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Integral Conversion: A Catholic Pedagogical Framework for Teaching Environmental Sustainability and Ecological Citizenship from Japan

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Abstract

As Vatican efforts expand to move awareness of environmental sustainability from the peripheries to the center of public consciousness, Catholic schools face the challenge of instilling in the next generation of graduates a distinctly Catholic sense of ecological citizenship. To this end, Catholic educators are faced with the challenge of presenting complex environmental problems in a manner that honors both the data of science and the transcendental worldview the Church proclaims. This paper offers a framework for examining environmental sustainability issues in the classroom from the perspective of Catholic social teaching. The author's professional context of teaching Catholic social ethics and Christian humanism at a major Catholic Jesuit university in Japan revealed the need for and inspired the creation of the following pedagogical framework in an effort to help students see the bigger picture of environmental sustainability as understood by Pope Francis, his predecessors, and the entire Catholic Church. The framework may also be a help within contexts of high familiarity with the Catholic faith since it provides a birds-eye view, so to speak, of the various inputs consequential to thinking about ecological issues as a Catholic.

Introduction

The ability of religious faith communities to shape values and behavior speaks to their potential role in framing change on a global scale.¹ Of growing importance in this regard is the work being done by the Catholic Church in addressing environmental degradation. In 2020, the *Centesimus Annus pro Pontifice Foundation* and the *Strategic Alliance of Catholic Universities* (SACRU) entered into a strategic partnership for research in ecology and human development with the aim of advancing interdisciplinary collaboration.² More recently, the *Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development* launched the *Laudato Si' Action Platform* for institutions and communities to further the work of environmental education and sustainability.³ The primary objective of these efforts is to contribute to a new socio-economic model informed by Catholic social teaching.⁴ To this end, Catholic education, especially universities, are called upon to play an active part in innovating for a more humane lifestyle that respects the symbiotic composition of life.⁵ Concerned for the sacredness of community and the dignity of persons, the Church insists that the ecological crisis is a moral issue connected both to

social justice and integral human development.⁶ Catholic environmentalism based on Catholic social teaching therefore is not just local socially, but ecologically as well.⁷ It attends to people and the environment in the rich web of family and community relations, speaking of subsidiarity as a principle for empowering individuals collectively to solve problems from the ground up. By emphasizing the relational dimensions of personhood, the Catholic Church, while not overlooking the need for top-down political action and governance, has continued to insist upon conversion and a commitment to solidarity consistent with its deepest faith convictions concerning the origin and destiny of the human race.⁸ Moreover, an extension of a Catholic understanding of rights to include "earth rights" can enrich the Church's conception of justice.⁹ A complete understanding of rights together with the traditional categories of conversion and solidarity in Catholic spirituality however must match the current reality insofar as the scientific data available points beyond personal lifestyle choices to a moral obligation for organized nonviolent action in response to environmental emergencies.¹⁰ To teach environmental sustainability from a Catholic perspective is to

make clear that change is only possible when personal lifestyle choices that bolster indifference to all forms of suffering and the urgent need for robust, broad-based participation in civil campaigns to address immanent environmental threats, such as climate change, are confronted. The mark is an individualism that twists a proper conception of being human and the direction of life energy into a caricature driven by consumption, unprincipled and lacking in the trust, cooperation, and restraint needed for the flourishing of life.¹¹

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to outline a pedagogical framework for teaching topics in environmental sustainability from the perspective of Catholic identity and Catholic social ethics. Given the lack of frameworks in this regard, the author's hope is that his proposal will inspire further developments that correct imbalances in teaching at Catholic schools and institutions of learning which rely on secular frames that may recognize the need for religion and spirituality to play a role in ecological conversion but are neither Catholic nor holistic in outline.¹² Positive outcomes may be expected for environmental sustainability by improving educational forms.¹³ For inspiring ecological citizenship, the author's belief is that an entire edifice of Catholic thinking should be sketched for students so that they can grapple with environmental and sustainability issues from a perspective that both comes from and can inspire faith. This is particularly important in a student context of low familiarity with not just Catholic beliefs, but more generally with a monotheistic transcendental perspective of life. The author's professional context of teaching Catholic social ethics and Christian humanism at a major Catholic Jesuit university in Japan revealed the need for and inspired the creation of the following pedagogical framework in an effort to help students see the bigger picture of environmental sustainability as understood by Pope Francis, his predecessors, and the entire Catholic Church. The framework may also be a help within contexts of high familiarity with the Catholic faith since it provides a birds-eye view, so to speak, of the various inputs consequential to thinking about ecological issues as a Catholic. Lastly, what follows is intended neither to be

exhaustive nor unduly exacting in thought given limitations in space, but rather inspirational for educators towards applying its concepts in ways deemed useful since every learning context, like every student, is unique.

Environmental sustainability and Catholic social teaching

Sustainability is a word that has been flexibly appropriated over the past half-century.¹⁴ Whether a new worldview descriptive of Fr. Thomas Berry's "great work" to refashion civilization and its values or part of the triple bottom-line of a capitalist vision for corporate social responsibility, sustainability can be written as large or small as personal ambition and special interests require.¹⁵ Currently, sustainability has become an essential objective in the "great reset" and post-pandemic plan to "build back better" advanced by many Western governments, media elites, and the World Economic Forum.¹⁶ Unsurprisingly, we find sustainability to blend with any number of enterprises and disciplines since as both an analytical and normative concept it can express the desire to integrate conservation into economic and social systems.¹⁷ As a way of both making sense of the world and an outlook for devising goals, sustainability, according to the United Nations, is concerned with improving quality of life without harming future generations.¹⁸

When covering environmental sustainability from a Catholic perspective, human activity contributing to issues ranging from climate change and ocean acidification to food toxicity and animal welfare that threaten the common good need to be linked to the role of the individual in making a commitment to a self-aware, responsible lifestyle as well as nonviolent civil action for structural change; a connection that often means "seeing rightly," a painful confrontation with personal complicity in aligning to social norms and political concessions that are the cause of immense suffering around the world.¹⁹ Only through a personalist approach to protecting the physical basis of life by facing up to one's own moral and spiritual development can a larger movement for ecological governance at both a local and a global level emerge, policy work upon which many of the environmental threats given their scale now depend. Pope Francis has underscored the

importance of environmental education that would “instill good habits” for ecological citizenship.²⁰ He has repeatedly contrasted a “throwaway culture” with a “culture of encounter and ecological conversion” that would protect people and nature as a “new work of mercy,”²¹ educating for a “culture of care as a path to peace.”²² Celebrating the fifth anniversary of *Laudato Si'*, he writes,

the principle of an ethics of care entails radically reversing the prevailing technical model that identifies training with education and views the process of education merely as the acquisition of conceptual and procedural knowledge, under the assumption that scientific expertise alone is sufficient for proper action.²³

Francis' immediate predecessor, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, emphatically spoke of education that leads to “far-reaching decisions” about changes in life-styles since environmental protection, human development, and global security are necessarily linked.²⁴ Saint Pope John Paul II, throughout a pontificate lasting nearly three decades, spoke of human responsibility and care of the environment as a duty toward the Creator for the preservation of the world.²⁵ Further, his Apostolic Constitution on Catholic universities, *Ex Corde Ecclesiae*, makes clear that protection of nature is part of an urgent call of responsibility for Catholic higher education in service of international peace and political stability.²⁶ Lastly, released just prior to the pontiff's death, “Chapter Ten: Safeguarding the Environment” of the *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* states that humanity is faced with a challenge of caring for the environment as a duty to uphold the common good and universal order established by God.²⁷ Environmental sustainability therefore has increasingly become recognized as one of the clarion calls for Catholics in the twenty-first century. In fact, the Catholic Church since the Second Vatican Council has slowly yet systematically grown its teaching on the relationship between nature, culture, and persons based on Biblical concepts such as stewardship and justice.²⁸ A full appreciation of the meaning of said concepts should include both personal and organized collective engagement for social

transformation informed by a Christian ethic of nonviolent solidarity for the common good as demonstrated by Saint Pope John Paul II's heroic fight against communism in Eastern Europe.²⁹ Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan in *Why Civil Resistance Works* point to the success of such nonviolent action in creating “much more durable and internally peaceful democracies.”³⁰ We may infer in this regard from the “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World,” *Gaudium et Spes*, that every nation and citizen is called upon to advance the protective charge laid upon humanity for the health of the planet given the growing interdependence of humanity chiefly through technological advancement as the proper response to “the signs of the times.”³¹

Catholic higher education in Japan

Since this paper comes from the author's experience teaching in Catholic Jesuit higher education in Japan, a brief word about context is in order. This paper presents a framework for teaching environmental sustainability from a Catholic faith perspective in Japan given the influential presence of Catholic secondary and post-secondary education in the country, and the economic and technological prowess of the Japanese nation for the future of world affairs. It accounts for an understanding of nature and humans within the spiritual tradition of Catholic Christianity which from Saint Francis Xavier to Pope Francis continues to be an important voice in Japanese society.³² Such a framework provides what this author calls “the necessary terms of reference” needed for classroom instruction in Japan where Catholic concepts, such as a transcendental understanding of human destiny, the dignity of all persons, and the idea of the common good are frequently unknown. With eighteen colleges and universities alongside 114 high schools, Catholic education in Japan is widely esteemed for its quality and contribution to Japanese society.³³ The selection of materials has been strategic in building an argument for engagement based upon Catholic convictions regarding the nature and destiny of persons and the need for conversion understood as responsible growth in self-determined being expressed in a functional struggle for change on personal and political levels. Although Catholic and even

Christian students are a minority in Japan, Catholic colleges and universities nevertheless have an obligation to fulfil their institutional mission by teaching, at least within areas of ethical formation, from the perspective of Catholic faith and morals.

The work of Catholic moral theologian Charles E. Curran has been adopted and expanded upon in order to highlight the essential elements of a Catholic faith perspective, the personalist and interdependent makeup of human consciousness, and the incumbent duties placed upon individuals for acting in the interest of environmental justice. In addition, the sources of knowledge are outlined so as to make clear what is considered when thinking environmentally from a Catholic faith perspective. Lastly, important principles for acting conscientiously in an ecological manner have been taken from the social teachings of the Church, along with concomitant virtues which strongly dovetail with norms deeply embedded in Japanese culture. Social ethics is admittedly a complex subject for students, especially within the context of religious thought. With a basic framework however environmental issues may be presented from a perspective that honors the spiritual reality in which they are rooted.³⁴

CST Sustainability Framework

Framing is an essential part of decision-making since our approach to information is fundamental to the “sensemaking” we enact in trying to understand the complexity of the world.³⁵ Whether in our personal or professional lives, arranging and interpreting information (sensemaking) so as to make causal and evaluative judgements is part and parcel of exercising our power as individuals enmeshed in patterns of responsibility in a world of social agents.³⁶ A framework therefore is a tool for evaluating and making reasoned judgements about possible courses of action within power-limits experienced vis-à-vis other agents, access to social and economic institutions, personal values and norms, and physical embodiment. In this way, a framework can function as an aid for reasoning and acting morally within the experience of human boundedness. A framework however can

also help in attending to vital aspects of reality by managing what gets accounted through perception. The right framework therefore should lend assistance in paying attention to and watching out for issues and information relevant to making good decisions. The proposal below is designed with both these functions in mind. It is crafted to be a resource for intellectually conceptualizing environmental problems from a Catholic perspective as well as an aid for calling to mind features of our world and lives that if ignored would jeopardize personal growth, social prosperity, and the health of the planet.

The foundation or heart of this framework is a personalist philosophy for envisioning the moral life within the Catholic tradition of theological ethics applied to issues of environmental sustainability and building sustainable societies: that is, forming ecological consciousness, a sustainability lifestyle, and organized nonviolent resistance in line with Catholic convictions about the value and purpose of human life and creation. Catholic social teaching refers to this as “Integral Ecology.”³⁷ The framework also outlines the horizon or stance which acts as the first step in reasoning from a Catholic perspective, the basic sources for doing Catholic ethics, a relational understanding of theological anthropology, and the major principles of Catholic social teaching important to the formation of an informed conscience and spiritual growth. Finally, the material presented is organized under five “terms of reference” that are intended to categorize and thereby simplify the framework for student acquisition: “Confessing,” “Engaging,” “Receiving,” “Giving,” and “Building.” Students can imagine the first four words as comprising the molding of the frame, while the final word signals a picture of sustainability to be creatively and intelligently constructed through the pastoral method of “See-Judge-Act.” Through personal commitment to sensemaking, both a lifestyle and a path to civil engagement can be forged that reflects moral conversion as a deepening fidelity to patterns of behavior that enhance transcendental authenticity. In other words, establishing a life-long process of growth in choosing, in the words of Bernard Lonergan, S.J., value (long-term codes of behavior) against satisfaction (short-term

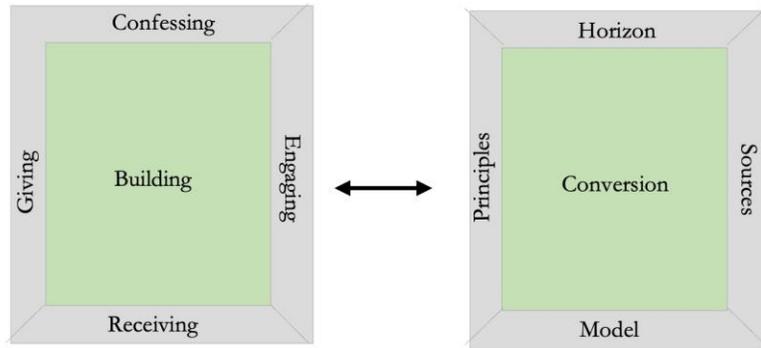


Figure 1: CST Sustainability Framework

gratifications), so as to live integrally in an ecological way.³⁸

Horizon

“Confessing” the horizon is the first piece of molding in the CST Sustainability Framework (Figure 1) for environmental education and represents the supernatural trajectory of a Catholic worldview. The horizon or stance is a critical piece in Catholic ethics since the mysteries of the Catholic faith constitute the position from which reality is given meaning and moral discourse is made. Even within secular disciplines however the question of horizon is worth addressing so as to provide a sense of ultimate purpose for scientific research.³⁹ Following moral theologian Charles Curran, a horizon involving the five-fold Christian mysteries of creation, sin, incarnation, redemption, and resurrection-destiny is broad enough to include an entire faith perspective on reality while being formal enough to ground reflection in orthodox religious doctrine since these five categories of belief are fundamental to the Catholic worldview.⁴⁰ A Catholic educator using this framework therefore should have an accurate grasp of these five categories of belief and their importance for the faith tradition of Catholicism as detailed in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* so as to present them intelligibly and sensitively within a diverse, pluralistic classroom setting. Irrespective of their acceptance by students, a truly Catholic approach to environmental sustainability cannot skirt convictions which should have a profound influence on the way in which Catholics see the world and live their lives. Catholicism is an eschatological religion of tension between the present moment pregnant with the call to faith and responsibility before God, and the

hope in a fulfillment of divine love and justice at the end of time. Those who profess the faith as encapsulated in the credal statements of the Church hold to these five mysteries as the horizon of belief in Jesus Christ and therefore are guided by the normative power they possess for appraising value and forming commitments that demonstrate growth in both virtue and holiness. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to articulate the ways in which these mysteries can inform moral reflection on environmental issues, they nonetheless demarcate a boundary for what is truly Catholic once their theological meaning is unpacked and properly used in the construction of moral claims.

Sources

Four sources are drawn upon in the discipline of Catholic ethics, which mutually relate and apprise one another in the act of critical analysis: sacred scripture, Church tradition, reason, and contemporary experience. These comprise the “quadrilateral” of authority necessary for holistic Christian teaching and learning.⁴¹ A rough sketch of these four sources will be given below from a Catholic perspective since “Engaging” constructs the second side of the frame.

Sacred scripture

While sacred scripture refers to the Bible as the principle source for revealed knowledge of God and God’s purposes for human beings, Christians disagree on the weight of contribution the texts of the Bible should have in formulating answers to ethical questions. Some churches and theologians typically place great emphasis on a literal reading of the inspired texts, while other denominations,

such as the Roman Catholic Church, take a more mediated approach to their use.⁴² The literary complexity of the Bible, including the construction of the canon itself, does not lend itself in many cases to simple consensus or blanketed agreements among believers as history has shown. A fruitful inquiry into sacred scripture as a source for moral guidance will therefore consider a number of different factors in constructing a hermeneutical approach that is in line with broader religious convictions and accepted facts within any ecclesiastical community. From a Catholic perspective, the use of sacred scripture as a source for environmental ethics will in the very least stress content that reflects human stewardship, a sense of reverence for creation, and a sacramental understanding of the earth as a sign of God's presence, power, and love as taught in the *Catechism* as well as other key pastoral documents aimed at educating the laity, such as those comprising the social teachings of the Church.

Church tradition

While Church tradition refers to the collection of beliefs and practices formative of ecclesial identity and behavior, Catholics understand tradition generally as a sacred reality handed down and enunciated through the Church's Magisterium, its official teaching office exercising authority under the Pope and bishops. In this way, the Catholic Church recognizes a second source of revealed truth correlated to sacred scripture upon which it relies for wisdom and knowledge in its teaching, making up a single deposit of the word of God normative for faith and morals.⁴³ Tradition in Catholic moral theology therefore is a living stream of information and inspiration that is ongoing in the life of the Church as it seeks to meet new issues arising within each generation. Considering environmental sustainability, Church tradition as a source for moral reflection will mean attending to those documents and statements offered by the Church in its official teaching capacity in addition to sacred scripture that spotlight environmental concerns in connection to personal lifestyle choices, the application of technology, and global development, to name a few. In the past several decades through the writings and speeches of Saint Pope John Paul II, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, and Pope Francis,

several important advances have been made in Catholic social teaching that articulate a burgeoning position on environmental concerns culminating in Pope Francis' aforementioned encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, and more recently in the 2019 synodal text, *Amazonia: New Paths for the Church and for an Integral Ecology*, and the post-synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Querida Amazonia*. Approaching the topic of environmental sustainability from the perspective of Catholic faith will mean incorporating thematic elements of these materials into the curriculum to guide reflection.

Reason

Reason employed in the analysis of complex problems can make use of both inductive and deductive approaches to problem solving. The Catholic Church historically has favored mainly a deductive approach called natural law reasoning, which implies that God's purposes for creation can be drawn from the structure and configuration of reality open to human intelligence.⁴⁴ Catholic theology has always insisted on the ability of reason to make valid judgements for guiding behavior based upon the purposes of God discerned in the natural world. Reason however as a source for moral reflection also involves drawing upon secular disciplines of learning not based in or dependent on divine revelation as material to consider in developing moral instruction. The scientific study of environmental systems and the biosphere therefore is an additional path of exploration in discovering God's will for human life when aided by sacred scripture and Church tradition as directed by the Magisterium. The Catholic Church sees faith and reason as engaged in a non-contradictory partnership working for the elucidation of God's will for human life. Material supplied by secular disciplines, like their divine counterpart, require careful interpretation and discretion in determining usefulness for moral reasoning in no small part because human knowledge always remains partial and incomplete, mostly locked into pragmatic application.⁴⁵ In addition, the ultimate purposes of God concerning human destiny are disclosed by revelation alone. For environmental sustainability in the classroom, where students are encouraged to follow broadly in their considerations the positions laid down by the Church, specialized

knowledge from scientific and sociological disciplines should be met with a spirit of prudent restraint, for example, in hypothesizing solutions involving the application of technology or non-democratic governance controls that may violate the dignity of persons. As John Wargo, professor of environmental policy, risk analysis, and political science at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, notes,

knowledge of the risks associated with technologies and products normally lags far behind recognition of their benefits ... there has been little incentive to speed up the discovery of risks so that policy makers and consumers can weigh the costs and benefits before using a product or technology.⁴⁶

Contemporary experience

Over the past half century, an inductive approach to ethical issues is being increasingly recognized by the Catholic Church as contemporary experience is gaining acceptance as an important component of sensemaking in moral reflection.⁴⁷ The use of experience however requires an informed and critical process of discernment in order to relate practical knowledge and intuition to the normative teachings of the Church. The rise of inductive methodology, whether by the theologian or lay person, signals a greater recognition and understanding of historicity, that is an awareness of the complexity of life as it is lived by persons enmeshed in a material world of contingency and limitation as well as the potential validity of information and learning acquired by persons on the subjective plane of existence (interiority). The recognition of the importance of experience in moral reasoning however is not an endorsement of relativism or ambiguity by the Catholic Church.⁴⁸ The Church continues to insist on the objectivity of truth, while acknowledging a “law of gradualness” in pastoral ministry.⁴⁹ Psycho-moral development varies in persons limiting the ability to recognize or accept truth and progress towards virtue. Weaknesses imposed on human nature by finitude and sin necessitate proper formation of conscience through both sound instruction and a humility that consents to and is attentive of the role the Magisterium performs in the service of faith. Concerns for the natural environment can be elicited through a general awareness of the

decline in living conditions around the planet that are part of contemporary experience. Everything from air pollution and extreme weather events to the toxicity of food and drinking water is becoming increasingly apparent as information is disseminated across societies and met by the heightened alertness of concerned citizens.

Model

The next piece of molding is “Receiving” the model. This boundary has to do with laying out a general formulation of Catholic anthropology which is interdependent and relational, temporal yet transcendent, and operative on both the objective and subject poles of human existence.⁵⁰ The label “Receiving” points to the necessary reception of this description of human ontology as a mode for conceptualizing the dignity of personhood and modeling Catholic ethics. Although “Receiving” is but a single side of the frame, its purpose is to supply the approach by which an account can be given of the moral life from a Catholic perspective. Historically, Catholic theology has appropriated different models in its social and moral teachings.⁵¹ The adoption of a single model by no means eliminates the advantage or even need for other models given the complexity of human relations when doing ethical analysis. Deciding on a single model however as a component of a framework for teaching environmental sustainability lends the advantage of clarity since it can be used consistently across related topics. In keeping with a style of reflection more accessible to students today, an inductive approach that highlights the dynamics of interpersonal and interspecies relations should work best. The relationality-responsibility model supplies a proper Catholic anthropology, an explicit recognition of historical consciousness, and adequate support for the great diversity and complexity of a globalized, shrinking world, while also stressing human connectivity and free agency in formulating positive action.

Curran’s model asserts the Catholic belief that persons exist within and are defined by a mode of relational consciousness established by the presence of God, neighbor, self, and the societal and natural environment of the world (Figure 2). In addition, persons also live in the context of history, a personalized experiencing of time (past

and future) that imparts additional boundedness to the individual subject. Finally, the possession of agency, that is the power to act and produce effects in a world of contingency, raises the matter of responsibility, especially since power is amplified through myriad forms of human organization, that is, collective action.⁵² Accordingly, Curran’s model attempts to explain what relating responsibly to God, neighbor, self, and world might look like in a human life. It will involve all of the following steps:

- 1) Initiating action as well as reacting to the actions of others toward us in accordance with an interpretation of what is going on;
- 2) With a willingness to be accountable by taking responsibility for actions and interpretations in their intended and unintended effects;
- 3) While being committed to solidarity, which is the Catholic virtue of social charity that works for a just distribution of both material and spiritual goods among all people.⁵³

When a person is attentive and responsive to action, situation, and context in solidarity with others that person is attempting to be present in such a way that their full being is engaged, actualized by their power of free agency directed towards the common good. Conversely, when these three steps are not translated into a pattern of living, a decline in moral consciousness is experienced which manifests as a breakdown in healthy relationality; that is, a relatedness that fosters spiritual growth.

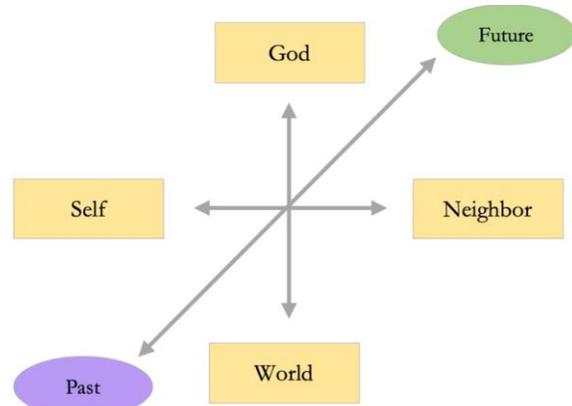


Figure 2: Relational Dimensions of Personhood

The key for presenting the model to students is to make clear that the form of agency (i.e. free action) being discussed necessitates a disposition of awareness, readiness, accountability, and commitment by the individual towards both the subjective and objective dimensions of existence. The model therefore seeks to capture something of the dynamic quality of persons as agents seeking to use power responsibly within the time and place of history in which they exist.⁵⁴ In doing so, locating and choosing the good in a world of interdependent relationality where outcomes are uncertain is a struggle to “see, judge, and act” responsibly before God, neighbor, self, and world thereby closing the contradiction between the call to holiness and divine destiny on the one hand and the historical influences which drag people down on the other.⁵⁵ The struggle however when tackled with an attitude of humility elicits self-discovery since disclosure and growth require uncovering and moving past biases and toxic relationality as well as a continual development in knowledge.⁵⁶ By focusing on agency-in-relation, the model also brings out the need for moral conversion of individuals in their basic orientation and fundamental commitments, according to Curran.⁵⁷ Vertical or transcendental freedom is exercised in and through categorical choices faced alongside others, in historical time. When measured by virtuous standards of behavior, such as modeled by the lives of the Church’s saints, action releases a person from a purely self-centered existence thereby raising the integrity of life before God.⁵⁸ The issue then is self-possession through self-determination; a hero’s journey with the imperative to “*Become* fully what you already

are, in the deepest, most authentic longing of your nature.”⁵⁹

Principles

Practicing virtues and choosing values as standards of conduct over short-term satisfactions is a life-long process of moral conversion guided by sound principles. Individuals are at their best when their power of agency is allowed to be formed and directed by criteria that move behavior towards outcomes that support mental and spiritual growth. Since many basic moral concepts are also shared across cultures, some principles esteemed by the Catholic Church can find acceptance by those adhering to other enduring religious or philosophical systems.⁶⁰ The five major principles of Catholic social teaching—human dignity, solidarity, the common good, subsidiarity, and justice—together provide a basis for transformational practices and habits (i.e. virtues) that structure and deepen the relational dimension of life as well as being identifying markers for the experience of moral conversion and group belonging.⁶¹ “Giving” principles therefore is the final side of the frame through which reflection is made on environmental problems because personal commitment through emotional engagement to a sustainability lifestyle is necessary for achieving sustainable societies.⁶² In learning about environmental sustainability from a Catholic perspective therefore, recourse to CST principles serves the purpose of building bridges between moral theology and other disciplines by reflecting on the value and meaning of human ingenuity and ambition as well as the proper utilization of knowledge vis-à-vis Christian virtues.⁶³ As traditional standards of habit formation that focus on the evolution of the individual in relation to God, neighbor, self, and world, in time, CST principles emphasize growth in personal character. The material self-expressionism and hyper-consumerism of modern culture, eclipsing the pursuit of transcendental values, can only be restrained by a reversal in sensemaking. The framework of consequentialist utilitarianism and instrumental efficiency that currently guides much decision-making today is incapable of producing outcomes that are healthy for individuals or the planet in the long-term.⁶⁴

Additionally, although the classic list of theological (charity, faith, hope) and cardinal (prudence, justice, fortitude, tolerance) virtues aids catechetical instruction in Catholic morality, there are many more attitudes and dispositions that “dispose all the powers of the human being for communion with divine love” which can be deduced from CST principles.⁶⁵ Since the author’s teaching context is in Japan, in addition to a basic understanding of the wisdom of the aforementioned principles, the following five virtues of “harmony,” “moderation,” “respect,” “simplicity,” and “cooperation,” gleaned from the aforementioned five CST principles and read in light of the sixth chapter *Laudato Si’* on “Ecological Education and Spirituality,” are introduced as habits supportive of environmental sustainability that are also deeply rooted in Japanese culture. Each virtue is descriptive of behavior conducive to environmentally conscious living when sensemaking is supported by the other three sides of the frame. They are a set of standards of care and attention that can urgently remind students to be present to reality in such a way that illusion is counteracted and “structures of value” are built up incrementally over time.⁶⁶ Principles, together with Horizon, Sources, and Model, completes the Framework Components (Figure 3, below) of the CST Sustainability Framework (Figure 1, above).

Building

Integral ecology is Pope Francis’ more inclusive understanding of the theme of human development promulgated by his predecessors, especially Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI.⁶⁷ Recognizing the profound interdependency of humans with their natural environment, Francis wishes to encourage “new convictions, attitudes, and forms of life” that reflect a resolve to live sustainably upon the earth as humanity’s common home.⁶⁸ “Building” therefore is the final goal in sensemaking since, as mentioned above, the purpose of a framework is ultimately to aid decision-making at both the private and civic levels of an individual’s life. “Integral Ecology” is a process of authentic human development that “includes efforts to bring about an integral improvement in the quality of human life.”⁶⁹ An important consideration in this regard is the Pope’s preference for the inductive methodology

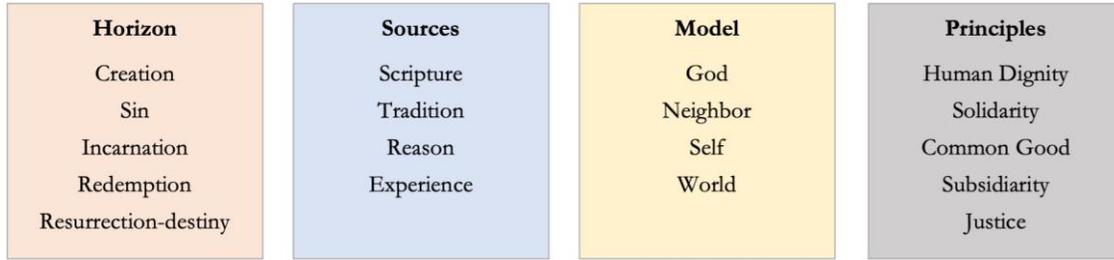


Figure 3: Framework Components

“See-Judge-Act” first developed by Cardinal Joseph Cardijn (1882 – 1967) for his Catholic Action groups, later adopted and expanded upon by many Catholic ecclesial communities and liberation theologians of Latin America.⁷⁰ A personal style of the “See-Judge-Act” method used by Francis prioritizes employing the best scientific resources to study problems in context (seeing) before moving to formulate through dialogue responses (actions) considered to be in accord with the spiritual and moral convictions of the Catholic faith (judgements). In this way, a consideration of secular sources and contemporary experience is the first step in developing an understanding of the available data prior to considering knowledge from sacred scripture and Church tradition for making moral judgements and devising courses of action. Within the conceptual framework outlined in this paper however the “See-Judge-Act” methodology, occupying the center of the frame, takes on greater pedagogical depth and breadth. “Seeing,” as an initial movement towards “Building,” becomes a multi-faceted process of gaining intellectual awareness whereby a spiritual worldview, all sources of human knowing within Catholicism, a relational understanding of personhood, and normative principles are brought together and accounted for in studying the best social and scientific data of each environmental issue. The next step, “judging,” is a deliberate process of discernment in which what is and is not only individually possible, but ultimately worthwhile in terms of outcomes, temporal and

eternal, is dynamically thought through. Judging is what might be called, “second-level thinking,” to borrow a phrase from financial investor Howard Marks.⁷¹ The purpose is to creatively come up with strategic “action” that makes a meaningful effort to live responsibly before God, neighbor, self, and world in building an environmentally intelligent society based on the urgency reflected in current scientific data. Accordingly, what might be implicit within Pope Francis’ approach at the second stage of judgement, since it is there that recourse is made to the sources of Catholic moral theology, is rendered explicit by the framework for learning about sustainability in the classroom. For teaching, the advantage of the framework is not only that the entire scope for thinking ethically from a Catholic perspective about integral ecology is clearly laid out, but also that select indicators or principles from the Catholic moral tradition are given for what sustainability on the personal and social levels of being should involve. According to Cardinal Walter Kasper, many people today possess a “virtually pathological delusion” of their own innocence when considering social problems.⁷² By rendering explicit the components of Catholic morality (Figure 3) and their convergence in the process of “Building” (Figure 4, below), a landscape is created conceptually within which environmental problems can be personally explored and positive student sentiments changed into constructive social and political action for what Pope Francis calls, “true integral conversion.”⁷³

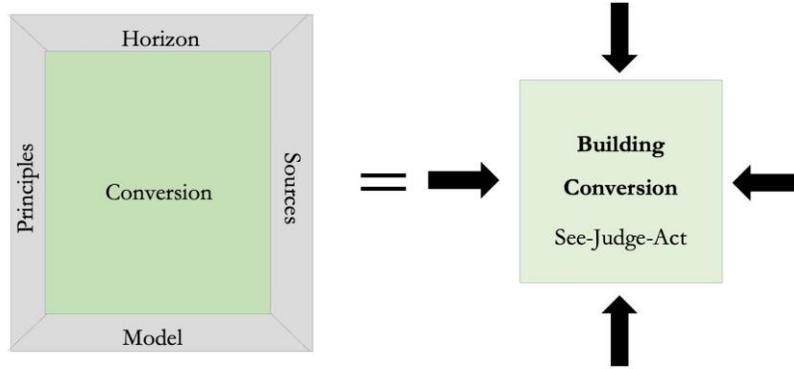


Figure 4. Integral Sensemaking

“Confessing” a *horizon* of ultimate meaning, “Engaging” all *sources* of human knowing from a Catholic faith perspective, “Receiving” a *model* for being human, and “Giving” to the world *principles* through our conduct in the world that support healthy growth, every environmental problem can be explored from a unifying relational angle that is distinctly Catholic whereby taking responsibility for complex global challenges becomes a real, personal choice in favor of civic engagement (Figure 5). Generational justice, the requirement of dealing responsibly with natural and social resources for the future of humanity, requires the complementary principles of subsidiarity and solidarity, which in Catholic social teaching promote both self-help and human interdependency.⁷⁴ The “constructive disposition” favored by Pope Francis for the Church in dealing with difficult pastoral matters is equally appropriate for ecological education where “what is lacking in a situation” for students in terms of the power to change the world will be all too clearly felt.⁷⁵ Focusing on identifying and making lifestyle changes towards greater ecological conversion while studying environmental issues is ultimately an act of leadership whereby a legacy is envisioned that springs from personal beliefs and actions.⁷⁶ When complimented by a proper understanding of the politics of nonviolent action, creative civil resistance campaigns can elicit from others the noncompliance required for successful change.⁷⁷ The environmental crisis is ultimately an anthropological crisis in the eyes of the Catholic Church, one in which persons endowed with unconditional dignity are being turned into instruments of consumption to fuel an economy of exclusion and violence.⁷⁸

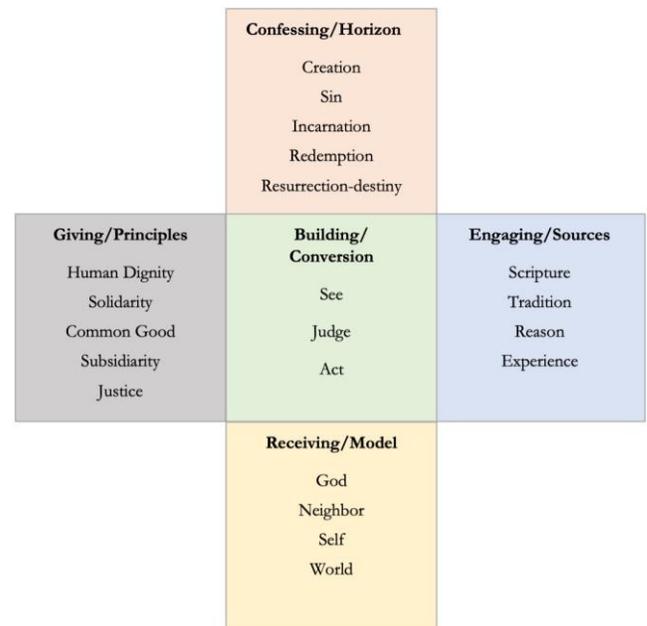


Figure 5: The Dimensional Unity and Convergence of the Frame in the “See-Judge-Act” Process

Integral Conversion in Japan

According to Thomas Massaro, S.J., Pope Francis “is calling for a comprehensive reconsideration of humanity’s place in the universe,” one which avoids an “exaggerated anthropocentrism”⁷⁹ that would prevent constructive engagement with environmental problems. “If social change is to come,” writes Massaro, “the kind of change that will empower people around the world to address the threat of environmental degradation, a set of renewed cultural values will lead the way.”⁸⁰ Indeed, since his election to the papacy in 2013,

the Pope has continued to push for a type of global moral and spiritual conversion to standards that would lift humanity above the self-centeredness that is destroying the planet. The “culture of care” of which he speaks is both a lifestyle of fraternal communion with others and nature, and an active commitment to political change that honors the Creator and humbly accepts the interdependency and shared responsibility which is the foundation of social life.⁸¹ In his most recent encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, the Pope both restates and further develops his convictions of the communal structure of human existence and the accompanying duties it entails, such as building up others and organizing participatory action for the common good. He writes,

Nor can we fail to mention that seeking and pursuing the good of others and of the entire human family also implies helping individuals and societies to mature in the moral values that foster integral human development.⁸²

An integral ecology necessitates an integral conversion in human development, a step-by-step transformation in toxic attitudes and behaviors at all levels of relationality. The most formidable enemy in this regard is the wasteful and compulsive consumerism of a “technocratic paradigm” that has spread throughout the world; a pattern of living “which sees everything as irrelevant unless it serves one’s own immediate interests.”⁸³ Teaching sustainability from a Catholic perspective therefore necessitates helping students to see environmental problems from a personal angle thereby drawing the connections between conservation and individual lifestyle choices, which, although seemingly insignificant, in aggregate amount to either the disfigurement or protection of the earth.

The enlightenment philosopher John Locke (1632–1704) argued in his *Two Treatises of Government* that the right to self-preservation is a duty imposed upon the individual by divine decree. From this conviction emerged not only a modern conception of the self but a vision of political order and personal liberty whereby the acquisition of private property is a process fundamental to being human.⁸⁴ Dominion over

the material world granted by God through the duty to preserve oneself is logically extended however to include the obligation of each individual to preserve all of humankind through both proper government as well as personal freedom.⁸⁵ Property, that is, possessions, and their procurement and use, therefore, ultimately should aim at charity since harming others is antithetical to the equality of persons established by the Creator. The use or misuse of the world’s resources hinges upon recognizing both the Golden Rule, to “love your neighbor as yourself,” as well as the sovereign proprietorship of God, who grants secondary ownership of the gifts of the earth to individuals through their industry for the common good.

Further back in the Western intellectual tradition, Saint Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) held in the *Summa Theologiae* that possessions as private ownership is a positive right devised by reason building on natural law.⁸⁶ The procurement and administration of personal property is a necessary act of human organization without which any semblance of peace would be elusive. The usage of “external things” however contains the provision that the goods of this world ought to be possessed in such a way that a person can “communicate them to others in their need.”⁸⁷ Beyond sufficiency for self and those under protective care, to deprive others through cupidity is vice opposed to charity and therefore condemned as sin.⁸⁸ The right to private ownership, fundamental to the autonomy and development of the human person, as in Locke, is not absolute, but rather subordinate to fulfilling the demands of justice in good stewardship of divine providence.⁸⁹ The original source of the world is God who has given dominion to humankind for the sustenance and enjoyment of all.

Both Locke and Aquinas, representative of main currents in Protestant and Catholic Christianity respectively, in their own way stand as two influential giants of the political heritage of liberal democracy and individual rights which despite current pressures hold sway in capitalist economies around the world. Indeed, for these men, as well as for many others who stood in their light, an “integral” understanding of existence that emphasizes relationality and responsibility towards

others, God, and the natural environment is the foundation upon which social order and individual liberty is both built and maintained. Pope Francis, wishing to remind the world of this heritage, states at length,

For my part, I would observe that “the Christian tradition has never recognized the right to private property as absolute or inviolable, and has stressed the social purpose of all forms of private property.” The principle of the common use of created goods is the “first principle of the whole ethical and social order”; it is a natural and inherent right that takes priority over others. All other rights having to do with the goods necessary for the integral fulfilment of persons, including that of private property or any other type of property, should—in the words of Saint Paul VI—“in no way hinder [this right], but should actively facilitate its implementation.” The right to private property can only be considered a secondary natural right, derived from the principle of the universal destination of created goods. This has concrete consequences that ought to be reflected in the workings of society. Yet it often happens that secondary rights displace primary and overriding rights, in practice making them irrelevant.⁹⁰

From a Japanese perspective, the diversity of religious traditions and forms within the country has meant in many ways less clearly defined beliefs and creeds.⁹¹ The three ancient traditions of Shintoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism however all stress order and social harmony as the outcome of integral living. The intelligentsia who became the architects of modern Japan, too, emphasized true understanding to be an act of personal engagement with reality that is practical, rather than theoretical, and therefore transformative for society.⁹² Ethical decision making in Japan involves more often than not discovering what people share and considering the inter-relationship existing between individuals so as to choose a course of action that will maintain the balance and integrity of the original connections established by nature.⁹³ Persons exist within the “midst of the interpersonal” which, from birth to death in

Japan, is an ongoing process of being human.⁹⁴ A main current in Japanese thought, both classical and modern, is a recognition of an original order or patterning of relationality and interdependency in creation, and that morality involves identifying and living within that order or those patterns for the common good. Community, at all levels, from the family to the nation, is the locus of value in Japan, since as a collective it is both a natural entity and stands in continual need of divine blessing and individual sacrifice for its protection and prosperity.⁹⁵

Although Western consumerist culture has in part made inroads into Japan, the discord that might accompany a rise in economic competition has been largely mitigated by the valuing of unity, modesty, and tolerance embedded in a Japanese way of life, which can be traced hundreds of years back in the nation’s history.⁹⁶ The twisted image of liberty that is crippling political and social cohesion in many nations has been held in check by a strong tendency to avoid public behavior that may bring about conflict, embarrassment, or shame for oneself and others. Additionally, “in important ways,” writes Asian policy analyst Michael Auslin, “Japan privileges order over openness, and stability over opportunity.”⁹⁷ Its approach to capitalism and liberal democracy therefore has been based on a profoundly different vision than for example the United States, its greatest political ally, in the post-war era. These cultural traits may present a formative barrier for many Japanese with respect to a level of civil engagement necessitated by environmental threats such as climate change. A pessimism and insularity among youth that diminishes personal engagement on important global issues such as climate change has been a more pressing concern in Japan.⁹⁸ Catholic education for sustainability in Japan, if it is to be effective, should build upon the strong foundation of communal sentiments deeply rooted in society by referencing standards that are still meaningful for many Japanese today, while speaking of its supernatural faith-convictions. The principles of Catholic social teaching, embodying as they do, “harmony,” “moderation,” “respect,” “simplicity,” and “cooperation,” express customarily Japanese virtues. They are also part of Pope Francis’ philosophy of Christian personalism, and the relationality-responsibility model in Catholic ethics, which insists that sin is a

movement towards selfishness and self-centeredness that inhibits the capacity both to hope and to love alongside others towards transcendental fulfillment in God.⁹⁹ Integral conversion on the other hand is a process of becoming whole by finding joy through solidarity and spiritual growth. At its best, Catholic education teaches students to frame the challenges of today correctly, to engage in sensemaking that discloses a larger world of charity and dignity, “social friendship,” beyond artificial borders and a materialist understanding of life.¹⁰⁰

Application: Climate Change and the Nexus of Freshwater

Given the magnitude and complexity of environmental problems, Catholic social teaching with every passing year is attempting to answer the call for a comprehensive response.¹⁰¹ In the classroom however, coverage of any single environmental issue naturally must be limited in scope so as to be manageable within the context of larger course objectives and intended learning outcomes. What follows is merely suggestive of how the “CST Sustainability Framework” might inform a classroom exploration of freshwater as a planetary resource impacted by climate change.

Freshwater is considered a nexus linking the three pillars of sustainability: people (social), planet (environmental), and profit or prosperity (economic).¹⁰² Alongside energy and the economy as two further nexuses, freshwater and its sustainable use as an essential resource for human communities and cities often transcends artificial boundaries linking urban and rural as well as a nation to others through river systems and catchments.¹⁰³ Further, population safety and stability is dependent upon the security of freshwater and its proper management in the face of threats from natural disasters or negative externalities, such as deforestation and climate change.¹⁰⁴ The latter has been called, “the ultimate negative externality.”¹⁰⁵ Defined as “a perfect moral storm,” a complex interplay of global, intergenerational, and theoretical obstacles has prevented humanity from launching a sufficient worldwide ethical response despite mounting scientific evidence.¹⁰⁶ In addition, tactical effort on the part of industry polluters have been largely successful in deflecting responsibility, thereby

blocking action that would lead to systemic change.¹⁰⁷ The casino-like reality of the situation however holds manifold risks for human and natural systems, especially considering vulnerable runoffs that feed crucial river systems providing freshwater for billions of people.¹⁰⁸ By using the “CST Sustainability Framework,” four steps might be taken in examining the critical topic of freshwater in relation to climate change:

1. Explore elements of the Christian creedal stance, such as the meaning of creation and redemption by God and how these activities of the divine are taken up in both the symbolic use of water for salvation as well as its material necessity for sustaining both the human body and all life. In addition, exploring the topic of social sin (“structures of evil”) as harmful patterns of activity is helpful for understanding the fallen condition of humanity and the urgent need for measured corrective action.¹⁰⁹
2. Selectively draw from the quadrilateral sources of scripture, tradition, reason (scientific and other), and experience as support for Christian claims concerning what can be known through faith and reason.
3. Understand how a relational and responsible model of personhood towards God, neighbor, self, and world calls upon the conscience of each individual to make choices that reflect moral and spiritual growth over satisfactions (Lonergan) once knowledge is gained, vis-à-vis the gift of water and a stable planetary environment.
4. Brainstorm and weigh proposals for action, singular and collective, against the five CST principles offered so as to move towards identifying values, articulating lifestyle norms, and making decisions for practical application and transformative action, including nonviolent campaigns with broad-based community membership that can erode the structural dimensions of global injustices (i.e. social

sin) and maintain resilience in the face of repression.¹¹⁰

A fifth and final step may involve long-term assignments outside of the classroom to work more thoroughly through a process of discernment (see-judge-act) centered on newly formed habits, resolutions, and community action plans. It must be stressed that creative adjustment and patience is required if fidelity to a personal vision is to bear fruit over time and “the challenge of participation” necessary for social transformation is to be reached (conversion).¹¹¹

Closing

Catholic environmentalism lacks a robust organizing, pedagogical framework for making explicit Catholicism’s underlying faith-

commitments, its relational and transcendental view of personhood and the world redeemed through Christ, commitment to sources of knowledge outside the secular and scientific, and ethical social principles for guiding strategic planning and action that safeguards all people. The absent of said framework can hinder teaching and the acquisition by students of a distinctly Catholic perspective on environmental problems and a suitably Catholic response to “the signs of the times.” The above has been an attempt to meet this need by proposing a framework that honors the two wings of the human spirit, faith and reason.¹¹² By their partnership, each student is called to the contemplation of truth. HJE

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