

NEW ECOLOGICAL EQUILIBRIUM: A PERSPECTIVE FOR OUR LONG CONVERSION JOURNEY

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ABSTRACT

Through the encyclical letter *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis launched integral ecology as a new paradigm to solve the global ecological crises. The most fundamental challenge identified was that the awareness of the fact that everything is connected should be chosen by those who are trusted to design pastoral leadership formation within the Church to implement the above new paradigm.

In line with the spirit of *Laudato Si'*, awareness should be understood as the opening of mind, heart, and will that will enable the development of new convictions, attitudes, and forms of life toward creating a new equilibrium. In this paper, five guidelines are proposed to be used in designing an appropriate pastoral leadership formation.

Reaching New Ecological Equilibrium Through Ecological Conversion

The COVID-19 pandemic did create a new term named “new normal.” But later this term had been questioned due to the fact that there is no emerging sign of the ending of this pandemic. The trajectory of this coronavirus outbreak is impossible to predict due to these three factors: (1) coronaviruses are ecologically diverse with the greatest variety, as seen in the bats as their reservoirs; (2) the peridomestic mammals serving as intermediate hosts may facilitate recombination and mutation events with expansion of genetic diversity; and (3) the recombination and mutation events can happen also in the human beings.¹ Based on this fact we can say that we have to live with this coronavirus for a longer time. There is no way to return to our normal life as we have before the emerging of the pandemic. This pandemic that originated from the natural world creates impacts on the process of natural change. In the natural world, this process occurs constantly and cannot be restored to its prior condition.² We have to find a way to live with this little creature in a new ecological equilibrium, which means a new condition of living together in harmony.

Pope Francis’s relating ecological education to the need of having ecological equilibrium is something that has very far-reaching pastoral leadership implications. It was said that an ecological education should be directed toward restoring the ecological equilibrium at various levels. It should be directed toward establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures, and with God (LS 210). Here, Pope Francis wants to say that harmony is the indicator for the existence of the new ecological equilibrium at all levels. It might be difficult to measure. But it can be felt. It can be experienced. It can be designed to achieve. It can be imagined

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1. Catherine F. Paules, Hilary D. Mauston, and Anthony S. Fauci, “Coronavirus Infections – More Than Just the Common Cold,” American Medical Association, downloaded from <https://jamanetwork.com>, by a Center for Disease Control User on 24 January 2020.
 2. Chris Maser, *Earth in Our Care: Ecology, Economy, and Sustainability* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009), xi, 1–2.

as a synergizing process of many acting components. It is like playing a musical instrument in an orchestra, singing a song within a choir group, and rowing an inflatable boat with friends in a river. It is possible to reach such a creative process of togetherness.

In addressing the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, Pope Francis said: “The adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the World Summit, which opens today, is an important sign of hope. I am similarly confident that the Paris Conference on Climatic Change will secure fundamental and effective agreements.” He described the new equilibrium expected coming from the 2030 agenda as a rising common home characterized by all men and women’s right understanding of universal fraternity, respect for the sacredness of every human life, of every man and every woman, the poor, the elderly, children, the infirm, the unborn, the unemployed, the abandoned, those considered disposable because they are only considered as part of a statistic, and the kind of fraternity built on the understanding of a certain sacredness of created nature.³ It seems that Pope Francis put the year 2030 as the year of the new equilibrium that can be targeted. He invited all nations and all individuals who have concern on this issue to pursue together for the actualization of this targeted hope.

The period offered for the ecological conversion through education to achieve the targeted new equilibrium will be only ten years ahead. Pope Francis asked the Church to be involved actively in making this global political agenda to be successful. The Church involvement has been initiated in various kinds of platform of action as promoted by many ecclesial bodies at local, national, and global levels, including the Interdicasterial Working Groups of the Holy See on Integral Ecology.⁴ The reflective questions that are interesting to be raised in relation to the pastoral works will be: How we should organize this ten-year process of ecological conversion in our pastoral works to achieve the

3. Ryan Teague Beckwith, “Transcript: Read the Speech Pope Francis Gave to the United Nations,” *Time*, 25 September 2015, <https://time.com/4049905/pope-francis-us-visit-united-nations-speech-transcript>, accessed 17 January 2021.

4. Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology, “Journeying Towards Care for Our Common Home: Five Years After *Laudato Si'*” (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020).

2030 new equilibrium? What kinds of challenge do we have to face and which one is the most fundamental challenge? What kind of pastoral leadership should be designed to respond to the most fundamental challenge?

Organizing the Ecological Conversion Through Platforms Constructed for Specific Challenges

Various kinds of pastoral activities at all levels have been organized in the Church to respond the messages of *Laudato Si'*. As reported by Brian Roewe⁵ the Philippine Church organized some rallies, petition drives, and prayer services in responding the encyclical messages. In May 2016, Lipa Archbishop Ramon Arguelles led a 10,000-person march against new coal-fired power plants. The Catholic Agency for Overseas Development⁶ reported that within one year after the publication of the encyclical there were interesting activities taking place. Some of them can be mentioned here: dozens of remarkable pilgrims travelled to Paris to put pressure on the delegates who were meeting at the UN climate conference; 8,000 copies of the encyclical study guide were distributed to help hundreds of people taking part in workshops held around England, Wales, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia, Bangladesh, and Colombia; over 900,000 Catholics worldwide signed a petition to their respective political leaders, including David Cameron from England, for calling to act following *Laudato Si'* messages. All these activities can be claimed as the direct impacts of the publication of *Laudato Si'*. The largest impact that had been expected before was coming from Paris where the world leaders and politicians made the Paris Agreement. Such an impact can be expected to continuously grow along with the implementation of its programs and projects, which would be evaluated every five years.

For the Church, the Paris Agreement organized in 2015 to respond the global climate change issue has been considered as a very important event. From this event, it can be measured how well the world leaders accepted

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5. Brian Roewe, "Philippine Church Takes Lead on Francis' Environmental Encyclical," *Earth Beat*, 25 July 2015, https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/world/eco-catholic/philippine-church-takes-lead-francis-environmental-encyclical?site_redirect=1, accessed 12 February 2021.
 6. The Catholic Agency for Overseas Development, "The Impact of *Laudato Si'* one year-on", *CAFOD*, 16 June 2016, <https://cafod.org.uk/News/Campaigning-news/Laudato-Si-one-year-impact>, accessed 12 February 2021.

Laudato Si' messages. It can be figured out as a global and fundamental platform through which Pope Francis's global ecological conversion message can be voiced, the necessary dialogues among global leaders and politicians can be promoted, and some concrete collaborative actions among nations can be developed continuously. When we think about a platform, we can think simply about a working group. An internal platform within the Church was already established by the Pope named as the Holy See Interdicastery Table on Integral Ecology or the Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology.⁷ It is a Vatican working group formed to evaluate ways to best promote and implement integral ecology as the new paradigm proposed by *Laudato Si'*. Those assigned to develop this platform consist of representatives of the Holy See related institutions, several Episcopal Conferences, and some Catholic organizations that can be involved in promoting and implementing the new paradigm.

Usually, a platform was established to respond a challenge. Various kinds of platform have been established within the Church in responding to the multi-faceted *Laudato Si'* challenges. To make it work, a platform should be intended toward responding a specific challenge. The more specific a challenge is chosen and formulated, the more likely a platform intended for it can be managed effectively. That was why the Discastery for Promoting Integral Human Development in its document named "*Laudato Si'* Special Anniversary Year 24 May 2020 – 24 May 2021"⁸ did classify its multi-year action plans into seven action platforms on the basis of seven different specific challenges to respond.

The seven action platforms with their specific challenges were constructed for seven years to meet a multi-year goal formulated as to make communities around the world totally sustainable in the spirit of integral ecology of *Laudato Si'*. Here we chose only three action platforms considered as the most important platforms, namely, the *Laudato Si'* Families platform, the *Laudato Si'* Schools platform, and the *Laudato Si'* Universities platform.

7. Isabella Piro, "Vatican Document on Integral Ecology: Safeguarding Creation Is Everyone's Responsibility," *Vatican News*, 18 June 2020, <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/vatican-city/news/2020-06/vatican-interdicastery-document-laudato-si-safeguarding-creation.html>, accessed 17 January 2021.

8. Discastery For Promoting Integral Human Development, "*Laudato Si'* Special Anniversary Year 24 May 2020 – 24 May 2021," 16 May 2020, <http://www.humandevlopment.va/en/news/laudato-si-special-anniversary-year-plan.html>, accessed 17 January 2021.

The first platform was constructed to meet the specific challenge of protecting life and promoting the family as protagonist of integral ecology. The second platform and the third platform were constructed to meet the same specific challenge of developing capacity for discernment, critical thinking, and responsible actions. Why do we say these three platforms are the most important? It can be related to the fact that these three platforms have the longest traditions in the Church and have the farthest multiplying effects. But it can be related also to the most fundamental challenge we have to face as the new equilibrium should be established on the basis of the integral ecology paradigm proposed by the Church.⁹

Figuring Out the Most Fundamental Challenge

The Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology,¹⁰ in promoting and implementing integral ecology as a new paradigm, identified many specific challenges as shown in the guidelines for actions. Among the specific challenges presented, there is one specific challenge we can consider as the most fundamental. What is it? It is stated in the guideline as follows: “Raise awareness of the importance of the connection between ‘personal equilibrium,’ ‘social equilibrium,’ and ‘environmental equilibrium.’” The question that should be raised here is: How do we figure it out as the most fundamental challenge?

The most fundamental challenge can be formulated in the form of this question: How far we can raise our awareness or consciousness of the connection of our own personal equilibrium, social equilibrium, and environmental equilibrium? Here the word “connection” should be considered as the key word based on which we can figure out the most fundamental aspects of the challenge. It is also the key word that we can explore deeply in trying to understand the meaning of integral ecology. There are at least three fundamental aspects that can be deduced from the word “connection.” The

9. Isabella Piro, “Vatican Document on Integral Ecology”; Discastery of Promoting Human Development, “LS Special Anniversary Year.”

10. Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology, “Journeying Towards Care.”

first aspect can be related to the personal connection, especially between we as created persons and God as our creator. It can be qualified as the spiritual aspect of the connection. It is fundamental since it can be related to the purpose of our creation as human beings as found in the principle and foundation of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius Loyola (Spir. Ex. 23) and the contemplation of obtaining love (Spir. Ex. 230–37).

The second aspect is related to the social connection among human beings. It can be reflected from the biblical messages taken from the story of the Samaritan, Jesus's teaching about being servant, and His sharing of life through Eucharist. This aspect had been explored deeply by Pope Francis in his recent encyclical letter *Fratelli Tutti* especially when he reflected on the parable story of the Samaritan helping a person falling into the hands of the robbers as told in Lk 10:25–37. It is about the continuously existing issue of human relationships. The main message of Pope Francis can be found in this concluding statement: “Let us look to the example of the Good Samaritan. Jesus’s parable summons us to rediscover our vocation as citizens of our respective nations and of the entire world, builders of a new social bond. This summons is ever new, yet it is grounded in a fundamental law of our being: we are called to direct society to the pursuit of the common good and, with this purpose in mind, to persevere in consolidating its political and social order, its fabric of relations, its human goals. By his actions, the Good Samaritan showed that ‘the existence of each and every individual is deeply tied to that of others: life is not simply time that passes; life is a time for interactions’” (FT, 66).

The third aspect is related to the environmental interconnection appearing in the history of God’s creation. Concerning this aspect, the story of Eden, the promise of Yahweh to Noah, the teaching of Jesus about God’s Kingdom, and His own being can be used as the sources of our reflection on this specific aspect. In relation to the story of Eden, this is the reflection of *Laudato Si’*: “The harmony between the Creator, humanity and creation as a whole was disrupted by our presuming to take the place of God and refusing to acknowledge our creaturely limitations” (LS 66). In relation to Jesus, it can be stated that Jesus lived in full harmony with creation, and others were amazed: “What sort of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him?” (Mt 8:27). God our Creator promised to continue the whole process of creation

towards its fulfillment through this special way: “the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God’s creation, in the last speck of dust of our planet” (LS 9).

Designing Pastoral Leadership Formation to Respond to the Most Fundamental Challenge

Ecological conversion in the sense of ecological education during and after the COVID-19 pandemic can be figured out as walking along the dry desert, like Israel who had to walk for 40 years to enter the promised land under the pastoral leadership of Moses and Harun. The year 2030 as the year of the new equilibrium targeted by Pope Francis can be figured out as the promised land. There were many new things and challenges that Israel as well as their leaders have to learn along the journey. The most fundamental challenge for Moses and Harun seems to be how to keep raising Israel’s faith and hope in the promised land. It will happen with us who want to respond to Pope Francis’s invitation for an ecological conversion through ecological education and using integral ecology as our new paradigm to arrive safely to the promised land. The most fundamental challenge will be how to keep raising our faith and hope in integral ecology as our new paradigm. It was given to the Church and all people who have good will as a way to reach the promised land. For this, we have to take the first fundamental step which is reflecting on how the three fundamental aspects mentioned above – namely, personal, social, and environmental aspects – of our way of being as members of the Church has been slowly integrated in our awareness.

For the sake of designing an appropriate pastoral leadership formation to respond to the aforementioned most fundamental challenge, this paper proposes the following five guidelines for raising the necessary awareness. Awareness here means the opening of our mind, heart, and will that enables the development of new convictions, attitudes, and forms of life toward creating a new equilibrium as expected by *Laudato Si’* (LS 202). Such an awareness can be raised through a pastoral leadership training designed appropriately for this need.

First, awareness of the fact that everything is connected. Everything is connected has been shown by the scientists as continuously happening in the evolution of the universe, earth as a planet, and all creatures living on earth. It can even be estimated that there are hidden connections integrating the biological, cognitive, and social dimensions of life on earth.¹¹ These connections can be found at all levels, global ecosystems, local ecosystems, all organisms, and even at atom and sub-atom particles and genetic codes as described in *Laudato Si'* (LS 138). The concept of “everything is connected” in *Laudato Si'* can be considered as the essence of the integral ecology paradigm. At a spiritual level, it should be related to how God created all creations in harmony by His infinite power of love (LS 73). It can be related also to how the fullness of human life and the global solidarity can be achieved as flowing from the mystery of the Trinity (LS 240). In raising our awareness, we can use our contemplation as being invited by God to participate joyfully in this Trinitarian mystery of the continuous creation. The new equilibrium can be figured out as harmony in drawing, dancing, or singing together with God our creator in doing artistic works of creation (LS 225).

Second, awareness of our being members of the Church. Being members of the Church originates from our baptism. It becomes our self-identity, chosen and given by Christ as the Head of the Church. For the present moment, our self-identity should be growing toward its fulfillment by living out integral ecology as our response to the vocation received in our baptism. Integral ecology is a complex and multidimensional reality calling for a long-term vision, not only for our own life but also for the life of all creation. It requires our self-giving which, being combined with Christ’s gift of himself, will become a source of life for all creation.¹² Since it is attached to our self-identity, living out integral ecology is not an option but an obligation.

Third, awareness of experiencing the light and the shadow. Imagine in our contemplative prayer how God created beautifully all creation from his infinite power of love and how everything is dynamically connected in

11. Fritjof Capra, *The Hidden Connections: Integrating the Biological, Cognitive, and Social Dimensions of Life into a Science of Sustainability* (New York: Doubleday, 2002).

12. Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology, “Journeying Towards Care,” 9.

harmony. Such an imagination can create a light experience. In contrary, see how vulnerable we are in front of the COVID-19 pandemic and how frightening we are surrounded by forest fire! Such a seeing can create a shadow experience. Astonishingly, behind the pandemic we can see something that gives a light experience, such as seeing the global solidarity among the scientists to find the needed vaccine as soon as possible; the dedications of doctors, nurses, and health volunteers in providing services to COVID-19 patients; and the joint commitment of nation leaders to fight against the pandemic. Living out integral ecology will bring us various light and shadow experiences. Both experiences create a kind of tension through which we have to do some deeper reflection and spiritual discernment to change our way of seeing. In this case, the first thing we have to do is seeing more deeply the reality of ourselves to find the distractions that might block our way of seeing.¹³ Why should we do this? Because we believe that behind the appearing reality, we would be able to find God's exciting mission opened for us to join.

Fourth, awareness of the various platforms for action that are emerging. The various platforms for action emerging within and outside the Church after the publishing of *Laudato Si'* signified the urgency of the challenges and the strong impact of their related messages. Certain levels of the new ecological awareness have been emerging everywhere that we have to embrace. Instead of initiating a new platform for action, we can join one or two of the emerging platforms which we judge as appropriate. How do we know that a platform is appropriate to choose? There are three aspects of action that can be judged. First, how far the spirit of its action is in line with the spirit of integral ecology. Second, how far its action can be related to pursuing the common good of people as the main orientation of social teaching of the Church. Third, what kind of impact can be expected from the actions carried out continuously by the platform. What should we do in case there is no platform existing? We are recommended to create a new platform, beginning

13. Adolfo Nicolás, S.J., "From Distraction to Dedication: An Invitation to the Center," *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 29 May 2020, <https://www.laciviltacattolica.com/from-distraction-to-dedication-an-invitation-to-the-center>, accessed 17 January 2021.

from our limited areas of responsibility, such as the family, community, school, or parish platform.

Fifth, awareness of the importance of doing concrete actions. In the implementation of social teachings of the Church we are familiar with the using of See-Judge-Act method. It happens with the implementation of the true integral ecology paradigm. Only if we are able to do some concrete actions we will understand what integral ecology means. Concrete actions can take various forms depending on the type of commitment we have. As an example, the Vatican City State chose concrete projects such as applying differentiated collection of wastes (organic materials, paper, used oils, tires, hazardous metals, plastics, batteries, and medical materials) in every office, drinking water from a dispenser by using person own glass, etc.¹⁴ Those who have commitment on decreasing their ecological footprints can choose concrete projects, such as using public transportation and bicycles or walking for going to office, planting vegetables in their own gardens, installing solar panels for home lighting system, etc. In its essence, it is about universal solidarity in handling the issue of global ecological crises. Solidarity can be found only in concrete actions. It is about how to build solidarity in our respective areas of responsibility, based on the principle of thinking globally and acting locally. Only by doing concrete actions are we hearing and responding both to the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor (LS 49, 117, 246).

14. Interdicasterial Working Group of the Holy See on Integral Ecology, "Journeying Towards Care," 213–14.

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