

## New trends in business in line with Catholic social teaching



Written by Oliver Williams

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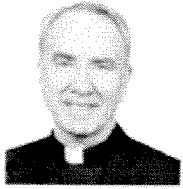
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OLIVER WILLIAMS

There are a growing number of companies that not only seek their private good, but also the common good and they embody this expanded purpose in their mission statement and core values.

Cardinal Turkson acknowledged this when he introduced the document *The Vocation of the Business Leader* based on Catholic Social Teaching on March 30, 2012: “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.”

Jerry Porras and James Collins in *Built to Last* (1994) call such companies that have long-term, excellent financial performance and an expanded purpose “visionary companies,” companies that believe that doing well and doing good are not opposites. For example, Merck Pharmaceutical Co. has a mission statement that calls on the company to “devote(s) extensive efforts to increase access to medicines through far-reaching programs that not only donate Merck medicines, but also help deliver them to the people who need them.” Merck sees its purpose as to preserve and improve human life. (See the Merck mission statement on the web). Hewlett-Packard speaks of its purpose as to make technical contributions for the advancement and welfare of humanity. In South Korea, Homeplus speaks of “a mission to create increasing value to our customers and communities. . . . We commit to balanced ‘growth’ and ‘social contribution’”. Starbucks opens its mission statement as follows: “Our mission: to inspire and nurture the human spirit—one person, one cup and one neighborhood at a time.”

The new understanding of business as a socially responsible political actor in the global economy may reflect a growing number of business people who want to make a difference by taking on some of the problems of the wider society. Asking about ultimate purpose, about what most deeply matters in life, is to focus on what some call spiritual values in business, another growing trend. Pope John Paul II captured the spirit of this trend when he wrote in *Centesimus Annus* (35) that the purpose of business is not simply to make a profit. Rather, business is a community of persons and this community can foster the development of society as well as people.

One initiative to promote and enhance more peaceful and just societies is the United Nations Global Compact. Founded in 2000 by the then secretary general of the UN, Kofi Annan, the Global Compact is intended to increase and diffuse the benefits of global economic development through voluntary corporate policies and programs.

By promoting human rights and labor rights, enhancing care for the environment and encouraging anti-corruption measures, the 10 principles of the Global Compact are designed to enable more peaceful societies. Initially comprised of several dozen companies, the compact as of 2013 had over 7,000 businesses and 1,000 nongovernment organization in 135 countries. The objective is to emphasize the moral purpose of business, with member companies setting a high moral tone throughout the world. Ban Ki-Moon, UN secretary general, expressed the mission well: “Business practices rooted in universal values can bring social and economic gains.”

When people perceive that business is not only seeking its private good but also the common good, and that this is embodied in a mission statement and a widened purpose and activity, there is a slow retrieval of trust in business. This retrieval of trust is manifest in the response to some of the endeavors of signatory companies of the Global Compact.

Business leaders with a conscience will find a helpful moral compass with the guidance of Catholic Social Teaching, especially the document *Vocation of the Business Leader*. They will also find like-minded colleagues, men and women striving to lead sustainable businesses, in the membership of the United Nations Global Compact. The Philippines has a local network of UN Global Compact companies, as do over 100 other countries, where leaders can share hopes and dreams, as well as learn from each other. I, for one, have great confidence that business can help us as we work towards a better world for all.

Fr. Oliver Williams is visiting scholar at De La Salle University. He is based in the University of Notre Dame in Indiana, USA and is a member of the board of the Global Compact Foundation.