

New Measures for Justice, Ecological Wisdom, and Integral Development¹

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This paper will sketch what Catholic Social Teaching (CST) offers, and in my view what CST needs to emphasize in the Philippines and the international community as regards the pursuit of human development and the role of politics in monitoring, measuring, and ensuring welfare in our age of inter-generational poverty, ecological risk, and climate change.

In CST, politics is the practice and art of governance of the citizens for the common good. The common good extends to the good of “future generations also,” and thus implies in our times “the protection of the environment.”² In light of climate change and the ecological crisis, CST has to emphasize this comprehensive understanding of the common good, which is a principle that usually is applied either to the present generation of a particular community or to all currently existing communities and nations of the earth.

For example, in his description of the common good in his last encyclical, *Caritas in Veritate* (2009), Benedict XVI wrote: “In an increasingly globalized society, the common good and the effort to obtain it cannot fail to assume the dimensions of the whole human family, that is to say, the community of peoples and nations” (C. V. 7). Unfortunately, there is no mention of the future generations, and they would not likely be included in the average person’s imagination of the community of nations.

Politics and Climate Change

For a leading interdisciplinary sociologist, Anthony Giddens, politics is the field where long-term innovative thinking and action is most urgent in order to guide and empower the work

of diverse groups, sectors, and institutions in seeking and pursuing an effective response to the threats and opportunities that climate change brings.

Giddens has published several works on social theory, human agency and structuration, modernity and its globalization, radical politics, and high consequence risks in our contemporary world. His concepts and insights can be useful especially for political and liberational theologians who are seeking to understand the forms and structures of domination, oppression, and legitimation, and the reproduction and alteration of such structures, in our dynamic and risky world.

“Political convergence” is one of the concepts that Giddens proposes in the formulation and pursuit of an effective politics to respond to climate change. It “refers to the degree to which policies relevant to mitigating climate change overlap positively with other areas of public policy” so that efforts in one area like “lifestyle politics” or “life politics” can be used to support climate change policies.³

The next sections will present the ideas of Giddens as regards the following: the significance of life politics to climate change mitigation and poverty reduction, the harmfulness of the ethos of *productivism*, and the phenomenon of over-development.

Life Politics

For Giddens, “life politics” gives prominence to emotive and ethical concerns.⁴ It is a politics of self-identity or self-actualization. It renders problematic both traditionalist and productivist beliefs about work, gender roles, sexuality, and other vital issues where personal choices are now possible. When life politics becomes central or prominent, it would be less difficult to persuade citizens of affluent societies to prioritize the venture to seek and sustain

expressive relationships over the venture to accumulate commodities or consume more goods. Thus a shift to low carbon lifestyles would be more likely.

In the formulation of an alternative development program for the poor in the developing nations, Giddens asserts that life politics should be made the vital center of the politics of emancipating people from “shackles of the past” and from forms of “illegitimate domination” in the present.⁵ Among the imperatives for such alternative development are the following: attend to “damage limitation” as regards the local culture and the environment; give prominence to life-political questions; distinguish the destructive ecological practices of the consumerist rich from those of the desperate poor;⁶ help improve the position of women in the community; seek to sustain family ties but undermine patriarchy and child exploitation; welcome critically the assistance of large organizations (states, businesses, and international agencies) as long as this assistance is sensitive to local sentiments and protective of the environment.⁷

For the affluent nations that are anxious about unemployment, Giddens supports the position of increasing employment through “public sector spending in six main areas: improving the energy efficiency of buildings; expanding public transport and freight; setting up smart electricity grids; building wind farms and solar power installations; and developing next-generation biofuels.”⁸

Climate change, the ecological crisis, and global poverty and inequality set before the affluent the following challenges: to settle for moderate or less consumption, to live content in frugal circumstances, to practice lifestyles that primarily satisfy emotionally, and to shun consumerism and wasteful luxury.

Productivism and Vital Enigmas

For Giddens, ecologically harmful consumerism is partly but deeply rooted in the ethos of productivism, which stigmatizes, demoralizes, or embitters many home-makers and unemployed and under-employed persons who seek alternative identities or who experiment with lifestyles that demonstrate that there is much more to living than earning or wage-working. Giddens writes:

Productivism can be seen as an ethos in which ‘work’, as paid employment, has been separated out in a clear-cut way from other domains of life. Work becomes a standard-bearer of moral meaning – it defines whether or not individuals feel worthwhile or socially valued; and the motivation to work is autonomous. Why one wishes, or feels compelled, to work is defined in terms of what work itself is – the need to work has its own dynamic.⁹

Pollution, deforestation, and the threat of extinction of many species are consequences of a productivist outlook, which regards nature and its resources as merely external and expedient. The outlook represses the existential contradiction of human life. Half of the contradiction, the inescapable fact and significance of being human as being part of nature, is put out of mind. The other half is retained and magnified. The fact of being “set off against nature,” being able to oppose and modify nature,¹⁰ becomes mesmerizing.

“Ecological problems disclose just how far modern civilization has come to rely on the expansion of control, and on economic progress as a means of repressing basic existential dilemmas of life.”¹¹ A precursor of the ecological crisis is an extensive repression of existential and ethical enigmas. For Giddens, sources of existential anxiety such as deterioration and death, chronic sickness, madness, and eroticism got sequestered from day-to-day routines in the process of denaturing the environment and building modern urban locales.¹² These sources of anxiety

and even breathless wonder indicate forcibly our being part of nature, its rhythms, and its contingencies.

In the process of building the surveilled environments of hospitals, asylums, and carceral complexes, sources of existential anxiety and wonder became secluded from regular activities. The face-to-face presencing of dying and death, the very smell of it, and the laughing and singing of the insane have become unusual phenomena to the average person especially in affluent societies.

“In pre-modern societies chronic sickness was part of many people’s lives and contact with death was a more or less commonplace feature of everyone’s experience.”¹³ These critical yet familiar features of pre-modern life were often enveloped in traditional practices and rituals that offered meaning and solace. These practices and rituals were preserved and transmitted usually by religious communities and institutions. Deep immersion in tradition helped people to appreciate the continuous intermingling of being and non-being in the world.

The sequestering of vital enigmas was interconnected with the modern disintegration of comprehensive tradition and the dissolution of natural environments. These processes yielded the everyday life of pure economic compulsion. The sequestering of existential and ethical enigmas accommodated the ascendancy of productivism, the compulsive ethos in which single-minded work defines the social value of the individual.

Integral welfare or well-being cannot be sought by repressing, hiding, or burying under clumps of capital or consumer goods the human existential enigma of, on the one hand, being part of nature and its contingencies, and on the other hand being able to wrestle with nature and domesticate or humanize it.

Over-development and the GDP Measure

For Giddens, when integral welfare stagnates or deteriorates despite economic growth in affluent societies, this can be described as “over-development,” which points to the narrowness of measuring a people’s welfare by the magnitude and growth of their Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Giddens affirms:

Activities that are environmentally damaging can appear to be wealth-generating in GDP measures, as many other harmful ones. GDP makes no distinction between industrial growth which acts to increase [carbon] emissions and that which does not. Nor does it factor in economic inequality—GDP can continue to rise even though only a small minority of the population is making any gains.¹⁴

Giddens sees great political convergence between climate change policy and a policy to measure welfare beyond GDP. Examples of alternative and apparently better measures of welfare are the Genuine Progress Indicator launched in 1995, the Index of Sustainable Economic Welfare, and the Sustainable Society Index (SSI) launched in 2006.¹⁵ The SSI includes environmental measures like the levels of carbon emissions and depletion of non-renewable raw materials. A better measure of welfare ought to guide national development planning and political decision-making as regards public sector spending in infrastructure and long-term investment of the resources of the State.

In the next section, we return to CST to show points of convergence with the sections on the ideas of Giddens.

Integral Development and Ecological Sensitivity

Catholic Social Teaching has emphasized constantly that authentic human welfare and development have to be integral and holistic. For example, Benedict XVI reiterates: “*Progress of a merely economic and technological kind is insufficient.* Development needs above all to be true and integral.” (C. V. 23) *Caritas in Veritate* recognizes also the uneven and distorted development of peoples globally, across and within nation-states:

The world's wealth is growing in absolute terms, but inequalities are on the increase. In rich countries, new sectors of society are succumbing to poverty and new forms of poverty are emerging. In poorer areas some groups enjoy a sort of “superdevelopment” of a wasteful and consumerist kind which forms an unacceptable contrast with the ongoing situations of dehumanizing deprivation. (C. V. 22)

In relating human development to God’s creation and the natural environment, Benedict XVI affirmed our responsibility to the poor and to future generations and the necessity of “inter-generational justice” (C.V. 48). He also recognized the link between the current ecological crisis and “the energy problem” in which poor countries not only lack access to non-renewable energy sources but also have poor capability to develop renewable alternatives. In the name of solidarity, he asserted:

The technologically advanced societies can and must lower their domestic energy consumption, either through an evolution in manufacturing methods or through greater ecological sensitivity among their citizens. It should be added that at present it is possible to achieve improved energy efficiency while at the same time encouraging research into alternative forms of energy. (C. V. 49)

“Greater ecological sensitivity” among the citizenry is shown and sustained by examining current lifestyles, evaluating them, and embracing “new lifestyles” that seek and embody predominantly spiritual and moral values (C.V. 51). Benedict XVI quotes his predecessor, John Paul II, who asserted the need “to create life-styles in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others for the sake of common growth are the factors which determine consumer choices, savings and investments” (*Centesimus Annus*, 36)

On the basis of Benedict XVI’s statements, one of the ten “commandments” or principles for environmental concern can be formulated as follows: “Environmental protection requires a change in lifestyles that reflect moderation and self-control, on a personal and social level.”¹⁶ Under Benedict XVI, the Vatican did the following: it sponsored a two-day scientific conference on “Climate Change and Development” in 2007; it turned itself into the first carbon-neutral State in which its greenhouse gas emissions were offset by carbon credits and renewable energy consumption; it replaced the roof tiles of its Paul VI Auditorium with 2,400 solar panels; it embarked on other “green projects.”¹⁷ Also, “Vatican officials say the Vatican plans to have sufficient renewable energy sources to provide 20 percent of its needs by 2020.”¹⁸

New Structure of Administration

In my humble opinion, for the institutional Church to create and nurture lifestyles and practices that are energy efficient, ecologically sustainable, and equitable or fair to the present and the future generations, it may have to adopt and reproduce this structure or standard of operation and administration: *measure regularly and report transparently the communal or organizational usage of energy and other renewable and non-renewable resources.*

In 2009, a large Philippine conglomerate of real estate, banking, electronics, water, and telecommunications firms issued its first “Sustainability Report,” which was the first of its kind for a Philippine conglomerate. In 2011, it issued another report, and another one is expected this year. The report included figures on the carbon emissions and the electricity and water consumption of its diverse firms. The conglomerate’s explicit goals for this initiative are as follows: measure its impact on communities and the environment, encourage good corporate behavior among its units, enhance its reputation, and attract investments from environmentally and socially responsible investors.¹⁹

According to a management adage, *what is not measured is not managed*. Measuring and evaluating periodically our activities and their impact, benefits, and costs are necessary steps towards making our deeds and efforts effective, efficient, and sustainable. Otherwise, they become wasteful or bear evanescent benefits, no matter how well-intentioned they happen to be. Those who are already committed to sharing and communicating God’s love with their actions need to keep in mind that “deeds without knowledge are blind” (C.V. 30).

Reporting regularly and transparently to the public or to a relevant body the measures and findings of the evaluation of activities and their impact is a reputable way to get feedback on the adequacy, accuracy, and relevance of the measures and findings and to validate, improve or refine them.

The institutional Church can intensify the impact of its propositions on inter-generational justice, ecological sensitivity, and energy efficiency by urging and persuading its central bureaucracy, dioceses, universities, and institutes to adopt and integrate the structure to measure periodically and report transparently the collective consumption of energy, fossil fuels, water and other renewable and non-renewable resources.

To put the structure into practice, sufficient resources have to be allocated to the effort to measure, evaluate, and report. To improve the structure, benchmarking on the measures and results can be undertaken initially among similar Church units and organizations and afterwards with similar entities in wider society.

The primary purpose to integrate the structure to measure and to disclose the consumption of resources by Church units and institutions has to be the intensification of the ecological sensitivity and the sense of justice of the leaders and members themselves of these units and institutions. The secondary purpose is to shine brighter as a model, and thus increase the impact, of CST on wider society. The structure to measure and to disclose both the consumption of resources and the efforts towards more efficient resource usage can contribute to the formation of ecological and social consciences.

Ecology in the Social Action Apostolate

Since 1992, among the tasks of Philippine bishops is the following: “An ecology desk must be set up in social action centers.”²⁰ In his research on what the Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines (CBCP) has done on this matter, Karl Gaspar says:

The CBCP set up an Ecology Desk at the office of the National Secretariat of Social Action, Justice and Peace (NASSA) with one full-time staff person serving as Ecology Program Coordinator. From data provided by this Desk, some dioceses are engaged in ecological issues but with different priorities from waste management to anti-mining advocacy.²¹

I humbly urge the CBCP to mobilize more personnel and resources for this Ecology Desk and to consider directing it to champion the integration of the structure to measure and disclose resource consumption in the dioceses and parishes.

I believe that, besides integrating the proposed structure, the institutional Church ought to mention specifically the Gross Domestic Product as a predominant but narrow and inadequate measure of the well-being of nations. On this matter, a specific Church pronouncement will be in great convergence with what a growing number of social scientists and public policy experts are saying on the limitations and the misleading usage of GDP in national development planning and political decision-making as regards public sector spending and investment. Catholic leaders, politicians, policy-makers, and academics have to be more active and diligent in resisting the structure or standard to measure a people's development only or primarily through GDP and its growth.

Also, as mentioned above, CST needs to emphasize a comprehensive understanding of the concept of the common good which includes and mentions specifically the welfare of future generations, and thus to link the common good closely with inter-generational justice.

Research on New Measures

I dare say that Catholic universities and research centers have to be more active and prominent in the task of reviewing, refining, applying and promoting alternative measures of human development such as the Sustainable Society Index. Furthermore, a Catholic institutional research agenda ought to include the creation of a data-based quantitative cum qualitative measure of a people's spiritual development which can integrate the degrees of intensity of the

attitudes of urban, rural, lowland, and highland communities towards nature, wildlife, and natural resources.

To guide local and national development planning and the decision-making of political leaders and ordinary citizens, is it possible to formulate a reliable or respectable measure of integral human development, which includes spiritual development and enduring liberation from greed, envy, and other harmful cravings? A systematic and adequate measure of a people's capability to create, sustain, and renew lifestyles "in which the quest for truth, beauty, goodness and communion with others" predominates? A defensible index of a people's capability to creatively and sustainably respond to vital enigmas and the continuous intermingling of being and non-being in the world?

I believe that if such a research project were pursued diligently and its methods and findings were reported accurately and widely, even if it would in the last instance fail, it already would have constituted a milestone on the way toward ecological enlightenment, integral human development, and the formation of an alternative global community that embodies the liberative and enduring wisdom of using just enough resources on the basis of real needs.

¹ This piece is a shorter version of my essay, "New Measures for Justice, Ecological Wisdom, and Integral Development," in *Just Sustainability: Technology, Ecology, and Resource Extraction*, edited by Christiana Peppard and Andrea Vicini (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2015), 69-80.

² Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (1994), 166.

³ Anthony Giddens, *The Politics of Climate Change* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 69. Another concept he proposes is "economic convergence," which "refers to the overlap between low-carbon technologies, forms of business practice and lifestyles with economic competitiveness" (*Politics of Climate Change*, 70).

⁴ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: University Press, 1991), 223.

⁵ Anthony Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right: The Future of Radical Politics* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1994), 160.

⁶ In 1991, the Second Plenary Council of the Philippines recognized the distinction, and declared: “Much environmental destruction may be attributed to the survival needs of the poor, as in slash and burn upland agriculture and dynamite fishing. But the greater sin against the integrity of God’s creation must be placed at the doorsteps of those who with impunity cause the pollution of rivers, seas and lakes by industrial wastes, and who for profit systematically destroy our forest covers to the point of unrenewability.” See Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II), *Conciliar Document* (Manila: PCP II, 1992), no. 322.

⁷ The other imperatives for the alternative development program proposed by Giddens are: tap and encourage the existing activities that indigenous social movements and self-help groups are doing for community development; promote self-reliance and integrity; emphasize the importance of autonomous health care; emphasize not only rights but also responsibilities. For an elaboration of the imperatives, see Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right*, 159-63.

⁸ Giddens, *Politics of Climate Change*, 147.

⁹ Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right*, 175.

¹⁰ Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 161.

¹¹ Giddens, *Beyond Left and Right*, 212.

¹² See Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 159-64.

¹³ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, 161.

¹⁴ Giddens, *Politics of Climate Change*, 65. In the case of poor nations, Giddens asserts the “development imperative” in which they “must have the right to develop economically, even if this process involves a significant growth in greenhouse gas emissions” (*Politics of Climate Change*, 72).

¹⁵ Giddens, *Politics of Climate Change*, 65-67. Giddens considers “sustainability” a concept that is useful but difficult to define. For him, “sustainability in its simplest meaning implies that, in tackling environmental problems, we are looking for lasting solutions, not short-term fixes” (*Politics of Climate Change*, 63).

¹⁶ Woodeene Koenig-Bricker, *Ten Commandments for the Environment: Pope Benedict XVI Speaks Out for Creation and Justice* (Pasay City: Paulines Publishing House, 2011), 23.

¹⁷ Koenig-Bricker, 2-9.

¹⁸ Koenig-Bricker, 10.

¹⁹ Felipe Salvosa II, “New Business ‘Philosophy’ for Ayala,” *Business World* (November 5, 2009), S1/1, 3.

²⁰ PCP II, *Decrees*, Art. 31 #2.

²¹ Karl Gaspar, "To Speak with Boldness," in *Reimagining Christianity for a Green World*, edited by R. Odchigue and E.M. Genilo (Quezon City: St. Vincent School of Theology, 2011), 31. For Gaspar, the Church in the Philippines has failed to speak and act boldly in responding to the ecological crisis because of the following: its opposition to pantheism to which panentheism is wrongly equated; the failure of its leaders to be updated on scientific and theological literature as regards ecology; their dependence on or close association with individuals and groups with vested interests in resource exploitation. See Gaspar, 35-38.