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# THE FRANCIS EFFECT ... AND WHAT IT MIGHT MEAN FOR US IN JESUIT BUSINESS EDUCATION, AND PERHAPS FOR OTHERS

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The following invited essay by Dr. Michael Garanzini, S.J., is based on a talk Fr. Garanzini originally gave in July 2014 at the International Association of Jesuit Business Schools Annual World Forum on “Mobilizing the Worldwide Jesuit Network: Collaboration for Global Sustainability” at Sogang University in Seoul, Republic of Korea. Although addressed initially to the conference’s largely Jesuit business school audience, we feel its focus on Pope Francis, as a person and as a spiritual leader, speaks to the concerns of our entire global community. The publication in June 2015 of Pope Francis’ (and his many advisors’) encyclical, *Laudato Si’*, speaks clearly of the reality that global sustainability and global social injustice are moral issues, and that moral leadership, by all of us, is called for in defining and dealing with the tragic situations they are increasingly creating.

We believe the members of the global network of Jesuit business schools have much to learn from all business schools around the world as they and we seek ways, in our teaching, research, and service, to contribute to a more sustainable and more socially just world. We also believe that this talk about one increasingly prominent source of moral leadership on these closely connected global issues may have much to contribute to other business

schools as they seek to build moral leadership into their efforts to deal with the issues of global unsustainability, global poverty, and social injustice.

**Keywords:** Pope Francis; Jesuit business education

Pope Francis has said some critical things about capitalism and the present state of the world's economy, especially in light of the effect on the poor. Those of us in Jesuit institutions, especially schools of business, do not often feel the need to pay close attention to "the Bishop of Rome," and are not always sure that what a Pope has to say will be relevant for our professional enterprise. But this one is different. He is "one of us" after all: he speaks our "Jesuit" language. He has stirred commentary from economists, scientists, and others who normally do not heed the words of Popes. And, his comments about capitalism, free markets, the rising tide of poor people and migrants, and the duties of more advanced economies are making some uncomfortable. Nevertheless, his ratings for "effectiveness on the job" are high. He touches a chord. People think he has important things to say. Many people admire him because they feel and think he "speaks truth to power."

What sense can we make of his words and their implication for our work as business educators? A few caveats might be helpful before we look more closely into that question. First, we should remember four things. He is a Jesuit and speaks in Jesuit idioms. He sees education as a key force, maybe *the* key secular force, for good. He is a Latin American and is all too familiar with the effects of economic disparities (they are not as well hidden in the South as in the North). And he is a master of symbol and wants to use his office to demonstrate, awaken, and keep the focus on the marginalized in society. He sees doing so as the proper role of a Roman Catholic Church leader ... and perhaps of any church or spiritual leader.

## THE JESUIT POPE

As a Jesuit, Francis uses Jesuit language and sees the world in "Ignatian" terms. First, caring for "souls" means caring for the whole person, that is, the physical, social, and spiritual needs of people which are not distinct needs but bound together. A healthy person is healthy in mind, body, and soul. A weak person struggles in all three areas. A deprived person is deprived in each sphere. Second, he speaks in places like *Evangelii Gaudium*, his master plan or manifesto for his papacy, of "discerning the operation of God in the world today." The realm of the spiritual and the worldly are not two different spheres but one reality.

Through his Ignatian lens, he will see “God in all things,” operating directly in the world. His aim is to awaken us to that reality. Third, he speaks of “shadows and lights,” that is, he sees the operation of good and evil—real forces—at work in the everyday affairs of human beings.

This is language that comes right out of St. Ignatius of Loyola’s Spiritual Exercises. This is a moral universe. In such a world, the action or inaction of individuals or groups can and should be judged for their moral goodness or their moral failure. And, what advances the welfare of human beings, especially the poor, is for good. What retards and inhibits development or fosters greed and independence is bad. It is a battle between good and evil, right and wrong, where one must take sides, that is, place oneself clearly under a banner, for or against the forces of good or evil. This is Ignatian language and Ignatian thinking, and it is Francis’. For instance, he will speak of following our Lord, doing right, as joining in the battle “under the banner of Christ.”

All these metaphors come from the Ignatian Spiritual Exercises. They form and color Francis’ imagination and enliven his rhetoric. In his homilies and his two lengthy writings, *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si’* (on the environment), he assumes a familiarity with what we Jesuits call “our way of proceeding.” This “way of doing things” is a method of analysis and discernment which begins by taking a serious look at reality, that is, seeing the world for what it is, good and bad, and desperately in need of solutions and those willing to fight for a just cause. What is important and matters most is that one has chosen, “elected,” either to be on the side of what is right and just, to be a positive force for change and inclusion, or not to decide, to play things as they come, seizing opportunity wherever it appears and wherever it might lead. Again, this is a religious vision and Francis will assume this as a necessary first step before discerning, next, “what must I do with what I have seen?” And, following that, “what must I do with what I have been given?” We are moral agents and must be responsible not only for our own behaviors but for the systems that we perpetuate or that we work to correct. His speeches to non-clerics, and clerics alike, are full of references to one’s moral responsibility as a person who has assumed a leadership position.

## THE POWER OF EDUCATION

Francis’ vision of education follows from this basic vision of the world as a place where good and evil are on a battle field. As a Jesuit, this Pope believes deeply in the power and importance of education. It is perhaps the chief, or best, way of truly helping individuals to become responsible

moral agents. Through education, we assist young people with the tools to understand what is “in play” and at stake in this very complex world. We offer them more than the credentials needed to impact it, to change it for the good. A good education, for moral leadership, cannot then be reserved for those within one’s own social group, or faith tradition, or who are able to pay for it. It must be for everyone with ability regardless of background, gender, or socio-economic status.

It is through education that we foster and advance the common good. It is an equalizer, first and foremost. Its aim is to give a young person a moral compass. It equips him or her with the credentials needed to succeed. Moreover, an education, especially a Jesuit education, models debate, analysis, investigation, engagement. It models this while asking repeatedly about what is best for the most people, especially and critically for those who have been left out, who are at the margins. In other words, no matter the role one plays in the economy—maker, manager, distributor, promoter—the responsibility to help people, that is, to benefit the most “souls,” is incumbent on the product of a Jesuit education.

The Pope famously compared the Roman Catholic Church to a “field hospital.” The sick and wounded come first. One does not ask, he said, about the cholesterol level of a person who is bleeding from a gunshot wound. First things first. A university’s first duty, then, like the Roman Catholic Church, is to deal with the students who come through its doors. They need skills in computation, in communication, and basic knowledge of business and the economy, its laws and dynamics. It then must move them to examine (see) those issues that critically impact the marginalized, for all the underlying issues and causes of poverty and marginalization first of all need study. All disciplines are needed to examine how we might expand the circle of those with opportunity and all disciplines need to help examine ways we foster greed and ways we retain power over the production and distribution of goods. And, today, given the way our economic systems rely on access to technology, we must find ways to widen access to technology. Finally, the university must move students to act on what they now see and understand.

These contributions, Francis believes, will occur only if the university regularly invites the poor and marginalized into its purview and, more importantly, into its halls. And, if faculty and students seek out those who are left behind. Only if faculty and students regularly come into contact with those who are disenfranchised in their classroom or in their research, he believes, will they be sensitive to the potential impact of their discipline and its questions, concerns, and discoveries on those who do not benefit from the advances in various fields—economics, health,

education, etc. See, engage, and reflect is the Jesuit “pedagogy” assumed by the Ignatian “way of doing things.”

## **A LATIN AMERICAN**

As a former South American bishop, Francis’ experience is that the elites have the advantages and hold on to those advantages, reserving them for their own kind. Again, it may be more blatant in places like Argentina and Latin America, but it is no less true in all other parts of the world. When he is criticizing capitalism, he is coming from first-hand experience of too many individuals who are denied the ability to feed their families, clothe them, or care for their health and other needs. Capitalism has left too many outside the room, and the evidence keeps mounting that he has a point. The refugee crisis that threatens to overwhelm Europe and the migration issues that have led to a rise in xenophobia in many places are an outgrowth not only of religious extremism but of economic disparity as well. People move when they are in danger and when they cannot feed their families. The political and social instability that these crises cause is threatening to halt economic development and the distribution of wealth across social and national divides.

This Pope knows a great deal about rich and poor. The “Dirty Wars” were a real proving ground for him, especially for his capacity to manage competing agendas, to be resolute but sensitive to the way others perceive things. It led him to work directly in the slums of Buenos Aires. He has many friends who are poor. And, he rather prefers to be with these simple people than with the rich and powerful. Once catapulted onto an international stage, he came to believe that his destiny was to bring the same messages, based on these experiences, to the world.

Beneath it all, Francis believes in a “liberation” that comes from a radical Gospel message of justice and mercy. Rich and poor need to be liberated from selfishness and fear, the two big drivers of human self-destructive behavior. Doing so calls for building a more just society that is also a place of mercy. In his theology, he is not at pains to dissect how a church or a society may be both just and merciful, that is, both fair, treating everyone the same, and charitable, doing more for the poor.

Political philosophers and theologians have always struggled with how justice and mercy can be operative at the same time. Is it a society’s duty to feed the poor, house the homeless, provide for health care to all, or is it society’s duty to offer opportunities for those with ambition so



that they can provide for all those necessities? It follows that those who have less ambition and ability will naturally experience less of these goods and benefits. Why should those who work hardest pay for those who work less, or not at all? In other words, do we have an obligation to support with basic necessities all those within our community or nation or world, or only those who earn their keep? For Francis, we must do both because siding with one or the other of these two choices is likely to distort and even come back to haunt us given the long term effects on the common good. For Francis, it is never giving in to one side or the other in this struggle.

## **PERSONAL ENGAGEMENT AND CONTACT**

This Pope is a master of the use of symbol as well as a disciplined manager who shows what he means by example. He wants to change both the style and substance of our discourse and how we see not only the Papacy and the Roman Catholic Church but ourselves as citizens of a global society. This Pope, in style, rhetoric, and substance, demonstrates what he preaches by active engagement with a torn and wounded world.

He believes in the value of the symbolic touch or action. It speaks volumes about where one's heart lies. Lampedusa was his first visit—a small, poor parish on the outskirts of Rome for Sunday morning Mass was his first pastoral visit shortly after being elected. The Jesuit Soup Kitchen in Rome was his first foray into a social outreach program in the City of Rome, his Diocese. He washed the feet of a Muslim woman on Holy Thursday, the first Pope to perform this symbolic gesture on a woman and a non-Catholic. It is *the* symbol of the Gospel call to servant leadership. He not only visited and prayed at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, but directed his car to stop at the wall separating the Israelis from the Palestinians. He invited the President of Israel, someone with relatively little political power, plus the head of the Palestinian government, also a position of no power, to his garden to pray for peace. In doing so, he broke a knot, the knot of intransigence, that was keeping both sides from advancing toward a sustainable peace. He has not pretended to solve this problem, but he has set the conditions for looking at the issue in a new way.

## **NEW APPROACHES AND NEW IDEAS**

What Pope Francis seems to cherish most of all are creative new solutions, new ideas, new insights into what might make for a better

society, a better way forward. Again, an academic institution, like a Jesuit business school, through its professors and students, should become a place for “new approaches and new ideas” as well as for inclusion, for economic opportunity, for keeping our attention on social problems. This is practical and pragmatic, not simply idealistic. When disparity and neglect are unattended or unaddressed, when they create dislocation, loss, or shrinking of opportunity, there is a threat to the whole system. Social entrepreneurship programs, programs fostering immersions into the lives of the less fortunate, research that helps economic development in poor areas, or examines sustainable logistics, or ways of farming, mining, etc., have direct impact on the most vulnerable. Such programs, carried out as a deliberate “mission” activity of the Jesuit business school, are models and metaphors of what business and commerce can do to foster a vision of inclusion and help for “souls.” When students ask “What creative new business or business product or service can make the lives of others less burdensome, less difficult, healthier and more sustainable?,” they are in sync with a vision presented by this Pope. And, more importantly, they need not be conscious or aware of this fact.

In sum, as Pope, Francis is a bishop-manager, a theologian-teacher, and a diplomat-statesman. That is the role inherited by anyone sitting in the Chair of Peter. He plays each of these deftly and with an agenda in mind. Let’s look more closely at that agenda.

## **TURNING UP THE HEAT**

The Pope’s comments about capitalism, the markets, the wrecking of the environment, and his fairly relentless barrage against wealth and power that isolate and protect a few to the detriment of others are disturbing to some. He has been called a communist or socialist, and anti-capitalist. That may be a bit too facile. He has a predilection for serving the poor. That does not make him a communist.

In his first major letter, he asked his bishops and priests to spend more time with the disenfranchised in their parishes than with the well-off and the well-connected. It also instructed them to reflect on the problems and the causes of poverty and alienation to make them more sensitive to the plight of the “other.” He then pointed to four “realities” that need scrutiny and collective action, urging priests and bishops with influence to turn up the heat, so to speak, on those with power and influence in the economic realm. Those with influence over young people, over policy makers, and who have ties to those with influence in the economic sphere (universities and business schools) are asked to do the same.

The first and most glaring reality is the existence of severe poverty. Despite some success in reducing the number of those whose incomes, as measured by the presently agreed upon indexes, leave them in severe poverty, conditions in the underdeveloped and developing world trap too many men and women into lives of subsistence. Proof that this situation has become intolerable for the masses of the severely poor is offered by the fact that the world has not seen, since World War II, the number of economic and political refugees that it sees today (fifty million by some counts). Leading nations, companies, and individuals in the economic sphere cannot ignore this reality. If they do, they do so at their own peril.

The second reality, which we must face, is the gross inequality we see in nearly every society. As the gap between rich and poor widens, and as too many are relegated to a status of permanency in their economic status—whether that status be in the top 1% or the bottom 50%—we run the risk of tremendous social and economic instability. It behooves even the most pragmatic of us to see that a gap of widening proportions does not bode well for social cohesion or social and economic progress. Taxes on those with wealth are just as their wealth is tightly tied to the goods, services, and natural resources paid for by all, yet the benefits are not evenly shared by all.

One of the features of this income disparity is the power of some with access to the resources of this earth, our common home, who use that access to the detriment of us all. The destruction of forests, depletion of farmable land, over-fishing of the seas, pollution of air and water through carbon emissions, and the dumping of industrial waste and fertilizers—these activities have clearly brought wealth to some and a great deal of present and future harm to the rest of us. The destruction of the environment is directly related to this unequal sharing and unequal caring for the environment that sustains the populations of the globe.

A feature of capitalism that this Pope and others point to as a relatively new and unhealthy phenomenon is the working of financial markets. Markets and how they are manipulated are not neutral in their effect on people, and on consumers especially. Like our natural resources, if we do not regulate these realities, they wreak havoc, a man-made havoc. The financialization of markets is a special case that cries for intervention by men and women committed to economic justice. Speculation on commodities is but one example of how markets are manipulated without regard for the work of others, that is, their effect on the suppliers and producers. This reality is certainly within our power to curb and to regulate. Those who regularly benefit from existing conditions of commercial exchange will fiercely resist any alteration in

the market practices they have worked to create and from which they benefit so greatly, but the damage these conditions can cause to innocent bystanders and those affected is unacceptable.

Finally, Pope Francis sees a direct link between economic injustice and violence. Drugs, gangs, attempts to halt over-mining, polluting, and the transport of refugees and migrants for profit are all places of violence that disproportionately affect the poor and innocent. Human trafficking, for example, has not occurred on a scale such as we see today in the last several hundred years. These are economic and social realities that cannot be separated and thought of as distinct problems. They are challenges calling for both concerted action and a change of heart.

This Pope is not naive. He knows that many will feel threatened. But their safety and security are more likely to dissipate if we do not address the growing threat of economic injustice. Having staked out his pontificate as a new kind of moral authority, with some earned credibility and with the Hebrew and Christian scriptures on his side, this Pope appeals to all men and women of good will to address the challenge of the environment, the financialization of the markets, the gap between rich and poor, and the reality of severe poverty and its link to violence. His new encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, makes the case for several of these themes even more strongly. It pleads over and over with a simple refrain that "all is connected." The message to all, government and business especially, is that policies that ignore environmental destruction and the growing dangers of a depleted and damaged environment hurt everyone. The world we live in is home to all and all are impacted by unnecessary and excessive over-consumption and unregulated commercialization of natural resources. The rain forests are one of our lungs, cleaning our air; the seas are our source of nutrition, and so forth.

## CONCLUSION

There has not been a Pope who seeks to "reach out and to dialogue" with everyone as does this Pope. He wants to engage all "men and women of good will," not just "believers." Nor has there been a Pope who has been as forceful in urging us to band together, to think and plan past our national boundaries or our social group, and who challenges us with a nobler cause. He has been direct and honest about the economic forces that divide us and that leave too many behind. The power of his metaphors and his actions gives visible witness to his call for solidarity and cooperation among nations and among socio-economic groups. The emphasis on our individual and collective responsibility is persuasive,

calling us to be better citizens of a global society. The agenda he sets before us is a remarkable and appealing plan, especially for a school of business, one that wants to do more than simply expand the wealth of the wealthy, or extend the reach and power of an economic sector. The “magis” or “more” which Jesuits so often hold up as a motto refers here to more inclusion, more opportunity, and more sustainability in our management of the goods of this earth. There is a great deal here in which to fashion a unique and relevant school of business for the world we are heading into.