

Business as a Noble Vocation

Richard Higginson was inspired by a Christian Business Conference in Lisbon

‘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’. These are the words of Pope Francis in his 2013 apostolic exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*. They served as the inspiration for the XXVI World Congress of the international organisation Uniapac, which took place in Lisbon from 22 to 24 November. I was privileged as a speaker to attend this event.

The congress attracted 519 participants from 36 countries, with 32 speakers from Argentina, Belgium, Chile, France, India, Indonesia, Italy, Lebanon, Mexico, Morocco, Paraguay, the Philippines, Portugal, Senegal, Slovakia, Spain, Switzerland, Thailand, the UK and the USA. It was

ecumenical, but overwhelmingly Roman Catholic in the make-up of people, style of worship and source of inspiration. It included four main sessions, each with a keynote speaker and panel of five supporting speakers, on Business as a Personal Calling, Promoting Inclusiveness in Business, Inspiring Principled Business Performance (my session), and Fostering Businesses that Positively Impact the Common Good.

The event was a real eye-opener for me. Hitherto I have always admired the body of papal encyclicals known as Catholic Social Teaching, but found it frustratingly abstract: what do grand and idealistic concepts like ‘the common good’ mean in practice? In Lisbon I found out. Here was a group of senior Christian businesspeople who were actively involved in making these fine concepts a reality. They were motivated not principally by personal or corporate gain but the

transformation they could effect in their societies, many of which are seriously poor. The final session on the Saturday morning saw ‘Business as a Noble Vocation’ awards given to several outstanding practitioners among the delegates. Three of them – from the Philippines, Senegal and Mexico respectively – were all involved in wide-ranging construction projects that served the common good, providing affordable housing and education in slum areas. From our privileged position in the West, we should never underestimate the difference that a regular and efficient supply of electricity, sanitation and reading materials can make to people’s lives.

These businessmen and women were genuinely motivated by their faith. It was wonderful to spend time hearing their stories and seeing how business can be a positive force for good in the world. **FIBQ**



***Richard Higginson** was Director of Faith in Business at Ridley Hall from 1989 until his retirement earlier in 2018. He is now Chair of Faith in Business. He is a founder-editor of FIBQ and the author of several books, including Faith, Hope & the Global Economy and (with Kina Robertshaw) A Voice to be Heard. He is an international speaker on business ethics and the theology of work.*