RECONCILIATION IN AND THROUGH THE ENTERPRISE: WHAT HOPE CAN WE SHARE TO HELP BRING IT ABOUT?

This text forms part of the work carried out in 2024 by the French chapter of the Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation (CAPP France). Three sub-groups were set up to reflect on three topics that are at once different and interconnected—issues that are highly topical for our societies and all their components, including businesses: violence, truth and reconciliation.

The return of war to Europe since 2022, its exacerbation in the Middle East since 2023, the retreat of democracy and freedom of speech around the world—going hand in hand with a growing fracturing of societies, an overabundance of increasingly dubious and polarized information, rising anxieties about the planet's future, the consequences of migratory flows, the impact on humanity of accelerating technological change—all raise fears of a forceful resurgence of violence in our world. Although generally shielded from violence and from society's fractures, the business world that concerns us here in particular would not emerge unscathed. A company is not an island sheltered from the rest of society. For some time now, it has even been asked to play a role of unification and inclusion in society—sometimes going very, perhaps too, far. Can careful attention to truth and to objectifying the debates suffice to calm our relationships? And if not, on what could we build reconciliation, without which living and working together would eventually become impossible?

It is this latter question that we have chosen to explore in this document, focusing on the business world considering our different experiences.

Our first salutary reflex, we believe, should be to take a step back and refuse to give in to fear. Yes, the enterprise, like society, is traversed by multiple tensions, conflicts and contradictions: between long-term considerations and short-term imperatives; between the interests of shareholders and those of employees; between market expectations and production capabilities; between the desire for predictability and environmental instability; between ambitions, competing wills to power or vanities; between employees' expectations—their legitimate aspirations to personal fulfilment, to quality of life at work, to recognition, including financial recognition—and the constraints of collective organization; not to mention the personal sufferings and inner conflicts experienced by this or that individual that rebound on the working community, all the more forcefully when the person concerned holds high responsibility. Yes, all these conflicts exist and are sometimes brutal. But they have always existed, in business as elsewhere—and perhaps less in business than elsewhere, because the enterprise is structured to address them through the employment relationship, which brings people, means of production and capital together around a common

purpose: to provide usefulness to customers. Above all, these conflicts and tensions are, in part, legitimate and useful. Nothing would be more vain and, no doubt, more dangerous than to claim to eliminate contradictions, conflicts and tensions. The example of totalitarianisms—both the "great" ones that have martyred or are martyring entire societies, and the "small" ones of tyrannical bosses who brook no contradiction—is there to remind us that debate, opposition and dissent—even at the price of some tension—are far better than the muteness of false peaces that allow no freedom of speech.

These conflicts and tensions become truly problematic only when they threaten the enterprise's vocation or that of one of its stakeholders and thus undermine the very reason for being together that constitutes the firm's common good.

It will therefore be necessary first (Part I) to identify those conflicts that are truly destructive, and to propose some criteria for distinguishing them from inevitable tensions and debates—indeed, from those that are legitimate and useful to the life of the enterprise.

It will then be necessary (Part II) to identify the reconciliation processes to be put in place within the company to prevent those conflicts recognized as deadly, and to ask what role hope can play therein. In this context, we understand reconciliation not as a utopian steady state, but as a process—never complete—that makes it possible to overcome conflicts before they destroy the common good of the enterprise. We will let ourselves be guided by our Christian faith and by the teachings of the Church's social doctrine. But we would like to nourish the reflection of all those—Christians or not—who, in their daily activity, may be confronted with situations of destructive conflict: "wars of chiefs", cultural antagonisms between different métiers, between companies after a merger, between headquarters functions and client-facing teams, between management and employee representatives, between beneficiaries and victims of some transformation, and so on. Hope is of course a theological virtue associated with faith in salvation and belief in eternal life. But we also think it is, quite simply, a human virtue, with much to contribute to a right understanding of reconciliation—to living and working better together—in ways of interest to any person of good will, whatever their beliefs.

In this regard, it seems essential to us that every enterprise clarify its purpose—its *raison d'être*—in a manner that enables the most fruitful possible alignment with the vocation or *raison d'être* of its stakeholders (employees, clients, suppliers, shareholders, etc.), through relationships that allow each of these stakeholders to bring forth the best of themselves. We therefore propose to define hope within the enterprise as the vitality of the relationships among stakeholders who are fulfilling their particular vocation in the service of the *raison d'être* that unites them. In this sense, hope is quite different from expectation, which is no more than waiting for the world to be as I wish it to

be. As the philosopher Martin Steffens says, "expectation belongs to the order of the future; hope to the order of the present, of action, of gratitude." Hope asks us whether we see light in the darkness—or light along the way—or signs. This approach is also fruitful in the enterprise: What is going well? What is working? What is going well in the projects launched? What attitudes are life-giving?

Lived in hope, the *raison d'être* is the enterprise's authentic common good—the thing that enables it to weather storms and conflicts, with the conviction that what unites its stakeholders will always be stronger than what divides them.

We will also consider the place of forgiveness in business and the specific nature of forgiveness as compared with reconciliation. Wherever possible, we will seek to illustrate our ideas with testimonies from lived experience.

Finally (Part III), we will examine how the enterprise can help reconcile society with itself and foster hope within it, in the sense in which we have defined it. For a company is not merely a place of production and a source of material and technological progress. It is also a place where each person can learn to discover and unfold their personal vocation, in contact with others.

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I. CONFLICTS AND THE STAKES OF RECONCILIATION IN THE ENTERPRISE

Business, society—life itself—are fields of regular tension. Only cemeteries escape them. Should we be alarmed? Christ greets his disciples with these words: "Peace be with you" (Jn 20:19). But he also says to them: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword." (Mt 10:34). There are, no doubt, legitimate conflicts and illusory reconciliations. But there are also conflicts that carry within themselves germinating forces destructive of collective or individual life. These are the conflicts that must be identified and prevented.

1.1. Just Conflicts

What could be more normal for a company than to be a place of debate—sometimes of tension and even of conflict?

When a major contract is lost, when performance falls short of expectations, when a significant, unexpected loss appears, when customers regularly complain about the same issues, is it not right to question the causes? Is it not just to do everything possible to remove those causes and to call for responsibility? No doubt it is important to do so rightly and to avoid hidden agendas that might pollute debates and turn tensions into conflicts. Experience shows, however, that despite many precautions, tensions can still fester. And yet, it is important not to flee the major questions that arise for the company's future, even when they are uncomfortable.

When strategic choices vital to the future present themselves—e.g., abandoning one business to invest in another—is it not healthy, in view of the human and financial stakes, that lively debates take place?

More generally, when a company faces a prospect of significant transformation—restructuring, acquisition, merger—should the decisions to be taken not be sifted through collegial discussions, as authentic as possible, through counter-powers and counter-expertise? Is the role of shareholder governance and that of employee representation not essential in such situations? Differences of view and contestation will be expressed and will sometimes degenerate into personal conflicts, even into at least verbal violence—but is that not a risk to accept, while seeking to reduce it?

In an ideal society there would be no competition for power. Each would wait to be called and would trust the election system to entrust the highest responsibilities to those best able to assume them. But reality is otherwise and leads us to organize as loyally as possible the confrontation of ambitions.

Finally—and without lengthening the list too much—the financial recognition of employees is very often a source of tension, even conflict, for which there is no general formula applicable everywhere and always. Who can say what a just distribution of value between capital and labor is? Who can determine the just maximum gap between the highest and the lowest pay in the company? Who has experienced a variable-compensation system universally recognized as fair? The "decent wage" mentioned by Michelin is a laudable principle. But how should it be defined precisely? On all these questions—and no doubt in every company—negotiation, debate, tension, and sometimes conflict, stand in for the spirit of justice and responsibility, which remains eminently necessary.

1.2. Illusory Reconciliations

There are situations in which it is surely illusory—indeed counterproductive—to seek reconciliation. When an executive or an employee has endangered a company's reputation or sustainability, protecting the company makes sanction indispensable. No one would understand, in such a situation, the company taking time to pursue reconciliation with the wrongdoer. That does not preclude the exchange of forgiveness—such forgiveness may even be essential—but it is granted personally and, most often, in the secrecy of individual relationships.

Likewise, reconciliation is not always a criterion of a good decision. This or that executive or employee may not be in the right position for the responsibilities they hold, even if they deny it. The corporate interest then requires drawing the consequences, even if the decision to be made is a source of conflict. Or again, the right strategy for the company is not always the one that preserves the immediate positions of all its stakeholders. The responsibility of the leader—even at the cost of exposure—may then be to decide in a way that displeases some, rather than to seek a consensus that would not serve the company's long-term interest.

There are even circumstances in which it is important to highlight—indeed to dramatize—the persistence of divergent viewpoints. This may be the case in labor relations or in relations between auditor and audited.

Some reconciliations may be mere pretences—the protagonists lowering their weapons for a moment, given a certain balance of power, only to take them up again later. That said, authentic reconciliations can no doubt occur without true acts of forgiveness being exchanged. The question of the place of forgiveness in business thus arises on its own.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation: What is the difference?

Forgiveness is always individual—granted to a particular person—whereas reconciliation can be a collective process. De Gaulle and Adenauer decreed Franco-German reconciliation; following a merger, the new CEO may decree that the grudges accumulated by managers of the two formerly competing entities will henceforth be consigned to the closet.

Reconciliation always presupposes reciprocity of will; forgiveness can be unilateral.

Forgiveness is independent of what the other does: even when the offender offers no apology or repentance, one can forgive.

Forgiveness does not depend on the other fulfilling conditions.

Forgiveness is given at a particular moment, definitively and without reserve. Reconciliation can be a gradual process—subject to ups and downs, fragility and setbacks.

Forgiveness springs from the interiority of the person who receives the grace to forgive. Reconciliation is more the fruit of a process that relies on outward signs, even an institutional framework. Hence a company can reconcile without being able, as such, to forgive. The very nature of forgiveness lies beyond the company—even if the company can be a space where forgiveness is given and received. But forgiveness exists there only on the initiative of personal freedom at work in the firm as elsewhere in society—and often in the secret of conscience.

1.3. Destructive Conflicts and Necessary Reconciliations

Some conflicts can be destructive for the company and for those who work in it. This is particularly true in an economic context marked, as Jean-Hervé Lorenzi notes, by the rise of various forms of manifest violence—strong tensions and excessive political reactions that are emerging in our time of economic uncertainty. Such violence may stem from boundless financialization of the economy, from accelerated technological change, from migratory movements, from transfers of activity, from widening inequality.

We must add to this the clashes over the role the company should play in response to claims that call for a new vision of the human person and of society. If the company must contribute to inclusion by welcoming—without discrimination on the basis of race, sex, religion or personal orientation—any person with the required skills and motivation, is it legitimate for it to promote the specific rights of this or that minority that considers itself poorly regarded in society? Can it do so without risking the triggering, within its walls, of endless rivalries unrelated to its purpose? Can it do so without abusing its authority at the expense of its employees' freedom of conscience?

Truly destructive conflicts are those that undermine the company's raison d'être and its employees' capacity to contribute to it.

A conflict will thus be harmful if it destroys an employee—or more generally a stakeholder (for example, a supplier)—or a business line, or a department of the company. Consider situations in which an employee is structurally unable to meet the objectives assigned to them. Cases of employee burnout are far from rare. The company cannot be indifferent to them—unless it turns its raison d'être into an idol conceived independently of its employees' vocation.

Destructive conflicts are, generally speaking, those that reduce the company's purpose to a value that is useful in itself when taken as a means, but that becomes an idol when made the true objective to pursue.

And in business as in society, idols proliferate.

1.4. Idols by the Legion

Rebuilding a shared future after a crisis, restoring a saving momentum to the company, requires a return of stakeholders' confidence in its management—and more generally in the values it upholds. Experience shows that the values displayed by a company reflect a kind of generosity toward different stakeholders (employees, clients and even shareholders or the public at large), and that they help overcome trials and conflicts provided they are truly lived—especially at the top. A crisis calls these values into question in light of the values actually lived in the company. Are these still the ones displayed on the corporate website, or have they changed? Have they not been skewed over time and managerial vicissitudes—replaced to some extent by simulacra of values, idols to which everyone owes deference—especially when they are inspired by the spirit of the age or by managerial fashions? Since "everyone else is doing it," we can no longer do otherwise—and a compulsory mimicry, often reinforced or imposed by standards (IFRS, GDPR, CSRD or others), becomes established—without our paying attention and especially without reflecting on their rationale or on their coherence with the values the company claims to uphold.

The financialization of the economy carries the risk of making short-term financial profitability the ultimate steering indicator of the company. Remember, for example, the categorical imperative that prevailed in the banking sector before the 2007–2008 financial crisis, of a ROE of at least 15%—a norm as imperative as it was poorly founded.

The laudable will to measure progress—preferably in the short term—in order to provide everyone, especially shareholders, with perfect information and to compare performance with other companies has enshrined the reign of KPIs. The implacable measurement of the productivity of factors of production—men and women included—has obscured the fact that the company is above all a relationship among men and women working inside and/or outside the firm, a relationship that creates their contribution to the common good of a society that encompasses and transcends them. The question then arises of aligning performance indicators with the company's values—or bringing them back into alignment.

Under the guise of focusing on the supposedly essential métiers of the company, a trend has developed in recent decades of shedding activities deemed not (or no longer) core. Some industrial companies have even gone so far as to divest themselves of their factories—entrusting their true know-how to third parties, generally financiers with no knowledge of industry—at the risk of losing the very sense of their enterprise, as well as control over their products. This trend toward specialization and outsourcing—the true managerial idol of the thirty pre-Covid years—has been a factor in relocating production or information systems to low-cost countries. We now see that it has made the country as a whole unduly dependent on risky supply sources in essential areas (medicines, electronic components, energy, etc.) and has resulted in entrusting information systems—without which our companies cannot function—to countries with totalitarian regimes that may be tempted to take control.

All this—for what, and with what results? A significant part of our industry, and of the workers it employed in many inland regions, has been sacrificed on the altar of another idol that French citizens continue to revere: consumption carried to excess and at low prices—excess precisely because prices are low. The frantic quest to reduce production costs and sales prices has reshaped the country's profile into a kind of logistics hub supplying a tertiarized population with largely imported consumer goods. The corollary is a degraded economic situation of accumulating deficits (trade deficit, public-budget and social-systems deficits) that the trend increase fails to curb—neither high unemployment nor the downward convergence of existing jobs—while creating external indebtedness that is increasingly hard to bear.

Idols are neither "right-wing" nor "left-wing"; more precisely, they are found as much on the "right" as on the "left." Employee representatives and trade-union organizations can have their own. When social statutes and acquired positions are turned into totems, one ends up forgetting the logic of the evolution of métiers. A growing disconnect then opens between the reality of business life and the content of the claims being made. The real representativeness of trade unionism collapses—except in a few companies or sectors protected from competition.

Power is also an inexhaustible source of idols in the enterprise as in society. This is the case when leaders make the promotion of their prerogatives or of their fiefdoms within the company the true object of their action. The recent period has seen the emergence, with wokeness, of new forms of hold—no longer really exercised by leaders themselves—but that seek to impose themselves upon them and upon the organizations they are supposed to lead.

These are the work of generally minority but activist groups that promote, within the company, various ideologies animated less by a spirit of justice coherent with the company's vocation (non-discrimination by age, sex, religious convictions, sexual orientation; integration of young people, of persons with disabilities, etc.) than by a vision of society stemming from debates disconnected from the company's vocation (recognition of specific rights for this or that group claiming minority status needing defense). The marker of belonging (ethnic origin, religious practice, gender claim, sexual orientation, etc.) can itself become an idol claiming to summarize

the person on its own and to serve as an explanatory schema for everything. Far from fostering reconciliation, such ideological movements can spread rivalries that play out on criteria foreign to the company's raison d'être—and whose concern is less justice than the conquest of power.

All these idols are at the origin of destructive conflicts, for they seek to thrive with no regard for the raison d'être that brings the company's stakeholders together. They are destructive, too, because they enslave those who revere them. Nothing seems more important to them than their Internal Rate of Return, their notoriety, their job title, their social gains, their identity marker… These idols crush and absorb every other reality. They filter every vision and dictate every action.

Overthrowing these idols enables useful work toward reconciliation in the enterprise. One way to do so is to create the conditions for the company's raison d'être to be lived in hope, in the sense set out in the introduction. We see this as one of the chief responsibilities of business leaders.

Here we also find a specific contribution of the Christian message to life in the enterprise: freeing oneself from idols and social models in order to reclaim the freedom to choose one's life according to the talents entrusted to us for the common good.

1.5. Reconcile or Die

Once idols are unmasked, is reconciliation around true values optional in a hyper-competitive environment? Daily reality teaches that an under-performing company—according to whatever criteria—can disappear. It will die all the more quickly the fiercer the competition—especially if its competitors benefit from lower-cost factors of production. To be and remain performant, the company will have to 'make body' (act as a body), and that social body will have to display a resilience made of innovation and solidarity: ongoing innovation in products and processes to keep enough of a lead over competitors to justify price differences; solidarity among stakeholders in accepting the efforts needed to act together—to give strength and agility to the projects pursued. Making body, being in solidarity, encouraging initiative and trial and error, accepting failures that go with them, measuring actions and investments against a long-term strategy—all are dimensions grounded in a deep and sincere accord among the enterprise's actors: leaders, employees and shareholders.

In a highly competitive world, reconciling egos or wills is not enough; it is merely a second-best optimum. If, as the adage says, union makes strength, then in the enterprise too re-union is needed after missteps or misunderstandings: the reconciliation of all around its raison d'être—or around the heart of what, in fact, unites employees' work—is necessary, with all that this concept expresses of will and tenacity to hold to it, to return to it constantly—to remain at the optimum. In the enterprise, too, to make one with the other is to be reconciled with them in truth: to grant them sincere forgiveness and accept theirs in return. It is to recover the tranquility of soul and serenity indispensable for winning the competitive battle and thereby ensuring the company's and its actors' sustainability.

II. HOPE AS A MEANS OF RECONCILIATION WITHIN THE ENTERPRISE

2.1. What Unites Us Is Stronger than What Divides Us: The Enterprise's Raison d'Être

Fulfilling the corporate purpose entails pooling production means—human and capital—around and in the service of a project that constitutes its raison d'être. But this project—shared by the men and women of the company (leaders, employees, shareholders, etc.)—presupposes, for its optimal realization, a shared will to act in the same direction toward the same goal. The continuity of this corporate project, and the prosperity that will ensue for the different stakeholders, presuppose a hope shared by all—i.e., a sense of confidence in the future that makes the fulfillment of what is desired appear probable (per Le Robert).

These definitions, which reflect an ideal of harmony among the company's actors—both in their intentions and in their execution—come up against what everyone observes in real life. As in an orchestra, harmony is achieved only through strenuous work by the stakeholders under the sometimes-stern direction of a conductor whose primary role is to reconcile the talents—and even the disharmonic wills—of musicians who, taken individually, may wish to develop their own score to the detriment of their neighbors who are nonetheless co-actors.

The group's hope will therefore be—under the company's leadership—carried by the conciliation, even the reconciliation, of individual wills in the service of the company's raison d'être and of its success on the market it serves.

This process of conciliating or reconciling contradictory tensions will be all the more effective if it does not proceed from an idealized vision or a predetermined model borne by the leader, but from a dynamic based on subsidiarity—leaving the various forces in motion to find their proper place. Within a clear and shared raison d'être, the compromises that enable reconciliation are often much easier to find in contact with operational realities in the field.

2.2. Unfolding the Best of One's Vocation in the Service of the Raison d'Être: Each Person's Place in the Enterprise

The first adversary of reconciliation is the idol that sets itself up as judge of proper company functioning or proper behavior within it. Idolatry is a constant temptation—both for governance and control bodies and for each stakeholder. The idol seduces by the idealized image of reality it proposes (e.g., the most profitable firm in the market)—the company as I would like it to be; but the idol demands sacrifices and turns into mere means everything not visible in the image it composes (e.g., respect for persons; preparing for the future; mastering a given risk).

Resisting idols is never easy nor accomplished once and for all. Who can claim to be forever safe from the temptations of fame, money, power—and the legions of totems they nourish?

Great inner strength is necessary to resist. This strength does not come from nowhere. It presupposes a daily practice of sources of renewal that, in our view, are not reserved to Christians alone—nor even to believers in a revealed faith. "Who is my God?" "What governs my actions?"

"What am I prepared to dedicate my life to?" These questions are decisive in business as elsewhere. They are decisive for every person—believer or not. They may remain unanswered. They may be eluded or censored. They may be mocked. They remain nonetheless.

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." (Dt 6:4) "... and your neighbor as yourself." (Lev 19:18). This commandment, common to Jews and Christians, is first of all a call to freedom— a call to serve a God who liberates, not an idol that enslaves. Its relevance to life in business is luminous.

The practical question for everyone is this: Have I put everything in place to ensure, throughout my days, that I remain truly aware of whom (or what) I serve? What safeguards—whatever my faith—have I given myself to be free of idols and to remain coherent in deed with what I believe? At what moments have I abdicated my freedom in favor of this or that idol of money, fame or power? Am I prepared to acknowledge this betrayal and to strive not to repeat it? And if I fall again into my faults, what shall I conclude? That I am bad? That I will never succeed? What will my hope be?

Faced with the idol that breeds guilt—since I am never "good enough" for it; faced with the idol that hardens hearts and shuts each in on their bitterness and fears—hope tells me that I have a unique vocation and that it is up to me to unfold it in the service of a unifying raison d'être. Hear, O Israel—hear what you are called to; hear your vocation.

2.3. The Relationships that Make Hope Live Day to Day: Values, Organizational Principles, and Attitudes that Structure the Company

The life of a company is made up of the daily work of the men and women who compose it—in connection, very often, with the work of the men and women of subcontractors or clients (in B2B), and even of individuals (in B2C). Whether meticulously codified or passed down orally— depending on the firm's size and formalization—the respect for working methods determines each person's understanding of what is expected of them in performing their assigned tasks. Implementing these pre-established processes enables the convergence of tasks—either simultaneous or successive—performed by different people. It concretizes the co-operation of their know-how in designing/producing/manufacturing the services/products sold by the firm.

Yet human life—including in business—cannot be reduced to applying methods, however intelligent and intelligible they may be, or to the co-operation of skills. It is, indeed, a matter of "living together for a productive purpose" by persons whose existence is not reducible to company life, but bears within it their personal and family history, their character and mood of the moment, even their disabilities or deviations from customary behavioral models. However willing they may be to work for the company's common good, their ability to do so will vary depending on the quality of their training and its fit with the task at hand, their understanding of the process in which

they operate, or simply their understanding of the very object of their work or of the goal pursued by the firm.

Their very desire to work there and with others will be variable—depending on themselves, of course, but also on the behavior of those around them: colleagues, managers, bosses, clients, etc.—as well as on working conditions, pay or commute. The company's values have a leading role to play here, which explains why many businesses give them growing importance. IBM's example is eloquent in this respect (see box).

Reconciliation in Business in Context: IBM REX

Promoting a spirit of reconciliation in a company means reflecting on its governance in the broadest sense, on leadership that is both embodied and collective, and on its operating model. There is no doubt about the implicit links between Truth, Violence and Reconciliation: the company is a place of truth—facts and figures; a place of violence—abusive authority and deviant behaviors; and a place of reconciliation—the continuity of operations and the settlement of disputes.

IBM's experience—113 years in an industry of permanent and accelerated "disruption" (information technology)—is singular. Written off as aging, sometimes mocked by peers, it repeatedly rises again from crises and trials that pave its achievements and performance. Its founder, Thomas Watson, had a conviction: "In a business, you can change everything but culture." At IBM, culture has three dimensions: innovation, people and territories. Innovation—without which you have nothing to offer to solve the planet's challenges; people—without whom (clients, partners, employees) nothing is possible; and territories—where ultimate responsibility materializes.

In 2003, a major worldwide consultation redefined IBM's mission and values. Over 72 hours, nearly 400,000 employees took part in prepared, moderated debate forums, each overseen by a domain expert and by a consultant charged with consolidating views. These forums were structured around three themes: innovation, the client, integrity. After careful, rigorous and adversarial analysis by IBM researchers, sociologists and communication experts, this vast online brainstorming defined a mission and three values. They were widely communicated to all stakeholders—clients, suppliers, partners, employees, investors, policy-makers… Every word counts!

Mission: Technology at the service of progress
Values:
• Dedication to every client's success.
• Innovation that matters—for our company and for the world.
• Trust and personal responsibility in all relationships.
In 2005, IBM went further and stress-tested its operating and management model against these values. This led to a review of processes and to corrections of management policies for coherence and alignment. A simple example: Why implement a coercive prior control system for expenses—based on the assumption that it is designed to catch offenders ("all thieves!")? Such a system is in obvious contradiction with the third value of trust and responsibility. It was

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corrected: a posteriori control was introduced, fostering personal responsibility. Thirteen major processes were revisited—in particular HR policies, client relations and purchasing.

In 2015, IBM went further still: another large consultation defined the leadership behaviors that best exemplify its three values. IBM thus operationalized its values in day-to-day life. The business issue at the time was IBM's lag versus the GAFA. Nine key behaviors—three per value—were defined and promoted. They underpinned the model and organizational transformations whose effects are visible today.

1. Put the client first – Make the client your focus
2. Anticipate needs, imagine tomorrow – Listen, Identify and Project
3. Share your expertise – Advise and Contribute
4. Reinvent yourself relentlessly – Innovate and Inspire
5. Dare to be original – Unleash and Design
6. Celebrate bold minds – Encourage and Include
7. Think, prepare, perfect – Take and invest the time
8. United to act now – Mobilize for impact
9. Create authentic connections – Interact and Nurture

By way of example, consider two: "Celebrate bold minds—Treasure wild ducks"—which aptly illustrates the imperative to leave room for new ideas and non-conformists often at the origin of new businesses; and "Create authentic connections—Show personal interest"—which promotes attention to the other, protects it, and values the precious bond of relationship.

IBM's example bears witness to the link between Truth, Violence and Reconciliation. Objectifying situations to be managed by collecting indisputable facts and figures leads to establishing a shared truth that reduces the risk of violence. Recasting managerial practices (escalation processes, open-door practices, organized collegiality) has, through listening and engagement, brought viewpoints closer, addressed conflicts and made social dialogue more peaceful and constructive. Transforming the commercial approach by valuing relationship equally with solution has revitalized client ties and reinforced loyalty. In the end, "reconciliation" includes "conciliation"—a just principle of life.

Behind it all are men and women—the human dimension always—who share courage, integrity and a will to innovate in order constantly to adjust the model to the mission

These various variables—sometimes convergent, sometimes centrifugal—must be assembled by the company to achieve its aim. Since cooperation is not a given, a work of harmonization—even conciliation among differing or divergent opinions—will be unavoidable throughout the work process, and sometimes even of reconciliation among people whose positions have clashed to the point they no longer agree to work together. Considering and defining together the foundation of what truly unites them will prove far stronger than what divides.

Harmonizing ways of working—or adopting identical or compatible methods—requires that all levels of the hierarchy, whether pyramidal or flatter, understand not only the methods themselves but above all the purpose pursued, so that everyone feels an actor and in solidarity with a shared

project that transcends them and helps them grow—in skill and in career. Coherence of the entrepreneurial project will be essential—especially vis-à-vis the company's declared values and those experienced daily. Individuals' sense of usefulness in the production chain—together with perceived coherence between the entrepreneurial project and the meaning and development of their own career—will forge their attachment to the company and their respect for those around them who, like them, devote themselves to it. Professional training that improves employees' employability, attention to their personal and family life, and profit-sharing are all means of attachment—even reconciliation—of employees with their firm. It is thus important to show how the "S" of ESG/CSR is as important as the "E".

Formulating the company's raison d'être can be an opportunity to establish a link between the firm's mission and employees' development—as was the case at Crédit Immobilier de France.

Raison d'être as a means of reconciling the company's mission and employees' aspirations: the example of Crédit Immobilier de France.

In a context of major restructuring that was to lead to the departure of a very large number of employees, Crédit Immobilier de France formulated its _raison d'être_ as the development of employees' expertise and employability in the service of optimizing the value of its assets and achieving the best performance in the French market for managing mortgage receivables.

This formulation created a direct link between employees' concern for external re-employment and the company's demand for performance and excellence. By emphasizing excellence and performance despite the restructuring context, this raison d'être contributed, over the years, to restoring employees' pride and engagement.

Work carried out together with a shared purpose leads to respect for the other as a worker and—even beyond work—to their discovery or acceptance as a human being different from oneself—whose sex, color, culture, age and character are differences to be accepted or addressed to accomplish the required task. This helps avoid the development of "woke-ism" at work. Conciliation among men and women who must contribute to a task arises first from the work done in common—without the need for an external conciliator.

Management's role is essential here. "Making a team" cannot be improvised, and managing today's men and women is no doubt subtler than it once was. Roles and tasks should be distributed according to readable and accepted criteria—competence remaining crucial—but where other elements must be considered: equity; equality between men and women, between younger and older; individuals' behavior toward each other; language and cultural differences—especially in international groups—in short, all the elements of diversity that contemporary life presents.

Yet following disagreements about what to do, how to proceed, proposed career moves or promotions, compensation developments—or misunderstandings stemming from misuse of the

working language or from spillovers of external events—negative tensions may arise within a team or along a hierarchy that good will alone will not resolve. Such tensions often correlate with reduced willingness to take part in common work; the fading of the initial enthusiasm elicited by a project; clashes among individuals that bystanders can observe without wanting to get involved or help resolve; and ultimately lower productivity, delivery delays, even defects in products made and sold—with sometimes serious consequences for the company's image and then its activity. People speak of a "toxic atmosphere" that "kills motivation"; one hears: "As for him, I don't talk to him anymore!" Harmony has disappeared; cracks have opened; hope suddenly seems to have evaporated.

Re-conciliation as the condition for the return of Hope

In an internal crisis two options are possible: an act of authority; or the pursuit of consensus—or, at least, of acceptance by all of the course chosen by management.

In the first case, everyone will no doubt comply, but adherence to the managerial decision—resting on respect for authority—will be stronger to the extent there was solid prior trust in the decision-maker. It is, however, likely that the threads among people that the crisis snapped will remain so absent appropriate repair—each remaining fixed in their stance toward others—thus leaving the field open to new crises, perhaps more painful and decisive.

The second course will surely be slower, since it requires repairing interpersonal relationships damaged by the crisis. It is no longer a matter of conciliation—of intelligently juxtaposing existing elements into a flabby consensus—but of reconciling persons whose destinies—or at least wills—now seem opposed: of moving beyond the irreconcilable to envisage a new way of cooperating, a new way of working and living together—in short, a renewed life, a new life.

How to proceed—and on what to rely—in order to foster compromises?

Here the CEO or manager has an essential role—beginning with a kind of duty of a positive, though not naïve, attitude—to pull the organization and its members—especially its leaders—toward recognizing what is going well, in order to build on it. It is for them to carry the torch that will illuminate and help everyone recognize past common successes and—together—envision a shared path of future success. They must be the trusted third party toward whom stakeholders can open themselves—at least set aside the distrust that paralyzed them—to accept to move, to turn back toward others with a positive gaze. On the basis of the trust previously built with subordinates and peers, the manager can infuse the organization with this need for hope that enables divisions and oppositions to be overcome so that people accept to speak to one another again and to envisage anew working and living together.

Note that the CEO's capacity to inspire trust will be all the more important when it rests on a permanent lucidity about the company's situation—its strengths but also its weaknesses. Any reconciliation process that does not start from a lucid diagnosis and from a demand for truth about

the company's vulnerabilities is doomed from the outset. This presupposes, on the part of the company's leaders, an ability to acknowledge mistakes as well as successes. Reconciliation does not go with denial, and hope is quite distinct from optimism. The leader's exemplarity plays a crucial role in feeding the company's animating hope and in fostering reconciliation.

Blessing Franco-German reconciliation in Reims in 1962, Archbishop Marty declared in his homily: "Stretching out a hand is good; stretching out the heart is better. Peace is engendered in the laboratory of love—the ores of that laboratory are justice and charity."

It is thus the reconciling role of love, justice and charity that must also be put into action in and around the enterprise. Here as elsewhere, the great challenge in the reconciliation process remains the need to accept to set out to discover—or rediscover—the other—especially the one about whom we thought we knew everything and in whom we no longer saw anything but faults, occluding their qualities. It is this new gaze toward the other—imbued with love—that will permit the forgiveness of supposed past wrongs and, by a reciprocal movement, a joint setting-out once more on a creative path.

But how can I love the other enough to be reconciled with them if I do not feel myself lovable? Behind the most violent personal conflicts is there not a kind of despair—a refusal or incapacity to allow oneself to be loved—i.e., to believe that I have a value of my own, linked to my personal vocation, that makes me worthy of being considered, recognized, respected, welcomed, desired—in a word, loved for what I am, independently of my immediate usefulness? There is here a subtle yet important equilibrium for the company's capacity to overcome its tensions and to nourish within it an authentic hope: What value does the firm grant to a person beyond their immediate utility?

Conversely, each employee is called to ask what value their work brings them, independently of the pay they receive for it: What does it contribute to their personal flourishing—to their capacity to be happy—to what they believe important in life and for themselves? Behind the much-invoked theme of "meaning at work" lie all these fundamental questions that condition each person's engagement in the company—their attachment to the firm—and thus their desire to overcome tensions and conflicts so as to be a catalyst of hope and reconciliation. Business leadership can be a privileged space for gratuitousness: attention to employees' futures and careers; professionalism; self-giving by corporate officers; sharing of results.

Spiritual life—understood as the interior dialogue in each person's conscience, independently of any particular creed—has an eminent role to play in enabling each to shed light on these questions for themselves. Here Christians may have their most decisive contribution to offer: by example, to show how a spiritual life inhabited by a God of love can be the ultimate guardian of freedom and interior peace—and thus a factor of peace, hope and reconciliation in the enterprise.

Because the Christian knows themselves to be beheld and welcomed by a God of love—tender and merciful—they dare to acknowledge their faults and know in advance that, if their heart is sincere,

they will obtain forgiveness. How then could they refuse forgiveness to those who have offended them? It is not because the Christian is better or nicer than others that they forgive; it is because they know themselves weak—yet loved by a forgiving God. With the help of grace, therefore, the Christian can only desire to forgive. Even if—for the reasons already stated—the enterprise as an institution does not "forgive," forgiveness has its place within it as a powerful factor of peace and reconciliation. It springs from the heart; it governs attitude without always requiring a word; it is not decreed; not imposed; it is one of the most beautiful expressions of personal freedom.

III. RECONCILIATION AND HOPE THROUGH THE ENTERPRISE

3.1. The Enterprise as a Place of Purposive Cooperation and of Self-Construction

In theory, the enterprise is a place of purposive cooperation. It brings together people from various métiers within a defined geographic and temporal frame for a verifiable and assessable accomplishment that will be negotiated on a market. It must find its critical path through an equation with multiple unknowns and arrange diverse resources to provide a service appreciable to clients—all while respecting the formal and informal rules imposed by its environment—in permanent confrontation with contingency, which distinguishes it from other social institutions less exposed to it. It must reconcile short-term and long-term, technical progress and human development, environmental preservation and use of resources, profitability and respect for subcontractors, wealth creation and its distribution. It must face multiple upheavals: the climate crisis, shortages of skills or raw materials, etc. It must know how to overcome the conflicts that traverse it even when their origin is external—sometimes in dramatic circumstances such as the confrontation between Russia and Ukraine.

THE ENTERPRISE IN WAR – **Example of a multinational services company plunged into the Russia–Ukraine confrontation**

Because of globalization—and because the enterprise is increasingly expected to be a full-fledged actor in citizens' lives (and not solely in economic life)—a company may face the geopolitical difficulty, but also the absolute necessity, of making reconciliation live within its international teams. This is notably the case when a war pits two countries of operation—or two communities represented among the workforce—against each other.

Thus companies that, at the start of the Russia–Ukraine war, had employees on both sides of the front line experienced complex and varied situations. On the eve of the outbreak of hostilities, teams were collaborating within cross-functional working groups or co-developing activities; suddenly the citizen took precedence over the employee—at the risk of bringing the war into the company.

And yet, where the company chose to remain present, it was essential—so that it could continue to carry out its mission—that reconciliation—or failing that, pacification of relationships—be attempted. Experience showed that this was possible despite the fighting outside the company.

With hindsight, a clear re-affirmation of the will to protect employees and of the enterprise's primary mission proved key. The company cannot be at war—and even less against its own employees. In parallel, day-to-day support for teams in both countries made it possible to show them what the company brought them and the scale of its commitment. Finally, exemplarity at every hierarchical level of the will to reconcile—without denying the reality of war—made a broader reconciliation conceivable at the appropriate time. It was through a stance "in truth" and a constant orientation toward forgiveness that war remained at the doors of the social body. When the Russian and the Ukrainian CEOs are able to say to each other, "I am not at war with you," then reconciliation will be possible.

For its employees, the firm sets utility criteria in terms of know-ledge, skills and behaviors for those who aspire to take part in this cooperation—and imposes its purposes on them—provided, however, that they have no alternative to this participation. It must therefore elicit in those it seeks to employ a desire to participate. This is generally the case, as holding a professional role is an ordinary, privileged source of identity and self-realization—alongside other social roles that individuals play; it is exercised with financial compensation that allows them to meet their needs. The importance of employment is appreciated at its true value above all by those seeking it. And to access it they must overcome the obstacles that can arise: aptitudes; competencies; commute time; more or less exclusionary criteria set by the employer regarding physical integrity, age or gender, and sometimes origin.

It is in the act of employing that one of the major interfaces between company and society lies—since the former depends, for its human resources, on what the latter can offer in training, housing, transport—and on the facilities with which people can exercise their other social roles.

The company is a powerful agent of social integration—whose importance is measured above all when it fails, as seen with the local effects of de-industrialization. When a company shuts down, an entire structuring economic fabric disappears, along with job opportunities—especially for young people—and the raison d'être of training structures and more besides.

Also to be mentioned, in terms of social integration, is the challenge of reconciliation between the company and the world of public education, which sometimes still harbors reservations about business—even as cooperative initiatives around apprenticeships with vocational high schools are developing. Currently, under the "l'entreprise s'engage" movement, 80,000 companies are involved in apprenticeship or immersion initiatives. This is an area in which huge progress has been made in recent years and in which much remains to be done—because, through the national education system, the relationship with the training of young people—who will later become actors in companies—is at stake.

For all young people—whether graduates or those who did not succeed at school—the company is the gateway to society. For many of them, it is only then that they begin to understand society's codes and rules of the game—and gradually to integrate into it through work and the relationships it entails.

Because it offers work whose remuneration is a form of "valorization" and thus of recognition of one's usefulness, the enterprise helps reconcile the human person with themselves and with society (the social body). This is notably what the encyclical Laborem Exercens expresses, in which Saint John Paul II makes it possible to understand that work is a vocation by which the human person realizes their humanity and participates in creation. He also emphasizes the dignity of the worker and the right to work—a source of reconciliation.

As Laborem Exercens explains, work is a source of reconciliation for the worker in several ways. By reaffirming the dignity and intrinsic value of work; by promoting just and solidaristic relationships; by respecting the environment; and by integrating a spiritual dimension, the encyclical shows how work—offered by the framework and needs of the company—can lead to personal, social, ecological and spiritual reconciliation. John Paul II presents work not only as an economic necessity but as an essential means of attaining human fullness and contributing to a more just and harmonious world.

In Caritas in Veritate, Pope Benedict XVI explores several dimensions of work that make it a source of reconciliation for the worker, evoking: 1) reconciliation with oneself through dignity and personal fulfilment; 2) reconciliation with others through solidarity and community; 3) reconciliation with society through social justice and participation; 4) reconciliation with creation through respect for the environment; and 5) reconciliation with God through vocation and the spirituality of the Christian worker.

3.2. Entrepreneurship as a Witness of Perseverance in Hope

Anyone who has set out to create a company knows how difficult the adventure can be: risks and uncertainty abound; no one is waiting for you; setbacks and rebuffs are often numerous; tangible results can be slow in coming. And yet the entrepreneur perseveres—carried by faith in the usefulness of what they propose—by the raison d'être of their project. The hope that animates and sustains them through trials is a testimony to society as a whole—which will recall, when it celebrates a success, the obstacles, doubts and criticisms overcome.

It is said that entrepreneurs must traverse long periods of solitude. The Christian entrepreneur's good fortune is never to be alone. They know they can rely on the presence of the Holy Spirit, who nourishes their hope day by day.

Entrepreneurship, Faith and Hope

In the business world, entrepreneurship is the act of faith par excellence. It is the place of patience and perseverance. It is an experience of abandon that requires letting go. It is also the place of risk-taking. But contrary to what is sometimes believed about the "loneliness of the leader," the Christian entrepreneur is not alone in this adventure. They are accompanied by the Lord and "augmented" by the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit—if they wish to ask for them:
- The gift of Wisdom – which continually puts things in perspective and thinks the adventure as a whole. It also reconciles paradoxes and gives them meaning.

- The gift of Knowledge – which enables one to think one's ecosystem of partners in an integral vision inspired by nature, biodiversity and the complex yet balanced relationships at work therein.
- The gift of Understanding – of the heart, which enlightens and warms pure reason; also relational intelligence that gathers and unites around a shared mission and vision.
- The gift of Counsel – rooted in quality listening that produces considerate, growth-giving advice that opens eyes and ears.
- The gift of Strength—physical and mental—cultivated in contemplative walking in communion with nature; it enables one to rise above, evacuate stress and foster peace, joy and creativity. It is this gift that nourishes patience and perseverance in trial.
- The gift of Fear (of the Lord) – by which I recognize my vulnerability, weaknesses and limits and entrust myself to God's grace. It is the gift of abandon that leads us to enter willingly into God's time.
- The gift of Piety – daily prayer that nourishes this friendship with the Lord and makes him a coach, mentor, co-pilot, partner, associate… and that feeds fertile intuitions.
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The Christian entrepreneur is thus an "augmented human"… Augmented by the Holy Spirit—before being augmented by technology. It is the Holy Spirit who enables the entrepreneur to cross the "Valley of Fear" by entering and remaining in Hope. For the entrepreneur who must navigate an ocean of uncertainties, "to hope is to possess today what is not yet seen."

3.3. The Enterprise as a Cause of Dissensus, Exclusion and Fragilization

If, as mentioned above, the enterprise plays such a role in individuals' fulfilment and social integration, it can, conversely, have—through its functioning—a profoundly destabilizing, even destructive effect—commensurate with the importance and centrality of the professional role in an individual's identity system in relation to their other social roles. The company's natural tendency is to monopolize the person's investment—without taking account of the fact that this investment is legitimately solicited by others than it. Furthermore, while individuals draw from exercising their professional role resources in terms of pay, self-realization and learning (thus increasing their potential), they also put their meaning-system at stake. If the latter diverges from the meaning that results from company practice; if new technical means at its disposal lead the firm to pre-empt more time than agreed; if the manner of employment fails to respect the multiple conditions of maintaining balance and health—then occurrences of professional exhaustion and individual de-structuring multiply.

Companies do not always take account of the effects of their practices on the people they employ—placing back on the market de-structured individuals who will struggle subsequently to recover. This is directly linked to the centrality of the professional role for the person—a centrality that companies themselves foster. They do so directly, or by externalizing constraints onto suppliers—or by transferring the consequences of production fluctuations onto temporary collaborators by

systematically resorting to fixed-term contracts—or by replacing the employment relationship with subcontracting.

Ultimately what is sometimes lacking is a sensitivity to weak signals that would allow timely detection of "excessive suffering"—due either to inconsistencies between declared objectives and those actually pursued; or to the fact that management—or its principals—assigns the company a mercenary's role and is not itself involved in the common fate; or to excessive control leaving insufficient room for employee autonomy; or—among some—to the development of characterological deviance destructive for colleagues; or to a growing fracture between "those above" and "those below" in their participation in the common endeavor, in the benefits they may expect from it, in the consideration they receive.

Also sometimes lacking are rules to prevent the expression, within the company, of imported cultural elements—present in society but foreign to its purpose—and which it does not know how to manage.

3.4. The Enterprise as an Inducer of Societal Objectives and Models

Because of its drive for execution, its constant search for innovation and experimentation, and its frequent sense of being threatened by change ("an innovative product lasts a year and a half"), the company carries society along in its movement—beyond what the latter sometimes wishes or is capable of bearing.

Some socially conflictual impacts arise from the company's product itself (Uber versus taxis; Airbnb versus hotels; digital media versus reading; imports versus domestic producers…). The company can then ask whether the violence of its social impact is legitimate or not. A good criterion often lies in the product's real usefulness for consumers and society—even if this assessment is not always easy.

Whatever judgment one passes on the direction of its activities, the company—structured around its project and even its mission—configures a distinctive culture that is more or less imposed on its members. This culture can be synonymous with cohesion (e.g., long-term attention to employees; defense of national products; financial arbitrage shared between shareholders and the firm's needs; family-owned businesses), or on the contrary with exclusion—and thus potential conflict (e.g., nepotistic hiring; conservative trade unionism; the will never to change the sale of harmful products said to be central to the company's specialization…).

The company must then avoid what Pope Francis calls "the globalization of indifference" and may benefit from integrating people with diverse characteristics—or from orienting its activity toward products with improved impact.

Difficulties arise when such openness becomes an external injunction toward orientations that would break an already inclusive corporate culture in its own way (artificial recruitment quotas, bureaucratic CSR norms)—or when such orientations ask the company to define Good and Evil

for society, generating potential conflicts that lie beyond the company's vocation. Should Coca-Cola fight obesity or racism? Should *Aéroports De Paris* focus on welcoming migrants—or on deforestation in Asia?

When corporate culture—shaped by constraints (notably economic) to which it is subject—sits on a plane too different from ill-defined or weakly legitimate political and social objectives, we must acknowledge the reality of this conflict between requirements that prove contradictory. Today the company is in an environment marked by individualization in a world where it is asked to carry a mission of social integration that society no longer knows how to fulfill. This may lead each person to dig in on their personal preferences—all the more so as they depend on them more broadly for identity formation.

The enterprise can be a factor of society's reconciliation with itself—on condition it does so at the very heart of its mission of production and of managing employees and territories—without letting itself be drawn into society's divisive debates that do not concern it. Did mutual insurers in France have a vocation to take a position in the debate on end-of-life? Did Disney in the U.S. have a vocation to run its scripts through woke criteria? BoursoBank invited political representatives to discuss their economic programs and triggered an employee outcry that "we should not give everyone a platform." The company must thus find an equilibrium that enables it to resolve more conflicts in society than it opens…

CONCLUSION

The enterprise is not a sanctuary isolated from society but a mirror of its tensions and fractures—and also of the ways they can be overcome. Because it brings together women and men, capital, know-how and aspirations around a common purpose, it is a unique place where the contradictions of our time confront one another and where pathways of transcendence can be invented.

Reconciliation in business is neither naïve utopia nor abstract injunction. It is a demanding process—rooted in day-to-day working relationships—in which economic and human equilibria are at stake. It first requires discerning legitimate conflicts—sources of creativity and progress—from destructive conflicts that threaten the very vocation of the enterprise. It then calls for implementing practices of truth, dialogue and trust that can transform antagonisms into opportunities for collective growth.

In this journey, hope plays a decisive role. Unlike expectation—which projects a distant ideal—hope takes root in the present and invites action despite uncertainty. It is the inner spring that allows us to believe that what unites stakeholders is stronger than what divides them. It nourishes the patience needed for reconciliation processes, supports the courage to face the truth and opens the possibility of forgiveness—at least personally. Hope is a theological virtue for the Christian; but it is also, for all people of good will, the vitality of relationships by which they unfold their particular vocation in serving the company's *raison d'être* that unites them.

Understood in this way, the enterprise becomes a space where each can unfold the best of their vocation in the service of a common work. It enables its members to build themselves by discovering their own dignity and, in return, helps reconcile society with itself by offering work, recognition and meaning. But it can also weaken, exclude or divide if it allows itself to be enslaved by the idols of short-term profitability, power, image, or ideologies imported with no relation to its mission. Discernment in the face of these temptations is therefore central.

Ultimately, reconciliation in and through the enterprise cannot be reduced to a managerial technique. It is an art of living together—a path of truth and freedom—sustained by hope. Far from being secondary, it conditions organizational sustainability in an uncertain, hyper-competitive world. More than this, it is a testimony offered to society: showing that it is possible to build a solid common good despite tensions; to make cooperation a school of fraternity; and to open—through shared work—a future that is not only efficient but also bears dignity and meaning.

Thus the enterprise—reconciled and reconciliatory—becomes a leaven of hope: not only for its members, but for the whole human community of which it is a part.