

Nonviolence and creation care/climate justice

Amy Woolam Echeverria

Global Catholic Climate Movement

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When our hearts are authentically open to universal communion, this sense of fraternity excludes nothing and no one. [...] Everything is related and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river, mother earth. Laudato Si #92.

Introduction

In a world that is often marked by social, political, environmental, and religious dis-integration which leads to isolation, violence and conflict, Pope Francis offers a pastoral and world view that seeks sublime communion, dialogue, care and respect for all people and all of Creation. At times his writings, statements, and actions seem new and unconventional. In fact, the radicalness is nothing more than an unearthing of the Gospel in the light of contemporary reality and a return to our early Christian tradition that did not separate God from the non-human natural world. Pope Francis' focused return to proclaiming the Good News of justice, peace, dialogue, respect, healing, and communion with all of Creation invites and challenges all people of good will to move beyond that which separates us and towards our universality.

In the same way that Pope Francis speaks of an interconnectedness of all Creation, he also speaks of the interconnectedness of realities. He draws direct links for example between economic greed, environmental exploitation, and violence saying, "Obsession with a consumerist lifestyle...can only lead to violence and mutual destruction". (LS #204). Any grim picture that can be painted to illustrate the relationship between social, ecological, and spiritual ills is balanced by the interconnected witness of hope, love, justice, peace, and healing. Whenever any of these virtues and graces are experienced, all which comes into its contact benefits.

In this paper, we will explore the relationship between peace and integral ecology first through the lens of an evolving Catholic theology, followed by exploring what might be considered spiritual violence, and finally we will name some examples of where we see both the brokenness and bonds between peace and ecology. Our moral imagination and Christian discipleship is being challenged and invited to expand to include integral ecology which naturally leads to integral peace. As Pope John Paul II said in his 1990 World Day of Peace Message, "Peace, justice and the preservation of creation are three absolutely interconnected

themes, which cannot be separated and treated individually without once again falling into reductionism". Our Trinitarian doctrine is the foundation for understanding our interconnectedness and communion with all of Creation.

Theological violence

Prior to the Renaissance and Enlightenment periods when humans began to see themselves as the center of knowing and being, there existed a cosmological theology in the Christian tradition. Ilia Delio, OSF, writes, "Cosmology was part of theology as long as the cosmos was believed to be God's creation, but as modern science began to understand the laws of the universe, there was no need for a doctrine of creation".¹ With the growing detachment of humans from the Divine as Creator of All, the Catholic Church began to develop a dominion interpretation of stewardship of humans over the non-human natural world. This anthropocentric theology coupled with the Industrial Revolution and the dualistic split between science and religion that emerged out of 17th century philosophy in which faith and mysticism were seen as incompatible with science has led to a human induced rupture of our covenant with God's non-human Creation. Humans are only beginning to awaken to the depth and breadth of the brokenness that we have caused and are in need of theological, spiritual, and scientific reorientation in order to begin the healing process. We are only beginning to return to a cosmological theology that is at the root of our Catholic Christian tradition.

It is here, in our human-centered theology and Catholic social teaching that we can identify the first root of human induced ecological violence. For when we theologically separate ourselves into a position of dominance over God's creation, we improperly remove God from the relationship and usurp God as Creator of All. While sacred scripture cultivates a sense of wonder and awe in relation to God's creation, the Church has interpreted scripture such that the non-human natural world is a resource meant ultimately to serve human beings as the pinnacle of all creation.

An anthropocentric hermeneutic of scripture in which the intrinsic value of nature is ignored has led to a utilitarian relationship with the non-human natural world and in this commodification, we have removed the sacredness of the Earth and its inclusion of our understanding of the One Body. When we devoid the non-human natural world of its divine presence it becomes much easier to disconnect from our sense of responsibility to care, honor and respect Creation. The absence of love, respect, care, and protection make way not only for violence against Creation but also violence between people in their struggle for access to resources which help sustain human life.

¹ Ilia Delio, OSF, *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution, and the Power of Love*. Orbis, Maryknoll, NY, 2013. p.13

The last 100 years has been a slow turning towards a cosmological theology which expands our experience of God to include the non-human natural world. Notable theologians from their perspectives as scientists, artists, and missionaries who have helped shape a Creation Story that is expansive beyond humans include but not limited to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, Thomas Berry C.P, Ilia Delio, OSF, and Sean McDonagh, SSC. Rereading mystics with an ecological interpretation like St. John of the Cross, who used Creation-centered allegory of the dark night of twilight, midnight, and dawn, helps us know that union with the Cosmic Christ is the union for which we long.

The urgency of the ecological crisis is felt more acutely by the slowness with which the Catholic Church has integrated care for creation as part of our Christian identity and discipleship. Despite warning signs, this indifference that has prevailed until recently is another kind of violence that contributes to an intensification of the Earth's cries. An ecological hermeneutic of scripture coupled with evolving theological language that includes the non-human natural world is essential to our growth as humans and people of faith.

Spiritual violence

The created things of this world are not free of ownership: "For they are yours, O Lord, who love the living" (Wis 11:26). This is the basis of our conviction that, as part of the universe, called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect (LS # 89)

As humans we acknowledge ourselves as children of God, and sisters and brothers of a universal family. In *Laudato Si*, we hear Pope Francis offering us a wider communion to which we belong that includes all of Creation. In order to live this spirituality we must cultivate a new kind of relationship with the non-human natural world. Just as any human relationship needs contact and encounter to imprint on the heart, if we are to understand creation of the land, sea, earth and sky as our common home and the Body of the Cosmic Christ, then it is imperative that we spend time in close contact; contact that is authentic and sustained. That is to say, our relationship must not stay in the romanticism of beautiful sunsets and awesome vistas, but include a closeness to the fragility and vulnerability of Creation which includes our human weakness as well. We cannot authentically praise the glory of God in Creation without also crying out its woundedness.

The human crying out must also include an ecological examen in which we acknowledge, take responsibility for, and lament our role in not only failing to protect, but more egregiously, our

role wounding God's creation. The extinction of species, the loss of biodiversity, and the imbalance within ecosystems are all signs and symptoms of how humans relate with the non-human natural world. How would the relationship dynamics change if humans were to take a position of humility, care and respect towards Creation? As Pope Francis observes, "When human beings fail to find their true place in this world, they misunderstand themselves and end up acting against themselves" (LS 115). Even more radically, can we cultivate a relationship of learning from the natural healthy rhythms and interconnectedness of creation which can teach us about spiritual practices such as, patience, simplicity, silence, waiting, faith, hope, reconciliation, and communion?

Eco-theologian Fr. Sean McDonagh, SSC, writes, "Through his death, Jesus reconciled all of reality to God, so, to destroy any aspect of creation or to banish species forever from their place in the community of life is to deface the image of Christ that is radiated throughout our world. Christ still suffers, not only when people are denied their rights and are exploited, but when seas, rivers, and forests are desecrated and biocide is perpetrated".² Pope Francis, for the first time in Catholic theology and teaching speaks about the intrinsic value of all of creation that is more than its usefulness to humans (LS #115, 140). If humanity were to truly enter into a relationship with all of Creation in which we were no longer at the center of life but in harmony with life, we can imagine a common home that brings us closer to the Kingdom on Earth as it is in heaven.

Hearing the cry of the Earth

We have come to see ourselves as her lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. The violence present in our hearts, wounded by sin, is also reflected in the symptoms of sickness evident in the soil, in the water, in the air and in all forms of life. This is why the earth herself, burdened and laid waste, is among the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor (LS #2)

Pope Francis urges us to hear the cry of the earth and the cry of those who are poor as one integral voice. In order to do this, we must make the linkages. There are many examples of how the earth is crying out for justice, healing, and reconciliation. Some examples include the climate crisis, access to and conflict over water, extractivism, the loss of biodiversity, an increase in ecological martyrs. Each of these cries briefly below illustrates some of the urgent areas which demand lifestyle and policy change both as individuals and as a global community. Each example demonstrates the failure of violence to bring promised peace. Moreover, not

² Sean McDonagh, SSC, *Our Common Home: the encyclical of Pope Francis on the environment, Laudato Si', with commentary by Sean McDonagh*. p.62.

only is violence a failed response it serves only to deepen and sharpen wounds to communities and all of creation.

War and the Earth

If a mistaken understanding of our own principles has at times led us to justify mistreating nature, to exercise tyranny over creation, to engage in war, injustice and acts of violence, we believers should acknowledge that by so doing we were not faithful to the treasures of wisdom which we have been called to protect and preserve. (LS, #200)

Violence done to the Earth itself is a part of war whether through habitat destruction or extraction of the Earth's resources for materials to produce weapons and technology used in war. For example, we see how extraction of natural materials in places like Chile, Peru and the Amazon are used for military purposes in Asia such as the construction of the U.S.-backed military base on [Jeju Island](#), South Korea. The construction of this military base has its own negative impacts on the environment such as destruction of sea-life and water contamination.

Increasingly countries and communities are in conflict as a result of competing for access to natural resources. The global demand for fossil fuels is a good example of how military policies are driven by access to natural resources. Diminished access to basic human rights like clean water, viable food sources, and suitable living conditions, and reduced access to land because of large-scale mining, are all conditions that exacerbate the vulnerability of countless communities around the world. The environmentally driven conflicts often cross boundaries of ethnic and religious divide which can lead to even more intense violence and war. An article in the Washington Post³ highlights some examples which include how illegal mining funds armed groups in the conflict in the Congo and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Access to water is one important dimension of the decades-long violent tensions between Palestine and Israel. International institutions like the United Nations are increasingly documenting the links between peace, security, and the environment such as through the work of the [UN Environment Programme \(UNEP\)](#). The UN Security Council has also recognized in [Resolution 2408](#) of March 2018, the correlation between climate change and national or regional security in Somalia. [A New Climate for Peace](#), a report commissioned by the G7 members in 2015, noted that "Climate change is a global threat to security in the 21st century. We must act quickly to limit the future risks to the planet we share and to the peace we seek."⁴

³https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2016/03/22/how-exploiting-the-earth-can-fuel-violent-conflict/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.1eff537db45d

⁴<https://library.ecc-platform.org/news/planetary-security-conference-2015-videos>

When we think of the casualties of war, we usually think of the loss of human life first, and perhaps the destruction of infrastructure like homes, roads, schools, hospitals, and in some cases entire villages, towns or cities. Rarely do we call to mind the landscape, the air, the water, the animal life, that is also frequently damaged, plundered, and at times irrevocably destroyed by guns, bombs, chemical warfare, and other weapons. In an article by WorldWatch⁵ on war and the environment, several examples are outlined about the impacts of war on the Earth such as examples include the defoliation from Agent Orange during the Vietnam War, the oil spills during the first Gulf War that threaten Kuwait's meager freshwater aquifers, and the devastation to mammal species from fallout from the Rwandan civil war. Taking into account this non-human loss of life is yet another reason to redefine Church teaching on war to recognize that no war is just against the environment.

Climate change

For decades scientists have been warning the world of the catastrophic and irreversible impacts of climate change. Some voices in the Church have also sounded the clarion call from a moral perspective. The denial of human induced climate change is a kind of violence. It is the violence of ignorance and the violence of isolation when we fail to see our interconnectedness that perpetuates policies and lifestyles that keep the world imbalanced and diseased.

All of Creation is under threat as a result of human-induced climate change created largely by an over-consumption of the environment and dependence on fossil fuels which is driven by an economic model that places profits over the common good. There are countless examples of climate change related natural disasters throughout the world. Typhoon Haiyan in the Philippines in 2013, Cyclone Winston in Fiji in 2016, Hurricane Maria in Puerto Rico in 2017, heat records that soar each year higher than the last, extreme flooding in Pakistan, and droughts in Africa and Australia well beyond cyclical norms all point to the catastrophic suffering and loss of human and non-human life. In recognizing the kind of ongoing, long-term, ecological violence being done to countless vulnerable communities around the world, the concept of [climate debt](#)⁶ which holds the highest-emitting countries and the countries responsible for highest demand of extracted resources responsible for the environmental, social and economic costs that the most vulnerable communities and countries must bear as a result of climate change. Holding wealthy countries responsible for mitigation and adaptation costs is one call for justice.

⁵ <http://www.worldwatch.org/node/5520>

⁶ This example is from Bolivia and reflective of the wider call to repay ecological debt from many countries in the Global South.

We must be cautious and careful of climate solutions that on the surface seem viable but when further explored can be just as damaging to communities and the environment. Genetically modified corn-based biofuels is one example of a poor use of 'green' technology as a response to the climate crisis. Renewable energy such as solar and wind farms, as well as hydro-electric dams can be destructive without proper siting and consultation with local communities. This is an opportunity for Catholics and others of faith to make sure climate solutions don't repeat mistakes of fossil fuels in these ways.

Water

In the Christian tradition, water holds a special place in our spiritual imagination and sacramental expression. We know from science of the essential nature of water to life. Our relationship with water is both spiritual and physiological and therefore demands a level of care that mirrors a sacredness for life.

The privatization, commodification, trade and export of water can be seen as both a violation of the Catholic principles of universal destination of goods and care for creation. The privatization of water often disregards the rights and needs of humans and all living things because the environment is not factored into the commercial equation. Water privatization has had consequences such as: violent conflict between communities over access to water which results in less access to water for people who are poor, extremely high tariffs, and poor water quality. We see conflicts arising throughout the world over issues of scarcity, access, privatization, and contamination. Some examples include Brazil at the Belo Monte dam; in southern Philippines a town was left without municipal water due to an attack attributed the militant Islamist separatist group Abu Sayyaf in 2015; and in the United States, Flint, Michigan has faced water contamination with lead since 2014. We see in these and many other crises that water can be the root of the conflict, a 'weapon' in a conflict, or the causality of a conflict. In all cases, water is particularly vulnerable to violence.

Biodiversity

According to McDonagh, "When we overshoot the capacity of the planet to meet our needs by 50 percent, the damage to the web of life is permanent." The violence of overconsumption and the extinction of plants, animals, and water are real wounds for which humans bear significant responsibility. The creative and generative processes that result from diversity are threatened with the rapid loss of species and sickening of ecosystems. In *Laudato Si'* Pope Francis boldly proclaims, "Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right." (LS #33). While we cannot restore the life that has gone extinct, we can take responsibility for preserving, conserving, and

cultivating the flourishing of biodiversity. In order to do this, we must begin to embrace a relationship with the environment which recognizes and celebrates its intrinsic value as the creation of God.

Extractivism

We see the growing threat of a massive depletion of natural resources, loss of biodiversity and destruction of the environment caused by extractivism which is the model of development promoted by many multinational corporations, governments and international financial institutions that is based on the intensive exploitation of natural resources, most of which are non-renewable, and creates conditions of dependency for countries from which the resources are extracted. This model of development commodifies the natural world which violates the relationship of balance and harmony intended for all of God's Creation and often generates social conflicts, violates human rights and endangers biodiversity.

One of the hotspots of extractivism is the Amazon region which knows well the impacts of violence on both human lives and the landscape. REPAM (Ecclesial Network for the Pan Amazon) cites one major infrastructure project known as Hydrovia⁷ as an example of how an economic view of a landscape and its people translates into violence to all. Similar examples exist throughout the world, particularly in economically vulnerable countries which are abundant in biodiversity and cultures. Pope Francis speaks of this double pronged disregard for life when he says, "It is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners, especially when large projects affecting their land are proposed. For them, land is not a commodity but rather a gift from God and from their ancestors who rest there, a sacred space with which they need to interact if they are to maintain their identity and values. When they remain on their land, they themselves care for it best. Nevertheless, in various parts of the world, pressure is being put on them to abandon their homelands to make room for agricultural or mining projects which are undertaken without regard for the degradation of nature and culture." (LS #146) The position of economic marginalization leads to exploitation of people and the earth.

Eco-martyrs

Here I want to recognize, encourage and thank all those striving in countless ways to guarantee the protection of the home which we share. (LS #13).

⁷ <http://redamazonica.org/en/2018/02/about-the-amazonian-hydrovia/>

Eco-martyrs such as Sr. Dorothy Stang, SSND, in Brazil in 2005, and Berta Caceres in Honduras in 2016 are just two women who dedicated their lives to hearing the cry of those who are poor and the cry of the Earth and were killed as a result of their commitment to protecting marginalized people and the vulnerable Earth. Violence against people who speak out prophetically about violence against Creation is a sure sign of how humanity has broken our covenant with the Cosmic Christ. We call to mind at least 158 environmental defenders who were killed in 2017 while protecting their communities' lands or natural resources. In 2017, the Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM) chose [All Saints Day](#) as a day to remember eco-martyrs and the extinction of non-human life. This is an example how existing liturgical moments can be reimagined with an ecological hermeneutic to include all of Creation.

These are some ways in which we see where the covenant is broken between humans and the environment. War, climate change, extractivism, water, loss of biodiversity, eco-martyrs all point to how violence is a failed approach and that our common home is crying out for healing, justice, and lasting peace.

Hearing the song of the Earth

It would be easy to despair when looking at the landscape of ecological violence. But there are signs of hope that ecological conversion and active nonviolence are taking hold in people's lives and in global policies when considering matters of the environment. Peace is mentioned at least 39 times in *Laudato Si'*, which has been a huge light of hope added to the body of Catholic Social Teaching. Other faith responses that inspire include the birth of major international networks like Global Catholic Climate Movement (GCCM), Ecclesial Network for the Pan Amazon (REPAM), and the Ecclesial Network for the Congo Basin (REBAC). Still other global processes and proposals like divestment from fossil fuels and carbon neutrality, liturgical reform to include a Season of Creation, and the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative are all nonviolent expressions of the Spirit breathing life and hope into the world. Creation itself and its natural regenerative process, threatened and under attack as it is, reminds us of our pascal faith that life does overcome death.

On Ash Wednesday 2015 during Pope Francis' visit to the Philippines and just months before the release of the Church's first encyclical that deeply addresses the world's environmental crisis and our relationship with the earth, [the Global Catholic Climate Movement](#) was born. Since then, GCCM has worked to animate the grassroots as well as Church leadership in bringing *Laudato Si'* to life. Its three areas of focus include: Ecological Conversion, Lifestyle Change, and Public Sphere advocacy, which when woven together take individuals, communities, and the world on a journey towards restoring right relationship with all who share God's common home. GCCM's campaign to keep rising temperatures below 1.5 degrees

Celsius is just one nonviolent response to an ongoing human induced violent conflict with Earth. Calling the Church to energy reduction, efficiency and carbon neutrality in our parishes, schools, hospitals, religious houses, seminaries and formation centers is yet another systematic response that will bring us into a healing and restorative relationship with each other, creation, and God.

Born out of a deep desire to bring healing, peace and justice to the Amazon and Congo Basin, [REPAM](#) and REBAC have emphasized a territorial approach by creating space for local communities and indigenous leaders to be protagonists in defending the rights of the people and the land. Locally led processes for education, formation, and prayer about human and environmental rights coupled international advocacy in places like the United Nations, U.S. Congress, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights are all ways that people and the earth are working in communion to bring nonviolent action and change to the Amazon region known as the “lungs of the planet”. Grounded in local realities and inspired by *Laudato Si’*, REPAM has been a key catalyst and partner with the Vatican for the upcoming Synod on the Amazon in October 2019, which Pope Francis has themed, "The Amazon: New paths for the church and for an integral ecology." which will certainly lead to a deepening of our commitment to peacefully caring for our common home.

A growing number of Catholic institutions, parishes and dioceses such as the Archdiocese of Manila that are celebrating the [Season of Creation](#) (September 1 – October 4) is an example of how the Church is taking up a systematic approach to bringing care for creation into liturgical and sacramental spaces. In doing so, the Catholic Church is beginning to recognize in deep theological and pastoral ways that care for creation is not an optional dimension of our faith, but integral to our Christian discipleship. In nurturing this kind of ecological conversion, it is only natural that the world will move towards healing, reconciliation and peace, and justice.

Another important response is the growing Catholic institutional commitment to divestment from fossil fuels and promotion of positive impact investing. In a divestment toolkit⁸ prepared collaboratively between GCCM and Trocaire, the Irish member of Caritas Internationalis, a new set of criteria are proposed to measure ethical investments. According to the toolkit, “In the light of climate change, a more robust investment framework would apply four ethical tests to prospective investments:

- Does the activity in question contribute to observable, grave or large-scale harm?

⁸ Full divestment toolkit here:

https://catholicclimatemovement.global/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/GCCM_Tr%C3%B3caire-Catholic-Toolkit.pdf

- Does the organization or sector contribute to a denial of the truth about harm, whether through misleading information campaigns or other means, intended to delay a response, thus leading to intractable resistance?
- Does withdrawing investments from this sector have a symbolic, prophetic impact, contributing towards redefining society's moral code?
- Does redirecting investments enable pragmatic and productive investments in essential clean energy development and job creation?

Drastically reducing dependency on fossil fuels and transitioning to renewable and clean energy sources is urgently needed as Pope Francis indicates, “We know that technology based on the use of highly polluting fossil fuels – especially coal, but also oil and, to a lesser degree, gas – needs to be progressively replaced without delay”. (LS 165). Making such a transition would have positive implications for restoring the earth, reducing corporate power, and developing a sustainable societal lifestyle change that is more harmonious with natural rhythms and relationships.

The international [Catholic Nonviolence Initiative](#) is yet another key sign of hope in the shifting of theology and teaching around care for the earth. Active nonviolence, while not new to Catholic Social Teaching, has taken on an urgency in the work towards integral ecology and integral human development. CNI notes these practices⁹ as key to living active nonviolence:

- Conflict transformation
- Trauma-healing
- Restorative justice
- Nonviolent resistance
- Unarmed civilian protection
- Nonviolent civilian-based defense

We can see how these practices can and need to be applied in contexts where violence and conflict occur both among peoples in relation to the environment and to the environment itself. Networks like REPAM and REBAC in the Amazon and Africa are doing just that. In the Philippines for example, [Saving Madre Tierra Network](#) brings together indigenous communities and the Church together for education, advocacy, and prayer. In the United States, many Catholics and Catholic organizations have stood in solidarity at the Standing Rock Sioux protest site against the Dakota Access Pipeline, while others have joined the years-long protests against the Keystone XL pipeline. In his book, *They Will Inherit the Earth*, John Dear gives an account of

⁹ Catholic Nonviolence Initiative: <http://www.nonviolencejustpeace.net>

Standing Rock and many other examples of where ecology and peace intersect. Of Standing Rock and the witness that can be seen there he writes, “They call themselves ‘protectors’ not protestors, ‘pray-ers’ not disrupters, ‘peacemakers’ not troublemakers. It’s that kind of creative nonviolence that has attracted the interest and sympathy of people around the country and the world” (pp.67-68). Embracing a spirituality and world view grounded in this kind of active nonviolence towards creation that we so often see in Original Peoples is not incompatible with our Catholic tradition, but rather deeply rooted in the Gospel of nonviolence and communion.

Finally, we have only to observe nature’s inherent balance and harmony as a model for peace among humans and with all of creation. For billions of years, life, death, and rebirth in the earth’s ecosystems were sustained in a healthy rhythm that honored time, space, and relationship. Today, in the face of the ecological crisis of climate change and related crises, we see how those rhythms have been broken. Certainly we can and should look to science and technology to aid in developing adaptation and mitigation responses. But we cannot diminish the role of creation itself in reminding us to practice sufficiency, patience, sacrifice, service and solidarity. We can imagine that the non-human natural world, as integral to the Cosmic Christ, has its own unique journey of transformation and resurrection. Any violence to that journey, particularly human-induced, is a violation of life and God. Therefore, our discipleship entails not only our human journey of sanctification but also ensuring that of all God’s creation is able to live its intended life to its fullest (John 10:10).

Conclusion

People live poised between each individual moment and the greater, brighter horizon of the utopian future as the final cause which draws us to itself. Here we see a first principle for progress in building a people: time is greater than space. (Evangelii Gaudium, #222)

Known for his love of being outdoors and surrounded by animals while praying, St. Columban issued this invitation in the 7th century, “If you want to know the Creator, know Creation.” A prophetic call like this made 1,400 years ago resonates deeply in our day and time which illustrates Pope Francis’ assertion that we are both rooted in our reality and part of a Creation story that extends far beyond ourselves both past and future. Also ahead of his time, St. Francis of Assisi, known for his peace-Creation-loving teachings and way of life, inspires us to take up Pope Francis’ call to ecological conversion. Mystic, scientist, and poet St. Hildegard of Bingen is yet another witness in our tradition who foretells in her Scivias this call to integral ecology and human development.

There is meaning in drawing on the lives of these and other ecologically and cosmologically attuned saints. They tell us through their lives that communion with Earth as essential to our

faith is not new, but rather deeply rooted in our Christian tradition. Our communion with the saints can be expanded to include communion with the sanctity of all life. According to the Catechism #948, “The term ‘communion of saints’ therefore has two closely linked meanings: ‘communion in holy things (sancta)’ and ‘among holy persons (sancti).’”[5] An ecological hermeneutic of our tradition of communion of saints gives us a framework for an expanded understanding to include a communion with all of Creation. In his 2018 exhortation, *Gaudete et Exultate*, Pope Francis reminds us that the path to holiness is the journey for us all: “We are called to be contemplatives even in the midst of action, and to grow in holiness by responsibly and generously carrying out our proper mission.” (GE, #20). To work actively for the care for creation is to actively work for nonviolence. This work, grounded in an ecological spirituality is more than environmentalism; it is a path of our vocation and peaceful Christian discipleship for the 21st century.

Integral ecology is an idea in *Laudato Si'* that invites us to see the interconnectedness of all things: the relationship between humans and non-human life; our spirituality and our lives; our environmental economic, political, and social systems; justice, peace, and care for our common home. In this same way, an integral peace invites us to an expansive understanding of what must be included in building peace within and among communities. If we do not consider just peace and active nonviolence to include all of Creation, we will continue to perpetuate lifestyles and systems of violence that wound each other, the environment and the Cosmic Christ. Dialogue, advocacy, formation, prayer, are all practices integral to our Christian tradition that in the face of the urgent environmental crisis will surely contribute to the transformation of peace. Our scripture, sacraments and symbols abound with Creation elements and imagery. A return to our early Christian cosmological view of the world coupled with the understandings of modern science, Creation becomes more than the landscape and backdrop for the human drama of salvation, but is interwoven to our ongoing ecological conversion that brings us into greater unity and peace with all of creation and God.

[1] Sean McDonagh, SSC, *Our Common Home: the encyclical of Pope Francis on the environment, Laudato Si', with commentary by Sean McDonagh*. p.62.

[2] GCCM's divestment campaign: <https://catholicclimatemovement.global/divest-and-reinvest/>

[3] Full divestment toolkit here:

https://catholicclimatemovement.global/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/GCCM_Tr%C3%B3caire-Catholic-Toolkit.pdf

[4] Catholic Nonviolence Initiative: <http://www.nonviolencejustpeace.net>

[5] Catechism of the Catholic Church:

http://www.vatican.va/archive/ccc_css/archive/catechism/p123a9p5.htm