

UNIAPAC'S TIME IS NOW... OUR TIME HAS COME

Rolando Medeiros

With the hope that you will have many blessings in the year 2017 which is just beginning, I take this opportunity to thank you very much for your support, for your trust and for entrusting me with such a challenging mission of leading UNIAPAC for the next 3 years. As I expressed in the General Assembly of November 19th, 2016 in Rome, I feel deeply honored and I accept this assignment, which hopefully will assume in the next few months, with humility, joyfulness and commitment.

With humility, because I do consider this as a mission; as a gift, a gift of God to serve Him and to serve my neighbors; to serve you... It is a calling and I recognize it as calling just by listening to my own heart. I see it as a vocation; and a *vocation is a call that requires a free and responsible answer.*

But I also accept this assignment plenty of joy. Once, Mother Teresa asked her counsellor for advice about her vocation. She asked *"How can I know if God is calling me?"* He answered her, *"You will know by your happiness. If you are happy with the idea that God calls you to serve him and your neighbor, this will be the proof of your "vocation"...* And I am full of joy to accept this challenge.

Also, I accept it with the highest level of commitment. I commit my time, my talents, my experience and my entire energy with the deepest conviction that the time for UNIAPAC is now; that our time has come to fully accept the challenge our Church is imposing on UNIAPAC, and on us. The challenge is to continue helping our societies and our business leaders to turn *business into a noble vocation.* UNIAPAC has made significant contributions to foster the integral development of the person in our responsibilities as business leaders, giving a deeper sense to CSR initiatives and putting the principles and values of the Social Doctrine of the Church at work in business decisions; my predecessors Étienne Wibaux, José Ignacio Mariscal, Pierre Lecocq and José María Simone deserve credit for having raised the bar so high.

Underlying this conviction and what UNIAPAC has been doing is a belief that every Christian Leader is called to practice its business mission in a manner corresponding to his vocation and according to the degree of influence he wields in society. The term *vocation* comes from the Latin *"vocare"* and suggests that our purposes are greater than just doing a task, or filling space, or busyness. It suggests that God, who made us, wants us to be similarly creative. He granted us gifts, and through our families, friends and neighbors, develops our talents, so that we may work with Him in tandem with His creative process.

Saint John Paul II in §42 of the encyclical letter *Centesimus Annus* defines the type of capitalism as the model which ought to be proposed: *"If by "capitalism" is meant an economic system which recognizes the fundamental and positive role of business, the market, private property and the resulting responsibility for the means of production, as well as free human creativity in the economic sector, then the answer is certainly in the affirmative, even though it would perhaps be more appropriate to speak of a "business economy," "market economy" or simply "free economy." But if by "capitalism" is meant a system in which freedom in the economic sector is not circumscribed within a strong juridical framework which places it at the service of human freedom in its totality and sees*

it as a particular aspect of that freedom, the core of which is ethical and religious, then the reply is certainly negative". The relevance of this quote for our purposes is that in it we can distinguish the roots of what is meant by business as a noble vocation.

Later, in 1996, the term *Business as a Vocation* was coined when explaining that having a good year in fulfilling one's calling as a business leader means passing tests that are a lot more rewarding than just having a good year in financial terms... which also gives us additional clues about the deep meaning of the term. For half of the pleasure from the business calling derives from a sense that the system of which it is part is highly beneficial to the human race, morally sound, and one of the great social achievements of all time. The other half is personal: finding purpose and meaning in what one does.

In 2009 in his encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate* Benedict XVI referred many times to business as a vocation and about the need to include the principle of gratuitousness in the economic activities. In §40 he stresses the need for a "*profoundly new way of understanding business enterprise*" and alerts about its great risk of being "*almost exclusively answerable to their investors, thereby limiting their social value*" when business management does not assume "*responsibility for all the other stakeholders who contribute to the life of the business: the workers, the clients, the suppliers of various elements of production, the community of reference*". In §63 he defines decent work as that that *expresses the essential dignity of every man and woman in the context of their particular society: work that is freely chosen, effectively associating workers, both men and women, with the development of their community; work that enables the worker to be respected and free from any form of discrimination; work that makes it possible for families to meet their needs and provide schooling for their children, without the children themselves being forced into labor; work that permits the workers to organize themselves freely, and to make their voices heard; work that leaves enough room for rediscovering one's roots at a personal, familial and spiritual level; work that guarantees those who have retired a decent standard of living*".

In 2015, in his encyclical letter *Laudato Si*, in §129, Pope Francis stressed the concept of business as a vocation to the extent that the creation of jobs is seen as an *essential part of its service to the common good*.

And, previously, in 2013, in its apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, in §203, Pope Francis elevates business to even a higher rank: "***Business is a vocation, and a noble vocation, provided that those engaged in it see themselves challenged by a greater meaning in life; this will enable them truly to serve the common good by striving to increase the goods of this world and to make them more accessible to all***".

So, if business as a vocation is an insightful concept, business as a noble vocation is a very powerful idea; an idea which demands a deeper sense of purpose by the business leader –so timely in a world which is experiencing a serious crisis of meaning and of trust—and also requires that the enterprise led by such a leader be oriented to serve the common good.

The booklet issued in 2012 by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace *The Vocation of the Business Leader – A Reflection*, in whose preparation UNIAPAC –and our former president Pierre Lecocq—played an important role, is a hardly needed contribution, in the light of the Christian Social Tradition ("CST"), to a better understanding of the legitimate

role that business plays and could play in modern life and about its critical contribution to the common good of the communities in which we live. A common good understood as the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members' relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment.

In the Foreword of this booklet Peter K.A. Cardinal Turkson provides a sound summary as a base for further analysis and deeper comprehension of Business as a Noble Vocation: "*Business leaders are called to engage with the contemporary economic and financial world in light of the principles of human dignity and the common good*". He provides a set of practical principles among which he recalls "*the principle of meeting the needs of the world with goods that are truly good and truly serve without forgetting, in a spirit of solidarity, the needs of the poor and the vulnerable; the principle of organizing work within enterprises in ways that respect human dignity; the principle of subsidiarity, which fosters a spirit of initiative and increases the competence of the employees who are thereby considered "co-entrepreneurs"; and finally, the principle of sustainable creation of wealth and its just distribution among the various stakeholders*". Put them in simple and concise terms: the "3G:s" for the service of the Common Good: Good Products and Services, Good Work, and Good Wealth.

New light might be shed to understand the role that business plays and could play in society and how business and society ought to interact. And UNIAPAC can continue making meaningful contributions to this aim: to offer business leaders options inspired in the CST for deeper meaning, direction, codes of conduct and set of practical rules which may help them to undertake their business mission as *a noble vocation*.

And it is an idea so closely related to UNIAPAC's mission that, by promoting it, we have a great opportunity to make a big difference contributing meaningfully to the betterment of the world. And, as Victor Hugo pointed out, "*all the forces in the world are not so powerful as an idea whose time has come*"... And *Business as a Noble Vocation* is a powerful idea whose time has come.

The time is now to continue planting seeds and harvesting. The time has come for UNIAPAC to take up the joyful call to help providing business leaders with a greater meaning of their role by seeing the need to take a broader view of their mandate in society, beyond short-term gains, and as builders of the common good and promoters of a new humanism of work. It is time to continue promoting business activities that truly serve human needs in every important aspect; to encourage businesses to function as they should in order to be considered, in the deepest sense, good businesses. It is time to stress UNIAPAC's view derived from the CST of what business could be if it fulfilled its potential. Time to encourage people who are engaged in the management of businesses to think somewhat differently about how they ought to do their work (and to encourage those outside business to recognize and support the good that business does). Time to promote business as a builder of the good of every man and of the whole man: Business as a noble vocation consists in its completeness: if it does not involve the whole man and every man related to it, it is not truly noble.

UNIAPAC can continue assisting in providing meaning to business leaders for them to pursue a career in business not only as a morally serious vocation but a morally noble one. Science, technology, the free market and democracy have enabled us to reach unprecedented achievements in knowledge, freedom, life expectancy and affluence. They are among the greatest achievements of human civilization and are to be defended and

cherished. However, technology gives us power but cannot guide us as to how to use that power. The market gives us choices but leaves us uninstructed as to how to make those choices. The liberal democratic state gives us freedom to live as we choose but refuses, on principle, to guide us as to how to choose. The result is that the 21st century has left us with a maximum of choice and a minimum of meaning.

But business as a noble vocation provides ground for those who are called to it to have reasons to be proud of and rejoice in it by serving to the common good. The dignity of each human person and the pursuit of the common good are concerns which ought to shape all business endeavors. UNIAPAC has to keep influencing in order to prevent them from being a mere addendum imported from without in order to fill out a politically correct discourse and to encourage a greater sense of responsibility for the common good from those who wield greater power.

And UNIAPAC can address and help answering many meaningful questions related to the potential of business as a noble vocation: What is the role of virtue in executive leadership? How can business leaders answer the call to be builders of the common good and promoters of a new humanism of work? Are they open to act adhering to principles which foster the integral development of those affected by the business? What general principles are to be identified for understanding business as a noble vocation, including a definition of a logic in which the purpose of business is found beyond itself; that is more than maximization of profit? How can business effectively undertake one of their foremost tasks of increasing the goods of this world and to make them more accessible to all? What is required for businesses to create not only economic wealth but also social, cultural, intellectual and spiritual wealth thus becoming a fruitful source of prosperity? How could the preservation of human dignity and the common good become amongst the chief aims of business; that is, the protection of the *Imago Dei* of every individual to be at the core of any business decision?

It seems ironic that in the contemporary world, a world that enjoys a level of general prosperity unprecedented in human history, business contribution is not obvious. Worse yet, not only is its contribution often unappreciated, but business is often cited as the cause of grave evils. Thus, if business is perceived as being part of the problem, then it must also be part of the solution if it is not to remain at the heart of the problem. And UNIAPAC can lead the way in this quest. It can contribute by constantly reminding us that the right to private property is subordinated to the right of common use; that it possesses an intrinsic social function aiming at the access, by each person, to the level of well-being necessary for his full development; that the principle of the universal destination of goods is an invitation to develop an economic vision inspired by moral values that permit people not to lose sight of the origin or purpose of these goods.

There are excesses and abuses in business and in our capitalist society, and Pope Francis has named many of them. There is also nobility, as he reminds us. We need to recognize the differences. For the sake of humanity and the free world, the time has come for UNIAPAC and us to stand together and help identifying those differences and help rescuing the reputation of business by showcasing many cases of enterprises which have been very successful without compromising the principles and values of the CST... Enterprises that are building the society that Francis envisions and which are answering his call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress and challenging the throwaway culture: enterprises for which business is a *noble vocation*.

In promoting the concept and implications of business as a noble vocation, UNIAPAC could apply two modes, or functions. One mode is a critique of positive and negative aspects of business conduct and of the context in which business operates, insofar as they influence the well-being of human persons (and perhaps insofar as they can be influenced). The second mode is a set of proposals concerning the shape and substance of a business that would fully respect human dignity and pursue the common good.

Distrust of business remains among the public, particularly of large corporations. People are apprehensive about the power they have to affect the lives of great numbers of people and often concerned that they will not use this power well. This distrust is not relieved by the failure of business leaders to explain how they understand business to be integrated within the social order... Nor is it mitigated by the occasional dramatic misbehavior of the managers and executives responsible for major companies. In many cases behind these misbehaviors is an instrumental way of reasoning, which provides a purely static analysis of realities in the service of present needs; in other words, this approach results in that the principle of the maximization of profits is frequently isolated from other considerations.

UNIAPAC can be instrumental to help to understand that 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 who offer their talents, skills, and knowledge to help build and fulfill a purpose of common good. Profit is a regulator of the life of a business, but it is not the only one; other human and moral factors must also be considered which, in the long term, are at least equally important for the life of a business and at the core of turning business into *a noble vocation*.

Businesspeople are not immune to sin, and UNIAPAC should not pretend that all businesses live up to any particular model at all times. UNIAPAC has to maintain its contribution to a dynamic process towards an ideal, but an ideal that many businesses can approach in their day-to-day activities. In other words, UNIAPAC should help to build a standard to which businesspeople can and should aspire –and the standard may be upheld sometimes more fully, sometimes more poorly, but always as a compass.

Thus there is a great challenge before us: to demonstrate –in thinking and behavior—not only that traditional principles of social ethics like transparency, honesty and responsibility cannot be ignored or attenuated, but also that in business relationships the principle of gratuitousness and the logic of gift as an expression of fraternity can and must find their place within normal business activity. What a challenge for UNIAPAC...!

Can a business leader transform the company and the system that he/she leads without being transformed him or herself? This transformation will come to life and be sustainable only if driven from within by people of good will; and here is where Christian business leaders can play a major role through their testimonies deriving from their efforts to unify their professional lives and their faith. UNIAPAC can assist us to recognize, as business leaders, the extraordinary power of transformation that our spirituality can give us when it is lived out in all aspects of our lives. Quoting our Chilean Jesuit saint St. Albert Hurtado, *our imitation of Christ consists in living the life of Christ, in having this inner and outer attitude that in all things we are conformed to Christ, doing what Christ would do if he were in our place*. Undoubtedly business will be a noble vocation if in critical business decisions we ask ourselves what Jesus would have done.

I look forward to working with you –but more precisely to work for you—in capturing the opportunity to sharpen our focus and genuinely move forward to capitalize and take full

advantage of this great opportunity: the time has come to continue making UNIAPAC more reflective of the modern business world.

The time has come for us to stand a little taller, to lift our eyes and stretch our minds to a greater comprehension and understanding of the magnificent mission of UNIAPAC. In other words, we are “called” to work alongside of God for His purposes and our fulfillment. We are called to restore trust, inspire hope, and keep burning the light of faith that fuels the daily pursuit of the good... and the transformation of business into a *noble vocation*.

In the next few months, before assuming the responsibilities I’ve humbly, joyfully and committedly accepted, I will be working with José María and with the presidents of regional and local associations to come back with a more thoroughly structured and comprehensive action plan...

UNIAPAC’s time is now... Our time has come!!!

Many thanks.

Santiago of Chile, January 2017.