

Paper by Vitali Kandalintsev
“The Calling of Business: Outer and Inner Aspects”

While answering in the affirmative the question “is there such a thing as a calling for the business enterprise itself?” – we should take into consideration both outer and inner aspects of the calling in question.

Outer aspects deals with the evident mission of any business enterprise to produce and supply goods/services in the most efficient way. This mission we might define as the outer calling of business. Through its self-evident nature, the outer calling of business is accepted by the great majority of people.

However, any business has to proceed from the above-said general description of its outer calling to the more specific one. The latter relates to the sphere of business (what things to supply), its ways (how to produce and supply), its scale (how many things to produce and supply), etc. The idea of such specific calling is generated by the entrepreneurs who start some concrete business.

In its outer aspects the calling of business seems to be religiously neutral. It is driven by people’s needs in material goods and by the desire of businessmen to organize the process of satisfying those needs within the principles of contemporary market economy. Profit, growth and expansion are the yardsticks of whether the businesses have fulfilled or missed their calling.

But it does not mean that business is an area of life exempted from such thing as “the comprehensive and general call of humanity to holiness”. The matter lies in the fact that regarding business and its calling only from an outer point of view is totally inadequate. There certainly are inner aspects of business as well as inner aspects of its calling.

What are they, the inner aspects of business and its calling? We may possibly track them proceeding from the triune structure of an earthly humane being – spirit, soul and body. There are three main trends in business originating accordingly in spiritual, soul and physical realms.

The Spiritual trend has its roots in the principle of love. It manifests itself in charity and other non-commercial good deeds. Here businessmen follow their God, Who just gives without compensation. Here businessmen find God’s blessing and their way to holiness. In accomplishing the spiritual trend businesses are being integrated with the Kingdom of God and its Law of Love in a most direct way.

Still, to be able to give something without compensation businesses have to be efficient and competitive. The source of their efficiency and competitiveness lies in the principle of freedom, which represents Physical (earthly) trend in business. Economic freedom for man is achieved through such institutions as private property, market economy, personal independence etc. This principle presupposes for everybody the right to choose his or her economic status, excludes limits on personal well-being or sphere of economic interests. Under present-day situation free entrepreneurship remains a driving force of economic development in many countries.

Finally, there is an intermediary trend in business which is connected with the soul realm and based on principles of justice and solidarity. This trend contributes to uniting both the Spiritual and Physical trends that seem to be polarized in the model of business under discussion. Justice seeks to approve economic freedom by demanding equivalency (no underpaid or overpaid factors of production) in economic relations. Solidarity seeks the same pertaining to love by demanding mutual interest and support of all people engaged in firm’s activity.

Considering business from the inner point of view, we could come to a conclusion that calling or vocation of a business enterprise consists of realizing, accepting and integrating in harmony all the three above-said trends. The idea to serve unto God makes a basis for such realizing, accepting and integrating.

Business must be efficient, profitable, competible – yes. But at the same time it must be healthy from moral point of view. That is, it must unite people of different economic status (owners, hired labour, partners, independent specialists) in solidarity and justice. Mondragon Cooperatives show us, as far as I understand, one of the possible ways to increase solidarity among company people – through a certain transfer of property rights toward all workers of the firm. Again, a prospering business is to undertake some charity obligations and contribute to social stability by displaying that it is capable of love and mercy in relation to those who are in the dire straites.

To combine efficiency, social transfers and charity needs much of a talent. There should be support for such a vision of business inside the firm. But this way of developing business is in essence a practical means to move toward holiness in the economic sphere. Such movement toward holiness becomes actual when corporate workers and the company itself (regarded in terms of a moral unity of corporate people) stick properly to Christian faith.

Thus, speaking of the calling of business from the inner, Christian point of view, we could here define it as a following principles of faith under conditions of people's joint economic activity. Three trends (or elements) as described above, denote three ways of fulfilling principles of faith in joint effort.

First, the principle of love as expressed in charity – it helps to keep business in conformity with God's Commandments, traditions of Church life and peoples's moral expectations in respect to Christianity.

Second, the principle of justice and solidarity, which may manifest itself in such phenomena as a "democratisation of capital" (certain transfer of entity in favor of firm's employees), good social packages, broader participation in management etc. All this may be viewed as an overcoming of people's elienation from each other, especially those whom God gave a destiny to work together for years.

Third, the principle of freedom. It is deeply rooted in Christian faith, for it is generally acknowledged in Christianity that God convinces man to do something but not presses him to do so. Nobody should press entrepreneurs (even morally) in matters like raising capital, formation of private property, legal structure of the firm and many other aspects of their business. Entrepreneurs like all other participants of economic life are free to agree on what is suitable for their economic interests, convincing others to join their business on certain terms and conditions.

Economic freedom is vital for an efficient economy, and the efficiency is vital for everybody's interests. That's why we must be careful and not to demand too much in respect of a "level of socialisation" of business. The Calling of business is not in a domination of one or another trend, but in a very complicated equilibrium of all three basic elements or trends of business.

We can hardly express that equilibrium in concrete figures or percents. It much depends on sectoral, stage, scale and other techno-economic factors, as well as psychological and historical factors. But we can speak of the inner equilibrium of business as a strategic target, or calling, which provides stability and mutual understanding in the society. And lays channels for moving in a more general direction called above as "the comprehensive and general call of humanity to holiness".