

The Most Recent Alliance between Faith and Knowledge to Save our Created World

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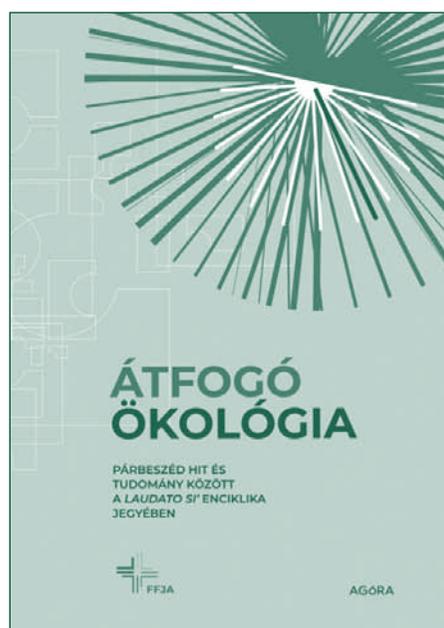
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József Benedek – Gábor Nevelős (eds.)

Comprehensive ecology

Dialogue between faith and science in the spirit of the encyclical Laudato si'

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Edited by *József Benedek* and *Gábor Nevelős*, the study volume adds to the so far small number of attempts to find comprehensive and authentic answers to the multi-level crisis phenomena of our time based on a dialogue and synergy between science and faith. The growing ecological, economic and social crisis of humanity has taken a dynamic turn that threatens with irreversible structural changes amidst the critical values of ecological-economic imbalance. All of these may easily turn our usual, seemingly predictable life upside down.

The volume covers the issues of *sustainability* in eight thematic units, in two studies per unit. If we take into account the sets of criteria for sustainability, they seem to be the most meaningful collective responses to balance out the violations of the most diverse thresholds of equilibrium.

■ In the first thematic unit discussing the dialogue between faith and science, an introductory study by *József Benedek* provides an insight into the common vector of the papers in the volume. This vector is a product of an interdisciplinary approach, as you can find theologians, engineers, economists, and geographers among the authors. The author *József Benedek* claims, as a starting point, that the three classical dimensions (social, economic and environmental dimensions) of sustainable development may be supplemented with a spiritual or mental dimension. He defines this *spiritual dimension* as an element that has been painfully missing from the above-mentioned relational system to date, and also clarifies some basic definitions (e.g., sustainability).

On the side of faith, he identifies Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato si'* written in a Jesuit spirit in 2015 to be the starting point, whose watchwords can be summarized as follows: humane, people-centred, comprehensive (all-round) development, solidarity between generations, and international cooperation. The role of faith here can prevail primarily in that it provides immanent motivation in the authentic enforcement of creation protection aspects through its moral, interiorised value system. All of these premises will pave the spiritual path of sustainable development, leading to *ecological conversion*. The concept of *Green Ten Commandments* is introduced, which will encourage us all to work for the public good instead of mere economic benefits.

■ A paper by *Gábor Nevelős* is also an attempt to approach the ecological crisis from the aspect of faith. As deduced from the title, the author highlights Ignatian spirituality as the foundation of *Laudato si'*, emphasizing the role played by St. Ignatius of Loyola's work, the *Spiritual Exercises*, in the process of value-based awareness raising of the ecological crisis. *Gábor Nevelős* highlights that his Holiness, while acknowledging the benefits of scientific

progress, also condemns the environment exploitation function of the technological paradigm, which lays the foundations for the harm of anthropocentrism and selfishness.

The author emphasizes that his Holiness classifies any aggression against the ecological balance or wildlife into the category of sin. At the same time, the circular letter condemns the concept of *practical relativism*, which relates to the cynical utilitarianism of human decisions and ignores the needs of the environment and the poor.

The referenced ecclesiastical documents assign an important role to the spiritual function of contemplation and amazement. They can help us extend the alliance between the Creator and humanity to wildlife, and the entire ecological system.

■ The basis of the study by *Sarolta Baritz* is the Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, which shows the human attitude allowing you to realise the common good, that is, how you can be happy in social, economic and community life.

In her interpretation, the basis of a turnaround for a value-based approach is the prioritisation of ME-ME relationships in a win-win set of relationships. A business life resting on this scheme will create 'mutuality', or 'reciprocity', which characterises the economic order of the economic paradigm of *virtue ethics*. The economic model of virtue ethics will serve the principle of sustainability much more than a deadly competition focused on profit maximisation.

■ A study by *György Kocziszky* begins with an outlook on economic history, starting from the impact mechanism of the model of the European social market economy, which can be traced back to the Freiburg school. This model was a sort of reimagining of Keynesianism, which fostered the unprecedented rise of Germany and Western Europe, which were emerging from wartime poverty. This economic

miracle took place in a way that made coveted prosperity possible for broad masses of people. However, this process got 'derailed' over time and, in its 'postmodernised' form, was distorted into overconsumption generated by an overworked, individualistic value crisis.

Further on, we can learn about the crisis factors of new capitalism, transformed from socially sensitive into neoliberal one. These factors include the proliferation of market mechanisms built on an investment spiral resulting from value production being sidelined, as well as a decline of the active population in mature market economies, a fact to be deduced from the demographic crisis.

The inventory of the crisis factors is followed by the identification of the pillars of a sustainable market economy, which partially reflects the general dimensions of sustainability (ecological, social, economic), complemented with the dimension of institutional network, which is essential for effective social functioning. At the same time, the author places the *value system* at the centre of all this, which essentially humanises the exact world of the economy by spiritualising the 'hard' factors. The value system serving a sustainable market economy includes components such as faith, family, respect for the law, political/economic stability, individual and community responsibility, work-based nature, fairness, respect for exogenous resources, and social sensitivity.

Harmony between all of these values can be created through a balanced role of the state, after it has been proven that spontaneous market mechanisms are hotbeds of repeated and deepening crises. The result of the outlined ameliorating factors is a moderate consumption preaching the primacy of *well-being*, rather than mere *welfare*, for all of us.

■ The article by *Klára Csiszár* is also based on the encyclicals *Laudato si'* and *Fratelli tutti*, and describes the orthopraxis of a sustainable

lifestyle. The author defines the Roman Catholic Church as one of the '*global players*' of our world, whose mission is to help the world find its way back to God and mature into Jesus Christ. The sustainable way of life must be propagated in the liturgy, and it must also be reflected in church development processes. Some particularly important tasks are identified, such as the creation of a green economy, a response to the cry of the Earth and the poor, following a simple lifestyle, ecological education, and creating ecological spirituality. The paper concludes that the transition to a sustainable way of life in church institutions and for those performing church services is becoming less of an option and more of a normative Christian, Christ-follower behaviour.

■ In his article, *János Zlinszky* clearly formulates the realization that the main problem in the current ecological crisis is not merely economic or technological, but primarily moral and spiritual. The study revolves around this question: to what extent is lifestyle identical to consumption and to what extent does this consumption burden our renewable or non-renewable resources. We can get a picture of the past and present distribution of eco-creditor (self-sustaining) countries and eco-debtor countries (states with insufficient resources). The author concludes that the threat of environmental disaster may be traced back to the fact that the annual use of renewable resources has been increasingly exceeding the interest on natural capital for more than forty years. A solution may be offered by a profound change of attitude, which radically transforms the daily course of our lifestyle (our consumption habits), and which is based on *environmental ethics*.

■ The paper by *Zsolt Hetesi* is an extremely well-documented text, which includes intriguing data and information to make the threatening shadows of the climate

catastrophe and the reduction of biodiversity easy to understand for everyone. In addition, it provides valuable information about the processes of soil destruction that threaten the agro-ecological potential, the consequences of the energy crisis and – also linked to that latter aspect – the growing weight of geopolitical risks in the ecological crisis. In this context, it can be noted that we can place confidence in technological optimism. All of this means that even horrible crises such as wars or the terror of climate catastrophe can as a counter-effect motivate human creativity in an unprecedented way in the creation of 'substitute innovations' and their established operation.

■ The paper by *Tibor Görföl* articulates the desire of theologians that the issues of global problems, such as climate change, should be conveyed to their believers, using the communication tools of spiritual sensitivity, in such a way that they do not appear to be purely esoteric or such assumptions that are understandable only within a single specific group. Although the ecological crisis is primarily a natural science and ethical problem, certain theological ideas may help solve it. These attitudes derived from theological foundations will help us deal calmly and moderately with the ecological threat, i.e., by attaching sufficient importance to the issue, we should not allow alarmist statements to embitter our daily lives and make us apostates.

The Universal Patriarch Bartholomew was the first to extend the concept of sin to include human activity that harms the natural environment in a novel way in 1988. Similar thoughts were expressed by the Metropolitan John Zizioulas, whose ecological reflections form a significant part of his life work. Zizioulas does not absolve Christianity of creating ecological problems, but he assigns an indispensable role to Christians in helping humanity overcome these difficulties.

In his study, *Tibor Görföl* underlines:

'Instead of activity, Orthodox theology paradoxically suggests that we stop and patiently think through our relationship with the world and our actions in the world...' (*Görföl*, 2022), an exercise in which the tradition of Eastern asceticism also helps us. In overall terms, we can establish that Eastern Christian theology ultimately wants to respond to the ecological crisis and, within that, climate change by connecting anthropology and cosmology.

■ The fifth chapter of the volume covers the topic of poverty in terms of sustainability and catching up (*Gergely Rosta, Miklós Vecsei*). Although the most pressing problems today include mitigating global poverty and reducing social inequality, on which considerable literature is available for us to understand them, the author still sheds new light on this global problem that is thought to be a classical one. In his first independent encyclical, Pope Francis also emphasizes that special attention must be paid to the poor when examining environmental and ecological factors, since environmental damage affects their life opportunities the most. The author offers a specific example to underpin the direct effects of environmental destruction on the poor, the ever-increasing ecological footprint of Western welfare societies, and the burdens borne by the world's poorest countries. An important part of the study is the exploration of similarities between the Pope's encyclical and the sustainable development goals formulated by the UN's Agenda 2030. Although the identification of problems is an important part of both documents, the papal teaching can see the solution in love that permeates civilization, in ethical responsibility and care rather than in economic growth. Miklós Vecsei's account is particularly impressive on the activities, tasks and results of the Maltese Charity Service, the small steps of social responsibility that promote territorial and social integrity. The reader can, after following numerous positive examples

and based on possible solutions recognized locally, conclude clearly that settlements and communities that are catching up are no longer that far from the balcony of prosperity.

■ The sixth chapter of the volume also takes on the character of settlement geography, as it examines the challenges caused by increasing urbanization and the broken relationship between built and living environment (*Géza Salamin, Csaba Török*). Do communities exist and how sustainable are they where ecological, demographic and economic problems arise in a cumulative way, where the majority of city dwellers have lost their direct contact with nature due to the acceleration of motorisation? The study presents a sustainable climate-friendly city model, which is defined by a closer functional and physical relationship with nature, and embraces the living and non-living community in a harmonious system. A nature-based approach to urban planning is also emphasized in *Laudato si'*, which can see the solution in the settlement of relationships between people, where the church fulfils the role of a common home.

■ The seventh major chapter focuses on the issue of environmental change, the exploration of a complex problem where the climate-changing role of human presence can be felt everywhere. *Balázs Nagy* presents this theme illustrated with a variety of images, guiding the reader to remote areas, thereby suggesting that the environmental degradation has become global in scale. The importance of a shift in paradigm is expressed in the second part of this chapter, in particular, as regards the effective management of the climate issue (Ferenc Patsh). All of this is presented by the author through Martin Heidegger's ecophilosophy, or, to be more precise, we can follow such an option for existence ('dwelling') in the world that respects nature's way of existence and its organic relationship with it. The encyclical *Laudato si'* also points out that, in addressing

the current ecological crisis, we should not think in terms of technical solutions, but rather in terms of a 'new and universal' solidarity that can lead to sustainable and integrated development and a more liveable environment.

■ The final chapter of the volume draws attention to the importance of social justice (*János Székely, Márton Péti*) and puts forward a sustainable development model that is not driven by 'utilitarian thinking' and a 'profit-oriented economy'. A growing income inequality hinders the processes of sustainable growth and catching up, and, after a while, a quantitative growth will not go hand in hand with experienced happiness. The Bible also emphasizes this, since the true source of happiness is not to be found in possession, but in love. Both Pope Francis' encyclical on the protection of creation and his encyclical that introduces the concept of comprehensive ecology encourage us to achieve social justice. The author dealing with the spatial and geographical aspects of this issue highlights the main messages of social justice, when analysing the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development. The author's message is that the pursuit of sustainable development cannot remain only a professional and scientific activity, and creating justice is also a moral duty and a duty of faith.

The study volume therefore strives to create a new synthesis between the *transcendent* and *realia* when exploring the reality. Revealing hidden dimensions that make our understanding more complete is important not only for scientific knowledge, but also for practice-oriented crisis management. This hidden dimension would be, in this case, lived-out *faith*. The sterile nature of knowledge without faith deprives us exactly of the inner 'drive' and passion that promises us all the common success and joy of saving the world

created by the Creator. The indispensable nature of a change in attitude should focus on breaking, for good, with the paradigm of '*development = mere growth*', which tempts us into immoderation. In this regard, the volume *Comprehensive Ecology* may serve as an important reference point when expanding the contents of public education curricula that deeply influence attitude formation,

and presenting the topic of sustainability in a separate discipline or in classical subjects (biology, geography, religious studies). This may be an essential starting point for an environmentally conscious attitude of the future generation. At the same time, the most perfect Jesuit traditions are present in this volume, which professes that faith and knowledge are interwoven. ■

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