

1-1-2018

Converting to and Nurturing Ecological Consciousness--Individually, Collectively, Actively

Jame Schaefer

Marquette University, jame.schaefer@marquette.edu

Published version. "Converting to and Nurturing Ecological Consciousness--Individually, Collectively, Actively" in *All Creation is Connected*. Ed. Daniel DiLeo. Winona MN: Anselm Academic, 2018: 136-153. [Publisher link](#). © 2018 Anselm Academic. Used with permission.

Converting to and Nurturing Ecological Consciousness— Individually, Collectively, Actively

JAME SCHAEFER

During Pope Francis's first homily as the 266th leader of the Roman Catholic Church, he urged all people to be "protectors' of creation, protectors of God's plan inscribed in nature, protectors of one another and of the environment."¹ He frequented this imperative on many occasions over the next two years of his pontificate and signed on May 24, 2015, the first encyclical dedicated to the ecological crisis, *Laudato si': On Care for Our Common Home*.²

In this epochal encyclical, Pope Francis explains the need to convert from attitudes and actions that are causing the ecological crisis to attitudes and actions that can be responsive to its many ominous manifestations. His discussion yields positive characteristics of the human person, some of which resonate with moral virtues that are valued in the Catholic theological tradition and variously within other world religions. Because ecological problems encompass many multi-faceted, local-to-global, and future-oriented challenges that require collective action, religious communities can nurture these

1. Pope Francis, "Homily of Pope Francis: Mass, Imposition of the Pallium and Bestowal of the Fisherman's Ring for the Beginning of the Petrine Ministry of the Bishop of Rome, Saint Peter's Square," March 19, 2013, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2013/documents/papa-francesco_20130319_omelia-inizio-pontificato.html.

2. Pope Francis, *Laudato si': On Care for Our Common Home*, June 18, 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html. All parenthetical citations in this chapter refer to *Laudato si'*.

characteristics among their members and act collectively in the public square.

Converting to Ecological Consciousness

Pope Francis was well aware of his predecessors' increasing concerns about the need to care about and for God's creation.³ Building on Pope John Paul II's encouragement and support in 2001 for the "ecological conversion" that was occurring among some people and groups,⁴ Pope Francis appealed in *Laudato si'* to all people throughout the world to engage in dialogue on the "immensity and urgency" of ecological problems (15) and to convert to ways of living harmoniously with other people, species, and systems of Earth—our common home.⁵

The conversion Pope Francis envisions is transitioning from negative attitudes and actions that are causing the ecological

3. Especially see Pope Paul VI, *Octogesima adveniens*, May 14, 1971, http://w2.vatican.va/content/paul-vi/en/apost_letters/documents/hf_p-vi_apl_19710514_octogesima-adveniens.html, where the environment is identified among the new social problems that need addressing; Pope John Paul II, *Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation: Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, January 1, 1990, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html, the first papal statement dedicated to the ecological crisis as a moral responsibility; and Pope Benedict XVI, *If You Want to Cultivate Peace, Protect Creation: Message of His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace*, January 1, 2010, http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_ben-xvi_mes_20091208_xliiii-world-day-peace.html, where he underscores "creation as God's gift to humanity" and encourages "contemplating the beauty of creation [which] inspires us to recognize the love of the Creator," no. 2.

4. Pope John Paul II, "God Made Man the Steward of Creation," General Audience, January 17, 2001, http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/2001/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20010117.html.

5. Air pollution forcing changes in the global climate, accumulation of wastes requiring disposition, decline in the quality and availability of potable water, and loss of biological diversity that exacerbate social problems including decline in the quality of human life and breakdown of society, inequalities between rich and poor individuals and countries, adverse effects especially on poor and vulnerable people, and threats to future generations (17–42). As Pope Francis stated at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015: "Any harm done to the environment is harm done to humans" ("Address of the Holy Father: Meeting with the Members of the General Assembly of the United Nations Organization," September 25, 2015, http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2015/september/documents/papa-francesco_20150925_onu-visita.html).

crisis⁶ to positive attitudes and actions that prompt caring for Earth (216–21).⁷ Though he does not explicitly identify characteristics that manifest a person's ecological conversion, they surface implicitly in *Laudato si'*.⁸ Drawing these manifestations to the forefront is the task to which this study now turns.

Characteristics of an Ecologically Conscious Person

A close reading of *Laudato si'* yields characteristics of the ecologically conscious person that Pope Francis envisions: open to awe and wonder, grateful, humble, respectful, cooperative, protective, compassionate, responsible, courageous, and contemplative. Each characteristic is probed briefly with reference to the encyclical.

Open to Awe and Wonder

An ecologically conscious person approaches with awe and wonder all aspects of Earth from the smallest types of life to panoramic vistas (85).⁹ Openness to them leads to recognizing the human connectedness with all creatures, realizing that they manifest God's presence and loving character, and seeking knowledge about them.

6. These attitudes and actions include thinking about humans as separate from other species and as objects to be dominated, making decisions based on our short-term economic desires, over-consuming and wasting the natural goods of the earth, deferring to technology as the source of solutions, and failing to care about other people whose suffering is exacerbated by the many manifestations of ecological degradation (102–36).

7. Positive attitudes include recognizing the earth as the common home of human and all other living and inanimate creatures, valuing them intrinsically for their natures and functioning in relation to one another, respecting human interconnections and interdependence with them, and exercising the unique intellectual and spiritual capacities of human creatures to interpret reality as “a kind of universal family” that God calls into existence (89).

8. An examination of Pope Francis's writings, speeches, interviews, and actions epitomize the characteristics of an ecologically conscious person that are explored in this essay.

9. Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, Social Affairs Commission, *You Love All That Exists . . . All Things Are Yours, God, Lover of Life*, October 4, 2003, <http://www.cccb.ca/site/Files/pastoralenvironment.html>, p. 1.

AWED BY INTERRELATIONSHIPS

In the introduction to *Laudato si'*, Pope Francis urges our opening to the awe and wonder of the "beauty in our relationship with the world" whereby "we feel intimately united with all that exists" (11). We recognize our interrelations and interconnections as "bonds" that God has "linked us to all beings" (220). Quoting from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, he emphasizes the divinely willed interdependence of creatures and their need for one another (86).¹⁰ Through awe and wonder about the connectedness and interdependence of humans with other creatures, ecologically conscious persons view them as constituting a "family" (42, 89) for which they care. The ecologically conscious never approach the family of creatures as "masters, consumers, [and] ruthless exploiters" who turn these creatures into objects "simply to be used and controlled" (11). Awareness of the human interconnections with other creatures is a "loving" awareness that leads the ecologically conscious to think about themselves as "joined in a splendid universal communion" and inspires them to "greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world's problems" (220).

OPEN TO GOD'S SELF-MANIFESTATION

Openness to the awe and wonder of Earth and her constituents has another meaning for faith-filled people who are ecologically conscious: the visible world is revelatory of God's character. In sync with *Laudato si'* and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the ecologically conscious recognize that "each creature possesses its own particular goodness and perfection" and that each "reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness" (69).¹¹ With Pope Francis and the Canadian bishops, the ecologically conscious approach other species and vistas as "a constant source of wonder and awe," and no creature is excluded from this "continuing revelation of the divine" (85).¹² They

10. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Washington DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1994), no. 340, p. 88.

11. *Ibid.*, no. 339, p. 88: "Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things which would be in contempt of the Creator and would bring disastrous consequences for human beings and their environment."

12. Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, *You Love All That Exists*, p. 1.

embrace the understanding of patristic and medieval theologians that God is the writer of “a precious book . . . whose letters are the multitude of created things present in the universe” (85).¹³ The ecologically conscious accept Saint Francis of Assisi’s invitation “to see nature as a magnificent book in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness” (12).¹⁴ They understand with Saint Thomas Aquinas that the many diverse creatures constituting the universe represent “the divine goodness” (86),¹⁵ and they grasp with Pope Francis “the importance and meaning of each creature” that is best contemplated “within the entirety of God’s plan” (86).

WONDERING ABOUT SCIENTIFIC FINDINGS

The ecologically conscious are also open to discovering scientific knowledge about a problem in order to make informed decisions about responding (183). In his encyclical, Pope Francis demonstrates a broad understanding of scientific findings and those upon which the other bishops based their pastoral statements on problems occurring in and near their dioceses.¹⁶ He recognizes Earth as the common home of human and all other living and inanimate creatures, the human connectedness with them, their interdependence within ecological systems and the larger biosphere, and human reliance on clean water to drink, clean air to breathe, and a climate within which to survive (17–42). An ecologically conscious person nurtures the sense of wonder that prompts searching for scientific knowledge that is indispensable for deciding how to function within the home humans share with one another, other species, and systems that constitute Earth.

13. For a historical overview of theological discourse on the sacramentality of creation, see Jame Schaefer, “Acting Reverently in God’s Sacramental World,” in *Ethical Dilemmas in the New Millennium II*, ed. Francis A. Eigo (Villanova, PA: Villanova University Press, 2001), 37–90.

14. “For from the greatness and beauty of created things comes a corresponding perception of their Creator” (Wis. 13:5); “His eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made” (Rom. 1:20).

15. *Summa theologiae* 1:47:1.

16. See especially 20–42, wherein Pope Francis demonstrates his understanding of scientific facts when discussing the four major ecological problems, all of which have societal ramifications: pollution and wastefulness, climate change, availability of potable water, and loss of biological diversity. The importance of recognizing the locales in which these problems occur and their local ramifications cannot be overstated.

Grateful for Earth—God's Gift to All

The ecological conversion that Pope Francis envisions calls for recognizing the world as "God's loving gift" and for expressing gratitude to God by imitating God's "generosity" through "self-sacrifice and good works" (220). From the pope's perspective, God's gift of the world must be received as a gift *for all*, to be shared *by all*, and to be preserved and protected *by all* for their common good (67, 95, 159). Ecologically conscious persons accept these restrictions and responsibilities, and they express their gratitude to God through demonstrations of justice that are aimed at assuring the flourishing of people in the present and a life-flourishing planetary home for future generations. They also express their gratitude through self-restraint when encountering and using the goods of Earth.

INTRA-GENERATIONALLY JUST

Following the pope's teachings, the ecologically conscious demonstrate justice among current generations by being open to the plights of materially poor and vulnerable people and nations that are plagued with ecological, economic, and political impediments to sustaining themselves and by acknowledging that these impediments are erected primarily by materially-developed nations. Ecologically conscious people recognize this injustice and strive to challenge and correct it. They are not self-seeking or self-centered. Nor do they engage in the destructive culture of "instant gratification" and "impulsive and wasteful consumption" (162).¹⁷ They limit themselves to consuming the goods of Earth for the *necessities* of life (67),¹⁸ and they avoid wasteful practices that are detrimental to other species, ecological systems, and the biosphere of Earth (22). They are aware of the suffering of the poor and vulnerable, see themselves in solidarity with them (162), and seek to mitigate their suffering individually and collaboratively with others in caring, sensitive, respectful, and creative ways. Following Pope Francis, ecologically conscious people

17. See also 95.

18. Pope Francis interprets the Genesis 2 story of creation and supportive scriptures as meaning that "each community can take from the bounty of the earth whatever it needs for subsistence, but it also has the duty to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations" (67).

also engage the poor and vulnerable in determining how their suffering can and should be mitigated (183).

INTER-GENERATIONALLY JUST

Demonstrating justice toward generations in the future is a responsibility that ecologically conscious people take seriously. They know that the long-honored principle of seeking the common good also extends to future generations, as Pope Francis underscores (159). They are committed to inter-generational solidarity because they know they are dealing with “a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us” (159). They think about the general direction in which they want to leave Earth, our common home. They ask deep questions: “What is the purpose of our life in this world? Why are we here? What is the goal of our work and all our efforts? What need does the earth have of us?” (160).

Ecologically conscious people know that leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is warranted, and how they act gives “ultimate meaning” to their lives (160). They orient their actions toward eliminating the current perils to a life-sustaining planet. They recognize as a positive step in that direction the Paris Agreement made by 195 nations in December 2015 to “hold the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels” and to pursue “efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.”¹⁹ They also recognize the need to contribute generously to the Green Climate Fund that was created to help poor nations mitigate and adapt to changes in the global climate.

SELF-RESTRAINING

Closely connected with the intra- and inter-generational justices to which the ecologically conscious are committed is the characteristic of self-restraint. Pope Francis prefers the term “sobriety” (11, 126, 223–24) to contrast the consumerism and wastefulness to which many people are addicted today. Ecologically conscious people restrict themselves to consuming what they *need* to sustain their lives

19. United Nations, *Paris Agreement*, 2015, article 2.1.a, http://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/application/pdf/english_paris_agreement.pdf.

(67), using the goods of Earth efficiently, and minimizing wastes (22). They are convinced that "less is more," and they believe that adopting a simpler lifestyle liberates them "to stop and appreciate small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack" (222). They set limits to economic growth for themselves and their families, and they redefine "progress" from exclusively economic and materialistic categories to more inclusive categories such as the quality of life, a healthful environment, social relationships, and recreational opportunities (47, 78, 112).

Humble

What does Pope Francis mean when urging everyone to express a "healthy humility" (224)? From his perspective, humility becomes a characteristic of ecologically conscious persons who have shed "the possibility of limitless mastery over everything," avoid viewing themselves as "autonomous" to the exclusion of God, and refuse to replace God with their "own egos" (224). Conversion to ecological consciousness is characterized by persons who humbly acknowledge their interconnectedness with and dependence upon other species and abiota²⁰ that constitute Earth (68, 139).²¹ They also acknowledge that they are not God and recognize their responsibility to God for how they function within God's wondrous creation (69). Finally, they realize that our species, *Homo sapiens*, is a relatively late

20. The inanimate constituents of Earth: air, land, and water.

21. Pope Francis advanced his thinking in *Laudato si'* when addressing the members of the General Assembly of the United Nations on September 25, 2015. There he proffered a "right of the environment" for two reasons: (1) Humans are "part of the environment," "live in communion with it, since the environment itself entails ethical limits which human activity must acknowledge and respect," possess bodies "shaped by physical, chemical and biological elements, and can only survive and develop if the ecological environment is favourable. Any harm done to the environment, therefore, is harm done to humanity"; and, (2) "every creature, particularly a living creature, has an intrinsic value, in its existence, its life, its beauty and its interdependence with other creatures." He continued from his faith perspective: "We Christians, together with the other monotheistic religions, believe that the universe is the fruit of a loving decision by the Creator, who permits man respectfully to use creation for the good of his fellow men and for the glory of the Creator; he is not authorized to abuse it, much less to destroy it."

arrival within the 13.8 billion year history of the universe.²² Their humility is prompted by the realization that our species emerged from earlier hominins in the biological evolutionary process approximately 400,000 years ago,²³ share more than 99 percent of our DNA sequence with African chimpanzees and modern gorillas,²⁴ and, like all species of organic life, consist of elements that were manufactured in the furnace of stars.²⁵ Acceptance of these scientific findings leads the ecologically conscious to resist the temptation of assuming any sense of mastery over or management of other species, systems, or Earth. Instead, ecologically conscious persons think humbly about how to *manage themselves* by exercising their unique capabilities.²⁶

Respectful

In *Laudato si'*, respectfulness takes several forms that are compelling for people who are ecologically conscious. They respect the "paternal relationship God has with all" creatures (96) and God's love for all creatures (93, 228). "Because all creatures are connected," Pope Francis teaches, "each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another" (42). The

22. The history of the universe is well documented in the scientific literature and reflected in popular literature. For one helpful example, see Nora Taylor Redd, "How Old Is the Universe?" Space.com, December 30, 2013, <http://www.space.com/24054-how-old-is-the-universe.html>.

23. See, e.g., Francisco Ayala, "Evolution and the Uniqueness of Humankind," *Origins* 27, no. 34 (1998): 565–80, at 565–68, and Ian Tattersall, "Human Evolution: An Overview," in *An Evolving Dialogue: Theological and Scientific Perspectives on Evolution*, ed. James B. Miller (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity, 2001), 197–209, at 197.

24. Edward O. Wilson, *Biophilia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 130. See also Ian Barbour's supportive discussion in *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1997), 253–55.

25. E.g., Harold Morowitz, "The First 2 Billion Years of Life," *Origins* 27, no. 34 (1998): 577–80, at 579: "The atoms of every living thing, including each one of us, were at one time in the history of the universe cooked up deep in the core of some unbelievably hot star."

26. The term "stewardship" conveys a sense of management over other species and systems of Earth that is inappropriate to use as a model of the human person. Among alternates is the "virtuous cooperator" model as explained in Jame Schaefer, "The Virtuous Cooperator: Modeling the Human in an Age of Ecological Degradation," *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion* 7, no. 1–2 (2003): 171–95.

ecologically conscious respect the natural environment (126, 143) and the “laws of nature” (66) within which all constituents of Earth function. They also respect the “unique place” of humans in the world (15) and live respectfully in relation to other living and inanimate constituents of our common home.

Key to living respectfully is valuing other species and systems *intrinsically* for themselves and their interactions with other species as well as *instrumentally* for their usefulness to humans. This requires following Pope Francis’s teachings about God’s love for and intrinsic valuing of species, ecosystems, and the biosphere of Earth. The ecologically conscious person values other species, ecosystems, and Earth intrinsically (115, 118, 140), recognizes that each has its own particular goodness and perfection (69), significance (76), and purpose (84) apart from its usefulness to humans, and respects the natural capacity of other species, ecosystems, and Earth to flourish (44, 69).

The ecologically conscious share Pope Francis’s end-of-time perspective from which to consider valuing other species, systems, and Earth. With him and Teilhard de Chardin, SJ, ecologically conscious Christians believe animals and systems proceed “with us and through us” toward the end of time where all will be embraced and illuminated by the risen Christ (83). The ecologically conscious respect all creatures as intrinsically valuable by recognizing their participation in this ongoing journey, knowing about them, loving them, and cooperating with them for their mutual flourishing in this life in anticipation of a glorious culmination in the presence of God.²⁷

Cooperative

Following the Catholic theological tradition, Pope Francis teaches that God counts on our cooperation to “bring good out of the evil we have done” (80). Harming the life-sustaining capacity of the Earth community is evil within the context of *Laudato si’*. Ecologically conscious people view their cooperation with one another, other species, and systems of Earth as a way of cooperating with God. With the

27. The pope’s end-of-time (eschatological) perspective has significance for his theology of hope that all people will convert to an ecological consciousness and act accordingly (61, 65, 71, 74, 142, 154, 165, 190, 198), a perspective that warrants in-depth development as encouraged by one reviewer of this essay.

pope, they understand that God “wishes to work with us” and draws us into “the act of cooperation” in the work of creation within which God is continuously present without impinging on creation’s autonomy (80). The ecologically conscious cooperate with God by limiting and directing technology to a constructive type of progress that resolves problems and promotes human dignity (112), assessing and mitigating human-caused harm to other species, *abiota*, and systems of Earth (117), and thinking about themselves as cooperators who seek their mutual flourishing.²⁸

Cooperation is also demonstrated collectively by the ecologically conscious at increasing levels of governance when the need for action exceeds prior levels. Cooperation becomes essential at the international level when problems exceed the capability of countries to resolve.²⁹ Among the examples to which Pope Francis points is the Earth Summit that was held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, where the nations proclaimed that “human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development”³⁰ and enshrined principles for “international cooperation to care for the ecosystem of the entire earth” (167).³¹ Pope Francis laments the many “ill-advised delays” in acting

28. For further exploration of the concept of cooperation, see Jame Schaefer, “Grateful Cooperation: Cistercian Inspiration for Ecological Ethics,” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (2002): 187–203; also Jame Schaefer, “The Virtuous Cooperator: Modeling the Human in an Age of Ecological Degradation,” *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion* 7, no. 1–2 (2003): 171–95. Scientific evidence of cooperation among biota and abiota has prompted many publications; see, for example, essays in *Cooperation and Its Evolution*, ed. Kim Sterelny, Richard Joyce, Brett Calcott, and Ben Fraser (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2013).

29. Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2004), nos. 81–83. For an exploration of subsidiarity and extension to bio-regional decision-making, see Jame Schaefer, “Solidarity, Subsidiarity, and Preference for the Poor,” in *Confronting the Climate Crisis: Catholic Theological Perspectives*, ed. Jame Schaefer (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2011), 389–425, especially at 396–401 and 413–15.

30. *Rio Declaration on Environment and Development*, June 14, 1992, Principle 1, http://www.unesco.org/education/nfsunesco/pdf/RIO_E.PDF; also accessible in *Report of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*, United Nations General Assembly, Annex 1, August 12, 1992, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/conf151/laconf15126-1annex1.htm>.

31. Among other principles enshrined at the Earth Summit in Rio that Pope Francis mentions are the obligation of those who cause pollution to assume its costs, the duty to assess the environmental impact of proposed projects, and limitations on greenhouse gas emissions (167).

cooperatively at the international level as envisioned at the Earth Summit and subsequent international gatherings. He attributes these delays to positions taken by countries that "place their national interests above the global common good" (167). Clearly, an international ecological consciousness is warranted in which nations recognize that the global common good is essential for mutual flourishing.

Protective

As previously mentioned, Pope Francis lauded Saint Joseph's protectiveness of Mary and Jesus during the first homily of his pontificate and urged all people to be "protectors" of God's creation.³² He expressed the model of protector in *Laudato si'* in several ways that ecologically conscious people demonstrate. They follow his interpretation of the Genesis 2 story of creation and supportive scriptures that humans are duty-bound "to protect the earth and to ensure its fruitfulness for coming generations" (67). They promote the development of strategies aimed at protecting species that are endangered and on the verge of becoming extinct (42). They receive God's gift of the world to be preserved and protected by all for their common good (67, 95, 159). And, they encourage the implementation of ecologically protective laws on appropriate levels—from local to international (38).

Compassionate

Pope Francis's words and actions throughout his pontificate epitomize compassion for the poor and vulnerable, including endangered species, degraded ecological systems, and Earth (2, 34–42).³³ When describing in *Laudato si'* the "deep sense of communion" humans have with other species and systems, he cautions that this sense "cannot be real if our hearts lack tenderness, compassion and concern for

32. Pope Francis, "Homily of Pope Francis: Mass, Imposition of the Pallium and Bestowal of the Fisherman's Ring."

33. "Mother Earth" and "like . . . a beautiful mother" when quoting and paraphrasing from Saint Francis of Assisi's *Canticle of the Creatures* (1); "mother earth" when paraphrasing *Canticle* (92).

our fellow human beings” (91). Thus, ecologically conscious people express their compassion for poor and vulnerable humans by offering to work with them in identifying actions that should be taken to eliminate the environmental injustices that are occurring in their blighted neighborhoods, assuring the availability of fresh foods for their families, and providing green spaces in which their children can experience other animals and breathe fresher air through the cleansing action of trees.

Broadening the goals of environmental education is key to bringing about the deep sense of compassion that Pope Francis urges. In addition to promoting scientific information about ecological problems and raising consciousness about them, he encourages educational efforts that include “developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care” (10). One impressive example that meets his criteria is *Healing Earth*, the environmental science textbook commissioned by the Higher Education Secretariat of the Society of Jesus in which scientific knowledge about major ecological problems are reflected upon from spiritual and ethical perspectives.³⁴

Responsible

Pope Francis’s calling upon all people to recognize and respond to ecological problems persists throughout *Laudato si*.³⁵ Though he recognizes that people are motivated variously to respond to ecological degradation and that some may be motivated by the fact that they are “a part” of the environment, Christians realize that “their responsibility within creation, and their duty towards nature and the Creator, are an essential part of their faith” (64). He focuses an entire chapter of his encyclical on the “ample motivation” that the Christian tradition provides for responding to ongoing ecological perils

34. *Healing Earth*, International Jesuit Ecology Project, 2016, <http://healingearth.ijep.net>. This project is administered by biologist Nancy Tuchman, PhD, and theologian Michael Schuck, PhD, at Loyola University Chicago.

35. “Responsibility” or a variant thereof occurs fifty-five times in reference to humans becoming aware of and addressing ecological concerns.

(62–100), and he encourages people of other faiths to return to the sources of their traditions for inspiration (200).

Unique to humans who are endowed with intellectual abilities to reason, develop arguments, interpret reality, and engage in meaningful relationships with others and with God (81, 119), an engrained sense of responsibility propels ecologically conscious people to dialogue with one another about their relationships with other creatures, their habitats, and the biosphere of Earth and to make and execute decisions for their mutual flourishing (68). According to Pope Francis, failing to be responsible ruins the person's relationships with others, with God, and with Earth (70).

Ecologically conscious people recognize their responsibility to care for Earth through "little daily activities of environmental responsibility" (211), correcting irresponsible use and abuse of God's creation (2, 6), inventorying and safeguarding species (42), and advocating the passage and implementation of protective laws (38). Committed to living up to their dignity as responsible persons, the ecologically conscious are described by Pope Francis as "selfless" (181).

Courageous

Responding effectively to the ecological crisis requires courage to make the ecological conversion that Pope Francis envisions and to remain ecologically conscious of problems that are occurring and assiduously predicted (160, 169, 181). People who are ecologically conscious are persistent. They consistently think of the common good before their own interests. They face challenges with conviction. They are not deterred from their convictions and commitments by "undue pressure and bureaucratic inertia" (181). They are able to persist because they are open to and draw upon God's grace (200, 205) that motivates and strengthens them to remain steadfastly courageous when seeking the common good of the Earth community.³⁶

36. Highly instructive for understanding how God's grace works in people collectively is Robert M. Doran, "Social Grace," *Journal of Lonergan Studies* 2, no. 2 (2011): 131–42.

Contemplative

Pope Francis's discussion of God's self-manifestation in and through the world leads to recognizing the benefits of contemplating each creature for its meaning "within the entirety of God's plan" (86). One benefit is discovering "a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us" and another is seeing "ourselves in relation to all other creatures" (85). Both benefits help the ecologically conscious live more cooperatively with all creatures for their mutual good.

Contemplation of God's creation can also prompt praise for God. Not surprisingly, the pope points to Saint Francis of Assisi's *Canticle of the Creatures* as a "magnificent expression" of praise for God (87).³⁷ Praising God in unison with other creatures by interrelating with them for their common good resonates with Pope Francis's understanding that God calls all into "universal communion" (76).

Pope Francis also encourages contemplating God's creation through a "Trinitarian key" of humans, other creatures, and Earth (239). Taking this approach stimulates in-depth probing of their interconnection in a way that parallels exploring the interconnection of the three persons in the Blessed Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.³⁸ In this way, the ecologically conscious "discover a key to [their] own fulfilment" as creatures who are intimately connected with other creatures (240).³⁹

37. Grounded in Ps. 148 and Dan. 3:57–81, theological reflection on creatures' praise for God according to their "voices" and humans joining voices with those of other creatures in a grand chorus is explored in the fourth chapter of Jame Schaefer, *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 103–20.

38. See Augustine's Trinitarian sacramental discourse, discussed in Jame Schaefer, "Augustine's Trinitarian Sacramental Sensibilities, Influence, and Significance for Our Imperiled Planet," in *Augustine and the Natural Environment*, ed. Kim Pattenroth, John Doody, and Mark Smillie, 141–63 (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2016).

39. Pope Francis explains (240) why using the human–other creatures–Earth lens helps us "discover a key to our own fulfilment": "The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures. In this way, they make their own that trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them when they were created."

Nurturing Ecological Consciousness within Religious Communities

Families, parishes, and other religious communities can help facilitate the ecological conversion of members by encouraging them to reflect on the sources of their faith as a basis from which to discern problems and identify actions for mitigating them (200). Families, parishes, and other religious communities are also vital for nurturing and advancing the characteristics of ecological consciousness in a person who has converted but needs support and encouragement to remain steadfast.

For Pope Francis, the family is “the primary social group” (142), the “basic cell of society” (189), the starting place for facilitating an ecological conversion and nurturing an ecological consciousness (213). Families provide indispensable settings for identifying, developing, and nurturing the characteristics that exemplify an ecological consciousness. Parents and guardians serve as key examples for their children.

Religious communities can support, advance, and enrich family efforts to facilitate and nurture ecological conversions. Priests, ministers, rabbis, imams, monks, and gurus can teach about their religious traditions that have meaning for ecological-societal concerns.⁴⁰ Catechetical directors and leaders of educational programs can provide prolonged opportunities for youths and adults to study ecological statements issued by their leaders, deepen their understanding of traditions that are promising for addressing the ecological crisis, and apply them to problems in their communities. Parish councils can establish teams of parishioners who are dedicated to acting on *Laudato si'* within their parishes,⁴¹ working with other parishes, and collaborating with other religious communities to constitute an effective ecologically conscious voice in the public square.

40. As already noted, Pope Francis is confident that the Christian faith is sufficient for motivating the ecological conversion of the faithful (64), and he encourages people of other faiths to return to the sources of their traditions for inspiration and motivation (200).

41. Among immediate possibilities for parish councils is assessing their buildings and grounds to identify ways of functioning that reflect the ecological consciousness Pope Francis proffers. Catholic Climate Covenant provides some thoughtful and constructive ideas for establishing “Creation Care Teams” in parishes. See <http://www.catholicclimatecovenant.org/cct>.

Bishops and parallel regional leaders of religious communities can encourage and facilitate activities aimed at mitigating impediments to the flourishing of ecological systems in their regions. One impressive example of episcopal leadership is an action plan motivated by *Laudato si'* that was written by faculty and staff at the University of Georgia in consultation with the Archbishop of Atlanta.⁴²

Conclusions

Pope Francis calls all people to an ecological conversion that is aimed at assuring the life-flourishing capacity of Earth. Maintaining this conversion requires an ecological consciousness that is manifested by key characteristics that can be discerned in *Laudato si'*: *openness to awe, wonder, and discovery* of scientific facts about other species and systems of Earth; *gratitude* for God's gift of Earth to all through self-restraint, intra-generational justice, and inter-generational justice; *humility* in relation to other species and systems of which humans are an integral part; *respectfulness* of the natures and interrelationships of human and other creatures; *protection* of other humans, species, habitats, and Earth's systems; *cooperation* with other species within systems of Earth for their mutual well-being and flourishing; *compassion* toward vulnerable people and species; *responsibility* to others and ultimately to God for addressing ecological problems; *courage* by steadfastly maintaining and advancing their ecological conversion; and *contemplation* of their role in relation to others within Earth that God made possible.

Developing these characteristics begins within the family. Local religious communities can help nurture and deepen these characteristics through educational and service programs. Bishops and area leaders of larger religious communities are vital for promoting, encouraging, and facilitating local efforts. Religious communities can network with one another to advocate action at appropriate governmental levels. As Pope Francis underscores, God's grace is readily available to all people for strengthening their efforts.

42. Archdiocese of Atlanta, *Laudato si'—On Care for Our Common Home: An Action Plan for The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Atlanta*, November 2015, <http://www.dio.org/uploads/files/Missions/Resources/UGA-Action-Plan-2015-11-24-10am.pdf>.

Review Questions

1. What does the phrase “ecological conversion” mean?
2. Name and explain three characteristics of an “ecologically conscious” person.
3. Why is humility a characteristic of a person who is ecologically conscious?

In-Depth Questions

1. What characteristic of an ecologically conscious person do you think would be most difficult to embrace and demonstrate?
2. How can a family best nurture an ecological consciousness in young children and in teenagers?
3. What activity would you want your religious community to begin that best reflects Pope Francis’s teachings in *Laudato si’*?

Suggestions for Further Study

- Healing Earth*. International Jesuit Ecology Project. Loyola University, Chicago. <http://healingearth.ijep.net>.
- Schaefer, Jame. “Environmental Degradation, Social Sin, and the Common Good.” In *God, Creation, and Climate Change*, edited by Richard W. Miller, 69–94. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2010.
- Schaefer, Jame. “Solidarity, Subsidiarity, and Preference for the Poor.” In *Confronting the Climate Crisis: Catholic Theological Perspectives*, edited by Jame Schaefer, 389–425. Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2011.
- Schaefer, Jame. *Theological Foundations for Environmental Ethics: Reconstructing Patristic and Medieval Concepts*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2009.