Climate and Christians: A Case Study in Engaging Social Values

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Abstract

Globalization and International Business have contributed to significant issues in climate change and environmental concerns. This case study outlines a number of these implications and then grapples with the religious and political positions of denial and non-engagement. The literature and proposal suggest that this is partially a problem with faith-learning integration, with gaps in understanding the biblical and Christian narrative, worldview, and science. Additionally, this topic exemplifies how principle and conviction over love and mercy can damage the Christian cause, and suggests faith-learning integration opportunities in equipping better leaders and difference makers.

Keywords: faith-integration, climate change, environment, Christianity, international business, globalization

Introduction

For several decades, there has been an emphasis on ethics in business and corporate conduct, and Social Corporate Responsibility (CSR) has also continued to suggest "doing good" on multiple social agendas. That said, there is some division among leaders on social agendas as these can often be seen as liberal, while some faith-based leaders that engage in the promotion of convictions and principles are often seen as conservative. The purpose of this research is to use one area of social responsibility (climate impact/climate change) and demonstrate that with effective faith-integrated learning, better alignment and engagement in critical issues is possible. This article has implications for scholarship and academia as it suggests a more detailed cause/effect study behind many religious vs worldly or secular tensions. Understanding interpretations and motivations is a prerequisite to teaching the biblical narrative and an informed Christian worldview for equipping students to truly engage in the world for better outcomes.

The Global Situation

In International Business (IB), the acceleration of technologies and globalization have introduced new ethical dilemmas in the 20th and 21st centuries. One of these significant challenges is the carbon footprint or environmental collateral resulting from the global transport of goods and services in volume and distance. The maritime shipping industry alone produces around 940 million tonnes of CO_2 (carbon dioxide) annually (over 1,000 tons), primarily driven by consuming "massive quantities of bunker fuels" (European Commission, 2021; Kiln Digital, 2012). The *shipmap.org* animated visualization by Kiln Digital, showing the 2012 movement of cargo ships around the world is sobering (Kiln Digital, 2012). Globalization is likely here to stay with international business levels significant in the transport of goods and services, and there are adjustments required to minimize some of the negative impacts of globalization (Roches, 2020).

Globalization has a number of both positive and negative outcomes. Globalization has improved global economics and living conditions around the world, bringing availability and variety of goods and services, keeping prices lower for consumers, and providing significant business and market opportunities. It has also stimulated progress as best-practice sharing and specializations are leveraged for innovations, production, and supply. Unfortunately, globalization has also had collateral issues including significant implications for climate change and pollution. The 21st century has presented a critical and consequential challenge to corporations as governments, scientists, and citizens are becoming aware and concerned about the progressively apparent global warming and climate change – both chronic and acute. "The problem of global warming and climate change (GWCC) is one of the greatest challenges facing governments around the world" (Liu, Vedlitz, Stoutenborough, & Robinson, 2015, p. 488). In efforts to slow the environmental impact and GWCC, energy reliance on fossil fuels has become a significant focus.

In environmental concerns, an "aspect" is an entity (activity, products, or services) that can interact with the environment through an output known as an "impact" (Block, 1999). The climate/environment is vulnerable to the impacts of industry aspects, and corporations are implementing some Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs to reduce, alter, or minimize aspects and consequently mitigate or minimize their impacts. Environmental protection and stewardship are the responsible (e.g., ethical) thing for corporations and leaders to do, and not all corporate's environmental conscientiousness is altruistic, as CSR environmentalism can be pragmatic and profitable. Direct positive correlations often exist between "green" or environmental practices adopted by firms, and those companies' respective competitive positions (Babiak & Trendafilova, 2011; Giménez Leal, Casadesús Fa, & Valls Pasola, 2003; Porter & Van der Linde, 1995). Additionally, companies can realize reduced risks and liability through environmental management systems and CSR (Bresciani, 2013). Companies recognize waste as a cost, and often through controlling waste and emissions, recycling, green energy, and material consumption – companies can find ways to minimize the impacts from their industry aspects while trimming costs.

Thomas Beschorner (2017) makes it very clear that true CSR is about how companies operate,

not what they do with their profit. Operating corruptly and then giving away money to charity from their profits can be philanthropy, but is not CSR. That said, some companies use philanthropy to contribute to mitigation efforts for a current crisis beyond addressing their own impacts. As industries expand into under-developed countries through globalization, and as global warming and climate change are a threat that is here to stay – it is imperative that 21st-century business considers energy, climate, and environmental implications in CSR strategies. Fortunately, the literature suggests that profit and environmentally-suited business practices can coexist.

An evolution or progression from environmental considerations is a condition of sustainability or equilibrium. If an organization can leave a null footprint, and/or leave the environment in which it operates no worse for its existence, they have achieved sustainability. An organization can better the conditions and the people surrounding it, or have an adverse effect. Thompson states:

> Businesses are citizens, whether or not they want to be, and global companies are global corporate citizens. Firms can choose to be active or passive in their behavior, and constructive or destructive in their relationship with society. Whatever courses their leaders chart, corporations will be judged for what they do and how they do it (Thompson, 2005, p. 135).

As companies migrate and/or expand globally in the 21st century, it is imperative that communities are socially and environmentally protected or improved. The role of CSR is to provide the programmatic framework to execute sustainable business within communities.

When firms and managers demonstrate ethical leadership and consider the consequences of their decisions and actions beyond short-term profit, community and environment are two vulnerable aspects. An important role of CSR is to measure and foresee the effect of the firm's actions on these aspects, and to facilitate the change toward neutral or improved consequences. The state of equilibrium, in which communities and/or environment(s) (e.g., climate and ecosystems) are not adversely impacted, is known as sustainability and is the target of the CSR role. The value of CSR programs is evident, as the ethical, environmental, sustainable, and cultural considerations of business management are requisite to responsible business. Leaders of corporations should urgently support and resource CSR programs to meet the challenges of this century and the current business environment. The CSR role of self-governance and accountability in executing these important initiatives can preserve our world and freedoms.

The Christian Response and Role

The Disengaged Current State

A troubling question in the climate and environment predicament is -- where are the Christian and moral leaders? Silence, denial, moral disengagement, and procrastination have held a significant role in shifting blame and/or not pushing for action (Heald, 2017). There persists a negative correlation between "Judeo-Christian" religiosity and pro-environmental values, engagement, and activism (Jenkins et al., 2018). A larger constituent of democratic political

leaning individuals in the United States embrace action on climate change (49%) than Republicans (10%), and only 11% who voted for Donald Trump in 2020 said climate change was important versus 68% who voted for Joe Biden (Tyson, 2021). That said, there has been slow acceptance and engagement by all parties. A large number of the United States Republican-biased individuals quote and/or have followed some of the Trump administration's denials of climate change as the Trump administration took various measures to avoid addressing the issues (De Pryck & Gemenne, 2017; Dietz, 2020; Dunlap et al., 2016; Friedman & Flavelle, 2021; Long et al., 2021; Panno et al., 2019). Concern for the climate, earth, and community has almost been branded with fringe or minority political parties (e.g., liberal, green, etc.) while the "conservative" political parties are perceived as more Christian and business aligned. Robin Globus Veldmang (2019) writes:

> Evangelicalism is one of just a few religious traditions (and in some studies the only one) to maintain a statistically significant association with climate skepticism after controls are added. Nor is the effect minuscule. Republicans are in general more likely than Democrats to be climate skeptics, but a self-rated "strong" Republican of high religiosity is more than twice as likely as a "strong" Republican of low religiosity to deny the human origins of climate change (Veldman, 2019, p. 3).

Veldman (2019) goes on to suggest that climate skepticism in white evangelical circles has become "natural, normal, and Christian," and that the link between faith and climate skepticism is also promoted and associated with a political bias referred to as the "Christian Right" segment of the Republican party. A recent study (Jylhä & Hellmer, 2020) found significant statistical correlations between climate change denial and exclusionary/anti-establishment attitudes and conservative ideologies. The United States is not the only country with a politicization of climate change (McCright et al., 2015; Michaelowa, 2013). Is this more than a political problem though? Conservative-leaning individuals have led resistance instead of accepting responsibility, and this suggests a problem of understanding and correctly engaging the biblical narrative, Christian worldview, and research.

The Urgent Need for Engagement

Thomas Friedman (2019) says that climate change will either happen by you or to you. The inevitability and urgency of climate change is real and upon us, and we can be either a change agent or a victim. Friedman also says that the globalized world has changed from an interconnected arrangement to an interdependent one, and as such, the rival or competitor who fails may harm us more than the one who succeeds (Friedman, 2019). This suggests that all are in this together, and a competitor on the other side of the world can impact both current and future generations globally. Corporate leaders and corporate strategy determine logistics, operations, and controls – and in International Business, the impact of these decisions and actions is greater. There is absolute responsibility for climate change and CSR on leaders. "Responsible leadership is an offshoot of global corporate social responsibility (CSR)" (Johnson, 2014, p. 248). Leaders are the custodians and guardians of resources, and many of the CSR initiatives involving energy conservation, sustainability, and

the environment are within the leadership's responsibility or role. In the role of a servant leader, Johnson suggests that leaders are putting community ahead of selfish ambition. This supports ethical (e.g., unselfish) decision-making, and this can extend to community and sustainability CSR programs. As leaders operate as global corporate citizens, they should embrace and facilitate community ahead of selfish ambition.

Arguments For/Against

There are a number of areas where effective faith-integrated learning within business, science, sociology, and political science could make a difference. In each of these areas, there is a biblical narrative and Christian worldview, but there are also misconceptions and concerns that must be taught to properly engage Christians in a biblical manner. Only by considering some of the motivations and causes, can educators create a curriculum that affects the learning outcomes in transformational learning.

Human/Earth Relationship

In the biblical narrative, Genesis 1:26-30 (NRSV) has some language that can be understood (or misunderstood) as very anthropocentric. In these verses, there are terms like "have dominion over," "fill and subdue," and suggestions that things were given to humankind for food – potentially construed as suggesting destroying and consuming (Johnson, 2005).

> [26] Then God said, "Let us make humankind in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." [27] So God created humankind in His image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them. [28] God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." [29] God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. [30] And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food" …

This could suggest a human/earth uncaring relationship if the God/human relationship is not fully understood.

God/Human Relationship

Adam Clark (commentary) says that God created man (e.g., the human race) in His image [*Then God said, "Let us make humankind in Our image, according to Our likeness…* Genesis 1:26(a)], and the term "dominion" does not fit this image. Rather the interpretation should be that the human race was equipped and instructed to govern, comfort, and care for creation while having "sustenance, convenience, and pleasure" in the earth and creation (Clarke, 1977, p. 38). Psalm 8 amplifies the idea that God placed humankind above the earth and charged humankind with ruling, care, and governance (Garrison, 1988). This is a less

anthropocentric interpretation and suggests responsibility and nurturing versus using, abusing, and possessing of implied rights. Janell Johnson suggests that these verses are misinterpreted primarily because of the understanding and interpretation of "humankind in God's image" [Genesis 1:26] and the view of what God's image is (Johnson, 2005) – often seen as distant, controlling, judging, destroying, and disciplining. The actual "image of God" includes redeeming, loving, healing, nurturing, etc., and this has implications for the following verses and the responsibility assigned for the care of the earth. In this Christian viewpoint, humankind is responsible for the earth and the impacts of conduct and business. In the greater Christian narrative and worldview, there is vertical (God to humankind) and horizontal (mankind to each other) love, care, mercy, and nurturing (Bassett et al., 1991). If Christians' view of God includes the use, abuse, and disposal of humankind, then the Christian "in His image" can/should treat the earth/creation in the same way. Conversely, if Christians treat the earth/creation in the way that God treats Christians in mercy, nurture, and provision – this should affect the Christian's human/earth relationship to align with the God/human image. Additionally, the earth still does belong to the Lord. "*Yours, O Lord, are the greatness, the power, the glory, the victory, and the majesty, for all that is in the heavens and on the earth is yours; yours is the kingdom, O Lord, and you are exalted as head above all.*" 1 Chronicles 29:11.

Earth/God Relationship

Christians have typically considered the earth as an inanimate object, and have resisted animating/relational terms such as "Mother Earth." Some Christians amalgamate naturalism (a form of worshiping nature) with the stewardship, care, and responsibility of nature, and thus view it as a form of other gods (McFague, 1997). Lodge & Hamlin (2006) provide essays that form a research-informed dialogue between the ecology and religious perspectives and work to reconstruct the credibility of the ecological realities and the Judeo-Christian ecological ethic. That said, the earth is God's creation and handiwork in the biblical narrative, and is a testament to God. "*The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork*". Psalm 19:1. "*The heavens declare his righteousness…*" Psalm 50:6. Instead of the terrestrial earth existing only for utility, it glorifies God as a testament. We find that during the Triumphal Entry, it is even suggested that if humans were not glorifying and praising Jesus, the rocks would cry out (Luke 19:40) as a proxy testimonial. This suggests that the earth testifies in parallel to humans of God's greatness. God called His creation "good" after creating it, and the study of creation is evidence of God's great design and order. All of this suggests that we should treat the earth in respect of God's creation, property, and testimony.

Earth/Eternity Relationship

Christians often reference the end of the world and/or the "new heaven and new earth" eventuality, suggesting that this earth is shaping up (or winding down) as God wills toward an ultimate end or destruction. That said, the biblical narrative does not suggest that this provides an excuse or exemption from care and nurture, nor does it give license to destroy the earth. The human body is also temporary but is given care and nurture to provide the best

health and functionality for as long as it is needed. Christians also sometimes consider engagement in things that are associated with the earth as less important as it focuses on the temporal versus the spiritual. Finally, some individuals suggest a cyclicality of the climates and suggest—just like the ice age—that this is just an inevitable event and age the earth must pass through. Unfortunately, this entirely ignores the proven effects of millions of tons of CO_2 emissions annually occurring from industrialization choices and many other adverse contributors stemming from human choices in the here and now.

Team/Discernment Relationship

Everyone must have an identity, but for Christians, this can be complicated. The first identity should be an identity in Christ (John 1:12; Romans 8:28; Ephesians 1:7; John 15:16; Genesis 1:27; Jeremiah 1:5; 1 Peter 2:9; Galatians 2:20; Philippians 3:20; 2 Timothy 1:7). The second identity is that of a Christian — a follower of Christ. In many cases, this identification is undertaken like choosing a favorite team, political party, color, or brand. Christians thus identify with a culture or set of common values, norms, and traditions that they believe identify them as Christian. There are times when a "team" or prevailing thought is, unfortunately, true by association without individual discernment. The Bible has a lot to say about discernment, including within the church (e.g., religion) [Colossians 2:8; 1 Timothy 6:3-5; Matthew 24:11].

Social Issues/Christianity Relationship

Environmental issues or climate change can be lumped in with a plethora of social issues, trends, fads, and platforms and can consequently be aggregated into an area of Christian resistance (Stackhouse et al., 1995). There may be a tendency to see identity as a binary choice — the world or the church, the right or the wrong. The challenge is that in aggregate bundles of issues and causes, it is easy to endorse a sinful and wrong cause or to condemn a good cause because of binary or partisan identifications. There are absolutely popular agendas or specific issues that Christians can agree do not align with God's design or instruction. Unfortunately, some worthy considerations that extend unity, love, and the Fruits of the Spirit to others, the earth, and communities get rejected due to polarization associated with the "right" and "wrong" bundles and fall victim to wholesale acceptance or rejection. It is much more difficult to be a discerning Christian and filter through each issue independently.

Science/Creation Relationship

Some Christians discount science based on disconnects between scientific reports and the biblical creation narrative, especially involving the age of the earth (Selva, 2011; Snelling, 1983). Science and research have variables that are studied, but there can be certain assumptions. Selva (2011) suggests that carbon dating uses certain steady-state assumptions, but that maturation/aging can be accelerated under varied conditions. This does not mean that science is wrong but means that it is incomplete as there are unknown conditions that can vary the outcome.

There can also be a tendency to see the earth, nature, and creation as natural and

non-technical, and to view technology as in opposition, while technology could actually be the tool that helps preserve nature or fight climate issues (Stackhouse et al., 1995, p. 49).

Science/Politics Relationship

Politics has historically used/cited specific reports or science that supported agendas, causes, or parties. In recent years this escalated and never more so than during the last decade (by both/all parties/agendas). Science has to be considered in totality versus isolated reports, and critically examined and carefully applied. There is an old example that says, "99% of murderers are bread-eaters." This is an exaggerated example to show that facts can be misinterpreted or applied to specific agendas. Obviously, we do not need to assume that statistically, those that eat bread will become murderers. Unfortunately, the recent trend is to take isolated fields of science (e.g., climate change, vaccines, etc.) and entirely discount or conversely artificially inflate and extend) scientific reports to support agendas, causes, or parties. This is dangerous as it changes the construct and support of truth from empirically proven to who said it.

Church/State Relationship

Over history, the church and governments have responded to crises—sometimes as an aligned front, other times in isolated efforts, and in still others--in opposing manners/agendas. Over the last decade, significant divides in issues of racial equity, vaccines/masking, and climate change have emerged and divided both the church and the state. While these issues have caused division in the church, in other cases, this has polarized the church to adopt a unified political agenda suggesting a closer alignment between the church and state. In other areas, when the state responded to specific issues, the church advocated for more individual and church liberty and suggested the state was overstepping. In the area of climate change, governments have pushed for change and action in environmental concerns, suggesting these are real, urgent, and both acute and chronic. The strange dance known as the separation of church and state has resulted in some exclusionary/anti-establishment attitudes and entrenchment in "conservative" ideologies—rejecting partially just because the state was engaged or promoting.

The Challenge

God has called His people to live in His image and extend love to each other. God cares about unity and love for one another—even over principles or sacrifice. In 1 Corinthians 13, the Church of Corinth is challenged to love and unity as the most important thing—even over discernment and principles or acts of sacrifice and service. Christians must treat each other and the earth/creation in the way that God treats Christians-- in mercy, nurture, and provision. This should affect the Christian's human/earth relationship to align with the God/human image. Several reasons (some listed in this article) are likely causes for the disengagement and absence of Christians in this urgent issue of stewardship and nurture of God's creation and handiwork. The rhetoric, posturing, skepticism, and disengagement in the area of climate change and environmentalism are incongruent with Christian values, even

though espoused so passionately. With all of the considerations, evangelical Christians are not adequately engaged in either the acceptance of the cause/problem or in the ideation and implementation of solutions.

This is one example of an area where faith-learning integration must extend beyond the education of principles. It must speak to supporting a oneness (1 Corinthians 13 *Love*) that does not assume a requisite sameness – but embraces extensions of grace and love across differences. It must suggest that Christlikeness of love, mercy, longsuffering, and grace; is more important than position, principle, or politics. In secular disciplines, faith-integrated learning should be less evangelistic, catechistic, or polaristic. Instead, it must be about creating individuals that in their respective disciplines, extend grace and uphold the example(s) of Christ—remembering that "the greatest of these is love" (1 Corinthians 13). Faith-integrated learning must include exposure to right/wrong but must avoid the creation of judges, and instead build scholars and difference-makers that can extend love and community. Faith integration is a continual improvement process, and scholars may evolve in the manner suggested in figure 1.
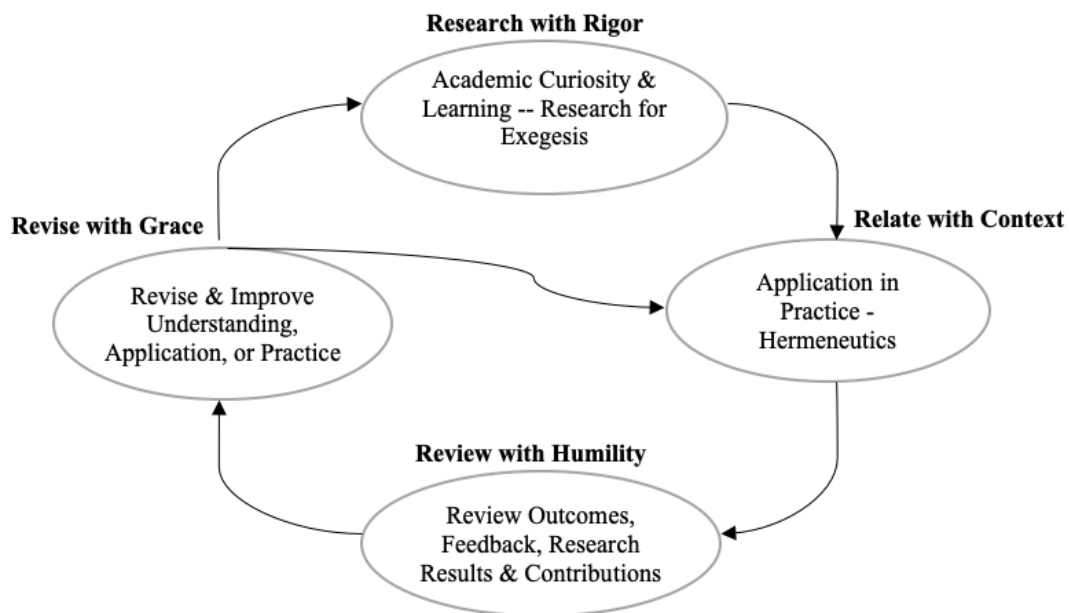

Figure 1. The Evolving Nature of Faith Integration

Note. Developed by the author with insights from (Azusa Pacific University, 2012, p. 8; Beers & Beers, 2008; Smith, 2006).

There is significant research, literature, and overall education needed to help change the narrative and bias of evangelical Christians and possibly other religions. There is an immediate need for scholars/educators to engage in faith-integrated instruction to build leaders that are not only about Capitalism and profit but are leaders in affecting sustainability involving God's creation and humanity's home. The literature, science, biblical narrative, Christian ethics, definitions of grace, and Christian worldview do not support the currently

espoused bias, actions, and positions of the evangelical Christian majority. In preparing Christian business leaders to engage in business around the world (e.g., international business as well as domestic), a significant faith-learning integration opportunity exists. There is also a need for Christians to engage in discernment and bravery and begin to buck the groupthink and set some examples in action. Capitalism, evangelical Christianity, globalization, and climate/environmental responsibility can and should co-exist.

Case Group Discussions and Exercises

1. While the article spoke to better faith-learning integration in preparing leaders for engagement in climate change, what can be done to bring "conservative" leaders in corporate today to engagement? Do biblical characteristics align with "conservative" as typically defined? How or how not?

2. While the article spoke primarily to tensions in the US and Evangelical Christians – what (do some outside research) do other religions say about humans ruling or having dominion over the earth? How do (or do) they encourage responsibility for the environment and community? Do the lessons of this case extend to other countries and/or religions? Why is this important to International Business (or is it)?

3. Consider and discuss how to preserve or change Capitalism for engagement in social issues (like climate) without needing to become Socialistic. Can this happen? --- How?

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