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WHAT DOES BEING A CATHOLIC ADD TO A BUSINESS VOCATION?

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## **WHAT DOES BEING A CATHOLIC ADD TO A BUSINESS VOCATION?**

### **Abstract**

A businessperson is a man or woman who leads the firm's persons into action to change reality and achieve results efficiently. Taking this description of the role of the businessperson as our starting point, in this paper we discuss the tasks of the businessperson, the variables that define the state of a business firm (efficiency, attractiveness and unity), and the firm's mission. We then go on to explain what being a Catholic adds to all this, the Christian's role in the world, and the function of the Christian businessperson.

**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship, Vocation, Calling, Catholic Social Doctrine.

## WHAT DOES BEING A CATHOLIC ADD TO A BUSINESS VOCATION?

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

To business firms we attribute the task of creating wealth and jobs, generating income, providing goods and services to satisfy human needs, improving the quality of life and even transforming the way we live. Just think of the countless ways in which the firms we work for, or whose customers we are, shape our lives, determining where we live and work, the hours we work and the holidays we take, our lifestyle, the goods and services we consume, and so on.

The business firm is obviously not the most important institution in society. It does, however, unquestionably play an important role, particularly since the collapse of the Communist system left the free business enterprise at the centre of the capitalist system. So much so that John Paul II, in the encyclical *Centesimus annus*, speaks of the market economy as a “business economy”<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, it is fair to say that the firm is one of the most important institutions in the society we live in.

So what is a businessperson? In this article I shall start from the definition given by a colleague of mine at IESE, Professor Juan Antonio Pérez López<sup>3</sup>: a businessperson – or manager, as for our purposes there is no distinction<sup>4</sup> – is a man or woman who leads the firm’s persons into action to change reality and achieve results efficiently.

Let’s see exactly what this definition is telling us. A businessperson is one who leads the firm’s persons, one who directs or leads: an individual or, more commonly, one of a team of people. What the businessperson does is direct the men and women who belong to the firm – the notion of a human team appears in *Centesimus annus*.<sup>5</sup> His goal is action, not study: he works to change reality (that is why he becomes the orchestrator of social change); to achieve results (because it’s not just a matter of thinking and deciding; there’s work to be done); and to do so efficiently (achieving as much as possible with as few resources as possible, which is the basic principle of any economy).

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<sup>2</sup> *Centesimus annus*, 42.

<sup>3</sup> See Pérez López (1991, 1993, 1997, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Naturally, I am not referring to the “entrepreneur” or creator of the firm, but to the man or woman who manages and governs it.

<sup>5</sup> Cfr., *Centesimus annus*, 20.

In this paper I shall take this definition of the businessperson as the starting point for an exploration of the tasks the businessperson must perform, the variables that define the state of the firm (efficiency, attractiveness and unity), and the mission of the firm. I shall then go on to explain what being a Catholic adds to all this; the role of the Christian in the world; and the duty of the Catholic who is also a businessperson. I shall end with the conclusions.

### **The tasks of the businessperson**

In management textbooks, it is not often one comes across a definition like the one we have just mentioned. And yet it states very accurately what a businessperson or manager is and does. The tasks we usually associate with managers – detecting opportunities, preparing business plans, formulating strategy, producing action plans, making decisions, getting things done, administering, controlling – these are all encapsulated in the basic task of leading the company's people into action to change reality and achieve results.

It is quite clear that this is a highly complex and highly responsible task, even though it may not seem like it to the man in the street. Let's look at some of the features of this complexity; we may find that they help us understand what the manager's task consists of.

First of all, the goal or end purpose of a manager's work is not fixed in advance. It obviously does not consist primarily of gaining market share, or boosting sales, or making more profit, or producing innovations, or even enabling the firm to survive. There may, of course, be unspecified, generic goals, but it will be up to the manager to fill those goals with substance on a daily basis for herself and for her team. Managing is not only about providing means but also, first and foremost, about choosing ends. That is why it is so difficult to judge a manager's performance. That is why managing is such a highly responsible task: in choosing a goal, the manager puts herself and her team on the line. And that is precisely why the businessperson needs freedom: freedom to decide where to go, not just how or by what route. Choosing her own goals is the first manifestation of a manager's freedom.

Secondly, it is a manager's task to solve non-operational problems. Non-operational problems are problems in which the symptoms do not immediately reveal the cause: to understand what is going on you need to know more about the organization and about people. Also, resolving non-operational problems does not consist of carrying out a predetermined sequence of operations, as might be the case in fixing a car. Nor is there an instruction manual: there could not possibly be such a thing, because no two problems are alike. Nor is there a "right" answer; instead, there is a range – sometimes a wide range – of possible answers, all of which may be more or less acceptable. We cannot even be sure what is the most important thing in this type of problem – and needless to say, the most important thing will not necessarily coincide with what is considered urgent, pleasant, feasible or profitable.

Thirdly, the manager must transform reality, and yet she does not *a priori* know how. All she has is a vague idea of where she wants to get to. A world in constant change is already fairly unpredictable, so when the manager herself tries to change it, she makes it even less predictable, both for other people and for herself. In an environment of free men and women, predicting what will happen is anything but a simple task.

What's more, the businessperson is going to be judged by the results she obtains. Even though those results are something she can control imperfectly at best, because they come from an environment of free persons to which she must react and which she must try to anticipate at her own risk, with no guarantee, and very often without a second chance.

And she is not going to be able to achieve those results on her own, but only with her team. So she has to mobilise, motivate, organize and guide other people. But these other people have their own goals and motives, which she cannot manipulate, and so she must take them, accept them, understand them and guide them: in a word, put them to work. Then the result will come. And the result must include, first, achieving the firm's goal (the common good of the organization); second, satisfying the needs of the men and women who make up the firm's human resources (otherwise they would not want to stay with the firm); and third, more important still, making the team more cohesive and united, so that all of its members are willing to carry on working together even more closely in the future, because all of them are getting more out of it (maybe not more money, but certainly more satisfaction, which obviously includes financial rewards, but also learning and training, personal development, friendship, and so on). The team must become steadily more of a unit, and to do that it must be trained to achieve new goals and meet new challenges. And again, the challenges will not be in terms of sales or market share but of personal development, of gain in virtue and humanity, of growth as individuals and as a group.

I shall not go into any more detail, as it seems to me that what I have said so far gives a clear enough picture of the complexity involved in leading people into action to change reality and obtain results efficiently. Marketing? Finance? Strategy? Of course, and much more besides. Power? Yes, the businessperson has it and uses it; without power, she could not possibly achieve her goal. But power as service –service to society, in the first place, which justifies the service to her team of people; *auctoritas* rather than *potestas*. Professionalism? Obviously, a businessperson needs an education in order to develop, first, her knowledge, through study; secondly, her skills and abilities, through study and practice; and thirdly, the attitudes, values and virtues, the business *ethos*, that come from effort and the ability to aspire to goodness, not only from good intentions or inclination.

### **Efficiency, attractiveness and unity**

According to Pérez López, in every organization there are three variables that explain the state the organization is in and how it has changed over time: efficiency, attractiveness and unity.

Efficiency is an organization's capacity to win the loyalty of the people who belong to it through what they get from the organization (pay, prestige, benefits, career, security...). Attractiveness is the organization's capacity to win its people's loyalty through what they do in the organization (the satisfaction they get out of their jobs). And unity is the organization's capacity to win its members' loyalty through the beneficial effect that the work they do in the organization has on other people, either inside or outside the organization.

Efficiency indicates the firm's economic dimension; the firm would not make economic sense if it did not strive to achieve the best possible results with a minimum of resources (which is what being efficient is all about). And it is manifested in the creation of added value – and, under certain conditions, the maximization of profit. Attractiveness is the firm's sociological dimension; it reflects the effort that the members of the firm make to adapt to what the firm demands of them and, therefore, points to the development of people's operational abilities. And unity is the ethical dimension: the learning that needs to take place for people to be motivated by the needs of others, that is, the development of moral virtues in those who take part in the firm's activities. Because, essentially, organizations exist to help people develop their virtues, their ethical excellence.

The economic dimension of business firms is easy to recognise, because firms are created primarily to satisfy the economic needs of the people who belong to them by satisfying the needs of other people by producing and selling goods and services in the market. The firm will try, therefore, to maximize its efficiency, though never as an absolute, but rather through processes that also enhance its attractiveness and unity. In other words, maximizing profit can never be done at the expense of the firm's social and ethical dimensions. Because, basically, unity is the key to all human organizations.

Of course, there has to be a certain minimum of efficiency and attractiveness: the company's owners, managers and employees expect to obtain financial benefits from their participation in the firm, and satisfaction from what they do and what they learn in it. The more attractive an organization becomes, the less efficiency it will need – the happier people are in the firm, the less important the economic motive will become. In any case, the more united the firm becomes (the more the firm's members see other people's needs as their own), the more effective it will be. In a sense, increasing the unity of the firm is the firm's ultimate purpose.<sup>6</sup>

### **The firm's mission**

Let's go back now to the functions of the businessperson and look at them from a different angle so as to understand them better. First, it is the businessperson's job to set the goals, what we might call the organization's "purpose". Then, she must communicate this purpose so that all the employees know what is required of them and are capable of doing it. Lastly, she must motivate the workforce to achieve those goals.

All of this determines the businessperson's task on four planes. The first is the plane of the "external mission", the firm's purpose with respect to the world outside itself. The external mission will be to produce useful goods and services and to put them on the market so as to satisfy needs – what earlier we called the firm's primary social responsibility. In other words, the firm must decide what needs of what people it aims to satisfy with its productive activity – why and for whom it produces. This is no trivial matter: one and the same activity can be defined as "selling sweets" or "sweetening the life of children and adults without harming their health at affordable prices". And the implications for the firm's activity will be different in each case.

The second plane is that of the "internal mission", which involves:

1. Understanding the external mission. Understanding it not as a description of a goal, but as a mission that the workers can identify with, because it justifies their effort and their pride in belonging to a firm that is making a worthwhile contribution to the common good of society. Understanding the external mission also means communicating it to others and motivating them, which are the tasks that define a leader. Like the stonemasons in the fable, it's not enough that people cut stone, or earn a living: they also need to know that they are building a cathedral.

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<sup>6</sup> The "purpose of a business firm is not simply to make a profit, but is to be found in its very existence as a community of persons who in various ways are endeavouring to satisfy their basic needs, and who form a particular group at the service of the whole of society" (*Centesimus annus*, 35).

2. Carrying out the external mission efficiently – what we earlier described as one of the firm’s social functions. This affects everything in the firm: design, organization, control, etc. Efficiency is a property specific to economic institutions and organizations. It includes the tasks of creating and distributing economic value added, as well as making a profit (which is part of that value). Profit is not the purpose, goal or *raison d’être* of the firm. It is merely an indicator of efficiency, even a *sine qua non* of the firm’s long-term survival – because if the firm does not make a profit, it will have failed as an economic institution. Efficiency is not the firm’s only social function, but it is one of its functions. All firms must have a degree of efficiency, or at least be striving towards it; merely adding a “social” dimension to the traditional economic one is not enough to make the firm a meaningful institution.
3. Being able to satisfy the needs and motivations of the firm’s internal agents (owners, managers, workers, etc.). This is another of the firm’s social functions, although it is common to all human organizations, which must attend to their members’ interests, motives, needs and wishes, and try to satisfy them – that is to say, their deeper interests: their “needs”, not their whims. An organization comes into being when a group of people try to satisfy their needs jointly, in collaboration with one another, so that the goals of the organization can be said to be oriented towards conserving and enhancing its members’ motivation to stay in the organization – which explains the organization’s unity.
4. All of this combined with a capacity for future development, that is to say, generating within the firm a capacity to stay in business, to persist in the task of satisfying internal and external needs. This is the fourth social function of the firm, which is to be understood not as mere persistence in time but above all as the consolidation and growth of the firm’s people.

Once we have defined the firm’s (external and internal) missions, the next step is to define the firm’s “object”, that is, the specific abilities –or professional competencies– of the people who make up the firm: the things the company does and is good at. The final step is to define and implement the “strategy”; in other words, to adapt the firm to the circumstances of the environment so as to generate economic value added.

We can therefore describe the businessperson’s task as being to design an external and internal mission that will make it increasingly attractive for people to take part in the firm’s activities by making what they do in the firm more meaningful; to identify and achieve the firm’s purpose, in other words, to first exploit and then develop her subordinates’ ability to learn and do things; and lastly, to design and put into practice strategies that will lead to the satisfaction of the needs of those who take part in the firm.

Is this description of the tasks and functions of the businessperson over-ambitious? Not at all; it is always useful to know what we are aiming for, even if we know that we are likely to fall somewhat short of our target. Moreover, these are not unattainable goals: all businesspeople perform this social function every day, however successfully or unsuccessfully – and those that don’t are unlikely to be in the job for long.

An approach such as the one we have adopted here helps us to understand that the task of the businessperson or manager has facets that go beyond the purely technical or economic dimension (of producing, selling, hiring and getting paid): at least two other facets. One is the socio-political dimension: businesspeople are harmonizers of men, organizers of

human teams, solvers of human problems. Another facet is ethics: the businessperson shoulders the responsibility for the development of the firm's human resources – each and every one of the people who work for the firm – and the fulfilment of their purpose as people.

So ethics is clearly not an add-on, or extra, but an essential element of all the firm's decisions, structures and rules. Everything a manager does has an ethical purpose; otherwise, it is best left undone.

### **What does being a Catholic add to all this?**

So far we have talked about businesspeople in general. Now we shall consider a particular type of businessperson: the Christian or Catholic businessperson (I shall use the two terms as synonyms, though I realise they are not).

What does it mean to be a Catholic?<sup>7</sup> The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*<sup>8</sup> does not provide a definition: it takes it for granted, which is natural enough, considering that “Catholic” is a term so rich in meaning that it can refer to a vocation<sup>9</sup>, the task of a lifetime. A Catholic is not a member of a club, but a man or woman who tries to live out in his or her own life Peter's confession in Caesarea Philippi: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the Living God” (Mt. 16: 16).

A Christian is, firstly, a religious man or woman<sup>10</sup>, “bound” (*religare*) to God, to a personal God (a “someone”, not a “something”); a God who is the centre of her life, whom she acknowledges as the Lord, whom she accepts (along with His law and His Commandments), whom she adores and to whom she addresses herself in prayer. In a word, a Christian is a man or woman who lives a life oriented towards God.

Secondly, a Christian is a man or woman of faith, because “without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Hebr. 11: 6). The believer is moved by truths which she believes for certain reasons: truths that God has revealed for the salvation of mankind, truths that man believes in order to be saved, truths that she believes because they have been revealed by God (trusting, therefore, in God's word), truths that are reasonable (not mere credulity) and certain. At the same time, she knows that faith is a gift from God, and that faith demands loyalty to God. Thus, the Christian has received faith, a new dimension, a new light, which orients her life in accordance with God's truth about Himself, about man and about the world.

Thirdly, a Catholic is a disciple of Christ, whom she sees as the “beloved Son” of the Heavenly Father (Mt. 3: 17; Lk. 9: 35) and to whom she listens. For the disciple, listening to the Master means following Him, putting into practice His teaching (cfr. Jn. 15: 14), which is the teaching of love of God and men (cfr. Jn. 15: 12). A Catholic, therefore, is a person who aims to embody in her life the model that is Christ. The essential thing in Christian life is not to adhere to a catalogue of truths or a code of ethics, but to imitate Christ.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Thi Cfr. Orlandis (1998).

<sup>8</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1999).

<sup>9</sup> On the Christian sense of vocation, cfr. Rodríguez (1986).

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 28

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. Melé (1996).



Also, the Christian is a child of God (cfr. 1 Jn. 3: 1), which is joyous news for mankind: God loves us, with such a love that He made us His children (cfr. Jn. 1: 12) and said to us “all that I have is thine” (Lk. 15: 31). The image of a provident God,<sup>12</sup> with a specific and immediate providence, close to every person in all the circumstances of her life, prompts us to see the world as a gift from God to man, to all men and women; therefore, to see that we are all children; and consequently, that we are bound by ties that, without the light of faith, we could not begin to suspect; that in this love of God for each man and woman lies man’s sovereign dignity,<sup>13</sup> and that a Catholic must have an optimistic view of life. In a word, the Christian is the steward of God’s heritage (cfr. Mt. 25: 14 ff.), the son who goes into the vineyard (cfr. Mt. 21: 28 ff.) on his Father’s business: God’s affairs are her affairs, and God’s Children are her brothers and sisters.

Lastly, the Catholic is a child of the Church. The Church is the depository of faith<sup>14</sup>; in her the Catholic learns what it is to be a Catholic; in her she becomes a Child of God and a member of His Body. A Catholic, therefore, is a member of a society, a brother or sister of other men and women: her life has a social dimension. In the Church she finds the means to fulfil her vocation, and the strength to carry it out, because Christianity is a religion of grace: without God we can do nothing. And she receives also the grace, the virtues and the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

### **The Christian in the world**

The Catholic knows, as we said earlier, that she has been placed in the world by God. The world has been created by God, not by man, and God has determined what the world is and what it means. Man tries to discover the meaning of the world by two means that complement rather than contradict one another: science (including economics, social science and management science) and faith. For the Christian, science is the same as for other men – there is no Catholic physics, Catholic psychology or Catholic mathematics – but it serves an additional purpose: to understand God’s work and lead it to Him.<sup>15</sup>

The Christian must therefore understand human realities and their autonomy.<sup>16</sup> If she is a businessperson, she must learn about the firm, its ends, its means, its conditioning factors, with the help of economics and the other sciences that study the firm. Faith does not supplant that knowledge, it confirms it. Faith sheds new light, but it does not obviate the need to understand reality. There is, therefore, no call for us to invent a “Christian firm”; rather, we must understand the firm as a human institution that is part of God’s plans for mankind and mankind’s response to the “challenge” that God has given it to “subdue the earth” (Gen. 1: 28).

The Catholic must understand her role in the world, taking God, creation and redemption as her points of reference<sup>17</sup>. God has created the world and has given it to man so that he may work in it and make it multiply (cfr. Gen. 2: 15). In giving it to man, as steward, He has set certain conditions. First, because man is created “in the image and likeness” of God (cfr. Gen. 1, 26), the subduing of the earth must not be carried out against man or against

<sup>12</sup> Cfr. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 303.

<sup>13</sup> Cfr. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1691.

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 84.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. Núñez Ladeveze (1996).

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. *Gaudium et spes*, 36.

<sup>17</sup> Cfr. *Laborem exercens*, 4, 25; *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 29-30; *Centesimus annus*, 31.

the image of God that is in man. Second, He has given the earth to man, “male and female” (Gen. 1: 27), as a social task, for the whole human race.<sup>18</sup> The world comes to us also as a gift from earlier generations, and we must hand it on to those that follow us. The duty to subdue the earth is the duty of work, the social task of man created in the image of God. And all of this is for man: “everything belongs to you” (I Cor. 3: 22).

Man has not set his own goal, but has been set a goal by God as a vocation, a calling to participate in His plans, as steward, or rather as His son and heir. The firm is, precisely, one of the institutions that men and women have devised for this transformation of the world. The firm belongs to the sphere of man’s vocation and must be understood in the context of the work of creation.<sup>19</sup> It is in their place of work that men and women will find their personal development, that they will be able to satisfy a good number of their needs, economically, efficiently, acting as the image of God; without harming the world, which is a gift from God; and without harming other men and women, with whom they must cooperate and, what’s more, to whose human development they must contribute.<sup>20</sup> In a word, the firm is, in its end and its means, a social task and an opportunity for the development of human solidarity.

The Gospels describe man’s task using the simile of the steward, as we have mentioned. What is required of a steward is loyalty. Accordingly, the businessperson must be, more than most, a loyal steward, who must use the resources received from God and from others for the benefit of all, and who will be called to account for the talents she has received (cfr. Mt. 25: 14 ff.). This is a source of responsibility for the businessperson, and a source of honour, and an entitlement to profit, as Saint Paul says, “Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn” (I. Cor. 9: 9): making a fair profit is not in any way incompatible with being a good businessperson and a good Catholic.

Redemption adds another dimension to this meaning of the world and of the firm.<sup>21</sup> Christ lead us to the Father, from whom we had strayed because of sin; He overcomes our limitations, corrects our errors and gives us back our plenitude as children. The disciple of Christ must therefore imitate He who is “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn. 14: 6), which means that the Christian has a very high vocation: to share in the redemption of the world by continuing the work of Christ, just as we said earlier that she must continue the Father’s work of creation.<sup>22</sup>

Obviously, it is not a matter of supplanting the autonomy of the world, but of recognizing the effect of sin and the need for redemption, which Christ carried out once and for all, but which Christians are called upon to put into practice in every historical circumstance. This dimension naturally does not replace man’s human vocation, described earlier, but completes, perfects and elevates it. “The dream of ‘unlimited progress’ reappears, radically transformed by the new outlook created by Christian faith, assuring us that progress is possible only because God the Father has decided from the beginning to make man a sharer of his glory in Jesus Christ risen from the dead”.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Cfr. *Centesimus annus*, 31.

<sup>19</sup> On the task of the businessperson as a vocation, cfr. Novak (1996), Sirico (2000)

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 34; *Centesimus annus*, 37-38.

<sup>21</sup> Cfr. *Laborem exercens*, 26-27; *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 31.

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. *Gaudium et spes*, 22.

<sup>23</sup> *Sollicitudo rei socialis*, 31.

## The Christian businessperson

We have already defined the businessperson as a man or woman who leads men into action to change reality and achieve results efficiently. The Christian who is a businessperson knows that she has a part in God's plan for the world and for herself; a meaningful plan which is not imposed on the world and on men by force; rather, God leaves the seeking and the stewardship of it to man's own freedom and effort. And the Christian businessperson wants to collaborate in this plan, following the example of Christ, in accordance with her vocation as a person and as a Catholic. To do this she has the providence of God and the help of the Church and other Christians, because she is not a solitary fighter, but a member of a chosen People (cfr. I Pet. 2: 9).

She performs this task, as we said earlier, by the light of faith, which allows her to discover the deeper reality, the "splendour of truth", which is, at the same time, the guarantee of freedom (cfr. Jn. 8: 32). In the light of faith she must reconsider the firm's ends and means, and the meaning of her life, not as something added to it from outside but as something that emanates from within it, because "The denial of God deprives the person of his foundation, and consequently leads to a reorganization of the social order without reference to the person's dignity and responsibility".<sup>24</sup>

Also, the Catholic who acts as a businessperson benefits from the guidance of the teachings of the Church, which are like a roadmap that shows her the way, a map she must strive to interpret and put into practice, but which will save her from getting lost, provided she is willing to follow its guidance.<sup>25</sup> She also has, as we pointed out earlier, the model of Christ, and the help of grace, because she is not fighting on her own, but has the loving help of God the Father, of the Church and of her brothers and sisters. It is not the Catholic who redeems the world, but Christ, using the Christian as an instrument, which calls for a fittingness and an attitude of cooperation.

So what will a businessperson who wishes to live in accordance with her condition as a Christian do? The same as everyone else, but in a new spirit. She will lead men and women into action, not as machines, but as Children of God and as her brothers<sup>26</sup> and sisters. She will lead them into action to achieve the firm's goals, which does not mean either endorsing purely human goals or ignoring the real needs of the company in the name of supposedly higher ideals – and if she cannot do this, then she will have failed as a businessperson and as a Catholic.<sup>27</sup> She will also plan her actions so that each of the actors in this adventure also achieves the goal of her life – which gives the mission of the businessperson an apostolic significance.

The mission is to lead people into action to change reality. In a spirit of solidarity, because they all must share in the common good of the firm and society.<sup>28</sup> Providing goods and services that are useful,<sup>29</sup> which means not only that they cause no harm but also that they make consumers and users happy and contribute to their development as people. Promoting quality and innovation, which also are ways of sharing in the common good. As

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<sup>24</sup> *Centesimus annus*, 13.

<sup>25</sup> On the treatment of the firm in the Church's social teaching, cfr. Fernández (1992, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> Cfr. *Centesimus annus*, 32, 43.

<sup>27</sup> As Gay (2002) points out, this is very different from limiting oneself to performing one's material and human duties as a businessperson, as if fulfilling our human vocation were enough to satisfy God's demand that we behave as His disciples.

<sup>28</sup> Cfr. Melé (1992).

<sup>29</sup> Cfr. *Centesimus annus*, 32, 34, 36.

*Centesimus Annus* reminds us, “foreseeing both the needs of others and the combinations of productive factors best suited to satisfy those needs (...) Organizing such a productive effort, planning its duration, making sure that it meets the demands, and taking the necessary risks — all this, too, is a source of wealth in today’s society”.<sup>30</sup>

Above all, the firm must change people – or rather, given that they are free beings, at least make such change possible. This has many implications, ranging from the need to treat people in accordance with their dignity to the need to provide them with appropriate jobs and incomes, create opportunities for their professional and human development (at work and through work), give their activity a meaning, trust them, foster their initiative and participation, and make it possible for them to find God in the firm and through their work.

And all of this while achieving results efficiently:<sup>31</sup> out of a commitment to do justice to society (a commitment that affects the optimal use of resources), out of a duty of professional competence, and out of a duty of justice towards those involved in production (workers, owners, managers, customers, suppliers, and so on), who have chosen to take part precisely in order to satisfy their material needs by sharing in the creation and equitable distribution of the economic value added created by the firm. In this way, profit is legitimated<sup>32</sup> not as the firm’s ultimate purpose but as a means.

And with an eye to the future, looking not only to the firm’s survival but also to its development and consolidation. This is not to say that the firm must be preserved in its present form: it may – and should – experience changes in its production process, its location, its workforce and its machinery, even its legal identity; but it must always be able to continue to be the same community of persons who contribute to the common good of society and who find in the firm the means for their material, human and spiritual progress. And this requires that the businessperson focus on the long term, foresee future changes and anticipate possible crises, acting heroically in the search for solutions when required.

## Conclusions

The Christian vocation does not change the nature and demands of a manager’s professional vocation. It does, however, add some new and very challenging dimensions. It is an antidote to professional, human and supernatural mediocrity; a call to excellence, not for human reasons but out of a duty towards God and towards other people. The businessperson cannot be content with just getting by if she wants her life to be that of the steward whom the Gospels praise as a “good and faithful servant” and invite to enter into the “joy of the Lord” (Mt. 25: 21).

I do not believe that the views presented here are over-idealized; on the contrary, they are very human and realistic. Perhaps even too realistic. Isn’t there perhaps a danger here of putting too much reliance on human values, on the firm’s human assets, to the point where we risk losing sight of the supernatural dimension?

I don’t think so. Asking a Catholic who is also a businessperson to be, above all, an excellent businessperson seems to me a natural thing to ask. And I don’t believe that God is

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<sup>30</sup> *Centesimus annus*, 32.

<sup>31</sup> *Cfr. Centesimus annus*, 35.

<sup>32</sup> *Cfr. Centesimus annus*, 35.

offended to see His children succeed as excellent businesspeople – because they will not be excellent businesspeople unless they are also excellent people and excellent Christians. Cardinal Martini, at a meeting of businesspeople organized by Uniapac in September 1994, told a rabbinical story that fits very well here. “One day, men performed a marvellous feat that until then had been considered impossible, and some of them were frightened, thinking that this would lead man to think that he no longer needed God. Some rabbis asked the prophet Elias: What did God say when he saw that man had excelled Him in bravery? And the prophet said: God laughed and exclaimed: My children have excelled me! Bravo! My children have excelled me!”

Before I finish, let me sum up some of the conclusions. Firstly, there isn’t, technically speaking, a specifically Christian way of managing companies. There is, however, a transcendent Christian vision and a Christian way of living as a businessperson – because being a Christian is not something that is confined to a person’s inner life.

Secondly, what Christianity adds to the businessperson is something that affects, not the nature of her work, but the meaning or purpose of her work, in line with the new meaning of her life. It is the work of a son of God, under the direction of the Spirit of God.

Thirdly, the social duties and functions of a Christian firm are the same as those of any firm: to produce useful goods and services, to be efficient, to create economic value added, to develop people... There is no reason why they should be any different. Being a businessperson and a Catholic does not mean making less profit, or causing less pollution, or paying higher salaries... Christianity does not add new managerial duties but new reasons for performing those duties, new certainties regarding the need to perform them, and additional means to perform them more successfully.

Fourthly, being both a businessperson and a Catholic is no easier and no more difficult than being an ethical businessperson, or being a good businessperson (in the comprehensive sense of “good”). Nor is it any easier or more difficult than being a nurse and a Catholic, a farmer and a Catholic, or a pensioner and a Catholic. The same high demands are made on one and all: “be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Mt. 5: 48). If there are specific difficulties in being an honest businessperson, neither the grace of God nor the means to achieve it will be lacking. The Catholic who is a businessperson cannot, therefore, be pessimistic or embittered.

Lastly, the Church’s social teaching is an invaluable aid to the businessperson.<sup>33</sup> It will not give her specific answers, but “principles for reflection and criteria for judgment and also directives for action”,<sup>34</sup> which managers and businesspeople will need to explore and develop in order to apply them to specific circumstances.

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<sup>33</sup> *Cfr. Centesimus annus*, 43.

<sup>34</sup> *Libertatis conscientia*, 72.

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