

World Council of Churches

## **“Faith-Based Entrepreneurs: Stronger Together”**

International Networking Conference

January 22-23, 2018

Organized by: **Christoph Stükelberger**, executive director of the **Geneva AGAPE Foundation**

### **“Faith in Business - Globally”**

**By: Rolando Medeiros**

I would like to thank first the Geneva AGAPE Foundation and to its Executive Director, Prof. Christoph Stükelberger for organizing this very interesting International Networking Conference and for the opportunity they are giving me to try to answer, from a global perspective, the key question of this insightful event: **How can I live my faith and values in daily decisions in my company and professional life?**

Answering this deep question is at the core of UNIAPAC’s mission; of this worldwide organization of Christian Business Leaders, UNIAPAC, which has associated entities in 42 countries in Africa, America, Asia and Europe. An institution which directly gathers more than 35.000 business leaders and, indirectly, over 120.000 more through their corporations that are directly associated to our national member associations. UNIAPAC’s Vision of the Future is to be recognized worldwide for its distinct promotion of business as a noble vocation. And, at the core of this visionary purpose resides the answer to the key question of this conference: how can I live in my business endeavors my faith and values?

The Catholic Social Teachings (“CST”) invites Christian business leaders to regard business as a vocation and, in so doing, to recognize that it derives from a transcendent call and that it is incapable, on its own, of supplying its ultimate meaning. It also encourages us to elevate this vocation to a noble status by orienting it to serve the common good.

When businesses and market economies function properly and focus on serving the common good, they contribute greatly to the material, and even the spiritual, well-being of society. The failings of businesses and markets, on the other hand, produce problems alongside their benefits: such as inequity, economic dislocation, information overload, financial instability and many other pressures leading away from serving the common good.

The document *“The Vocation of the Business Leader – A Reflection”* issued in 2012 by the former Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace of the Vatican, now merged into the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development, is a document in whose preparation UNIAPAC played an active role. It identifies many obstacles to serving the common good: corruption, absence of rule

of law, tendencies towards greed, poor stewardship of resources... but, most significantly, that a business leader leads a divide life, i.e. the split between faith and daily business practice. This split can lead to imbalances and misplaced devotion to worldly success. The alternative path of faith-based “servant leadership” provides business leaders with a larger perspective and helps to balance the demands of the business world with those of ethical social principles, illumined, for Christians by the Gospel.

The apostolic exhortation of Pope Francis “*Evangelii Gaudium*” contributes with additional insight about the meaning of faith in business. It says “*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*”

The first element in this business as a noble vocation definition is the need for the business leader to be challenged by a greater meaning in life. This is an invitation for us, as business leaders, to assume our leadership roles as a calling and to have the courage to use personal transformation to positively impact our lives and our organizations. It is an invitation to move ourselves and others to the highest level of excellence by accessing and applying the power that lies within us in ways that will change our world for the better.

As clearly stated at the very beginning of Benedict XVI’s encyclical letter *Caritas in Veritate*, “*Love — caritas — is an extraordinary force which leads people to opt for courageous and generous engagement in the field of justice and peace. It is a force that has its origin in God, Eternal Love and Absolute Truth. Each person finds his good by adherence to God's plan for him, in order to realize it fully: in this plan, he finds his truth, and through adherence to this truth he becomes free*”. An each of us needs to see our business role as part of the plan that God has for each of us and, in its execution, our path to deep and truly freedom.

Thus, the call for seeing ourselves challenged by a deeper meaning in life is an invitation to look within to make a fundamental change which has to do with our purpose in life, with making fundamental choices about who we are, about our own life and what we stand for. A fundamental choice to live in accordance with our highest spiritual truths, to be true to ourselves and to align our outlook and behavior with our principles and values in all that we do, including our responsibilities as business leaders. It is an invitation for us to overcome that key obstacle to serve the common good in our business endeavors: a divide life, as already explained, and to undertake our duties and responsibilities as a vocation. And the definition of vocation is that it is a conviction that one is called by God to do a particular kind of work, that one is fitted for it and has a duty to do it.

And, in my opinion, to do so we first need to acknowledge that our business acumen is a God’s endowment. Then, to strive to return this gift to society by being a servant leader and by building spiritual capital in the organization we lead. And, in turn, this is a quest to instill –and lead by example– an organizational culture where all stakeholders are seen as neighbors to be loved as

oneself. It is to engrain values founded in the unconditional respect for the dignity of every person in all the interactions taking place in business contexts.

The result is a corporate culture where 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.

Thus, the great challenge before a Christian business leader is 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; that the preservation of human dignity and the common good have to be amongst the chief aims of business; or, in other words, that the protection of the *Imago Dei* of every individual needs to be at the core of any business decision.

And let me finish with a key question. 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, recognizing the extraordinary power of transformation that our spirituality can give us when it is lived out in all aspects of our lives.

To conclude, let me quote our Chilean Jesuit saint St. Alberto Hurtado. He tells us that 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 any critical business decisions we ask ourselves what Jesus would have done...and, at the same time, by transforming business into a noble vocation, we would feel the joy that comes from responsible freedom.

Thanks.