

Pursuit of integral ecology

Later this month (23 and 24 May), the United Nations will convene the first World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul, where global and local leaders will commit to putting each and every person's safety, dignity, freedom, and right to thrive at the heart of decision-making. More than 125 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, a level of suffering not seen since World War II. The social problems are wide and deep, from war and human trafficking to the gross inequality between the wealthy 1% and the poorest 3 billion of the population. Included in the summit's Agenda for Humanity are climate and natural disasters. Indeed, 1 year ago, Pope Francis emphasized, in the encyclical *Laudato Si*, that complex crises have both social and environmental dimensions. The bond between humans and the natural world means that we live in an "integral ecology," and as such, an integrated approach to environmental and social justice is required.

The need for an integral ecology approach can be seen, for example, in the coupling of economic activities and wealth inequalities with environmental pollution and climate change. Climate pollutants come primarily from the wealthy 1 billion, but the worst consequences of associated climate change will be experienced by the bottom 3 billion, who had little to do with this pollution.

Last year brought two historic global agreements that renewed optimism about a sustainable future. The United Nations' (UN's) declaration of sustainable development goals called for the eradication of poverty and the improvement of human well-being. The Paris agreement was signed by 195 nations to limit global warming to well below a 2°C increase. These global acknowledgements of systemic ecological and social problems have opened a window of opportunity to focus on how problems of poverty, human well-being, and the protection of creation are interlinked. The real innovation is this new synergy between science, policy, and religion.

The origin, transformative potential, and future development of an alliance between science, policy, and religion

is based on recent advances at the Holy See, which houses two Pontifical Academies devoted to science: one for natural scientists and the other for social scientists. The members of these academies are chosen not for their religious affiliations but for their scientific preeminence. In May 2014, the two academies of scholars, philosophers, and theologians met to contemplate the sustainability of humanity and nature, and came to a remarkable (for a scientific body) conclusion: The resolution of major environmental problems facing society requires a fundamental reorientation in our behavior and attitude toward nature and toward each other. Both academies convened faith leaders of the major religions, including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam (both Sunni and Shia), and Judaism to state that slavery and human trafficking are crimes against humanity. Although it is hard for different religions to pray at the same altar, it finally became possible and necessary for them to act together to defend the dignity of human beings and their common home. This new attitude spurred meetings in 2014 and 2015 between scientists, policy-makers, and religious leaders that included UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and governors and mayors from more than 80 large cities. The groups agreed that the mitigation of climate change was a moral and religious imperative, and that the development of a sustainable relationship with the planet also requires a moral revolution. This new alliance also declared that extreme globalization of forms of indifference such as human trafficking and modern slavery should be acknowledged as crimes against humanity.

Pope Francis' effort to unite science, policy, and religion toward an integral ecology approach is just a start. We hope that other religions and moral and political leaders will join this new synergy and nudge society toward equitable solutions to ecological and social justice problems without losing sight of the values of the human person and the common good.

- **Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo and Veerabhadran Ramanathan**



“The real innovation is this new synergy between science, policy, and religion.”



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PHOTOS: (TOP RIGHT) PONTIFICAL ACADEMY OF SCIENCES; (BOTTOM RIGHT) VEERABHADRAN RAMANATHAN; (INSET) RICCARDO LENNART NIELS MAYER/STOCKPHOTO.COM

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