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Vocation of the Business Leader

In the name of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, I am very grateful for the invitation to take part in the XXIV UNIAPAC World Congress and to launch the new book: *Vocation of the Business Leader*. The Pontifical Council which I represent is spiritually very near to you, Christian business leaders who, all around the world, daily strive to witness to your faith in Christ and his charity at work in the world, especially in the world of business.

Premises in the Gospel and the Church's Social Teaching:

Indeed, the concern for the whole well-being of mankind is not new to the Church. Reflection on what it means to be authentically human in history, society and culture goes back to the Scriptures and the Fathers of the Church. Later, during the time of the early persecutions, Christian communities were deeply involved in providing social services and, once the persecutions of Christians ended, the Church used its new freedom, like leaven, to influence society:

The spirit of Christian charity and devoted self-sacrifice which had once so impressed the pagan world was by no means dead. Rather, the needs of the times called forth new efforts in the service of Christian charity. History records innumerable examples of practical works of mercy.... There arose many institutions for the relief of every human need: hospitals, poor houses, orphanages, foundling homes, shelters for travellers, etc., which had been entirely unknown in pre-Christian times.¹

Such responses to the human condition of suffering in the light of Christian faith and the charity of Christ continued with various protagonists: religious orders, ecclesial movements and inspired individuals down through the ages. These various responses to the *social question* did feed into

¹ Karl Bihlmeyer, *Church History*, Vol. 1. Westminster; Newman Press, 1968, p. 373.

and find formal expressions in the Church's *social teachings*,² beginning with the great encyclical of Pope Leo XIII, *Rerum Novarum* (1891).³ The encyclicals, messages and other documents have defined and continue to set out the structural principles articulating this tradition of the Church's engagement in the social order and the involvement of its members. The Church's Social Teaching addresses our persistent poverties and provides a map which Christian ministry follows in practice with a view to integral human development.⁴

Accordingly, Pope Paul VI taught,

it is up to the Christian communities to analyze with objectivity the situation which is proper to their own country, to shed on it the light of the Gospel's unalterable words and for action from the social teaching of the Church... It is up to these Christian communities, with the help of the Holy Spirit, in communion with the bishops who hold responsibility and in dialogue with other Christian brethren and all men of goodwill, to discern the options and commitments which are called for in order to bring about the social, political and economic changes seen in many cases to be urgently needed."⁵

And for this, Paul VI also called for people endowed with a "forward-looking imagination both to perceive in the present the disregarded possibility hidden within it, and to direct itself towards a fresh future."⁶

The mission, then, of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace is, on the one hand, to promote the vocation of Christians engaging the social order with their faith and the charity of Christ, and, on the other hand, to spread the knowledge of the Social Teaching of the Church, especially as the Pope articulate them in their encyclicals and letters, to deepen them and to help to apply them throughout human society, within and beyond the borders of the Church. For example, when our Pontifical Council held a Congress in Rome in May 2011 to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the promulgation of *Mater et Magistra*, it devoted the third day to the discussion of the Church's social doctrine, its implementation and best practices.

² The social teaching of the Church, with roots in the Old and New Testaments and throughout the tradition, is usually reckoned to begin in its modern form with the 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum* of Pope Leo XIII. The documents of Catholic social doctrine include certain encyclicals from the past 120 years as well as documents from the Holy See and from Episcopal Conferences and even individual Bishops. For a history, cf. *Le Discours social de l'Église Catholique: de Léon XIII à Benoît XVI*, Paris: Bayard Montrouge, 2009.

³ Cf. A. DE GASPERI, *I tempi e gli uomini che prepararono la Rerum Novarum*, Vita e Pensiero, Milano 1984; O. KÖHLER, *Il progetto universale di Leone XIII obiettivi e metodi* in H. JEDIN, ed., *Storia della Chiesa*, IX, Jaka Book, Milano 1988; F. TRANIELLO – G. CAMPANINI, *Dizionario storico del movimento cattolico in Italia*, 3 vv. Marietti, Casale Monferrato 1981-1984.

⁴ The Church, with its extensive experience in human issues, does not seek to interfere in the politics of the State (*Caritas in veritate*, § 9). The Church's Social Doctrine provides *principles for reflection, standards for judgment, and directives for action* (Cfr. Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), § 4) ... while witnessing to Christ's truth and love in the world. For she has a mission of truth to accomplish in every time and circumstance, for a society that is ever more attuned to man, to his dignity and to his vocation.

⁵ Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), § 4.

⁶ Paul VI, *Octogesima Adveniens* (1971), § 37.

Serving the Social Teaching of the Church, its heritage and its development, the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace essentially promotes two types of activities:

- the promotion of discipleship of Jesus Christ, engaging the social order with their faith in Him and as witnesses to His charity, that is, the love of God incarnate.
- the diffusion and promotion of Catholic social teaching expressed in Papal encyclicals, messages and addresses, through which the principles underlying, inspiring and articulating Christian witness in the social order are enunciated and developed. It is through these principles that the Church continues to shed her light of faith and reason on the ever-changing situation of “man and his world” to use the celebrated expression of Antoine Saint-Exupéry.⁷

In order to present the new reflection, *Vocation of the Business Leader*, I shall focus on the promotion of *Christian witness in the social order, especially in the world of business*.

“Look to the Rock from which you were hewn”

Christian witness in the social order and its promotion belong primarily to the Church. It is her mission, which she carries out in the power of the Holy of Spirit as *leaven in the dough, salt of the earth and light of the world*. Born from the wounded side of her crucified Lord, the Church is *called forth* to proclaim in the world her faith in her crucified and risen Lord and to witness to the love of the Father that the Son revealed to humanity from the cross. Christian engagement in the world and its social order is first and foremost the *vocation* of the Church, which she shares with her children. In and through the Church, the glorified Christ continues to call followers to discipleship; and those called he also calls to witness to his love in the world.

This dynamic relationship, defining the *vocation* – the identity and mission – of the faithful, recalls the relationship between the people of Israel and their parents, Abraham and Sarah, in the prophecy of Isaiah. The passage reads: “Look to the rock from which you were hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug. Look to Abraham your father and to Sarah who bore you” (Is 51:1-2). The metaphors *rock* and *quarry*, with which the prophet presents the relationship between parents (Abraham-Sarah) and children (the people of Israel), indicates strict *identity* and likeness. Deriving her vocation from Abraham and Sarah, Israel must also find the meaning of her life from them.

In this light, let us glance at a very instructive Rabbinical reading of the Isaian passage which underlines the role and sense of *rock*:

God says: How can I create the world, when they will become godless and revolt against me. But when God saw that Abraham would be born, He said: Behold, I have found a rock on which I can build and establish the world.

⁷ “Man and his world” is the translation of the title *Terre des hommes* (1942).

This Haggadah, according to which God found in Abraham a rock which will sustain creation, is to be related with what God said about him and his children in the Book of Genesis: “*I have chosen him that he may charge his children and household after him to keep the ways of the Lord by doing **righteousness and justice***” (Gn 18:19ff). The two virtues, **righteousness** and **justice** are often reread by the Rabbis as **love** and **justice**. These, then, are the virtues, whose practice makes Abraham a **rock** that sustains creation, and which his children, *dug and hewn* from their parents, are supposed to have and practise.

Dear friends, I have not gone far afield to bring these images about Abraham and Sarah, their children and their virtues, for the origins and the basis of all **business** lie in the same Book of Genesis, in the account of creation. There, through the *dominion* granted Adam and Eve over creation (Gn 1:28) and their need to “*till the earth*” (Gn 3:23), humanity is to make creation serve its needs through the transformative power of work. In its exercise of **business**, therefore, humanity would become a **rock that sustains creation through the practice of love and justice**. And this appears to be really the vocation of the Christian business leader: *to practise love and justice and to teach business household for which he or she is responsible to do likewise, for the sustenance of all creation, beginning with our brothers and sisters*.

Having rooted the sense of *business* in the biblical accounts of creation, one may be led by the Rabbinical Haggadic story to conclude that *the vocation*⁸ *of the faithful business leader* is to sustain creation through the practice of *love and justice*. Thus understood, business can be a genuine human calling and Christian vocation. *Charity* plays a central role in it.

Love and justice for the *sustenance* of the created order resonate powerfully with the concept of *integral human development* as developed in the social encyclicals of the Church, particularly *Populorum progressio* of Pope Paul VI, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* of Pope John Paul II, and *Caritas in veritate* of Pope Benedict XVI. According to this teaching, development which merits its name is not simply economic or technological. It is integral, involving the whole person, whole and entire: his person and his world. It is development that *sustains creation: the life of the human person and the life of his world*. This is development which is the fruit of *human activities inspired by love and justice*. This is development which approaches the heavenly for, as Pope Benedict XVI teaches, “Man’s earthly activity, when inspired and sustained by *charity*,

⁸ **Vocation**, from what has been said about Abraham and the Church, would have us know who we are and what God’s plan for us is. It becomes really our mission in life that corresponds with what each one discerns to be God’s plan for his/her life, thus giving it meaning (cf. *Populorum Progressio*, §§ 34-37). Cf Andreas Widmer (*The Pope and the CEO*) who would say that your vocation, understood, embraced, and faithfully lived, is what makes you feel truly and fully alive.

contributes to the building of the universal city of God, which is the goal of the history of the human family.”⁹

Thus, our Catholic social doctrine and practice ought to be prized as an efficacious instrument of *evangelization*,¹⁰ a catalyst for *conversion*, and a dynamic guide for Christians and those who find its teaching reasonable, as they engage society. And this brings us exactly to the guidebook or vademecum which *Vocation of the Business Leader* aspires to serve as.

Reflections on the Vocation of the Business Leader:

How was *Vocation of the Business Leader* born? It began at a seminar entitled “Caritas in Veritate: The Logic of Gift and the Meaning of Business”, which was held 24-26 February 2011 at the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, in collaboration with the John A. Ryan Institute for Catholic Social Thought (Center for Catholic Studies at the University of St. Thomas) and the Ecophilos Foundation. Convinced of the capital importance of developing a habit of *discernment* to accompany the important, often daily, decision-making of every Christian business leader, the participants resolved to prepare a kind of executives’ handbook or *vademecum* which could also be utilized by professors in formative moments in schools and universities. It proposes an integral vision and understanding and provides business leaders (and future ones attending business schools) with both principles and tools for discovering the good and deliberately pursuing it, so to live a harmonious or integrated life of enterprising service.

Thus the reflection, *Vocation of the Business Leader*, fulfils its purpose of being a helpful *guide* to business men and women seeking to grow in the virtue of *charity* as befits their vocation and their degree of influence in the *polis*.¹¹

The new book covers three constitutive, interconnected moments of the process of discernment: *seeing*, *judging* and *acting*. This is a method developed by Fr. Joseph-Léon Cardijn, later Cardinal, and given formal recognition in *Mater et Magistra*:

⁹ Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in veritate* (2009), n. 7.

¹⁰ Cfr. Pope John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Centesimus Annus* n. 54, May 1991.

¹¹ Cfr. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate* (2009), § 7.

There are three stages which should normally be followed in the reduction of social principles into practice. First, one reviews the concrete situation; secondly, one forms a judgment on it in the light of these same principles; thirdly, one decides what in the circumstances can and should be done to implement these principles. These are the three stages that are usually expressed in the three terms: look, judge, act.¹²

Expanding on this much-appreciated approach, Bernard Lonergan S.J. urges attentiveness both to empirical reality and to context. “See, understand, judge and act,” he would say: “Be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible.”¹³

I will now briefly touch on each of the three steps.

Seeing

The first part of the *Vocation of the Business Leader* focuses on how one interprets the “*signs of the times*”. It analyzes the contemporary scenario in which business leaders and organizations find themselves, a scenario characterized by *globalization, new communication technology, financialization, and cultural change*.

The main feature of globalization, the interdependence of world economies, leads us to conclude that no person or nation can think of itself as entirely independent of others. Indeed, the speed of modern communication unites us daily with members of the international community. We are ever more interconnected, and it becomes ever more apparent that we share a common destiny. Decisions made in one part of the world frequently impact peoples’ lives half a world away. This increasing *interconnectedness* imposes great responsibility on business leaders involved in the decision-making process. Business executives and members of their enterprise are called to commit themselves to the common good of the entire human family.

As humanity becomes more interconnected, we should make every effort to enter into true communion with one another. While globalization makes us neighbours, it does not automatically make us brothers. An important cause of poverty and underdevelopment is a lack of brotherhood among individuals and peoples.

One might reasonably ask if it is *possible to achieve brotherhood by human effort alone?* Reason, by itself, is certainly capable of grasping the equality that exists among men, and helps to peacefully order their civic coexistence, but it cannot establish fraternity. The latter originates in a transcendent vocation from God the Father, who loved us first, and taught us through the Son what fraternal charity is.¹⁴

¹² John XXIII, *Mater et Magistra* (1961), § 236.

¹³ Bernard J.F. Lonergan S.J., *Method in Theology*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1972, ch. 14.

¹⁴ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in veritate* (2009), § 19.

Besides, in the last quarter century there has been a radical shift in the economy from production to finance, a phenomenon known as the *financialization of the economy*. The revenue and profits of the financial sector have become an increasingly large segment of the worldwide economy. This process has not only contributed to *cultural changes* within business but also significant changes in society. We observe a rise in short-termism, the spasmodic search for short-term success and profit, and commoditisation, I would dare to say, of “everything”. The meaning of human enterprise is reduced to price. As Pope Benedict warns in his social encyclical *Caritas in veritate*, one of the greatest risks for businesses is that they are almost exclusively answerable to their investors, thereby limiting their social value. It is becoming increasingly rare for business enterprises to be in the hands of a stable director who feels responsible for the long-term – not just the short-term – life and results of the company.

Judging

The second part of the *Vocation of the Business Leader* prepares entrepreneurs to make sound judgments within the complex reality of the world of business. Two fundamental principles of the social doctrine of the Church serve as beacons or light-houses: human dignity and the common good.

Created in the image of God, every individual possesses the dignity of personhood. Each and every person is an end in him or herself, never merely an instrument valued only for its utility – a *who*, not a *what*! He is not *something*, but *someone*. In addition, he is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering in communion with other persons.¹⁵

Each aspect of man’s social and economic life finds its fulfilment when it places itself in service of the *common good*. The common good is best defined as the good of the social and economic body and all its individual members. Hence, it is not the sum of the individual goods, but a multiplication of them. The health and vitality of a social body depends on the participation and relations of its members. Businesses play a significant role in the economic body because they affect factors that contribute to the common good of the larger society. Their products and services, the jobs they provide, and the economic and social surplus they make available to society, are foundational to the good life of a nation and of humanity as a whole.

From these fundamental principles derive the practical principles in *Vocation of the Business Leader*. Its pages convey encouragement to *meet the needs of the world* with goods that are *truly good* and *truly beneficial*, without forgetting, in a spirit of solidarity, the needs of the poor and the vulnerable. The volume advocates the principle of *organising work within enterprises* in a manner that is *respectful of human dignity*; the principle of *subsidiarity*, which fosters a spirit of initiative and increases the competence of the employees, who are considered “co-

¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992), § 357.

entrepreneurs”; and, finally, the principle of the *sustainable creation of wealth* and its *just distribution* among the various stakeholders.

Acting

The third step in *discernment* calls for action. It is the integration of the aforementioned principles into one’s ordinary working-life. More than anything, however, it is the moment in which one bears *witness* to the teaching of the Holy Gospel. At this point, a devout spiritual life is absolutely indispensable. One should be receiving the sacraments and praying frequently. When the spiritual gifts are sought, they will give one the grace to live an integrated life, and keep one from living a divided life. As I address you on the eve of Holy Week, I cannot but recall the invitation of Pope Benedict XVI, in his Message for Lent 2012, to aim for the “high standard of ordinary Christian living” and to reflect on the universal call for holiness (n.3).

“You are the salt of the earth. But if salt loses its saltiness, how can it regain its flavor? ... You are the light of the world... Let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven” (Mt 5:13-16). Fortunately, we are witnessing a change in business, a new tendency among organizations, both public and private, to view profit as a *means for achieving human and social ends* – in other words, as an opportunity to serve the common good. Indeed, enterprises are making room for the principle of gratuitousness and the logic of gift involved in the production of work, the organization of work, in the relation to various stakeholders, and in the distribution of revenue. They are doing this from the beginning, and so the canons of justice are being intentionally heeded as the economic process unfolds, not just afterwards or incidentally¹⁶

Conclusion

I conclude my brief introduction by recalling the Gospel of the *Miraculous Draught of the Fishes*, around which these days of the International Congress in Lyon have been structured. Let us echo the apostle Simon, who answered Jesus, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. *But because you say so*, I will let down the nets.” (Lk 5:1-11). Let us *trust* in the words of Our Lord; let us follow his teaching and his witness in expectation of lasting reward. In the long-term, your effort to keep the light of faith burning in your working-life will bear lasting fruit for the common good, and trust in the market will be restored.

Indeed, the decision of Pope Benedict XVI to proclaim the *Year of the Faith* to begin in October 2012 is relevant for all people who recognize that only through faith is it possible for the human being to overcome the temptation of *nihilism* and to face the problems and difficulties of the present times. The crisis that we have been experiencing for the last three years is mainly a crisis of faith -- a crisis of identity, meaning, and the dignity of work, which dramatically manifests itself especially in economic spheres. The economic paradigm of the last thirty years,

¹⁶ Cfr. Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), § 37.

which centered on capital gains, has come to its term. A change in gear is required and turn-about is required. You are our hope. You are our hope for a more *human* economy, a more creative mark and more profitable to “foster the development of each man and of the whole man.”¹⁷

Cardinal Peter Kodwo Turkson
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¹⁷ Paul VI, *Populorum Progressio*, 14; cf “the fulfillment of the whole man and of every man” 42.