate goal: to participate in and to contribute to God's creation. *Our Project* does not hesitate to affirm that "it is necessary for all who work in the company, in their own ways, to put more and more silence and prayer into their lives." By treating their workers with fairness and respect, and by promoting silence, reflection and prayer throughout the company, it is believed that this will create an atmosphere of love, forgiveness and well-being among all employees.

This mission statement bears Ouimet's stamp. It expresses his unique ideas about business and the economy at large. It reflects his belief that business in general, and his company in particular, should exist to serve people.

> There is friction, continuous and constant, and even conflict, apparent or real, between the drive for sustainable economic growth, with all the decisions that it entails on the one hand, and the individual and collective happiness of people on the other. That is why our main purpose is to create an atmosphere in the workplace that encourages silence, reflection and, for those who are interested, silent and personal prayer at work. Without that, the constant struggle between the drive for economic growth and the ideal of promoting people's happiness will lead to conflict and to all of the woes we have studied in economic and social history. That is the cornerstone of our company project. Nothing else.
>
> And today, in the Ouimet-Cordon Bleu-Tomasso Group, if we find that we care for each other a little more than we did five or ten years ago, and if our profitability

> has also improved during those same years, it is because during that time there has also been an equal growth in silence, reflection, serenity and, for those who wanted it, prayer. Even though this growth has often taken place in small and discreet ways, it is still nonetheless very precious. If *Our Project* has contributed anything of significance to philosophy or economic and social policies, it will be because we have shown proof of the correlation between the growth of silence, reflection, serenity and silent prayer in the daily life of an economic organization on the one hand, and the growth of productivity and efficiency in the search for profits on the other.

It is clear that *Our Project* is almost a declaration of the faith and convictions to which Ouimet has dedicated his life. But if it is indeed a profession of faith, it is not just an affirmation of some "loony visionary," who is cut off from the harsh realities of business and the many restraints that the market forces. The history of *Our Project* shows that the ideas have been in development for a long time. It clearly bears witness to the fact that these ideas are based on sound social and economic principles, which were the subject of Ouimet's doctoral thesis.

The beginning of the dream

After completing his studies in Montreal and at the universities of Fribourg and Columbia, Ouimet began working for his father's company in the early 1960s. At that particular juncture in his life, he had not yet formulated a definite plan for his future. He says he only wanted to continue in his father's footsteps, giving priority to working people while striving for the company's economic growth. Even at that time, he had a dream of reconciling the company's economic prosperity with the happiness and material security of his employees regardless of their place in the

company structure. He had attained this insight in the summer of 1953, while working in his father's factory. He loved the work passionately, even when he was required to do the hard tasks, such as cleaning the large boiler, which produced the steam used to cook and sterilize products. He would go down into the boiler, where it was very hot, and clean out the tar residue. Even though he was the boss' son, he worked as hard as anyone there. His coworkers grew to appreciate his friendship and accepted him into their ranks. He enjoyed the solidarity and brotherhood that he developed with his coworkers.

The experience of working at the so-called "bottom of the ladder" instilled in him both respect and affection for the working class, and he recognized that they were often the most vulnerable in society. From that awareness sprung a burning desire to make the workplace kinder and gentler.

> It was the first time in my life that I was conscious of being surrounded by people who thought highly of me, even though I had power over them. They saw that I was happy to do their work and that I was no different from them. I remember the looks in their eyes when they saw me take on the hardest tasks. I couldn't help thinking that work had meaning for everyone in the company, at all levels, including those at the bottom of the corporate ladder, working in the factories and warehouses or driving trucks.

Marketing has a soul

Ouimet also learned that marketing is not just a technique for increasing profits; it can also be used to better serve the consumer. This led him to see the company's mission in a new light.

I began to see the company's role as serving people, and that meant we had to make products that were not only nutritionally superior but also affordable when compared with those of our competitors. I realized that all our products were intended for the people we were committed to serve and respect. So not only were our employees valuable but so were our consumers. That made me see that marketing, new product development, and quality control all had an importance that went far beyond dollars and cents. In short, I realized that we were making products for beings that God inhabited and loved. That's when I began to see that this concept could make us unique as a company and give us a natural advantage over our competitors. Furthermore, such a conviction would lead to a special spiritual strength, which could help the company develop great new products that would have greater intrinsic consumer value.

Viewing things in this way means infusing the concept of soul into the process of marketing. Marketing can be managed in the manner of Jesus Christ. All of the departments in the company – quality control, research and development, strategic planning, human development, finances and accounting, marketing of new products, withdrawal of old products – everything can be managed in the manner of Jesus Christ.

So it is possible to give management and the quest for profits and economic efficiency a higher meaning and human, moral, spiritual and religious dimensions. It can all be done in a climate that respects the freedom of everyone. In brief, it is possible to do everything as a service to people, as a service of co-creation with God.

"Stop talking about it; just do it!"

Ouimet always had a deep desire to follow the social doctrine of the Catholic Church ever since Marcel Clément introduced him to it during his studies at the HEC in Montreal. The core concepts of the doctrine would be realized later in *Our Project.*

> In 1965, after being married and working for four years at various jobs in the company, I bought my father's business. I decided I wanted to live out the social doctrine of the Catholic Church, with all my frailties but with all my heart, to the best of my ability. I wanted to discover for myself how it was possible to instill Catholic social doctrine into one's daily life; how I could live out faith, hope, love, prayer and the Eucharist at work and how this could be done in an atmosphere of healthy and total freedom, both individually and collectively. And even though I couldn't have expressed it as clearly as I just did, I had the will to carry out this kind of program in 1965.

Catholic social doctrine was first set down by Pope Leo XIII in 1891 in his encyclical *Rerum Novarum.* In the years that followed, Pope Leo's successors regularly developed the concept further in their own encyclicals. Ouimet knows the history behind the development of the doctrine. He is convinced that it was founded on solid principles and that it has universal applicability because it is based on what is most common in human nature. From this point of view, one can consider it the universal wisdom of action.

> Everyone interested in human happiness and economic affairs would do well to read the various documents published by the Catholic Church over the span of a century. Whether they be atheists, agnostics, strong or weak believers, whatever their religion or philosophical

> tradition, I believe they would greatly profit from it. No other religion or philosophy in human history has ever published such a masterly compilation on the philosophy and technique of living in a social and economic environment.

But what is really important to him is putting this doctrine into practice and finding ways to make it a reality in the actual day-to-day life of his business. He deplores the fact that so many business leaders are content just to talk about the doctrine without indicating how they plan to live it out concretely.

> I remember very well a congress of UNIAPAC in Lucerne, Switzerland, in June 1959. It was during my studies in economics and social science at Fribourg. I had heard many remarkable business leaders speak, especially one called Leon Bekaert, who at the time was a very important industrialist from the Benelux countries. Bekaert spoke about how they tried to negotiate with the unions, how they tried to be fairer and more just. He made frequent reference to many wonderful principles based on Catholic social doctrine. Driving back from Lucerne to Fribourg, I remember saying to myself: "We have to find a simple and practical way to put all that into practice. We have to stop talking about it and just do it, in actual fact, every day, in our daily life. We have to find small, practical ways that, when added together, will make it possible to manage a company more and more in the manner of Jesus Christ. More today than yesterday, this year more than last." I have to admit that I've never met a business leader – I don't say there are none, but only that I've never met any – who can describe a management model capable of putting the Church's social doctrine into day-to-day

> practice. And yet, that is the goal: to stop talking about it and to put it into practice, to live out social doctrine on a day-to-day basis.

Ouimet's passion is to find ways of putting the grand principles of the Church's social doctrine – regarding the dignity of the human being and the meaning of human work – into practice, imbedding them into the very fabric of the company's daily routine. It is this obsession that drove him to experiment with the very simple concepts in *Our Project*. These activities were tested and evaluated and their results were scientifically quantified. Many errors were made at the beginning but they were corrected, so that after forty years of experimentation, it is possible to say that the activities put into practice in the framework of the human management tools of *Our Project* correspond to a process, to a concrete and valid model, that has been verified by two sorts of biennial, scientific studies. One study deals with the organizational state of the company and the other analyzes the values fostered by the specific activities of person-centered management.

This process model can be put into practice in many companies, with certain adjustments that allow for each company's particular situation. It is not a system of ideas; rather, it is instead a system model for action.

The "Fifth Gospel"

At a deeper, almost mystical level, the source of *Our Project* lies in the numerous trips that Ouimet took to the Holy Land. There were sixteen trips in all, the first in 1958 when he was studying in Fribourg. It was in the Holy Land that he discovered the humanity and extraordinary humility of God in Jesus Christ. He discovered that Christ is not an abstract idea but a presence at his side, like an intimate friend who is with you each day through the Eucharist.

It was in the Holy Land that Ouimet felt Christ's presence on earth. He saw the actual places where Christ had lived, suffered and loved. This experience anchored the presence of Christ in his life. It became impossible for him to imagine living without Christ's real and concrete presence, without having Him by his side.

> When I look back on those sixteen visits to the Holy Land, visits that are really quite phenomenally "Fifth Gospel," it is obvious that this is where Christ slowly and patiently groomed me. He moved closer to me, slowly. I was not the one who moved closer to Him; I'm not capable of doing that. He's the one who came closer to me. He's quite a listener; He is so compassionate. He is someone very extraordinary, an extraordinary God, who yet is human. The result of all my trips is that I feel Him physically and concretely present, more than ever. He is a constant presence in every moment of my life, even during those times that are not very nice. It is a phenomenal grace, for which I had never asked, because I would've never believed it was possible to attain. In the Holy Land, I can truly say that I discovered my best friend, and I can't take credit for that. As far back as I can remember, from about the age of five, I have always felt a need inside me to know Him better.

From then on, it was impossible for Ouimet to imagine his existence as a business leader and a family man without Christ's presence in his life. He felt he had to merge what many business leaders and managers often keep separate, their professional and spiritual lives. He also had to find ways to propose this ideal of a coherent life to the board of directors, managers and personnel in the company. *Our Project* was created precisely for this. It was a set of intuitions that expressed an innovative, even revolutionary path for his company.

Thirty-five years of maturing

Since *Our Project* was first created in 1974, it has gone through several revisions. The first edition set down the human, moral, economic, social, spiritual and religious responsibilities of the company and its personnel. The second version came out after Ouimet's first meeting with Mother Teresa in 1983. It included the company motto, inspired by Mother Teresa: *Orare ad gerendum in Deo*, Pray in order to manage in God.

There were other meetings with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, Rome, New York, Washington, and twice in Montreal. Ouimet also exchanged many letters with her throughout the years. Finally, on October 15, 1988, she came to Canada and paid a visit to the Ouimet business. These contacts with Mother Teresa resulted in a new version of the document, which was revised by a committee made up of the company board members and managers. In 1990, the company printed a new abridged version.

In 1993, on the 60th anniversary of the company's founding, the title of the document was changed from *Our Mission* to *Our Project: Simultaneous Growth of Human Happiness and Economical Profitability*. The original title, *Our Mission*, indicated that the project was to become a new, focal point for all the personnel. *Our Project*, on the other hand, expressed concepts that the company had experienced and the goals it had achieved. *Our Project* was an expression of maturity, experimentation and concrete living. The name became an emblematic proclamation for the entire company.

9

THE HEART OF *OUR PROJECT* *

How can a business be managed in the manner of Jesus Christ, or even better, with Jesus Christ? That is the question, stated clearly and precisely, that *Our Project* wanted to address. Stated less bluntly: how can the well-being of the company's employees be reconciled with the driving need for profits, which are necessary for the survival of every business? This is no doubt a monumental challenge, especially when seen through the lens of history.

Ever since the Industrial Revolution, a dominant theme has been the exploitation of people in the quest for profit. Is there any way to break out of this mindset without falling into utopian dreams? And if we do, can a company remain competitive? These are the questions *Our Project* aims to answer through very concrete, simple means and great humility.

Two rival visions of man

In today's business world, there are two visions of man that are at odds with each other. The first conceives of man in purely economic terms; the second has an exaggerated, humanistic view of him.

Dominated by the model *homo economicus*, the first notion sees man only as an instrument that serves production. The prime

* www.our-project.org

objective is to make as much profit as possible, even to the detriment of people, whose sole value is as consumers. In this model, "human capital" can be exploited for the benefit of the economic project. It is this view that is gaining ground nearly everywhere today, swept along by the currents of globalization. Of course, it is a given that a business cannot function without people. However, can a business be seen only as an engine of production and profit?

The second view sees man as having external needs that must be met, internal, subjective desires that also require fulfillment, and a personal richness that must be developed. This view sometimes forgets that profitability is the first condition of a business' survival. In an excess of good intentions towards man, this view is sometimes so ambitious that it comes dangerously close to neglecting the fundamental realities and constraints of economic life. These constraints can sometimes be a painful reminder to company management that a business is not just a place for personal development.

And herein lies the great challenge of *Our Project*: to truly reconcile these two opposing views of mankind – the long-term happiness and spiritual growth of people in the workplace and the sustained competitive profitability of the company. It is easy to state this objective, but extremely difficult and even risky to enact it. It is also a very demanding task, for it requires that managers have perfect integrity, so as not to give into the temptation of manipulation.

The two "ISMAs"

Our Project has two Integrated Systems of Management Activities (ISMAs). The first one, the economic ISMA, is classic and well known, especially in the West.

> In the last half century, all the major management schools have taught an integrated system of economic management tools that can, over time, increase the

> competitive profitability of any organization operating in a market economy, as well as improve the efficiency of one functioning outside the market economy. The main phases of this economic ISMA are planning, organization, coordination, motivation, and verification. If these precepts are rigorously followed, there is a good chance that the company will experience considerable, long-term growth in efficiency and competitive profitability. It has taken thousands of years for humanity to give birth to the free market as conceived by Adam Smith and it must be said that it performs extremely well today. It is well understood and taught in all the world's business schools. Furthermore, it is perfectly integrated by practically every manager. Mankind now knows new ways of producing more, cheaper and better products. The production of goods today is greater than the sum of all the goods ever produced since the beginning of man.

In the free market system, humanity is taken into account solely from an economic viewpoint. Human resources, that is to say the management of people, are spoken about in the same way material resources are discussed for the management of financial assets. People are considered only as players in relation to productivity. In the opinion of Ouimet, this is the basic source of imbalance in our market economies.

The novel and prime concept of *Our Project* is to complete and rebalance this faulty system with another framework that is generally neglected or ignored – the human ISMA. The human ISMA consists of management tools organized into a system that favors the personal development of working people.

> This non-economic system has as its goal to steadily improve people's lives at work. It is a system that nurtures human values that are absent in most workplaces,

> creating a place of joy. This joy can then spread out to the workers' families. This model, which promotes the personal development of employees, can work in any organization or business.

The Ouimet companies patiently experimented with this human ISMA throughout the years and gradually improved it until it could provide the subject matter for Ouimet's doctoral thesis, which he defended at the University of Fribourg in 1997. However, the seeds of this idea had been planted forty years earlier, after working two years at his father's side and following his studies at the HEC. Moreover, it was this original idea that spurred him to ask his father if he could pursue his studies in economics and social science in Fribourg.

> My father asked me why I wanted to study economics and social science and I told him: "I would like to understand the human dimension of management, as well as its economic side. I already know a little about the economic principles as well as the scientific techniques that one can use not only to avoid bankruptcy but also to prosper in business. But I need to understand in greater depth man's true nature and how one can manage an organization in a human, moral and spiritual way, for the well-being of everyone, as our Catholic faith requires." That was really the beginning of my thesis on the two ISMAs, the economic and the human.

The human management tools and the values they foster

The management tools that make up the human ISMA are so simple that they can be disconcerting at first glance. But the Ouimet Group of companies has been experimenting with them for more than forty years and it has been scientifically established

that, by using appropriate measuring methods, the combined action of these activities can, over the long-term, foster values that positively affect the workers' personal development.

> When people develop their inner selves at work, two basic things happen. First, when they return to their families and social circles, they express more happiness and a greater sense of well-being, a feeling that they spread to those around them. Secondly, workers are more willing, even eager, to contribute to the growth and goals of the company.

The values fostered on a scale of varying intensity by the human ISMA have over the years been identified and classified under 12 categories: Dignity and Freedom, Peace and Serenity, Brotherhood and Solidarity, Humility, Truth and Authenticity, Prudence and Judgment, Listening and Wisdom, Justice and Love, Faith and Hope, Responsibility and Courage, Forgiveness and Reconciliation, and Efficiency and Productivity.

It is clear that the values engendered and promoted by the activities of a person-centered management approach are similar to the fundamental principles of the Catholic social doctrine that Pope Benedict XVI once again mentioned in a recent presentation to a plenary session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences. His address included the topics of human dignity, the principle of subsidiarity (promoting responsibility at the lowest levels), the common good and solidarity.

The Ouimet Group has also organized the values they have quantified into three high-level categories: humanization values, spiritualization values, and mixed humanization-spiritualization values.

> Humanization values contribute to people's personal growth, both individually and in relation to others.

They promote human dignity by appealing to people's better nature to understand and be in touch with their feelings, and to relate to others in order to accomplish the short-term and long-term goals they have set for themselves. These values allow them to better handle the inevitable obstacles and difficulties that are inherent to daily life.

Spiritualization values help people to integrate their splintered lives and give them meaning. They sustain people's efforts to reach beyond their limits towards the Absolute or God/Love, the Being who has put the quest for perfection and a thirst for the Infinite in their hearts. These values lead them on the path towards real happiness.

The mixed values, as their name indicates, contribute both to people's individual and relational development as well as to their search for meaning.

The activities associated with the human management tools have been classified into three categories as well, depending on whether they engender mostly humanization values, mixed humanization-spiritualization values or mostly spiritualization values. All these activities take place on company time and the employees are free to participate or not. Their choice in no way affects the evaluation of their professional qualities.

The following activities make up humanization values.

a. A Gesture

Company personnel are involved in a project, called Sharing. This can take many forms: serving meals to the homeless, helping out in a hospital or prison, collecting clothes, toys or food to be distributed to the needy, etc. Naturally, no reference is ever made to the company's commercial trademarks. This activity takes place once a year and is immediately followed by a meeting in which the

participants share their impressions and talk about the experience. Such sharing profoundly affects human relationships in the company. The participants experience firsthand the values of brotherhood and the primacy of human dignity, courage, humility, hope and love. Ouimet recalls when he, three upper level managers and Mother Teresa had participated in a similar activity together.

> I said to Mother Teresa: "I'd like to bring three men along and serve meals to the poor in the Bronx." The men I chose were three of our vice-presidents. The part of New York we chose is so poor and dangerous that taxis refuse to drive people there unless they receive a very large tip. So, off we went with Mother Teresa and we all served meals to the street people. This is something I do regularly in Montreal with the Missionaries of Charity, at Accueil Bonneau and at various hospitals and prisons. Nonetheless, that event was an extraordinary experience for me and for the three vice-presidents that came along. It was the first time they had seen Mother Teresa in person, in real action, manifesting her love for the poorest of the poor. And having witnessed that, none of them would ever look at people in quite the same way again.

b. The final interview before hiring or "Meal for Four"

Before the final decision is made to hire a new employee, the recruiting manager invites the candidate to dinner. Both the recruiter and the candidate are encouraged to bring along their spouses. However, everyone's freedom of choice is respected and, depending on circumstances, the manager, like the finalist, can decide to come or not, with no questions asked.

The participants generally consider this activity to promote the primary values we espouse: solidarity, genuineness, brotherhood and real listening.

c. Community Meals

Twice a year, before Christmas and summer vacation, we serve a simple dinner, generally a buffet, to all the company personnel. The managers serve the meals and eat after everyone else has finished. This is our way of following Christ's example when He washed His disciples' feet. This activity promotes the values of authenticity and humility in the managers, and fosters a sense of solidarity, brotherhood, love and appreciation among all our employees.

d. The Prize of the Heart

Each year, a prize of between $500 and $1,500 is awarded to an employee who, over their years at the company, has shown an attitude of solidarity and joy, a willingness to help others, a respect for his colleagues and generally exemplary work. The winner of the prize is held up as a model of *Our Project*. The primary values we associate with this event are brotherhood, solidarity, a sense of efficiency and work well done.

e. The shared bonus

This bonus is meant to share the company's wealth with those who contribute to making it grow – the employees – and varies according to how well the financial objectives are met. When the company's or the department's annual fiscal goals are met or surpassed, a bonus is paid out to every person working in the company or the department, regardless of what role he or she played. Each person receives the same amount and the bonuses vary from $300 to $2,000. These bonuses are extra and are not part of the regular salary schedule. Managers also receive a supplementary bonus, which varies according to their level of responsibility and the company's financial results. If the company or the department fails to reach its profit objectives, then no bonus is paid out. This activity favors the values of sharing, solidarity and human dignity.

f. Meetings after layoffs

Managers who were forced to lay off staff are required to meet with these employees after they leave the company. There are least two meetings in the year following the layoffs. The first meeting is inevitably difficult and tense. The second one, some months later, generally establishes an authentic, human and friendly relationship or, at the very least, the beginning of a real reconciliation. This activity comes in addition to other measures dealing with laid off workers, which take place in the framework of personnel management. These include retraining, reclassification, outplacement, etc. Some of the laid off staff still decides to participate in the annual community meals. This activity mainly fosters the values of solidarity, justice, brotherhood, human dignity, humility and forgiveness through self-awareness.

> I recall laying off an upper-level manager once. The experience really turned him against us, not legally, but emotionally. He found us abominable. We didn't know what we were doing. He said we were wrong, that he was more competent and better loved by the employees than we had judged. Then, even though I wasn't his direct boss, I decided to meet with him twice, one on one. The first time was a truly horrible experience for the two of us. There was a terrible tension in the air and he said things to me that really hurt. And I said some pretty harsh things back to him as well. We were very frank with each other, but somehow we survived the meeting. I saw him again a few months later. It was two weeks before leaving for Mother Teresa's beatification in Rome. I somehow felt that I had to see this man again. So we met and, at some point in our conversation, he said to me, "Mr. Ouimet, I really love you very much!" It was not a long sentence but it was proof of the value

of embracing people, not by theological, philosophical or moral discussion, but by taking concrete action.

Having to let fellow workers go for sound, economic reasons is one of the most painful tasks a business leader has to do and, by far, the most fearsome challenge he ever has to face.

It exacts the highest toll on the human spirit. In the conferences that I give on university campuses, I never stop saying that it is a terrible experience. I've prayed over it many times over the years and I've read everything I can about the process. But though I've tried to find a way to lay off people in the manner of Jesus Christ, I've never really found a way to do it that I think is acceptable.

I've read about some wonderful experiments that took place in the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries in certain European companies. In one, they decided to lower every employee's salary in order to avoid laying people off. Other companies decided to use their savings to weather the lean times. I can tell you, however, that most of those companies have disappeared from the economic map. I know of no survivors. Laying people off is unavoidable. And layoffs occur, not every five years or so, but every year. Sometimes it involves only a few people; sometimes the layoffs are massive, but layoffs occur all the time. The only thing that I have found we can do, and I've done this with my board of directors as my father did before me, is to pray for the people that we were forced to let go, as well as for their families. Even though they were laid off many years ago, we continue to pray for them. And if God exists, and indeed He does, if there is Love, and there is indeed, then He has to do something, and there is no doubt that He does. But that still leaves me with questions about

laying people off. The few things we do can never really alleviate the damage caused by the layoffs but we still do them anyway. About the only thing I'm really certain of is that the market economy, though it is the best system that man has devised, has flaws in it, though far fewer in number than in Karl Marx's time. We only have one choice, and that is to continually improve the system. Twice in a public forum, in November 2007 and March 2008, I gave a talk about *Our Project* to the leaders of the CNV union in the Netherlands. They were very interested to learn about our policies, especially those of meeting with laid-off employees.

The following are the activities that promote the humanization-spiritualization values.

g. Sponsoring

All new employees are welcomed to the company by someone already working in their area. These sponsors introduce the newcomers to their fellow workers and tell them about the procedures, customs and culture of the organization. The sponsors also introduce the new employee to the concepts and activities of the human ISMA. Sponsoring takes place during the first six months following the initial hiring and mainly promotes values of solidarity, human dignity and efficiency.

h. The annual, one-on-one meeting

Once a year, the company arranges a meeting between an employee and his immediate superior during which there is an open discussion concerning specific events that may have positively or negatively marked their interpersonal relationships over the past twelve months. Both sides share how they experienced these events and how they feel about them. It is the perfect opportunity to dis-

cuss possible problem areas and breakdowns in relationships with colleagues. These sessions also provide the opportunity to candidly explain points of view, reconcile and even forgive. These meetings complete the annual evaluation of professional performance. This procedure was first tried with managers for many years before it was decided to extend it to all personnel at all levels of the company. The values that flow from this activity are mainly listening to others, truth, authenticity and humility.

i. Meetings with a manager

For at least an hour, once a week, three employees meet with an upper-level manager to openly discuss subjects chosen by the workers. During these meetings, no notes or minutes are taken. After this process was firmly established with upper-level managers, it was then progressively introduced and extended to all managers. Managers with the most seniority choose two colleagues for the group. So that all employees can participate in these meetings, at least one person in the three-member group is someone who has never before participated in a meeting. Listening to others, the primacy of human dignity and brotherhood are the principal values associated with this activity.

j. Testimonials

Twice a year, invited guests come and speak to the company's personnel about their life's path and the human, moral and spiritual experiences that have guided their steps and shaped their personal evolution through life. Two guiding principles are strictly followed. The first is that these talks are open to everyone and take place during company time. Each employee is entirely free to participate or not. The second is that those who accept to make a testimonial must never use themselves as an example and should never make any recommendations. Experience has shown that listening to others talk about truth, courage, faith, hope, wisdom, humility, silence and prayer is the important value that underlies this activity.

We started this particular activity more than thirty years ago. Frankly, it was the easiest to implement. For the first five years, we, that is, those who helped me set it up, sensed a certain current of tension in the company. We could see that a significant portion of the employees, perhaps half, felt uneasy about these testimonials. During these early years, we repeated often and in vain, "You're free to choose. If you don't come, you'll get paid just the same. You'll continue to do your work like always; that's it. Others will come, but they won't be favored for promotions, just as not coming won't cause you any professional problems."

They didn't believe us because they were afraid that the testimonials were thinly disguised attempts "to convert them." I suppose that in a certain way, they were right to have that fear. The more intelligent a management group is, the more it is possible to manipulate workers through this kind of activity. This was certainly not our intention but they were right to be cautious. It's pretty clear that I have a certain reputation in Canada as a believer, a man of prayer, weak and fragile. I've never tried to disguise that fact. So naturally they were afraid of being taken advantage of. It took us five to eight years to convince this group that they had nothing to fear. I suppose they needed to see for themselves that those who attended the testimonials weren't picked for promotions and, inversely, that others who never attended were promoted purely on the merit of their professional performance. It took a long time to get to that stage though. And I can tell you that if those who started this activity with me weren't also people of prayer, we wouldn't have lasted very long.

k. Moments of inner silence before and after meetings

This activity consists of short periods of silence, sharing, reflection, meditation or prayer. There is no fixed format. At the beginning of a meeting, someone may read a text and briefly comment on it. Someone else may refer to a particular event that has taken place in the company or in the world or to something personal about one of the members of the company or their family. Prayers may be said or someone may ask for one. Peace, serenity, faith, hope, wisdom and love are the primary values fostered by this activity.

> My father introduced the practice of saying a short prayer or taking a moment for reflection or meditation at the beginning of meetings with his board of directors. When I arrived in 1961, I tried to improve this practice a little. At the beginning, I was the one who always led the meditation or prayer. I always hoped that someone else would offer to take my place, but it took five or six years before any other member of the board stepped forward. Then it became customary at the end of a board meeting to ask who would volunteer to lead the prayer or meditation the next time. Today, it is very rare that I take the lead in the meditation prayer at the beginning of the meeting. During the economic crisis that beset us in the 1990s, we had a few meetings of the board of directors that were very difficult and even fierce. The economic downturn had made it necessary to manage the company with great discipline, thus forcing us to make difficult decisions. At the end of one of these meetings, a director approached me and said: "Robert, we're going through a period of great tensions and our discussions are quite heated. Would you think it a good idea if we have a moment of silence, a short meditation or prayer at the end of the meeting as well?"

> I recall being happy that I wasn't the one who had made the proposal. Suffice it to say, since that day, we also have prayer at the end of all our meetings. Today, none on the board of directors has a problem with any of that. Everyone likes it, but it has taken sixty years for all committees in the organization to begin their meetings with a moment of silence. But it was very, very difficult to implement. None of that would have been possible without creating a very real climate of freedom, and doing that took careful planning. It also took lots of time, courage and listening because people are afraid that others will try "to convert them," and they're quite right to be fearful of that.

Finally, these are the activities of the spiritualization values.

l. Wall posters and annual mottos

In all the buildings, the walls and free space in the hallways, meeting rooms and offices are reserved for various kinds of posters that reflect the fundamental values fostered by the activities of *Our Project*: friendship, generosity, welcome, relaxation, hope, etc. Each poster promotes a different value but they are all complementary. Moreover, each year, all the members of the company choose one motto from a collection. This is then posted in various locations in the company buildings and they serve as inspiration for everyone. Some examples of our mottos are: All work is empty except where there is love. Actions speak louder than words. The mind is enriched by what it receives and the heart, by what it gives. Only love leads to peace. The first form of sharing is respecting others.

m. The monthly support group

This activity is directed mainly, though not exclusively, to members of the board of directors and the management team. They are asked if they'd be interested in joining a monthly celebration of

the Eucharist at one of the four religious congregations that have agreed to host the company. The celebration is followed by a simple, communal meal and a discussion on a spiritual subject. Led by an appropriate person, the group may discuss a topic of faith or the path towards Transcendence. Participation in these meetings is strictly on a volunteer basis. Everything is discreetly organized so that no one feels that there is even the slightest pressure to convert him or her. The meetings have two goals. The first is to enrich the participants so that they may find spiritual renewal. The second is to increase the common good of the organization, because some who come may want to pray for its personnel and the company's success. Faith, hope, peace, serenity, wisdom and a sense of responsibility are the primary values fostered by this activity.

> It is a source of great joy to those of us who live in the stormy world of business that Benedictine nuns are praying for the success of *Our Project* and that they are living the dictum of their Benedictine life, *Ora et labora*, in spiritual union with us. It is also comforting to know that two new lay communities, the Alliance in Trois-Rivières and Marie Jeunesse in Sherbrooke, pray for us on the first Wednesday of the month at Eucharist and we pray for them in return. In addition, since 1987, with the written approval of Mother Teresa and now of Sister Nirmala, who has succeeded her, the contemplative Missionaries of Charity, who live in the poorest sections of Calcutta, unite with us in prayer on the first Wednesday of each month. Every year, we renew this "contractual agreement" in writing, so that they pray for us and we for them. They also pray for the poor flawed person that I am. This is a source of immense strength for me and it gives me the courage I need to take up any task. I feel that everything we are trying to do can be found in the heart of Transcendence, in the heart of

> God, in the Eucharist, in the mystery of the communion of the saints. I can state without equivocation that without the very particular Eucharistic alliances that we've made with the Missionaries of Charity in Calcutta and the Benedictine Sisters, north of Montreal, I would have never been able to carry out this experiment, wonderful though it is, for it runs counter to everything in our contemporary culture.

n. The room for silence

> We have a room in the company that can be used by anyone who feels the need to spend time in an atmosphere of inner silence, relaxation, reflection, meditation, and if he or she wants, personal and silent prayer. Of course, people can take the time only when it does not negatively affect the efficiency of his or her department. All who use the room do so respecting the rule of silence. This room is not for doing work of any kind. The number of people using the room has been slowly growing over the years. The values associated with this activity are mainly peace, serenity, faith, hope, wisdom, love and a sense of responsibility.

During his second meeting with Mother Teresa, she did more than just suggest to Ouimet that he install these rooms for silence in his companies. She practically ordered him to do so.

> This was the important message that came out of our meeting in Calcutta in 1985. She said to me: "You should have a prayer room in each of your different work sites." Just like that. "You should have..." She didn't say, "You might think about having..." She probably saw that I needed a lot of prayer. I am not sure, but that's what she said. I told her she didn't realize what she was

asking. People would consider me a loony, a crackpot. It would be very difficult. That didn't seem to faze her, and she answered, "Do it!"

I did everything she told me to do. Two weeks after I returned to Montreal, I installed a prayer room in the head office, but I did it badly, without any preparation or consultation, in a very undemocratic way. The room was in the wrong place; it was much too close to my office. I only spoke about it to members of upper management. They agreed with me and I didn't go any further than that. I couldn't have acted in a worse way. Nonetheless, as I wrote in my doctoral thesis, the decision to set up the prayer room was a true act of faith for me. When the room was finished, I said to the Lord, "This is Your room. You don't have to pay any tax or the heating; we're letting You have it free of charge. Just move in."

And He did because Mother Teresa was right. We may not be always in the room, but God is there permanently because it is His room. Certain people in the company later admitted to me in private: "In very difficult moments, when things were going badly, the room was important to me. I felt His presence there and it gave me courage. I felt that I wasn't alone anymore. There was a force that told me I shouldn't give up." Strangely, these people didn't use the room. But just its mere existence reminded them of His real presence, of a spiritual dimension. Today, because we are sensitive to workers' various spiritual orientations, we don't call it a "prayer room" but "a room for silence and meditation." Nonetheless, it has taken more than ten years, maybe fifteen, for everyone to feel comfortable with it, and not think that somebody is trying to convert them. A pivotal moment occurred in 1993, when we had to make an important promotion in the company. We had

the choice between two candidates; one who never went to the prayer room and one who went there regularly. We chose the first candidate. From then on, it became clear to everyone that management respected their inner freedom.

The measurement tools and the human strategic plan

The number and nature of the activities of the human ISMA are not written in stone. They can be changed. Certain activities can be withdrawn and new activities can be added, according to the needs and wishes of the employees. In order to manage and improve these activities, management uses three necessary and appropriate management tools. Both the experimentation and the coordination of the human and economic ISMAs must be solidly grounded on scientific fact, so that the results can be measured quantitatively and qualitatively. This data allows managers and directors of human development – in other companies, called human resource managers – to make appropriate decisions to better promote the values fostered by the human ISMA. These values have a major impact on organizational culture, people's personal development and their productivity.

a. Research projects on the organizational climate

Every two years, management launches studies to identify problem areas in the company, whether they be in efficiency, planning, organization, coordination, communications, motivation or control. These studies measure the sense of satisfaction and personal development of the employees, as well as the tension, friction or complete breakdowns in interpersonal relationships that inevitably crop up in any workplace. The studies reveal if the system is working well or if it needs to be reinforced or corrected in some way. In this way, management can evaluate and critique more than twenty areas that they consider important, such as communica-

tions in all its forms, work conditions, personal development, goals, salaries, the future of the company, job security, etc.

b. Research projects on the activities of the human ISMA

As well, every two years, research is conducted to determine how those participating in the activities view the values that the human ISMA attempts to foster. It reveals the activities that are most appreciated, those that must be modified, and those that must be temporarily or permanently abandoned or replaced. It also makes it possible to identify the primary values fostered by each activity of the human ISMA, as well as how the management tools complement each other.

> The two scientific research projects that we carry out are absolutely necessary and complement each other. We also consider it important to make the results known as soon as possible to everyone who has participated in the project. We try to act on as many requests and suggestions as we can and then we inform everybody of the improvements we intend to make. This way, people can see for themselves how they can influence decisions and how their comments are taken into account. In our first research study, even it was carried out by an outside agency and responses to the questionnaires were anonymous, the participants were quite guarded. They were more guarded during the qualitative phase of the study, after the completion of the questionnaires. The researcher calculated the average results for each question and then asked participants if they wanted to comment. During those first years, the participants spoke up very little. They were afraid that, despite our assurances, their names and comments would find their way into the report and they would suffer some sort of consequence. Of course, this never happened.

> In our second research project, we noticed that participants were beginning to speak out more. This trend continued in the third study. Why? Because they saw that those who had expressed their opinions did not suffer any ill consequences for their remarks, even if they had been critical of the company. They saw that no one mysteriously left the company a few months after the project for having said certain things or for having made certain criticisms during the project. I had read their comments and found them very hard to read. Any manager, or myself for that matter, could have easily found out who had said this or that, but we never did. A climate of trust had to be created, for that had to be at the very foundation of *Our Project*, but it took a very long time to achieve.

c. The triennial strategic plan for the human ISMA

Every three years, management reviews the results of the research and works out a strategic plan for the human ISMA. The plan is revised every year and it complements the triennial, strategic plan for the economic ISMA, which focuses on making the organization more efficient, dynamic, competitive and profitable. The strategic plan of the human ISMA charts the development of each human management tool and includes improvements intended to increase the personal development and well-being of the people who work in the organization. It also lays out a path to strengthen the values fostered by the activities proposed by the human ISMA.

d. The keystone

The two ISMAs are constantly at odds with each other because they pull in two opposite directions. The goal of the economic ISMAs is to increase the organization's efficiency and competitive profitability. The goal of the human ISMAs is to promote human

dignity and the personal development of workers. But how can the inevitable tension between the two be eased so as not to adversely affect the company?

The answer lies in the second original concept in *Our Project*: the element that allows the two ISMAs to adjust to each other and to maintain a balance, which Ouimet calls "the keystone." The keystone is an openness to Transcendence and to help and wisdom "from on high." In his presentation of *Our Project*, Ouimet describes the economic and human ISMAs as two columns joined by an arch. The arch symbolizes the spiritual dimension, a source of inner strength, whose key is "God/Love."

> The two columns, in constant tension, are joined at the top by an arch that represents God or the Supreme Being that each person chooses. This Supreme Being, which helps to keep the two management systems in balance, can be defined as Creator, Higher Power, God/Love, Father, Son and Holy Spirit or any other embodiment of Transcendence. Transcendence can be experienced through various forms of reflection, meditation and, for those who so desire, silent prayer at work. All the players in the company are free to interpret the value of Transcendence in their own way.

Harmonizing these opposing values is a monumental challenge considering the increasing secularization of social and economic life. And herein lies the great innovation of *Our Project*: the affirmation that, without infusing spirituality in management, it is not possible to carry out authentic human values in the business world. Without spirituality in management, business has a tendency to reduce man to the level of a simple tool, a resource to be used in the pursuit for profit. *Our Project* is revolutionary because it requires a complete change of perspective in the way we look at things.

Ouimet has already experienced the deep personal need for Transcendence in his business life. He states plainly that without this presence of God/Love and the Trinity in his business life, he suspects that he would have been a CEO without conscience or pity for anyone. He would have had "a heart of stone" instead of a "heart of flesh."

> If there is a certain balance between sound economic management, that is, striving for productivity and profitability, and managing humanly, I can in all truth say that it is because of a certain "keystone." I believe that with the very special intelligence and willpower that have been loaned to me, and with the courage I know I can muster, I would have turned into some sort of financial tycoon, focusing on profits and productivity and treating everything else, including the human dimension, with complete disregard. I believe the key to managing our organization is prayer, ever more constant in my life as CEO, as well as in that of the members of the board of directors and managers. If there is something beautiful in my life, it must be said that it doesn't come from me, but from Him, God the Father, Son and Spirit. I've lived my life with Him because that's what I wanted and He accepted. I know my limits and my weaknesses.

The recognition of these limits is much more than just a personal and an individual experience. The whole company can be a real human community if spirituality and transcendence are integrated into its daily life. Even if the CEO and the most important stockholders embrace spirituality, it also must be present in the lives of all the players in the organization. There must be unconditional respect, not just for people's freedom of conscience but also for their spiritual lives. Ouimet is convinced that it is

possible for everyone to integrate transcendence into their lives, whatever their convictions or religious beliefs.

> I am certain that if any two or three people responsible for an organization – even if they don't believe in anything but are perhaps just searching for greater meaning in their lives – if these people are willing to take the time to meet together once a month, to sit down for one or two hours at a time and to reflect in silence, then they will not be far from God, and God will not be far from them. They will be able to put into practice the types of management activities that serve man. I am sure that God, who is Love, Father, Son and Spirit, will answer them in some way. He will not to refuse to walk with them. He will do so, quietly, through the primacy of human dignity, through what is human. And He will help them to discover Love. I feel certain that what I say is the truth, for in my heart I feel a sustained and constant peace.

The conditions for making it work

If there is anything that the experimental work carried out for almost forty years in the Ouimet Group of companies shows, it is that no organization can put into practice the principles of *Our Project* without the firm determination and backing of stockholders and management. Certain favorable conditions must also be in place. The activities must be introduced in a certain order, starting with the easiest and moving to the more difficult. Easy activities include the testimonials, the shared bonuses, the gesture of solidarity, community meals, the wall posters, the Prize of the Heart and the biennial research projects. The difficult ones require much more time and need a certain maturity on the part of the organization. These include the follow-up meetings with laid off workers, the moments of silence and prayer at the beginning of

meetings, the extended, spiritual support group and the rooms for silence and meditation. In any case, the activities of the human ISMA can only be put into practice incrementally and require a lot of patience to implement.

> It seems to us that whatever the size of the organization or the number of people working in it, it's going to take at least five years for the personnel to completely believe that their professional advancement in the organization will in no way be affected by whether or not they participate in the activities of the human ISMA. They will need to see for themselves that those who participate are not awarded more promotions or given higher salary increases than nonparticipants. In other words, they must completely accept that a climate of freedom exists in the company. It will take at least ten to fifteen years of work and patience for most of the activities to be functional.

There is, however, one necessary and preliminary condition that must be met. There has to be a small group of people at the head of the company that is determined to introduce the human and spiritual elements into the management philosophy. This core group will need to spread the theory and practice throughout the company, but it will be only by example that others will be convinced.

> Every company, like every organization, is an ordered entity in which each person has a defined role. Therefore, the company head and the directors have to want, by their own accord, to live out this spirituality in their daily life; not in words, but in deeds and by example. From them, the rest of management and then all of the personnel will progressively become interested (in total freedom and in various degrees) in the importance of

> spirituality in their lives as well as in the workplace. Only then will it be possible to implement, little by little, the various management tools of the human ISMA.

Given the inevitable difficulties and discouragement that are sure to follow, it would be of great help if the management team were to come together at regular intervals. As the activities of the human ISMA slowly take root and create a framework for a common, spiritual project, it would also be a great source of strength for the company leaders to know they are supported and accompanied in this process by the prayer of religious congregations. Ouimet acquired this great spiritual support from Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity in 1988, during his third trip to Calcutta; she had already come to Montreal to visit the company.

> Mother and I had gone to the Eucharist at the convent of the contemplative nuns in Calcutta. At the end, as we were leaving, I said to her: "Could we come to an arrangement? I'd like for our employees in Montreal to unite spiritually with your sisters through the Eucharist every first Wednesday of the month. Your sisters could pray, not for the prosperity of our company but so that we could manage our company more and more each day in the manner of the Lord. For our part, we would pray for you and your sisters to embrace God's will." It was a very simple contract. We weren't asking for anything for ourselves. We weren't proposing praying for personal gain or for the spiritual success of *Our Project* and much less for the economic goals of the company. We just wanted to pray so that we might be more and more ready to do His will. That was quite something to suggest to Mother Teresa – "Could we pray for your sisters, so they can embrace the Lord's will more every day?"

She could have thought it rather pretentious of me to suggest this, but she didn't take it that way at all. She immediately indicated her agreement. Later, the arrangement was confirmed in writing and it has been renewed every year since then, with the superior of the contemplative sisters in Calcutta. This agreement has been the cornerstone of our company.

Above all, the company must be in sound economic health. It must offer the personnel good salaries, at least similar to, but preferably superior to, those companies competing in the same industry. It is an illusion and the worst kind of hypocrisy to talk about treating people in an organization in a spiritually enlightened way when their wages barely allow them a decent life and the owners and directors live in luxury. Good working conditions and appropriate satisfying rewards reinforce the values of human dignity, sharing, mutual help, justice and solidarity. These constitute the preliminary favorable conditions that are necessary for the activities of the human ISMA to take root. It goes without saying that the company must be competitive in every area in order to offer its people working conditions that are in line with the current market.

My father founded his company on a bedrock of fundamental values – the primacy of human dignity, wisdom, courage and determination – as well as on the active spiritual and religious life that he shared with my mother. To my father's basic values were added those of my mother – faith, hope, gentleness and compassion. In my father's time, there was a lot of fraternizing between people in the company. Except for prayer at the beginning of board meetings, however, there weren't, strictly speaking, any spiritual activities taking place in the company when I took over in 1965. I believe now as I look back that I did what the Lord wanted me to do.

> I spoke to the workers about the spiritual dimension of life but I also let them know that their livelihood was secure. I felt that my first duty as CEO was to show them that I could follow in my father's footsteps and continue to grow the company while still adhering to his fundamental values. Only afterwards, and then only very slowly, did we begin to integrate into the organization the practices and activities that today we call the human management tools. It was done incrementally and empirically, like groping in the dark, by trial and error. We discovered things little by little, making many mistakes along the way. It was not by talking about social doctrine but by putting it into practice concretely, day-to-day, that we arrived at a real model of human management that we could scientifically test and evaluate.

Probably the most difficult thing to do is to convince the workers that management does not have a hidden agenda. They must be certain that the activities being proposed are indeed intended for their inner development and well-being and not to increase productivity. They must be sure that they are truly loved and not just being manipulated. For this, management must constantly prove that their intentions are just and they have no desire to convert anyone. On this point, I believe workers have the wisdom to see through any such attempt. If management's intentions are not sincere or they are not perceived as such, the activities of the human ISMA are bound to fail. They will be experienced as manipulation and the people in the organization will quite rightly do everything in their power to put an end to them.

It is certain that these activities, the cost of which has been calculated at less than 0.3% of profits before taxes over the years, do not diminish productivity. Rather, they improve it. This is not surprising. If people feel more appreciated, if they feel more fulfilled

at work, it is easy to see why they would be likely to give more of themselves to the enterprise.

> If the project is truly implemented, not for the goal of increasing productivity, but out of love and respect for the workers, I can guarantee that the company's competitive productivity will not be endangered. When people feel they are being treated with love and genuine respect and, at the same time, that the company is being managed in a disciplined and productive way, they give themselves wholeheartedly to their work and become more productive. But if improving productivity is the prime objective of implementing this kind of management system, the project is bound to fail, because then it is nothing more than manipulation and people will sense that immediately. The organization is there to serve people and not to be served by people. Work exists for people and not people for work. A person is not "human capital" or a "human resource" to be managed. People are precious because God lives in them. Those are the convictions that a company must have if they want to implement the management model set out in *Our Project*.

A terribly demanding project

The greatest challenge experienced by business leaders who want to establish the management model proposed by *Our Project* in their own companies is the suspicion of their employees regarding their motives. Certainly, there is no point in even starting out on such a venture without the conviction that human dignity is the most basic value that cannot be compromised. As soon as a business leader makes this conviction public, however, he or she will inevitably draw suspicion: "What is that person up to? What's

the hidden agenda behind this project?" The heaviest burden to bear is to be under suspicion for the heart's most intimate sentiment – love.

> It was terrible to sense that people in my organization weren't telling me what they were really thinking, either because they didn't want to hurt my feelings or because they were afraid to speak the truth to someone in power. They were saying to themselves: "He's trying to force us to go somewhere." But I didn't want to lead anyone anywhere. I myself didn't even know where I was going. To those who would like to embark on the same journey that we took more than forty years ago, I'd like to say clearly and with all the strength and conviction that I can muster: it's terribly, terribly, terribly difficult! I'd even say it's terrifying. If I did not have the strength of the Eucharist and the comfort from the sacrament of Reconciliation, I would have probably abandoned the project long ago. Believe me when I tell you that I could have been perfectly capable of managing the organization simply and gracefully and making lots of money like everyone else. Mind you, we do make a lot of money, but we also, come hell or high water, live out the tenets of *Our Project*. It is beautiful now. But before it was beautiful, it was very difficult and it took a very long time. Mother Teresa was right when she told me, "Don't try to do it without a lot of prayer; you won't be able to!" That's why she welcomed me to her convent in Calcutta that day. She must have said to herself, "This guy is really going to need this." She wasn't wrong. Today, I'm not afraid to categorically state that I would not start over again unless the Lord appeared to me and explicitly ordered me to do so. It's just too difficult, but I am happy to continue with Him by my side.

10

HOPE

What is Ouimet's hope today? It is that now is no longer the time to build, but rather to spread the fruit of so many years of effort, years that were often marked not only by solitude and lack of understanding, by numerous mistakes, weaknesses and sins, but also by growth of reconciliation, pardon and improvements and, very important, also by numerous economic successes and by great moments of human and spiritual joy. It is to this end that Ouimet is devoting his final energies.

A strange organizational chart

A delicate change in the organizational chart took place in 2007 with the addition to the executive staff of a Chief Spiritual Officer or CSO. That executive reports directly to the CEO. His key responsibility is the leadership of *Our Project* on a daily basis. He is mainly responsible for the planning and implementation of all the activities of *Our Project* in the company's different work places. These activities reinforce and renew the value system of everyone working in the organization. The CSO is also a member of the Board of Directors.

Three-quarters of a century

In 2008 and 2009, the company celebrated the 75th anniversary of its founding. It was a celebration of the economic success of the company but it was, above all, a celebration of the success

of *Our Project* and the perseverance in the face of all opposition to put it into practice. The festivities were quite grand and impressive, and unusual. It was held at the Delta Hotel, one of Montreal's finest. The black tie celebration was attended by high-ranking political figures, a number of leaders from various companies and large universities along with some six-hundred guests coming from North America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia.

However, in contrast to what normally occurs at this sort of prestigious event, the content of the celebration did not revolve around the work and accomplishments of the company's founder, J.-René Ouimet and of his successor, J.-Robert Ouimet.

In most celebrations elsewhere, expensive videos summarize the accomplishments – in this case, of the founder and his successor. What took place at the Delta Hotel was profoundly different. The key part of the celebration consisted of musical pieces, very well known by everyone, thus inviting the guests to remember and to meditate.

> In October 2008, we held the gala, "Peace and Joy," to launch the celebration of the 75th anniversary of our founding. The evening program was very unusual. Among other things, after the meal, there were no videos about my father or me. Instead, we had an orchestra of forty musicians and thirty-five singers, including four well-known opera singers, Manon Feubel, Geneviève Couillard-Deprés, Jean-Marc Hervieux and Gaétan Laperrière. The musical program included four classical pieces by Mozart, Vivaldi, Haydn and Beethoven. Each piece was dedicated to different people or groups, who through their grace and vigor had played a central role in developing the human and economic ISMAs in our organization over the past seventy-five years. These included my parents, J.-René and Thérèse, my wife, Myriam, and every person who has worked in the company since 1933, especially those who gave more

> than thirty years of service and their families. Finally, Beethoven's "Ode to Joy" was played to thank the God of Love for having accepted to walk beside us with His wisdom, courage, love and forgiveness. We also asked Him to walk with us, if He so desired, for another three-quarters of a century.
>
> During the night of the gala, I gave a brief talk about the three values that the aforementioned fostered in our business for three-quarters of a century. It was a wonderful way to both speak about and to celebrate the values that are the very foundation of our company. What is interesting is that they are the same values that our ancestors lived by when they founded Quebec and Canada.

It was a humble celebration, inviting people to meditate and to reflect, and for those who wished, to live quite a few moments of interior silence, and for some of us, silent prayer. It is typical of Ouimet's character that the event emphasized *Our Project*, the common work done, little by little, over seventy-five years by different people, ranging from those known to everyone, to those known only to a few. While they all contributed to the company's growth in terms of economic and competitive profitability, they did so, while respecting and promoting, always imperfectly, the dignity of each person in the company. And finally, it was a celebration to thank the Lord, without whose loving presence nothing that was accomplished would have been possible.

After me?

Despite the inevitable ups and downs of any human enterprise, the economic achievements and the enlightened human development of the Ouimet businesses can clearly be considered a very difficult and great achievement.

Ouimet says he is more than ever receptive to the signs of

Divine Providence, and the following story illustrates this. After giving a lecture at the Vatican to a group of university professors and business leaders, someone asked him, "What will happen to your companies' project after your death?" His answer:

> Your question is clear, my answer will be clear. My profound conviction is this. If *Our Project* is my project, it will die with me. And it will be better like that. If *Our Project* comes from God, then it will go on and continue. I am absolutely convinced of that. But please listen well: The continuation will not necessarily be carried out in our company. And in full truth, let me just add that I am quite indifferent to the way it might turn out.

Is he really indifferent? Beyond what is obviously an attempt to challenge and to provoke the audience – and that is typical of his manner – the words in fact reveal something deeper and yet much simpler about him. Ouimet has achieved what every human being profoundly desires: *inner peace.* It is a peace that is not the work of human hands, but of God's shining presence in the innermost center of our being. This presence is the source of that wonderful energy that has allowed him to struggle for what he believes to be true and just, and yet not to be diminished in that struggle. It is why he has been able to endure the most painful defeats, which if they sometimes affected him, were not able to crush him.

> Today, I feel more fragile than ever as a human being, with regard to love and the capacity to love. But I now live everything in prayer, that is to say, intimately with Christ, and I feel that this pleases Him. I feel Him physically present in my life in a constant way. And that is why for some years now, I live a profound and constant inner peace that never leaves me, even in the midst of life's storms. Am I attached to that constant, inner

> peace? The answer is no. Do I deeply appreciate that constant, inner peace? The answer is yes. With great wisdom, Bishop Gazaille regularly draws my attention to the fact that this peace can vanish in a minute, for it is a free and total gift from God the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. I never ask the Lord God that this peace should endure. However, what I do at least twenty times a day, every day, is to say to Him, thank You and thank You and thank You. But, I repeat, I never ask Him to make the peace endure.

The "To God Go" Foundation

Now that he is progressively passing on his food business to a younger generation of managers, Ouimet devotes his time to managing important investing funds and to developing a foundation that he has created. Contrary to custom, he did not want the foundation to bear his family name. Instead, he wanted it to have an unusual but luminous name that reflected his distant family origins in St. Malo and Brittany: "To God Go"!

> My family's first ancestor, Jean Houymet, came from Champagne. He sailed from Saint-Malo and arrived in Quebec in 1634, three centuries before I was born. "To God go" is the English translation of the Breton expression *Doue d'ho miro*. This is what Breton parents said to their children when they saw them set sail on a dangerous, three-month journey to the New World in very small ships and under very precarious conditions. This motto is inscribed on the ring that my father wore and which I still wear. Each of our children also has a ring, hence the name for the foundation. It seemed in keeping with the company motto that Mother Teresa gave us: "Pray so as to manage with God." The Breton motto seemed like the natural extension of the compa-

ny's motto. After I chose the name, I felt that the Father, Son and Spirit of Love were glad that a poor human had proclaimed his Christian convictions by calling his new endeavor the *"To God Go" Foundation.*

The three main objectives of this Foundation are (1) to help make *Our Project* known in the world, (2) to help by co-financing pilgrimages for twelve days to the Holy Land, the Land of the Fifth Gospel. The groups are formed by twelve pastors and priests, and we are including a bishop in each group. And finally, (3) to help produce Christian religious videos for the electronic media. Ouimet's mark is clearly visible in the priority given to the foundation's objectives:

(1) To promote and develop that to which he and his father have dedicated their business lives.
(2) To allow others not only to discover the place of the "Fifth Gospel" in the Holy Land, the source of the Christian faith, but to experience for themselves what Ouimet found during his sixteen pilgrimages (one of them with his wife at the end of their honeymoon in 1965) there, a discovery that changed progressively the direction of his whole life.
(3) To spread the message of the Christian faith to the most important electronic media of our time.

During its first 10 years of operation, the *"To God Go" Foundation* will be financed by our group of companies. It will be more difficult later on to launch successful fundraising projects outside our company, especially because of the foundation's name as well as its objectives. However, if the Three care about Their foundation, new money will flow in at the right moment. The foundation belongs to God the Father, Son and Spirit. This is why I'm convinced that the *"To God Go" Foundation* will receive what it needs to achieve its three basic goals. It's

> Their affair, the Three's affair. Moreover, in all humility, I feel that They're happy with things that way.

At the end of the race

Ouimet knows that he is approaching the end of his journey on this earth. "He can come and take me whenever He wants. I'm ready," he says with joy and conviction. He's also sure that he will stay active until his last breath. "I'm convinced that as long as I'm not sick or mentally incapable, I will never be inactive."

Now freed from the cares and responsibilities of managing the day-to-day affairs of the companies, he has three basic wishes for the future. First of all, he wants to spend more time with the woman who has shared the adventure of his life with him, from whom he knows he has too often stolen the time and attention she deserved. He also wants to spend more time with his four children and six grandchildren. And finally, he wants to continue to bear witness to God's unconditional love for all people.

> To my children and grandchildren, to those who work in our companies, to the students and professors whom I meet during my visits to university campuses and at various functions in conferences throughout the world where I gave (up to 2013) around 265 conferences and personal testimonies in North America, Europe, the Middle East and Asia, I would simply like to continue to tell them that with the help of spirituality, it is possible to manage any organization, large or small, in whatever country, so as to grow slowly, with many ups and downs, the human well-being of each person in the organization, along with competitive productivity and profits. I would like to continue to tell them that God the Father, Son and Spirit of Love loves them unconditionally and that He couldn't care less about their stupidities or mine. He is all-forgiving – what a marvelous

thing – His memory fades when we tell Him freely and humbly that we want to start over and try again to love Him better. I want to say to everyone that the human dignity of all people is the most precious thing. I want to tell them that God is found in the silence of prayer and that the two greatest gifts He has given us are the key sacraments of Jesus Christ: Baptism and the team work of the Eucharist and Reconciliation.

In the end, I know that all this – the time God chooses to call me to Him – has very little to do with me, and I'm really happy about that. The Trinity has the option of deciding whether to let me continue being active here on earth or to call me back whenever the time comes. The end of my path is to arrive at the door where Jesus is standing, to see Him face to face, and to say the only thing I want to say to Him: "Thank You." That's all I want to say to Him: "Thank You." Nothing else. So today, this is the only thing I can say to the Three: "Call me back, Lord, when You want. I have absolute confidence in You. I trust You totally. Allow me, Lord, to tell You: You are my most intimate and reliable Friend and why not… Brother."

Conclusion

TO GOD GO

Before it was the name of a foundation, "To God Go" has been the motto of the Ouimet family for more than 50 years. It is a motto that goes back to Ouimet's ancestors, who left France for the New World with little hope of ever returning. It is a motto that is a pledge to place everything in the hands of Providence. This is not just a pious expression. In the 16th century, sailing off to the New World was quite a serious gamble. Yet those who made the wager had a measure of confidence in the outcome. Similarly, Ouimet dared to make a drastic wager as well and has made it with the confidence of a fully realized Christian business leader, or at least (for he is much too aware of his imperfections), one who has always tried to be fully Christian. Nonetheless, he is not a Christian of compromise, a "worldly" Christian, an "anything-goes" Christian or a Christian "in disguise." He is not a Christian who shies away from pushing the limit, nor is he one who paints himself in halftones, always prudent and cautious in everything to the point of blandness. Neither is he a part-time CEO, for being a Christian does not lead to being a second-class manager. Affirming one's religious convictions and faith endangers neither a company's economic performance nor one's own professional success.

He is also not a divided Christian CEO, that is to say a CEO during the week and a Christian on Sunday. This sort of "double

personality," which afflicts so many intellectuals and political and economic leaders, is not in this man's nature. Simply and completely, he is fully one and the other, a business leader and a devout Christian. Make no mistake; this is not so easy. Daring to have your management actions meet the standards of your Christian faith, knowing that others will mercilessly judge the difference between what you say and what you do requires extraordinary courage. All in all, such a choice borders on the heroic, especially given the cutthroat competition that is at play in today's global economy. It is understandable therefore that many business leaders prefer to be discreet about their convictions. It is, by far, the safest position.

As CEO, Ouimet is convinced of the superiority of the market economy and of the undeniable advantages it offers compared with collectivized and planned economies. Nothing holds him back from saying so and affirming his belief with the force of his conviction. Nonetheless, he calls for vigilance, for the market economy, driven by self-interest and an appetite for bigger and more is now more than ever in danger.

> I believe that the market economy is by far the best economic system in the history of mankind. It has created the greatest amount of wealth in terms of quality and quantity and permanence through time. It draws on our initiative and on our individual and collective creativity. It provides for greater rewards for those who contribute the most to the successful performance of a business, and this is altogether justified, if it is not carried too far. Obviously, we all know of serious exaggerations of the system and, in some cases, coming more and more to light, grievous cases of fraud. Nonetheless, it must be emphasized that the market economy is functioning much better today than in the 19th century, when Marx made his criticisms. Much has been done, especially since World War II, to improve justice and

fairness in the system: charters of people's rights and freedoms, social and labor laws, social security, collective agreements, etc. But today the market economy is in danger because it has fallen prey, on a world scale, to unscrupulous financial institutions. I am certain that *Our Project* can give the market economy a push toward a new awareness of human dignity, justice and fairness for people in the workplace, while still maintaining the market system's competitive strengths. If this isn't done, there will soon come, somewhere on our planet, a revolution like the one that began at the end of the 19th century.

Communism has disappeared from most countries but the growing inequalities between nations, as well as the disparities between the wealth of upper management executives and the rest of the population, make for a very explosive situation. Do businesses at the beginning of this third millennium not have more and more exhausted workers who find their work, and often their own lives, meaningless? I'm convinced that *Our Project* can breathe new life into the market economy and at the same time prove the relevance of the universal principles of Catholic social doctrine. In order for this to happen, there need to be in each business and organization a few key managers and stockholders, who have a more evolved spiritual vision, who are courageous and generous and who have a deep appreciation of human dignity.

Ouimet's conviction is in no way at odds with his Christian faith. As a Christian, he champions the fact that without the keystone of *Our Project*, it is impossible for any business leader not to be "taken over" by the very subtle and progressive impact that power at the top of the organization, and the accumulation of material and monetary wealth both have over the years on the value system

of the leaders. We become more ego centered, we don't notice it, it is very slow and progressive. New material and monetary wealth is never enough, we want more. We become more ego centered. This is the temptation hidden in profit-driven economics. With the "help of above" coming with spirituality, inner silence and, for those interested, with silent and verbal prayer calling on to the Transcendent, it allows leaders to develop themselves, it gives them the strength to persevere in the service and primacy of people's dignity. Only with God-Love can people find the strength to work each day so as to increase both their well-being at work and the business's competitive profitability. Only by calling and using the strength of spirituality, the strength of inner silence and prayer, can the leaders of the organization increase their inner strength so as not to be taken over by pride, by unlimited power, by the increase of material wealth. Then, only with the keystone, can we overcome egocentric increase in daily life, this tendency to be more and more self centered, and progressively caring less and less authentically about the well-being of the other people in the organization, particularly those much more vulnerable who are at the last echelons of the organization. It is to this that Ouimet has unrelentingly borne witness all his life, along with his human limits and mistakes. That is why the motto that Mother Teresa has transmitted to him, during his first encounter with her in Calcutta in April 1983 is also very alive today: "Pray to manage with God."

> A long time ago, someone asked me, "You bear witness to many things. Have you always done it to the degree that you do now?" I simply said, "Yes, I've always done it that way." I've probably hurt many people by saying things too strongly or not using the right words, but I've always basically been a witness. I don't know how to be anything else. Somewhere in the Gospel, Christ says something like this to His disciples: "If you do not publicly bear witness for me, affirming what you should

affirm about me and what you believe about me, then when you will need me, especially on Judgment Day, I'll not bear witness for you."

As for me, I think that's just the way it should be. I once read this passage from the Gospels when I was standing on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, during my most recent trip to the Holy Land and I said to the Lord, "Just between us, in full friendship and in humility, are You pleased with the way I bear witness for You and with You, through suffering and misery, through mistakes and sins? Are You pleased with what I say about Your life, about Your words, especially those in the Gospels, even if I don't always use the right words or the right tone, and often talk too much?"

I felt that He answered me, "Yes, I'm happy." I was dumbfounded once again. I asked myself then, what I would answer if He asked me the question, "From the time you were born, has there been one single time when you didn't go all out in bearing witness for Me?" In all honesty, I can't remember a single occasion when I should have gone further or could have been a stronger witness to Him. It probably has happened, but I can't remember it. On the other hand, I know that I have often gone too far, been too strong, reacted too fast, and acted in a way that caused a lot of damage. But the Lord always managed to fix things up later on.

Bearing witness is not without risks and consequences. Ouimet knows that. He has often lived the experience. In Greek, the word "witness" means "martyr." To be a witness, a martyr, does not necessarily mean shedding one's blood, but it always means offering one's life.

Yves Semen
Fribourg, Switzerland, May 22, 2008

BIOGRAPHICAL MILESTONES

1634	Jean Houymet arrived in Quebec City from Champagne. He married Renée Gagnon on Sunday, October 3, 1660.
1929	J.-Robert Ouimet's parents, J.-René Ouimet and Thérèse Drouin, were married.
1933	J.-Robert Ouimet's father founded J.-René Ouimet Limited.
1934	J.-Robert Ouimet was born and baptized 300 years after his ancestor, Jean Houymet, came to Quebec City.
1943-1948	He received the sacraments of Reconciliation, First Communion, and Confirmation; he changed schools three times in five years.
1950	Brother Dieumegarde, member of the order of the Clerics of St. Viateur and a teacher at the Académie Querbes, encourages him by telling him that if he worked hard, he could be a very good student and be among the top in his class. He went to Europe for the first time for the Holy Year and had an audience with Pope Pius XII.
1953	During Holy Week, he and seven other students from the HEC met his first spiritual guide, Dom Vidal, the guest master at St. Benoît-du-Lac Monastery, Magog, Quebec. He also celebrated the 20th anniversary of the founding of J.-René Ouimet Limited.
1953-1956	He worked every summer in one of the family's factories, bearing the humidity and high temperatures needed for the food sterilization process. The contacts he made with his fellow workers profoundly marked the young HEC student. This is where he first came up with the ideas that would lead to his doctoral thesis 45 years later.
1956	He was elected president by his fellow students and later received his diploma from HEC in Montreal in economics.

This was his first leadership experience and it had a great impact on him.

1958 During his studies at Fribourg, he went to the Holy Land for the 1st time during the Christmas break.

1959 He obtained his degree, *magna cum laude*, in economics and social sciences from the University of Fribourg, Switzerland. He then began his MBA at Columbia University, New York.

1961 He graduated with an MBA from Columbia University and made his 2nd pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

1962 He met his future wife, Myriam Maes, at the world congress of UNIAPAC in Santiago, Chile.

1965 His father, J.-René Ouimet, handed the company over to him. In July, he married Myriam, and the couple spent the last part of their honeymoon in the Holy Land (3rd visit). In the years that follow, they have four children: Joanne, Marie-Diane, J.-René, Jr., and J.-Robert, Jr.

1968 He made a 4th pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

1972 He made his 5th pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

1973 He celebrated the 40th anniversary of the founding of J.-René Ouimet Limited.

1975 He and Myriam celebrated their 10th wedding anniversary. He became president of the Greater Montreal Prayer Breakfasts and subsequently expanded them and gave them a profoundly different direction.

Between 1975 and 2005, 22,000 business leaders and managers from various organizations and companies participated in these meetings. Some important leaders gave personal testimonials at the Prayer Breakfasts: Mother Teresa, Abbé Pierre, André Frossard of the Académie Française, Jeanne Sauvé, Governor General of Canada, Paul Cardinal Grégoire of Montreal, Marc Cardinal Ouellet of Quebec City, Jean-Claude Cardinal Turcotte of Montreal, and numerous other prominent leaders of businesses and organizations.

1978 He celebrated the 45th anniversary of the company's founding and made a 6th pilgrimage to the Holy Land. He also mourned his mother, who was called to the Lord.

1979 He mourned his father, who was called to God.

1981 At Myriam's suggestion, he met Fr. Marc Roy, a well-known cleric, who became his second spiritual father. He also went to the Holy Land for the 7th time.

1983 He first met Mother Teresa in Calcutta. It was agreed that her sisters and his businesses would participate in joint prayers at their daily Eucharist in Calcutta and Montreal.

The company celebrated its 50th anniversary. For the 8th time, he visited the Holy Land, this time with his daughter Joanne.

1985 He traveled to Calcutta for the second time and enacted the written, contractual alliance between Mother Teresa's contemplative sisters in Calcutta and the managers of the Ouimet family businesses.

1986 Mother Teresa accepted to make a personal testimonial at the Queen Elizabeth Hotel in Montreal before 2,200 business leaders and managers from various businesses and organizations. For the 9th time, he went to the Holy Land.

1987 He and Mother Teresa met in New York for a private meeting and Eucharist. He, Mother Teresa and three company vice-presidents all served meals to homeless people in a Bronx soup kitchen. Later, he and his daughter Marie-Diane went to the Holy Land. It was his 10th pilgrimage.

1988 In January, he completely gave up drinking. In April, he underwent a quintuple bypass surgery. In September, he started his doctoral studies. In October, Mother Teresa visited his new food processing factory in Ville d'Anjou, a suburb of Montreal. Following that visit, Mother Teresa, in a follow-up of her visit to the Ouimet companies, sent a memorable handwritten letter to Ouimet and Myriam from Moscow. The Ouimet companies celebrated their 55th anniversary.

1990 He made his third trip to Calcutta.

1991 He and Mother Teresa celebrated the Eucharist together and had a private meeting in Washington, D.C. He also traveled to the Holy Land for the 11th time.

1992 For the second time, Mother Teresa came to visit his companies. It was agreed that the house bought "in the shadow of the Jacques-Cartier Bridge" would become the residence of the first four Missionaries of Charity in Montreal. He went to the Holy Land for the 12th time in the company

of his daughter Marie-Diane. It was her second time. The Custody of the Holy Land gave Ouimet a unique and rarely conferred medal that can be worn when visiting the Pope.

1994 He was made a Knight of the National Order of Quebec (ONQ) and made his fourth visit to Calcutta.

1995 He and Myriam celebrated their 30th wedding anniversary and renewed their marriage vows. He and his son J.-René went to the Holy Land. It was Ouimet's 13th visit.

1997 He defended his doctoral thesis at the University of Fribourg and obtained the distinction *magna cum laude.* Mother Teresa died. He made his 14th trip to the Holy Land.

1998 His second spiritual mentor, Fr. Marc Roy, died. Before his death, Fr. Roy chose Fr. Jacques Leclerc, founder of the North American Brotherhoods of Charles de Foucauld, to become Ouimet's third spiritual father.

1999 Ouimet was made a Knight of the Order of Canada. He made his 15th trip to the Holy Land.

2001 He visited the Holy Land for the 16th time.

2003 He visited the Holy Land for the 17th time.

2005 He and Myriam celebrated their 40th wedding anniversary and once again renewed their marriage vows. He made his 18th trip to the Holy Land.

2007 On the occasion of the centennial of the Montreal HEC, the business school's MBA students chose Ouimet as their Mentor of the Century. Several months before his death, Fr. Jacques Leclerc suggested Bishop André Gazaille become Ouimet's fourth spiritual father. Later, he made his fifth trip to Calcutta and prayed at Mother Teresa's tomb. First major tour of public conferences and testimonies in India. Launch of the French edition of the biography.

2008 The company celebrates the 75th anniversary of its founding. He made his sixth trip to Calcutta and prayed again at Mother Teresa's tomb. He celebrated 65 years of receiving the sacrament of Reconciliation on a monthly basis and 25 years of receiving the Eucharist daily, with only a few exceptions when absolutely necessary. From the age of reason, at about 7, until today – that is, for some 68 years – and to differing degrees: constant lack of love for others

and for myself; for some repeatedly failing to love and during many years; difficulty to forgive others and myself; constant human frailness. For this, he credited God for helping him to keep the promise he made to Him in 1983 in Calcutta, after having met Mother Teresa. The year also marked 55 consecutive years of regular meetings with his spiritual father, and 20 years without alcohol. Launch of the Polish edition of the biography.

2009 First major tour of public conferences and testimonies in Romania and Poland. Second major tour in India.

2010 Birth of two additional grandchildren. Now six of them. First major tour of public conferences and testimonies in China and Taiwan.

2011 First major tour of public conferences and testimonies in the country of Mexico. Launch of the Spanish edition of the biography and the brochure.

2012 First tour of public conferences and testimonies in greater Paris and North Western France. Second major tour of conferences and testimonies in Poland.

2013 Second major tour of public conferences and testimonies in the country of Mexico, in Paris, Fontainebleau, Versailles and North Western France. Third tour in Poland.

THE PRAYER OF THE COMPANY

In 1995, after his last meeting with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, Ouimet composed a company prayer. It was in the evening, while still at the airport hotel in New Delhi, before departing for Canada that he felt suddenly inspired. He took out his pen and wrote, without stopping. He sent it to Mother Teresa the following day for her consideration. Six months later, he received her response. She had typed the prayer from his draft. Along with it was an image of the Sacred Heart and a note, saying she had taken the liberty to change a few minor details. She said she had found the prayer very beautiful and was sure it would be a source of many blessings for all those who recited it.*

Dear Lord and Father, Creator of the Universe and of each human being working in our enterprise, in Your enterprise, help us to spread Your fragrance everywhere we go, in our work place where we earn our living, in our business relations with our clients, suppliers, labor union, which are, like we are, Your sons and Your daughters.

Dear Lord and Father, flood our soul with Your spirit and life so that, with You, we pray our sweat, we pray our work, which will translate itself into the food products that we prepare with love for our consumers, who are, like we are, Your sons and Your daughters.

* Some slight changes to this prayer were made by J.-Robert Ouimet at the beginning of the celebrations of the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Ouimet companies. What follows is the revised version.

Dear Lord and Father, penetrate and possess our whole being, so utterly, that our lives at work may be only a radiance of Yours. Shine through us, and be so in us, that when, after our day or night of work, we get back to our wives, our husbands, our children, for our companions, they may feel Your presence in our heart through our love and affection for our families, Your families.

Very dear Father, stay with us in our work place, work with us, love with us, sweat with us, so as to improve our performance and productivity, our food products, our technologies and strategies so as to contribute to the security and standard of living of every human being in our company, in our country and on earth, who are, like we are, Your sons and Your daughters.

Very dear Father, stay with us in our work place, and then we shall begin and continue to love You, Father, and to love each other in our work place, and at the same time, we will continue to improve our work and performance, so as to solidify the security of our families. Let us praise You in the way, Lord, You love best, by shining Your love on our families, our neighbors, and our consumers.

Let us preach You without preaching, not by words but by our example in our work place, by the sympathetic influence of what we do, and the evident fullness of the love our fragile hearts bear to You.

And for those of us, Lord, who believe in Your Son Jesus and in the Holy Spirit, we beg the Three of You to come to work, with all of us in our work place every day.

Amen.

FRATERNAL SHARING

At the end of the document entitled *Our Project*, there is a very personal text, written by Ouimet during one of the most important years of his life – 1988.* In it he speaks directly to the reader and sums up everything to which he has dedicated his life with the Lord, as a Christian CEO.

> After this long, very wonderful and very difficult adventure, which I've lived through and will continue to live through, if God so wills, allow me to share something with each one of you in a personal and brotherly way. In some cases, we've been together for twenty, forty, and even fifty years, so let's imagine for a moment that I have the privilege of walking with you along the shore of a lake, on some afternoon at the end of September, just you and me.
>
> There were many times since 1960 when I could have just given up trying to attain the double objective of increasing the long-term happiness of each one of you and at the same time, striving for the long-term and necessary growth of our company's competitive profitability. I've often been deeply discouraged, as you have been as well, I'm sure. Our reasons have no doubt been very different, but the result was the same. I could

* For the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Ouimet Group of companies, J.-Robert Ouimet made some minor changes to this "Fraternal Sharing."

have managed the business my father founded, either directly or indirectly, as do most other CEOs. Believe me when I tell you that it would have been very easy for me to do that. For example, I could have been satisfied with the minimum in fairness and justice in the contract clauses we periodically negotiate. I could have been fair and correct, and if possible not much more. I could have been just fair enough to avoid disputes. I could have been a good, "honest" citizen, following the law and doing the minimum required to maintain the motivation and social peace of the company, while keeping my focus on making profits.

Perhaps, if I had chosen to run the company like everybody else, taking the much easier and much less demanding path, it would certainly have been a much lighter load on my shoulders and maybe on yours, as well. But as the founder's only son, I was able, without ever really deserving it, to acquire the company and I always asked myself the question, "Why did I have this considerable privilege; why me more than anyone else?" I certainly did not have anything to do with the matter. The Parable of the Talents exists, and I know it only too well. Moreover, I'm a man of simple faith. I know I've received many things that I don't deserve. I think it's quite normal then for the Lord to expect a lot of me in return. If He didn't, He would be unjust, and it's here that I'll speak very personally. I want to tell you, from the bottom of my heart, that since I didn't give up, since we all continued working for the happiness and well-being of all the people in the company, with the ups and downs, through the many economic storms that forced us to shore up our profitability, as the old timers remember, it was not just because I was courageous though I probably was, but because I'm a man of

simple faith. And it's this faith that has always driven me to do everything possible to increase your happiness and well-being. But I've made a lot of mistakes along the way and, for those, I've always asked for your forgiveness, expressed my regrets and tried to do better. But above all, I have asked forgiveness from the Lord Jesus Christ for any voluntary and involuntary errors I have made. What I've discovered is that He's always willing to forgive when He knows that we really want to improve and to love more and better. And so, since I felt He always forgave me, I discovered that I had to do two things: ask for forgiveness from the people I've hurt and forgive the people who've hurt me for whatever reason.

But I haven't come yet to the most important part. I want to assure you and tell you with all my heart that if *Our Project* has now reached cruising speed, as our research of the last few years has shown, it's because when I felt discouraged, I turned to the Lord Jesus Christ and to His Father, and I implored Them both to accompany us in our enterprise through Their Spirit and, thus, my humble limits were no longer of any importance.

I prayed an awful lot and we all got through the difficulties and the storms, the economic ones as well as the organizational ones. As for *Our Project*'s success, let me say that I had very, very little to do with it, except perhaps, for simply being available through the exercise of my freedom, attempting along with you to live out *Our Project*, and not giving up when it was hard, and refusing to do things the way everybody else did them.

Let me say that the success of *Our Project* completely belongs to the Lord, and I congratulate Him often. Let me also say that the Lord Christ knows full well that I never asked Him to make *Our Project* a success, I never

asked Him. I always said to Him that if He was pleased with the project and with its continued operation, all He had to do was simply be at our side. And believe me, that's what He has done. This is the main reason why today our companies are well established in the northeast sector of the North American continent in this free market of fierce competition, which is good for the consumer in the long term. I know that I've been judged severely by many of you over the years. You were right. It was correct to ask, "Where is he trying to take us?" I often did not know and, I repeat, you were right. Daily prayer helped me to discover and to understand that your fears and questions were justified. You wondered if I was trying to convert the whole world, but I've never tried to do that. Your fear was understandable, but after ten, twenty, or thirty years, it all disappeared. I have to say, I've never been able even to convert myself, though I've tried often enough. It's the Lord who does that, so I don't have the right to convert anyone. You were right, however, to ask all those questions. And in my doctoral thesis, I addressed those fears and questions.

Because we've all suffered together throughout the years, the level of mutual confidence between us has grown. And this has made our pleasant walk on the lakeshore possible today.

My second spiritual adviser, Fr. Marc Roy, a man who some of you knew very well, always used to tell me, "The proof is in the testing." That's why we have research projects looking into our organizational environment, as well as the well-being of our people. That's why we've added complementary studies on noneconomic management tools and on the values fostered in the workplace by these tools. They've been carried out, and will continue to be carried out, so you can clearly and

honestly voice your concerns, your suffering, and any tensions you may feel. And this you've been able to do. You've noticed that no one has been let go, or "quietly sidelined" for having said or written things, at times harsh and often quite true, that were revealed during this research. And certain statements that were summed up in writing after the research were not easy for the managers or the stockholder to read and accept. Very often the things that needed to be improved, the mistakes that others and I had made, were correctly pointed out. We could have refused to accept them. We didn't have to improve ourselves; we didn't need to admit that we'd done wrong. But that's not the path we chose to follow. As much as it was humanly possible, we chose to rigorously correct and improve what was legitimately required. That's how we love each other, and that's how we learn to love each other. By forgiving, by listening to one another, by reconciling ourselves with each other, by admitting that we were wrong, publicly and in private. It's by doing these things that pride "shrivels up" and allows for humility to grow. And when it does, it allows us to love others more and more, beginning with our spouses, then our children, then the people with whom we have the privilege to work and so on.

Allow me to thank all of you who through the years have forgiven me for the errors that I made and the pain I caused you, very often unintentionally. Your forgiveness has often been silent but I saw it in your eyes, and it made me feel so good. Let's continue to do all we can, all of us together, so as to love each other and to help each other a little more every year. Let's continue to work hard, to sweat and to improve ourselves in our individual and collective responsibilities. Let's continue to make His business a competitively profitable one, be-

cause we've all seen what happens when we have several consecutive years when it's not.

On a more personal note, and so you may know that I'm weak and vulnerable and still plagued with pride and ego, I want to share something very intimate with you. You must know that the reason we haven't given up on *Our Project* during the last forty years, is because of the daily Eucharist and the simple faith, which I've never deserved, which has only been "loaned" to me and which I accepted with joy. It's because of the unshakable conviction that God loves me so very much, as He does every human being, and the profound conviction that God is Love, and since He is Love, He is forgiveness and mercy.

And along with this Love, God offers each of us His continual forgiveness. This reassures me and shows me that I shall have a small chance at the end of my life "to cash in my chips." Since it is more difficult for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of Heaven than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, it is very good that this is so.

Let all of us together, each at our own pace and according to our own conscience and culture, come to believe in the years to come that without certain forms of inner silence in our life at work, without certain forms of exchange and sharing between us that have been brought about as a result of the noneconomic management tools that have fostered certain humanization and spiritualization values, and without various kinds of inner and intense prayer at work – let me assure you, and there's no possibility that I am wrong here – that without these values, it will absolutely and eternally be impossible to continue to live out *Our Project* for another three-quarters of a century with Him.

If you don't believe me, and that would be quite normal, try it and you will see. We will give up and you will give up on *Our Project*. It will be too hard, too demanding. Fighting against individual and collective pride as well as self-centeredness is the biggest challenge that a human being or a group of people can face in their existence, especially at work. However, if we choose to listen to others, if we open up to other people, if we participate more often in the testimonials, in the moments of silence at the beginning and end of meetings, in the efforts to reconcile ourselves to one other, in the brief and discrete visits to our rooms of silence, in the two or three meetings that we hold between a person laid off and his immediate superior, if we do all those things, we'll discover that we aren't the only ones who are suffering, and that others are suffering even more. If we participate in the other activities of *Our Project*, like the community meals, the one-on-one, the annual meetings, the meals for four, and many of our other activities, we'll discover that they make us richer and warm our hearts more than our heads. If we look a bit more at the clouds, the setting sun, and the sky, if we listen a little more to the singing birds, to the sound of the wind, we'll discover together that, as Mother Teresa told us in Anjou in 1988: "Silence leads to prayer, prayer leads to faith, faith to love, love to self-giving, self-giving to peace, and peace to silence."

Along with you, I honor the many people who have gone before us since 1933, those who by their courage and perseverance, by their strong and wonderfully human, moral, spiritual and religious values have made it possible for the business to thrive, so that we today can pass it on to those of the third generation, some of whom are from my family. And we shall pass it on to

those who will work here after us. Life at work is worth living only in solidarity and in brotherhood; by giving more and more importance to the sacred, human dignity of people we meet every day. This is what opens us up so that we can listen to others.

This is what slowly makes it possible for everyone, according to his or her own progress, to discover certain values of faith and hope. This is also what opens us up to the Transcendence of Love, all people perceiving it at the rhythm of their own hearts. Yes, we now know that it's possible for a business competing in the marketplace to put into place practices that increase the long-term happiness and well-being of its workers, while at the same never losing its long-term competitive profitability.

Again, I thank you for having accepted to take this wonderful walk on the lakeshore with me, among these red and golden maple trees, with the warm fall breeze blowing, the forerunner of the harsh cold periods that are to come. Thank you for this moment of intimate sharing. Yes, I love you, even if my love has always been and will always be imperfect. And if you wish to, thank you for loving me in return. Thank you, if you see fit, for loving Him who is the only One who loves perfectly.

Yes, ACT and WORK as if everything depended on you, but pray, too. Yes, pray as if everything depended on God, but act and work, too. As Mother Teresa suggested: "PRAY so as to be able to manage with God."

LECTURES

J.-Robert Ouimet has given more than 245 public conferences and testimonies worldwide at various universities, business schools and organizations in North America, the Middle East and Asia.

IN CANADA:

Ivey Business School – University of Western Ontario, Ontario
International Management Forum, Ethics and Spirituality – École des Hautes Études Commerciales (HEC), University of Montreal, Montreal, Quebec
Archimedes Conference – École des Hautes Études Commerciales (HEC), University of Montreal
Northern Alberta Institute of Technology, Edmonton, Alberta
Newman Center – McGill University, Montreal, Quebec
McGill University – Department of Communications and Public Relations, Montreal, Quebec
University of Quebec in Montreal – Education Faculty, Montreal, Quebec
Laval University – Management department, MBA students, Quebec City, Quebec
Laval University – Social science and religious studies department, Quebec City, Quebec
University of Sherbrooke in Montreal, School of Nursing, Montreal, Quebec
University of Ottawa – Faculty of Theology (Dominicans), Ottawa, Ontario
Sobeys School of Business of St. Mary's University, Halifax, Nova Scotia
University of Quebec in Trois-Rivières, Trois-Rivières, Quebec
Albert le Grand Dominican College, Montreal, Quebec
University of Montreal, Nursing Faculty, Longueuil Campus, Longueuil, Quebec
University of Montreal, Nursing Faculty, Montreal Campus, Montreal, Quebec

University of Quebec in Rouyn-Noranda, Nursing Faculty, RouynNoranda, Quebec

IN THE UNITED STATES:

St. Edwards University Business School, Austin, Texas (Profs. Phillip Thompson and David Trott)

John Carroll University School of Business, Cleveland, Ohio (Profs. Ben Forbes and N. Hartman)

University of Notre Dame School of Business, South Bend, Indiana (Profs. C. Woo, G. Enderle, K. Misciewisz, B. Levey, O. Williams and B. VanDyck)

Marquette University School of Management, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (Profs. Thomas Bausch, David Shrock and James Spillane)

Loyola Marymount University School of Business, Los Angeles, California (Prof. Mark Bandsuch)

Tarleton University Management Business School, Killen, Texas (Profs. Jody Fry and Laura Matherly)

Fordham University School of Business, New York, New York (Profs. Jim Stoner, Joyce Orsini, Donna Rapaccioli and Lawrence Costiglio)

Columbia University, Graduate School of Business, New York, New York (Profs. Glenn Hubbard, Roger Mecznick, William Duggan and Marita Altman)

University of New Haven Business School, New Haven, Connecticut (Profs. Jess Boronico, Thad Henry and Sheila Wall)

Scranton University School of Business, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Profs. J. Stoner, J. Temple and E. Higgins)

St. Thomas University School of Business, St. Paul, Minnesota (Profs. Michael Naughton and Deborah Savage)

Detroit Mercy University School of Business, Detroit, Michigan (Prof. Gerald Cavanagh)

St. John's University School of Business, New York, New York

Golden Gate University Graduate School of Management, San Francisco, California (Prof. L. Robins)

Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio

Baylor University, Waco, Texas

DePaul University, Chicago, Illinois (Profs. Laura Hartman, Lyne R.K. Copp and Martha Painter)

Santa Clara University, San Francisco, California (Prof. Andre Delbecq)

Georgetown University School of Theology, Washington, D.C. (Prof. John Haughey)
George Washington University Business School, Washington, D.C. (Profs. Prabir Bagchi, Tim Fort and Paul Swiercz)
Boston College, Boston, Massachusetts (Profs. Sandra Waddock, Jean Bartunek and James Halpin)
Babson Business School, Boston, Massachusetts (Prof. Tom Sullivan)
University of Tampa, Tampa, Florida (Prof. Dianne Welsh)
Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut (Prof. David W. Miller)
Johns Hopkins University Hospital, Baltimore, Maryland (Dr. J. Finkelstein)
University of Arkansas School of Management, Fayetteville, Arkansas (Mr. Donald Bland)

IN MEXICO:

USEM (Unión Social de Empresarios, member of UNIAPAC), Puebla, Mexico, conference to Business Leaders (Sr. Enrique Pérez Gutiérrez Rosales)
USEM de Morelia, México, conference to Business Leaders (Ing. Ricardo Fernández Velasco)
USEM-DF, conference to Business Leaders (Ing. José Ignacio Mariscal)

IN EUROPE:

University of Nyenrode School of Business, Netherlands (Prof. Paul de Blot)
University of Amsterdam School of Business, Netherlands (Profs. Erik de Jongh and Bart Eikelenboom)
University of Leuven, Leuven, Belgium (Profs. Johan Verstraeten and Luc Van Liedekerke)
Deusto University, Bilbao, Spain (Prof. Dominec Mele)
London Business School, London, England (Prof. Craig Smith)
Pontificia Università Gregoriana, Rome, Italy (M. Sergio Bernal)
Université de Louvain, Brussels, Belgium (Prof. Yves de Ronge)
Pontifical University of St. Thomas (Angelicum), Rome, Italy (Prof. M. Naughton)
University of Westminster, London, England (Prof. Yochanan Altman)
IESE Business School, Barcelona, Spain (Doyen Jordi Canals and Prof. Domenec Mele)
INSEAD, Fontainebleau, France (Profs. J. Frank Brown and Craig Smith)

Academia Turcovici, Bucharest, Romania (Prof. Emil Moraru)
University of Fribourg, Switzerland (Profs. Maurice Villet and Robert Berthouzoz)
HEC Lauzanne, Switzerland (Prof. A. Bergman)
Facultatea de Teologie Orthodoxa, Bucharest, Romania (Prof. Emil Moraru)
University of Iasi, Institut Teologic Romano Catolic, Iasi, Romania (Prof. Wilhem Danca)
Observatoire de la Finance, Geneva, Switzerland (Paul H. Dembinski)
Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich, Switzerland (Prof. Bernard Lehman)
University of Alexandru Ioan Cuza, Iasi, Romania (Rector Vasile Isan)
University of Iasi Economics Department, Iasi, Romania (Prof. Dinu Airinei, Dean)
University of Cluj Faculty of theology, Cluj, Romania (Prof. Ioan Chirila, Dean)

IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND ASIA:
India Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad, India (M. Gurugi Narayana)
India Institute of Management (IIM), Calcutta, India (Prof. S.P. Parashar)
Assumption University, Bangkok, Thailand (Fr. V. Srivichairatana and P. Phattaramayteekij)
St. Joseph University Graduate School of Business, Beirut, Lebanon (Prof. Joseph Aoun, Rector)
Sun Yat Sen University Business School, Guangzhou, China (Prof. M. Li, Dean)
MS University, HRM Faculty, Educational Institute, Vadodara, India (Prof. Aruna S. Kasgiwala, Dean)

In 2009, Ouimet made three important trips to five Eastern European countries. In October and November 2009, he delivered eleven public conferences and personal testimonies in business schools and different organizations in India.

In 2010, he delivered eight public conferences and personal testimonies in China (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Hong Kong) and Taiwan.

ASSOCIATIONS, INSTITUTIONS AND COMPANIES

IN CANADA:

Jeune Chambre de commerce de Montréal

Conseil de l'Industrie laitière du Québec Inc.

The Benedictine Monks – Saint-Benoît-du-Lac Abbey, Saint Benoît-du-lac, Québec

Chambre de Commerce de Laval

Fondation Groupement Innovation, SaintJérôme, Québec

Opus Dei, Montreal, Québec

Ordre des conseillers en ressources humaines et en relations industrielles agréés du Québec

Jeune Chambre de commerce de Granby

Cistercian nuns – NotreDame du bon Conseil Abbey, Saint-Romuald, Québec

Jeune Chambre de Commerce du Québec métropolitain, Quebec City, Québec

Board of Trade of Metropolitan Montreal

Chambres de Commerce du Haut-Richelieu, Québec

Comité International de Réflexion et d'Action sur «Notre Projet» le CIRAN

Chambre de Commerce de Lévis, Québec

Chambre de Commerce Les Mascoutains, Québec

Congrès annuel du Conseil de la transformation agroalimentaire et des produits de consommation du Québec (CTAC)

Chambre de Commerce et de l'Industrie de la Rive-Sud, Québec

Fédération des établissements d'enseignement privé, Montreal, Québec

Rencontres Silence Intérieur et Prière (RSIP), Montreal, Québec

Chapitre de Granby des Clubs d'administration du Canada, Québec

École Foi et Mission, Saint Louis de France Parish, Montreal, Québec

Centesimus Annus Foundation, Montreal, Québec

The Quebec MBA Association

St-Patrice de Magog Parish, Magog, Québec

Mount Royal Club, Montreal, Québec

Association des Hommes d'affaires du Plein Évangile, Montreal, Québec

Rencontres Silence Intérieur et Prière (RSIP), Chicoutimi, Québec

Communauté de l'Alliance de Trois-Rivières, Trois-Rivières, Québec

Rencontres Silences Intérieur et Prière (RSIP), Laval, Québec

La Maison Horeb SaintJacques, Joliette, Québec (Adélard Froment)

Prayer Breakfasts, Quebec City, Québec (Roger Leduc)

IN THE UNITED STATES:

Academy of Management – Division MSR, Conference in Atlanta, Georgia

American Enterprise Institute, Washington, D.C. (Michael Novak)

International Association for Spirit at Work, New York, New York (host: Judy Neal)

Academy of Management – Division MSR, Conferences in Hawaii, Montreal, and San Antonio

Ninth International Conference on Business and Consciousness, Santa Fe, New Mexico (Charles Beaupré)

Tyson Center for Faith and Spirituality, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, Arkansas (Mrs. Judi Neal)

Tyson Foods, Fayetteville, Arkansas (John Tyson, Chairman of the Board and CEO)

IN EUROPE:

European Institute of Anthropology, Philanthropos, Fribourg, Switzerland (Archduke Rudolf, Crown Prince of Austria, Yves Semen)

Benedictine Monastery of Douai, London, England (Dermot Tredget)

Nicolas & Dorothée de Flüe, Switzerland (Eucharistein), (Nicolas Buttet)

Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, Rome, Italy (Cardinal Etchegarry, Cardinal Martino)

ADIC, UNIAPAC, Union internationale des dirigeants chrétiens, Brussels, Belgium (Mark Van Ossel and P. de Woot)

SPES Research Institute, Brussels, Belgium (Luk Bouchaert and Luk Van Liedekerke)

Slovakia Business Leaders Association, Slovakia (Prof. Jozef Vanco)

CNV Labour Union, Netherlands (EvertJan Slootweg)

VNONCW Protestant Church Association (Huib Klamer)

Laboratoire International de recherche sur la spiritualité dansla pratique des affaires, École Cathédrale, Paris, France (G. de Lacoste and Denise Maass)

Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales (Ben Andradi and Charles Wookey)

Academy of Management, Journal of Management, Spirituality and Religion, London, England (Prof. Yochanan Altman)

Academia Teologica Evanghelica, Sibiu, Romania (Prof. Iurgen Henkel)

Italian Banking Association, Rome, Italy (Sergio Bernal)

UNIAPAC, Union internationale des dirigeants chrétiens, Paris, France (Laurent Mortreuil)

Entrepreneurs et dirigeants chrétiens, Paris, France (Thierry du Parc and Françoise Vintrou)

Faculty of Orthodox Theology, Cluj, Romania (Prof. Sebastian Moldovan)

St-Nicolas Church, Chapel of the University of Bucharest, Bucharest, Romania (Prof. Vasile Gavrila, Sr. Brândusa Vrânceanu and Ionut Dima)

Turcovici Academy and Faculty of theology of the Romana-Catolica Eparchy, Bucharest, Romania (Prof. Emil Moraru)

Metropolia Moldovei si Bucovinei, Iasi, Romania (Metropolitan Teofan)

ASCOR, Iasi, Romania (Marius Pavel, president)

Institut Teologic RomanoCatolic, Iasi, Romania
(Wilhem Danca, Rector)

Radio Trinitas Iasi, Centru Eparhial, Iasi, Romania
(Prof. Dumitru Paduraru)

Arhipiscopia RomanoCatolica, Iasi, Romania
(Bishop Petru Gherghel)

Mitropolia Clujului, Orthodix Eparchy, Cluj, Romania
(Bishops Vasile Solmesanul, Sorim Câlea and
Metropolitan Bartholomew)

ClujNapoca, Cluj, Romania (Dan Calin Nistor, director general)

Cultural Spiritual Center, University of Krakow, Krakow, Poland
(Senator Zbigniew Cichon with Cardinal Stanislaw Dziwisz,
former secretary of Pope John Paul II for forty years)

Solidarnost (Solidarity), with seven union leaders, Krakow, Poland
(Senator Zbigniew Cichon)

Benedictine Institute of Culture to Protect the Good, Tyniec, Poland
(Fr. Bernard Sawicki, Abbot of the Tyniec Monastery, the
oldest Benedictine monastery in Poland)

IN THE MIDDLE EAST AND ASIA:

Punjab Chemicals Corp. Ltd., Mumbai, India (Gurugi Narayana)

SDAgchem (Europe) NV, Mumbai, India (Vipul Joshi)

Endurance Industries, Pune, India (G. Narayana)

Excel Industries Limited, Mumbai, India, (Ashwin C. Shroll and
Mr. Upadhayay)

Reliance Industries, Pune, India (M.G. Narayana, the largest
company in India)

Indian Institute of Management (IIM) Center for Human Values,
Calcutta, India (Ranjan Mitter)

KHS Machinery Pvt., Ahmedabad, India (Yatindra R. Sharma)

United Network Pvt., Ahmedabad, India (Mr. Deevyesh and J.
Radia)

Institute of Project Management, Pune, India (G. Narayna)

Transpek-Silox Indutry Ltd., Vadodara, India (Vijay Joshi and Paresh
Saraiya)

India Institute of Management (IIM), Ahmedabad, India (Gurugi
Narayana)

Daga Global Chemical Ltd., Baroda, India (R.J. Sarvaiya)

Reliance Industries Ltd., Varadora, India (largest industrial group in India) (A.P. Singh, COO, and P. Vijayaraghvan)

Indian Petrochemicals Corp. Ltd., Vadodara, India (S.K. Anand)

Nirlep Industries, Aurangabad, India (G. Narayana)

National Insurance Co. Ltd., Calcutta, India (Ashok Kulthe)

LaOpala Solitaire, Calcutta, India (Sushil Jhunjhunwala)

National Board of Education, Mumbai, India (Mohan Desay)

National Institute of Personnel Management, Aurangabad, India (G. Narayana)

Anand College of Management, School of Business, University of Vadodara, India (G. Narayana)

IPCL – Reliance Industries of India – the largest industrial group in India, Vadodara, India (A.P. Singh, CEO, P. Vijayaraghavan, site president, S.M. Kathuria, Head Eng.)

Claris Lifesciences Ltd., Pharma, Ahmedabad, India (Sushil Handa)

GRUH Finance Ltd., Housing Finance Institution, Ahmedabad, India (Sudhin Choksey)

Bullion Flex – Packaging Industry, Vadodara, India (Kumar Sahini)

Netafim Irrigation India Pvt. Ltd, Vadodara, Gujarat, India (Bharat Goswami, general manager)

Eclipsys, Alkapuri, Vadodara, India (Bharat Mehta, general manager-human resources)

ASK Management Consultancy Services (P) Ltd., Baroda, India (Vinod Joshi)

“EVERYTHING HAS BEEN LOANED TO YOU”

The author, Mr. J.-Robert Ouimet, passed away in 2018.
If you have questions or requests, please communicate to info@fondationadv.ca
If you prefer, complete this information card and mail to:
"To God Go"Foundation
8383, J. -René Ouimet St.
Anjou, Qc H1J2P8
Canada

(Please Print)

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Province: _____ Postal Code: _____

Country:_____

Telephone number: _____

Email address: _____

YOUR REQUEST OR QUESTION:

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