



Fostering Awareness of Christian Moral Rights and Obligations For Catholic Youth Based on the Teachings of the Catholic Church and the Concept of Actus Humanus

Gonti Simanullang

Program Studi Ilmu Filsafat, Fakultas Filsafat, Universitas Katolik Santo Thomas, Medan, Indonesia

Article Info	ABSTRACT
Corresponding Author Gonti Simanullang	The development of digital technology, individualistic culture, and moral relativism are influencing the way young people understand freedom, rights, and social responsibility. This condition gives rise to a tendency to demand personal rights without being balanced by the awareness of carrying out moral obligations to God, others, the Church, and society. This Community Service activity aims to increase the understanding and awareness of young Catholics regarding the relationship between rights, obligations, freedoms, conscience, and responsibilities based on the teachings of the Catholic Church and the concept of actus humanus. The implementation of activities uses an educational, pastoral, participatory, and reflective approach through interactive lectures, group discussions, Scripture reflection, moral case studies, and the preparation of action plans. Evaluation was carried out using pre-test and post-test, observation sheets, case study assessments, participant reflections, and satisfaction questionnaires. The draft results show an increase in the average score from 55.5 to 84.3. Participants also showed better ability to distinguish moral rights and obligations, connect freedom with responsibility, analyze moral issues, and formulate service commitments. This activity emphasizes that actus humanus-based coaching is able to help young people understand that moral action always involves knowledge, freedom, choice, and accountability. The sustainability of activities is directed through OMK mentoring, the use of modules, periodic reflection meetings, and evaluation of pastoral involvement. Keywords: rights; obligations; Christian morality; actus humanus; Catholic youth.

This is an open access article under the [CC BY-NC](#) license



INTRODUCTION

The development of modern society marked by the advancement of digital technology, cultural globalization, and changes in the pattern of social relations provides opportunities as well as challenges for the formation of young people's morals. Social media expands the space for communication and expression, but it can also encourage individualism, interpersonal conflict, irresponsible dissemination of information, as well as a tendency to understand freedom as a right to act without limits. Francis (2017) emphasized that communication should build hope and trust, not magnify fear, prejudice, or hostility. In the

Fostering Awareness of Christian Moral Rights and Obligations For Catholic Youth Based on the Teachings of the Catholic Church and the Concept of Actus Humanus—**Gonti Simanullang**

digital context, these challenges are increasingly important because online spaces can trigger polarization, isolation, and weakening of authentic interpersonal relationships (Francis, 2020). Therefore, awareness of the relationship between rights and obligations is necessary so that freedom remains directed towards goodness and moral responsibility.

In the teachings of the Catholic Church, human dignity stems from the belief that every person is created in the image and likeness of God (Gen. 1:27). This dignity is the basis for the recognition of human rights, but at the same time it gives birth to the obligation to respect life, freedom, and the goodness of others. Francis (2020) emphasized that the recognition of equal dignity cannot stop at the demand for individual rights, but must be realized through brotherhood, solidarity, and responsibility towards others. Thus, freedom is not understood as an unlimited action, but as the ability to choose the good consciously and responsibly.

Pastoral observations show that some young people find it easier to demand personal rights than to realize social, moral, and spiritual obligations. This can be seen in the low participation in social and pastoral activities, lack of concern for others, and the use of digital media that does not always consider moral impacts. Francis (2019) reminds that young people need mentoring that listens to their real experiences and helps freedom develop into meaningful life choices, service, and commitment to the common good. The imbalance between rights and obligations can weaken life together because personal decisions always have consequences for others and communities.

The concept of *actus humanus* provides an important framework for understanding the moral quality of action. *Actus humanus* is an action that comes from knowledge, consideration, will, and free choice so that the perpetrator can be held accountable for actions and consequences. Löwe (2021) explains that human actions are distinguished from other activities because they are preceded by judgments and free choices that direct the will. Therefore, an action is judged not only by the final result, but also by the object of the action, the purpose, the means, the circumstances, the level of consciousness, and the freedom of the perpetrator.

The relationship between rights and obligations is also rooted in human social nature. Francis (2020) emphasized that social fraternity requires everyone to recognize the dignity of others, to come out of self-interest, and to build a common life through solidarity and service. This principle shows that self-fulfillment does not take place through self-interest alone, but through the willingness to respect the rights of others and carry out obligations to the community. In faith building, this orientation needs to be translated into concrete habits in the form of care, dialogue, cooperation, and social involvement.

Moral coaching for young people needs to be carried out contextually, dialogically, and participatively. One-way lectures alone are not enough to form decision-making skills. The Synod's final document on youth emphasizes the importance of integral assistance that connects the spiritual, human, social, and moral dimensions (Synod of Bishops, 2018). In line with that, Francis (2019) encourages the Church to listen to the questions of young people, make room for their participation, and help the process of discernment or affirmation of choices. Participants therefore need to be given the opportunity to analyze real cases, express experiences, reflect on Scripture, consider alternative course of action, and formulate action plans.

Based on these conditions, this service activity aims to increase young Catholics' understanding of Christian moral rights and obligations, strengthen their understanding of the *actus humanus*, form a responsible conscience, improve the ability to analyze moral cases,

and encourage involvement in the Church's ministry and social life. The program is expected to result in changes in aspects of knowledge, attitudes, reflective skills, and commitment to action through coaching that is close to the concrete experiences of young people and the challenges of digital culture (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, 2020).

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

Location and Objectives of the Activity

The activity is aimed at Catholic Young People, Catholic students, Church ward administrators, catechists, companions of the faith, and pastoral activists. The group was chosen because it has a strategic role as a beneficiary as well as an agent of change in the community. In this draft article, the number of participants is arranged as many as 30 people according to the draft budget proposal. The number, location, implementation time, and characteristics of participants must be adjusted to the actual data.

Approaches and Methods

The program uses an educational, pastoral, participatory, reflective, and contextual approach. The educational approach is used to provide a conceptual basis, the pastoral approach connects the material with the life of faith, the participatory approach actively involves the participants, the reflective approach helps the participants evaluate the experience, while the contextual approach directs the discussion to the real problems of young people. The choice of this approach is in line with the catechesis orientation that places experience, digital culture, mentoring, and community involvement as part of the faith-formation process (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, 2020). The methods used in the activity are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Method of Implementation of Activities

No.	Method	Description
1	Interactive lectures	Conveying the concepts of rights, obligations, freedom, conscience, and actus humanus.
2	Group discussions	Discussion of the experiences and moral issues faced by the participants.
3	Reflections on Scripture	Deepening the values of love, service, justice, and social responsibility.
4	Moral case studies	Analysis of social media cases, relationship conflicts, personal rights, and social obligations.
5	Action plan	Preparation of individual and group commitments for responsible service and digital life.

Stages of Implementation

The series of activities is systematically arranged starting from the identification of needs to the preparation of follow-ups. These stages are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Stages of Implementation of Activities

Stages	Activities	Process	Exterior
1	Preparation	Coordination with the Church and OMK management, identification of needs, preparation of administration and media.	Data on the needs and readiness of activities

Stages	Activities	Process	Exterior
2	Preparation of materials	Preparation of modules on rights and obligations, actus humanus, conscience, and digital ethics.	Modules and airing materials
3	Implementation	Lectures, discussions, Scripture reflections, and moral case studies.	Improved understanding and analytical skills
4	Evaluation	Pre-test, post-test, observation, reflection, case assessment, and questionnaire.	Activity achievement data
5	Follow-up	Preparation of commitments, recommendations, and follow-up assistance plans.	Participant and partner action plans

Evaluation Instruments

Formative evaluation is carried out during the activity process through observation, participation, discussion, and reflection. Summative evaluation is carried out at the end of the program through post-tests, case study assessments, questionnaires, and action plans. Indicators of success include increased understanding of rights and obligations, the ability to connect freedom with responsibility, the ability to analyze moral cases, and a commitment to engage in social and pastoral activities.

RESULTS OF ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSIONS

Implementation of Activities

The activity began with a pre-test to find out the participants' initial understanding of rights, obligations, freedoms, and human actions. The material session then discussed human dignity, the relationship between rights and obligations, elements of actus humanus, the formation of conscience, and moral responsibility in the use of digital media. Participants are engaged through questions and answers, group discussions, and reflection on daily experiences so that moral knowledge does not stop at concepts, but develops into the ability to assess and choose actions consciously (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, 2020).

In the case study session, participants analyzed several issues, such as the dissemination of information without verification, insults on social media, neglect of family obligations due to personal interests, conflicts between the right to expression and respect for the dignity of others, and low service participation. The case was chosen because digital communication requires honesty, fact-checking, responsibility for the impact of messages, and willingness to encounter reality directly (Francis, 2018b, 2021). Each group was asked to identify the facts, the affected parties, the rights and obligations involved, the level of freedom of the perpetrators, alternative actions, and moral consequences.

Quantitative Attainment

The change in participants' understanding was measured through a comparison of pre-test and post-test scores on four main indicators. The results of the draft evaluation are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Draft Results of Pre-test and Post-test Participants

Aspects Assessed	Pre-test	Post-test	Differences	Remarks
Understanding of moral rights and obligations	58	86	+28	Increase
Freedom and responsibility	55	84	+29	Increase
Moral case analysis skills	52	82	+30	Increase
Social and pastoral participation	57	85	+28	Increase
Average	55,5	84,3	+28,8	Increase

To provide a visual overview of the changes in participants' achievements, the average scores before and after the construction are presented in Figure 1. The graph shows improvements in all aspects of the assessment.

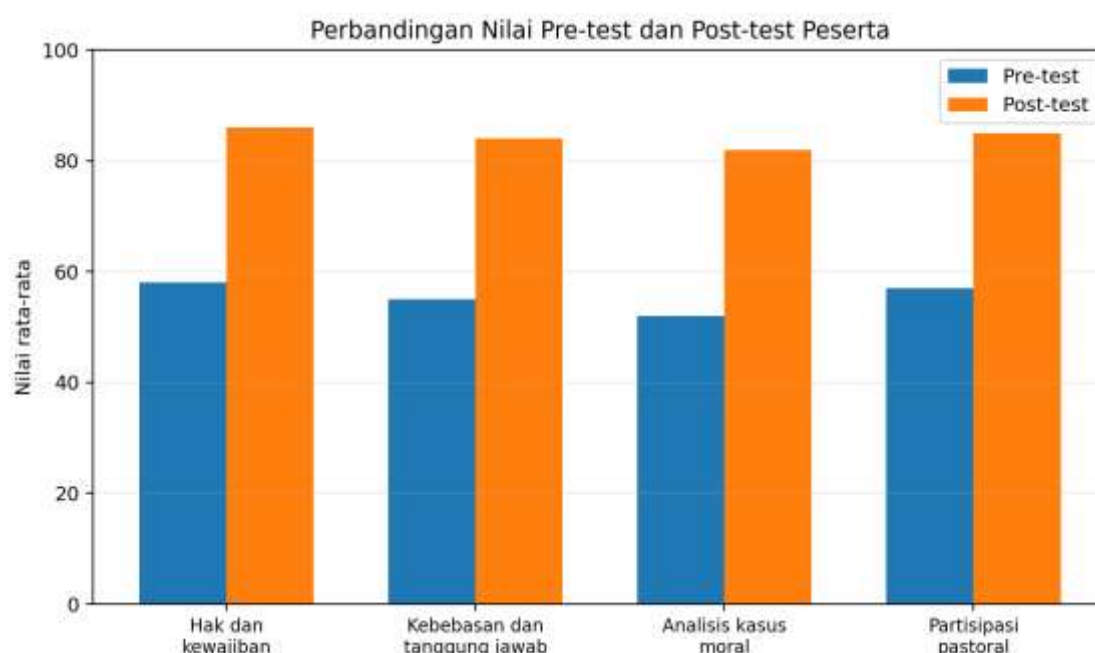


Figure 1. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Scores of Participants

The draft results show that the highest improvement occurred in the ability to analyze moral cases, which was 30 points. These findings suggest that case studies and group discussions help participants move from a general understanding to a more structured process of moral consideration. The process of considering multiple points of view, acknowledging the limitations of information, and seeking a balance of interests are important elements of thoughtful reasoning (Grossmann et al., 2017). The post-test average of 84.3 also shows that all indicators have exceeded the target of at least 80.

Qualitative and External Outcomes

The output of activities and qualitative changes observed during the coaching process are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4. Output and Activity Outcomes

Exterior	Reach	Meaning
Conceptual understanding	Participants were able to explain the relationship between rights, obligations, freedoms, and responsibilities.	More comprehensive moral knowledge

Exterior	Reach	Meaning
Moral case analysis	Participants are able to identify the facts, rights, obligations, choices, and consequences of actions.	Increased moral reasoning ability
Personal reflection	Participants assessed their social media usage habits and social relationships.	Self-awareness develops
Service commitment	Participants develop social and pastoral action plans.	Youth participation strengthened
Construction modules	The material is prepared for reuse by OMK administrators and faith companions.	Coaching sustainability supported

The facilitator's observation showed that participants increasingly understood that personal rights cannot be separated from the obligation to respect the rights of others. In the discussion, participants also began to use considerations regarding the purpose, means, circumstances, freedom, and impact of the action before making a decision. Participants' reflections showed awareness to use digital media more wisely, avoid insults, check information before sharing it, and communicate based on truths and real encounters (Francis, 2018b, 2021). Participants also showed readiness to be more actively involved in the ministry.

Discussion

The increased understanding of participants supports the principle that moral freedom should be directed to the good. Francis (2018a) places discernment as an important process for recognizing good will in the midst of various choices, influences, and life situations. Freedom is therefore not synonymous with unlimited action, but is the ability to assess, choose, and act consciously. Awareness of rights must go hand in hand with recognition of obligations, the dignity of others, and the consequences of actions against others (Francis, 2020).

The concept of actus humanus has been proven to help participants understand the basis of moral responsibility. According to Löwe (2021), human action is related to free choice that is preceded by judgment, then manifested through concrete will and action. In this activity, participants not only judge an action as right or wrong, but also consider the motive, object, circumstance, means, degree of freedom, and its consequences. The framework helps participants understand that moral responsibility increases as the perpetrator's knowledge and freedom become more intact.

The case study approach provides a space for participants to apply theory to concrete situations. The ability to see problems from the perspective of others is related to the development of wise reasoning. Grossmann et al. (2017) show that wise reasoning involves the ability to consider multiple perspectives, acknowledge uncertainties, and seek a balance of interests. This element arises when participants discuss the conflict between the right to expression and the obligation to respect the dignity of others.

Reflection on Scripture strengthens the orientation of love and service in moral understanding. The teaching to love one's neighbor as oneself places respect for the rights of others as an obligation of love, not just a legal demand. Francis (2020) emphasized that fraternity and social friendship require openness to others, attention to the vulnerable, and a willingness to build a common good. Thus, personal rights acquire moral meaning when they are exercised in relationships that respect the dignity of others.

Moral development is also related to the development of young people's identities. Youth is an important period in the formation of values, identities, and moral systems (Santrock, 2018). Francis (2019) added that young people need to be accompanied in order to be able to recognize their vocations, make responsible choices, and actively participate in the life of the Church and society. Therefore, mentoring needs to be carried out in a dialogical and sustainable manner so that participants are able to integrate moral knowledge into habits and real decisions.

Supporting factors for the activity include the openness of participants, the relevance of the case, the support of the OMK management, and the use of various methods. Obstacles that need to be considered are differences in initial abilities, tendency to give normative answers, and limited time to observe behavior changes. Therefore, pastoral impact needs to be monitored one to three months after the activity through observation, interviews, and participant engagement assessments.

The sustainability of the program can be carried out through regular OMK meetings, discussions of actual cases, the use of reflection journals, assistance by catechists, and the implementation of social actions. Continuous assistance is needed so that faith formation touches experiences, relationships, digital culture, and community involvement (Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization, 2020). With this mechanism, coaching does not stop at increasing knowledge, but develops into moral habits, social concern, and pastoral involvement as emphasized in youth development (Francis, 2019).

CONCLUSION

Christian moral rights and obligations are designed to help young Catholics understand that freedom, rights, obligations, conscience, and responsibility are integral in human action. The approach of interactive lectures, group discussions, Scripture reflection, moral case studies, and the preparation of action plans is able to bridge conceptual understanding with the concrete problems of young people's lives. The evaluation draft showed an increase in average scores from 55.5 to 84.3, with the highest improvement in moral case analysis ability. Participants also showed better awareness of the use of digital media, respect for the rights of others, and service involvement. The sustainability of activities needs to be supported through OMK assistance, coaching modules, periodic reflection meetings, and pastoral impact monitoring. Before the article is published, all quantitative data, number of participants, time, location, documentation, and testimonials must be verified based on the actual implementation of the activity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The service team expressed its gratitude to the Catholic University of Saint Thomas, the Faculty of Philosophy, the Church, OMK administrators, catechists, faith companions, and all participants who supported the implementation of the activity. Appreciation was also given to those who assisted in the preparation of materials, facilities, evaluation, documentation, and program follow-up.

REFERENCES

Francis. (2017). *Message for the 51st World Communications Day: "Fear not, for I am with you" (Is 43:5): Communicating hope and trust in our time*. The Holy See.

- Francis. (2018a). *Gaudete et exultate: Apostolic exhortation on the call to holiness in today's world*. The Holy See.
- Francis. (2018b). *Message for the 52nd World Communications Day: "The truth will set you free" (Jn 8:32): Fake news and journalism for peace*. The Holy See.
- Francis. (2019). *Christus vivit: Post-synodal apostolic exhortation to young people and to the entire People of God*. The Holy See.
- Francis. (2020). *Fratelli tutti: Encyclical letter on fraternity and social friendship*. The Holy See.
- Francis. (2021). *Message for the 55th World Communications Day: "Come and see" (Jn 1:46): Communicating by encountering people where and as they are*. The Holy See.
- Grossmann, I., Gerlach, T. M., & Denissen, J. J. A. (2017). Wise reasoning in the face of everyday life challenges. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 8(6), 611–622. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550616652206>
- Löwe, C. L. (2021). What is a human act? In *Thomas Aquinas on the metaphysics of the human act* (pp. 11–34). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108986120.002>
- Pontifical Council for Promoting New Evangelization. (2020). *Directory for catechesis*. Libreria Editrice Vaticana.
- Santrock, J. W. (2018). *Life-span development* (17th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
- Synod of Bishops. (2018). *Young people, the faith and vocational discernment: Final document of the XV Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops*. The Holy See.