

## INTERVIEW WITH ALESSANDRO BARATTIERI, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AT UNIVERSITÉ DU QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL (UQAM)

Interview conducted by Quentin Wodon  
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### EXCERPTS:

- “According to an author I deeply esteem, Fr. Luigi Giussani, educating is introducing to the totality of reality, and the experience of education is in essence a *“communication of ourselves, of our way to relate and look at reality.”* Sharing my values, therefore, simply means incarnate them as I live and work.”
- One way in which this shapes my research is that my papers often start with questions that are from the “real” world and relevant for policy... One challenge I face sometimes is when I see the economics profession discounting too much the relevance of the research questions, to put nearly all the emphasis on the innovations in the execution of the papers.”

**You are an Associate Professor of International Economics at École des sciences de la Gestion of UQAM (Université du Québec à Montréal). Could you tell us a bit about the University?**

The University where I work was founded in the 1970s with a strong vocation to be a university that would be democratic and accessible to all. It has been a long path to the present reality of a “dynamic, open, creative university with an international outreach.” It certainly remains an accessible university and definitely it is not a confessional one. Last, but not least, UQAM is a francophone university, where most of the courses are taught in French (a language that I happily learned!).

**What is your main area of research and what do you teach? Why did you choose these fields within economics?**

My research interests include international economics (trade and macro), macroeconomics and finance. I teach courses in international finance, trade and globalization, and currencies and financial markets.

### Box 1: Interview Series

**What is the mission of the Global Catholic Education website?** The site informs and connects Catholic educators globally. It provides them with data, analysis, opportunities to learn, and other resources to help them fulfill their mission with a focus on the preferential option for the poor.

**Why a series of interviews?** Interviews are a great way to share experiences in an accessible and personal way. This series will feature interviews with practitioners as well as researchers working in Catholic education, whether in a classroom, at a university, or with other organizations aiming to strengthen Catholic schools and universities.

**What is the focus of this interview?** In this interview, Alessandro Barattieri, an Associate Professor of International Economics at UQAM, talks about his teaching and research. This interview is part of a series on Catholic economists in partnership with the Catholic Research Economists Discussion Organization (CREDO).

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When I arrived at Boston College for my PhD, the professors that I found most interesting were working in these fields, so I followed them for my specialization. I have to say, however, that I was always very interested in the global dimension of economic phenomena, and I always loved travelling and learning about new cultures and countries.

**Are you able to share your values in your teaching? What seems to work and what does not?**

According to an author I deeply esteem, Fr. Luigi Giussani, educating is introducing to the totality of reality, and the experience of education is in essence a “communication of ourselves, of our way to relate and look at reality.” Sharing my values, therefore, simply means incarnate them as I live and work. Let me give you a concrete example. Teaching during the pandemic required to change a lot, innovate, and be creative. I did all of that not because I was obliged to, but because I wanted to really enjoy the experience of teaching in those new circumstances. The end result was that I did enjoy a lot teaching during the pandemic (some new features of my courses will remain also when we will be back to teach in person), and my students appreciated my courses enormously.



Photo: Fr. Luigi Giussani.

**Do your values affect your research? If so, in what way? And what are some challenges you face?**

One value I certainly have is to try to contribute to the society and the world I live in. One way in which this shapes my research is that my papers often start with questions that are from the “real” world and relevant for policy. Examples include: What determines the global trade imbalances? What are the effects of protectionism? What happens if banks become too interconnected? One challenge I face sometimes is when I see the economics profession discounting too much the relevance of the research questions, to put nearly all the emphasis on the innovations in the execution of the papers.

**Is being a Catholic economist easy or hard, and why is that?**

I always loved this quote from Benedict’s *Deus Caritas Est*: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction”. Ever since I had this encounter in my life, a gratitude for the discovery of the deep preference of God in my life has been growing in me. Recognizing to be object of an infinite love makes everything easier: even being an economist!

**What is your advice for graduates who may be Catholic or have an affinity with Catholic values and are contemplating doing a PhD?**

My advice here would not be an epsilon different for a Catholic or a non-Catholic student: be sure you are really interested in economics, because serious PhD programs are challenging. If you then enroll in one such program, when things gets tough, do not forget your interest of the beginning.

**Could you share how you ended up in your current position, what was your personal journey?**

I picked economics starting a joint management and economics program out of interest (I had enrolled in that program to study business). I followed the suggestion of one of my early mentors in Italy to pursue a PhD in economics in the US, which was probably the key turning point in my path. I then went through the fascinating process of the job market and ended up working in a great department (Econ at UQAM), and living in an amazing city (Montreal).

**Finally, could you share a personal anecdote about yourself, what you are passionate about?**

I love sports (tennis especially) and travelling, but I guess the thing I am most fond of is learning. I also deeply value friendship, so now that I am in Italy (after nearly 3 years) I am spending my vacation time on trains to go visit friends in our beautiful cities.