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THE BUSINESS LEADER'S VOCATION TO SOCIAL PURPOSE AND SUSTAINABILITY

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ABSTRACT

The document "The Vocation of the Business Leader: A Reflection" (VBL) facilitates the understanding of the Christian leader's role in these times characterized by serious economic disturbances and growing inequality. VBL points to new movements and programs that have emerged, such as economy of solidarity initiatives, which are examples of economic activity marked by gratuitousness and communion. We seek to integrate the leadership requirements of solidarity economy enterprises with those based on Catholic Social Thought (CST) and the VBL to come up with a more complete set of factors for a construct that can be called "Christian business leadership." This paper has found that the Christian business leader can add participation and cooperation, as well as a sharp focus on sustainability, to his or her leadership arsenal. The business leader should strive, above all, for personal sustainability which requires, among others, constant reflective work and the exercise of important moral virtues.

KEYWORDS

Catholic social thought; business leadership; vocation of the business leader; solidarity economy; sustainability; personal sustainability

INTRODUCTION

Business has undoubtedly contributed to humanity by developing new and innovative goods and services that generate economic growth while delivering important benefits to society. However, business has also contributed to serious economic disturbances and growing inequality: the failure of businesses and markets to distribute the benefits of economic prosperity equitably to all segments of society is remarkable.

The document “The Vocation of the Business Leader: A Reflection” (VBL; Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2012; Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, 2018) facilitates the understanding of the Christian leader’s role in the context of this turbulence. In addition to reminding the business leader’s need to uphold respect for truth, fidelity to commitments, human dignity, freedom, creativity, and the universal destination of goods, VBL points out that there are new movements and programs that have emerged, such as economy of solidarity initiatives, which are enabling business leaders to recognize their work as a vocation.

Can the leadership requirements of solidarity economy enterprises be integrated with those based on Catholic Social Thought (CST)—respect for human dignity, solidarity, fraternity, integral human development, etc.—to come up with a more complete set of factors to make up a construct called “Christian business leadership?” Christian leadership studies can perhaps benefit from the analysis of solidarity economy initiatives.

I start with VBL, which has come to be a handbook or guide for business men and women, as well as business educators, to address the important role of vocation for the business leader in today’s global economy. It represents a particularly insightful ethical approach to illuminate morally desirable leadership practices (Rousseau, 2017).

Then, I describe solidarity economy initiatives, which VBL cites, among other new movements. Solidarity economy enterprises focus on participation, cooperation, self-management, and mutuality, in addition to an emphasis on sustainability.

Afterwards, I describe the various business leadership conceptions in the literature that have sought to describe leaders of faith who, through the virtues

afforded them by their faith, have achieved success in running various types of organizations.

Research on Christian leadership in the secular world seems to highlight the following attributes of Christian leaders: Christ-led, a person of character, humility, wisdom, absence of power and ego, and a servant leader (Jones, Murray, & Warren, 2018). Since the application of Christian spirituality to modern business activity is fairly recent (Melé & Fontrodona, 2017), the hope is that this paper adds to the suggestions in VBL of the leader qualities found in successful social businesses and solidarity economy initiatives.

I include a brief discussion on the “Individual Sustainability instrument,” since personal sustainability is increasingly becoming a sought-after quality for leaders in social and solidarity economy businesses.

The paper concludes with a listing of the factors or qualities that ideally a “Christian business leader” should possess, viz., a focus on participation, cooperation, and personal sustainability, in addition to the pillars of CST and the recommendations in VBL.

THE VOCATION OF THE BUSINESS LEADER

In March 2012, Cardinal Peter Turkson, president of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, presented a document titled “Vocation of the Business Leader” [VBL] to 2,000 business leaders at the International Christian Union of Business Executives World Congress in Lyon, France. At the heart of the document is the conviction that business executives are called not just to do business, but to be a particular kind of leader in business. The document sees business as a vocation that makes “an irreplaceable contribution to the material and even the spiritual well-being of humankind” (Naughton, 2012).

At the heart of the document is the conviction that business executives are called not just to do business, but to be a particular kind of leader in business. VBL makes possible a transformation in our understanding of the special role business ought to play in the unfolding of creation. It is organized according to a structure common in CST—“See, judge and act.” VBL reminds business leaders that “truth-

filled love” ought to be the yardstick for performance, that is to say, a relationship with Christ, which animates and strengthens the life of every Christian, should imbue the professional life of the business leader (Naughton, 2012; Wishloff, 2014).

Businesses are essential to the common good of every society and to the whole global order. Businesses also support the well-being of members of society in the following three aspects: 1) the production of *Good Goods*, such as addressing genuine human needs through the creation, development, and production of goods and services; 2) through *Good Work* by organizing good and productive work; and 3) *Good Wealth* through using resources to create and to share wealth and prosperity in sustainable ways (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2012).

Some of the basic concepts and elements that VBL reminds us of are: 1) Integral human development; 2) Fraternity and solidarity; 3) Human dignity; 4) Common good; 5) Principle of subsidiarity; 6) Practical wisdom; 7) Framework for judging—Good goods, Good work, Good wealth; and 8) Business as a *communio personarum*. The document also invites us to return to the content of the encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, whereby business persons should view their task in the business organization as one of love: *love received and given* (Benedict, 2009; Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2012).

It is noteworthy that VBL makes reference to economy of solidarity initiatives, which are helping business leaders to recognize their work as a vocation and the role their businesses play in contributing to the common good. The document identifies the deep and abiding purposes of business as: 1) offering needed goods and services to customers; 2) organizing good and productive work for employees; and 3) creating wealth and distributing it justly. Each objective gives rise to two broad principles that should shape the actions of business leaders: 1) in order to contribute to the common good, businesses must produce goods that are truly good and services that truly serve; and 2) business leaders ought to maintain solidarity with the poor by being alert for opportunities to serve otherwise neglected populations and people in need (Kennedy, 2012).

Fostering solidarity with the poor by serving deprived and marginalized populations is one of the main principles drawn from CST. Solidarity entails an orientation to choose actions that support the common good of society in concrete ways. It requires more than the determination to avoid harms; it moves people to

be alive to the needs of others and creative about the ways in which they might use their own gifts and resources to address those needs (Kennedy, 2012). These characteristics of solidarity and mutuality in business organizations stand out in the *solidarity economy movement*, and conceptualizations of Christian leadership found in CST can perhaps be enhanced through the analysis of solidarity economy initiatives. The history and nature of the social and solidarity economy are discussed in the next section.

SOLIDARITY ECONOMY: HISTORY AND CHARACTERISTICS

The solidarity economy has been proposed as a framework for economic justice. Solidarity is a way for first-world Christians to define their obligation to the distant other, to their global neighbor whom they do not know but to whom they are connected through the interdependence of God's created order. Solidarity, in this context, can be defined as a relationship between people or groups of people who are different from one another but who share mutual respect and a willingness to work together to address issues of social injustice. Solidarity describes a new vision of society built on shared bonds between people that call for loyalty, compassion, and companionship; bonds rooted in the *agape* (self-sacrificing) love of the Christian tradition (Peters, 2012).

The social and solidarity economy (SSE) is made up of activities involved with production, distribution, and consumption, but also savings and credit services. These activities could take the form of fair trade initiatives, social entrepreneurship, community currencies, and micro-credit programs, as well as worker, consumer and producer cooperatives, community gardens or community-supported agriculture, community-run exchange platforms or do-it-yourself initiatives, among others. Many of these activities exist at the grassroots level, either marginalized by or hidden within the dominant market economy (Sahakian & Dunand, 2015).

Latin America has one of the oldest and most vibrant solidarity economy movements. It is also the place where the term itself was coined, adapted from the work of Luis Razeto, a Chilean professor of philosophy. Razeto wrote about the solidarity market, and about creating economic enterprises that embody 'Factor C'—cooperation, co-responsibility, communication, and community. By the 1990s, solidarity economy organizing and networking was already starting to flourish in

Latin America, largely in reaction to the harsh neoliberal policies implemented by authoritarian governments in the previous decade. Activists and academics in Latin America realized that the neoliberal model of development was not working, particularly for the poor (Allard, Davidson, & Matthaei, 2007).

The social and solidarity economy (SSE) in Latin America is promoted via the *Red Internacional de la Promoción de la Economía Social y Solidaria* (RIPESS) or Intercontinental Network for the Promotion of Social Solidarity Economy: it has increasingly been tied to a new 'development' paradigm termed '*buen vivir*' (lit. "good living"). The *National Secretariat of Solidarity Economy of Brazil* cites the following as the values of the solidarity economy: 1) Self-management; 2) Democratization of the economic relations; 3) Co-operation instead of forced competition; 4) Valuing diversity; 5) Human beings are more important than profits; 6) Valuing local knowledge, constant learning, and training; 7) Social justice and emancipation; and 8) Protection of the environment (<https://fbes.org.br/>).

In the United States, the solidarity economy emerged at the first U.S. Social Forum in 2007, resulting in the launch of the U.S. Solidarity Economy Network (USSEN). The 2007 Forum saw hundreds of participants and advocates of the solidarity economy coming together to craft a vision for the World Social Forum Movement. The solidarity economy approach is more of a dialogue to bring people together to find common ground from which to organize and build movements. The discussions and debates cited the following as the consistently mentioned core values and principles: 1) stewardship of the environment/sustainability; 2) cooperation; 3) shared well-being (with an emphasis on the importance of diversity); 4) equality; 5) exploring and promoting non-monetary and non-traditional forms of wealth; and 6) democracy and participation (Miller & Kawano, 2007).

There are hundreds of SSE projects and initiatives being reported continually across the globe. In the Asian region, the Asian Solidarity Economy Council (ASEC) is the continental network in Asia of RIPESS (<http://www.ripest.org/reseaux-continentaux/asie/>). It is the leading resource center on social solidarity economy in Asia and espouses the following Fivefold Principles of SSE: 1) Socially Responsible Governance, 2) Edifying Ethical Values, 3) Socio-Economic Benefits of the Community, 4) Ecological Conservation, and 5) Economic Sustainability. Its case studies have provided evidence that SSE practices work not only in rural areas within

small scale economies, but also that SSE is a major component of an alternative to the neoliberal market economy.

The SSE principles stated above are completely consistent with those that have been articulated around the world as characterizing social and ethical business. Shared values, of course, do not automatically translate into collective organizing. These values may be articulated differently by different groups. They may be only partly and imperfectly realized in actual practice; there may be varying commitments to these values by diverse participants in a given organization; and, in some cases, a particular economic structure might generate effects that are in line with the values while not consciously articulating them as an organization. Building a solidarity economy, then, is not a matter of simply identifying shared values; it is a process of organizing around those shared values to build a shared story of economic possibility. The common values form the fertile ground in which new relationships between diverse groups and actors can be built (Miller & Kawano, 2007).

In a sense, the SSE is a concrete way of carrying out the suggestion by Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI:

In order to defeat underdevelopment, action is required not only on improving exchange-based transactions and implanting public welfare structures, but above all on gradually *increasing openness to forms of economic activity marked by quotas of gratuitousness and communion*. The exclusively binary model of market-plus-State is corrosive of society, while economic forms based on solidarity, which find their natural home in civil society without being restricted to it, build up society. (Benedict, 2009)

BUSINESS LEADERSHIP CONSTRUCTS AND THEIR RELATION TO CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP

Christian faith and reason intertwine to bring about principles, criteria, and guidelines for action and a set of virtues with relevance for economic activity. However, the application of Christian spirituality to modern business activity is fairly recent (Melé & Fontrodona, 2017). The conceptualization of Christian leadership that is developed in this article takes into account the literature on spiritual leadership, faith at work, authentic leadership, servant leadership, Biblical leadership, and related constructs.

The *Servant Leadership* construct, for instance, has gained currency among Christians of various persuasions. Publications have been written on biblical principles of servant leadership, and innumerable workshops have been conducted on how to practice servant leadership in various ecclesial and secular settings. This is because the biblical narrative depicts many examples of those who embody the characteristics and principles of servant leadership (e.g., listening, acceptance, empathy, foresight, awareness, persuasion, conceptualizing, healing, and serving) (Shirin, 2014). There is also some overlap between servant leadership and *Responsible Leadership*: the responsible leader is a leader who acts as a citizen, meeting moral obligations to society and the environment, including future generations. This construct emphasizes the sustainability of decisions and citizenship behaviors that seek to create long-term value for society (Voegtlin, Frisch, Walther, & Schwab, 2020).

Delbecq (1999) identifies the following themes present in contemporary Christian business leadership: 1) the Christian perspective on “calling” as an orientation to work that adds a sense of vitality and purpose to their leadership journey; 2) the integration of the leaders’ spirituality with their work, or being “contemplatives in action;” and 3) courage to stay the course and survive with dignity the special challenges of executive leadership. The guiding force of Christian leaders is knowing and becoming like Jesus; this implies discerning wisely and transforming our hearts. This transformation emphasizes humility, integrity, kindness, forgiveness, peace, and love as the core of Christian living. It definitely means being a person of character who embodies the virtue of humility, admits mistakes and leads with wisdom and honesty by avoiding the pitfalls of ego and the influence of power (Jones et al., 2018).

Leaders who exhibit *Biblical Leadership* in the secular workplace must have a clear understanding of their purpose and mission at work. This leadership works on the basis of a dependence on God through a strong relationship with Him; the purpose of serving God at work is not to gain status but to focus on completing the necessary tasks and services for the glory of God. There are six main qualities at work: (a) integrity, (b) trust, (c) diligence, (d) love/shepherding, (e) ethics and morality, and (f) humility. Their actions and influence should be used to help the organization and the followers (Babyak, 2017). The *Ethical Leadership at Work Scale*, on the other hand, found the following seven ethical leader behaviors: fairness, integrity, ethical guidance, people orientation, power sharing, role clarification, and concern for sustainability (Kalshoven, Den Hartog, & De Hoogh, 2011).

Recent research suggests an additional leadership trait necessary for contemporary business: individual sustainability. Individual sustainability includes possessing a well-developed and demonstrated value system that acknowledges the interconnectedness of all global biological systems and our appropriate place in the natural world. It likewise includes harmony, awareness, and intentionality in thought and behavior, leading to increasingly responsible actions and continued growth in one's physical, emotional, social, philosophical, and cognitive life (Barrella, Spratto, Pappas, & Nagel, 2018). This jibes with another study that integrated CST into the resource-based approach to ecology, thereby proposing a leader mindset that is characterized by moral sensitivity, moral cognition, and motivation for ecology and sustainability (Rousseau, 2017).

Leadership in Economy of Communion enterprises seeks to apply the logic of gratuitousness and gift. The leader exhibits altruistic behavior in view of the attainment of organizational innovation: innovation derives from the desire to help others, such as employees and customers. In addition, a culture of dialogue among employees, managers, and the whole organization enhances risk-taking and, therefore, innovation (Esteso-Blasco, Gil-Marqués, & Sapena, 2021). This is a concrete way of carrying out the suggestion in VBL that

business is inherently other-centered: a business coordinates people's gifts, talents, energies and skills to serve the needs of others. This in turn supports the development of the people who do the work. The tasks they perform in common generate the goods and services needed by a healthy community. (Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, 2012: 43)

TOWARDS A CONCEPTUALIZATION OF "CHRISTIAN BUSINESS LEADERSHIP"

The Christian leader has the greater ability and obligation to ensure the attainment of human flourishing within the organization; in addition, he has a more acute awareness of the need for personal conversion and the grace of God in the achievement of those goals. Although the Christian business leader does not live values different from those expected of non-believers, he experiences a greater demand and motivation as well as a broader responsibility to aspire to human fulfillment. Christian business leaders exercise spirituality and *presence* (that is, truly loving the others) in the business organization. They feel that their faith makes a

difference: they experience their profession as a vocation; they know that the world is the arena for their personal sanctification. Their faith at least functions as an inspiring motivation for ethical and moral compliance; they believe that their deeds decide their eternal life (Schlag & Melé, 2019; Argandoña, 2012).

Inspired by the document *The Vocation of the Business Leaders*, Christian business leaders have been enjoined to bridge the gap between vague theory and practice (Melé & Fontrodona, 2017; Naughton, 2012). With the mention of *solidarity economy* enterprises in the document, business leaders can learn to include participation, democracy, cooperation, diversity, and sustainability as they run and manage their business organizations. Thus, the listing of qualities of the Christian business leader, drawing from VBL—enhanced by characteristics of leaders in the solidarity economy—could look like this (see Table 1).

1. Fraternity and solidarity	7. Participation, democracy, cooperation
2. Human dignity	8. Mutuality and co-responsibility
3. Common good	9. Diversity
4. Integral human development	10. Sustainability
5. Principle of subsidiarity	11. Framework for judging: Good goods, Good work, Good wealth
6. Business as <i>communio personarum</i>	

Table 1: The Christian Business Leader

The paragraphs that follow will focus on only those leader qualities present in solidarity economy enterprises, as the purpose of this paper is to integrate these with and add them to those based on CST, such as respect for human dignity, solidarity, fraternity, integral human development, etc. Thus, this section proposes a more complete or enhanced conceptualization of the idea of a “Christian business leader” based on what solidarity economy leadership can add to the construct.

Participation, Democracy, and Cooperation

Solidarity economy enterprises have encouraged workplace democracy, whereby more job security and participation rights are given to workers. Labor should no longer be a commodity to be bought and sold. When you join an enterprise, you join a community with full voting rights. Experiments with democratic workplaces

date back to the early nineteenth century. Thousands of worker cooperatives exist today, some of them quite large.

The Mondragon Cooperative Corporation in the Basque region of Spain is by far the dominant economic enterprise in that region and is now the third largest employer in all of Spain (Schweickart & Albert, 2007). Mondragon's mobilizing leader, Arizmendiarieta, highly encouraged the incorporation of workers as co-participants in the management of the companies. The new Christian order that he envisioned in Mondragon required an educational program with a dual objective: moral transformation towards a more communitarian Christian practice of worker solidarity and the technical training of workers, which would give them equal footing with their bosses and break the ruling-class structure (Molina & Miguez, 2008). Presently, Mondragon co-operatives are united by a humanist concept of business, a philosophy of participation and solidarity, and a shared business culture. The workers of Mondragon own their company and make their own decisions. Today, Mondragon is a model for those who want to bring democracy and solidarity into economic life.

Sustainability

Another characteristic that stands out in the SSE, as shown in Table 1, is *sustainability*. The SSE framework seems to facilitate strengthening environmental sustainability concerns. Studies linking SSE and sustainable development identified a series of elements of the SSE that contributed to sustainable development: (i) their social mission is aligned with societal challenges at the core of the vision of sustainable development; (ii) their organizational set-up and their democratic and participative governance processes; and (iii) they help in emphasizing the social dimension of environmental problems, since many of the drivers of these problems are social or political. Overall, SSE actors help to raise social conscientization and awareness about sustainable development issues (Villalba-Eguiluz, Egia-Olaizola, & Perez de Mendiguren, 2020).

But authentic and complete sustainability should not be seen as merely surviving, but thriving—as flourishing in ways that elevate innovation, personal excellence and workplace well-being. It is an invitation to individual flourishing inside the firm, to accessing the spiritual dimensions or higher reaches of humanity's sense of meaning, purpose, and significance. When sustainability is viewed in this

manner, one also takes into account the flourishing of people, the quality of their relationships, their health and wellbeing, their motivation and performance, and their capacity for growth, resilience, and positive change (Cooperrider & Fry, 2012).

Conceptualizing sustainability in this way emphasizes cultural dimensions and personal virtues; struggling for sustainability implies to be personally committed to the natural foundations of human life as well as to the social foundations of human interaction and free development of personality. Thus, the ideal of *homo sustinens* (as opposed to *homo oeconomicus*) is presented: a human being who, possessing virtues of will, of insight, and of receptivity, can deliver the basis for cultures which are sustainable. In other words, whatever enables humans to develop a good conduct of life—the virtues, and in particular self-control, courage, a sense of justice, and reasonable judgement—results in an enterprise that can be sustained in the long run (Manstetten, 2018; Racelis, 2020).

In this view, a business leader aspiring to sustainability would focus on four areas: ecological worldview, systems perspective, emotional intelligence, and spiritual intelligence. This approach emphasizes on individual values, beliefs, assumptions, anchors of identity, sense of purpose and mission, and thinking processes. Such internal perspective addresses the foundation underlying human actions and decisions. Individuals learn to notice the lens through which they see the world and are able to revise it, explore the up- and downsides of it, and identify alternatives. The *spiritual intelligence* requirement involves *defining one's purpose* as well as *mindfulness*, which enhances awareness and compassion and predisposes one to social and environmental actions (Rimanoczy & Klingenberg, 2021).

The term *personal sustainability* has been coined, which emphasizes on the inner features such as consciousness, spiritual, cultural and worldview-related aspects or a sense of well-being. The inner features further include perceptions, bodily experiences, as well as thoughts and values, needs and wishes, and emotional and habitual patterns. One way in which to practice *personal sustainability* is to regularly do reflective work—what is called “imaginal thought practice”—whereby a person explores the inner images that arise from an experiential walk on the planet, hoping that the person can experience how he or she thinks and sees, and could change the lenses with which they see, allowing for possibilities for inner and outer connective

action to emerge, and thus, enhancing their ability to take action (Akkuzu, 2016; Sacks, 2018).

The *spiritual intelligence* component of sustainability involves practicing important moral *virtues* like honesty, fairness, beneficence, courage, and prudence: these have been held as urgent and critical in leading business organizations. Christian business leaders, being influenced by deep spiritual values and an ethic of care, feel it their obligation to exercise greater care over human resources and a keener social responsibility. The spirituality in business leaders has the powerful potential for bringing together a workforce or organization and, hence, bringing about a greater solidarity and unity for the work community. Such leadership spirituality contributes significantly to advancing the sustainability project through facilitating engagement with deep questions about values and ethics, providing moral leadership and critical voices, influencing behavior, and introducing hope to an often demoralizing effort (Racelis, 2017, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS AND AREAS FOR FUTURE STUDY

The document “The Vocation of the Business Leader: A Reflection” (VBL) and related constructs on faith-based business leadership have presented the leader as emphasizing work as a “calling” or vocation, as integrating spirituality with one’s work, as having the fortitude to stay the course, discerning wisely and acting with humility, integrity, kindness, forgiveness, and love. With VBL’s suggestion to look at new movements and programs such as economy of solidarity initiatives, this paper suggests investigating the leadership requirements of solidarity economy enterprises and integrating them with those based on CST.

This paper has found that the Christian business leader can add participation and cooperation, as well as a sharp focus on sustainability, to his or her leadership arsenal. The business leader should strive, above all, for *personal sustainability* that requires, among others, constant reflective work and the exercise of such *personal virtues* as honesty, fairness, beneficence, courage, prudence, selflessness, compassion, stewardship, and accountability, which have been shown to correlate with positive sustainable enterprise performance. In addition, the leader needs a clear definition of personal purpose as well as mindfulness, which enhances awareness and compassion

and predisposes one to social and environmental actions (Rimanoczy & Klingenberg, 2021).

The added responsibilities of a Christian business leader (see Table 1) can be included in an eventual evaluative tool for assessing a given enterprise's ability or potential for fostering the Gospel-aligned performance of a Christian business leader. Similar to the *Biblical Leadership Scale* (Babyak, 2017) or the *Ethical Leadership at Work Scale* (Kalshoven et al., 2011) described in an earlier section of this paper, a "Christian Business Leadership Scale" can be developed, whereby the business leader is shown to be a person who lives out certain values and attitudes that perfect him, contributes to the good of others and satisfies their needs, and contributes to the well-being of society.

It is likewise suggested that business organizations conduct (or continue to conduct) ethics training programs to educate organizational members. Very promising results concerning the effectiveness of ethics training programs have been reported by scholars. For instance, training through the use of role models of individuals from the organization or from history who exemplify ethical and virtuous behavior—has proven quite helpful (Weber, 2008). Studies similar to that on leadership in *Economy of Communion* companies (Esteso-Blasco et al., 2021) or that on Catholic spirituality for business (Schlag & Melé, 2019) would be particularly instructive, whereby actual cases of successful Christian business leaders who are virtuous and altruistic are described.

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