

## **The Faith, Ethics and Vocation Project: Catholic Visions of Environmental Justice as Transformative Education**

Paper presented at the "Commitment to Justice in Jesuit Higher Education, October 13-16, 2005" at John Carroll University, Cleveland, Ohio

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Inter-disciplinary teaching offers distinct advantages for integrating justice into Jesuit education. Conventional disciplinary approaches to education can be incompatible with normative claims such as justice, but Environmental Studies by its very nature seeks to enhance environmental protection and human well-being. This paper outlines several Catholic approaches to teaching justice in the field of Environmental Studies, and describes how we have tried to express these through the Faith, Ethics & Vocation Project in the Environmental Studies Institute at Santa Clara University.

### **1. The role of faith and justice in Environmental Studies**

Justice intersects Environmental Studies in three somewhat distinct domains: Environmental Justice, sustainability, and biodiversity stewardship. This section describes Catholic theological resources for teaching on the Environmental Studies/Religious Studies interface, and how Environmental Studies can promote justice.

**Environmental Justice (EJ)** is a distinct movement within the broader field of environmental studies. Its focus is the intersection between environmental protection, and social and racial justice. It emerges from a broader set of social justice efforts, and it remains closest to these.

The original steps toward EJ were taken by Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King in 1968, the very week he was assassinated. He had traveled to Memphis to express solidarity with Black sanitation workers, who were striking for equal pay and equitable working conditions. During subsequent years, community members and researchers began noticing a consistent pattern: pollution and environmental problems disproportionately impact low income people and communities of color (Bullard 1993).

During the 1980s, the environmental justice movement emerged as a distinct expression of environmentalism, focused more on where people live, work and play than on wild nature. It draws more from civil rights, labor, and community organizing efforts than traditional environmentalism. As a result, this movement devotes itself to the unfair distribution of environmental risk, and efforts to achieve pollution prevention (Cole and Foster 2001). It complements traditional environmentalism by making the poor and marginalized the object of special concern.

The EJ movement has been strongest when community based organizations have partnered with university researchers (Gottlieb 2001). Local groups have more knowledge of neighborhood environmental issues, but academics have contributed by

bringing their scientific, analytical, and legal expertise to bear on local problems. The environmental justice movement has been most successful when it has advanced its agenda simultaneously through legal proceedings as well as the court of public opinion.

During the early 1990s, Christian theologians and national church leadership began to recognize and articulate the similarities between EJ and a biblical vision of humans-in-nature. Scripture scholars articulated a broader vision of justice in the Hebrew Scriptures with stewardship and care for the poor and marginalized. Moral theologians related contemporary environmental ethics to Catholic social teaching.

Catholic theologians were urged to address these issues by Pope John Paul II's "The Ecological Crisis: A Common Responsibility" (Pope John Paul II 1990/1996). In 1991, the US Catholic Bishops issued "Renewing the Face of the Earth," a pastoral letter calling on Catholics to engage in environmental protection activities (United States Catholic Conference 1991). They have emphasized environmental justice because it builds organically on the Catholic vision of economic justice (Christiansen and Grazer 1996). Bishops in Appalachia, the Pacific Northwest, and the New England states have issued their own regional pastoral letters (Catholic Committee of Appalachia 1995; Columbia River Pastoral Letter Project 2001; Bishops of the Boston Province 2000).

Churches and local faith communities have typically been part of the coalition speaking out for environmental justice around the United States (Miller-Travis 2000), but they have been noticeably absent from these efforts in California. Fortunately that is beginning to change. The Catholic Diocese of Stockton has launched a multiyear project to educate itself, its members and ministries, about the environmental justice challenges facing this region, and Santa Clara University students have been able to participate in this.

**Sustainability** has profoundly influenced Catholic teaching on development and the environment, yet our justice tradition is critically needed to realize the full potential of sustainable development. Indeed many development projects founder because they ignore the critical issue of equity. Graduates of Jesuit institutions could make substantial contributions by drawing from our Catholic justice teaching. At its most basic level, sustainability means meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (World Council on Economic Development 1987).

Catholic teaching on development began with Pope Paul VI's *Populorum progressio* in 1967. Although this specific term had not been coined, he used "authentic development" to describe a more comprehensive and moral vision of fostering improved economic conditions for poorer nations. In 1972 *Octogesima adveniens* became the first papal encyclical to use the term "environment," and to frame environmental problems in terms of duty. "Not only is the material environment becoming a permanent menace - pollution and refuse, new illness and absolute destructive capacity - but the human framework is no longer under man's control, thus creating an environment for tomorrow which may well be intolerable. . . . The Christian must turn to these new perceptions in order to take on responsibility, together with the rest of men, for a destiny which from now on is shared by all" (Pope Paul VI 1972).

Pope John Paul II took up this call for devoting more resources to development, but he simultaneously insisted that ecological considerations be integrated into them. His concern with environmental issues emerged in his first encyclical, *Redemptor hominis*, in which he argued that the human race was failing its moral responsibilities. Pollution and resource problems, along with war, poverty, and a lack of respect for life, indicated that creation "was subjected to futility." Technologically enhanced exploitation of the earth for military and industrial purposes alienates humankind from nature, and turns us from "guardian" to "heedless exploiter and destroyer." He prescribed a re-reading of Genesis for a correct theological anthropology, and a rediscovery of the vocation of work and human stewardship of God's creation. *Laborem exercens* provided an exegesis of Genesis as the basis for his theological anthropology, emphasizing the vocation of human work and co-creation. In 1987, *Sollicitudo rei socialis* analyzed development problems through the lenses of Scripture and his theological anthropology. Recent statements by US Bishops and Catholic development organizations (e.g., Catholic Relief Services, National Catholic Rural Life Commission) have called for sustainable development, drawing from the broader international development discourses.

The 1992 "Earth Summit" at Rio called for sustainable development to be defined by "three pillars of sustainability": 1) protection of the Earth; 2) social development; and 3) economic prosperity. Others have defined sustainability as having three "E's": environmental protection, economic development, and social equity. Unfortunately, many institutions have restricted their *de facto* definition of sustainability to environmental protection. Many development projects have failed, however, because they do not take seriously the aspirations of economically marginalized peoples for development, nor the critical issues of social equity.

Generally speaking, the very rich and the very poor of our world cause the greatest environmental damage. High consumption among the affluent has massive impact on resources and results in high levels of pollution. Roughly one billion people live on one dollar a day, and another billion on two. People of these economic conditions also frequently exploit (fishing, grazing, forestry) resources in unsustainable ways, but with one critical difference: the affluent have much greater power to choose less environmentally harmful life styles. Genuine sustainability must integrate economic development and social justice. Our graduates could make a huge contribution to society if they brought this full perspective to development initiatives.

**The biodiversity crisis** has yet to capture the attention of the Catholic magisterium, yet scripture scholars and theologians are now developing resources from this tradition to contribute to conservation efforts. Addressing the global collapse of biological diversity is an over-riding ecological and ethical challenge facing human society. It challenges us to reflect soberly on the impoverished natural world we are leaving to our children and future generations.

Justice as understood by the authors of the Old Testament was much, much more comprehensive than contemporary conceptualization (Brown 1999; Hiebert 1996). Justice in our society is frequently conceptualized in a legalistic framework. In contrast,

the Old Testament sees justice as cosmological, reflective of the full personality of God, and finding expression in all creation. Just as *shalom* in the Biblical sense is much more than the absence of conflict, so too justice is more than social equity. Guinan (2004) suggests that we can describe creation as: 1) God's sanctuary/tabernacle (the Priestly material in the Pentateuch); 2) God's kingdom (the Psalms); and 3) the world as God's playhouse (Proverbs/wisdom texts). Thus, a Biblical vision of justice includes stewardship of all of God's creation: God care's about God's creation, and therefore we should as well.

Pope John Paul II was been particularly bold in describing humanity's collective "ecological vocation," drawing repeatedly from Genesis accounts of creation to describe human duties to the environment. He articulated a more comprehensive vision linking justice and stewardship than most magisterial voices, and the "uncontrolled destruction of animal and plant life" (Pope John Paul II 1990/1996). This area of environmental studies does not articulate tightly as tightly with the dominant social justice themes of Jesuit institutions as do other environmental issues, but a deeper reflection on our Biblical roots would stimulate an expanded vision of justice incorporating the entire created world. The Old Testament describes a God of justice concerned with every aspect of divine creation – how can this vision inspire Jesuit environmental education?

## **2. Faith, Ethics & Vocation Project origins and purpose**

I was hired to create and direct the Faith, Ethics & Vocation Project, which integrates distinct features of Santa Clara University's mission into Environmental Studies Institute (ESI) educational activities, and provides opportunities for students to extend education beyond the classroom. These features are: promoting a faith that does justice; fostering leaders of conscience, compassion, and competence; and facilitating vocational discernment. Based on the inter-disciplinary practice of the ESI, the project pilots innovative pedagogies to better fulfill the university mission. It consists of four classes on the religious studies/environmental studies interface, the Environmental Vocation Internship, and the creation of exportable educational units about environmental, ethical, and faith issues. The four classes are:

- Environmental Justice Practicum: The Central Valley
- Faith, Ethics & the Biodiversity Crisis
- The Moral Vision of Cesar Chavez: Agriculture, Food & the Environment in Catholic Social Teaching
- Spirituality and Sustainability: Our Ecological Vocations

The first two fulfill the third level, and the second two the second level, of the three part undergraduate religious studies requirements. The role of justice, faith, and ethics in these courses is outlined in Table 1 (more information at: [itrs.scu.edu/kwarner/index](https://itrs.scu.edu/kwarner/index)).

The Environmental Vocation Internship offers undergraduate students at Santa Clara University the opportunity to develop environmental leadership skills through community based education and participatory research, combined with spiritual development and personal mentoring. Most internships do not adequately articulate experiential with academic learning. This internship provides opportunities for

outreach and research fully integrated into two courses. Students who take two courses, "Faith, Ethics, and the Biodiversity Crisis" and "Environmental Justice Practicum," can then conduct environmental education and research among local faith communities, based on the concepts and approaches presented in these classes. This offers students a theologically-grounded vision of stewardship that embraces social justice as well as advocacy for the intrinsic value of Creation, and a comprehensive introduction to religious and ethical resources to address environmental problems.

This internship was inspired by SCU's campus conversations about using the framework of vocation for heightening moral development as integral to the Jesuit educational tradition. We invite interns to discover their personal calling by aligning their gifts with the deepest needs of our world, and this most certainly includes environmental protection. This internship is designed to provide students the skills and sustained contact in a community with real world opportunities to test out their own vocational aspirations as environmental leaders.

### **3. Internship results from year one**

The internship activities take place in winter and spring quarters, and include immersion trips, vocational reflection retreats, mentoring in leadership for civic engagement, and reflection on our vocational gifts. The internship requires regular (once or twice a month) travel to these regions, since most outreach events take place on weekends. Interns chose one of two regions for their internship, based on their preference for concentrating on marine biodiversity (Monterey and the Central Coast) or EJ (Stockton and the Central Valley). This year, 3 coast interns worked primarily with the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, and the 4 valley interns with the Diocese of Stockton.

During this first year, 7 interns conducted 14 educational events in both regions, reaching a total 822 people. Of these, 10 were formal presentations, and 4 were educational fairs. Examples include: presentations to confirmation classes, their sponsors, and youth groups; organizing sustainable fish dinners; and conducting outreach to parishioners after mass. The interns created a total of 13 educational tools, including 3 posters and 7 electronic slide shows. Year end internship reports and student work can be found at: <http://itrs.scu.edu/kwarner/internship.htm>.

**Environmental Justice in the Catholic Diocese of Stockton.** Interns tackled Environmental Justice issues in the Central Valley. This region is not well known by residents of the state's populous coastal areas, but it is exceptionally rich in resources, even as it struggles with its environmental problems. Over half the nation's fruit, vegetables and nuts are grown here, yet farm workers and rural communities suffer from the effects of pesticides. Two-thirds of the state's water passes through the Sacramento Delta on its way to irrigate farms and quench the thirst of Southern California. Changes in land use or water management here could impact many at a distance. The same mountain ranges that define the valley also contribute to its environmental problems by containing air pollution. This region often has the dubious honor of air quality that seasonally can be the worst in the nation. Rapid suburban

sprawl threatens to exacerbate all of these problems. The internship provided an opportunity for students to engage faith communities in the effort to promote environmental justice here.

Beginning in January 2005, four interns from Santa Clara University worked with six parishes in the Diocese of Stockton. They developed educational materials on EJ, led a series of parish confirmation retreats, conducted outreach to parishioners, and engaged other members of the diocese in EJ at other events. Their efforts demonstrated the terrific potential for incorporating Environmental Justice into the ordinary religious education activities of a parish. As one confirmation program director explained, "it's wonderful for the kids to see young men interested in their faith and God in the world. They were a big hit with the kids." At another parish, two interns spoke to over 400 people, including a child who had been directly affected by a devastating tire fire that the interns were using as an environmental justice case study on asthma risks. They also created educational tools for use by the diocese, and members of the Environmental Justice Committee asked for permission to reproduce these displays and use them in their own parishes for the Environmental Justice Sunday in October 2005.

**Ocean stewardship on the California Coast.** The major goal of the Central Coast internship was to conduct outreach to local faith communities about the Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary as it conducts a management plan review. The Sanctuary, designated in 1992, is a federally protected marine area offshore of California's Central Coast. It encompasses a shoreline length of 276 miles and 5,322 square miles of ocean, extending an average distance of 30 miles from shore. At its deepest point, it reaches down 10,663 feet (more than two miles). It is the nation's largest marine sanctuary -- larger than Yosemite or Yellowstone National Parks. The Sanctuary's natural resources include our nation's largest kelp forest, one of North America's largest underwater canyons and the closest-to-shore deep ocean environment in the continental United States. It is home to one of the most diverse marine ecosystems in the temperate world, including 33 species of marine mammals, 94 species of seabirds, 345 species of fishes, and numerous invertebrates and plants.

The major challenge for the Central Coast internship was to conduct outreach to local faith communities about the Sanctuary as it conducts a management plan review. This year marks the Sanctuary's tenth anniversary, and the management plan review provides a special opportunity for the public to voice its desire for new stewardship initiatives (for more information: <http://montereybay.noaa.gov>). The interns educated local faith communities about the environmental issues at stake in the management plan review, cultivating interest among these faith communities, and laying the groundwork for civic participation inspired by a vision of ocean stewardship. In year two interns will provide research and outreach about marine protected areas, or no-take zones, which one of our community partner termed "A Sabbath for the Sea."

## **Conclusion**

A Catholic/catholic vision of Environmental Studies incorporates the perspectives of scripture, theology, and ethics, and has much to offer Jesuit education as

it serves faith and promotes justice. The three domains of justice intersecting Environmental Studies offer compelling examples of the opportunity to promote justice through this interdisciplinary field. The success of the Faith, Ethics & Vocation Project demonstrates the transformative potential of this field for promoting justice in Jesuit higher education.

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Table 1. Environmental, faith, ethics, and vocation themes in the FEV project

Course title	Environmental	Faith	Ethics	Vocation
ENVS 160 Spirituality & Sustainability: Our Ecological Vocations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Ecological footprints</li> <li>-Critical thinking on and sustainable development</li> <li>-The global challenge of promoting sustainability</li> <li>-Three pillars of sustainability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Introduction to spirituality, and contrasting with religion</li> <li>-Eastern &amp; Western religions &amp; spiritualities</li> <li>-“Mysticism for a New Era”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Global ethic</li> <li>-Social equity as a pillar of sustainability</li> <li>-Moral development</li> <li>-Using ethical criteria to evaluate sustainability efforts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Managing our distress associated with our socio-environmental crises</li> </ul>
ENVS 161 The Moral Vision of Cesar Chavez: Agriculture, Food & the Environment in Catholic teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-The agrofood system, and its socio-environmental impacts</li> <li>-Rural environmental issues</li> <li>-Farmworkers and pesticides</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Catholic social teaching on agriculture</li> <li>-Biblical visions of stewardship</li> <li>-Human dignity, agriculture, and stewardship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Catholic social teaching as practical wisdom</li> <li>-Moral vision and action</li> <li>-Agro-environmental ethics</li> <li>-Actions of solidarity with farmworkers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Consumer and citizen action in solidarity with resource poor farmers and farmworkers</li> </ul>
ENVS 161 Environmental Justice Practicum: The Central Valley	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-EJ vs. conventional environmental initiatives</li> <li>-California environmental and resource history</li> <li>-Environmental policy</li> <li>-Pollution prevention strategies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-EJ in the Old Testament</li> <li>-EJ and Catholic social teaching</li> <li>-Eco-justice vs. EJ</li> <li>-The example of the Diocese of Stockton</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Virtue ethics &amp; public policy</li> <li>-Justice and the moral life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Community based EJ organizing, and the potential contribution of faith communities to this</li> </ul>
ENVS 163 Faith, Ethics & the Biodiversity Crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Using biodiversity as an analytical lens for understanding environmental problems</li> <li>-Biodiversity and evolution</li> <li>-Biodiversity conservation strategies</li> <li>-Biodiversity and science institutions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Genesis account of creation</li> <li>-Inter-religious resources for environmental ethics</li> <li>-The relationship between religion and ethics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-What is the standing of non-humans in our ethics?</li> <li>-Moral deliberation and decision making models</li> <li>-Case study methods in environmental ethics</li> <li>-Scientific and professional ethics</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Ecological vocations</li> <li>-What implications does biodiversity stewardship have for our professional vocations as leaders?</li> </ul>