

Baptismal Witness in the World of Commerce¹

—*Oliver F. Williams, C.S.C.*

BEFORE THE SECOND VATICAN Council the common understanding of the lay apostolate was participation in the apostolate of the clergy, for example, in such “inner-church” affairs as assisting in the diocesan or parish council, teaching catechetics, serving on financial committees, and serving as extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist. While these roles are not unimportant, Vatican II teaches that the role of the laity, based on baptism, is to evangelize the secular order.² The business person has a vocation as a lay apostle to bring the spirit of Christ into the professional world. As a baptized person, the business leader shares in the mission of the church to evangelize and, in fact, by the “Church,” Vatican II means all the baptized, not just the clergy or hierarchy.³

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2. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 31–37; *Gaudium et Spes*, 43; *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 2–7.

3. Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium*, 31.

It may be helpful to highlight some of the relevant texts from the three Vatican II documents celebrated in this volume. From the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* (*Apostolicam Actuositatem*) comes the clear mandate:

Christ's redemptive work, while of itself directed toward the salvation of men, involves also the renewal of the whole temporal order. Hence the mission of the Church is not only to bring to men the message and grace of Christ, but also to penetrate and perfect the temporal sphere with the spirit of the gospel. In fulfilling this mission of the Church, the laity, therefore, exercise their apostolate both in the Church and in the world, in both the spiritual and the temporal orders. These realms, although distinct, are so connected in the one plan of God that He Himself intends in Christ to appropriate the whole universe into a new creation, initially here on earth, fully on the last day. In both orders, the layman, being a believer and a citizen, should be constantly led by the same Christian conscience.⁴

The document goes on to say that the "apostolate of the lay person is that of the social milieu or temporal sphere"⁵ and that "the laity are to make the church present in those places and in those circumstances where it is only through them that the church can be the salt of the earth."⁶ In *Ad Gentes*, the church states: "All sons of the church should have a lively awareness of their responsibility to the world."⁷ And in the pastoral constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, we are pointed to the purpose of business: "In the economic and social realms . . . the dignity and complete vocation of the human person and the welfare of society as a whole are to be respected and promoted. For man is the source, the center, and the purpose of all social life."⁸

The Purpose of Business: The Key Issue

In line with the quote above from *Gaudium et Spes* that the person "is the source, the center, and the purpose of all social life," the single-minded focus on making money in business has never been accepted in Catholic social teaching (CST). Religious social thought has long championed a wider role for the purpose of business than simply making profit. Catholic social thought expresses this well in the 1991 encyclical of Pope John Paul

4. Second Vatican Council, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, 5.

5. Ibid., 7.

6. Ibid., 31.

7. Second Vatican Council, *Ad Gentes*, 36.

8. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 69.

II, *Centesimus Annus*. A central thesis of this document is that the purpose of business is not simply to make a profit, but rather, that business is a community of persons and that this community can foster development of society as well as people.⁹

What is thought to be the role of business in society today? I argue that we are in the midst of a major paradigm shift in our understanding of the purpose of business and that this new understanding holds much promise for business being a significant force for peace in our world. What we are seeing is the emergence of a view of the firm as a socially responsible political actor in the global economy and as an institution that can generate not only material wealth, but also wealth that nourishes the full range of human needs, what some call spiritual capital. The purpose of business, then, is to create sustainable value for stakeholders, including employees, suppliers, the community, the environment and, of course, the shareholders.¹⁰ Mirroring the best of secular thought, a 2012 document from the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace titled *Vocation of the Business Leader* (VBL) spells out what it means to create sustainable value for stakeholders by advancing the idea that the purpose of business is to create good goods, good work, and good wealth. Under these three rubrics, the document discusses how sustainable value might be created for the various stakeholders, including employees, suppliers, investors, the poor, the wider community, customers and the environment.¹¹

Neoclassical economics asserted a strict division of labor between the private and public sectors. Governments are charged to provide public goods and deal with the challenges of social justice, while collecting taxes to pay for these services. If the people are not pleased with the way elected politicians establish priorities and mediate interests, they can vote them out of office. Business, on the other hand, has another task: to produce goods and services at a reasonable price while returning on investment. Business has made tremendous progress not only in the quantity of goods and services available but also in the quality of life. Technology that enables us to enjoy good music, medicines that increase life expectancy and decrease infant mortality, and machinery that humanizes work are only a few of the fruits of capitalism.

The strict division of labor between the private and public sectors is no longer a reality in our time. Under the rubric of corporate social

9. John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, 35.

10. For a discussion of the purpose of business, see Williams, *Corporate Social*, 30–50. Also Williams, *Sustainable Development*.

11. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Vocation*, 38–56.

responsibility (CSR), corporate citizenship or sustainability, companies are taking increasing responsibility for problems in the wider society. At least in practice, there is clearly a change in progress in the way the responsibilities of the private and public sectors are apportioned. Perhaps a major driver of this enlarged role of business in society is the changing expectations of consumers evidenced over recent decades. A 1999 poll by GlobeScan, the Prince of Wales Business Leaders Forum and The Conference Board revealed that two out of three respondents wanted companies to go beyond their traditional economic goals (provide jobs, create wealth, pay taxes and obey laws) and to help solve some of the problems in the wider society. Called the *Millennium Poll on Corporate Social Responsibility* and based on 25,000 interviews, the poll reported that one in five consumers claimed to reward or punish companies based on their perception of the companies' social performance.¹²

In contemporary business literature, the term "license to operate" is often used to convey the idea that meeting society's expectations is part of the implicit social contract between business and society. Failing to meet society's expectations can result in tough regulation, for example, the 2002 Sarbanes-Oxley law and the 2010 Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act, resulting in a loss of discretionary power. This may explain why many companies have become proactive in meeting society's expectations; some, for example, by collaborating with NGOs in designing and implementing ethical norms for the global community. Companies either alone or partnering with NGOs have taken on numerous projects to assist the poor around the globe. Motives are always difficult to fathom, but clearly some business leaders want to reach out to the poor because they are concerned. In a November 2004 *Fortune* article about his company's projects throughout the world, Jeffrey Immelt, CEO of General Electric, commented: "The reason people come to work for GE is that they want to be about something that is bigger than themselves. People want to work hard, they want to get promoted, they want stock options. But they also want to work for a company that makes a difference, a company that's doing great things in the world."¹³ Building community and doing great things in the world are goals that flow from the identity and culture of a business; for some business leaders they are intrinsic objectives and are not designed to make more money for the business.¹⁴

12. GlobeScan, *Millennium Poll*, 1999.

13. Gunther, "Money and Morals," 1.

14. Collins and Porras, *Built to Last*. See also Mackey and Sisodia, *Conscious Capitalism*.

What we are experiencing is that, under the influence of the wider society, there is a broadening of the values of many business people and, hence, a broadening of the values of capitalism. To be sure, this phenomenon is not present in all business, but a growing number of business people want to make a difference. They are asking about ultimate purpose, about what most deeply matters in life, and they want to chart a life plan that draws on the full range of resources of the human spirit. This new focus is what many describe as a focus on spiritual values. From this standpoint, sustainability reflects the connectedness of business with the wider society. Business must not only take responsibility for its own activities, but also for some of the problems in the wider society.

This wider vision of companies, the belief that doing well and doing good are not opposites, is championed by many management scholars and business leaders. Jerry Porras and Jim Collins in *Built to Last*,¹⁵ as well as John Mackey of Whole Foods, discuss a number of these "visionary companies." A business leader, John Mackey, founder and CEO of Whole Foods, sees business as a high calling, a noble vocation, and its purpose is creating sustainable value for stakeholders. Value is not simply financial value, but value for employees, customers, the physical environment, communities, and so on. While Whole Foods employees feel good about their company and this has reportedly enhanced productivity and decreased turnover of employees, this concern for creating value for all stakeholders is part of the DNA of the company and is not single-mindedly driven by profit motivation. Companies that have an overarching view that their mission is to make the world a better place, which also creates more sustainable value for stakeholders, often have leaders who believe in the dignity of the human person based on human rights as, for example, stated in the UN's 1948 Declaration of Human Rights, or on the notion of a religious vocation.¹⁶

UN Global Compact

One relatively new initiative to promote and enhance peaceful societies based on the 1948 UN Declaration of Human Rights 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,

15. Ibid.

16. Global Compact, United Nations.

the, principles of the Global Compact are designed to enable more peaceful societies. Initially composed of several dozen companies, the compact as of 2017 included over 9,000 businesses and 1,500 NGOs in 135 countries. The objective is to emphasize the moral purpose of business, with member companies setting a high moral tone throughout the world. Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon expressed the mission well: "Business practices rooted in universal values can bring social and economic gains."

The mission of the Global Compact is to foster the growth of humane values in global society. The underlying insight is that without the values embedded in the Compact—for example, trust, fairness, integrity, and respect for people—global capitalism would eventually lose legitimacy in the wider society.¹⁷ There is much evidence from surveys on trust that people are increasingly losing trust in business. Public trust in business institutions and leadership is at a low level. For example, the 2012 Edelman Trust Barometer—an annual survey that measures public trust in business and institutions—found that globally, only 29 percent trust information about a business provided by the CEO. In the United States, only 38 percent trust business to do the right thing. As people come to trust business less and to judge that trusting the behavior of business is risky, there is more pressure for stronger organizational control systems, that is, rules, regulations and laws.

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. In the book, *Peace Through Commerce*, ten case stories of what companies are doing are presented in some detail.¹⁸ For example, in rural sub-Saharan Africa, General Electric provided equipment, and, perhaps more importantly, management skills so that the indigenous people could be a part of the project, taking ownership and improving the clinics and hospitals. The GE program in Africa has been cited as a good example of how to aid a developing country. Employees of GE are proud to be part of this program.¹⁹

17. See Williams, "Responsible Corporate," 431–52.

18. Greenhut and Corcoran, "General Electric," 349–66.

19. Ibid.

Business Leadership as a Noble Vocation

This essay argues that a growing number of business leaders and firms are taking on projects in the wider society to alleviate poverty. This is done by many leaders, not because business caused these problems, but rather, because these executives are thinking and feeling human beings who realize that their organizations might have the managerial talent and resources to act where governments are unable or unwilling to do so. These leaders have a sense of being called upon to make a difference, to make the world a better place for them having been there.

This “calling” is often paired with the term “vocation.” (The Latin *vocare* means to call).²⁰ This “servant leadership” perceives the interconnectedness among life and all its enterprises, especially business and the environment. While it is true that some of this activity is done simply to respond to society’s expectations, there is a growing number of leaders who do it because they believe it is the right thing to do. When Pope Benedict XVI visited the United Nations in New York City on April 18, 2008, he wrote a powerful yet succinct message in the visitors’ book: “Erit opus iustitiae pax” (Justice will bring about peace.) Taken from the Book of Isaiah (Is 32:17), this theme captures the flavor of much of CST.

Work can be understood in one of three ways: as a job, a career, or a vocation—or some combination of the three. When work is thought of as a job it is done for extrinsic motivation, for example students working for the summer flipping burgers may be only working for the money to pay tuition; they have a job. An accountant who has studied in college and mastered the skills to be an effective officer in a business has a career; she does work that is personally satisfying and has self-esteem based on successful achievements. This is intrinsic motivation. A person with a vocation has an overarching world view, some idea of what life is all about and how he fits in the grand scheme of things. He sees that talents and skills are to serve and develop others, in terms of the Christian message, to build up the Kingdom of God. In each of these three notions of work, leisure plays a differing role. In work as a job, leisure is amusement, activity that helps us forget the boring work we do. Perhaps it is playing on the Internet or drinking with friends. In work as a career, leisure is time out for a rest so that we can continue to be effective and productive. In work as a vocation, leisure is contemplation, time to receive what God has done for us; it entails such things as some solitude, weekly Mass and the habit of service.²¹

20. McGee and Delbecq have a good discussion of vocation in “Vocation,” 94–110.

21. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Vocation*, 68.

Only with contemplation are we able to nourish and refresh our overarching world view as a co-creator in the Kingdom of God.²² A problem for many Christians is that they regularly check their Christian values at the office door—they lead a divided life. *Gaudium et Spes* called this split “one of the more serious errors of our age.”²³ “Dividing the demands of one’s faith from one’s work in business is a fundamental error which contributes to much of the damage done by business in our world today.”²⁴ Business leaders who do not see themselves serving others and God in their working lives will fill the void of purpose with a less worthy substitute.²⁵

The Vocation of a Business Leader: A Practical Handbook

As referred to in the previous pages, the notion of business as a vocation has been highlighted in a recent Vatican document. On March 30, 2012, Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (now part of the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, headed by Turkson), issued a document titled *Vocation of the Business Leader: A Reflection*.²⁶ In practical, down-to-earth terms, these reflections outline CST and offer a set of questions designed to enlist business leaders in the difficult task of applying the principles.

The opening line of the executive summary of the document sets the tone of the reflections: “When businesses and market economies function properly and focus on serving the common good, they contribute greatly to the material and even the spiritual well-being of society.”²⁷ Thus business not only produces goods and services but it also cultivates virtue; this is a remarkable affirmation of the role of business in society.

Following the approach of Cardinal Joseph Cardijn and the Young Christian Workers movement of almost a century ago, the document employs the three stages of seeing, judging, and acting.²⁸ A brief summary of these reflections may be helpful.

22. Ibid., 69.

23. Second Vatican Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, 43. This divided life is also a focus of *Vocation*, 10.

24. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Vocation*, 10.

25. Ibid.

26 25 The text is available at www.pcgj.it/dati/2012-05/04-999999/Vocation%20ENG2.pdf.

27. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Vocation*, executive summary, 2.

28. This section summarizes some of the highpoints of paragraphs 15–80 in *Vocation*.

1. Seeing. While there is much that is good in our time, four new developments present major challenges. The developments are “signs of the times.”²⁹
 - a. Globalization. Movement across borders has brought new efficiencies and vast new markets for business but it has also exacerbated inequalities and lessened the power of states to monitor and affect business for the common good.
 - b. Communications technology. While technology has brought lower costs, much easier connectivity around the globe, and new products and services, the speed of communications has given new focus to short-term decision making and information overload.
 - c. Financialization. Today the revenue and profits from the financial sector dominate the global economy. Emphasis on wealth maximization and short-term profits can easily overshadow concern for the common good.
 - d. Broader cultural changes. We are living in a time when focus on individual rights often clouds concern for the common good. The erosion of family life, the stress of private goods at the expense of public goods, the neglect of duties that are entailed with rights, and the single-minded focus on wealth maximization are all factors that can lead to the neglect of shaping a healthy society.
2. Judging. For a Christian, the fundamental principles that inform all business decisions concern core principles of CST, such as respect for human dignity, the notion that business ought to be a community, and power as service for the common good. With these principles in mind, the business leader will try to produce goods and services that meet the needs of the world while at the same time considering the social and environmental issues involved, not only for the company but the supply and distribution networks, as well. Work will be structured taking into account the people involved and their flourishing. Justice will be sought in not only wages, but taxes, prices, as well as returns for shareholders. In all of this, business leaders are always alert to find new opportunities to serve the poor.
3. Acting. It is third dimension of acting as leaders who serve God that is the most troublesome for many in business. So often our definition of success and thus our judgment refers only to financial success. It is

29. *Gaudium et Spes* calls us to scrutinize “the signs of the times” and “to interpret them in the light of the Gospel,” 4. *Vocation of the Business Leader* follows this call, 15.

very easy to compartmentalize, to check our ethical and religious principles at the office door. One may be a wonderful Christian at home and in the community but the workplace is off limits for Christian principles and action. This third dimension is a reminder that overcoming a divided life and bringing a vision into the world based on CST require an active spiritual life, prayer, and an acknowledgement of God's presence and gifts.

The document concludes with "A Discernment Checklist for the Business Leader." It is here that the genius of the document is most manifest. While there are hard questions here, there are no answers. The questions are informed by CST and the answers must come from those many intelligent business leaders who are pursuing a Christian way of life. It may be helpful to include the full text of the checklist here.³⁰

A Discernment Checklist for the Business Leader

- Do I see work as a gift from God?
- Is my work as a "co-creator" truly a participation in God's original creative act?
- Do I promote a culture of life through my work?
- Have I been living a divided life, separating Gospel principles from my work?
- Am I receiving the sacraments regularly and with attention to how they support and inform my business practices?
- Am I reading the Scriptures and praying with the will to avoid the risk of a divided life?
- Am I sharing my spiritual path with other Christian business practitioners (my peers)?
- Am I seeking to nourish my business life by learning more about the church's social teaching?
- Do I believe that taking seriously the dignity of the person in my business decision-making will promote integral human development while making my company more efficient, more agile, and more profitable?

30. The checklist is taken directly from *Vocation*, appendix, 26-27.

Meeting the Needs of the World

- Do I see the responsibilities of my company as extending to all the participants who contribute to its life, not simply to the interests of the owners?
- Am I creating wealth, or am I engaging in rent-seeking behavior?
- Am I engaging in anti-competitive practices?
- Is my company making every reasonable effort to take responsibility for externalities and unintended consequences of its activities (such as environmental damage or other negative effects on suppliers, local communities and even competitors)?
- Do I recognize the importance of strong and lively “indirect employers” to ensure the right levels of labor protection and community dialogue?
- Am I sensitive to the fact that if corporate decisions are not deeply grounded in the dignity of the human person, they will be prone to instrumentalist and utilitarian constructs which fail to promote integral human development within business?
- Do I regularly assess the degree to which my company provides products or services which address genuine human needs and which foster responsible consumption?

Organizing Good and Productive Work

- Do I provide working conditions which allow my employees appropriate autonomy at each level? In other words, am I organizing human resources mindful of the subsidiarity principle in my company management system?
- Am I assuming the risk of lower level decisions to assure that his (*sic*) autonomy is genuine?
- Are jobs and responsibilities in my company designed to draw upon the full talents and skills of those doing the jobs?
- Have employees been selected and trained to be able to meet fully their responsibilities?
- Have these responsibilities and their scope been clearly defined?

- Am I making sure that the company provides safe working conditions, living wages, training, and the opportunity for employees to organize themselves?
- Have I embedded a set of comprehensively defined values and integrated that into my performance measurement process? Am I honest with my employees about their performance?
- In all countries where my company is engaged, is it honoring the dignity of those indirectly employed and contributing to the development of the communities hosting these operations? (Do I follow the same standard of morality in all geographic locations?)
- Do I place the dignity of all workers above profit margins?

Creating Sustainable Wealth and Distributing It Justly

- As a business leader, am I seeking ways to deliver fair returns to providers of capital, fair wages to employees, fair prices to customers and suppliers, and fair taxes to local communities?
- Does my company honor all its fiduciary obligations to providers of capital and to local communities with regular and truthful financial reporting?
- In anticipation of economic difficulties, is my company taking care that employees remain employable through appropriate training and variety in their work experiences?
- When economic difficulties demand layoffs, is my company giving adequate notifications, employee transition assistance, and severance pay?
- Does my company make every effort to reduce or eliminate waste in its operations, and in general to honor its responsibility for the natural environment?

The Ministry of Preaching and the VBL

In the Bible the term “vocation” or “calling” often has a broader meaning, that is, God’s call for people to come to Christ and participate in the redemptive work in the world (Rom 1:6; Rom 8:28). In this reflection, vocation is used to mean God’s guidance to advance creation in a particular kind of work (Gen 2:15, 19–20). Given the vast needs of the world and the unique

gifts one might have received, a person is obliged to act. The Gospel for the Nineteenth Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year C, has the text that underlies Catholic social thinking on vocation: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much will be asked (Luke 12:48). This text opens *VBL* and sets the tone for all of its reflections.³¹

Echoing Pope Benedict XVI in the encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate*,³² the notion of vocation or calling is built upon the "Logic of Gift." The call for business leaders to do great things in making the world a better place is based on the fact that these business leaders have been given great resources, not only high intelligence, but also a spirit of entrepreneurship and exceptional talents. *VBL* stresses that the meaning and purpose provided by CST gives the business leader the possibility for a happy and fulfilled life. Leaders come to see that God has a purpose for them in the work they do.

Moving beyond the notion of a life's work as a job or a career, a life's work as a vocation is informed by reflection on the scriptures, contemplation, and prayer. It is this kind of leisure which will likely enable a leader to "see" what should be done to advance the Kingdom of God. *VBL* states it well: "Sacramental worship is not an *escape* from the world of business—it gives us the space to see more deeply into the *reality* of the world and to contemplate God's work."³³

Conclusion

Business leaders with a conscience will find a helpful moral compass with the guidance of CST, 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. Cardinal Turkson acknowledged this when he introduced the *Vocation of the Business Leader* in an address to the UNIAPAC World Congress in Lyon, France, 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."³⁴ Today there are over a hundred local networks of UN Global Compact companies where

31. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Vocation*, 1.

32. Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, 36.

33. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Vocation*, 69.

34. Turkson, "Vocation of the Business Leader."

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 and empowering the lay apostolate with CST will play no small role in advancing the Kingdom of God.

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