

The transcendence of the Roman Catholic Church's Holy Bread.

Bearer and usher of cultural sustainability

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- 1. Introduction**
- 2. Methods**
 - 2.1. Research questions
 - 2.2. Research methodology
 - 2.3. Research limitations
- 3. Review of related literature**
 - 3.1. Culture and cultural sustainability
 - 3.2. Bread as a harbor of culture
 - 3.3. Bread, sustainability, and religions
- 4. Results and Discussion**
 - 4.1. What are the attached spiritual values and meanings on the Holy Bread by the Roman Catholic Church?
 - 4.2. What are the sustainable ways of living according to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church?
 - 4.3. How do the attached spiritual values and meanings of the Holy Bread relate to such ways of living in terms of sustainability?
- 5. Conclusions and Recommendations**

Keywords: culture; Sustainability; cultural sustainability; Holy Bread; Roman Catholic Church.

Abstract. *Culture is less considered a part of the pillars of sustainability which is usually composed of social, economic, and environmental pillars. However, this paper argues that it should be permanently designated as a pillar in its own right. Through the analysis of the Holy Bread and the spiritual values and attached meanings by the Roman Catholic Church, this study illustrates a two-pronged argument that: (1) the bread, by the process towards and state of transcendence as a Holy Bread, is a bearer and proof of the essentiality of sustainability's cultural pillar; and (2) through this bearing of cultural sustainability, this pillar becomes essential together with the other three pillars of sustainability. Utilizing official texts and sources from the Church itself, this study provides evidence for its argument leading to a conclusion that the concept of sustainability finds the cultural pillar a necessity. Further recommendations for future studies and policy making are provided.*

1. Introduction

The concept of sustainability as well as Sustainable Development (SD) are the contemporarily accepted method of development and are evident across industries and international fora (Ruggerio, 2021). Its three pillars, economic, social, and environmental, have been guiding its practitioners as considered variables. However, an emerging interrelated fourth pillar has been reflected in several related literatures on SD: the cultural pillar (Hidalgo-Giralt et al., 2021; Harkonen & Stockell, 2019; & Grant, 2019). This pillar of sustainability, which mainly focuses on ideals and practices of people that has a particular meaning to them, reflects various intangible and tangible aspects. One aspect within the discussion of culture is religion (Aranoff, 2020). Each religion has a particular set of valuable elements for its believers which includes food. In the case of the Roman Catholic Church, it is the Holy Bread, given in every celebration of the Holy Eucharist that symbolizes the body of Jesus Christ (Ryan, 2015). Some literature included the Holy Bread as a concept or variable but within the confines of religion and doctrines as well as cultural studies (Sparre & Galal, 2018; & Lipiec, 2022). However, its relation to sustainability, particularly cultural sustainability, has not been explored yet.

With this research gap in mind, this paper argues that bread, by the process towards and state of transcendence as a Holy Bread, is a bearer and proof of the essentiality of sustainability's cultural pillar. This study also advances the argument that through its bearing of cultural pillar, it becomes essential together with the other three pillars of sustainability. In the context of this study, this is demonstrated through the teachings and practices of the Roman Catholic Church and through two sub-points; (1) the guided process of creating and consuming the Holy Bread, and (2) the attached spiritual values and meanings on the Holy Bread.

2. Methods

2.1. Research questions

This paper proposes that the Roman Catholic Church's Holy Bread, its process and state of being such, bears cultural sustainability and proves its essentiality with the rest of the pillars. Specifically, this is supported by answering the following questions.

1. What are the attached spiritual values and meanings on the Holy Bread by the Roman Catholic Church?
2. What are the sustainable ways of living according to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church?
3. How do the attached spiritual values and meanings of the Holy Bread relate to such ways of living in terms of sustainability?

2.2. Research methodology

The study utilizes a qualitative approach as the non-numerical information and explanation of different texts is analyzed and interpreted. The texts are taken from primary and secondary sources, specifically through the process of collecting and categorizing themes in providing answers for the research questions and advancing the main argument. The documents are from the Roman Catholic Church as a general basis as well as related credible supporting literature from external sources.

2.3. Research limitations

This study is generalist in nature in terms of analyzing the official rules and laws of the Roman Catholic Church and the utilization of the Four Pillars of

Sustainability. The study utilizes the term “Holy Bread” over the “Holy Host” in emphasize the sacred bread received by Catholics during the celebration of the Eucharist. This is to highlight the focus on food in the overall aspect of culture which is being attempted in the study. Nonetheless, both terms in the context of this research remain the same while recognizing that the latter is the official terminology utilized by the Roman Catholic Church.

The study does not consider the meaning and values of the Holy Bread from the common practitioners of the Roman Catholic faith nor any specific practices regarding the Eucharist across the world. The research focuses on generalist official doctrines, writings, related articles on, and recommendations of the Roman Catholic Church as well as on other journal articles and book chapters. The study does not include the Holy Wine since, in practice, it is not conventionally shared for mass attendees as the Roman Catholic Church find the Holy Bread already sufficient to symbolize the body of Christ.

The study does not include the actual practicing of teachings of the Roman Catholic Church as well as the creation, consumption, and the transcendent meanings of the Holy Bread. The study focuses only on what cultural sustainability could possibly usher, by the teachings of the Church alone, through its interrelation with the environmental, economic, and social pillars. This is because such a focus would require a narrowing of scope, reliance on facts of the ground since the study requires how it is practiced, as well as direct data collection from participants and key informants. This limitation of focusing only on concepts does not, however, render the arguments of this paper unprovable.

3. Review of related literature

3.1. Culture and cultural sustainability

Culture as a phenomenon and concept to define is unsettled (Lysgard, 2013; Mironenko & Sorokin, 2018). Its loose structures suggest the encompassing consideration on external objects and internal humanity of the person. These may refer to attitudes, values, languages, moral norms, behaviors, traditions, artifacts, and tangibly produced materials (Allen, 2003; Tuleja, 2017). It is in this scope that most studies and this research shall bank the parameters of the variable. Despite the argument for consolidation towards an empirical and objective meaning, culture’s current state suggests its applicability for interrelations with other concepts. One of these is its interrelation with the concept of sustainability which also has no fixed definition (Moore et al., 2017).

Nonetheless, Johnston et al. (2007) points out the basic inclusion of the traditional pillars of sustainability upon analysis of different definitions rendered for the concept. It is on these generalizations in which the study anchors its combination of culture and sustainability substantiated by further studies that utilized both.

The literature is scattered with different narrow scopes. The focus ranges from tourism to entrepreneurship (Tan et al., 2018; Davari & Jang, 2023; Tu et al., 2019; Kraus et al. 2020). Such studies could be noted for their emphasis on tangible and intangible characteristics of culture as well as how it is interrelated with the other three traditional pillars of sustainability. With the growing literature relating culture to the discussion on the pillars of sustainability (Thimm, 2019; Bergan et al., 2021), cultural sustainability can be shown to be connected with the social, economic, and environmental pillars.

Hawkes (2001) points out that culture is an “expression and manifestation” of every individual that is evident in different institutions. These institutions include environmental facilities, community interactions and activities, as well as economic-related actions. Such values, behaviors and traditions are vital if an action, policy, phenomenon and/or idea constitutes development today without compromising the future. In relation to this point, Loach & Griffiths (2017) state that culture contributes on how to approach economics, environment, and society through material outcomes produced and ideas. Despite being closely related to social sustainability, Soini & Birkeland (2014) emphasize that there is a case for emphasis on preservation of; heritage, diversity, locality, eco-cultural resilience, eco-cultural civilization, economic viability, and vitality which potentially merit culture's separation as its own pillar.

Through these arguments, food can be a physical existing cultural product to focus on. Literature highlights foods' relation to social, economic, and environmental sustainability (Bohm, 2023; Hoogland et al., 2007; Moustafa, 2016; Darmody, 2022). As a further contribution, this paper argues for the advancement of culture as a pillar of sustainability through food.

3.2. Bread as a harbor of culture

Food reflects the ideals and actions of a group of people through the process of its creation, provided meaning, and interaction with and through it. Primarily, several studies already included food and philosophies or ideas as variables (Christensen, 2017; Schosler et al., 2013; Heldke, 2002). Aside from the intangible part of culture as a focus, other studies have focused on food and specific cultural

localities and local economy (Welz, 2013; Olson, 2019; Magat, 2020). The existence of such relations generally ushers in the process of making the food within the realm of the environment, the management of resources, the people's assertion on its meaning as well as the process of their consumption and its implications.

Amongst all types and varieties of food throughout existing cultures in history, bread is common and a table staple (Nature Publishing Group, 2018). Locations such as France, Central Asia, the Mediterranean, as well as Middle Eastern countries all do have bread as notable part of their cultural backgrounds (Tripathi, 2023; Zocchi et al., 2022). Several evidence provides explanations on why bread is a common part of human consciousness. One hypothetical reason is the universal registration of the word "bread" in political, social, and economic set-up (Costello et al., 2015; Packham, 2014). Another probable reason for its prevalence is the abundance of its ingredients like wheat and water to most places and the ease of its basic creation.

Aside from geographically situated cultures, religions often associate bread with religious ceremonies and their traditions (Bennett, 2014). It is on this aspect that this study would like to focus on. Bread within religious set-up can be shown to bear all four conceptualized pillars of sustainability including cultural sustainability.

3.3. *Bread, sustainability, and religions*

Religion and sustainability have been the focus of different analysis (Jenkins, 2008; Ives & Kidwell, 2019; Berry, 2023). Several studies, such as from Berry (2014) and Chapple (2008) suggest that religious institutions and their rituals often contribute to the concepts and practices of sustainability. Different religious groups have incorporated bread in their worshipping rites. For the Jewish and Muslim people, bread is an important part of Shabbat and Ramadan (Bharath, 2016). These breads are known in different terms and have served as a cultural symbol in many ways. For the Jews celebrating Shabbat, it is called *challah* which is traditionally baked as plain round but can be served braided in contemporary times (Ron, 2022). In the case of Muslims states that bread is a staple food during Ramadan for satiety and appetite. With this, it could be inferred that food, specifically bread, plays an integral role in the practice of various religious ideals and teachings across different beliefs.

For this research, the focus shall be on the Roman Catholic Holy Bread. Anyfantakis (2020) points out that this bread is vital as it is a part of the Eucharistic elements particularly in the Holy Communion. Although other forms

of religious ideals and practices regarding food and eating exists, it is the Holy Bread in which Catholicism anchored its highest regards. This study argues that the process of making and the Holy Bread itself is a bearer of cultural sustainability and that it ushers overall sustainability through the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. What are the attached spiritual values and meanings on the Holy Bread by the Roman Catholic Church?

The spiritual value of the Holy Bread for the Roman Catholic Church is first and foremost reflected on the Code of Canon Law (1983) is the official guidelines that the Roman Catholic Church currently follows that consists of a compendium of rules, norms, practices, and ideas to adhere on as a religious institution. In terms of the Holy Bread, it emphasized that the Holy Eucharist and Holy Communion must be celebrated with such, and it should be made with wheat and must be unleavened (Book IV, Part I, Title III, Chapter I, Art. 3, Can. 924 § 1-2; & Can. 926). Furthermore, the act of Holy Communion should be done “under the form of the bread alone” (Can. 925). The bread can be considered as holy and worthy of the sacrament upon the consecration of a priest (Can. 927).

There have been no official guidelines rendered in buying and/or selling the bread. However, it is important to note that as the Holy Eucharist is a part of the official sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church, the Holy Bread is considered as a “sacred object” and no longer an ordinary matter (Book IV, Part II, Title I, Can. 1171). Therefore, buying or selling a bread to be utilized in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist is acceptable but prohibited if it is already a Holy Bread upon consecration. In general, utmost reverence to the Holy Bread should be observed (Instruction *Redemptionis Sacramentum*, 2004).

In terms of consuming or receiving, only baptized Catholics that have undergone the Sacrament of Communion, dying children, a person who committed a grave sin but with an acceptable reason not to confess, and/or anyone who is generally nearing death (Book IV, Part I, Title II, Chapter I, Art. 2, Can. 912; Can. 913 § 1 & 2; Can. 916; & Can. 921 § 1 & 2). On the other hand, people who are excommunicated are not allowed to receive the Holy Bread (Can. 915).

With these rendered facts, we can infer that the Holy Bread is of utmost importance and value to the Roman Catholic Church. As a religious institution, it created a formal and systematic process of creation and consumption of the

Holy Bread rendering it as an important part of its religious functions. Nonetheless, the general spiritual value and meaning of the Holy Bread also lies on the concept of transubstantiation. This concept explains that the Holy Bread, through its consecration, is Jesus Christ itself (Francis, 2021). By its transubstantiation, the unleavened bread transitions into a sacred object. As the bread becomes Christ itself in the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church, every ideal, practical as well as identical attributions to Christ, is also attributed to the Holy Bread.

The Holy Bread from being an unleavened bread is a consecrated and integral part of the celebration of the Holy Eucharist and received during the Holy Communion. The Holy Eucharist “is the action of Christ himself and the Church” in which Jesus Christ offers himself to God the Father and for believers spiritually (Can. 899 § 1). Part of this is the Holy Communion in which Catholics accept Jesus Christ through the Holy Bread symbolizing communion with him, the forgiveness of sins, being charitable to the poor and union with the Church (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1992, CCC 1391-1398; & The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta, 2015).

These attributions are reflected in other writings of the church that corroborate such arguments. Benedict XVI (2010) points out that Jesus Christ is “the Bread of Life” providing “eternal and spiritual nourishment”. This is corroborated by Hammes (2005) elaborating out that if the bread nourishes us from physical hunger, the Holy Bread therefore replenishes lives. Moreover, Susin (2005) emphasized the further importance of God’s word attached on the bread than the bread itself. From here, it can be concluded that spirituality, life, and health supersede the physical one.

Another provided meaning is that the Holy Bread is God’s reality and a way to communicate his love (Pieper, 1991). The believer receives God’s love and provides him/her with other attributes such as “hope” “light”, “joy”, and “salvation” for eternal life (Fortin, 2005) as we accept the Holy Bread. By this act of receiving the bread, the Roman Catholic Church suggests that Jesus Christ is within every faithful, and therefore the people within the church are bounded with the identification of being a Christian and affirming Catholic affiliation (CCC 1395) as such. This would entail being empathic, generous, and of service to fellow brothers and sisters (Cavanaugh, 2005; Dodaro, 2005; Muller, 2005).

Overall, these values and meanings of the Holy Bread attached to the culture of the Roman Catholic Church highlight the acceptance and emulation of Jesus Christ’s wholeness by the followers. It can be inferred that these set of ideas and

actions are part of its cultural sustainability. As the Holy Bread becomes Jesus Christ, taking it during the celebration of the Holy Eucharist also meant being with Jesus Christ (Mendez, 2005) and following his teachings on how to lead a life. The food itself becomes an integral part of the culture as it embodies the transcendent within the Roman Catholic Church, which in this case is the existence of Jesus Christ.

From the rendered spiritual values and meanings, we could already see that the culture imposed through the Holy Bread has manifesting interrelations with social, economic, and environmental aspects. One example of this is charity and being of empathy with brothers and sisters. This culture manifesting invites the followers of the Church towards acts of sustainability. Values such as empathy for others can be contextualized into possible forms of social care, economic help, or environmental care. With the initiation of the idea and actions upheld upon the acceptance of the Holy Bread, there will be a spillover in the social, economic, and environmental realms. Furthermore, there are heightened and provided concrete examples from the act of accepting the Holy Bread further into the other specified teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

4.2. What are the sustainable ways of living according to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church?

The teachings of the Roman Catholic Church as a part of its culture are with the overall sustainable ways of living for the followers, particularly the three traditional pillars of social, economic, and environmental. Christie et al. (2019) mention the concept of Catholic Social Teaching (CST) and its relations to sustainability. This is the official teachings of the Roman Catholic Church in terms varying social issues from various official sources (Sison et al., 2016). Notable among these sources are writings or documents attributed to the pontifical. Leo XIII (1891) was noted for creating the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* that pioneered contribution to CST. The mentioned encyclical focused on the rights and duties of capital and labor, specifically about supporting workers in their labor rights and wages as well as facilitating self-efficiency from resources for them (Davis, 2021). It could be inferred that economic and social sustainability is directly evident from the idea of the encyclical.

Other documents have reflected more themes depending on contemporary issues at the time of their writing. John Paul II (1987) tackled economic inequality, international debt, underdevelopment, unemployment, and arms production across the world. In this encyclical, the Pope presented a form of development that is “more human” rather than focusing on its economic aspects

alone and the use of resources for human vocation (Par. 28-29). Furthermore, human rights should be upheld as well as the morality of development's character (Par. 33 & 35). Traces, on the other hand, of similarities between the genesis of the concept of sustainability (Renoldner, 2013) and the Roman Catholic Church's conceptualization of development at this time can be inferred.

Benedict XVI (2009) focused on charity in justice and the concept of common good (Par. 6). Framing charity as a vocation, emphasis on the concepts of integral human development is stated (Par. 17-18) pointing on providing for everyone and for every need of every individual. In line with the thought of John Paul II (1987), the economic focus of development is not sufficient (Par. 23). Social welfare, peace, infrastructures, agriculture, religious freedom, value for different cultures, justice in economic activities, the environment must also be given priority to usher common development for all (Par. 27, 29, 26, 37, & 48).

Moreover, almost all similar themes are reflected in the Apostolic Exhortation of Francis (2013). Notable emphasis on the poor, scientific progress, and interreligious dialogue (Par. 186-201, 242-243, & 250-254) are differing points from the previous encyclicals. However, as climate change continues to be a dominant contemporary global issue, Francis (2015) provided an encyclical entitled *Laudato Si* which focuses on proper environmental stewardship.

As the following guidelines within CST settle the ideas, values, and actions the Roman Catholic Church wants to instill to its followers as an institution, it can be derived that these can affect the society, economy, and environment in general. Upon the initiation of the Church to settle norms and morals that needs to be followed, an adherence to ushering holistic sustainability is evident. Referring to the four pillars of sustainability, it is with the settlement of the cultural pillar that the other three traditional pillars coexist with it.

4.3 How do the attached spiritual values and meanings of the Holy Bread relate to such ways of living in terms of sustainability?

The acceptance of Jesus Christ through the Holy Bread is the commencing prerequisite of following all his teachings and ideas regarding Christian living and adherence with the Roman Catholic Church (The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta, 2015; & CCC 1396). The Holy Bread is metaphorically an opening door to the specific teachings of the Church which would include the Holy Eucharist and CST. Through the celebration of the Holy Eucharist together with what is further taught for the members of the church as they accept Jesus Christ

by the Holy Bread, these comprised the cultural sustainability that is interrelated with the social, environmental, and economic pillars.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

Food is a vehicle of cultural meaning and importance as well as a proof of the existence of cultural sustainability with the traditional three pillars (economic, social, environmental). This is through the ideas and actions of groups and institutions towards and from the food itself. Furthermore, this paper concludes and therefore emphasizes a recognized pattern, that the three traditional pillars of sustainability coexist with the cultural pillar. Future studies are also recommended to explore other focal points aside from food that can advance this conclusion whether tangible or intangible. This is a pattern that could possibly exist in other contexts or sustainability phenomenon. In the case of religions, the element of transcendence is evident on the value and meaning of food as the purpose of creating such is an integral part of the metaphysical. Thus, the sustainability it ushers depends on the latter.

However, the nature of this relationship should be further analyzed through future studies of other religions and beliefs. In general, such anchoring on religion and transcendence further advances the case of food as a bearer of cultural sustainability. Specifically for the Catholics, it is through eating/acceptance of the Holy Bread that symbolizes following and acceptance of Jesus Christ which in turn promoted overall sustainable teachings for their faith. The concept of “transubstantiation” built by the Roman Catholic Church as an institution is an act that transcends its significance. Moreover, upon its acceptance, it symbolizes the believer’s adherence to a multitude of CSTs which provides a cultural framework with economic, social, and environmental sustainability.

Lastly, this study defends the argument that there is a need to emphasize culture – the ideas, actions, and behaviors of groups of people – as a sustainability pillar together with the social, economic, and environmental pillars. No sustainability can be without the initiative of a group of people with their thinking and practices towards social, economic, and environmental structures. In this case, it is justified by the Roman Catholic Church as a group with their creation and provided significance on the Holy Bread.

As a recommendation, future studies should be created that observe specific practices and idea interpretations regarding the creation and consumption of the

Holy Bread. Geographical or parochial differences, as well as other independent variables like cultural variations, environmental and economic phenomenon, socio-political situations etc. are worthy of being explored. In this way the overall sustainability of this focus can be contextualized and better analyzed. Moreover, the potential of food as a justification for and advancement of cultural sustainability's recognition should be further investigated. Food within religious contexts should be the specific focus of future studies, including major religions and spiritualities such as other denominations of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Shintoism etc. Specific points about cultural heritage and diversity can be emphasized through this endeavor.

Meanwhile, policy making and analysis in sustainability and even SD should include cultural sustainability for further effectiveness and credibility. The development planning and conceptualizing under such principles must then include people's ideas and actions. In this way, social structures, economic ways, and environmental set-up can be approached in a proper and sustainable manner.

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Ethical Considerations

This study, in consideration of inclusivity and multiculturalism, does not employ any means or consider any information that can be discriminating and damaging to any culture, religion or belief.

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