POPE FRANCIS AND INTEGRAL ECOLOGY

By Sam Mickey

Editor’s Note: This article was first published on the blog Becoming Integral: Coexistence in the Planetary Era and is reprinted with permission. Dr. Mickey teaches at the University of San Francisco in the Environmental Studies program and the Theology and Religious Studies department

The new encyclical by Pope Francis, Laudato Si’: On the Care of our Common Home, contains many references to “integral ecology,” including an entire chapter by that title.

It’s relatively clear that Francis is working with the integral ecology proposed by the Brazilian liberation theologian Leonardo Boff, who draws on the general ecology of Félix Guattari and the integral ecology proposed by the cultural historian Thomas Berry. Regarding Boff’s influence, consider the pope’s allusion to Boff’s Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor. “Today, however, we have to realize that a true ecological approach always becomes a social approach; it must integrate questions of justice in debates on the environment, so as to hear both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor” (Par. 49). The pope’s sense of integral ecology is also clearly influenced by the ecological sensibility of St. Francis of Assisi, whose phrase “Laudato Si'” (from his Canticle of the Creatures) provides the title and opening line for the encyclical.

The following are the selections from the encyclical that explicitly mention integral ecology. There are also many other references to integral and integrative approaches, including integral development, progress, and education. Moreover, the pope does not intend integral ecology to be an exclusively or primarily Catholic endeavor. The encyclical is addressed to “every person living on this planet” (Par. 3).

“I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically. . . . Francis helps us to see that an integral ecology calls for openness to categories which transcend the language of mathematics and biology, and takes us to the heart of what it is to be human.” (Par. 10-11)

“We urgently need a humanism capable of bringing together the different fields of knowledge, including economics, in the service of a more integral and integrating vision. Today, the analysis of environmental problems cannot be separated from the analysis of human, family, work-related and urban contexts, nor from how individuals relate to themselves, which leads in turn to how they relate to others and to the environment.” (Par. 141)

Any approach to an integral ecology, which by definition does not exclude human beings, needs to take account of the value of labour. (Par. 124)
“An integral ecology includes taking time to recover a serene harmony with creation, reflecting on our lifestyle and our ideals, and contemplating the Creator who lives among us and surrounds us . . . .” (Par. 225)

“An integral ecology is also made up of simple daily gestures which break with the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness.” (Par. 230)

“Intergenerational solidarity is not optional, but rather a basic question of justice, since the world we have received also belongs to those who will follow us. The Portuguese bishops have called upon us to acknowledge this obligation of justice: “The environment is part of a logic of receptivity. It is on loan to each generation, which must then hand it on to the next”. An integral ecology is marked by this broader vision.” (Par. 159)