



ORCIE+BCREI

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*

April 13, 2026

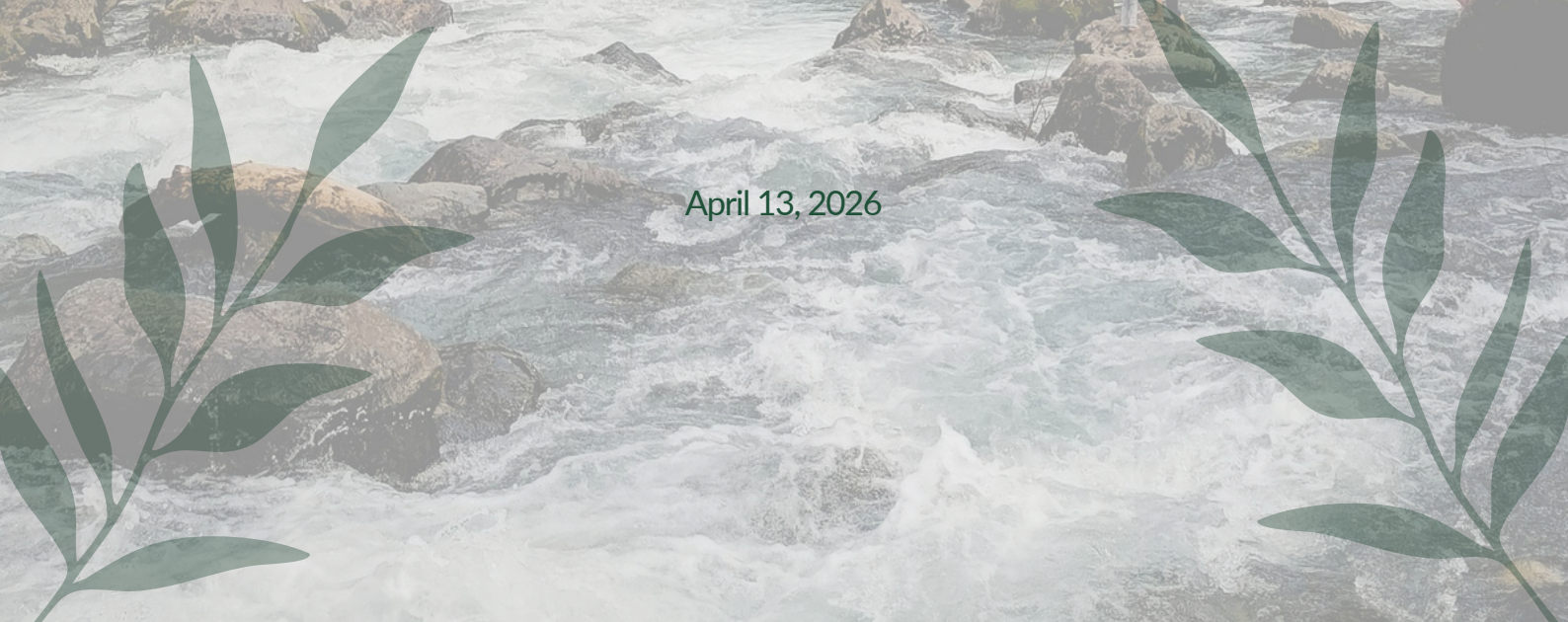


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Integral Ecology

Integral ecology is a **way of living** that honours the interconnectedness at the heart of life on earth, and indeed in the universe. It holds a communion sense of the 'whole of life' with countless, intricate interconnections and interactions within the whole. It reminds us that life is fundamentally relational.

The **wholeness at the heart of integral ecology** urges us to approach every justice issue as a doorway into the whole of life. For example, climate change is multidimensional in that it has many impacts and interacts with many other issues. And, although everyone is impacted by climate change, we need to use an intersectional lens to appreciate how social and economic barriers intersect in the life of an individual or social group in ways that create disproportionate impacts.

Wholeness also draws attention to the interplay between the **inner structures** of consciousness and the **outer systemic structures** of society, a critical nexus for transformation. In part, recovering the hidden wholeness of life requires us to recognize the systems of which we are a part, and to learn to work well with fragmented and competing worldviews. In this way, integral ecology is issuing a call to discernment and conversion in the Catholic Church. A 'culture of encounter' and a synodal process for dialogue offer critical dynamics for journeying together toward transformation. Likewise, engagement with the Truth and Reconciliation process, and the decolonization of mind and heart, have the capacity to move us toward new ways of being in relationship with earth and each other.

Meeting the Moment

There are so many social, political, economic, environmental, religious, and cultural events interacting with each other that we hardly know where to look, let alone act.

This moment has been described as a time of polycrisis, suggesting that we're not so much living through many distinct crises as one multi-dimensional crisis.

Herein lies the hope: If we can get to the 'unity' underlying the polycrisis, or the crux of what's going on, we can create transformative change.

Of course, it's not just about understanding the crisis. It's also about tapping the inner drive to transform ourselves and the world --- and doing so 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). So much so that we might, at times, feel that different social groups are living in alternate worlds. As a result, collective and collaborative action is becoming rarer, even though such action, on local, national and global scales, is exactly what the world needs.

It becomes clear that 'meeting the moment' will present both spiritual and ethical challenges.

What needs to shift in our understanding of humanity's place in the universe?

What creative role are we being urged to play in earth's story?

What is the transformation that we must undertake?



Integral Ecology and Climate Change: A door into 'the whole'

Because climate change is a part of an interacting whole, it is important to address multiple issues together. In 2025, the U.N. Environment Assembly highlighted the environmental aspects of the whole while also making economic and health links:

The U.N. Environment Assembly gathered almost 300 scientists from 83 countries and issued a report. Global Environment Outlook 7 insists that the world's four main environmental issues (**climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and land degradation**) need to be addressed together because they interact and amplify each other. And, at the same time, the report points out that investments to address climate change and pollution as well as to protect biodiversity and land, would lead to trillions of dollars each year in **additional economic output**, avoid millions of deaths, and lift hundreds of millions of people out of hunger and poverty in the coming decades.

Integral ecology urges us to be attentive to the way these interactions amplify each other. On the one hand, the **interactions between these issues** can be a good thing: If we make progress in the care of one area, it can have beneficial impacts on others. For example, when we increase and protect biodiversity, it can lessen climate change impacts. On the other hand, as one crisis grows in severity, it can have negative impacts on others. For instance, we have witnessed how severe flooding can damage infrastructure, disrupt food production and transport, ravage homes, create financial devastation for households, businesses and even nations, lead to landslides, and increase biodiversity loss.



Likewise, climate literature shows that climate change **worsens inequality** both within and between countries; and that countries and individuals with lower-incomes experience the worse climate impacts. Climate change also is driving up food prices, which disproportionately affects low-income households. Moreover, high-income groups disproportionately contribute to climate change with two-thirds of global warming attributable to the wealthiest 10% and one-fifth attributable to the wealthiest 1%.

Indigenous communities disproportionately experience climate change impacts. Given that many Indigenous communities live in ecologically sensitive regions, the interactions between climate change, loss of biodiversity, degradation of land, waterways, and oceans, and pollution can impact their constitutionally protected rights to hunt, fish, and practice traditional lifestyles.

Many Indigenous communities are experiencing temporary displacements due to severe weather and wildfires. And the intersections between Indigenous housing and climate change are also troubling. Inadequate and unsafe housing in Indigenous communities drives higher rates of asthma, respiratory illness and mental distress. Climate change multiplies these impacts as extreme weather events and wildfires increase the risks of mold and air pollution. Moreover, homes that are not adequately constructed are an additional source of greenhouse gas emissions.

Indigenous communities also have taken a leadership role in addressing climate change and protecting biodiversity. Indigenous-led conservation efforts have developed effective approaches to protecting bio-diversity and mitigating climate change, while also preserving culture, including worldviews that foster ways of living in harmony with earth.



Artificial Intelligence (AI) Developments in AI have been moving at a pace that even AI experts find surprising. While there have been arguments that AI could contribute to addressing climate change positively, the potential risks must be understood and regulation is essential. These risks include problems we are seeing right now, such as the extensive demand by AI data centres for energy and water. This will only increase. In addition, there are concerns about the ability of AI to distribute misinformation, disrupt democracy, and prop up authoritarian regimes. There are predictions about other possible social disruptions, including extensive job loss and impacts on personal relationships and wellbeing. Taken further, unregulated AI which develops agency could pose a risk to human survival and the survival of life systems on earth.

Violent Conflicts The links between violent conflicts and climate change occur from different angles. On the one hand, climate change can increase the likelihood of violent conflict between social groups by intensifying resource scarcity and displacement. On the other hand, conflict itself accelerates environmental damage.

While **migration** is often triggered by violent conflicts, it can also be "prompted by slow, gradual climate change impacts. Hotter temperatures can threaten agricultural livelihoods, sea-level rise can make floods more severe, and desertification can foster conflict over water access, all of which can lead to migration." People who are most marginalized end up with the fewest options when climate change impacts devastate a region.

Gender Justice and Climate Change A 2023 report by UN Women asserts that climate change is threatening progress on gender equality and human rights. In addition, the 2025 UN Spotlight brief noted that climate change is intensifying the social and economic stresses that can fuel increased levels of violence against women and girls.



Looking at climate change through an intersectional lens reveals that its impacts are worse for Indigenous and other racialized women, LGBTIQ+ persons, women and girls living in poverty, and persons living with disabilities or in areas of conflict. The 2023 UN Women report also concludes that reversing climate change requires nations to move resources away from extractive and environmentally damaging activities, and towards those that prioritize care for people and the planet.

Fossil Fuel-based Economy Hannah Ritchie, Ph.D., from Our World in Data, points out that a great deal of the human progress that has been made over the past 200 years was achieved through significant cost to the environment. This is because the energy that catalyzed the progress came primarily from fossil fuels. Ritchie notes that, until the current era, there have always been trade-offs between human development and environmental damage, such as climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and land degradation. However, with the rapid drop in costs for renewable energy, this trade-off no longer needs to be the case.

As we work toward a transition away from the fossil-fuel based economy, there are significant concerns about the mining of the critical minerals that are used in cleaner energy sources, including environmental harms, forced displacement of communities, child labour, and governments ignoring Free, Prior and Informed Consent. In addition to addressing these issues, it will be important to invest heavily in recycling efforts including the development of technologies for recovering critical minerals.

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.



Global Debt Crisis and Climate Justice To understand the links between the global debt crisis and climate justice, it is helpful to keep in mind that many of today's low-income countries came to statehood with debts already owing after centuries of resource extraction and economic exploitation by colonial powers. From the start, they were forced to borrow heavily to build basic infrastructure, thereby remaining dependent on colonizing countries. Today, this borrowing comes from international financial institutions, whose structures and priorities were designed by wealthy nations, as well as private investment firms, who now hold most of the Global South debt and profit from high interest rates. As a result, the current system perpetuates debt by obstructing development and enabling predatory lending.

The impacts of climate change both magnify and create urgency to deal fairly with the global debt crisis: The Global South is disproportionately affected by climate impacts and climate change is caused primarily by the world's wealthiest countries. These dynamics create a climate debt that is owed to the Global South and especially Indigenous communities. In addition, many heavily indebted countries do not have the financial resources to invest in climate mitigation and adaptation. This is why international climate change conferences now have recognized the obligation for countries to fund global climate actions according to their responsibility for the climate crisis and their ability to pay.



Global Efforts to Address Climate Change are Waning

The meetings and processes of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) are the key vehicles for creating global action on climate change.

While progress has been slow, and uneven, COP 21 (2015) in Paris was perhaps the most notable of the climate conferences. The Paris Agreement, a legally binding treaty, mapped out a vision for a net zero emissions future. In addition, all countries agreed to submit their climate action plans, known as nationally determined contributions (NDCs). All major emitting countries committed to reducing their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, strengthening their commitments over time, and funding global climate actions according to their responsibility for the crisis and their ability to pay.

The Paris Agreement urged nations to cut GHG emissions in half by 2030 and aim for net zero emissions by the middle of this century. We had a clear path forward that would prevent the most catastrophic impacts of climate change, committing to hold global average temperature rise to well below 2°C (from preindustrial times) and pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C.

However, the drive to create change has waned. On the current trajectory, the climate could warm by 2.4 degrees Celsius by 2100: A major new report notes that governments have plans that will lead to the production of more than double (120%) the volume of fossil fuels in 2030 than would be consistent with limiting global warming to 1.5°C. These plans are also estimated to lead to emissions that are 77% more than would be consistent with 2°C. Governments, including the Canadian government, are expanding fossil fuel infrastructure even as the nations around the world, and especially the nations of the Global South, hurtle toward increasingly devastating climate change impacts.



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.



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Dissonance in Canadian Climate Policies

“**National emissions** are now 7.1 per cent below 2005, the baseline year for Canada’s official target of at least 40 per cent reduction by 2030. The Prime Minister has acknowledged that Canada will not meet its 2030 or 2035 targets. And fossil fuels continue to account for the lion’s share (77%) of Canada’s total energy supply.”

An Energy Mix article notes that Canada also has not done its fair share when it comes to contributing to climate change mitigation and adaptation in the Global South as well as the Loss and Damages Fund. Climate Action Network Canada (CAN-Rac) estimates that Canada must reduce emissions 160% below 2005 levels by 2035 to fulfill its obligation. In practical terms, this requires Canada to help finance other nations’ efforts to reduce emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change.

On a more positive note, Energy Mix also notes that Canada’s electricity sector is now 36 per cent cleaner than in 2015. The Canadian Climate Institute largely attributes this to a decision by the Ontario government to phase out coal by 2014. Overall, the country’s electricity sector is now about 60 per cent cleaner than 20 years ago, among the lowest carbon electricity in the world.

Moreover, a recent study led by Concordia researchers demonstrates that federally funded and Indigenous-led conservation programs are delivering highly effective climate and biodiversity outcomes. Such projects, aligning climate change mitigation with biodiversity goals and Indigenous leadership, are pointing to ways forward that demonstrate a consistency with integral ecology approaches.



Climate Change and a Discernment Rooted in Integral Ecology

As a way of living that honours the interconnectedness at the heart of life on earth, integral ecology urges us to keep climate change action in the context of the wider polycrisis. At the same time, as a **discernment lens**, integral ecology highlights not only the interconnections we can see but also those that are not easily visible or recognizable. It reminds us that there is a hidden wholeness underlying our relationships with earth and all earth inhabitants.

Integral Ecology and Wholeness

Wholeness puts a focus on **worldviews** which function as the over-arching narratives, or interior scaffolding, that shape our individual and collective life. Worldviews influence (mostly unconsciously) how we interpret our experiences and interact with people and all earth inhabitants. In this way, our worldview shapes not only our individual choices and sense of identity but also political, societal, and environmental priorities.

While scientific insights can leave us marveling at the interconnectedness of life, we also can intuit this hidden wholeness in our bones. Indeed, people have reflected on the sacred nature of these human experiences in scripture (“**For since the creation of the world, God’s invisible qualities [...] have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made.**” (Romans 1:20), in mystical teachings (e.g., Hildegard spoke of God as the Mystery that animates all creation: “**I am the breeze that nurtures all things green [...] I am the rain coming from the dew that causes the grass to laugh with the joy of life.**”), and in church teaching (“**We are called to accept the world as a sacrament of communion.**” Laudato Si, 9).



In his book *Agrarian Spirit*, Norman Wirzba gets to the crux of how Western society's dominant worldview currently shapes our relationship with earth inhabitants when he points out that our Western societies and economies are characterized by **“the reduction of places and (human and non-human) creatures to units of production to be claimed, controlled, mined to exhaustion, and then abandoned”** (2022, 36). It is a worldview that is deeply at odds with the biblical notion of a spirit-filled creation.

Recovering the hidden wholeness that underlies all our relations will be, in part, rooted in society's growing awareness of the significance of our embodiment. As Wirzba insists, **“there simply is no human life apart from the countless threads of receiving and giving that join human flesh to the flesh of the world and the myriad lines of development that intersect, inspire, and interrupt our own development.”** (2022, 44). Uncovering wholeness is about the integration of earth inhabitants in one earth community.

Wholeness also 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).

So, **uncovering wholeness means recognizing the systems of which we're a part** (social, cultural, spiritual, environmental, political, and economic) and discerning how we are impacted by these systems. Living wholeness requires a recognition of intersectionality, that is, an understanding of how various forms of oppression rooted in societal interpretations given to race, gender, class, sexuality, and disability can intersect and in a person's life to compound the ways they are marginalized. With this societal awareness comes the possibility of removing the intersecting barriers that people face.



Wholeness and Discernment

"Unjust structures need to be recognized and eradicated by the force of good, by changing mindsets but also, with the help of science and technology, by developing effective policies for societal change" (97).

Pope Leo Dilexi Te

In terms of discernment, **wholeness means attentiveness to the back-and-forth synergy between consciousness and societal structures.** This dialectic can bring to awareness how unjust policies and systems have distorted our thinking and our ways of being in relationship. Conversely, the dialectic can reveal how our collective shadow patterns are being concretized in unjust social, political, and economic structures and systems, leading to poverty, racism, classism, gender bias, environmental damage, and social violence.

At the same time, attentiveness to the synergy between consciousness and societal structures can help us to live more fully into the wholeness at the core of integral ecology. Just as societal values like justice and solidarity can lead to the creation of equitable structures such as government policies and institutions, our interaction with just policies and systems can contribute to a more widespread evolution of consciousness and a deepening of collective values.

The vision of wholeness at the heart of integral ecology can draw us into new insights about how we are called to live our relationships with all earth inhabitants. And with these insights, possibilities for transformation emerge.



A Call to Discernment and Conversion in the Catholic Church

The encyclical Laudato Si' (2015) marked an inflection point in the Catholic church. With this encyclical, Pope Francis calls for an ecological conversion. He urges Catholics to address climate change but also makes it clear that the conversion he seeks goes deeper. It is not just about better environmental practices but also a transformation in how we understand our relationship with earth and all earth inhabitants.

Pope Francis writes that “**our goal is to become painfully aware**” of what’s going on in our world (LS 19), in our common home (LS 17); to “**dare to turn what is happening in the world into our own personal suffering**” in order to discover what we can do about it (LS 19).

What social, cultural, religious, environmental, political and economic patterns in our own context are pointing to the need for a deep change from us?

What is the transformative work that the world needs today?

The first step is to admit what we’ve gotten wrong:

“We Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted Scriptures; nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being ‘created in God’s image’ and ‘given dominion over the earth’ justifies absolute dominion over other creatures” (LS 67).

So Pope Francis goes back to the creation accounts in the Book of Genesis and highlights how “**they suggest that human life is grounded in three fundamental and closely intertwined relationships: with God, with our neighbour and with earth itself**” (LS 66).



What new image of God will help us to awaken us to the new consciousness that we need?

How can this new image shift our understanding of how we're in relationship with God, earth and each other?

How is this shift connected to the brokenness in the world today?

In 2023, in Laudate Deum, Pope Francis laments the lack of progress on climate change. The call to ecological conversion is not yet mainstream in the Catholic Church so he calls us to continue a “**pilgrimage of reconciliation**” with all earth inhabitants (69).

Situating Catholic Religious Congregations in this Conversion and Discernment

Many Catholic religious congregations in Canada were among the first to recognize their own need for ecological conversion, and they began a process which continues to this day. Even ahead of Laudato Si, they immersed themselves in the newly emerging narratives that urged humanity to transform our relationships within earth community.

Growing numbers of members of religious congregations recognized that, **in an era of ecological crisis, a profound shift in worldview is essential**. People needed a new overarching narrative to support humanity's shift from economic, cultural, and spiritual relationships of dominance over the earth to transformed relationships of solidarity and communion within the Earth community. For inspiration, we turned to authors such as Mary Evelyn Tucker, Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, and Heather Eaton, each of whom has advanced this transformation by articulating wholistic ecological visions that integrate science, spirituality, and ethics, while fostering a reverence for all life.



Likewise, religious orders have recognized the affinity between the ecological visions of these authors and the ecological wisdom in Indigenous teachings. One example is the principle of “Two-Eyed Seeing” or Etuaptmunk developed by Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall from Eskasoni First Nation in Unama'ki (Cape Breton). Two-Eyed Seeing recognizes that the complementarity of Indigenous worldviews and knowledge with western worldviews provides fuller insights and perspectives. Seeing through both eyes allows us to deepen understanding and shift toward a more relational and interconnected approach that aligns well with integral ecology. The work of Indigenous biologist Robin Wall Kimmerer beautifully demonstrates using both eyes to explore and embrace this deep relationality.

When the encyclical *Laudato Si'* was released its primary focus on integral ecology reinforced earlier ecological visions. Collectively, the insights and narratives from these sources provide a foundation for systemic justice by linking ecological wellbeing with social and economic equity.

Among religious orders in Canada, integral ecology has been adopted as a way of being and living that deepens and sensitizes our human interactions with earth and all earth inhabitants. It focuses our attention on the ways that life on earth connects and interacts, be it in positive or negative ways.

Catholic orders recognize that, with the lens of integral ecology, we are guided into a discernment of the quality of our relationships with other earth inhabitants.

In what ways are relationships life-giving; in what ways are they life-diminishing?

What structures and systems are creating these ways of being in relationship?



Religious orders quickly moved to practical applications of these ecological visions by setting up centres to nurture ecological spirituality and practical applications as well as popularizing ecological narratives, committing to the Truth and Reconciliation process, and financially supporting projects to protect land and water.

Over time, political advocacy also became an integral part of this work. Today, the religious orders that comprise the Office of Religious Congregations for Integral Ecology (ORCIE) recognize that, with our small population, Canada does not emit a significant share of global GHG emissions. Nevertheless, this paper argues that, as a wealthy nation with one of the highest per capita emissions in the world, **Canada has a moral duty to demonstrate strong leadership on this issue**; a duty to be a leader in transitioning from fossil fuel-based energy to renewable and cleaner energy sources, to do so while safeguarding the social, economic, and environmental wellbeing of the people and bio-regions in Canada, and while contributing significantly to climate mitigation and adaptation in the Global South as well as the Loss and Damages Fund.

As mentioned earlier, a discernment rooted in integral ecology also puts a focus on interactions between the **inner structures that shape our consciousness and the systemic structures that shape the world**. Such a discernment guides us toward a transformation that touches us individually and collectively; changing the way we are in relationship with land, water, atmosphere, other species, self, each other, and God.

Closer attention to this interaction between inner and outer structures may hold a key to moving through the current dissonance between what we know needs to happen to address climate change and what is actually happening. The remainder of this paper will point to some of the spiritual and ethical choices that can make significant contributions to meeting the climate justice challenges of the present moment.



Spiritual and Ethical Reflection

Learning from 'Being and Living Integral Ecology'

The principles of Catholic Social Thought remain important guideposts in our ethical reflections on how to respond to the polycrisis. The dignity of the person, common good, solidarity, preferential option for the poor, care of creation, subsidiarity and the role of government, participation, rights and responsibilities, economic justice, and peace are critical values that need to be contextualized in different times and places.

At the same time, reflection on experiences of being and living integral ecology will surface new guideposts that speak more effectively to the complexity of these times. Below, we identify a few of these guideposts and invite your further reflection on others.

Working with Fragmented and Conflicting Worldviews

Here we return to the **ethical conundrum** we identified earlier: The multidimensional impacts of climate change have never been more apparent or devastating, and yet, the political will for addressing climate change is waning. The polarization of political and cultural perspectives can be observed at the heart of this inertia. And the presence of fragmented and competing worldviews is a critical factor in this polarization.

Diverse worldviews evolve as people experience the limitations of whatever worldview currently dominates, whether it be the individual's worldview or that which dominates in society. For example, a person or group with traditional values may prioritize community and family values; someone with a modern worldview might emphasize individual achievement and progress; and someone with a postmodern worldview might challenge facile notions of objectivity, advocate for a sense of equity that respects diversity, and seek to empower people to create their own narratives. Each emerging worldview highlights new insights, solutions, and values while also carrying forward its own set of limited perspectives and blind spots.



As worldviews become more fragmented in society, they compete for predominance in shaping that society. While each of us may hold a particular worldview as dominant, we're all shaped by the interplay of fragmented worldviews in our cultural and indeed global context.

From the perspective of integral ecology, 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.

Dialogue and a Culture of Encounter

In Laudato Si', where ecology-based interpretations of the Creation story (66-67), and "communion" (LS, 9) are presented along with a strong critique of the technocratic paradigm (Ch. 3), Pope Francis calls for dialogue. But perhaps more to the point, throughout his papacy, Francis called for the development of a culture of encounter. It called for people to engage each other more deeply and openly as they navigate differences. To go beyond seeing to looking; to go beyond hearing to listening. Again in his 2020 encyclical Fratelli tutti, (215-217) Francis reiterates the call for a new culture of encounter which opens one to hear the insights that ring true in another's perspective so they can be pulled forward and integrated with the insights that ring true in other perspectives.

This **culture of encounter** can, then, 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.



At the same time, religious congregations can bring cultural and political dimensions of a culture of encounter to the fragmented worldviews that are operating in society and manifesting in polarized conversations about climate change and the wider polycrisis. Perhaps this could be a contribution that religious can make to begin to build the political will that is needed in Canada, and the world, to act on climate change.

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.**

An article by three Indigenous scholars and practitioners (Graeme Reed, Angele Alook and Deborah McGregor) in Nature Communications identifies colonial dynamics within the processes and structures of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The authors point out that **“Indigenous Peoples [...] remain structurally excluded from impacting climate policy.”** For example, **“the relegation of Indigenous Peoples to the status of non-party stakeholders allows Parties to control how, and where, Indigenous Peoples are referenced in all COP decisions.”**

The authors also identify barriers at the UNFCCC process, including a lack of access to badges, interpretation, and funding to attend meetings. **“These barriers, coupled with the delegitimization of Indigenous knowledge systems, prevent meaningful participation in negotiations and meetings.”** As a result, Indigenous perspectives, which could challenge the status quo, are sidelined. For example, the authors note that climate talks are

“replete with climate solutions, such as carbon capture, utilization, and storage, and zero-emission vehicles, designed to address the problem of climate change as a one-dimensional reduction of emissions. By contrast, Indigenous Peoples define climate change as a symptom of a deeper problem, requiring a reset between humans and their relationship with the natural world.”



The authors conclude: **“Indigenous Peoples engagement in UNFCCC is not just about inclusion in non-Indigenous processes.”** Decolonization of the negotiation process is a much deeper task, requiring new models of participation.

Within Canada, Indigenous communities have similar critiques about being marginalized from political decision-making processes and having their right to free, prior consent ignored. For example, when the federal government signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the government of Alberta to build a pipeline, B.C chiefs quickly criticized the negotiation of the MOU without the participation of the Indigenous communities who would be most affected. In addition, the launch of the 8th Fire Rising website, 8thfirerising.ca is a more grassroots Indigenous response to resist policies, practices, and processes that are deemed to be colonial in nature.

Promoting Systemic Change

The **Office of Religious Congregations for Integral Ecology (ORCIE)** seeks to integrate the vision of integral ecology as way of being, living and discerning with a culture of encounter in our 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.

At the heart of the problem is the concern that the position people take on climate change debates is now more strongly rooted in their political and cultural identity than in facts on the ground. Indeed, the energy behind political loyalty now makes the identification of what counts as a ‘fact’ more problematic than ever (climate change scientists have never been so frustrated).



We know the policies that have the capacity to address multiple issues in an integrated way: a Circular Economy, a Just Transition, the implementation of Free, Prior and Informed Consent, Debt Cancellation, action on Climate Mitigation and Adaptation, paying our Fair Share. The harder, and more necessary work, takes place in the space where inner and outer transformation interact, creating political and cultural openness to change.

This is where ORCIE, religious congregations, and wider faith communities, can collaborate to remove the barriers which undermine our efforts to be and to live integral ecology.



(Photo by [Ryan Wilson on Unsplash](#))



Conclusion

We live in a time of polycrisis. If, collectively, we can get to the crux of this multidimensional crisis, we can find effective levers for transformative change. Integral ecology, understood both as a way of living and a lens for discerning, is attentive to the interconnectedness of life on earth as well as the interconnectedness of the issues that plague us. Integral ecology insists that key environmental issues like climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and land degradation need to be addressed together because they interact and amplify each other. But this lens also highlights how these environmental issues interact with other social and economic issues such as poverty, the growing gap between rich and poor, Indigenous rights, violence, and the global debt crisis.

Integral ecology also calls for greater attention to the interplay of inner and outer structures in transformation. Attention to worldviews helps us understand a key factor in the societal fragmentation that is undermining our efforts to address the polycrisis. By integrating an understanding of evolving consciousness with an approach to systemic change that is rooted in decolonization, intersectionality, and a culture of encounter, we open possible pathways for transformation. And we live 'integral ecology.'



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