



Office of Religious Congregations for Integral Ecology
Bureau des congrégations religieuses pour l'écologie intégrale

Integral Ecology

*How the Concept of Integral Ecology is
Evolving in the Canadian Context*

Executive Summary

April 13, 2026

How the Concept of Integral Ecology is Evolving in the Canadian Context

ORCIE (Office of Religious Congregations for Integral Ecology) has been reflecting on how the concept of integral ecology is evolving in the Canadian context. To this end, our full paper explores integral ecology from three different perspectives:

- a critical reflection on the interconnectedness of our being in earth community through the lens of climate change;
- a way of living that honours this interconnectedness;
- and a discernment lens that draws us into ongoing conversion through attentiveness to the inner structures that shape our consciousness as well as the outer systemic structures that shape the world.

Meeting the Moment

We live in a time of polycrisis (multiple crises interacting with each other). If we can get to the 'unity' underlying the polycrisis, or the crux of what's going on, we can create transformative change. But such deep change also requires us to tap the inner drive to transform ourselves and the world in collaborative ways. And therein lies the rub: We also live in a time of fractured worldviews (narratives for understanding ourselves, the world, the planet, the universe) which make collaboration difficult. It is clear that 'meeting the moment' will present both spiritual and ethical challenges.

Integral Ecology as Critical Reflection on our Interconnected Life

This paper highlights climate change as a doorway into the exploration of integral ecology. As we follow climate change interactions, we see that it is both multidimensional (interacting with and impacting many different issues) and intersectional (having different impacts on different social groups while also disproportionately affecting groups facing multiple social and economic barriers).

These insights indicate that climate change needs to be addressed in conjunction with biodiversity loss, pollution, and land degradation because these environmental issues interact and amplify each other. But the interactions are not just environmental. Artificial intelligence, violence, migration, and culture are a few examples, among many others, of interacting concerns.

In addition, to give a few examples from the perspective of intersectional analysis, climate change also worsens inequality, disproportionately impacts Indigenous communities, undermines gender justice and worsens the global debt crisis.

As we look at the unity underlying these interactions, it becomes clear that climate change calls for changes in the economic model. The development of new economic models such as a Circular Economy and a Just Transition have the potential to change our relationship with the economy. If these models were to be adopted on large scales, they would increase our capacity to mitigate climate change, protect biodiversity, lessen pollution, and protect human rights, especially social and economic rights. However, a lack of political will for such significant social, ecological and economic transformation remains the biggest obstacle.



Integral Ecology as a Way of Living that Honours the Interconnectedness of Life

Why is it that, eleven years after the Paris Agreement, even as the severely damaging impacts of climate change become more evident, the political will to address the issue is diminishing? This is the ethical conundrum that the world faces. And we, in Canada, are at the heart of this alarming dissonance between what we know needs to happen and what we are choosing to do.

Addressing this dissonance is both a spiritual and ethical task. And learning to live from the **'wholeness'** which underlies the interconnectedness of life is key to creating change. The wholeness at the heart of integral ecology puts a focus on the need to engage fragmented and conflicting worldviews (the over-arching narratives, or interior scaffolding, that shape our individual and collective life). As a foundation for this engagement, it is critical to see how worldviews interact with not only our individual choices and sense of identity but also political, societal, and environmental priorities. For example, the narratives that emerge from the dominant economic model tend to reduce earth inhabitants, people included, to resources to be used for production and profit-making. These narratives shape a worldview that is deeply at odds with the biblical notion of a spirit-filled creation.

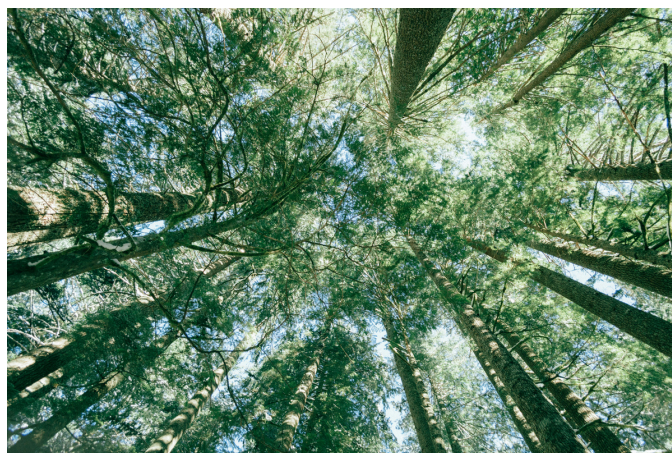


Photo by [William VanBuskirk](#) on [Unsplash](#)



A Call to Discernment and Conversion

The encyclical Laudato Si' (2015) marked an inflection point in the Catholic church, calling for an ecological conversion; for a transformation in how we understand our relationship with earth and all earth inhabitants. Many Catholic religious congregations in Canada were among the first to recognize their own need for ecological conversion, perceiving that, with the sense of wholeness that emerges from the lens of integral ecology, we are guided into a discernment of the quality of our relationships with other earth inhabitants.

Working with Fragmented and Conflicting Worldviews

Wholeness integrates inner and outer life. It puts a focus on both the inner structures that shape our consciousness (e.g., assumptions and narratives about how we're in relationship with other earth inhabitants) and the outer systemic structures that shape the world (e.g., corporations, government policies, institutions). Closer attention to the interaction between inner and outer structures holds a key to moving through the current dissonance between what we know needs to happen to address climate change and what is actually happening.

From the perspective of integral ecology, or wholeness, the key challenge is to learn to work well with the presence of multiple worldviews. Too often, we grapple with the symptoms of diverse worldviews (e.g., different perspectives, assumptions, and values) without explicitly addressing the presence of different worldviews.



A Culture of Encounter

A culture of encounter calls for people to engage each other more deeply and openly as they navigate differences. This culture can become a basis for the ongoing evolution of consciousness that is so necessary for living integral ecology. And the spiritual and ethical dimensions of a culture of encounter can be deepened by the integration of contemplative practice. Within the church, the contemplative practices at the core of a synodal process for dialogue are showing themselves to be critical to a process of deep listening that can draw participants into a transformative journey with one another and the earth.

Truth, Reconciliation, and Decolonization

Catholic religious orders have taken many practical actions to contribute to Truth and Reconciliation and to foster closer, respectful relationships with Indigenous communities. At the same time, a culture of encounter calls us to a decolonization of mind and heart as well as political policies and processes.

ORCIE

ORCIE seeks to integrate the vision of integral ecology as way of being, living and discerning with a culture of encounter in our approach to the promotion of systemic change. It is not enough to point to strong policies which have the potential to shape a new future. We need to work toward a better quality of encounter and dialogue that can create cultural and political space for these policies to be adopted.

The full version of the paper “How the Concept of Integral Ecology is Evolving in the Canadian Context,” can be accessed here at www.orcie.org.



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