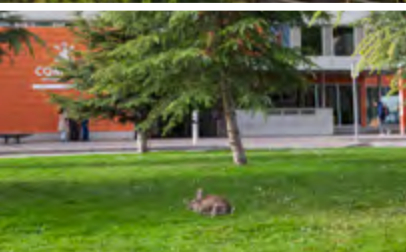


Conceptual Framework of Integral Ecology

COMILLAS PONTIFICAL UNIVERSITY



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Conceptual Framework of **Integral Ecology**

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Conceptual Framework of Integral Ecology. Comillas Pontifical University

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Preamble

Antonio Allende Felgueroso, SJ
Rector of the University

Humanity still has the ability to work together in building our common home. Here I want to recognize, encourage and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the home which we share[...] Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded.

Pope Francis. *Laudato si'* (no. 13)

The Comillas Pontifical University's commitment to integral ecology is an expression of its mission; therefore, it has to take concrete form in its teaching and research activities and in the way it is organised. It gives us identity because this commitment to being sustainable and promoting sustainability allows us to recognise ourselves as a University and as a Jesuit University.

This concern responds, on the one hand, to Pope Francis's call to consider ecology not just as an "extra item" to be taken into account in our strategy, but as a fundamental part of the being and doing of a Church institution. The Pope invites everyone to contribute, each through his or her own activity, to the care of our common home. The university finds inspiration in the Encyclical *Laudato si'* to address this challenge: "I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all" (no. 14). The University finds here its natural way of responding to this challenge, with rigour, depth and in dialogue with as many as possible. All of us at the University are invited to reflect with other universities, with companies, with colleagues and with society in general on the challenge of a development model capable of integrating a genuine "human ecology".

Meanwhile, the Society of Jesus itself shows us the way by declaring the care of our common home to be one of its Apostolic Preferences. We feel invited to take responsibility for conserving the conditions of life on our planet, providing the best we have as a university, which is a deep analysis of the problems and the encouragement of reflection and discernment in order to make decisions that contribute to repairing the fragile ecological balance that is already damaged.



Panoramic view of the Alberto Aguilera campus

Moreover, given the profound ethical implications of the problem, we are aware that our work will be fruitless if we do not also strive to engage personally in this task.

The Conceptual Framework of Integral Ecology that we now unveil is the fruit of this conviction and has been prepared by the Integral Ecology Unit, which Rector Enrique Sanz Giménez-Rico had the good sense to create. I would like to thank him and the entire team of the Unit for having provided us with a solid intellectual frame of reference that will help us to become a University and a University community that contributes to building a fairer society.

Foreword

Belén Urosa Sanz

Vice Rector for Alumni and Students

Pope Francis's Encyclical *Laudato sí'* has been a beacon of inspiration for the creation of the Integral Ecology Unit at our University. Under the direction of the Vice-Rectorate for Students and Alumni, this Unit's mission is to promote and integrate the principles of Integral Ecology and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 in all facets of university life.

The Integral Ecology Unit not only has a complete vision of the actions carried out at the university in the fields of teaching and research, but also plays a crucial role in raising awareness among the entire university community. Through various actions and programmes, it seeks to foster an ecological awareness that transcends the classroom and that is reflected in the day-to-day lives of our students, lecturers and administrative and service staff.

Through the services it provides, the Vice-Rectorate for Students and Alumni works for the integral development of our students and also to promote a committed and supportive university community. The activities carried out in collaboration between the Integral Ecology Unit and the other services of the Vice-Rector's Office aim to achieve this.



Integral ecology aims, as Pope Francis tells us in *Laudato si'*, “to protect our common home *[and]* to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development” (no. 13), working in the complex socio-environmental crisis in which we find ourselves.

The message is clear, but as a university, we felt it was absolutely necessary to develop a theoretical conceptualisation that would help us to achieve the objectives of integral ecology from a university point of view. This conceptualisation aims to clarify and unify our understanding of integral ecology, providing the necessary framework to develop our University functions from this perspective. It could, in short, serve as a guide for our initiatives and efforts.

This is the aim of this conceptual framework. It defines integral ecology and its different areas of development: environmental, social, economic, quotidian, educational and spiritual ecology. These areas are key with regard to understanding and addressing ecological challenges in a holistic and effective way. We hope that this document will serve as a valuable tool for all those committed to building a more sustainable and just future.

Introduction

Jesús Sánchez Camacho

Director of the Integral Ecology Unit

On 27 June 2022, the Governing Council of Comillas Pontifical University approved the Resolution on the creation of the Integral Ecology Unit (IEU). The document referred to the Encyclical *Laudato si'*, in relation to the SDGs and the rest of the knowledge generated on environmental issues, as a unique tool to promote an ecological conversion, and to alleviate the climate emergency and human suffering that the environmental crisis is generating on our planet.

Comillas Pontifical University wishes to advance its commitment to integral ecology, integral human development and the fulfilment of the SDGs of the 2030 Agenda. These Goals, with their technical guidelines, focusing on the economy, society and the environment, and integral ecology, from an anthropological, ethical, cultural and theological perspective, invite all members of the University community to reflect and act in order to provide answers to the problems of our world. In this regard, environmental education is a key element in recovering the different levels of ecological balance: internal balance, with oneself; solidarity, with others; the natural balance, with all living beings; and spiritual balance, with openness to transcendence.



The creation of the IEU is a response to this educational need, as well as being a Universal Apostolic Preference, determined by the Society of Jesus, to collaborate in the care of the common home. This is a project that represents an end and, at the same time, a means in itself. An end, because it wishes to articulate a university structure designed to ensure awareness and good practice in socio-environmental matters; and a means, because it has the vocation to serve the University itself, to coordinate ecological work and to acknowledge all that is being carried out in this field. The IEU is an organisational service that emerges as the backbone of the activities related to ecology at the University. The Unit, which is part of the Vice-Rector for Identity and Mission and Alumni and Students, aims to promote and coordinate ecological initiatives in the fields of governance, teaching, research, knowledge transfer and social impact, extracurricular activities and environmental management. It also aims to engage in dialogue with the contemporary world in order to contribute to solutions to the socio-environmental crisis and to foster integral human development.

The IEU consists of an advisory team, composed of professors from different faculties and centres, as well as a team of delegates, who support academic and extracurricular initiatives related to ecological and social engagement, and represent a bridge between this service and their faculty or centre. The contributions of the advisory team and the delegates, the research conducted on the fundamentals and implications of integral ecology and the SDGs in Catholic



Ecodidactic garden on the Cantoblanco campus

university education¹, and other key documents from CRUE (Conference of Rectors of Spanish Universities), the University itself, the Society of Jesus and Christian social thought, have contributed to the development of this Conceptual Framework. This document aims to establish the horizon of integral ecology in dialogue with sustainable development, which is a fundamental step to guide the ecological and social commitment in all areas of our University.

This Conceptual Framework is the prelude to another document that aims to define the guidelines and mark the ecological commitment, which will be the backbone of the following strategic areas of Comillas Pontifical University:

1. **Governance**, adopting lines of action that favour the well-being of people, the protection of biodiversity and care for the planet. The governing bodies, assisted by the IEU, will develop ecology in the different strategic areas of the University: teaching, research, knowledge transfer and social impact, extracurricular activities, and environmental management for the achievement of a sustainable campus. The guidelines on integral ecology must be aligned with the University's strategic plans, the expectations of our key stakeholders, with the commitments adopted by the Universities of the CRUE in relation to the SDGs, and must serve as a framework for the development of an Integral Ecology Plan designed to transform life on the different campuses.
2. **Teaching**, helping students to discover life as a vocation, as a project and as meaning. The University must continue to move forward in its commitment to the competency framework promoted by the European Higher Education Area, integral ecology, the SDGs, Ignatian pedagogy, teaching innovation and the value of excellence. These formative elements can benefit the development of specific skills in each subject area and other skills related to personal development, social transformation and care for the common home. In particular, the IEU has the task of promoting environmental education in the different educational pathways of the University.
3. **Research**, contributing with research to provide solutions to the challenges facing humanity, which is immersed in a socio-environmental crisis in the midst of the fourth Industrial Revolution. The University must maintain its commitment to knowledge about the human species and the planet through the transdisciplinary study of formal sciences, natural sciences, human sciences, social sciences, applied sciences, and philosophical and theological reflection, in order to improve the human impact on the environment. Hence, the IEU aims to

1 Sánchez-Camacho, Jesús, and José Luis Villegas Moreno. 2024. "Foundations and Implications of the Integral Ecology and Sustainable Development Goals in Catholic University Education" *Religions* 15, 4: 480. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15040480>

promote the interdisciplinary study of ecology, especially through the different institutes, chairs and research groups, and by networking with other centres.

4. Transfer of knowledge and social impact, focusing on innovation and entrepreneurship while endeavouring to solve specific problems of society and the planet. Comillas is developing its cooperation with civil organisations, companies and ecclesiastical bodies, and strives to establish a fruitful dialogue with society and achieve a positive impact on the lives of people and nature. The University's student and alumni associations represent an opportunity to continue transmitting and putting into practice respect for the environment and human dignity in society.

5. Extracurricular activity, contribuyendo con la formación integral del estudiante con el fin de que pueda descubrir el sentido de su vida a través de una sana relación consigo mismo, con toda la familia humana, con el medio natural y con la trascendencia. La Universidad ofrece procesos de aprendizaje no formales, en los que el alumno puede orientar su estilo de vida cimentado en una ética ecológica. Las actividades socioambientales no integradas en el currículo académico se despliegan en ámbitos como la solidaridad, la salud y el bienestar, el arte, la espiritualidad y la atención integral de la persona.

6. Sustainable campus, developing good ecological policies and practices with environmental management in which the necessary resources are provided so that the green infrastructure of the university community contributes to the conservation of biodiversity and benefits the human population. With the aim of caring for our common home, Comillas is committed to adopting the necessary measures in the fields of infrastructure, energy, treatment of water resources, green procurement, waste management and mobility.

This Conceptual Framework for Integral Ecology of Comillas Pontifical University first examines the integral ecology proposal in the context of integral human development in Christian social thought. The paper then explores the complementarity between integral ecology and the SDGs. Finally, it presents the commitment of Comillas Pontifical University, as a Catholic higher education institution, to integral ecology and the SDGs. The document concludes by warning that this is only the beginning of a long journey that lays the foundations for a materiality analysis, ecological guidelines and an Integral Ecology Plan that we hope will involve the entire university community and have an impact for the benefit of ecosystems and the entire human family.

1. The integral ecology proposal

On 24 May 2015, Pope Francis formulated the category of integral ecology in the Encyclical *Laudato si'*, an ecclesial document on the care of the “common home”, which was written for all human beings. In addition to setting down the anthropological, social and spiritual implications of human interaction with the environment, the pontiff invited citizens around the world to seek holistic solutions and to work together in an integrative approach to sustainable development in order to end poverty, restore dignity to the excluded and protect nature (no. 137-162).

Although the Social Doctrine of the Church (SDC) does not claim to provide a technical solution to the problems of development, the Catholic Church shares the concern of other civil organisations regarding this issue. The Second Vatican Council’s Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes* emphasises human development, which must be integral and in solidarity: integral, as it encompasses not only the material dimension, but also the intellectual, moral, spiritual and religious dimensions; and development in solidarity, since it concerns all human beings, without distinction of race or region of the world.

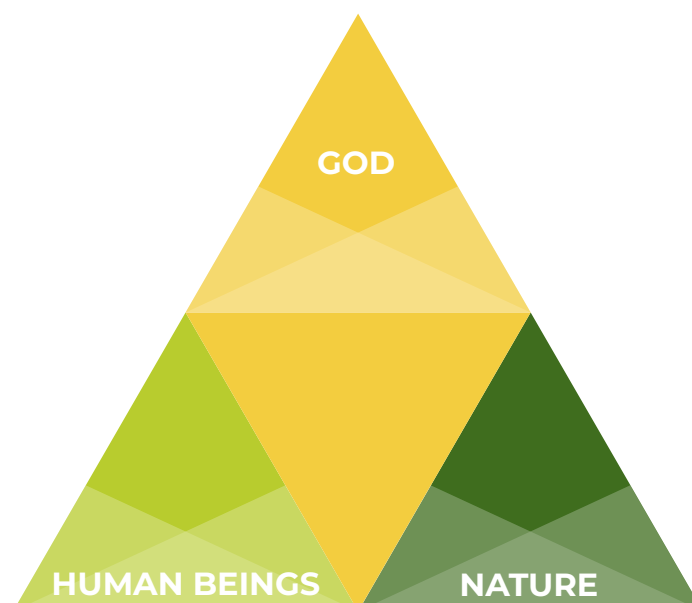
Paul VI, in the Encyclical *Populorum Progressio*, addresses this issue as a comprehensive and common development that concerns the whole of humanity.



John Paul II, in the Encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, explores the problem of development in terms of solidarity and the common good, relating it to the environment. This is the starting point for the reflection on the ecological implications of development, which the pontiff expounds in greater detail in the Encyclical *Centesimus Annus*. The document points to the misconception of development seen only in terms of consumption and refers to the waste of the Earth's resources "in an excessive and disordered way", defining the destruction of the natural environment as an "anthropological error" (nos. 36, 37). Subsequently, Benedict XVI, in the Encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, reflects on development based on vocation, which entails respect for truth and charity, and a responsible freedom of human beings towards themselves and towards nature (nos. 16-18, 48-49, 51).

The Encyclical *Laudato si'* offers the new category of integral ecology, the fruit of a terminological evolution that embraces the proposal of holistic solutions to the interactions between natural and social systems. The document's point of departure is the biblical understanding of human existence based on three closely connected relationships: the relationship with God, with other human beings and with the earth (nos. 65-75; Figure 1). In addition to looking more deeply into the anthropological, social and spiritual implications of human interaction with environmental reality, the document is critical of the dominant technocratic paradigm and a distorted anthropocentrism. The Encyclical also proposes an ecological conversion in which

Figure 1. Relations between God, human beings and nature. Own elaboration



spirituality takes centre stage to help discover the role of human beings on the planet (nos. 68-69, 106-114, 118-19, 122, 216-21). This anthropological perspective entails global action in relation to the defence of justice for the most excluded, the integration of the biosphere into the economic sphere, the path of new national and local policies, the adoption of sustainable lifestyles and the promotion of education in the spirit of this integral ecological culture (nos. 37-62, 176-81, 202-15).

In 2023, the Apostolic Exhortation *Laudate Deum* takes up the concern about the global climate crisis and the critique of the technological and economic power that underlies the process of environmental degradation. On the eve of COP28, which agreed on a loss and damage fund for the countries most vulnerable to climate change, as well as the transition away from fossil fuels, the Apostolic Exhortation highlights the need for a transformation of the energy sector away from fossil fuels and towards clean energy to mitigate climate change. In this regard, the process of ecological conversion involves all social agents, including those belonging to the university community, who must seek solutions to confront this socio-environmental crisis.

But the Catholic Church does not walk alone in this socio-environmental challenge. In the same year that the Encyclical *Laudato si'* was published, the 2030 Agenda was approved. While, in the Catholic sphere, the category of integral human development has evolved towards the concept of integral ecology, in the civil context the concept of development is complemented by the attribute sustainable. The anthropological, social and spiritual keys of the SDC and its specific approach can complement the technical nature of the 2030 Agenda, being open to all peoples, cultures and religious traditions. The SDGs are therefore a timely tool, shared with other institutions, to end social inequalities and protect a common home that, in the Christian worldview, has been created by God.

2. Commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals

On 25 September 2015, UN member states agreed on 17 goals and 169 targets to harmonise economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. “Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” is the resolution adopted as a result of the commitment of 193 nations to end poverty, protect the planet, ensure peace and promote a more prosperous world. In continuity with the Millennium Development Goals, these agreements aim to move forward by projecting new targets for 2030 to complement the goals not achieved in 2015.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the product of a long journey dating back to the San Francisco Conference in 1945, where 50 countries signed the Charter of the United Nations. The treaty sets out the principles of the international organisation in order to protect fundamental human rights, equality, justice, respect for international law, social progress and freedom. In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights set out the fundamental human rights, which must be protected by all peoples and nations.

In the 1960s, initiatives to promote economic growth emerged to address the problem of people’s development. In the so-called Stockholm Declaration in 1972, the right to the environment was recognised as a primary issue for future generations. Indeed, at the Rio de Janeiro Conference in 1992, development and environment began to be perceived as two deeply interconnected realities. Subsequently, the Millennium Declaration in 2000 defined eight goals that represent a significant step towards reducing extreme poverty, promoting universal education and controlling diseases. However, at that time, the environmental issue was not yet perceived as a central and interrelated issue with the rest of the goals. In this regard, the Rio+20 Conference in 2012 paved the way for the 2030 Agenda, which saw the environment as a cross-cutting element related to the economic and social goals.

The eradication of poverty, the realisation of human rights, gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, and the protection of the environment are the pillars of 17 SDGs and 169 targets focused on ending poverty; hunger and food security; health and well-being; quality education; gender equality; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation and infrastructure; reducing inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; responsible production and consumption; climate action; life below water; life on land; peace, justice and strong institutions; and partnerships to achieve the goals.



SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



Source: United Nations

Similarly, the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) held in Paris in 2015 committed to reducing global greenhouse gas emissions to keep temperature rises below 2°C, limiting them to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. The declaration of a clean and healthy environment as a human right in 2022 and the energy transition agreed at COP 28 in 2023 marked the start of a step change. These pacts bring a significant impetus to the achievement of the SDGs. While the 2030 Agenda is open to criticism from different perspectives and views of reality, the fact that 193 states have consensually adopted global action to address major social, economic, political and environmental challenges is a cause for hope for all.

3. Comillas Pontifical University, integral ecology and the Sustainable Development Goals

In its university management policy, Comillas Pontifical University is committed to a responsible mission of educational service. The University Social Responsibility (USR) at Comillas is based on excellence, innovation, and a comprehensive, inclusive, equitable, religious and plural education. This educational commitment is framed within a Jesuit pedagogical paradigm that aims to educate future professionals who are aware, competent, compassionate, committed and capable of having a positive impact on society and the environment. Likewise, Comillas assumes the “Magna Charta of European Universities”, signed in Bologna in 1988, which defines the institution of higher education as an academic entity that, “produces, examines, appraises and hands down culture by research and teaching [...] morally and intellectually independent from all political authority and economic power”.

With the grave climate crisis upon us and in the midst of the 4th Industrial Revolution, which is decisively transforming the lives of citizens, the University requires in-depth, rigorous, interdisciplinary, applied research to address contemporary problems. Likewise, teaching committed to excellence, innovation, educational quality and Ignatian pedagogy will contribute to the human growth of students who need to develop general and specific competences for their professional and personal lives. This comprehensive training aims to promote a complete learning process not only through a spirit based on utility, but also on justice, humanism and faith. Likewise, excellence in research and teaching results in the transfer of knowledge and social impact in cooperation with companies, and social and ecclesial organisations, in order to better serve the human family and the common home.

In the context of the Catholic university, this line of action, committed to the fourth goal of the SDGs, which guarantees inclusive, equitable and quality education, must combine ecological and social responsibility. The articulation of integral ecology and the SDGs offers an excellent opportunity for teaching, research, knowledge transfer and social impact at the University. While the 2030 Agenda provides technical guidelines, focusing on the economy, society and the environment, integral ecology offers a reflective framework from an anthropological, ethical, cultural and theological perspective that invites action for practical and meaningful responses to the problems of our world.

Integral ecology proposes to evolve our Catholic higher education in an ecological conversion through the holistic approach of environmental ecology, encouraging



Environmental volunteering

action to protect the planet; social ecology, promoting social justice in contexts of environmental poverty and defending human life and other forms of life on Earth; economic ecology, including the economy as a subsystem of human society integrated into the biosphere; the quotidian ecology of daily life, making moderate use of resources and energy; educational ecology, rethinking the academic and extracurricular programmes of the educational institution; spiritual ecology, seeking the meaning of life in communion with nature; and cultural ecology, preserving the natural, historical and artistic heritage of our planet.

Therefore, given the urgency of the problems that arise, Comillas Pontifical University aims to become a relevant, proactive player to accelerate the transformation towards a more sustainable society, committed to the essence of integral ecology, not only in the university environment, but also catalysing the socio-economic change that these challenges require. To bring this commitment to fruition, the University is working on a materiality analysis, the definition of guidelines and a sustainability report that will serve as a framework for the development of an Integral Ecology Plan with its respective reports, which in the very near future will include the lines of action aimed at transforming campus life (Figure 2). These projects can serve to optimise Comillas's role as a university institution committed to more sustainable, green and inclusive development. This Plan aims to incorporate key indicators that will allow us to communicate our performance internally and externally, as the basis for a process of continuous

Figure 2. Phases of the University's integral ecology strategy. Source: Authors



improvement. All of this is designed to guide the University and, above all, its students, in a principled and efficient manner, towards the ecological transition required by the challenges we face as a society.

Conclusion

The environmental crisis is particularly impacting biodiversity and contributing to the deterioration of the quality of human life, especially among the poorest. Therefore, in order to prevent additional damage that further degrades the environment and people, a change is needed from all citizens, especially those who have responsibilities in the public or private sphere. In this sense, the Encyclical *Laudato Si'* calls for ecological conversion, so that the human family does everything possible to protect the planet, to defend justice for the most disadvantaged, to integrate the biosphere into the economy, to adopt sustainable lifestyles and to educate in the spirit of this integral ecological culture.

Global action is needed to address climate change and its social consequences. On this point, the university has a key role to play in training ecologically-aware citizens with knowledge and principles that enable them to develop positive habits. Through the pedagogical dimensions of usefulness, justice, humanism and faith, Comillas maintains its commitment to an environmental education that helps students to grow in solidarity, responsibility, and care for the common home, biodiversity and all human beings. Educating conscious, competent, compassionate and committed students involves dialogue and collaboration with other institutions,



groups and individuals in society who, from different perspectives, seek to improve the economic, political, social and environmental spheres. Hence, the SDGs are a decisive step towards transforming the world.

Although the theme of sustainability, as developed in different ways in teaching, research, extracurricular activities and management, is not new to this University, this Conceptual Framework is the beginning of a path that wishes to continue to improve Comillas in caring for our common home. We hope that the efforts made by the IEU team will involve the entire university community, and will benefit the ecosystems, students and society as a whole.



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