

Frontier Challenges: Ecology

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The following reflections target an international audience of leaders in Jesuit or Jesuit affiliated universities and centers of learning, who have gathered to discern about their joint responsibilities in a rapidly changing world that faces interlocked worldwide, planetary challenges. We speak about “frontier” challenges, a word used by both Peter-Hans Kolvenbach and Adolfo Nicolás to indicate the locus of the Ignatian mission at the cross-roads of greater suffering and insufficiently explored commitments and solidarities. These frontier challenges are for us, not only as individual members of the Society of Jesus or the Ignatian Family, but also as institutions within the Society of Jesus and the Ignatian Family, and as Society of Jesus and Ignatian Family universally, urgent priorities. In our contemporary world, we have identified ecology as one of these challenges, and we ask ourselves here how we may contribute – or how the Lord of Life may contribute through us and our institutions – to a proactive, creative and constructive response to this challenge.

Of course, these reflections, made by a European Jesuit who is professor of systematic theology in a non-Jesuit university in one of the wealthiest regions of the planet and who is also affiliated with OCIFE in Brussels precisely with regard to environmental issues, have their limitations and can only represent one voice in a larger conversation that I hope we will continue together here.

I propose four steps. I will first focus on the complex worldwide challenges at hand when we speak today about the environment and ecology. There exist, of course, some healthy and less healthy discussions about these “facts”. However, we should not allow such discussions to become escape routes from facing a hard and threatening reality. I will, then, argue that these challenges should not paralyze or demoralize us, but rather represent oppor-

tunities (“costly grace”) for religions in general, for our Christian churches particularly, for the Society of Jesus and the Ignatian Family, and for the universities and centers of learning we represent here. By addressing these challenges we will gain deeper touch with our own spirituality and our own mission as nodes of learning and intellectual reflection in our world. Not acting upon these opportunities constitutes in the face of the urgent challenges at hand, a serious sin of omission. In my third step, I will explore some concrete ways in which we can assume the specific leadership role that we as universities and centers of learning are called to take on amidst the current environmental crisis. My fourth step deepens this call to explore possible commitments by inviting us all to enter into a long-term and worldwide process of common apostolic discernment. We will highlight some of the preconditions necessary for such processes.

1. Challenges

Today’s worldwide environmental challenges – I refer more specifically to worldwide climate change, the loss of biodiversity and the depletion of traditional easy-use natural and energy resources – constitute some of the most threatening and complex challenges we and our planet have faced in the course of history and face today. These challenges are closely connected to our life styles and to our traditional (economic, scientific, technological, military, legal, etc.) ways of understanding our world and our “life together”, as well as of addressing and controlling the crises that we face. I will pay closer attention here to the political and scientific aspects of the environmental challenges, and will also emphasize how they are intimately connected to global social justice issues.

1.1. Clear and Present Danger

Today’s environmental challenges represent a life-threatening, complex, multifaceted and planetary crisis, that originates to a large extent in unsustainable human behavior and life

styles (anthropogenic causes). Therefore, these challenges that surface most visibly in worldwide climate change, in the loss of biodiversity and in the depletion of traditional easy-use natural and energy resources, present, apart from scientific and technological aspects, also political, economic, legal, moral and religious features. This is not some Western luxury issue about green life-styles, but concerns profound injustices in the way human beings arrange their “life together”, as well as our planet in its capacity to sustainably carry life. We are still in a position to mitigate our impact on climate change (e.g., by reducing our CO₂ emissions) and to plan for resilience and adaptation to rapidly changing planetary living conditions, particularly for the poorest among us. However, this window of opportunity is closing fast, as we seem to be alarmingly near to so-called “tipping-points”. The facts of this worldwide environmental crisis are well documented by qualified scientific and military research at a scale never seen before; they are also increasingly visible and tangible in threatening natural events that run out of control and reflect the planet as a whole searching for new balance, in the loss of biodiversity with its consequences on interlocked food chains, and in people who already suffer the consequences of global climate change (e.g., sinking islands in the Pacific, eco-refugees and eco-migrants).

Some of the characteristics of these environmental challenges are: (a) they represent a threat to human life, to life on earth and to the planet’s capacity to sustainably carry life; (b) they are urgent; (c) they are overwhelming and the human ability to control or influence these natural processes seems to be diminishing rapidly; (d) they are complex and multifaceted and we do not always understand well the ongoing processes and the feedback processes they involve; (e) they are worldwide challenges, but at the same time they result in contextually and geographically differentiated consequences (“glocal” perspectives are needed that balance in a creative tension the particular and the universal); (f) they have anthropogenic causes; and (g) one has to take into account that those who are most responsible at this mo-

ment suffer least from the consequences of climate change. This is a dangerous situation that increasingly lies beyond our risk-calculations. Although the message is very hard, this does not mean that we cannot or should not act.

1.2. The Poor

Who are, in this situation, those most threatened by the consequences of the worldwide environmental challenges, of climate change, of the loss of biodiversity and of the scramble for natural and energy resources? The poor in the world – those with a small ecological footprint –, who are least responsible for the current crisis, have least resilience and are least capable to respond to the crisis or to adapt to its consequences. The poor are also those, whose voices are not heeded when in the face of the challenges decisions have to be taken. At COP15 (Copenhagen, Dec 2009) the following people and groups of people spoke the voice of the poor: young people, whose future is at stake, carried T-Shirts with the question “how old will you be in 2050?”; inhabitants of regions that are already threatened by the consequences of global climate change (e.g., disappearing islands in the Pacific Ocean, people leaving in low lying coastal areas, people whose water supply depends on mountain glaciers); indigenous people worldwide, whose habitats are increasingly destroyed for economic profit and who are sometimes mercilessly killed (there are ecological martyrs in various places in the world); an increasing number of eco-refugees or eco-migrants; nature itself, especially living beings. More generally, all human beings are in danger, as the fact of continuing to exceed the carrying capacity of the earth may result in severe planetary changes. When we look at the poor who already suffer and observe that we do not really change our perspectives on and understanding of limitless growth, nor do invest sufficiently in mitigation and adaptation measures, the future looks bleak. The question, therefore, is: What are we willing to do?

1.3. Science

The worldwide environmental crisis is characterized by interlocked complexities and feedback loops that are challenging our scientific grasp and understanding. New scientific models are necessary, we need to explore new paradigms and thought frames (e.g. transdisciplinary, holistic and systemic approaches, ideas as emergence and networking). For that reason, scientists, who are well aware of what they can and cannot do, speak about our “best available science” (BAS), which is available in the models of authoritative international reports, such as of the IPCC or other international organizations. These reports have passed scientific and political scrutiny, although the complexities of the matter at hand make some errors inevitable. These reports convey at least three recommendations: (a) although we do not understand all the events and mechanisms in their full depth (science and technology need to continue to develop), (b) nevertheless, we claim with a good degree of certainty, that there is a real and threatening crisis at hand, and (c) that the results of our BAS invite us to prudent and cautious attitudes and decisions geared towards mitigation and adaptation.

Scientists do not claim to have final and adequate scientific, technological, economic and juridical answers to the crisis: a searching transition process is necessary through changing lifestyles, increasing worldwide equity and justice, and coping with the uncontrollable natural events that seem inevitable. To move through such transition, we will need the guidance of moral decision making and the deep awareness of reality that spiritualities, religions and worldviews offer us. Scientists, at this moment of time, are cast in the position of messengers bringing very bad news, and they often experience the same rejection as prophets do. However, they also research and offer possible transition paths on which we may individually and institutionally engage, e.g., concerning our habits with regard to consumption, food, housing and travel; concerning geo-engineering and the development of alternative energy sources; concerning new economic and legal articulations of our “life together”.

1.4. Politics

New approaches to political decision-making are needed in at least three situations: mitigation (planning for the future by changing our behavior now and diminishing the causes and effects of the crisis, e.g. CO₂ emissions reduction), adaptation (providing the means to cope with the consequences of climate change as it unfolds, particularly in the case of people with least resilience), disaster response and relief (coping with catastrophes as they take place). Five main challenges present themselves to our ways of doing politics: (a) open up the field of interest to the planet as a whole and don't stick to the mere interests of your region, country or nation, although, of course, that local voice has creative importance in the global conversation and decision-making processes; (b) therefore, speak from your local roots in solidarity and open conversation with all other actors in the world, paying special attention to the poorest and to those whose voice is excluded (including the voice of nature); (c) build up a long term future oriented time perspective against all pressures to act merely on the short term (the decisions taken now are important for the people tomorrow); (d) review the generally accepted understanding of "growth"; (e) pay close attention to balancing development equity and the response to environmental changes. These five requirements go against the grain of contemporary political praxis, but also against the grain of how people in my part of the world behave and against what people worldwide understand by growth. In Europe, we tend to have a short time perspective and think locally, as the crisis is too complex and the global is too threatening. We also tend to think that ours are the authoritative voices, that we have the best science and the most advanced understanding of the world. We think in terms of our levels of consumption and well-being and assume that others can and will reach the same levels, even though we are told that our planet has limited resources.

Some politicians, when facing the environmental challenges and the BAS claims, will suffer the temptation to cynicism. They know that human population numbers are crucially affect-

ing the carrying capacity of the earth; they may conclude that these large numbers have to drastically come down to allow fewer human beings to enjoy the earth in a sustainable way. They also know population control is politically difficult, but they foresee that nature itself will probably take care, in its own way, of reducing numbers. The only preparations that such politicians will want to make are of a military kind: to protect the chosen survivors by military measures. Such cynicism may become the de facto result of us all not addressing the issues properly today: “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing”. These cynical “laissez-faire” policies are a real threat.

1.5. Control?!

In our western cultures, we dispose of a “classical” arsenal of measures to cope with a crisis. These are, in fact, mostly control measures: economic, political, legal, scientific and technological, military. They reflect our self-confidence in our ability to fully control and exploit our environment, although recent history and particularly the murderous world wars that originated in Europe, have taught us that sometimes we lose control. In the face of today’s worldwide environmental crisis, with nature out of control and looking for new planetary equilibria, we do best to heed that historical lesson. Of course, we will have to continue to use those control methods, but we will also have to look at them with a critical eye, in the awareness that too much control may well, paradoxically and tragically, lead to more evil and violence – particularly when there are geographical gradients in the consequences of climate change or when oppositions arise between those who can control and those who cannot (but suffer the consequences of the control of those in control) –. Moreover, the desire for control is a key factor in causing the crisis that we are suffering today. We have been used to speak about calculable and foreseeable risk; we will have to learn to take into account also dangers that we cannot calculate or foresee. Precisely at this place, more is needed than control: ethically based choices, worldviews that take into account the bigger picture, philosophical dis-

course that fathoms the ways in which we think and our motivations to think as we do, religious convictions that provide us with deep motivations, vision that reaches beyond what we can imagine and the capacity to face evil and suffering in a constructive way. All of these perspectives can be abused out of selfishness – they have rightly been criticized for that – but we need them if we want to break through our self-centered anthropocentrism that has wrecked such havoc in our world and against which our traditional control mechanisms remain powerless.

1.6. Eco-skepticism

There exists a solid and varied eco-skepticism, the reasons of which reveal the seriousness of the crisis. People face a highly threatening situation, which is too complex to grasp and which lies beyond their individual control: it is more than they can cope with. This elicits in some of us a reaction of denial, which may, in fact, be strengthened by the apocalyptic language that is sometimes used to describe the challenge.

On a more argumentative level, some authors express the concern that the commitment to address the environmental challenges, particularly when it starts using important human and financial resources, may well result in less spending and commitment to alleviate the fate of the poor and needy in the world. Particularly to those, who are aware of the neo-colonial features of the global world and still see environmental concern as the luxury of Western green activists, who, ultimately, want to perpetuate their own life styles, there seems to be a profound separation between development and solidarity with the poor on the one side, and environmental commitment on the other side. To address their concerns, it is necessary to point out and analyze how intimately linked are the environmental crisis and the fate of the poor. The poor suffer most from the consequences of climate change, a crisis that they have done least to bring about; they are also, precisely because of the poverty that impels them to over-use the resources at their direct disposal, those, who can do least to change the situation: they

do not enjoy the luxury to understand their immediate situation in the context of a larger world problem. Therefore, addressing the environmental challenges is crucially and intimately connected to development and social justice.

Eco-skepticism often takes the form of fundamentalist religious attitudes and a strong criticism and distrust of science and scientists. Eco-skeptics point out that science is incapable of dealing with the challenges and that scientists are unreliable and fake their results or hide important material that contradicts global warming. It is important to note and to become aware that strong anti-science feelings and affects are growing worldwide – often, as in creationism, linked to religious convictions and arguments. At a moment when scientific analysis and argumentation are greatly needed, such attacks on science, are dangerous. It will be important that the major religions, as well as universities and centers of learning, express their balanced understanding of science and their appreciation for the work of scientists. Roman Catholic Christians should clarify that the relationship between faith, theology and science is not a mere theoretical issue, but that it has political implications at a planetary scale.

2. Opportunities

The worldwide environmental crisis challenges not only the political and scientific world, but also the various religions and worldviews around the world. In this context, the Roman Catholic Church, the Society of Jesus and the Ignatian Family cannot remain idle. Neither can the institutions that are inspired by the Ignatian perspective, such as the universities and centers of learning that are represented here. Interestingly, these challenges also represent an opportunity to deepen the understanding of our universal mission and of the Ignatian spirituality. For theologians, this is also an occasion to re-discover their concepts and to re-articulate their arguments and doctrines. The rediscovery of the strength of spiritualities and theological tools is a concrete way of addressing the crisis and of encouraging and empowering people to constructively respond to it.

To perceive that the threatening challenges harbor deep opportunities, constructively answers any paralysis or overwhelming pessimism in the face of the crisis.

2.1. Religions are well adapted to address the worldwide environmental crisis

In the face of the global environmental crisis, religions and the Roman Catholic Church in particular, encounter themselves in a quite unique and strong position. They enjoy a worldwide reach (beyond what politicians are capable to do today) and are present in the field where things happen and people suffer the consequences of global warming (“glocal” presence), they inspire and lead institutions of research and learning that are capable of analysis and education, they control media and can influence public opinion, they enjoy direct contacts with political decision-makers, they have the capacity to mobilize people and organize them, they develop worldviews and visions, they treasure spiritualities that touch the hearts of people. In the face of today’s worldwide challenges of globalization and of the environment, these are crucial assets and it would be, in my opinion, a sin of omission for religions and for the churches not to act. They can play the role of catalysts, of conveners at the table of discernment about what is to be done to reach sustainable development for the planet. In fact, the Anglican Church already takes on a decided position by voice of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, who was very outspoken at COP15. Recently, also Pope Benedict XVI has spoken out, as did Mgr Migliori, the Vatican nuncio at the United Nations.

2.2. Interreligious and intercultural dialogue

Decision-making with regard to global environmental challenges requires mature worldwide dialogue. At this level, religions have experience (positive and negative) to offer, in their dialogue with cultures and in the dialogue between themselves. In fact, focusing on a challenge such as the environment, may help to broaden, strengthen and deepen the interreligious dialogue. Such dialogue can draw the best out of people and recognize what is valu-

able and worthwhile in the conversation partners, it can critically question opinions and ways of living, it can respect local (religious) identities as creative team partners and nevertheless bridge geographical differences, it can focus people on the future and on responsibilities that move them beyond themselves and their own direct concerns and worries. In this sense, it can point politicians in the direction of processes of common discernment that take into account planetary realities and focus on the future. The development of a better understanding of models for interreligious conversation is, therefore, an opportunity amidst the environmental crisis.

In a way, intercultural and interreligious dialogue aims at transforming the never-ending conflict of “life together” on this planet. It does not always work and religions can become a stimulus to violent conflicts. We can hope that today, when worldwide concerns are raised, the conflict will be creatively transformed, allowing participants to deepen their faiths in the interactions with others and to commit more deeply and more united to the needs of the world in which they live.

2.3. Spirituality and Theology

The environmental challenges invite us to develop spiritual attitudes that help us to cope with threatening situations at a large scale, that encourage people in difficult circumstances, that call for solidarity in the face of sharing a planet and its limited resources, that address responsibility, and that invite people to engage the world, particularly when under threat. They invite us to think about the right place of human beings in nature and in the universe, pointing out that humans cannot occupy an outside position of control. Although humans enjoy the extraordinary capacity to create a distance between themselves and the universe, this can never mean that they would be isolated or separated from that universe to which they belong and that expresses itself in them.

Theologies that attempt to answer the environmental challenges focus on “life together”, not only between human beings, but also within nature and on the same planet. They will pay close attention to the structures, patterns and institutions for such “life together” to be truly and sustainably possible. In fact, theologians will discover how the full range of their conceptual space is challenged to unfold its relational depth; by fully entering and engaging in this world (incarnation), they will discover the profound connectedness of reality revealing the immanent and perichoretic depths of the economic trinity. The vows characteristic of religious life, now appear as rules of the game “life together” and invite us to a renewed attention to the value and practice of religious life as an inspiration to sustainable life on earth.

2.4. Science and Politics

In the current crisis, sciences have a lot to offer and are called to reappraise their approaches and methods, so as to be more capable to deal with the intricate complexities and feedback processes of a rapidly changing world. New concepts are introduced, such as emergence, systemic sciences, symmetries, networks, etc., often indicating how new reality arises out of qualified relationships between natural elements. Science is rapidly advancing in various terrains and scientists are interacting transdisciplinarily so as to constitute new bodies of knowledge that arise out of hitherto undreamed of collaborations. Also, new technologies are being developed, offering a perspective even on geo-engineering and on alternatives for our traditional energy resources.

The delicate balance between science and religion (theology) – again a hot topic at a moment when eco-skeptics question science and scientists, often suggesting or using religious arguments or alternatives to science – may help to return science to its full importance while recognizing its limitations. In fact, there is here an opportunity to renew the construc-

tive alliance between religion and science. The role and place of science and technology is of crucial importance in the contemporary situation. There are similar opportunities for developing legal and political tools, that may help to restructure “life together” on a planetary scale.

2.5. Ignatian Spirituality

The current crisis in a new way opens our eyes to the deep assets of Ignatian spirituality. The challenges lead to a rediscovery of a spirituality that is particularly well adapted to the contemporary worldwide challenges. I point to some of its features: (a) the focus on the universal body; (b) the inner coherence of creation as a whole; (c) common apostolic discernment at the basis of the foundation of the Society of Jesus; (d) the generation of vision out of the relationship with God; (e) the capacity to build up institutions and the awareness that these are important; (f) the emphasis on international networking; (g) the capacity to face suffering and to enter into profound solidarity with those who suffer; (h) a combined understanding of incarnation and trinity (trincarnation); (i) the focus on “sentire cum ecclesia”, a church at the service of the whole planet (ecclesiogenesis). To fully unfold these features of the Ignatian spirituality will require the rediscovery of a broad background to its history: its narrative and mystical aspects as found in Ignatius’ Spiritual Diary and Autobiography, its careful approach to the individual spiritual experience as set out in the Spiritual Exercises, its institutional concerns as elaborated in the Constitutions, and its capacity for networking as emerging from the body of letters that Ignatius wrote and received.

The apostolic priorities of the Society of Jesus, as expressed in its latest General Congregations (faith and justice, interreligious and cultural dialogue) represent key factors in the challenges that face us.

2.6. Opportunities for universities

The crisis invites us to rediscover and emphasize a set of attitudes that are important for universities: (a) the need for transdisciplinarity in knowledge; (b) the importance of and focus on young people; (c) the effort at closer international collaboration that bridges over national borders; (d) the commitment to social justice. These opportunities question some of the financial, administrative and managerial features of today's universities, particularly in the developed world. They certainly call for a renewed reflection on the role of universities in our contemporary global world.

3. Leadership and Excellence

How then, in the face of such challenges and opportunities, can universities and centers of learning with Ignatian inspiration concretely address the worldwide environmental crisis? What initiatives can they take, individually and jointly? Does the fact of being part of or connected to the apostolic body of the Society of Jesus and the Ignatian Family open up further alliances and collaborations at the service of a more equitable and sustainable world? What does it mean to be a center of excellence in a world under threat?

3.1. Young People

At their core, today's environmental challenges are about the sustainability of a future world and, therefore, they concern the young people. Universities focus on educating and preparing young people for this world. Particularly in these times of crisis, when our planet runs out of control while looking for a new equilibrium, crucial questions are: How do we best equip young people to face a rapidly changing world and the consequences of these changes? What kind of world will we leave them? Young people and the future of the planet are the first targets of our universities.

The reality of young people is a qualified “here and now” in the midst of a threatening worldwide crisis: “today”, as seen through the eyes of an open future; the “place” where they are (their “locus”), as seen through the eyes of the planet earth, as a connected whole.

Through our international contacts and exchange programs for students (sending and inviting), we can promote a planetary feeling and collaboration that are crucial for addressing the environmental crisis.

In the perspective of the preferential option for the poor, the most vulnerable young people deserve special attention as sources of creative and challenging thought. I think especially of refugees and migrants. What are our possibilities, e.g., through offering them the possibility for advanced university studies, to let them play a creative role at the discernment table?

It is important to give young people the opportunity to engage the situation creatively. This can be done by offering workshops and encounters where young people can ask the right questions and receive support to research their future world as it may come about out of the present. Universities can be places where committed young people are really at the core of the research effort, where transdisciplinarity and friendship are being stimulated and fostered amongst the students (e.g. in our chaplaincies).

3.2. Thought and Research

There is great need for the development of novel and interconnected thought frames in the many areas of sciences, economics, politics, etc. This is true also in philosophy, anthropology, cosmology and theology. These new perspectives are transdisciplinary and holistic. Are our institutions really at the forefront of this research, or are we still continuing to honor control like types of isolated packages of knowledge? What is the cutting edge research that we need to promote so as to better understand our complex world in crisis? What is the

reading list that we would compile for all our students to suggest to them an initial frame of reference and to entice them to cross the borders of separate disciplines? Do we invite our students to think from the future and from the possible consequences of our decisions today? Are we ourselves capable of doing so?

3.3. Theological Research

In today's context, theology constitutes a pivotal science as it is itself in need of transdisciplinary contacts, to which it can offer suggestive thought frames, such as holistic and connected perspectives of creation; the close respect for difference and otherness (although relational, cf. immanence and transcendence); the tension produced by an open vision of the future; the invitation to enter relationally into the world (trincarnation); the effort at building sustainable life together (ecclesiogenesis); the constructive sensitivity to forgiveness and reconciliation amidst our errors, evil and faults; the motivation and commitment that spiritualities can provoke; the effort to deal with pain, suffering and trauma in a constructive way; the attention paid to structural evil and its victims. Theologians can rally and convene fellow scientists and researchers around these ideas. They are a transdisciplinary asset to our universities.

Theologians can also ask important political questions: How can we think in a long term perspective? How can we overcome our national and particular interest towards a more worldwide commitment? Can we rethink our understanding of growth? Can we pay attention to equity and social justice on a planetary scale?

3.4. A Spirituality of Common Discernment

Universities can in many ways cultivate processes of global discernment by linking up various levels of decision-making concerning how to address the current crisis, e.g., politi-

cians, scientists, journalists and analysts, people in the field, etc. They can build up new planetary loyalties through these processes of discernment by lending support to and joining people who are working towards sustainable life. They can advocate for the earth and its nature, by presenting the narratives of the planet and analyzing the ongoing destructive processes. Such processes of discernment and decision-making are very like the processes described by relational constructionism: building communities by focusing together and jointly on the issues at hand. They can develop knowledge as a heuristics that requires togetherness and teamwork with special attention for the voices that are usually not heard.

The approach of common apostolic discernment also questions our approaches to management and leadership: How do we organize our universities? How do we take decisions in our universities? What do we consider to be academic excellence? Do we invite the voiceless at the table of our decision-making processes?

3.5. Convene

Universities can, in many ways, be conveners to address challenges: transdisciplinary workshops and reflection groups, international gatherings, in all of which the voices of the voiceless (also nature) are given a space. Universities are nodes of communication with a transnational loyalty that goes beyond and is even critical of narrow national or geographical perspectives. Universities are invited to open up transitional spaces in which common apostolic discernment is possible and in which transdisciplinary and international research programs can be developed. This represents a challenge to our universities to overcome the borders within and between universities. To do so, universities are called to promote and live collaborative rather than competitive working styles.

3.5. Collaborate

The scale and complexity of the worldwide environmental challenges require collaboration on a planetary scale, where our loyalties lie beyond regional and national boundaries to encompass earth as a whole. I suggest using the collaboration between our universities to set up a global institute or center of concern dealing specifically with environmental concerns. It would use common apostolic discernment as a frame for collaboration, and its communication patterns may be along the lines of a FaceBook structure where members and participants can share interpersonal information that will also be of help in deciding together.

Apart from this global institute, in which research and support can be shared, I suggest also to develop some global platforms in different locations, with the goal of effectively enacting the transition that will have to take place.

3.6. Disaster Response

Environmental change on a planetary scale will result in some disasters and catastrophic events, the effects and consequences of which will require large scale relief actions. Our universities, in their international collaboration and in their connections with relief organizations, can provide support, coordination and know-how both for the direct effects or such events as well as for reconstruction efforts. I suggest that international research programs be set up for researching best relief strategies and efforts. Collaboration with the Jesuit Refugee Service may be a first step to take, particularly, at this stage, with regard to the increasing number of eco-refugees and eco-migrants. The collaboration platforms will play an important role in the process of catastrophe response.

3.7. Conscientization

Worldwide climate change is a threatening reality; eco-skepticism is a powerful reality as well, and it is often connected to distrust of the science and scientists involved in climate studies, as well as with some fundamentalist religious attitudes and with a concern for worldwide social justice. In this context, our universities and centers of learning will feel the necessity and urgency to conscientize people with regard to the seriousness of the crisis at hand as well as the danger of eco-skeptic attitudes. This should be a concerted and worldwide effort where we all show collegial solidarity and coherence.

Universities can also stimulate people – their professors and students, but also the larger public as a whole – into individual and structural, political, institutional action, out of a growing awareness of each one's responsibilities with regard to the current crisis. Universities themselves are invited to take on this responsibility, e.g. by greening their campuses towards more sustainability.

4. Discernment

From an Ignatian perspective, the real and profound challenge in today's worldwide environmental crisis is ecclesiological: How to bring about an equitable common discernment that is apostolic in its desire – born out of the vision of God's Reign – to serve the universe, in particular one of its planets and the human beings living on earth, to build up sustainable life for this universe as creation. Universities and centers of learning play an important role in this game, as they can act as conveners at the table of common apostolic discernment, while bringing in their assets of research, education, willingness to listen to the poorest and those who are left without a voice in decision processes that also concern them, theology, spirituality, influence on public opinion and political decision-making. The questions that I

want to put before you, therefore, are questions about the first steps on the road to how to take on this leadership and how to exercise it in an excellent and humble way.

4.1. Awareness

To what extent are we aware of (a) the crisis, (b) our capacities, (c) the opportunities that the worldwide environmental crisis holds for the development of our institutions, (d) the suffering that awakes us from all complacent academic slumber and selfish career mongering, (e) the responsibility that rests on our shoulders amidst God's groaning and growling creation? If we consider ourselves on that Ignatian battlefield of the two standards, how would we describe each of the camps and lords and where would we situate ourselves? Can we move towards a vision and a mission statement? Can we describe some first "excellent" steps and moves?

4.2. Preconditions for a discernment platform

Are we ready to enter into a common apostolic discernment process? Are we – and "we" refers also to our institutions – free to open up our minds and hearts and wills to dive into the deep of listening to others, particularly to those who have no voice or are suffering the consequences of climate change, and also to the planet as it presents itself in all the variations of being that it carries? Can we recognize in each one of us the voice of God for all of us? Do we feel how our togetherness in this discernment process opens up more possibilities than the sum of what each of us could do separately – dare we engage on this road to emergence which gives us a foretaste of divine transcendence? Are we willing to give time to explore the non-control options, while also paying close attention to the results of our transdisciplinary research? Can we open up space for prayer, so as to become sensitive to the broad and long haul?

4.3. Universality

Are we willing to engage – in line with the so-called fourth vow, which is a vow to respect the universal perspective at all cost – on the path of “universality,” gauging our decisions not only by our own immediate interests, but by the equitable and sustainable well-being of our planet? Can we transform our own institutions and our loyalties to become ever more faithful to the world as creation, in view of God’s Reign? Are we willing to walk on that hard and risky road that leads us to a de facto solidarity with those who are the least on our planet? Are we willing to engage all our knowledge and institutional capabilities with them? How are we going to do this? Can we plan concrete steps towards our universal commitment and the construction of bonds of solidarity that forge us into the one body of creation outside of which we cannot exist?