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Educating for Engagement

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Abstract

Daily headlines confirm that when religion and politics interact, the results can be explosive. Most Catholic universities, however, count religious inquiry and political responsibility among their overall learning goals. In this paper, we explore how Catholic social teaching (CST) can inform political dialogue in ways that unite rather than divide. Specifically, we focus on the background for a collaborative project at a Catholic university to teach students to apply CST to the political dimensions of environmental sustainability. Catholic social teaching can serve three functions that are useful to Catholic universities in preparing graduates for full citizenship: 1) complicating students' habits of moral reasoning, thereby providing the condition for the possibility of moral reasoning about politics; 2) incorporating social analysis to provide a basis for non-polemic analysis of political issues; and 3) providing religious motivation and justification for active involvement in politics.

Keywords: civic education, Catholic social teaching

Introduction

The topics of religion and politics are generally understood to be taboo in polite conversation. Daily headlines confirm that when religion and politics interact, the results can be explosive. Most Catholic universities, however, count religious inquiry and political responsibility among their overall learning goals for students. While this combination is potentially volatile, it also has the paradoxical potential to create common ground in reasoned inquiry and analysis of pressing social issues. In this paper, we focus on the ways in which teaching and learning about religion and politics together in Catholic higher education position Catholic universities to meet their civic mission and educate graduates for full participation in democracy.

The Catholic intellectual and social traditions contain rich resources for educating students about politics. Specifically, in this paper, we hypothesize three potential contributions Catholic social teaching (CST) makes by: 1) complicating students' habits of moral reasoning, thereby providing the condition for the possibility of moral reasoning about politics; 2) incorporating social analysis to provide a basis for non-polemic analysis of political issues; and 3) providing religious motivation and justification for active involvement in politics through CST's sacramental worldview. We close with a description of our partnership in teaching courses in American Government and Theology that focus on environmental sustainability as an example of an effort to provide political education for our students that is informed by CST.

The Civic Mission of Higher Education

Pleas for universities to promote the civic mission of higher education and to contribute to healing America's ailing democracy proliferate. Perhaps the most direct call for such engagement was the National Task Force on Civil Learning and Democratic Engagement's release of "A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future." Lamenting the dismal preparation and participation of American citizens in public life, the "A Crucible Moment" authors issued a "National Call to Action [which] challenges higher education and all its stakeholders to focus with new intentionality on the role that education should play in helping all students prepare for their roles as citizens in this globally engaged and extraordinarily diverse democracy" (29). Meeting this challenge, the authors argue, requires universities to foster a multifaceted "civic learning that includes knowledge, skills, values, and the capacity to work with others on civic and societal challenges [that] can help increase the number of informed, thoughtful, and public-minded citizens well prepared to contribute in the context of the diverse, dynamic, globally connected United States. Civic learning should prepare students *with knowledge and for action* in our communities" ("Highlights," emphasis original).¹

¹See also Allison Rios Millett McCartney's differentiation between civic engagement and volunteering which does not require the analysis of political power structures. Civic engagement is a "catch-all term which includes, but is not limited to, political engagement: it refers to an individual's activities, alone or as part of a group, that focus on developing knowledge about the community and its political system, identifying or seeking solutions to community problems, pursuing goals to benefit the community and participating in the constructive deliberation

Higher education has been quick to respond to the challenge to “foster a civic ethos across all parts of campus and educational culture [that] establishes a commitment to public-mindedness and a concern for the well-being of others . . . and ensure[s] that the full range of civic-learning dimensions – including civic action – are incorporated into every student’s experience” (31). The importance of robust civic education on college campuses to the health of American democracy has been widely embraced, and universities sponsor extensive programming to support this mission. The challenges to these efforts, however, have also been significant. The American Association of Colleges and Universities, the American Political Science Association, Campus Compact, and numerous other organizations and scholars have recently focused on expanding civic learning in higher education and addressing some of the barriers to such efforts. A perusal of the current literature provides insights into these civic engagement efforts, isolates challenges confronting these efforts, and exposes a few strategies available to make civic education efforts more successful.

Service-Learning and Civic Engagement

Answering the challenge raised by “A Crucible Moment,” campuses nationwide have funded and staffed civic engagement offices, and many universities have revised their mission statements to underline commitment to the civic mission of higher education and to educating graduates as active, educated citizens. Much of the expansion of the civic education movement in higher education has been carried out through extension or repurposing of service-learning programs. As Matthew Hartley demonstrates, this marriage has been fortuitous for the civic engagement movement due to the widespread institutionalization of service-learning in universities across the nation. However, as Hartley also demonstrates, this marriage has come with a cost. Popularization of the service-learning pedagogy has been accomplished, in part, by demonstrating to faculty that the method teaches discipline-specific knowledge, skills, and values. When many campuses repurposed service-learning programs to promote civic engagement, it was widely assumed that community service and academic service-learning would teach political knowledge, skills, and values. But because many faculty are teaching service-learning courses in which the service resembles professional practica, this was not the case.

Grafting civic engagement efforts onto existing service-learning programs has been facilitated by the proliferation of various and vague definitions for civic engagement, many of which do not involve robust political dimensions. Barbara Jacoby cites terms universities use for civic engagement such as “social capital, citizenship, democratic participation/citizenship/practice, public work/public problem solving, political engagement, community engagement, social responsibility, social justice, civic professionalism, public agency” and others (Jacoby: 6).² As universities nationwide have institutionalized these understandings of

among community members about the community’s political system and community issues, problems or solutions. It means actively participating in and seeking to influence the life of the community” (14).

²Early writings on service-learning assumed that students “progress” on a continuum from provision of service to commitment to social change. Keith Morton debunked this assumption and proposed instead three paradigms of service-learning that can be engaged in thin or thick ways based upon program and course design. Furthermore, even justice education for social change is not necessarily political, though Colby et al. contend that some forms of “organizational involvement *can* build civic skills, expose participants to political issues, and

civic education and engagement, the result has been an increasingly strong commitment to a remarkably apolitical understanding of civic engagement and education for democracy. Following the professionally focused service-learning model, civic engagement programs typically expose students to social problems within the community, engage students in service, and utilize reflection to examine personal and societal impact (see, further, Steinberg, Hatcher, and Bringle). Rarely do these programs involve students in rigorous analysis of the impact of political structures and public policies on the social issues they engage. Even more rarely do they encourage students' political action or frame political action as a necessary response to the underlying problems causing a need for service.

Universities' "thin," relatively apolitical version of education for civic engagement is arguably consistent with American political culture. American politics is suffused with the language of rights, but lacks a natural language of political responsibility (Glendon). American citizens can act politically and are encouraged to do so, but they are unlikely to see political participation as a responsibility to the body politic or as a commitment to the public good (see Eliasoph). Because theories of American politics assume rational political action to be self-interested, the secular language of American politics often leads to understanding even the public good through the lens of its personal impact. As Meredith Hutchison argues, "resistance to . . . speak(ing) in terms of duty arises from a fundamental tension we are facing in the U.S. Self-interest and individualism are driving forces in our economy and our culture; duty is antithetical to this. Associated with humility, it demands action that is not out of self-interest . . . our patriotic rhetoric is vague and undefined, and the whole notion of American exceptionalism points to a sense of further entitlement; it does not spur us to reflect on what is demanded in exchange for such freedom."

Because universities so closely link their civic engagement efforts to service-learning programs, broadening and "repoliticizing" our understanding of civic education and strengthening its capacity to bolster American democracy requires that service-learning reach back to its social justice roots. While service-learning can be used as a strategy to facilitate social analysis, reach for solutions and practice advocacy, these learnings are not automatic outcomes of the use of the pedagogy and (as Hartley demonstrates) often are not. If we want service-learning to accomplish essential objectives of civic learning, we need to make clear that these goals are essential objectives of the method.

A concrete example from our university demonstrates a way service-learning courses can be refocused so that they emphasize social justice issues and political concerns. While our service-learning program has always valued social analysis and cultural competence as key learning objectives of the method, a recent survey revealed that service-learning faculty most often use service-learning as a tool to teach more narrow, discipline-specific course material. Our service-learning team has been working to develop strategies to make civic learning (including political learning) more central to our service-learning courses. Our current proposal is that all service-learning faculty include university-wide student learning goals which promote social analysis and political advocacy (Global and Cultural Competence, and Worth

successfully recruit members into political activity, but it is also clear that this happens only under some circumstances" (37).

and Dignity) in their syllabi. At the conclusion of each service-learning course, students will assess progress they made toward meeting these goals. It is our hope that more explicit focus on the civic learning outcomes of service activities will clarify commitment to civic learning for both faculty and students, and it will deepen the political and social learning achieved through curricular service.

Practicing Politics and the Campus Civic Ethos

Even with a refocused service-learning program, efforts in higher education to create and sustain civic learning programs which inspire students to involvement (including political) in the life of the community face substantial barriers. One of the most notable barriers is a bit paradoxical. Specifically, decline in political engagement across American society has produced a general populace that is uninterested and lacks confidence in the political arena. This widespread disengagement is reflected in the university and complicates efforts to build both infrastructure and ethos to support civic engagement. It is, in essence, a “chicken and egg” problem. Politics must be scaffolded into the civic programming of the university to address lack of political knowledge and interest. But the impetus to build this scaffolding is diminished by the same lack of political knowledge and interest. In other words, lack of knowledge and interest in politics on campus diminishes the commitment to building infrastructure to promote broad civic engagement.

Lack of knowledge and interest in politics is common to all campus constituencies; students and faculty alike. Researchers have documented U.S. students’ widespread pursuit of individualistic goals. Students’ underlying individualism, as well as their unwillingness and inability to analyze social structures and history, mirrors that of college-educated adults in this country. The Higher Education Research Institute (HERI) and others document that university students overwhelmingly regard the main purposes of higher education as ensuring long-term financial stability and a successful career. For example, the portion of incoming freshmen that cited “to be able to get a better job” as a very important reason for attending college reached an all-time high of 87.9 percent in 2012. More incoming students than ever also reported their perspective that the ability “to make more money” was a very important reason to attend college (Wyer: 1).³ Although 57.4% of college seniors in 2015 reported they “had publicly communicated their opinion about a cause, whether through emails, blogs, petitions, or other media during the last year” (HERI), this political action via media does not seem to evidence consistent political involvement. Christian Smith et al.’s longitudinal study of emerging adults yielded distressing conclusions about their involvement in politics: “Almost all emerging adults [18-23 years of age] today are apathetic, uninformed, distrustful, disempowered, or, at most only marginally interested when it comes to politics and public life” (2011: 225). Most emerging adults aspire to a rich private but not public life, which they define as including a good job, financial security, family, materialism, avoiding the world’s troubles, and retirement. According to Smith et al., “The idea that today’s emerging adults are as a

³ Furthermore, concerns about career and financial stability persist through the senior year: “Results from the 2011 Freshman Survey, when many from the Class of 2015 entered college, revealed the most important reason students cited for attending college was to get a better job. Four years later, 59.2% of seniors in this sample considered it very important for their career path to provide high income potential, with 85.3% desiring a path that offers a stable, secure future” (HERI: 1).

generation leading a new wave of renewed civic-mindedness and political involvement is sheer fiction” (2014: 225). Clearly, university students overall perceive personal satisfaction and financial gain as more important outcomes of education than social or political involvement.

Students’ lack of knowledge regarding political processes and events is not surprising, given that our political culture encourages simple opinions and a divisive (not dialogical) milieu. Although most students do not engage consistently in politics, they often do express their good will in service, which can feel like systemic change (see Putnam; Nebraskans for Civic Reform). Unfortunately, research on student learning indicates that students’ provision of direct service may undermine efforts to facilitate students’ political involvement if students see service as a more appealing alternative to the complex world of politics. Ironically, given the connection between service-learning and civic education efforts on many college campuses, students’ service can result in decreased motivation to pursue political action and involvement (Smith et al. 2014: 225).

Robust civic education programs must address the multiple roots of students’ political disengagement. The Carnegie Foundation’s Political Engagement Project (Beaumont) identified best practices to building students’ political knowledge and sense of political efficacy. Implementation of these practices decreases students’ political apathy and may increase the commitment to a broader campus civic ethos. Findings from the Political Engagement Project’s study conducted from 2001 to 2005 and including nearly 1000 undergraduates indicate that the following practices are most likely to build long-term civic agency in college graduates: 1) creating opportunities for students to experience politically active communities in which they engage with others to address shared concerns which are explicitly identified as political concerns; 2) providing students with ample opportunities to practice the political skills they are developing (such as political organizing, etc.) and 3) engaging the students in open and respectful political discourse on a regular basis (Beaumont: 51).

Incorporating these practices into the life of the university requires faculty and administrative leadership. Faculty leadership in creating core courses in which students learn political skills and practice politics together is essential to beginning to chip away at student disengagement and accordingly, beginning to build support for the establishment of the university’s civic ethos. Core courses “that are intentionally designed to grapple with pressing real-world problems and advance critical thinking that leads to action” (Hartley: 45) provide a helpful complement to service-learning courses rooted in social justice. These courses can supplement the social critique service-learning courses offer with training in political skills and practice in collective action.

Efforts to address student apathy and educate for active citizenship require faculty leadership and accordingly, must also address frequent lack of commitment on the part of faculty to civic education and/or the practice of politics. Research on why higher education often does not adequately manifest its mission for civic education places responsibility on faculty as well as students. This lack of attention and commitment has many roots. First, faculty may judge (rightly or wrongly) that their knowledge of politics inadequately prepares them to broach political issues with students. Faculty may be unsure of the political dimensions of their disciplines (Musil) and may not know how to integrate political knowledge and skills.

Graduate work may not prepare faculty to facilitate discussion of conflicting viewpoints expressed in the classroom as sources of knowledge. Finally, faculty may believe that it is futile to broach political topics because of students' assumptions and values outlined above. Most faculty want to ensure that their courses appeal to students of all (or no) political viewpoints (Colby et al.: 5) and are worried that student evaluations of their teaching will suffer if they integrate politics into their courses. Faculty express their concern about being perceived as (or revealing) political partisanship and values (Jacoby: 6) but feel competent facilitating service. So faculty are more apt to express their concern about the common good by including direct service and service-learning in their courses than by integrating politics into their courses.⁴

Meeting the civic mission of higher education requires an understanding of these barriers and a concerted effort to combat faculty's political disengagement. Here we argue that best practices for cultivating students' political efficacy apply to all college constituents. Arguably, the most effective way for the university to support attention to the political dimensions of civic life is to encourage faculty to attend to these dimensions *and* to practice politics openly and intentionally on campus. Open political discussions and debates on campus can serve to "normalize" politics for students and faculty alike, and they underline that political life is compatible with academic inquiry. Participation in politics on campus helps to build skills and knowledge, increasing both students' and faculty's sense of political efficacy.

Broadening and extending the civic focus of the university requires campus dialogue to which all parties are committed (see Rios Millet McCartney: 14). Many university faculty accept an institutional commitment to civic education, but believe that responsibility for accomplishing that task belongs to others within the institution. Campus dialogues can help all campus constituents see their connection to civic education and, thereby, increase all constituents' understanding of and commitment to a campus civic ethos. In 2015, the American Association of Colleges and Universities released "Civic Prompts: Making Civic Learning Routine Across the Disciplines," a guide to facilitating campus civic conversations and expanding civic education efforts across the curriculum. "Civic Prompts" lays the groundwork for surfacing the civic dimensions of implicit and explicit curricula, building from three of the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) principles of excellence for higher education: engaging the big questions; connecting knowledge with choices and action; and fostering civic, intercultural and ethical learning. When we engage the big questions, we connect curricula to the important issues of our time, helping students to place their studies in a real world context. When we connect knowledge with choices and action, we allow students to explore their responsibility as citizens to engage in democracy through reasoned and informed decision-making. And, when we foster civic, intercultural and ethical learning, we prepare students for the difficulties of democratic choice, fostering ethical and moral reasoning for choices for which empirical logic is inadequate (Musil: 12). With these principles, the authors urge universities to develop campus conversations that identify the civic dimensions of the range of disciplines. "Civic Prompts" offers examples of how civic inquiry

⁴ Colby et al. report that in 2000, a review of 600 college service-learning programs showed that over half involved direct service, 42% involved education and training to community members, and only 1% involved political concerns or solutions. In contrast to the prevailing trend of ignoring the political dimensions of service-learning, Marshall Welch documents an excellent example of a theology course that includes political action.

in each field affects the “boundaries of the subjects studied, the pedagogies adopted, and how students prepared themselves for their professional lives as well as for their participation in the civic life of their local and global communities” (2).

Despite the importance of open political inquiry and dialogue, making politics acceptable on campus is a difficult endeavor. Calls to practice politics openly on university campuses inevitably raise concerns regarding partisan persuasion and indoctrination. Evidence from the Political Engagement Project provides a counterargument to those concerned about political pressuring, as it confirms that open attention to politics, if rightly structured, rarely affects participants’ partisan leanings (Beaumont: 49; Crawford: 72). A politically engaged campus would clearly build bridges for all campus constituents to active engagement in democracy. However, developing the infrastructure for such engagement requires planning and oversight, and it must overcome real and perceived barriers to mixing university and politics (see Westheimer and Kahne). The American Association of State Colleges and Universities has begun to work through some of the challenges of this endeavor with such projects as The American Democracy Project and the Political Engagement Project. Below we discuss resources Catholic universities possess to pursue similar goals.

Civic Education in Catholic Universities

Like public and private universities, Catholic universities have made efforts to respond to the challenge of developing graduates who are prepared to participate in civic life. According to the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, the U.S. has approximately 246 Catholic colleges and universities that serve nearly 950,000 students. Central to the Catholic mission of these universities is a focus on social justice and a commitment to educating students, both Catholic and non-Catholic, for compassionate engagement in global society. Catholic higher education’s commitment to justice education and engagement is supported by the broad teachings of the Catholic intellectual and social traditions. The foundation of the Catholic intellectual and social traditions in Catholic higher education and the resultant emphasis on moral reasoning, social analysis, and commitment to the public good position Catholic education both to educate for a healthy democracy and to avoid some of the pitfalls experienced by other, secular colleges and universities engaged in this endeavor. The Catholic tradition contains a rich set of resources that may be deployed to educate students for civic responsibility, including politics (see Posman and Locklin).

In order to limit the discussion, this paper focuses on Catholic social teaching (CST) as one facet of the broader Catholic intellectual and social traditions (see Martino; Crawford). It must be acknowledged from the outset that significant obstacles to students’ reception of CST exist. First, for university students (mirroring contemporary society at large), arguments from religious authority hold little sway; students are not convinced of the moral rightness or wrongness of particular attitudes and actions solely because these views are promulgated by those who occupy positions of religious authority in the Catholic Church. As Stephen J. Pope notes, the decline of the magisterium’s credibility has serious implications for Catholic influence in politics: “It affects not only the internal life of the Church but also its influence in the public square. . . . The erosion of the effective authority of the magisterium – its ability to persuade and to exert moral leadership rather than its institutional control – undermines, or at least seriously compromises, its ability to offer a prophetic counterweight to the radical

individualism, careerism, and consumerism of American popular culture. It also undercuts its constructive ability to teach the importance of the common good, the global moral interdependence of humanity, and the inherent dignity of the person” (29). For some students the fact that popes and bishops author CST makes CST less attractive and credible than if it were written by others. Moreover, the long history of formation work in Christianity makes clear that telling people what to value, believe, and do is not sufficient to bring about sustainable transformation of people’s lives (Kyle). We cannot expect students to promote particular social policies on immigration, labor, the environment, racism and white privilege, or other issues CST takes up simply because CST officially recommends them.

A second complicating factor for students’ appropriation of CST is that data on the Catholic Church’s influence on 18-24 year-olds (so-called “traditional-age” college students) are discouraging (see Smith et al. 2011: 19; Smith et. al. 2014: 68, 255-63; Massaro: 218-25). Recent Pew Research Center polling data document the decline in the number of Catholic (as well as other religious) adherents in the United States. As of 2014, 36 percent of 18-24 year-olds (and nearly 24 percent of adults overall) in the U.S. describe themselves as unaffiliated with any religion (Lipka). Catholics lost the largest share of adherents from 2007-2014, with nearly 13 percent of American adults reporting that they are former Catholics (Pew Research Center 2015). These demographic data provide an important context for the challenges Catholic higher education faces.⁵ Moreover, Catholic higher education’s overall landscape has changed considerably in the last fifty years in light of ecclesial, cultural, social, and educational factors, leading to a renewed need to consider the ways in which students learn about CST (Killen).

Although the Catholic Church’s declining authority and influence pose obstacles to teaching university students about CST, they are not insurmountable. For those who do participate in Catholic higher education and remain receptive to learning about Catholic resources for social responsibility, what are some possible ways that CST can influence students’ involvement in politics? To answer this question, it is important to recognize the common understanding that CST includes two levels of teaching: 1) general principles (or themes) to which all Catholics are expected to assent, and 2) application of the principles to specific issues, where Catholics in good conscience may disagree. However, the principles of CST are by definition accessible to all people using the faculty of reason, not intelligible to Catholics alone (USCCB 2005). The documents that comprise CST generally employ social analysis (analyzing “the signs of the times”) in order to make a case for the policy prescriptions bishops and popes offer for particular issues. Because the policy prescriptions are based upon principles available to all reasonable people, they may persuade both Catholics and non-Catholics alike (see Francis 2015).

Given that the magisterium offers both principles central to the Catholic tradition (such as human dignity, solidarity, and common good) and prudential judgments about policies, how

⁵ Catholic theologians and sociologists have hypothesized various reasons the institutional Catholic Church has lost adherents as well as why the magisterium’s credibility has declined among Catholics and the public at large. According to Pew Research Center’s “Clergy Sexual Abuse and the Catholic Church,” more than 25 percent of former Catholics who were religiously unaffiliated (i.e., did not join another church after leaving Catholicism) cited the clergy sexual abuse scandals as a reason for leaving the church.

can CST contribute to university students' engagement with politics? We sketch in the following the contours of three possible hypotheses, which are not intended to be exhaustive. None of them is mutually exclusive. First, CST's principles may complicate students' habits of moral reasoning, thereby providing the condition for the possibility for students to engage in moral reasoning about political issues. CST's principles call into question the common sensibilities most students hold by turning contemporary U.S. American values on their heads (see Rademacher). For example, the principles of option for the poor, common good, human dignity, and solidarity appeal to persons' highest aspirations, noblest visions of the good, and most elevated sensibilities regarding human responsibilities. But these principles contrast with the highly individualistic ethos that assumes all people in the U.S. have equal life chances, that individual effort yields fair outcomes in individuals' lives, and that the primary goal of life is private happiness. The concept of the common good, for example, describes systems and structures rather than individuals, and as such, may be difficult for U.S. Americans to apprehend. As John Coleman writes with respect to the principle of the common good, "Americans, notoriously individualistic and dismissive or distrustful of institutions (especially large and national institutions) have had a hard time grasping the concept [of the common good]" (4).

To be sure, the principles of CST significantly differ from the prevailing view of traditional-age university students. The studies of 18-23 year-olds by Christian Smith and others indicate that their dominant faith orientation, "moralistic therapeutic deism," mirrors that of the majority of U.S. adults. This view deemphasizes religious doctrine and values each individual's autonomy in acting according to a personal sense of what is right (Smith and Denton: 71-72). By contrast, the principles of CST provide standards for judgment and affirm that a different and better world – and a different way of viewing the world – are possible. The first hypothesis about how the principles of CST function differs from what Roger Bergman (15) aptly terms CST's "default pedagogy" – that the faithful should simply apply principles to particular situations. Rather, the first hypothesis suggests that prior to students' (or anyone's) application of principles, it must be the case that the principles offer an attractive way of viewing oneself, society, and communal responsibilities. By offering a more adequate set of values or principles than the highly individualistic view that most students hold, CST offers the condition for the possibility of students' abilities to engage in moral reasoning about political issues. If students accept CST's principles, it becomes possible for them to consider issues that they at first glance may regard as outside the purview of their own interests. Immigration, the environment, and other political issues can become relevant to students, who can consider them from the perspective of the common good rather than only in terms of immediate self-interest. The principles of CST provide a basis for understanding one's place in communal and civic life, and for understanding politics as a way of constructing the common good.

Second, CST incorporates social analysis, which it terms "reading the signs of the times." CST's social analysis provides a basis for nonpartisan and non-polemic social analysis of political issues within the contemporary U.S. political landscape fraught with partisanship, which is often amplified by alliances between religiously-affiliated political groups. CST assumes that social structures are not immutable. They can be transformed, so that they become less sinful and more reflective of God's grace. Students can learn to use social analysis

to examine both social problems and the policy prescriptions that flow from the general principles of CST. These policy prescriptions are often at odds with what students have been previously taught, and may *prima facie* seem at odds with narrow understandings of self-interest. Bryan Massingale and others note that CST's social analysis of economic issues is more comprehensive than its social analysis of some other issues CST takes up, particularly the issue of U.S. racism. Without adequate social analysis, CST can slip into "pious exhortations that do not persuade critical readers" (Massingale: 74). Conversely, however, when CST provides adequate social analysis, students can learn both from its method of social analysis and its conclusions. Pope Francis' encyclical letter *Laudato Si* provides an instructive, positive example. Here Pope Francis provides extensive analysis of the current state of several aspects of the contemporary ecological crisis. In chapter one, "What is Happening to Our Common Home," he discusses pollution and waste (2015: 20-22), a basic overview of the science of climate change (2015: 23-25), an analysis of economic and political interests as they affect climate (2015: 26), water and loss of biodiversity (2015: 27-42), global economic inequality (2015: 48-52), and weak political responses to climate change and environmental degradation that exacerbate international conflict (2015: 53-59). In chapter three, "The Human Roots of the Ecological Crisis," Pope Francis writes that "it would hardly be helpful to describe symptoms without acknowledging the human origins of the ecological crisis" (2015: 101). He proceeds to analyze the deleterious effects of the prevailing technocratic paradigm (2015: 101-14) and modern anthropocentrism and relativism (2015: 115-23) on the environment. Pope Francis' social, political, and economic analyses of the phenomena of climate change and environmental degradation, prior to theological reflection, provide a persuasive foundation for thoughtful evaluation of the phenomena even if students disagree with particular policy prescriptions CST offers.

Why is the social analysis in CST distinctive from other methods of social analysis that students may learn in a standard sociology course or other courses? While courses in the social sciences provide excellent complements to the study of CST, the third resource in CST that may potentially transform students is its Catholic sacramental worldview. Students may adopt (or have already been informed by) this lens for seeing and interpreting reality. The sacramental worldview that suffuses and underlies all of CST – both principles and policies – provides a frame of reference that provides religious motivation and justification for active involvement in politics. "Sacramental worldview" refers to the understanding that the "sacred" and "profane" are linked, with the upshot that we have sacred obligations to improve the world and contribute to the kingdom of God. All creation is suffused with the holy, by God the Creator and sustainer of all life, with the implication that we may experience God's love through ordinary and extraordinary events, persons, and the natural world (Himes 1995; 2015). A sacramental worldview implies that all is interconnected, and that humanity is one family. The holy is accessible through all creation, and we must transform social structures marked by sin into graced, just social structures. The sacramental worldview affirms a positive engagement with society and public life, which encourages students to engage in political action for transforming the world.

"Forming Consciences for Faithful Citizenship: A Call to Political Responsibility from the Catholic Bishops of the United States" (USCCB 2015) illustrates the Catholic sacramental worldview's impact on making the case for the centrality of political advocacy for Catholics.

In paragraph 1, the U.S. bishops quote Pope Francis's encyclical *Evangelii Gaudium* at length regarding the role of Catholic social teaching on public life:

Our redemption has a social dimension because “God, in Christ, redeems not only the individual person, but also . . . social relations.” To believe that the Holy Spirit is at work in everyone means realizing that he seeks to penetrate every human situation and all social bonds. . . . Accepting the first proclamation, which invites us to receive God’s love and to love him in return with the very love which is his gift, brings forth in our lives and actions a primary and fundamental response: to desire, seek and protect the good of others.

The U.S. bishops elaborate on the connection between faith and political involvement with a second quotation from Pope Francis:

An authentic faith . . . always involves a deep desire to change the world, to transmit values, to leave this earth somehow better than we found it. We love this magnificent planet on which God has put us, and we love the human family which dwells here, with all its tragedies and struggles, its hopes and aspirations, its strengths and weaknesses. The earth is our common home and all of us are brothers and sisters. If indeed “the just ordering of society and of the state is a central responsibility of politics,” the Church, “cannot and must not remain on the sidelines in the fight for justice” (1).

The bishops here make clear that Catholic faith significantly influences assessment of the political realm, and should guide Catholics’ discernment of how politics can contribute to alleviating the suffering of human beings and the planet itself.⁶ CST has much to recommend it for informing students’ moral imaginations, decision-making, and involvement in political life: its attractive principles for judgment, social analysis, and sacramental worldview.

Practical Application on Our Campus, College of Saint Mary

We conclude by describing one current effort to engage students in political action informed by Catholic social teaching. We have designed two courses, “Faith, Politics, and Social Concerns” (offered by the Theology Program) and “American Government” (offered by the History/Political Science Program) that focus on advocacy for environmental sustainability.⁷ The Sisters of Mercy Institute Justice Team facilitated a seminar in Washington,

⁶ “Forming Consciences” is not without flaws, however. See, for example, Winters on the criticism of the document as being out of touch with Pope Francis’ focus on social issues, poverty, the environment – and being too concerned with bedroom issues and same-sex marriage, which the bishops term an intrinsic evil like racism. Roberts documents that some commentators and bishops called for the bishops to write an entirely new document rather than revise the 2007 document for 2015, given that Pope Francis has called the bishops to prioritize the poor and the environment.

⁷ For descriptions of seven pedagogies for civic engagement, broadly understood, in theology and religious studies courses, see Stewart.

D.C. as part of the courses.⁸ The seminar included visits with experts in the areas of lobbying and environmental sustainability (including Catholic groups such as NETWORK) as well as meetings with elected officials in Washington, D.C. in order to enable the students to practice direct lobbying.

This collaboration evidences many of the elements supporting the civic engagement agenda discussed above: politically informed service-learning courses that explicitly focus on practicing political skills and clearly connect with Catholic social thought. Though College of Saint Mary offers many local service-learning courses, as well as one that includes a seminar at the U.S.-Mexican border, it has not offered previously a course focused on political advocacy. With a focus on obtaining and applying advocacy skills, the political science course worked explicitly to help students gain a sense of political efficacy and was a departure from standard Introduction to American Government courses which focus on the history and institutions of government. The focus of both courses on advocacy related to environmental sustainability was well-timed with the Pope's recent encyclical, *Laudato Si*. Indeed, the theology course included resources from CST on the Catholic understanding of the responsibility to engage in politics, the centrality of care for creation, and the principles of CST. It also included analysis of the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy, particularly the concern for the earth, and the significance of engaging in political action congruent with Catholic social teaching. Our partnership with the Sisters of Mercy Institute Justice Team in planning the advocacy seminar in Washington, D.C. assured strong connection with the Critical Concerns of the Sisters of Mercy.

Many in higher education have assumed that general knowledge of political processes, service in the community, and general commitment to the themes of CST yield the capacity for political action. But if we do not give students the opportunity to practice the actual skills that we value as course goals, we cannot expect them to be successful civic agents. Therefore, the courses explicitly teach students skills in political advocacy and the resources from CST that inform political action, as well as provide opportunities for students to practice and reflect upon their developing advocacy skills. This collaboration is one visible and important step in the continuing process of building a civic ethos at College of Saint Mary. Through building a larger political focus to our civic engagement efforts, we hope to initiate broader conversations about the important role of CST and the Critical Concerns in educating our graduates for participation in American democracy. Rooting our advocacy training and practice in the Catholic mission of higher education (and specifically, the mission of College of Saint Mary), we hope to underline the synergetic effect of religion and politics and to disprove the old adage that religion and politics do not mix.

⁸ Recognizing that many students lack the time and financial resources to travel over Spring Break to Washington, D.C., there is a second section of the Theology course where students advocate for environmental sustainability in Omaha.

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