

A PROPOSED INTEGRAL ECOLOGY



Public discussions often frame the needs of the environment and individuals to be incompatible. Pope Francis points out how interconnected the two truly are. In *Laudato Si'*, he makes the case for developing an **integral ecology**. Since ecology is the study of the relationship between living organisms and the environment in which they develop, **an integral ecology connects care for the environment with care for people**. For example, the protection of nature also must address issues of poverty and restore dignity to the marginalized, including the unborn. As each issue is part of “one complex crisis,” any solution that does not address all would not be desirable (no. 139). At the same time, it can be tempting for leaders to address environmental concerns with a one-size-fits-all approach. The pontiff takes care to acknowledge that addressing environmental concerns requires engagement of local people, knowledge of local concerns, and a respect for the local culture. Environmental solutions cannot ignore the needs of those impacted directly, especially the poor and indigenous whose lives have been uprooted due to pollution, waste, and the depletion of natural resources (no. 143–146). •

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION



Laudato Si' encourages discussion of the means to care for God's creation. The following questions have been adapted to assist in these discussions:³

- What lifestyle changes can we make to combat the throwaway culture?
- How can we protect all God's creation, especially the poor, the unborn, and the elderly?
- Do we consume more than we need, and if so, how can we change this habit?
- Do we consider the needs of the poor in the way we live our lives and make decisions?
- How can we include the perspectives of the vulnerable in actions to care for creation? •

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“Work is a necessity, part of the meaning of life on this earth, a path to growth, human development and personal fulfillment.”

—*Laudato Si'*, No. 128



LIVING CARE FOR CREATION

A deep concern for the welfare of others and for the world is central to Catholicism. Jesus lived by these convictions, and they impacted every aspect of His life. *Laudato Si'* calls for people of faith to live by their convictions as well, to become responsible stewards of the creation that God has gifted to past, present, and future generations. Pope Francis reminds readers that there is “no one path to a solution” and instead encourages dialogue, as all have experiences and gifts to share (no. 60). Humanity must work together, as the Holy Father writes: “**we must regain the conviction that we need one another, that we have a shared responsibility for others and the world**” (no. 229, *emphasis added*). *Laudato Si'* and centuries of Church teaching do not leave believers without ideas for renewing their care and respect for nature. Some of these include:⁴

- Learning more about environmental responsibility and praying for the care of God's creation.
- Showing care for others, recognizing the inherent dignity of each person, and nurturing relationships.
- Giving thanks for one's possessions.
- Engaging the vulnerable in environmental discussions and encouraging attention to their concerns.
- Buying and cooking only what can be reasonably consumed or donating surplus food to those in need.
- Reducing water consumption, turning off lights, turning down the heat or air, and buying energy efficient appliances.
- Adding solar panels to a home or institution, if feasible.
- Finding creative ways to reuse items, whenever possible and safe.
- Participating in a recycling program.
- Organizing cleanup events for rivers, streams, lakes, and shared spaces.
- Planting trees and native plants.