

# **“It Cannot Be Emphasized Enough How Everything Is Interconnected”: Ecological Wisdom, Cross-Cultural Insight, and Pope Francis’ Social Teaching**

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Volume 34, numéro 1, 2018

Focus on Laudato Si'

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1060948ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1060948ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Athabasca University Press

ISSN

1705-9429 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer cet article

Hrynkow, C. (2018). “It Cannot Be Emphasized Enough How Everything Is Interconnected”: Ecological Wisdom, Cross-Cultural Insight, and Pope Francis’ Social Teaching. *The Trumpeter*, 34(1), 36–60. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1060948ar>

## Résumé de l'article

When understood as anthropogenic phenomena, contemporary social and ecological crises can be framed as moral issues, arising from human action and neglect of duties to marginalized human and ecological neighbours. In so much as the roots of these problematic outcomes lie in worldview, ecological wisdom can help in fostering spaces for integrated ethical responses to associated challenges like global climate change, social injustice, and ecological degradation. The present article highlights select instances of thinkers who express convergences between social and ecological concern by exploring cross-cultural perspectives on ecological wisdom. Then, with the aid of a green theo-ecoethical viewpoint informed by those perspectives, it maps relevant teachings of Pope Francis that are expressed in two of his most important exercises of his magisterial office: *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si'*. As brought into view through dialogue with contemporary articulations of ecological wisdom, inclusive of overlapping Indigenous and academic insights, this approach helps discern a noteworthy measure of rhetorical support for socio-ecological flourishing found in the teaching of Pope Francis.

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# “It Cannot Be Emphasized Enough How Everything Is Interconnected”: Ecological Wisdom, Cross-Cultural Insight, and Pope Francis’ Social Teaching

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*Christopher Hrynkow*

## **Introduction: Ecological Wisdom and Christianity**

Ecological wisdom has many roots within the world’s religious traditions.<sup>1</sup> While ‘environment’ denotes that which surrounds the human and therefore carries a certain, limited anthropocentric connotation,<sup>2</sup> the term ‘ecology’ implies relationships within the context of the larger life community, captured in Pope Francis’ emic understanding of integral ecology as pointing back to the basic nature of reality wherein “everything in the world is connected.”<sup>3</sup> This connectivity has sometimes been seemingly forgotten in Christian life, theological reflection,<sup>4</sup> and Western societies, yet these are essential relationships we need for every breath we take.<sup>5</sup>

More specifically, the compound term ‘ecological wisdom’ as employed in this article is sourced from the *Global Greens Charter*. That collaboratively and cross-culturally crafted document situates ecological wisdom and its implications in the following manner:

We acknowledge that human beings are part of the natural world and we respect the specific values of all forms of life, including non-human species.

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<sup>1</sup>See, for example, Winona LaDuke, *All our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1999).

<sup>2</sup>Compare Edmund O’Sullivan and Marilyn Taylor, “Glimpses of an Ecological Consciousness,” in *Learning Toward an Ecological Consciousness*, eds. Edmund O’Sullivan and Marilyn Taylor (New York, NY: Palgrave 2004), 13-16.

<sup>3</sup>Pope Francis, “Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si’* of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home.” (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 18 June 2015), #16, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.pdf](http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.pdf).

<sup>4</sup>See Joseph Sittler, Jr., “A Theology for Earth,” *The Christian Scholar* 37, no. 3 (September 1954): 367-374.

<sup>5</sup>Compare Young Woon Ko, *The Beauty of Balance: A Theological Inquiry into Paradox* (Lanham, MA: University Press of America), 88.

We acknowledge the wisdom of the indigenous peoples of the world, as custodians of the land and its resources.

We acknowledge that human society depends on the ecological resources of the planet, and must ensure the integrity of ecosystems and preserve biodiversity and the resilience of life supporting systems.

This requires:

- that we learn to live within the ecological and resource limits of the planet,
- that we protect animal and plant life, and life itself that is sustained by the natural elements: earth, water, air and sun
- where knowledge is limited, that we take the path of caution, in order to secure the continued abundance of the resources of the planet for present and future generations.<sup>6</sup>

Building upon such a framing of ecological wisdom that is also tethered to moral duties, a green theo-ecoethical lens seek to hold together in creative tension green, theological, ecological, and ethical dimensions within one framework to facilitate both interpretation and colligation. Within this framing, 'theo-ecoethical' denotes an attempt to explicitly bind intertwined sets of concerns within an interpretative framework, in this case modified by the coupling of commitments to incarnating social justice and ecological health denoted by the term 'green.' The normative goal here is to seek out confluences that might not otherwise be apparent. This task is undertaken with a normative purpose of promoting socio-ecological flourishing, in this case, principally on the level of insight through discerning support for ecological wisdom within Pope Francis' social teaching. In green theo-ecoethical terms, the working premise active in this approach is that human-Earth relationships take on a distinctive set of nuances as ecology is understood as creation, which, in turn, implies a spiritual worldview extending beyond the planetary community to the entire cosmos. Spirit and matter are seen as inseparably intertwined herein, so that, for instance, humans are understood as beings who are at once embodied and spiritual, owing to their location as members of created community infused with relationships. Within such a green theo-ecoethical worldview, all creation shares in a special relationship and the cosmos is understood as infused with divine action, which both creates and sustains the natural world.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Global Greens, *Global Greens Charter* (2001, 2012), <http://www.globalgreens.org/globalcharter-english>.

<sup>7</sup>See Acts 17:24-28; compare John Paul II, "Message of His Holiness Pope John Paul II for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace 1 January 1990: Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All of Creation." (Vatican City: Libreria

This working premise finds support within Christian traditions. Although too often marginalized, Christians have a long relationship with wisdom as a concept closely connected to creation understood in this ecospiritual and green theo-ecoethical sense.<sup>8</sup> A relatively recent example from the two millennia of Christian reflection on wisdom can be sourced in *Darwin, Divinity and the Dance of the Cosmos*. In that monograph, the United Church of Canada minister Bruce Sanguin explicitly links ecology and the representations of Wisdom within biblical and spiritual traditions.<sup>9</sup> Applying these connections to our contemporary world, he suggests that a necessary greening of Christian faith ought to be grounded in ecological concepts and rooted in the Earth community, whose vitality is now in peril. Writing succinctly about this contextual imperative, Sanguin states: “[I]t’s time for Christianity to get with the cosmological program.”<sup>10</sup> He also strives to foster an ecospirituality based upon an understanding of humanity’s location within an enchanted universe, which is itself imaged in relational terms as the “kin-dom” (rather than the kingdom) of God.<sup>11</sup> In such relational light, ‘ecological wisdom’ as articulated in the *Global Greens Charter* and thus tethered to duties, can be further understood as a cogent form of knowledge that supports the establishment of quality relationships among human neighbours, the rest of creation, and the divine. It is in this deep relational sense that the term ‘ecological wisdom’ will be employed in this article and sought out in Pope Francis’ *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si’*.

### **Cross-Cultural Perspectives on Ecological Wisdom**

There are numerous cross-cultural insights that are important sources for green theo-ecoethical reflection on ecological wisdom. Entire cultures were formed around ecological wisdom and a significant number remain vital to this day. As an example, many groups of Indigenous peoples on Turtle Island recognize the creative force of nature as inseparable from their cultural contexts.<sup>12</sup> Writing in *Laudato Si’*, which is the focus of this article’s last mapping section, Pope

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Editrice Vaticana, 8 December, 1989), #15, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf\\_jp-ii\\_mes\\_19891208\\_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peace/documents/hf_jp-ii_mes_19891208_xxiii-world-day-for-peace.html).

<sup>8</sup>For example, Margaret Barker employs Wisdom as a way to discern early Christian worldviews on creation and bring them forward to address contemporary challenges associated with the ecological crisis. See Margaret Barker, *Creation: A Biblical Vision for the Environment* (London: T & T Clark International, 2010).

<sup>9</sup>See Bruce Sanguin, *Darwin, Divinity, and the Dance of the Cosmos: An Ecological Christianity* (Kelowna: Copper House, 2007).

<sup>10</sup>Sanguin, *Darwin*, 27.

<sup>11</sup>Sanguin, *Darwin*, 170-173.

<sup>12</sup>See, for example, Basil H. Johnson, *Honour Earth Mother* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).

Francis recognizes this connection between nature and culture when calling for something akin to a preferential option for Indigenous peoples in the face of contemporary ecological challenges.<sup>13</sup> Preferential option is here positioned as relative to an unjust status quo that Pope Francis asserts is necessary to shift in the service of social justice and ecological health:

Any intensive forms of environmental exploitation and degradation not only exhaust the resources which provide local communities with their livelihood, but also undo the social structures which, for a long time, shaped cultural identity and their sense of the meaning of life and community. The disappearance of a culture can be just as serious, or even more serious, than the disappearance of a species of plant or animal. The imposition of a dominant lifestyle linked to a single form of production can be just as harmful as the altering of ecosystems. In this sense, it is essential to show special care for indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. They are not merely one minority among others, but should be the principal dialogue partners.<sup>14</sup>

Any such multifaceted and cross-cultural dialogue would encounter as one of its central themes the importance of deep respect for the natural world in most Indigenous peoples' cosmologies. For example, this worldview translates into the fussing of personal identities, protocols, and other spiritual practices in the work of river restoration work amongst all of the Walpole Island First Nation (Ontario), Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians (Michigan), and Wai-kato-Tainui (New Zealand).<sup>15</sup> In Navajo traditions, an illustration of the special importance given to ecological reality is found in the image of Corn Mother. This image is brought to life in the traditional practice whereby members of the Navajo nation will place an ear of corn beside a newborn child to acknowledge "the role of the mothering principle with powers beyond that of the human mother."<sup>16</sup> In a theme that is revisited below, such ecospiritual ritual recalls the special status accorded to Mother Earth by many of the first peoples of Turtle Island. Such status is poignantly represented by the invocation of Pachamama in the Ecuadoran constitution, marking a notable contemporary development in Earth jurisprudence as that

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<sup>13</sup>Compare Donald Dorr, *Option for the Poor and for the Earth: Catholic Social Teaching* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2012).

<sup>14</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, #145-146.

<sup>15</sup>Coleen A. Fox, Nicholas James Reo, Dale A. Turner, JoAnne Cook, Frank Dituri, Brett Fessell, James Jenkins, Aimee Johnson, Terina M. Rakena, Chris Riley, Ashleigh Turner, Julian Williams, and Mark Wilson "'The River Is Us; The River Is in Our Veins': Re-Defining River Restoration in Three Indigenous Communities," *Sustainability Science* 12 (2017): 521-533.

<sup>16</sup>Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 187.

document enshrines legal rights for nature.<sup>17</sup>

Another important feature of the influence of Indigenous ways of being-in-the-world for an integral understanding of ecological wisdom grows from the premise that Indigenous peoples have inalienable rights. Of particular significance in this regard are rights to the land as its caretakers and guardians.<sup>18</sup> One of the earliest Catholic pastoral letters addressing ecology, written by the Guatemalan bishops, makes this point in its foundational paragraph before arguing with conviction for Indigenous peoples' land rights (note here the invocation of 'People of the Corn'):

The *cry for land* is undoubtedly the strongest, most dramatic and most desperate call heard in Guatemala. It bursts forth from millions of Guatemalan hearts yearning not only to possess the land, but to be possessed by it. It is a cry from the "People of the Corn" who on the one hand identify with furrows, sowing, and harvest, and who on the other hand find themselves expelled from land by an unjust and punitive system. They are like strangers in the land which belonged to them for thousands of years; they are considered second-class citizens in the nation forged by their extraordinary ancestors.<sup>19</sup>

In line with and informing green theo-ecoethical concerns, this statement is strong on social justice, calling for the equal treatment of Indigenous peoples. However, in contrast to Pope Francis' relatively more integral treatment of ecological wisdom mapped below, it strays from articulations of "Mayan Cosmovision" presented by members of the cross-cultural and solidarity-oriented Movement for Peace and Sustainability in Mesoamerica.<sup>20,21</sup> In short, the

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<sup>17</sup>Cormac Cullinan, *Wild Law: A Manifesto for Earth Justice*, 2nd ed. (Totnes, Devon: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2011), 185; compare Natasha Bakht and Lynda Collins, "The Earth Is Our Mother: Freedom of Religion and the Preservation of Indigenous Sacred Sites in Canada," *McGill Law Journal* 62, no. 3 (2017): 777-812.

<sup>18</sup>See Joan G. Fairweather, *Common Hunger: Land Rights in Canada and South Africa* (Calgary, AB: University of Calgary Press, 2006).

<sup>19</sup>Catholic Bishops of Guatemala, "Cry for Land: Joint Letter of the Guatemalan Bishops' Conference," (1988), #0.1, [http://faculty.theo.mu.edu/schaefer/ChurchonEcologicalDegradation/documents/CryforLand\\_000.pdf](http://faculty.theo.mu.edu/schaefer/ChurchonEcologicalDegradation/documents/CryforLand_000.pdf).

<sup>20</sup>Though members of this movement will pragmatically reference sustainable development when explaining their work to Anglophone donors, the author witnessed inculturated rituals employing "Mayan Cosmovision" by members of this movement at multiple locations in rural El Salvador prior to undertaking peace, ecojustice, and community building projects. On the former point and for more on the movement, see Foundation for Sustainability and Peacemaking in Mesoamerica, "Alas," (2016) available from <http://discover-peace.org/>.

<sup>21</sup>Taa' Pi't, an important "Guate-Maya" NGO, employs a definition Mayan Cosmovision that describes it as "based on the harmonious relationship of all elements of the universe in which to be human is only one more element. The earth is the mother who gives life and maize (corn) is a sacred symbol which the culture revolves around." From Taa' Pi't, "Mayan Cosmovision," (2016), <http://www.taapit.org/cie/en/about-us/cosmovision.html>.

bishops may be reproducing a certain Western framing of human-land relationships centred upon property rights. This is understandable given the great inequalities faced under the current land tenure systems in Mesoamerica. Nonetheless, it should be emphasized that for many Indigenous peoples, land rights do not so much grow out of previous patterns of ownership, or even use,<sup>22</sup> but are in large part based on integral relationships with the land. Such relationships are summed up with a praiseworthy accessibility in the Cree Nation Partnership's (Tastatweyak Cree Nation and War Lake First Nation) statement of worldview, which was developed through a wide-ranging consultation with elders and other community members:

- We see the earth as the Mother that bears all things as her children.
- All things are related.
- We are part of the natural world.
- There is no separation between living and nonliving parts of the natural world.
- Animals and plants are Members of one's family.
- Spiritual, physical and emotional relationships with land and water are the essence of our culture.
- The land is validation of our past.
- Land, culture and spirituality cannot be separated.
- We have a responsibility as caregivers for Mother Earth.
- We have a responsibility to share with others but do not do so out of responsibility, but out of our spiritual connection to the Creator, instilled by the teachings of our ancestors.
- Personal and community history are part of the land.
- All things, including inanimate things, have a spirit.
- All things are at the same time spiritual and physical.
- Our relationships with Mother Earth are based on respect.
- Our spiritual, emotional and physical needs can only be met when we live in

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<sup>22</sup>This is in contrast to Locke's labour-mixing value theory of ownership that has been so influential in Western thought. See John Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, ed. C.B. Macpherson (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1980), 27.

harmony with Mother Earth.<sup>23</sup>

This listing represents a clear and accessible voicing of an integral worldview,<sup>24</sup> which adds enriching poignant content to the implications of understanding everything as interconnected within a reality that is at once material and spiritual. Moreover, it also identifies a number of insights highly relevant to crafting green theo-ecoethical interpretation and action. Such articulations by Indigenous thinkers, communities, and activists have been the focus of an emerging critique that asserts that they point back to a sort of quasi-internalization of the myth of the noble savage and as such they invoke a past state of connectivity, communality, and respect for nature that never existed.<sup>25</sup> However, from a green theo-ecoethical perspective this is something of red herring. Indeed, more important is how the integral concepts mapped in this article are related to present and future cultural pride and vitality of communities bearing the weight of colonialism, racism, and other forces of marginalization. Indeed, the Indigenous thinkers and community activists surveyed in this article, while frequently referencing the past to frame the importance of rituals, protocols, and connected integral concepts are doing so with an eye to providing foundations upon which to respond to social and ecological crises. Moreover, they provide paths to help move humanity toward supporting a future marked by the incarnation of integral concepts in fresh and contextually appropriate manners that support socio-ecological flourishing.

Here, it may also be emphasized that the issues in play are time relative because all human cultures, including Western ones, at very least in their antecedents, necessarily emerged from the Earth community. Indeed, there would have been a time in our developmental-evolution past where proto-humans simply did not have the opportunity to conceive of themselves as apart from the cosmos.<sup>26</sup> These origins, combined with the fact that there have also been people, even if they were merely a creative minority, who have seen themselves as connected to the natural world, represents an opportunity for a nourishing recovery. One path grows from the fact that integral cultures will have left behind certain seeds, deposited at various points

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<sup>23</sup>Cree Nation Partners, *Keeyask Environmental Evaluation: A Report on the Environmental Effects of the Proposed Keeyask Project on Tataskweyak Cree Nation and War Lake First Nation* (Tataskweyak Cree Nation and War Lake First Nation, January 2012), <https://keeyask.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/CNP-Keeyask-Environmental-Evaluation-Web-Jan2012.pdf>, 18.

<sup>24</sup>On listing as an important activity for growing spaces for socio-ecological flourishing, compare Niamh Moore, "Eco/feminism and Rewriting the Ending of Feminism: From the Chipko Movement to Clayoquot Sound," *Feminist Theory* 12 (April 2011): 3-21.

<sup>25</sup>Compare Thomas J. Woods, Jr., *33 Questions About American History You're Not Supposed to Ask* (New York: Crown Publishing, 2007), 17-24.

<sup>26</sup>Compare Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York, NY: Perennial, 2002).



through human cultural history, intact that can now be nourished in new soil that will allow for socio-ecological transformation to take place in a culturally enriching manner to the benefit of increased levels of socio-ecological flourishing. Building upon comparable premises, Edmund O'Sullivan, professor emeritus at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, names "emancipatory hope" for dynamic cultural transformations, looking towards a future characterized by mutually-enhancing relationships supportive of substantive peace, social justice, and ecological health.<sup>27</sup>

The Cree minister, former moderator of the United Church of Canada, and University of Winnipeg emeritus theology instructor, Stan McKay, grounds the importance of such dynamic transformations in a poignant manner that illustrates the promise of socio-ecologically fruitful relationships with the past, present, and future discussed above with his recounting of "an Aboriginal perspective on the integrity of creation." In the process, he shares some insights that are valuable in constructing a green theo-ecoethical understanding of ecological wisdom. According to McKay, an Aboriginal spiritual worldview is worth pondering due to its nature as at once profound and simple, resting upon an affirmation of the interconnectedness of all life.<sup>28</sup> In this worldview, creation is irreducibly relational. The image of gift is employed, not in terms of creation being for the use of people,<sup>29</sup> but rather in terms of life as a gift. McKay ties these elements together succinctly: "If creatures and creation are interdependent, it follows that it is not faithful to speak of ownership. Life is understood as a gift, and it makes no sense to claim ownership of any part of the creation."<sup>30</sup>

Regrettably, as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on residential schools has made clear, the churches and their members actively participated in several aspects of the colonization of Indigenous peoples in what became Canada.<sup>31</sup> To cite a crucial example, underpinning church

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<sup>27</sup>See Edmund O'Sullivan, "Emancipatory Hope: Transformative Learning and the Strange Attractors," in *Holistic Learning and Spirituality in Education: Breaking New Ground*, eds. John P. Miller, Selia Karsten, Diana Denton, Deborah Orr, and Isabella Colalillo Kates (Albany, NY: University of New York Press, 2005), 71; compare Anne Marie Dalton and Henry C. Simmons, *Ecotheology and the Practice of Hope* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2010), xiii.

<sup>28</sup>Stan McKay, "An Aboriginal Perspective on the Integrity of Creation," in *Liberating Faith: Religious Voices for Justice, Peace, and Ecological Wisdom*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (Lanham, MA: Rowan & Littlefield, 2003), 519-520; compare Timothy Leduc, *Climate, Culture, Change: Inuit and Western Dialogues with a Warming North* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2010).

<sup>29</sup>For an interesting take on how the reciprocity inherent in gift giving can mean that understanding creation as a gift actually lands humans into the territory of reciprocal relationship with the rest of the created world, see Mark Manolopoulos, *If Creation Is a Gift* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2009).

<sup>30</sup>McKay, "An Aboriginal Perspective," 520.

<sup>31</sup>Compare The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, "Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada," (December 15, 2015),

participation in the colonialist project, Christian settlers erroneously understood themselves as taking “‘possession’ of a ‘vacant, pagan land.’”<sup>32</sup> The ensuing destructive system failed to communicate with both Indigenous peoples and the land, resulting in pollution and depletion of resources to the point of causing harm to life, including the lives of the colonizers. From within an integral worldview this activity is simply “insane, since we live in an environment that gives life but is sensitive to abuse.”<sup>33</sup> Here, McKay emphasizes that Aboriginal perspectives on the integrity of creation, growing out of the realities of marginalized peoples, thus “continue to challenge faceless corporations to be faithful to their humanity.”<sup>34</sup> This challenge represents a crucial moral project at this important moment in planetary history because, in McKay’s words, “our earth mother is in a time of pain and she sustains many thoughtless children.”<sup>35</sup>

Accordingly, within an Aboriginal spiritual worldview, medicine for this pain is found in a deep respect, which grows from the integrity of creation that “allows for diversity within the unity of the creator.”<sup>36</sup> As rendered by McKay, this insight concerning the nature of connectivity fosters a communitarian and inter-generational set of ethics that is deeply integral, extending (1) across communities, (2) through dialogue, (3) to the entire life community, and (4) to future generations.<sup>37</sup> Haudenosaunee (Six Nations) wisdom also holds a similar tenet, which asserts that decisions should be made taking into account the contributions of the seven generations that precede the decision makers and, in addition, the lives of the seven generations that will follow and be affected by the choice.<sup>38</sup> Thus, this methodology for decision-making grounds political processes within a multi-directional timescale more conducive to fostering socio-ecological flourishing than much contemporary Western political practice. Additionally, with its foundations in an integral worldview, Gitxsan law explicitly connects concern for future

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[http://www.myrobust.com/websites/trcinstitution/File/Reports/Executive\\_Summary\\_English\\_Web.pdf](http://www.myrobust.com/websites/trcinstitution/File/Reports/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf).

<sup>32</sup>McKay, “An Aboriginal Perspective,” 520.

<sup>33</sup>McKay, “An Aboriginal Perspective,” 521.

<sup>34</sup>McKay, “An Aboriginal Perspective,” 521.

<sup>35</sup>McKay, “An Aboriginal Perspective,” 521; compare Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #2.

<sup>36</sup>McKay, “An Aboriginal Perspective,” 521.

<sup>37</sup>McKay, “An Aboriginal Perspective,” 521-522.

<sup>38</sup>A deeper discussion of Haudenosaunee worldview can be found in Paul Wallace, *White Roots of Peace: The Iroquois Book of Life* (Santa Fe: Clear Light Books, 1994). See also Oren Lyons, “The Politics of Human Beings Against Mother Earth: The Nature of Global Warming,” Sol Kanee Lecture on Peace and Justice, University of Manitoba, November 8, 2007, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HiA4\\_e4YwZE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HiA4_e4YwZE).

generations and creation care through the persons of the *Sidigim haanak'a* who are charged with ensuring that "the environment is conducive for the animals to continue their lives."<sup>39</sup>

When viewed from a green theo-ecoethical perspective informed by these cross-cultural sources, such worldviews and the moral project of re-vitalizing ecological wisdom is particularly important for members of all cultures. This statement rings true because in our current socio-political context, anthropogenic social and ecological crises may be explained by the fact that, in the West, we have lost many of our connections with our heritage within the Earth community and its concomitant ecological wisdom. Yet, a past state of deeper connectivity that, from a green theo-ecoethical perspective, we would do well to 're-member' today is present even in the English language. For example, 'Adam' is generally equated with the first man in Christian and Jewish thought. However, according to an important aspect of the Jewish tradition that name can be more closely connected to *Adamah*, which signifies both Earth consciousness and an Earthling.<sup>40</sup> Even the word 'human' has its etymological roots in 'humus' and can be understood as connoting someone who is "of the earth."<sup>41</sup> The Indigenous and academic perspectives on ecological wisdom presented in this section promote an ethical methodology and human agency oriented toward healing the disconnect that allows us to forget such integral relationships. Positively stated, these cross-cultural sources provide energy to engage in the fostering of ecological wisdom.

Today, however, especially in the West, our ways of being are causing harm within the Earth community. This has turned into a situation whereby human-induced ecological violence, fuelled by a "supreme pathology," translates into a malaise wherein "we are indeed closing down the major life systems of the planet."<sup>42</sup> Hence, rather than somehow thinking that humans can extract ourselves from the Earth and universe communities from which we emerged and continue to be sustained, another strain of the contemporary imperative to pursue ecological wisdom emerges. It is in this light and integral sense that a cross-cultural understanding of ecological wisdom informs the green theo-ecoethical viewpoint of the present article.

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<sup>39</sup>Patricia Dawn Mills, *For Future Generations: Reconciling Gitksan and Canadian Law* (Saskatoon: Purich Publishing Limited, 2008), 119.

<sup>40</sup>Michael Trainor, "A Footstool or a Throne? Luke's Attitude to Earth (*ge*) in Acts 7," in *The Earth Story in the New Testament*, eds. Norman C. Hable and Vicky Balabanski (London, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 132.

<sup>41</sup>Ernest Klein, *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (New York, NY: Elsevier Publishing Company, 1966), 749.

<sup>42</sup>Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, 206.

## **Ecological Wisdom in *Evangelii Gaudium* Mapped Through a Green Theo-Ecoethical Viewpoint**

This article also proposes that ecological wisdom as defined in the *Global Greens Charter* and further informed by the Indigenous and academic sources surveyed above resonates within Christian traditions. This confluence comes into focus if one seeks those resonances with the aid of a green theo-ecoethical viewpoint influenced by cross-cultural insights. The mapping undertaken in the next two sections proceeds in that light.

Pope Francis gives several nods to ecological wisdom in his first apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*. The theological anthropology he presents notes humanity's embodied nature and how that connects us to the rest of the natural world on an immediate and sensory level: "Thanks to our bodies, God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement."<sup>43</sup> This theme of connection and pain is returned to below, but first it is important to note the submersion that is recommended with regard to this anthropological location. For example, the pontiff teaches that a primary basis for the initial and essential proclamation of the Gospel lies in its wisdom-filled nature before asserting, "all Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the kerygma."<sup>44</sup> Further, since, as demonstrated above, ecological wisdom is premised on connectivity and valuing what is substantive, it is therefore significant that while decrying a reductionist anthropology that views humans as mere consumers,<sup>45</sup> Pope Francis teaches about the fragility of the natural world: "The thirst for power and possessions knows no limits. In this system, which tends to devour everything which stands in the way of increased profits, whatever is fragile, like the environment, is defenceless before the interests of a deified market, which becomes the only rule."<sup>46</sup> The socio-ecological link implied in that passage is laid bare later in the document when, after discussing the plight of marginalized people, Pope Francis proclaims, "there are other weak and defenceless beings who are frequently at the mercy of economic interests or indiscriminate exploitation."<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Pope Francis, "*Evangelii Gaudium*: Apostolic Exhortation of the Holy Father to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World," (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 24 November 2013), #215, [http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apostexhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium\\_en.pdf](http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apostexhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.pdf).

<sup>44</sup>Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #165.

<sup>45</sup>Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #54.

<sup>46</sup>Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #55.

<sup>47</sup>Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #215.

Pope Francis presents such exploitation as antithetical to what the Indigenous and academic perspectives this article has unfolded above name as encompassing integral ecological wisdom. He bookends this statement while also removing a major rhetorical basis for presently existing unsustainability, stating succinctly that “money must serve, not rule!”<sup>48</sup> Indeed, it is quite evident that he is pointing to a materiality that is of a more biospiritual type than one that makes money the normative measure of all things. In this regard, it is informative to note the link Pope Francis makes between the embodied nature of the Incarnation and the actual quenching of contemporary spiritual hunger:

Today, our challenge is not so much atheism as the need to respond adequately to many people’s thirst for God, lest they try to satisfy it with alienating solutions or with a disembodied Jesus who demands nothing of us with regard to others. Unless these people find in the Church a spirituality which can offer healing and liberation, and fill them with life and peace, while at the same time summoning them to fraternal communion and missionary fruitfulness, they will end up by being taken in by solutions which neither make life truly human nor give glory to God.<sup>49</sup>

Here, very much in the spirit of a green theo-ecoethical viewpoint and through its application to the question of humanity’s truest nature, healing and liberation come into focus as intimately coupled with the type of relationality and awareness of embodiment associated with ecological wisdom.

### **Ecological Wisdom in *Laudato Si’* Mapped Through a Green Theo-Ecoethical Viewpoint**

In a statement that also dovetails well with the basic interpretative framework of this article and the *Global Green Charter’s* articulation of the ethical requirements flowing from ecological wisdom, Pope Francis presents the purpose of *Laudato Si’*, his social encyclical on caring for our common home, in the following manner: “I would like from the outset to show how faith convictions can offer Christians, and some other believers as well, ample motivation to care for nature and for the most vulnerable of their brothers and sisters.... It is good for humanity and the world at large when we believers better recognize the ecological commitments which stem from our convictions.”<sup>50</sup> In a cogent parallel with the cross-cultural perspectives presented above and expressing the view that the ecological crisis is a call to profound conversion, Pope

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<sup>48</sup>Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #58.

<sup>49</sup>Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #73.

<sup>50</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #64.

Francis states: “Living our vocation to be protectors of God’s handiwork is essential to a life of virtue; it is not an optional or a secondary aspect of our Christian experience.”<sup>51</sup> Extolling such vocational duty to the Earth community and in sharp contrast to the reductionist way that Lynn White Jr.’s contribution to the study of religion and ecology is often read,<sup>52</sup> Pope Francis ties together several green theo-ecoethical principles under a rubric of wisdom in *Laudato Si’*:

Believers themselves must constantly feel challenged to live in a way consonant with their faith and not to contradict it by their actions. They need to be encouraged to be ever open to God’s grace and to draw constantly from their deepest convictions about love, justice and peace. If a mistaken understanding of our own principles has at times led us to justify mistreating nature, to exercise tyranny over creation, to engage in war, injustice and acts of violence, we believers should acknowledge that by so doing we were not faithful to the treasures of wisdom which we have been called to protect and preserve.<sup>53</sup>

Indeed, right from the outset of the encyclical, in line with his stated goal of attempting “to get to the roots of the present situation, so as to consider not only its symptoms but also its deepest causes,”<sup>54</sup> and drawing upon the example of St. Francis,<sup>55</sup> Pope Francis sets a relational tone by employing a gendered image that shares a certain set of resonances with the cross-cultural perspectives mapped above. Here, he invokes ecological wisdom in the areas of solidarity, beauty, and nurturing that accompanies understanding Earth as both sister and mother. In accord with the cross-cultural perspectives referenced in the preceding section, the pontiff says about Earth that “our common home is like a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us.”<sup>56</sup> This relational naming lends credence to Pope Francis’ assertion that the Bible makes “no place for a tyrannical anthropocentrism.”<sup>57</sup> Rather, he continues that, as amplified by the magisterium, Christianity holds that other-than-human creatures have a worth beyond the monetary, a worth that is

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<sup>51</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #217.

<sup>52</sup>On White’s influence see Martin Palmer’s interview in *Beyond Belief*. “The Environment.” BBC Radio 4, March 24, 2014, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b03yn6xt>. Compare Lynn White, Jr., “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203-1207.

<sup>53</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #200.

<sup>54</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #15.

<sup>55</sup>Compare Ilia Delio, *A Franciscan View of Creation: Learning to Live in a Sacramental World* (St. Bonaventure, NY: The Franciscan Institute, 2012).

<sup>56</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #1.

<sup>57</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #68.

intrinsic and, therefore, not “completely subordinated to the good of human beings.”<sup>58</sup> Giving further support to a green reading of wisdom, Pope Francis emphasizes relationality in his explanation of ecology, stating with pastoral frankness, which recalls the accessibility of the above-cited Cree Nation Partnership’s Statement of worldview, that “[i]t cannot be emphasized enough how everything is interconnected.”<sup>59</sup> This relational reading of reality is given further expression in Pope Francis’ framing of social and ecological crises in terms of “what is happening to our common home.”<sup>60</sup> For the pontiff, our embodiment ties us to the Earth community in a deeply relational manner that resonates with the integral cross-cultural understandings of ecological wisdom explored in the preceding section of this article, including the notion of gift present in Stan McKay’s articulation of an Indigenous perspective on the integrity of creation:

It is enough to recognize that our body itself establishes us in a direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings. The acceptance of our bodies as God’s gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation. Learning to accept our body, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning, is an essential element of any genuine human ecology. Also, valuing one’s own body in its femininity or masculinity is necessary if I am going to be able to recognize myself in an encounter with someone who is different. In this way we can joyfully accept the specific gifts of another man or woman, the work of God the Creator, and find mutual enrichment.<sup>61</sup>

As a result of this deep, embodied connectivity so important to the academic and Indigenous viewpoints presented above and flowing from Pope Francis’ theological anthropology, authentic human development is firmly placed within a moral perspective that is at once respectful of people and the rest of creation: “Authentic human development has a moral character. It presumes full respect for the human person, but it must also be concerned for the world around us.”<sup>62</sup> Recalling both Aldo Leopold’s contribution to land ethics and the cross-

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<sup>58</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’* #69.

<sup>59</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #138. It is due to the accessible and frank nature of this statement that it was selected for inclusion in the title of the present article.

<sup>60</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #17.

<sup>61</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #155.

<sup>62</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #5.

cultural insights presented in the preceding section,<sup>63</sup> the pontiff also extends intrinsic value to whole ecosystems, advising that “[w]e take these systems into account not only to determine how best to use them, but also because they have an intrinsic value independent of their usefulness.”<sup>64</sup> Faith offers relational insight that can help in this regard, allowing people to engage in a renewing contextual ‘resourcement’<sup>65</sup> akin to what this article has termed ‘essential recovery’<sup>66</sup> of regrettably obscured green wellsprings of ecological wisdom: “Cultural limitations in different eras often affected the perception of these ethical and spiritual treasures, yet by constantly returning to their sources, religions will be better equipped to respond to today’s needs.”<sup>67</sup>

As such, Pope Francis thirsts for responses to interlocking social and ecological crises that both recognize moral concerns for all of humanity and are rooted in a deep understanding of our anthropological location within an interdependent world. From a green theo-ecoethical viewpoint on ecological wisdom, it is in this light that the pontiff’s characterization of technology and consumerism as too often serving segmented interests is best read. In this regard and in accord with Stan McKay’s above-presented insights, Pope Francis questions the limited conception of both human freedom and quality of life that a “techno-economic paradigm” spawns: “This paradigm leads people to believe that they are free as long as they have the supposed freedom to consume.... We have too many means and only a few insubstantial ends.”<sup>68</sup> This lack of a substantive telos has negative consequences for the entire Earth community. As Pope Francis tellingly writes, “a sober look at our world shows that the degree of human intervention, often in the service of business interests and consumerism, is actually making our earth less rich and beautiful, ever more limited and grey, even as technological advances and consumer goods continue to abound limitlessly.”<sup>69</sup> As a result, an ethical imperative for the precautionary principle as an expression of contextually necessary ecological wisdom emerges.<sup>70</sup> Indeed, in harmony with the above-presented Haudenosaunee

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<sup>63</sup>Aldo Leopold, “The Land Ethic,” in *Ethics in Practice: An Anthology*, ed. E.H. LaFollete (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), 634-643.

<sup>64</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #140.

<sup>65</sup>Compare Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 4.

<sup>66</sup>Compare Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #114.

<sup>67</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #200.

<sup>68</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #203.

<sup>69</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #34.

<sup>70</sup>In legal and ethical terms, the “precautionary principle” can be defined as denoting “a duty to prevent harm, when it is within our power to do so, *even when all the evidence is not in.*” See Canadian Environmental Law Association, “The Precautionary Principles: Collection of Publications on this Topic,” 2012,



methodology for making decisions, Pope Francis explicitly endorses this principle and its associated processes:

This precautionary principle makes it possible to protect those who are most vulnerable and whose ability to defend their interests and to assemble incontrovertible evidence is limited. If objective information suggests that serious and irreversible damage may result, a project should be halted or modified, even in the absence of indisputable proof. Here the burden of proof is effectively reversed, since in such cases objective and conclusive demonstrations will have to be brought forward to demonstrate that the proposed activity will not cause serious harm to the environment or to those who inhabit it.<sup>71</sup>

In this regard, Pope Francis also provides a culturally-themed explanation as to why that very sensible principle does not characterize all socio-ecological decision making: "Some projects, if insufficiently studied, can profoundly affect the quality of life of an area due to very different factors such as unforeseen noise pollution, the shrinking of visual horizons, the loss of cultural values, or the effects of nuclear energy use. The culture of consumerism, which prioritizes short-term gain and private interest, can make it easy to rubber-stamp authorizations or to conceal information."<sup>72</sup> Here, ecological wisdom, articulated in light of the cross-cultural perspectives presented above, can buttress Pope Francis' teaching in a symbiotic manner so as to encourage the reflective consideration of both particular projects and the human project writ large in terms of their long term and wide impacts upon both people and the planet:

What is needed is a politics which is far-sighted and capable of a new, integral and interdisciplinary approach to handling the different aspects of the crisis.... A strategy for real change calls for rethinking processes in their entirety, for it is not enough to include a few superficial ecological considerations while failing to question the logic which underlies present-day culture. A healthy politics needs to be able to take up this challenge.<sup>73</sup>

In its consideration of the incarnation of micro and macro endeavours reflecting such healthy politics, *Laudato Si'* echoes Thomas Berry's call for redefining progress and reinventing the human in the wake of negative effects on the entire Earth community caused by a certain

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<http://www.cela.ca/collections/pollution/precautionary-principle>. Emphasis in the original; compare Celia Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2008), 7

<sup>71</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, #186.

<sup>72</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, #184.

<sup>73</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, #197.

cultural amnesia and blindness to ecological wisdom.<sup>74</sup> In its treatment of these areas, the encyclical also adds a clear invocation that more members of the human family need to wake up and act by re-examining the essential location of humanity. According to Francis' teaching, this moral movement requires turning the suffering of the Earth community into our personal suffering. This invocation represents an amplification of his earlier teaching in this regard as cited in the preceding section.<sup>75</sup> For those taking up that challenge, the above-referenced human agency of the *Sidigim haanak'a* of the Gitksan Nation offers a mimetic model for embodying both care for creation in the present and concern for future generations. It is in such a green light that Pope Francis explains the purpose of *Laudato Si'* by writing:

Following a period of irrational confidence in progress and human abilities, some sectors of society are now adopting a more critical approach. We see increasing sensitivity to the environment and the need to protect nature, along with a growing concern, both genuine and distressing, for what is happening to our planet. Let us review ... those questions which are troubling us today and which we can no longer sweep under the carpet. Our goal is not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.<sup>76</sup>

Within a similar vein, in what a green theo-ecoethical viewpoint helps to discern as a remarkable parallel with the insights of Stan McKay about valuing all life as a gift, and in light of the concomitant requirement for humans to craft creative responses to contemporary social and ecological crises, Pope Francis writes, "The destruction of the human environment is extremely serious, not only because God has entrusted the world to us men and women, but because human life is itself a gift which must be defended from various forms of debasement."<sup>77</sup> It follows that those who hold economic and political power cannot legitimately engage in efforts to mask significant problems or otherwise hide their symptoms. Rather, they ought to be crafting policies that substantively address socio-ecological challenges, notably those that reduce carbon emissions and support renewable energy.<sup>78</sup> Such policy change emerges as absolutely necessary given the ultimate primacy of the Earth community for

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<sup>74</sup>See Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2009).

<sup>75</sup>Compare Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, #215.

<sup>76</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, #19.

<sup>77</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, #5.

<sup>78</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, #26.

any human endeavour. This primary quality of Earth as our common home comes into focus through ecological wisdom as understood in the Indigenous and academic perspectives presented in this article.<sup>79</sup>

### **A Confluence Concerning the Earth Community that Celebrates Diversity**

The cross-cultural insight about the primacy of the Earth community for human endeavour helps to cogently situate the primacy accorded to Mother Earth by the Idle no More founder, lawyer, and “mother, grandmother, sister, and ... passionate protector of all lands, waters and animals” Saysewahum (Sylvia McAdam)<sup>80</sup> when she poignantly writes about the need to revitalize Nêhiyaw (Cree) legal systems, which have been disrupted by the negative forces of colonialization. More specifically, she argues for the importance of *iyini miyikowiswin*, the intimate coupling of legal and ethical relationships. These relationships are, in turn, inseparable from the sacred relationships with all of creation. She adds that today such sacred relationships need to be brought forward in a heartfelt manner to meet contemporary social and ecological challenges. As such, Saysewahum feels the destruction of her ancestral lands by extractive industry as her own “grief and pain,”<sup>81</sup> thus in effect offering a model response to Pope Francis’ repeated but diversely articulated call to not “amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it.”<sup>82</sup>

For Saysewahum, central to any transformative repairing of that pain is the keeping of the sacred relationships with land, other people, waters, and animals in right order, signified by the Nêhiyaw term *miyi-wîcêhtowin*, which denotes the active state of having good relations. Thus, pain due to the destruction of the natural world is channeled into her activist work to promote *miyi-wîcêhtowin*.<sup>83</sup> Such ecological wisdom and the way it cries out for transformation on multiple levels, inclusive of but beyond personal conversion, is not only discerned in light of the cross-cultural sources presented above, but also receives an important measure of support in *Laudato Si’*: “If everything is related, then the health of a society’s institutions has

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<sup>79</sup>Compare David Mevorach Seidenberg, *Kabbalah and Ecology: God’s Image in the More-Than-Human-World* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 267.

<sup>80</sup>Saysewahum (Sylvia McAdam), *Nationhood Interrupted: Revitalizing Nêhiyaw Legal Systems* (Saskatoon, SK: Purich Publishing), 118.

<sup>81</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #87.

<sup>82</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #19.

<sup>83</sup>See Saysewanum, *Nationhood Interrupted*.

consequences for the environment and the quality of human life.”<sup>84</sup> Pope Francis further connects this relationality in a manner that supports the assertion that socio-ecological flourishing represents an important telos for the human project at the present juncture in Earth’s history:

What kind of world do we want to leave to those who come after us, to children who are now growing up? This question not only concerns the environment in isolation; the issue cannot be approached piecemeal. When we ask ourselves what kind of world we want to leave behind, we think in the first place of its general direction, its meaning and its values. Unless we struggle with these deeper issues, I do not believe that our concern for ecology will produce significant results. But if these issues are courageously faced, we are led inexorably to ask other pointed 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? It is no longer enough, then, simply to state that we should be concerned for future generations. We need to see that what is at stake is our own dignity. Leaving an inhabitable planet to future generations is, first and foremost, up to us. The issue is one which dramatically affects us, for it has to do with the ultimate meaning of our earthly sojourn.<sup>85</sup>

Here, important questions about how we ought to live and what legacy we will leave behind emerge as deeply cogent within a relational framework that accords with ecological wisdom as situated with the aid of the Indigenous and academic insights presented earlier in this article. Hence, it is not surprising, because most humans identify with a religious tradition, that Pope Francis affirms the importance of inter-religious initiatives that help foster socio-ecological flourishing. As the pontiff states: “The majority of people living on our planet profess to be believers. This should spur religions to dialogue among themselves for the sake of protecting nature, defending the poor, and building networks of respect and fraternity.”<sup>86</sup> Further, in accord with the spirit of the seven generations principle of the Haudenosaunee cited above, *Laudato Si’* extends the Catholic Social Teaching principle of the common good to future generations as part of Pope Francis’ broader treatment of ecological wisdom, returning us to the concept of integral ecology named at the beginning of this article: “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.... An integral ecology is marked by this

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<sup>84</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #142.

<sup>85</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #160.

<sup>86</sup>Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #201.

broader vision.”<sup>87</sup> In harmony with a green theo-ecoethical viewpoint on ecological wisdom, *Laudato Si’* unfolds ‘integral ecology’ as infused with spiritual content, extending to a lateral harmony within the Earth community, and accessible to all those who can slow down sufficiently to perceive the immanence of God: “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.”<sup>88</sup> Moreover, in accord with this broader vision, Pope Francis argues that realizing the common good under conditions of ecological crisis means that isolationism, most especially its religious, disciplinary, and social movement expressions, is no longer tenable.<sup>89</sup>

As one significant outcome in this regard, *Laudato Si’* develops the Vatican’s contribution to ecospirituality in an integral and markedly innovative direction,<sup>90</sup> which both supports and is buttressed by the cross-cultural perspectives presented above. Pope Francis does so by arguing that a reality of connectedness accessed through ecological conversion provides creative energy of the sort that is necessary to effectively respond to contemporary challenges for the Earth community: “As believers, we do not look at the world from without but from within, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has linked us to all beings. By developing our individual, God-given capacities, an ecological conversion can inspire us to greater creativity and enthusiasm in resolving the world’s problems and in offering ourselves to God.”<sup>91</sup> As brought into focus by the Indigenous and academic sources surveyed above, that is certainly a type of conversion which opens those who undergo it to the treasures of a green theo-ecoethical understanding of ecological wisdom. In a noteworthy confluence, the mapping of Pope Francis’ teaching presented in this article demonstrates that such a worldview receives a significant measure of support within *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Laudato Si’*.

By undergoing this integral conversion and thus seeing the intimate connectivity of all things and embodying a green theo-ecoethical understanding of ecological wisdom, Christians and

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<sup>87</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #159.

<sup>88</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #225.

<sup>89</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #201. However, this sentiment is somewhat tempered in terms of Christian dialogue with Eastern religions and natural scientists who may take offence to the ‘us vs. them’-type sentiment that *Laudato Si’* expresses (note the exclamation mark): “How wonderful is the certainty that each human life is not adrift in the midst of hopeless chaos, in a world ruled by pure chance or endlessly recurring cycles!” From Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #65.

<sup>90</sup> Compare Christopher Hrynko and Dennis Patrick O’Hara, “The Vatican and Ecospirituality: Tensions, Promises and Possibilities for Fostering an Emerging Green Catholic Spirituality,” *Ecozon@: European Journal of Literature, Culture and Environment* 2, no. 2 (Autumn 2011): 177-197.

<sup>91</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, #220.

other theists can then become fuller participants in what, as we saw in the introduction, Sanguin names the 'kin-dom' of God. Such spaces of convergence, in turn, mark a fruitful symbiosis sustained by the multiple entanglements between ecological wisdom and Pope Francis' social teaching. Moreover, within the ethical nexus of a 'kin-dom,' forces of domination are transformed as ecological wisdom facilitates individuals and communities entering into mutually-enhancing relations with the divine, their human neighbours, and the rest of creation. From a green theo-ecoethical perspective, at a time of interlocking social and ecological crises such transformation must count among our hope-filled action to established increased levels of socio-ecological flourishing on this planet, our common home. It is in this common context that Indigenous, academic, and Pope Francis' respective paths of dialogue and action can converge in support of much needed ecological wisdom to help heal an Earth community whose vitality is in peril.<sup>92</sup>

### **Conclusion: Why This Confluence Matters for Walking Together**

Keeping in mind the multi-dimensional definition of ecological wisdom from the *Global Greens Charter* cited above that includes an acknowledgement of the importance of the examples of Indigenous people and requires, as per Pope Francis' social teaching, living within ecological limits, it then follows, in accord with the example offered by Saysewahum, that taking on roles as protectors of all life and endorsing the above-described integral approach to embracing the precautionary principle emerge as contextual ethical imperatives. In this light and when viewed through a green theo-ecoethical lens, it is now possible to see why the colligation of the academic, cross-cultural, and papal discourses presented in this paper matters. Some part of our present social and ecological crises is due to segmented ethical foundations that allow people and other members of the created community to be marginalized and therefore exploited. Those with political power might have too often felt justified in supporting such domination. However, the sources mapped in this article provide foundations for an integral solidarity that can flow from seeing everything as interconnected, as infused with spirit, and therefore as having intrinsic worth for those who connect spirit and ethical duty. Asserting that there are deeper confluences found in Pope Francis' social teaching in this regard than those which were previously evident in the Vatican's articulation of ecospiritality is by no means to assert that the present Pope has articulated a perfect system or that he has unambitiously embraced worldviews like those presented by Stan McKay or Saysewahum in their entirety. Moreover, it must be acknowledged that there are significant divergences between all of Pope Francis', McKay's, and Saysewahum's contributions to an ethic of deep connectivity. In Pope

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<sup>92</sup>Compare Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, #163, 15.

Francis' case, in part due to the way papal documents are crafted with the input of multiple authors and consultants, there are even contradictions within the documents selectively mapped in this article. In concentrating on the confluences amongst papal teaching and academic and cross-cultural perspectives as they relate to ecological wisdom as articulated by people seeking to promote integral concepts, this article is not claiming equivalence. It is however a demonstration that there is now present in papal teaching significant additional points for deep dialogue, where for example Catholic and Nêhiyaw people can come together and speak about the importance of viewing Earth as mother and sister. That there are people who hold both identities helps with this dialogue and can result in new kinds of collaboration, which, in turn, provides a basis for transformative action in support of social-ecological flourishing that can be emancipatory in the sense named by O'Sullivan, even if all the notoriously slippery problems associated with moving from ecological insight to ecological action are taken into account.

As an example to ground this point, consider the joint statement on "Water as a Path of Dialogue and Action to Care for Our Common Home" that was only possible because of the spaces opened up for dialogue by the promulgation of *Laudato Si'*, in this case for particular kinds of conversation amongst settler Canadians and Indigenous peoples with diverse religious, spiritual, and secular motivations. Notice the opening with an acknowledgement of treaty and place that situates the general orientation towards the relational aspect of and duties tethered to ecological wisdom in this article, for example expressed in the language of gift invoked in accord with Stan McKay and Pope Francis' articulation of the term:

We, who gathered on Treaty Six territory and the traditional homeland of the Métis, to reflect on our duty to care for our common home for as long as the rivers flow crafted the following statement at Saskatoon on October 22, 2016.

We recognize treaties as a covenant to share and care for our common home. As Treaty peoples we are all bound together with each other, the land, and water. Yet, this covenant has been damaged by unjust laws and policies, such as the implementation of the Indian Residential Schools and the 'sixties scoop', which have negative inter-generational impacts. To contribute to healing such trauma, we affirm our responsibility to be Treaty people in the fullest sense.

As a key part of such a response, we are called to hear the cry of the Earth and the cry of those on the margins of our society. By dialoguing and acting to care for our common home, we take up our responsibilities toward future generations. We undertake this urgent and exciting task so that all might reach their full potential. The social and ecological benefits of these approaches and actions provide an important opportunity for reconciliation.

Water is a commons, a precious, life-giving gift that must be appreciated and protected. It must not be taken for granted or wasted. Caring for water opens a path of dialogue and action on which we can walk together. Caring for water can also lead to a deep ecological conversion, overcoming the negative effects of consumerism and rapidification.<sup>93</sup> By honouring Indigenous cultures and values, and entering into wholesome relationships with each other, Mother Earth, and the Creator, we can transform our society.

In all of this we can learn from rivers, the veins and arteries of Mother Earth. Our watersheds provide us with intimate connections to the places in which we live. Listening to what rivers can teach us can help us slow down and gain the necessary courage to be fearless in our work for justice, peace, and the integrity of creation.

In this light, we assembled here today have each committed to an individual or collective action to bring this statement to life. We make these commitments as part of our hope for a vibrant future.

Our commitments include:

1. To live in a more environmentally friendly manner,
2. To take concrete actions to show more respect for our gift of water.
3. To continue to learn to walk with my Indigenous brothers and sisters.
4. To walk mindfully by bodies of water, and rivers, in gratitude and openness to the learning they offer.
5. Slow down
6. Simplify my life to be able to be more responsive to life itself and others, including the Earth.
7. Listen, listen, listen then dialogue, dialogue, dialogue.
8. Cut down on water usage.
9. To learn about Treaty Six.
10. Daily personal examination of how I walk with Pope Francis' encyclical *Laudato Si'* and proclaim the wonder and awe of creation within my life.
11. To dialogue as equal and central partners, from idea formation onward on

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<sup>93</sup>See Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, #18.



projects that effect our relationship with the land.

12. To be mindful of the precious gift of water.

13. To continue to learn about being a treaty person.

14. To learn more about the treaties and calls to action.

15. To re-envision a nation that is full of collective beliefs, which can all offer a piece of the unity, in order to see how we are all Treaty people.

16. To become more educated and aware of the churches' role in where we are today.

17. No more bottled water for me. I have to pack water when I travel.

18. To take action every day in my own life.

19. To be more personally aware of the use and gift of water.

20. New consciousness of a renewal of the quality of relationships with each other.<sup>94</sup>

When viewed through a green theo-ecoethical lens, this statement is highly significant even though it might not be polished, like *Laudato Si'*, or wholly philosophically consistent, also like *Laudato Si'* and other papal teachings on ecological wisdom, which are certainly uneven in the mode and strength of their support of integrated social, spiritual, and ecological connectivity. Working with comparable and perhaps more evident limitations, the symposium that drafted this statement in collaborative and dialogical manner informed by small group consultation around and aided by a skilled facilitator was organized in partnership with the Office of the Treaty Commissioner and a number of Catholic organizations, including Oblates of Lacombe, Greater Saskatoon Catholic Schools, Saint Paul University, the Diocese of Saskatoon, Saskatoon Catholic Schools, and St. Thomas More College, and was attended by over one hundred people with diverse religious, spiritual, and secular identities coming together at Saskatoon's Holy Family Cathedral to dialogue about water, while also considering what is named in this article as a preferential option for Indigenous people within a rubric of treaty.<sup>95</sup> Those who participated in the symposium all signed this statement, including affirming the twenty

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<sup>94</sup>Attendees at the Our Common Home: As Long as the Rivers Flow Symposium, "Water as a Path of Dialogue and Action to Care for Our Common Home," October 22, 2016, <https://stmcollege.ca/conferences/past-conference-lectures/2016/common-home-conference.php>.

<sup>95</sup>For a media report on the Symposium see Kiply Lukan Yaworski, "Collective Statement about Water and Treaty Rights Crafted at Symposium," *Prairie Messenger: A Catholic Journal*, November 2, 2016, [http://www.prairiemessenger.ca/16\\_11\\_02/dnews\\_16\\_11\\_02\\_2.html](http://www.prairiemessenger.ca/16_11_02/dnews_16_11_02_2.html).

commitments as crafted in a manner that was invitational, allowing for take up according to individual conscience. During the drafting process, anyone in attendance could have objected to any particular point, which did occur in part and helped to forge a more robust consensus. The consensus encompassed by this statement is representative of a bridge between ecological wisdom and transformative ecological action. Not all attendees will have crossed that bridge, nor will have crossed it for the same reasons, yet, in the face of the challenges posed in Canada by the continuing realities of the legacy of colonialism in which Christians were and are, as Stan McKay emphasized, complicit and too frequently active agents in oppressing Indigenous people and other marginalized members of the Earth community, it remains noteworthy. Indeed, it is in this light that the statement emphasizes the need for a relational reconciliation buttressed by ecological wisdom that sees everything as connected in accord with various tributaries surveyed in this article, including Pope Francis' notion of integral ecology and the Cree Nation Partnership's statement of worldview. Moreover, this is a realm of a cross-cultural synthesis that retains, respects, and promotes the distinctiveness of the cultures and worldviews that provide its tributaries, understanding them as wellsprings of ecological wisdom in their own right. When they come into dialogue they provide a solidarity-oriented opportunity and motivation to walk together, via attempts at mutual understanding and collective action, to care for our common home.

A critical mass of people taking up such opportunities would undoubtedly help heal present social and ecological crises. Pope Francis' opening up of paths of dialogue and action that support ecological wisdom has provided greater spaces for the world's more than one billion Catholics and others influenced by him to start upon or continue on this healing journey. This opening of paths matters from a green theo-ecoethical perspective because as many people as possible need to walk together on this journey, finding their own motivations to do so, so that that planet may not only continue as a diverse community of life, but also come to be more fully characterized by socio-ecological flourishing. While some academics may be drawn to upholding the limitations and contradictions inherent in any resultant attempt to hold together a coalition of learning and action, from a green theo-ecoethical perspective, because of the overriding importance of such a goal, ways need to be found to accommodate these divergent and diverse motivations for common action, acknowledging the tensions therein, but also holding them together as much as possible in a mutually-enhancing manner so that they can become creative forces for positive change. Further, the goal of promoting socio-ecological flourishing on the level of insight and action emerges as contextually necessary in accord with most of the perspectives on ecological wisdom mapped in this article, which, simply put in Stan MacKay's above-cited profound sense of that term, combine to urge all of us on this planet to start walking together.

