

Vocation of a Catholic Business Leader Today

ACL Breakfast

20 June 2012

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning!

Introduction

Before sharing a few thoughts with you this morning about your vocation as Catholic business leaders, I wish to thank Brett Powell and those have been working so closely with him for the magnificent way in which they took the bull by the horns and set about organizing this new group in the Archdiocese: the Association of Catholic Leaders. Thank you so much, Brett, for giving of your own expertise and enormous leadership gifts to the founding of this Association. We shall certainly miss you here in Vancouver, but also know that you will continue to serve the Church and community in Ottawa. I am also confident that the good work which you have begun will flourish in the years ahead – and that you will be proud of the seeds that you and the Planning Committee have planted.

You Have Vocation

Now to the theme of this morning's presentation: your calling, ladies and gentlemen, your vocation as leaders in the world of business.

In the Gospel, Jesus tells us: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked" (Lk 12:48). Imperious.

Demanding. Even frightening. As you know, the Lord has given you talents and resources, and he is asking you to do great things with your life as a person working in the world of business. This is the place or context of your calling to holiness and happiness – both as human being created in God’s image and likeness (cf. Gen 1:26-27) and as a person who has been baptized into Christ. Your vocation as a businessperson is an authentic and worthy human and Christian calling. Its importance in the life of the Church and in the world can hardly be overstated (cf. 1, 6). The Church honours your vocation.

World of Business as a Good

Indeed, the evident benefits that business brings to the community encourages the Church to take a lively interest in it. Catholics are *not*, I repeat *not*, anti-business. Where businesses succeed, people’s lives can be significantly improved (cf. 4). Think about what happens when business activity is carried out justly and effectively: customers receive the goods and services they need at fair prices; employees engage in fulfilling work – “work is for the person, not the person for work” – and earn a livelihood for themselves and their families; investors earn a reasonable return on their investment; and communities see their resources put to good use and the overall common good is increased (cf. 2). When managed well, businesses actively enhance the dignity of employees and the growth of human and Christian virtues, such as

solidarity, practical wisdom, justice, discipline, and many others (cf. 3).

Businesses certainly have the potential to be a force for great good in any society, and many, thanks be to God, do live up to their moral and economic promise (cf. 9).

A market economy must be based on the pursuit of the common good in freedom. But freedom without truth leads to disorder, injustice and social fragmentation. It becomes licence. Knowing the truth about who human beings are and what their destiny is provides guiding principles for business men and women. While not the only source of this “truth,” the Gospel surely points us in the right direction. A Christian can work to ensure that businesses are places in which the desire for profit is coupled with the pursuit of justice, where power is exercised with prudence, technology is used to advance human dignity, and self-interest is regulated by the common good (cf. 4).

Back to Your Vocation

I am speaking to you this morning specifically as Christian business leaders, who have at the heart of your work a deep sense of God’s calling you to be collaborators in his magnificent work of creation (cf. 5), to share with him in properly “subduing” the earth for the good of everyone. Building a productive business is for you the primary way in which you can share in the unfolding of this divine work. When you realize that you are participating in the work of the Creator through your

stewardship of a productive business enterprise, regardless of its size, you realize, I hope, the grandeur and awesome responsibility of your vocation (cf. 8).

Unfortunately, there are some people of faith within the world of business – as in every field of human endeavour – who fail to witness to and be inspired by the faith and moral convictions they claim to profess in the workplace. In everyday language we refer to this as hypocrisy. It is not only the major cases of their greed, exploitation and desire for power which are portrayed by the mass media that are painful to witness.

What is also tragic, perhaps even more so, is that there are Christians who, while not engaging in illegal or publicly scandalous activities, readily accommodate themselves to the world, living for all practical purposes – as Popes John Paul and Benedict have said – as if God does not exist. If not theoretical atheists, they are practical ones, for the presence of God touches their business life not at all. Religion is one silo and business is another – and never the twain shall meet. Contrary to Jesus’ warning, such people not only live *in* the world, but they have become part *of* the world. While they might well have some kind of devotional life in the home and on Sundays, they fail not only to live the Gospel in their workplace, but cannot even see its relevance. On the job, God is kept at arm’s length. As a result, their lives “conceal

rather than reveal the authentic face of God and religion.”¹

The “Divided” Life

Among the chief obstacles to realizing one’s vocation at a personal level is living this kind of “divided life”: what the Fathers at Vatican II described as “the split between the faith which many profess and their daily lives.” The Second Vatican Council saw this split as “one of the more serious errors of our age.”² For them, separating the demands of one’s faith from one’s daily work – whatever that may be – is a fundamental error which contributes to a mistaken view of what it means for a person to be “holy” or “good.” That pursuit is thought to be limited to a restricted personal realm. Sometimes we call such people “Sunday” Catholics, suggesting that the rest of the week, especially the work-week, is “God-free.”

The many pressures you face as business leaders could lead you to forget the call of the Gospel in your daily *professional* activities, even if you are exemplary in meeting the demands of your family and your Christian responsibilities in other spheres of personal life. You may even be deceived to think, falsely – very falsely, I would say – that your professional life is incompatible with your spiritual life. You might be tempted, whether from self-centredness, pride, greed or anxiety, to

¹ Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 19.

² Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 43.

reduce the purpose of your business solely to maximizing profit, or to growing market share or to any other solely economic good (cf. 12).

The Church reminds businesspeople of the words of Jesus: “No one can be the slave of two masters. He will either hate the first and love the second or be attached to the first and despise the second. You cannot love both God and money” (Mt 6:24). What the Lord is describing is a divided life, two separate silos.

Business leaders who do not recognize the nobility of their vocation, who do not see themselves serving God and others in their working lives will fill this void with an unworthy and ultimately unsatisfactory substitute. Because a divided life is not unified or integrated, where all that we do is for God’s honour and glory, it is fundamentally disordered, and thus fails to live up to God’s call (cf. 10).

Moreover, such a fragmented life can lead to idolatry, an all-too-common occupational hazard of business life. This idolatry means following the Israelites at the foot of Mount Sinai when they worshipped a golden calf, a symbol of misplaced devotion, born of a false idea of true success (cf. Dt 5:6-8). There are many familiar surrogates for the golden calf in modern life – and we should never think that idolatry is a sin only confined to the past.

What are these contemporary idols? I mention just a few. You can surely think of many others. When: “the sole criterion for action in

business is thought to be the maximization of profit”³; when seeking personal wealth or influence does not serve the common good; or when utilitarian ethics – that is, whatever seems to work best, with the fewest negative consequences – replaces the values of the Gospel or the moral law written in human nature. Each of these “golden calves” is usually accompanied by rationalization. Business leaders who see their work as a calling must pay careful attention to avoid these lures of idolatry (cf. 11).

Integrated Life

The opposite of a “divided” or “fragmented” life is an integrated one, when individuals can respond to the rigorous demands placed upon them with the attitude of a servant, imitating Jesus who washed the feet of his disciples at the Last Supper (cf Jn 13:1-15). Leadership in this spirit of being a servant is different from the authoritarian exercise of power too often present in business organizations.

Servant leadership is a distinguishing mark of Christian business leaders and, when authentic, positively influences the work environment which they seek to foster.

³ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 71.

Practising Ethical Social Principles

A necessary dimension of an integrated, servant leader's vocation is practising ethical social principles, all the while conducting the normal affairs of his or her business. This entails *seeing* clearly and with a moral perspective the situation in which the business finds itself, *judging* that situation with principles that foster the integral development of individuals and communities, and *acting* in a way which implements these principles in light of the business's unique circumstances and in a way consistent with the Gospel (cf. 14).

I will not take up "seeing" the present situation, what is often called "environmental scanning" – fascinating though that is – and will instead concentrate on your call as a leader to make good moral judgments, ones which are truly wise and rooted in truth. For the Catholic business leader, it is not just "best practices," however helpful they may be, but the Gospel of Jesus Christ that points the way, though of course it does not provide ready answers to specific technical questions. For example, in the agricultural and fishing economy of his day, Jesus did not give advice on how to increase productivity but drew upon them in his parables to teach about the Kingdom of God and how one was to live within this new reality now present in him.

When we speak of the Gospel as a guiding light in judging how to approach one's business decisions and act in the workplace, this is not to

reduce the Good News to an ethic or moral philosophy. Above all, and first of all, the Gospel is about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the Son of God man flesh for our salvation: “Being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea,” Pope Benedict has written, “but the encounter with an event, a person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction.”⁴ Certainly, this personal relationship has ethical implications, just as any friendship makes demands on the parties involved. For business leaders, then, friendship with the Lord, as I have already said, will affect them in the day-to-day exercise of their profession and not just “in their private life.”

Over the course of centuries, those engaged in living the Christian life have built up in the Church what we can call her social tradition, with specific reflections on how the followers are to integrate their lives as those engaged in business with their faith. This tradition has grown and continues to grow through its complementary relationship with authoritative Church teaching found, for example, in the great social encyclicals from Leo XIII’ *Rerum Novarum* published in 1891 down to Benedict XVI’s *Caritas in Veritate* published in 2009, and in the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*. Like all traditions, Catholic social teaching and practice is constantly being developed and

⁴ Benedict XVI, *Deus Caritas Est*, n.1.

purified as Christians, including business leaders, seek discernment in their professional lives (cf. 28).

It is not the place of authoritative teachers in the Church to prescribe in detail the workplace actions of business leaders. Such prescription is the work of practitioners, and is largely carried out by people such as you. The Church's official teaching does not have technical solutions to offer. Yet, what the Church does teach is that "there can be no genuine solution of the 'social question' apart from the Gospel."⁵ The Pope and the bishops preach the Church's social doctrine to business leaders not to impose a burden upon them, but to reveal to them the spiritual importance of their actions and the social significance of business as an institution. As Benedict XVI writes in *Caritas in Veritate*: "Man's earthly activity, when inspired and sustained by charity, contributes to the building of the universal city of God, which is the goal of the history of the human family."⁶

Acting Out Your Vocation

Since our faith is more than personal devotion, it has social implications in the realm of business; it is not merely a private, interior reality. It is essentially public. That's why the Church's social doctrine

⁵ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, n. 5.

⁶ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 7.

is “an essential part of the Christian message, since this doctrine points out the direct consequences of that message in the life of society and situates daily work and struggles for justice in the context of bearing witness to Christ the Saviour.”⁷ The social principles of the Church call upon business leaders to act, and because of the current challenging environment, how they act is more important than ever.

The social principles developed in the Church’s reflection and teaching can help orient a business leader in his or her desire to conform to God’s will in all that they do. This entails addressing the demands of the organization with practices and policies which promote personal responsibility, innovation, fair pricing, just compensation, humane job conditions, responsible environmental practices, social and socially responsible investment, and a host of other issues such as hiring, firing, board governance, employee training, and supplier relations (cf. 72).

The day-to-day actions, the real decisions made by Catholic leaders in the business community, are the way in which your vocation is fulfilled and the way in which you are an evangelizer by witness, drawing others to the truth by what you do. “Today more than ever,” Blessed John Paul II wrote, “the Church is aware that her social message will gain credibility more immediately from the witness of actions than

⁷ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, n. 5.

as a result of its internal logic and consistency.”⁸ You, ladies and gentlemen, are not “solely passive beneficiaries but are the protagonists of the Church’s social doctrine at the vital moment of its implementation.”⁹

I am very grateful to you, because as business leaders, as men and women of action you demonstrate an authentic entrepreneurial spirit, one which recognizes the God-given responsibility to accept generously and faithfully that business is a vocation, a path to holiness. You are, I believe, motivated by much more than financial success or enlightened self-interest, as often prescribed by economic literature and management textbooks (cf. 61).

Faith enables you as Catholic business leaders to see a much larger world, a world in which God is at work, and where your individual interests and desires are not the sole driving force.

A difficult but necessary dimension of every call to holiness, regardless of where it is lived, is the need to develop a mature spiritual life, for you need the grace to overcome the temptation to a divided life.

“Receiving” as Necessary to the Business Person’s Vocation

Pope Benedict XVI’s *Caritas in Veritate* provides a vision for

⁸ John Paul II, *Centesimus Annus*, n. 35.

⁹ Benedict XVI, Address to Participants on the 50th Anniversary of the *Encyclical Mater et Magistra* (May 16, 2011).

action. He explains that charity – “love received and given” – is at the heart of the social teachings of the Church.¹⁰ Charity “is the principal driving force behind the authentic development of every person and of all humanity.”¹¹ How easy it is to dismiss “charity” as an added extra or a private virtue – and not the foundation of a business vocation.

However, when business leaders act in accordance with their vocation, this implies both a “receiving” and a “giving.” Let’s look at each in turn (cf. 65).

The first act of the Catholic business leader, as is that of all Christians, is to receive; more specifically, to receive what God has done for him or her. This act of receptivity, particularly for business leaders, can be particularly difficult. As a group, business leaders tend to be more active than receptive. Yet, without receptivity in our lives, business leaders can be tempted by a quasi-Nietzschean “superman” complex. The temptation for some is to regard themselves as determining and creating their own principles, not as receiving them. Because of the nature of their profession, business leaders see themselves as creative, innovative, active, and constructive. And this is good and necessary. But if you neglect the dimension of receiving, you

¹⁰ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 5.

¹¹ Benedict XVI, *Caritas in Veritate*, n. 1.

distort and overestimate your own achievements and work (cf. 66).

No matter how enterprising and accomplished, however, a person “comes in the profoundest sense to himself not through what he does but through what he accepts,”¹² not through what he achieves but through what he receives. Indeed, human accomplishment taken alone and by itself leads only to partial fulfilment. In addition, to be fully “alive” in both a human and Christian sense, one must also experience the grace of receptivity. This refusal to receive is found in our origins, in the story of the fall of Adam and Eve, when God commanded them not to eat “of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen 2:17). The moral law is given by God, and we can only receive it.¹³ The social principles of the Church found in her teaching are her reflection on this moral law for business. When you received your vocation, and it is a gift that you received – just as the call to life is a gift – you are therefore also open to receiving principles which foster the integral development of those affected by the business.

Moreover, you show the receptivity of your vocation when you embrace the gifts of the spiritual life and integrate them into the active life. They provide the grace needed to overcome the divided life and to

¹² Joseph Ratzinger, *Introduction to Christianity* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1990), p. 266.

¹³ Cf. John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, n. 35.

humanize us, especially in our work. The first act to which the Church calls the Christian business leader is to receive the sacraments, to accept the Scriptures, to honour the Lord's Day, to pray, to participate in silence and in other disciplines of the spiritual life. These are not optional actions for a Christian, not mere private acts separated and disconnected from business (cf. 67-68).

“Giving” as Necessary to the Business Person’s Vocation

As well as “receiving,” your vocation also calls you to “giving,” giving in a way which responds to what you have been received. This giving is never merely the legal minimum. For Christians, it must be broader: a real desire to make the world a better place. The self-gift of the person inquires not “how far it must go, but how far it may go.”¹⁴ This need to give should move you to ask profound questions about your vocation: How does your receptivity to God’s love animate or play a role in the relationships you have with the various stakeholders of your business? What kind policies and practices will foster the integral development of individual people and communities? (cf. 71).

I am not talking about “giving” in the sense of charitable works done outside the business or on behalf of the business, but that “giving”

¹⁴ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *The Christian State of Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1983), p. 48.

of charity by business leaders who give themselves through the goods and services they provide, the productive work they organize, and the sustainable wealth they distribute justly (cf. 72).¹⁵

Conclusion

Before closing, I want to thank you for embracing your vocation to be business leaders who are consciously seeking to integrate your professional life with that of being a disciple of Jesus. It is a challenging task, and one which can be met only with the help of God's grace, which is always offered to those who seek it. Remember that yours is a noble calling and that both the Lord and the Church are with you – and both are counting on you to live your vocation integrally and joyfully in light of the Gospel.

Thank you all very much.

✠ J. Michael Miller, CSB
Archbishop of Vancouver

¹⁵ The “cf.” references in parentheses refer to the paragraph number of this most important document: Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Vocation of the Business Leader: A Reflection* (2012).