
ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY AND THE UNIVERSITY

大学与环境责任

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I write in support of making environmental responsibility central to the new economic paradigm. Others have spoken in support of this idea. I want to emphasize the role of private institutions, particularly higher education institutions, such as Silliman University, can play in demonstrating innovative leadership in this area. As important as it may be to promote political change, there's no need to wait for a transformation in government policy priorities and the appropriate allocation of public resources. Private institutions, business corporations as well as NGOs such as educational institutions, can move ahead, in the expectation that their successful experiments will be replicated in public institutions and policies.

Let me focus on those I know best, institutions of Christian higher education. Those that profess their Christian mission need to demonstrate and set good practices for winning the war against ecological destruction, rising poverty, and the health crisis, now made more visible and urgent by the Covid pandemic. Each college or university rooted in the tenets of Christian faith must be steadfast in its vision and mission in these changing times. But surely the

teaching-learning contexts have changed. The ways of thinking about and carrying out the mission of Christian education must adapt strategies consistent with the current needs and challenges. In facing these challenges, Christian colleges and universities must re-examine their understanding of the faith and mission in the ministry of teaching. What are the moral imperatives? What is the nature and scope of our institutional response? How can we best respond in ways that move beyond the piecemeal approaches of the past?

Moral Imperatives

Christian commitment to environmental responsibility is inspired by a vision of the earth as our common home. This is the telling phrase used by Pope Francis, for example, in his recent encyclical letter, *Laudato Si'* (Francis, 2015) which, while meditating on the witness of St. Francis of Assisi, spells out the meaning of the Bible's claim, not only that we are made to the image and likeness of God, but also that we have been given "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26, KJV). Biblical scholars insist that the "dominion" entrusted to us—otherwise known as "stewardship"—does not mean that we are free to do anything we want with the earth and our fellow creatures. We are not free to exploit resources—human, animal, or mineral—exclusively for our own comfort and security. Caring for our common home means cultivating the earth so that all creatures can fulfill their role in pursuing our common destiny. "Dominion" must not be confused with domination, at least not if we are to be faithful in our stewardship.

Because we are gifted to bear in ourselves the image and likeness of God, our stewardship means first of all the cultivation of intelligence. Education consistent with Christian commitment

means pursuing the learning that will enable us to understand our common home, its capacities and its constraints, so that we can respond more effectively, not only to our own needs, but also to the needs of all our fellow creatures. In light of what we now know about the impact of human activity in exacerbating the interrelated threats of ecological disaster, rising poverty, and the health crisis, we must re-examine our values and institutional practices, our teaching methods and curricula, to determine whether in fact we are effective in responding to the vision we profess as Christians.

For over a generation now, scientists have been documenting the growing effects of climate change and its role in increasing both the frequency and the depth of ecological disasters. What we ought to be learning from this new intelligence is that we can no longer address our stewardship obligations in piecemeal fashion. We cannot accept a "trade-off" in which we address the looming global temperature rise, while either ignoring the cries of the poor and the sick or addressing them on a business-as-usual basis. If, as appears to be the case, they are interrelated problems, then we cannot solve any one of them while ignoring the others. What, then, can institutions of Christian higher education do to respond to the interrelated threats of ecological destruction, rising poverty, and the health crisis?

Some Strategies and Practical Approaches

In the spirit of melding theory and practice, universities need to break down the silos of teaching, research, and community service. We need to adopt learning models that integrate the avowed trifocal functions of higher education. In July 2018, Silliman University began its vigorous campaign for zero waste management on campus. Recognizing our calling to be stewards of God's creation, we at Silliman University are committed to the prevention of environmental pollution, the conservation and enhancement of our natural

resources, and sustainability (Board of Trustees, Silliman University, 2018) As an institution intending to demonstrate leadership by becoming a model of a sustainable campus, this commitment is reflected in our internal management processes (administration, operations, planning, and infrastructure development). We believe that everyone is a stakeholder and has a role to play in sustainability, thus our environmental commitment engages the whole Silliman community, the city we live in, and beyond. In light of our experience of making “zero waste” a campus-wide priority, here are three ideas that I think should be included in a new economic paradigm:

First Key Idea: Making Environmental Responsibility an Educational Priority

The adoption of environmental approaches in academic institutions concretizes their commitment—as we say at Silliman University—to “total human development for the wellbeing of the society and the environment.” This way, academic units within the university just don’t teach, they practice what they preach especially in their specific discipline (Medical Sciences, Engineering, Biology, Political Science, Agriculture, etc.) and its link to the general area of economics – how individuals deal with scarce and finite resources as they satisfy their needs and wants.

Second Key Idea: Demonstrating the Economic Impact of Good Environmental Practices

Even in an educational institution, environmental practices make good business sense: Segregation of waste makes for more efficient operational processes, creation of alternative income streams and favorable economic returns that sustain environmental project goals. For example, time and energy may be saved through more effective waste collection;

biodegradable wastes can be used to sustain organic fertilizer production; recycling supports the local household economy and reduces destruction of primary sources of products like trees and mineral deposits. Similarly, tapping alternative forms of energy like solar energy saves costs on light and power (our institution’s second biggest cost item next to personnel cost). The savings allow the institution to allocate more for the improvement of our teaching and learning services which redound to general improvement of our core business.

Third Key Idea: Service-Learning is the Best Way to Engage Student Participation in our Approach to Environmental Responsibility

Service-learning as a teaching methodology can be an effective approach to introducing a community based economic perspective. Its adoption, for example, can bring lessons on economic inequality and unequal access to resources to the level of households, away from the “tyranny of the average” evident in focusing merely on average household income, or on an average basket of goods. Giving more importance to understanding specific households (as opposed to an aggregate household) will call attention to the quality of life of each household in a community, to the unique or specific contexts of farming or fishing households and being mindful of specific sociocultural contexts.

While our “Zero Waste” policy and other new environmental programs began in 2018, they remain “a work in progress.” The impact of the pandemic on our environmental policy is not yet fully clear, especially since most of our students are as yet unable to attend classes and resume living here. Nevertheless, we can see already that what we do, we need to do better and in a more purposive, consistent and integrated way. The details of these policies, and the steps already taken to measure our progress toward implementing them are available in the statement, “Silliman

University Environmental Principles, Policies and Guidelines 2018,” formally adopted by the Board of Trustees (Silliman University Board of Trustees, 2018), and my own presentation, “President’s Message during the All-University Convocation” (Cernol-McCann, July 9, 2018). What should be clear from these documents, as well as the follow-up reports published at the Silliman University website, “My Environment” (Silliman University, 2020), is that our goals are not simply aspirational, but have been thought through systematically, with the designation of specific responsibilities for various units within the University corresponding to the specific requirements assigned in the Board of Trustees statement, that I am pledged to implement in the months and years ahead.



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