

Vatican Releases 'The Vocation of the Business Leader'

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The Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace recently published a useful and practical guide for business men and women entitled [Vocation of the Business Leader: A Reflection](#). This relatively short guide of 30 pages (87 short paragraphs)-one might characterize it as something of a "*vade mecum*" or "*speculum*" for business leaders-is the fruit of a seminar held February 24-26, 2011, entitled "*Caritas in Veritate*: The Logic of Gift and the Meaning of Business."

Issued at a time of "darkness" in the global economy, it is hoped that by following the principles and guidelines of this document Christian leaders will help "restore trust, inspire hope, and keep burning the light of faith that fuels their daily pursuit of the good." These are the stated objectives in the Foreword by Peter K. A. Cardinal Turkson.

Aimed at an audience of business men and women, professors, and students, the guide promotes the vision that there is, in a manner of speaking, a "vocation" that business men and women ought to be cognizant of, regardless of the particular business institutions of which they are part. It is intended to cover the entire gamut of business, from family businesses to multinational corporations, from cooperatives to non-profit business to for-profit business, from industry to banking and finance. (¶ 5)

Though based on traditional Catholic principles, it is thoroughly modern, and incorporates the contemporary realities of the business world, including globalization, communication technologies, and the "financialization" of the economy. (¶ 17-23, 26) It also addresses them fully recognizing the modern prevailing overemphasis on individualism ("what works for me," independently of the effects on others") and instant gratification is also recognized. (¶ 17, 24) This latter error is something that must be overcome by the virtue of solidarity.

Solidly grounded in Catholic Social Doctrine, the guide seeks to elaborate on practical principles that are calculated to advance the principles of human dignity and the common good. It seeks to do this based on the promotion of the good and the sustainable creation of wealth and its just distribution, without forgetting the fundamental value of solidarity, especially for the poor and vulnerable.

The *Vocation of the Business Leader* is quite bullish on the market system as an efficient way to serve the common good, and yet it recognizes that the market system can suffer blight through "absence of the rule of law or international regulations, corruption, destructive competition, crony capitalism, excessive state intervention or a culture hostile to entrepreneurship in one or more of its forms." (¶ 9)

The guide, however, looks less at institutional problems and institutional solutions. It is highly personal and seeks to convince Christian business men and women that they must act with integrity, which is to say that they ought not to lead a "divided" life. (§ 10) The Church knows that social justice starts with the individual human heart.

Integrity is the theme. There ought to be no "split between faith and daily business practice"; we are not to live a compartmentalized life, as that is a "fundamental error." (§ 10) Indeed, it might be said to be a form of idolatry, a worship of mammon or a worship of a "golden calf." (§§ 10-11) Under the lead of Christian virtue, particularly prudence, and the social doctrine of the Church, the business life must be reconciled to the faith. (§§ 13-14)

This reconciliation is done through purifying the way business people see, judge, and act (§§ 15-16), so that there is less selfish and short-term focus, and greater weight given to the common good, human dignity, and the just use of the world's resources.

The *Vocation of the Business Leader* reminds business men and women that they have been given much, and along with the "great resources" at their disposal goes the divine injunction "to do great things." (§ 1) The use of their particular gifts in building productive organizations that benefit of humankind is to be seen as a sort of "vocation," *i.e.*, an "deep sense of God's calling to be collaborators in creation," one which helps in the "unfolding" in the work of creation. (§§ 5-8)

When properly ordered, businesses and markets "make an irreplaceable contribution to the material world and even the spiritual well-being of humankind," and the common good is increased. (§ 2)

Similarly, when properly managed, business activities also enhance the dignity of employees and promote virtues, including those virtues of "solidarity, practical wisdom, justice, discipline," and so forth. Business promotes interdependency which itself results in cultural openness, peace, and prosperity. (§ 3)

But as good as free markets and businesses are, they are only as good as the men and women that participate in them. When moral principles and virtues are forgotten or neglected, then markets and businesses "can be places in which expediency overcomes justice, power corrupts wisdom, technical instruments are detached from human dignity, and self-interest marginalizes the common good." (§ 4)

For the Christian business leader, business judgments must be based upon reason, but they "must be nurtured in the moral and spiritual culture from which business leaders come." At the "heart of that culture is the Gospel of Jesus Christ." (§ 27)

This Gospel is not a superimposition of ethical rules but is a message of love, in particular love arising from "a relationship with Christ." (§ 28) In practical terms, the love of Christ will incorporate the tri-partite sources which (in level of bindingness from more binding to less binding) consist of Catholic social doctrine, Catholic social thought, and Catholic social practice. (§ 28)

Businesses identify "genuine human needs"-from bolts to lifesaving medical devices-and then invent "entirely new ways of meeting human needs." (§ 40) "Needs" are to be distinguished from "mere wants," particularly those wants that "do not contribute to well-being," and in fact may even "be detrimental to human well-being as, for example, in the sale of non-therapeutic drugs, pornography, gambling, violent video games, and other harmful products." (§ 42)

Businesses must seek to identify and serve genuine human needs without violating the "foundational ethical principles" of business which are human dignity and the common good. These foundational ethical principles are amply discussed in paragraphs 30 through 37 of the text. "Respect for human dignity and the common good are foundational principles which should inform the way we organize labor and capital employed, and the processes of innovation, in a market system." (§ 38)

Similarly, businesses must not neglect the poor or vulnerable, but most stand in solidarity with them. (§ 43) The text identifies the various ways that this can be done.

The *Vocation of the Business Leader* then narrows its focus to the business enterprise itself, and the organization and difficulty it involves. It views business in a positively light, as a "community of persons" (§§57-59), and encourages businesses to foster dignified work (§§ 45-56), and create subsidiary structures which promote responsibility and trust. (§§ 47-50)

What, then, is to be done with the fruits of the market system and business? Recognizing the "social mortgage" on the world's resources (§56), the *Vocation of the Business Leader* discusses the legitimate role of profit, "a good servant," but "a poor master" (§ 51, 53), the need of stewarding resources (§ 52) and stewarding of the environment (§ 54), and the just distribution of that wealth through just wages to employees, just prices to customers, just prices to suppliers, just returns to owners, and just tax rates for a reasonable contribution to the entire community. (§ 55)

The Church sees the specific Christian contribution to markets and business as a "witness of actions," a living out of the Gospel in the world, indeed even a proclamation of Christ the savior. (§§ 60-64) "When Christian business leaders fail to live the Gospel in their organizations, their lives 'conceal rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion.'" (§ 63) We want to reveal the authentic face of Christ whichever business we are in.

The *Vocation of the Business Leader* has an interesting development of the notion of "love received and given" as Pope Benedict XVI mentioned in his encyclical *Caritatis in Veritate*. This is well-developed in paragraphs 65 through 80, which describe the notions of giving and receiving in love in the context of markets and business.

Finally, the *Vocation of the Business Leader* encourages business leaders not to forgo the contemplative life, and its complementarity with the active life.

An interesting feature of the text is its Appendix, which is "An Examination of Conscience for the Business Leader." We can hope that business leaders will be seen before confession, in the

silence of the conscience, with this examination in hand, and the searing love of the Holy Spirit, to guide them.

This is a splendid resource, and one we hope lands on the desk of every business man and woman. And, we hope, not only on the desk of every business man and woman where it might remain a dead letter, but also on their lips and, even more, in their minds and in their hearts. The teachings in the *Vocation of the Business Leader* ought to be an integral part in the life of business leaders, so that Christ may be found not only in the Temple, but also walking down Wall Street and Main Street.

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