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Robert Brancatelli
rjb@fordhamroad.net

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LAUDATO SI' AND A SPIRITUALITY OF RESILIENCY

ROBERT BRANCATELLI
Fordham University
New York, New York, U.S.A.
rjb@fordhamroad.net

The external deserts in the world are growing, because the internal deserts have become so vast. (*Laudato si'*, §217)¹

Abstract. This article examines Pope Francis' encyclical letter, *Laudato si'*, from the perspective of a spirituality of presence, which it relates to resiliency, or the ability of organizations to respond to current or emerging crises. This spirituality consists of two dimensions: the prophetic and the contemplative. This article explores both dimensions and demonstrates their application in a business context. In addition, an important part of a spirituality of presence is Sabbath, which allows for the rest and re-centering of the individual and organization. Once “frenetic activity” ceases, both the leader and the organization can begin the work of anticipating, preparing for, and responding to crises. The focus of this article, therefore, is on the person of the business leader and how he or she might prepare for resiliency individually and then lead an organization through a crisis. The particular crisis the article is concerned with is environmental deterioration as treated in the papal encyclical.

Keywords: *Laudato si'*; resiliency; presence; Sabbath; risk

¹This quote originally appeared in a homily by Benedict XVI (2005).

INTRODUCTION

In the encyclical letter *Laudato si'* (2015), Pope Francis calls upon “every person living on this planet” (§3) to acknowledge “the immensity and urgency of the challenge we face” (§15). The challenge he refers to is the “environmental deterioration” of the planet (§3) and the related deterioration of our collective humanity (§56, 117–119). In similar fashion to the *Didache*, the first-century Church Catechism, the Pope lays a clear choice before his readers: life or death. The path toward death regards nature as nothing more than “an object of utility, as raw material to be hammered into useful shape; it views the cosmos similarly as a mere ‘space’ into which objects can be thrown with complete indifference” (§115; Guardini, 1965/1998: 63/55).² The path toward life, however, is paved with gratitude and appreciation for the mystery of creation (§243). This path is found through a “profound interior conversion” (§217) in which the individual becomes present to self, others, and the earth, which, “burdened and laid waste, ... ‘groans in travail’ (*Rom 8:22*)” (§2).

In the following sections, this article will summarize what the author has identified as a spirituality of presence in *Laudato si'*, explore resiliency as a concept related to presence, analyze resiliency within a business context, and consider ways resiliency can be integrated into the Jesuit business school curriculum. Along the way, the article will entertain larger philosophical issues and suggest areas for further research.

THE SPIRITUAL VISION OF *LAUDATO SI'*

There are three overarching themes in *Laudato si'*: (1) recognition of nature as a gift from God, which compels human beings to accept the gift and respond in gratitude for the beauty of creation (§220); (2) rejection of the dominant “culture of consumerism, which prioritizes short-term gain and private interest” over the long-term interests of the poor and planet (§184); and (3) a conversion that reconciles individuals with themselves, others, and creation (§217–218). The Pope cites the Australian bishops in declaring that “we must examine our lives and acknowledge the ways in which we have harmed God’s creation through our actions and our failure to act. We need to experience a conversion, or change of heart” (§218). The Pope believes that conversion can occur only in a

²See the related concept of *der Bestand*, or standing reserve: “Today all things are being swept together into a vast network in which their only meaning lies in their being available to serve some end that will itself also be directed toward getting everything under control” (Heidegger, 1977: 17–18).

spirit of sobriety (§223–224), moderation (§222), and simplicity (§214, 222). As a spiritual model, he offers St. Francis of Assisi, whose “poverty and austerity ... were no mere veneer of asceticism, but something much more radical: a refusal to turn reality into an object simply to be used and controlled” (§11).

A closer look at these themes reveals what might be described as a “spirituality of presence.” Readers familiar with the work of Martin Buber may recall his understanding of presence (*die Gegenwart*) as an unmediated encounter (*die Begegnung*) between two self-aware beings (Buber, 1970/1996: 45). Similarly, presence here implies more than physical or temporal location. It refers to the spirit of God as it is encountered in all areas of life, including creation, which stands “alongside” traditional forms of revelation such as Sacred Scripture (§85; John Paul II, 2000).³

Presence has two dimensions: the prophetic and the contemplative (§222). The prophetic, in turn, is composed of two parts that reflect the ancient biblical understanding of prophecy. In the first, the prophet warns the people that their actions are misguided and will result in calamity if pursued further. Ideally, this leads the community to acknowledge its sins and seek repentance, including for acts of past sin that need to be rectified.⁴ In the second, the prophet shows the way toward reconciliation with God. This process can be found in the Hebrew Bible, in the books of the major and minor prophets like Isaiah and Joel. Contemplation, on the other hand, refers to the difficult inner work that must be done to act prophetically. This includes being open to realities that are not visible and requires a lifestyle of humility (§224), justice (§92), and inner peace (§11).⁵ Pope Francis encourages everyone to live this way, which he characterizes as the only authentic way to be human (§225).

Again, in the tradition of the *Didache*, Pope Francis contrasts this spirituality of presence with its opposite, which he describes as a “throwaway culture” (§16). This culture is characterized by impermanence, distraction, and a certain “frenetic activity” that causes people “to ride rough-shod over everything around them” (§225), including the earth and other human beings. Such frenetic activity, fueled by “collective selfishness” (§204) and grounded in the “ironclad logic” of utility (§108), has led to the appearance of what liturgical

³For creation as a form of divine revelation, see also the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (2003: 1).

⁴The concept of a historically responsible presence is taken up by Beth Crisp (2015).

⁵Compare Marsh (2015).

theologian Romano Guardini termed “mass man” (§203; Guardini, 1965/1998: 66–67/60).⁶ In this worldview, the postmodern human being is treated in the same throwaway manner as the natural environment. Both are regarded as commodities with limited usefulness and function. The result is a breakdown of the natural world and society. This has become evident in climate change (§23–26) and its impact on biodiversity (i.e., the destruction of rainforests, species extinction, and the depletion of natural resources) (§32–42). The breakdown is also evident in its social effects such as poverty (§134), mass migration (§25), urban expansion (§44), and the scarcity of food and other resources for survival (§154).

When the spiritual void created by the throwaway culture is filled with even more material goods—the result of “compulsive consumerism” (§203)—people become aggressive, anxious, and fixated on superficialities (§226). Over time, these characteristics and the socio-economic conditions accompanying them give rise to a spiritual and ethical crisis that reinforces the consumerist lifestyle. This crisis becomes so addictive that individuals cannot recognize the degree to which they have been molded by its values and attitudes. Individual effort alone is often not enough to free oneself. Rather, achieving freedom requires the entire community (§219), which for Christians is the *ecclesia* (§64). To remedy the crisis, Pope Francis calls for the creation of “a new way of thinking about human beings” (§215), one based on fraternal love (§226), “ecological virtues” (§88, 211), and a “human ecology” (§5, 155). This ecology offers “liberation from fear, greed, and compulsion” (§9) while promoting relationships of care and love (§231). When practiced regularly, this ecology grows into a *habitus* or virtue, and one’s focus changes from material to relational goods.

Building upon his predecessor Benedict XVI’s “ecology of man” (§155), Pope Francis identifies an “ecological conversion” (§217). This conversion is connected directly to human conversion and derived from the same sensibility and awareness (§16). By being present, one can see the interdependence of human beings and creation (§240). Such presence can have a positive impact on regional and global economies so that resources might be developed and allocated more justly (§32, 231). “Everything is connected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity” (§240). However, global solidarity requires an honest assessment of economies (e.g., trade, capital, investment, markets, labor) so that attempts to counter ecological crises are not merely perfunctory or

⁶This theme is continued in Guardini (1930/1998), who speaks of “the restlessness of purposeful activity” (71).

rhetorical (§54). Unfortunately, at this stage in history, the Pope believes that the ecological condition of the planet has deteriorated so much that “radical change” is needed (§171). “The earth, our home, is beginning to look more and more like an immense pile of filth” (§21). Therefore, it is incumbent upon everyone—business, government, academia—to work collectively on policies and laws that are effective and enforceable.⁷

THE SPIRITUAL BASIS OF RESILIENCY

Resiliency refers to the ability to adapt to current or emerging, often unforeseen, crises. These crises might involve anything from climate change to political unrest and economic globalization. In an ecological context, resiliency anticipates the challenges of environmental deterioration, prepares for those challenges, and acts in ways that restore harmony to our relationships with nature and each other. Thus, resiliency relates directly to the themes of *Laudato si'* and can be viewed within the same spiritual framework of presence and conversion. However, to anticipate, prepare for, and meet the challenges of environmental deterioration, one first must become aware of those challenges. This is crucial, since what is not seen cannot be acknowledged, and what is not acknowledged does not exist. “This is the way human beings contrive to feed their self-destructive vices: trying not to see them, trying not to acknowledge them, delaying the important decisions and pretending that nothing will happen” (§59).

The unwillingness and/or inability of people to acknowledge reality despite scientific consensus and overwhelming empirical evidence may be the greatest challenge to resiliency.⁸ Neither a conversion of heart nor an ecological conversion can take place without acknowledgement of the problem and a commitment to follow its solution to the end, even if that solution conflicts with one’s established worldview. Thus, the Pope’s plea for a new vision *of* human beings is also a call for a new vision *for* human beings; that is, for people to see in a new way. It is a call in the tradition of the biblical prophets for the people to wake up to the impending disaster and change their behavior. Here, “people” might refer more to business and governmental leaders than to the

⁷The 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference reached an agreement on greenhouse gas emissions, global temperature reduction, and the establishment of national targets. The conference included business leaders. See Knowledge@Wharton (2015).

⁸See IPCC-WGII (2014), particularly the summary which addresses policy in the face of intellectual bias.

public, since common citizens have demonstrated the capacity to act on their own when dissatisfied with official efforts to stop environmental deterioration. Nonprofit organizations like Greenpeace, Environmental Defense, and the National Resources Defense Council are examples of this, as well as the emergence of so-called “green” consumers, employees, investors, etc.⁹

The way business and governmental leaders will be able to reverse deterioration is by becoming prophetic themselves. This begins with the inner work of contemplation as exemplified in the biblical concept of Sabbath. In the Hebrew scriptures, Sabbath was the preeminent sign of the covenant between Yahweh and the Israelites just as it is in contemporary Christianity on the *Dies Domini* (Day of the Lord). Its purpose was to remind the people that they were part of a universe in which concern for other, whether in the form of worship to God or service to the poor and needy, defined what it meant to be a human being. No work was to be performed on that day, which was described as a “day of rest” analogous to God’s day of rest in the creation narrative (Ex. 31:12–17).¹⁰ It served to maintain balance not just between work and leisure but within social arrangements and even nature, since it required that the land lie fallow every seventh year so that it could replenish and not be consumed entirely (Lv. 25:1–7). Sabbath was also an act of economic justice because it gave the poor an opportunity to glean what they could from the fields for their survival (Lv. 23:22).

Sabbath forms the basis of a spirituality of resiliency in that it allows for the rest and re-centering of the individual and organization. Once frenetic activity is stopped, both the leader and organization can begin the work of anticipating, preparing for, and responding to crises. This, however, is not a one-sided affair but done in consideration of the profitability and mission of the organization. Admittedly, this may be difficult to achieve on a practical level and may even be more problematic for those working in highly competitive industries like financial services or mobile technology. The good news, though, is that Sabbath does not exist by itself. It often elicits and develops virtues like humility, patience, and prudence, which are crucial qualities to have alongside technical competence and managerial experience. No longer

⁹This has been considered in detail by Carroll and Buchholtz (2012/2015: 450–452).

¹⁰Compare with the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace (2012: §69): “The Sabbath, for example, is not simply a break from work. Perhaps paradoxically, it is only in our detachment from work that we see its deepest meaning. Pope Benedict XVI explains this connection by stating that ‘the biblical teaching on work finds its coronation in the commandment to rest.’”

seen as soft skills, these virtues have assumed an important place in the literature on decision-making. They help create a culture of trust in which employees are invited to contribute in meaningful ways to the organization's mission. This has been shown to lead to greater employee morale and measurable increases in profitability (Achor, 2010).¹¹

By giving the leader an opportunity to align being with doing, which is the essence of spirituality, Sabbath can affect one's leadership style in substantive ways. As one withdraws from frenetic activity and turns inward, decisions become integrated not only with the self but with the organization. This means that self-discovery bears directly on individual and organizational performance. Alignment anchors the leader to an Archimedes point, as it were, from which various kinds of decisions can be made, from strategic to tactical and operational. This is important when leading teams from various functional areas whose members bring different areas of expertise to a project. A spirituality of resiliency is about becoming present to oneself and others and operating virtuously in all aspects of life, including decision-making (Kilburg, 2012: 57–62). It begins with contemplation and ends with reflective action or praxis.

RESILIENCY IN BUSINESS

When considering resiliency beyond the individual, several questions come to mind. First, is it even possible for organizations to develop in contemplative and prophetic ways, thereby becoming resilient in the face of crises? Second, can a spirituality of resiliency lead to scalable, sustainable action that becomes a *habitus* of virtue? And, finally, are there recent examples of resiliency in business that might serve as models or case studies?

First, for an organization to develop in contemplative and prophetic ways, it must rethink its presuppositions about the purpose of business. As a result of globalization, business leaders can no longer ignore the negative externalities of profit maximization. Rather, they must become aware of and acknowledge the consequences of what an earlier Pope, Pius XII, called a "cold and calculating egoism which tends to hoard the economic resources and materials destined for the use of all to such an extent that the nations less favored by nature are not permitted

¹¹See Zetlin (2015); McGregor and Doshi (2015); Valentine, Godkin, Fleischman, and Kidwell (2011); and Kelly (2004), all of whom measure the relationship between social responsibility and profitability.

access to them” (Von Mises, 1944: 226).¹² Concern for profit, particularly in a global environment, must be balanced with sensitivity to the organization’s mission and role in wider economic affairs.

Sensitivity can be nurtured only through a culture that promotes and is aligned with organizational values. This often requires the ongoing training and support of employees and a consistent focus on mission at all levels. This is famously exemplified by the encounter between President Kennedy and a NASA janitor in 1962. “What are you doing?” Kennedy asked the man, who was carrying a broom. “Well, Mister President, I’m helping put a man on the moon” (Nemo, 2014).

Like the individual version, organizational alignment begins by stopping frenetic activity and assessing the current situation—in this case, culture. In what ways does the organization suffer from misalignment between what it claims to be and what it actually does? Misalignment can occur consciously at the leadership level or unconsciously among employees. Regarding the latter, it is important to evaluate how employees view their work, their relations with each other and management, and the direction the company is taking. It is not enough to note what people say, since culture is reflected more accurately in unspoken actions. One of the most important factors here is trust: how is trust (or mistrust) experienced throughout the organization? Without trust, alignment is impossible, especially in the long-term.

An organization that has aligned profit with mission is in a much better position to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to challenges. Alignment reflects Pope Francis’ view of the potential of business to be a “noble vocation” (§129), and becoming noble is the work of the prophetic dimension of presence. This is not meant to disparage profit, since no business can exist without resources. However, like the example of the NASA janitor, vocation puts profit in perspective. Vocation drives the culture of an organization just as profit fuels its operation. All too often, however, the image an organization conveys to the world through its marketing is at odds with the reality of its internal culture. When this occurs, the organization most likely is out of alignment and will eventually suffer financial consequences.

¹²See also John XXIII (1963: §126). Pope John XXIII’s *Pacem in Terris* marked a turning point in the Church’s view of itself and its place in the world, emphasizing the context in which the deposit of faith is proclaimed, with that context being the modern world. It urged the faithful to spread the Gospel message while bearing in mind the “signs of the times” (§126) which, for the purposes of this article, include business.

Secondly, is development of the contemplative and prophetic dimensions of an organization scalable? The answer depends on the degree to which these are taken seriously and supported by management. A mobile app development company in Silicon Valley, for instance, may be more attuned to and aware of its prophetic role simply because of its size compared to a more established company like Verizon. However, in either case, the development of a culture in which frenetic activity gives way to measured and focused decision-making begins with awareness. Most organizations have accounted for this through their risk management function, with some even appointing chief risk officers (the risk management industry has developed in recent years in terms of both membership and resources). However, as the Pope has stated, the crisis affecting the environment and society can only be solved by new thinking (§191), not merely by managing new threats in conventional ways (Kaplan & Mikes, 2012). Thus, a spirituality of resiliency might provide a fresh approach to current risk management models. This suggests that scalability begins with individual effort, creativity, and dialogue (Kaplan & Mikes, 2012; Pillay, 2012). But the individual need not come from the C-suite, since a vibrant culture can produce ideas throughout the organization.

Finally, are there examples of companies that exemplify resiliency? The North Face, REI, and Whole Foods are three companies that have become resilient by “flattening their organizations and working across vertical boundaries, breaking down silos, transferring best practices, collaborating cross-functionally, and promoting laterally” (Organization Analysis and Design, 2015: 2), and they have done so in environmentally conscious ways that reflect the spirit of *Laudato si'*. For example, Doug Thompkins, founder of The North Face, was involved in land preservation projects in Patagonia (Langman, 2012). General Motors rebounded from bankruptcy in 2009 by reducing debt, eliminating underperforming brands, and anticipating market trends (Higgins & Urstadt, 2013).

In reality, most companies react to crises rather than prepare for them, which is the case with GM and its lack of resiliency during the financial crisis of 2008–2009. Ironically, its response to that crisis produced an even worse problem in the form of a public water crisis in Flint, Michigan. Another cautionary tale is Volkswagen, which faces its greatest challenge in the catalytic converter scandal. That scandal caused the resignation of CEO Martin Winterkorn and a dramatic drop in the company's earnings. The company is now in a Sabbath phase of reassessment, rethinking, and regrouping, and the most effective solution will be found through changes to the culture and not merely in decision-making or quality-control processes.

EDUCATING FOR RESILIENCY

Pope Francis acknowledges the importance of education in the effort to reverse environmental and social deterioration (§15). Jesuit business schools have an opportunity to help in this effort by forming leaders who are present to themselves and their organizations in the ways already noted. Thus, a spirituality of resiliency need not be seen as alien to the purpose of a business school, especially if it is integrated into the curriculum as a new form of risk management. Moreover, a spirituality of resiliency has the advantage of *being over doing*; that is, it creates the condition of possibility for putting risk management principles into action, including the move toward dialogue and away from a rules-based response to risk (Kaplan, Mikes, 2012). But it is even more than that, since it leads individuals and organizations toward virtuous behavior.

Before such a change can take place, however, Jesuit business schools must confront and eventually overcome a major hurdle: the belief that they need to compete with other business schools solely in terms of conventional market categories and rankings. This is not to say that Jesuit schools should become less rigorous in their admissions or turn their back on the market. It means that they should recognize and leverage their unique advantage. That advantage is an education grounded in concern for others, *cura personalis*, which now can be expanded to include the environment—*cura terraeque personalis*. This demands more than required courses in business ethics or sustainability—a revised curriculum should focus on Pope Francis' conversion in which students discover their natural virtues and learn how to use them for the good of the self, the organization, and the planet. When these goods clash, as they often do, students will learn how to move from contemplation to prophetic action in concrete ways which can be achieved across disciplines (Avari & Brancatelli, 2014).

Overcoming this hurdle will not be easy given that there are powerful biases acting against change. No matter how one downplays the role of rankings, test scores, and job placement, Jesuit schools will continue to be externally judged in these areas. From students to parents and alumni, many believe that a school's success comes down to the number of graduates it places. This requires an understanding of the needs of employers as well as trends in the workplace. It also requires ongoing analysis of macroeconomics. Internally, most Jesuit schools are diverse, composed of faculty and students from many ethnic and religious backgrounds. Since concern for others and the environment transcends religious affiliation, a revised curriculum must be designed in such a way that conversion is seen not in a sectarian sense but a

humanistic one centered on professionalism, vocation, and a spirituality of resiliency (Haughey, 2009). It also must have practical applications in technical courses such as accounting and finance. In the end, such a change in emphasis will require a concerted effort at all levels, beginning with the board of trustees. Most importantly, it will require the will to change and the determination to treat this principle of Jesuit education as a strength rather than something to be explained away or relegated to the mission office.

One might well wonder how this transformation is to be accomplished. Can a business school change its spots? Even if key administrators and faculty were committed to change the school's focus, how do they convince skeptics? This becomes even more important when those skeptics argue that the school is already seen in an ethical light and that concern for others does not need to be emphasized any more than it already is. However, while it is true that *cura personalis* is a hallmark of Jesuit undergraduate education, there is much work to be done at the graduate level, where students understandably are interested in acquiring practical skills for the job market. But this is where teaching business as a noble vocation makes the most sense and where Jesuit schools have the greatest advantage. *Laudato si'* has established a framework for teaching business in a morally responsible way based not on the content of decisions or the decision-making process but on the person deciding. Thus, courses could be offered to help students develop a spirituality of the individual as executive and leader. Such a spirituality would include presence, resiliency, and an appreciation of the differences between managing and leading. The spirituality of the organization could also be explored, since organizations are viewed increasingly as evolving entities with personhood and identity. This certainly would mark Jesuit schools as distinctive and set them apart from competitors, many of whom offer leadership programs emphasizing conventional categories like communication and team building.

Finally, an issue in need of further research concerns the "option for the poor," which the Pope has described as an "ethical imperative" (§158).¹³ This option promotes the common good and questions the distribution of wealth (§156–158). The classic tension that it represents between the Gospel and the market touches upon basic questions of mission and identity for Jesuit universities, particularly business schools. It also presents exciting opportunities for dialogue and debate that could be integrated into a revised curriculum.

¹³The option for the poor was elaborated at the Latin American Bishops' Conference meeting in Medellín, Columbia (Latin American Bishops' Conference, 1968).

CONCLUSION

This article has examined Pope Francis' encyclical letter, *Laudato si'*, from the perspective of a spirituality of presence, which it related to resiliency. Resiliency—the ability to respond to current or emerging crises—has become an essential feature of organizations in the twenty-first century. However, resiliency is attained only after the business leader goes through a series of changes beginning with Sabbath and ending with prophetic action. But none of these changes can be programmed or controlled with any degree of certainty. In fact, dealing with uncertainty is a major characteristic of resiliency, which means that anticipating, preparing for, and responding to crises are a function of the spirituality of the leader. The focus of this article, therefore, has been on the person of the business leader and how he or she might prepare for resiliency individually and then lead an organization through a crisis. The particular crisis the article has been concerned with is environmental deterioration (§3).

What is the significance of examining the spiritual vision of *Laudato si'* and relating it to resiliency? Perhaps the best answer is to take seriously the call for a new way of thinking about the environment (§215). For a new way of thinking is required not just to meet that crisis but all crises that may develop in an organization, whether externally or internally. New problems will not be solved with the same kind of thinking that worked previously. And although risk management models may contain sophisticated approaches to uncertainty, how many deal with the greatest uncertainty of all—the human psyche? The larger philosophical questions here are obvious but may not be addressed in the rush to find practical solutions to problems, with practicality being a powerful bias in business. For instance, are certain decisions predetermined by the genetic makeup of the individual or by the cultural code of the organization? How, exactly, does a business leader exercise free will given operating constraints and the needs of stakeholders? What does a spirituality of the individual look like on a daily basis? In a different cultural context? What about organizational spirituality? Given that one can speak of organizational consciousness and subconsciousness, both of which have a direct effect on the bottom line, these questions are not purely academic.

For business to become noble and organizations to become resilient, attention must be paid to the underlying motives that drive individuals and organizations. These often involve more than money, since human beings desire meaning in their lives and organizations provide the structure within which people can find a purpose that transcends their

daily struggle for material security. The word “company” is derived from Latin (*cum pane*) and connotes breaking bread with others. Sitting down and breaking bread implies mutual trust, shared purpose, and belief in the collective effort to make life better, if not for the current generation then certainly for successive ones. This is the essence of spirituality and the basis for conversion in business especially as organizations evolve in the decades to come. Without necessarily offering specifics, *Laudato si'* provides a vision and goal for that evolution to take place.

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