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# Editorial

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Issue 64 December 2016

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*The Journal of Corporate Citizenship (JCC)* Issue 64 is a Special Issue on “The UN Global Compact and the Encyclical *Laudato Si*”, guest-edited by Oliver Williams, C.S.C., Director of the Center for Ethics and Religious Values in Business, Mendoza College of Business, University of Notre Dame. In collaboration with the United Nations Global Compact Office, the University of Notre Dame hosted a conference in April 2016—“A Global Compact for Sustainable Development: Advancing Care for Our Common Home”—to discuss the *Encyclical Laudato Si* and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In his Guest Editorial, Williams highlights the major contributions of each of the articles in this issue that arose from that conference.

*JCC* 64 is not the first issue of the journal with a UN Global Compact focus. In the Autumn of 2003, I co-edited *JCC* 11 which was a theme issue on “The United Nations Global Compact”. In our Introduction to the issue, fellow guest editors Malcolm McIntosh, Rupesh Shah and I acknowledged that the Compact was in its infancy and that the articles in *JCC* 11 were “tentative and exploratory”, as was the initiative itself at the

time. And in her Editorial, then General Editor Sandra Waddock noted that early

reactions in the public arena ... ranged from kudos for using the UN’s moral authority and convening power to push business into principled and responsible actions with respect to human rights, labour and the natural environment, to charges of corporate “bluwashing” (wrapping company actions in the blue UN flag without real substance behind them) (p. 3).

Waddock concluded then that “the truth ... probably lies somewhere in between” (p. 3).

Before looking forward, let us look back at the evolution of the Global Compact from its inception to the present day. In January 1999, the seventh UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, first invited the international business community to enter into a global compact with the UN and civil society, and “articulated a vision of a more sustainable and just world with partnership as its cornerstone” (Murphy, 2002, p. 63). But, even as the Global Compact was still emerging at the turn of the century, the idea of UN–business collaboration was

under attack. Corporate watchdogs such as the Transnational Resource & Action Center challenged the Secretary-General, participating UN agencies and their new corporate partners from the Compact's outset (Karliner, Cavanaugh and Bennis, 1999; Transnational Resource & Action Center, 2000). Global Compact critique and challenge from civil society, academia and from within the UN system itself has continued over the years (see: Richter, 2004; Knight & Smith, 2008; Utting & Zammit, 2009). Nonetheless, 16 years on, the Global Compact claims to be the world's largest corporate sustainability initiative with its website listing more than 11,000 participants, comprising approximately 9,000 business entities and 2,000 other organizations.

In recent years, the Global Compact and other corporate sustainability, corporate citizenship and corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives have continued to face scrutiny from civil society and other sectors. In the late 1990s, the primary social and environmental critics of large corporates were NGOs, trade unions and anti-globalization activist groups. With the publication of *Laudato Si* in May 2015, the Roman Catholic Church and its leaders are presenting new challenges to globalization and some of its key international players such as corporations, governments and the UN system. For example, note this 2015 critical analysis of the global economic system by Cardinal Peter Turkson of Ghana, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice & Peace and recently appointed by Pope Francis as the first prefect of the Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development: "Much of world remains in

poverty, despite abundant resources, while a privileged global elite controls the bulk of the world's wealth and consumes the bulk of its resources" (see Kirchgaessner, 2015). And this overt corporate critique from *Laudato Si* itself: "the social and environmental responsibility of businesses often gets reduced to a series of marketing and image-enhancing measures" (p. 142).

Cardinal Turkson's words and the excerpt from *Laudato Si* cited above would not have been out of place in an activist critique of global business in 1999 or more recently. Even Georg Kell (2016), the Global Compact's Founding Director, has recently voiced his concern about "tangential and ultimately unsustainable philanthropic contributions" which are characteristic of many CSR programmes. Kell's new agenda for global corporations is "to adopt a bolder, more activist approach to address the challenges to continued prosperity" founded on "corporate statesmanship, which emphasizes collective leadership and not just responsible individual participation". The current Executive Director of the Global Compact, Lise Kingo (2015), agrees with her predecessor and offers an effective bridge to the Guest Editorial and articles that follow in this Special Issue:

Whether we are talking about scaling up action on the Guiding Principles [on business and human rights] or contributing to the SDGs, we need leadership. Businesses must have top-level commitment and accountability to assess their impacts, engage in genuine dialogue with rights-holders, and to innovate their business models (p. 3).

*Laudato Si* is hopeful: "Business is a noble vocation, directed to pursuing wealth and improving our world"

(p. 129). The essays that follow offer a path to guide that hope.

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