

The Vocation of the Business Leader: Reflections on the New Pontifical Document

On March 14th of 2012 the Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace presented the document *The Vocation of the Business Leader: a Reflection* in front of two thousand business leaders gathered in the city of Lyon, France. This text of thirty-two pages, addressed not only to entrepreneurs but also to university professors devoted to the education of future managers, is perhaps the first comprehensive document emerged from a pontifical dicastery on business activity. Certainly, the Popes have developed a long doctrine in their social *magisterium* about the meaning and purpose of the company and the employer's responsibility; but they have always done this in the context of a broader teaching about the economy in general. In this case, the text is not a papal encyclical but a document issued by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace in collaboration with prominent specialists in business ethics. It is a sort of *vademecum*, specifically designed to illuminate the activity of business managers.

The first thing that stands out is the title of the document that recalls the well known book by Michael Novak *Business as a Calling. Work and the Examined Life*, a classic on the subject of 1996, which introduced the theme of business vocation as a form of Christian vocation –of Protestant origin– in the field of Catholic social thinking. Besides, the text leads us to the book by Helen Alford and Michael Naughton, two of the authors of the document, entitled *Managing as if Faith Mattered: Christian Social Principles in the Modern Organization*, published in 2001. Thus, it is possible to see how in this case, as it happens with the encyclicals, the text signed by the ecclesiastical authorities comes not only from their own authorship but as the result of a long process of research and reflection previously made by many lay scholars.

A second point to emphasize in order to contextualize the reading of this important document is its continuity with the papal social encyclicals. Particularly the teachings about work, business activity and the market economy in John Paul II's *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, *Laborem Exercens* and *Centesimus Annus* and in Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate*. In regard to this last encyclical, there is a direct line of continuity and some sort of deployment of some paragraphs especially devoted to the business activities (in particular 40 and 41) seen in the context of the new realities emerged from the process of globalization of the economy.

Finally, the text pays special attention to its applicability, its practical nature centered in life itself. The method “see-judge-act” used in the document dates back to the method of life revision, emerged within the pastoral proposals by the Young Christian Workers (YCW) guided by P. Joseph Cardijn in the 1930s. Later the method was adopted by Catholic Action, a lay organization of great importance among the renewal movements within the Church. It was a methodology for Christian's practical action in order to overcome the divorce between faith and life. This method was also

adopted in the Second Vatican Council and especially at the conferences of Medellín, Puebla and Aparecida of the Latin American Episcopate. Thus, the document aims to become a part of that tradition which is not pure speculation or reflection on principles but a guide for concrete action set in the here and now.

The aim of this special issue of *Cultura Económica* is to provide our readers the thoughts on the pontifical document –in Spanish and English versions– written by different international specialists which have a distinguished career in business ethics and corporate social responsibility. First, we present the article by Professor Miguel Alfonso Martínez Echevarría of the University of Navarra and member of the Academic Board of our journal, that contextualizes the current situation of the firm discussed in the document in the framework of the history of economic and business practice. Secondly, we present the article by Michael Naughton, director of the John A. Ryan Institute for Catholic Social Thought at the University of Saint Thomas (Minnesota) and coordinator of the drafting of *The Vocation of the Business Leader: a Reflection*, in which the general features of the document's novelties are presented, in particular its practical nature and its focus on changing attitudes toward life and not just principles.

Carlos Hoevel, director of this journal, sees the document as an expanded analysis of ethics and corporate social responsibility after the reductionism suffered by both concepts over the last decades. In this thread of thought, Simona Beretta, a Professor specialized in financial ethics at the Catholic University of Sacro Cuore in Milan, argues that the document provides a reading that seeks to overcome the attempts to reduce business activity to some sort of codified recipe, and to open it to the dynamic and relational dimension of the person. In the fifth place we present the text of the businessman Jose Maria Simone, elected President of UNIAPAC Latin America (International Christian Union of Business Executives) in which the author analyzes the document as a continuation of the principles enunciated by Pope Leo XIII in the encyclical letter *Rerum Novarum*.

Then, we present the article by Robert G. Kennedy, a Professor at the Department of Catholic Studies of the University of St. Thomas (Minnesota), and one of the authors of the document, which focuses on the concept of vocation, the starting point of the pontifical document's reflection to analyze how it turns into specific responsibilities. Seventh, the Professor Maria Marta Preziosa, ethics and CSR specialist at the Catholic University of Argentina, stresses the importance of the concept of subsidiarity in the document by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. In her opinion, 'subsidiarity' implies a concept of organizational structure, compatible with the vocation of the business leader's practice. In the eighth place, we present the article by Professor Daniel Finn of St. John's University of the United States who, while stressing the value and contributions of the paper, notes and describes its weak points, especially those related to the most traditional problems of the world of work –such as the struggle for workers' rights embodied in trade union associations. In his opinion, the document should present these matters to be more properly inserted in the context of the Catholic social thinking tradition. Finally, Professor Antonio Argandoña from IESE Spain, provides an anthropological, ethical and specifically Christian framework as the text's hermeneutical key.

In this special issue we include as well a summary of the debate that took place on October 24th, 2012 on "Business Leadership's failure", in the context of the Seminar "The faces of the global crisis", held by the Center for Studies in Economy and Culture of UCA, whose speakers were Professors Silvia Bertani and Alfredo Confalonieri. This issue of *Cultura Económica* includes as well the foreword, the executive summary and the appendix of the document by the Pontifical Council for

Justice and Peace in its original English version and in a Spanish version translated by Professor Silvia Bertani of the Pontifical University of Argentina.

In summary, throughout these reflections and this dialogue between these renowned academics on the main ideas of the document *The Vocation of the Business Leader: a Reflection* by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Cultura Económica* seeks to enlighten the central ethical values of business activity and of the life of the firm, and aims to broaden the reason and sense of justice in economic life.

C.H.