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James A. F. Stoner

Fordham University, New York, stoner@fordham.edu

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# NOW WHAT? *LAUDATO SI'*, JESUIT UNIVERSITIES, BUSINESS EDUCATION, AND BEYOND

JAMES A. F. STONER  
*Fordham University*  
*New York, New York, U.S.A.*  
*stoner@fordham.edu*

## WHAT'S SO?

As *Laudato Si'* makes clear, the way we currently produce, distribute, and consume simply cannot continue, and even if it could continue, it is tragically unjust and should be altered. The current system works obscenely well for very few, moderately well for a considerable number, and not well at all for a much larger number.

One of the most devastating consequences of this production-distribution-consumption system is climate change:

Climate change can no longer be viewed as a distant threat that may disrupt the lives of our grandchildren, but one that may be singled out as a factor, possibly a critical factor, in the storm that flooded your house last week. (Cullen, 2016)

## SO WHAT?

While the words in *Laudato Si'* call attention to the many ways our common home is at risk, they also make clear that all of us have exceptional opportunities to contribute to the world and are called to do so. Jesuit business schools are uniquely positioned to do just that—to contribute to the world by transforming business education from

being part of the problem of global unsustainability to being part of the solution.

The extent to which many business schools are part of the problem is becoming more and more clear—the dominant business paradigm in virtually all business schools accepts that (1) exponential growth can continue forever in a finite system/world, (2) consumerism is the appropriate way of being in the world (the “new religion”); (3) the main purpose of the private corporation is the enrichment of its shareholders; and (4) the theme and much of the reality of marketing education is to “take-make-waste-faster-and-faster-for-the-richer-and richer.” To a distressing degree, almost all business school education around the world produces graduates who are trained to ignore the systemic effects of their actions as they contribute to destroying the capacity of the planet to support their own and other species and to feel good about themselves as they do so.

### *Taking action*

Jesuit business schools and their universities can contribute to the transformation toward a more viable world by seizing upon both the power of symbolic actions and the power of substantive actions. Some of the ways Jesuit business schools and universities can make their contribution to the transformation of business education include:

1. publicly acknowledging that the existing production, distribution, and consumption system is broken and needs to be transformed, even if they (we) do not yet know exactly how to accomplish the needed transformation;
2. publicly committing to devote a great amount of their research, administration, and teaching to discovering how to create a flourishing world (Ehrenfeld, 2008), one that works for everyone with no one left out;
3. taking bold actions to move toward that world by actually making public promises about their efforts to align themselves with the need for a sustainable world, and by being transparent about their progress and lack of progress in doing so;
4. publicly and forthrightly recognizing that the situation we are in is so serious that the leadership to be taken by Jesuit business schools is intended to benefit and help transform all business schools and hopefully business itself, and that this intentional and purposeful leadership is meant for the greater

good, not for the network of Jesuit business schools to gain a competitive advantage over other business schools; and

5. publicly and boldly calling on their various stakeholders— alumni, employees, faculty, community members, the Jesuit community, and especially political leaders and representatives—to demonstrate that they are taking responsibility for being well-informed about the situation we are in and for taking appropriate actions within their domains of influence.

### *Why Jesuit Business Schools have a special opportunity to contribute*

The Jesuit business schools have the opportunity to make an exceptional contribution at this time because of a series of events affecting them and the resources available to them. Many of the events also affect other business schools, and many of the resources are also available to other business schools, but for Jesuit business schools, the events and resources can be especially valuable and useful. These events and resources relate to symbolism, inspiration, concern, mission, network, knowledge, and partners.

**Symbolism:** In a world yearning for inspiration and inspired leaders, symbolism and symbolic actions by Jesuit universities and business schools in particular have great potential for energizing commitments and enrolling others in bold initiatives for change. As Michael Garanzini notes in this issue of the *Journal*, Pope Francis is a master of symbolism, and symbolic acts both inspire and energize constructive action. Jesuit business schools are ideally suited to demonstrate very simple and very impactful symbolic acts.

**Inspiration:** Not only has inspiration for action and dialogue occurred most recently in *Laudato Si'*, but also earlier in the Jesuit Task Force on Ecology Report entitled *Healing a Broken World*, in Catholic Social Teaching, in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and in many other publications, calls, and programs.

**Concern:** With the removal of all reasonable doubt about the seriousness and immediacy of the global unsustainability situation, the pressure for immediate action should be clear to all of us. We are all at risk, not just “future generations.” This is especially acute for Jesuit university members because the most vulnerable are the ones most severely affected by global unsustainability, and concern for the most vulnerable has always been deep in the very core DNA of Jesuit universities.

**Mission:** Although Jesuit universities, like all universities, seek to achieve a number of objectives, the educational mission of Jesuit universities is, at its very core, to produce soundly-educated, spiritually-rich *men and women for others*. The commitment to work with others to create a sustainable world fits perfectly with the Jesuit university mission, and the transformation of business education could become a distinguishing mark of such a commitment for Jesuit business schools.

**Network:** The world-wide network of Jesuit business schools—over 100 business-focused educational and research institutions—is unique in its size and geographical scope, giving the Jesuit educational community the opportunity to explore, develop, and share innovative and bold approaches across the globe.

**Knowledge:** We all have the intellectual resources that enable us to understand much about our current ecological, social, political, economic, and cultural situation, and what we might do about that situation. These resources include concepts and theories for bringing about change and transformation such as appreciative inquiry, the ASHOKA Changemaker Campus support system, and too many others to list here. It is not wholly unrealistic to say that we know, to a considerable extent, what needs to be done and that we know how to do much of it. We can be confident that, as we take actions, we will keep learning what works and what does not work—“walking on the bridge as we build it” (Quinn, 1996), enabling us to improve our interventions on a continuing basis.

Although all universities and their business schools have access to such a core body of knowledge, faith-based universities, and perhaps especially Jesuit universities, have a particularly rich body of knowledge that is not readily and richly available to many other universities—knowledge from the world’s great faith traditions about how to bring about individual change and transformation. The rich body of knowledge typical of Jesuit universities’ inclusive and ecumenical approach to religion and spirituality provides an unusually valuable resource for the discovery of old and new personal transformative processes—the types of transformations called for in *Laudato Si’* and that will be required in moving toward a more sustainable world.

**Partners:** Many organizations would be eager to, or have already started to, work with the Jesuit business school network in transforming business education. Natural partners include ASHOKA and the network of Changemaker campuses that are part of the ASHOKA U endeavor, the UNPRME Secretariat, and the current PRME signatories. Many of the members of the Academy of Management’s Organizations and the

Natural Environment (ONE), Social Issues in Management (SIM), and Management Spirituality and Religion (MSR) divisions and interest groups are natural partners as are the many explicitly global sustainability-focused organizations like the Fowler Center at Case Western Reserve's Weatherhead School, Columbia's Earth Institute, MIT's Sustainability Initiative, Stanford's Center for Sustainable Development and Global Competitiveness, Santa Clara's Center for Sustainability, 350.org, Repower America, etc.

## NOW WHAT

All of us have many opportunities to take actions that contribute to a sustainable/flourishing world. Specific actions that can be taken by the Jesuit business schools and universities in particular include:

**Jesuit Educational Mission:** Jesuit universities have the powerfully symbolic, financially-free, and very visible opportunity to commit publicly to adding a new, fourth tenet to the three traditional tenets of Jesuit education—*cura personalis* (care for the whole person), *homines pro aliis* (men and women for others), and *magis* (striving for excellence/continuing improvement). The new tenet would focus on caring for the planet and the world's capacity to support our own and other species—to live in, as John Ehrenfeld has said, “the possibility that human and other life will flourish on the planet forever” (Ehrenfeld, 2008).

**The Purpose of Business:** Jesuit universities and their business schools can take a loud and passionate stand that business organizations, like all organizations, are intended to serve humanity and not simply shareholders or other narrow interest groups, and can commit to a public exploration of what such a definition of the purpose of business implies for what is taught and researched in their business schools and throughout the university. As noted in this issue of the *Journal*, particular attention in such an inquiry would focus on finance courses where virtually all finance professors in virtually all universities accept the concept that the purpose of the business firm is the maximization of shareholder wealth.

**Conferences:** Faculty and administrators of Jesuit universities and business schools can focus their actions on inspiring and taking action by asking the question “now what” at the end of conferences, journal articles, and other activities—that is, asking the question in the form of committing to actions: “now what will we commit to do as a result of what we've been hearing and learning and exploring?” An excellent



example of such an action is the International Association of Jesuit Business Schools' decision to invest ten years of its global conference, the IAJBS World Forum, for the theme of providing leadership for global sustainability.

**Administration:** Administrators of Jesuit universities and business schools can increase their existing efforts to align their administrative actions with their commitment to creating a sustainable world by doing such things as removing investments in fossil fuel companies from university endowment portfolios and achieving renewable energy independence for campus operations.

**Public Activism:** Members of Jesuit universities and business schools, and all other individuals everywhere of course, can use public meetings, publications, and conferences to call publicly for politicians at every level to demonstrate that their actions are in alignment with the scientific consensus on the unsustainable nature of our world and to demonstrate what actions they are taking to protect present and future generations and deal with immediate crises and emergencies created by global unsustainability.

**Technology of Transformation:** Perhaps the most exciting and unique contribution Jesuit universities and other faith-based institutions can make would be in bringing thousands of years of spiritual and religious experience in individual transformation into the globally flourishing (sustainability) adventure. Faith-based institutions can provide leadership in exploring how the world's spiritual and religious wisdoms can help us develop powerful new approaches to the kinds of individual (and organizational) transformations we will need to create and thrive in a flourishing world.

## LET'S JUST START

The opportunities we are called by *Laudato Si'* to seize are simply too exciting and too important not to invest our time and energies in. How could we choose not to be part of meeting the greatest challenge our species has ever faced? Let's just start and discover the magic, and blessings, of being in action.

Until one is committed, there is hesitancy, the chance to draw back.... Concerning all acts of initiative (and creation), there is one elementary truth that ignorance of which kills countless ideas and splendid plans: that the moment one definitely commits oneself, then Providence moves too. All

sorts of things occur to help one that would never otherwise have occurred. A whole stream of events issues from the decision, raising in one's favor all manner of unforeseen incidents and meetings and material assistance, which no man could have dreamed would have come his way. Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it. Begin it now. (Goethe Society of North America, undated)

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