

# Ecology and Spirituality

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Spirituality is fundamental on our path towards integral ecology. If we fail to cultivate our interior life, we cannot effectively care for the external world, and vice versa. Therefore, we need to “develop a spirituality” (*LS 240*) that helps us to perceive reality in an integral manner, recognizing it as a joyful mystery of communion and relationships.

Spirituality provides the motivations we need for “a more passionate concern for the protection of our world” (*LS 216; EG 261*). It even enables us to experience “the intimate connection between God and all beings” (*LS 234*), allowing us to reach a mystical experience. We need that “interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes, and

gives meaning to our individual and communal activity”. Indeed, the life of the spirit must not be dissociated “from the body or from nature or from worldly realities, but lived in and with them, in communion with all that surrounds us” (LS 216).

Nature must not be reduced to mere objects that we can know and, therefore, master. Its mystery is an invitation to savor, contemplate, and live. God has not revealed himself to increase our knowledge, but to establish a loving relationship with us. Indeed, all of creation “is conceived of to create the place of encounter between God and his creature.”[1]

“The knowledge that proceeds from the senses and the intelligence reduces but does not eliminate the distance between the subject and the object, between the «I» and the «you.» Love, on the other hand, gives rise to attraction and communion, to the point that transformation and assimilation take place between the subject who loves and the beloved object. This reciprocity of affection and liking subsequently permits a far deeper knowledge than that which is brought by reason alone. A famous saying of William expresses it: «*Amor ipse intellectus est*», love in itself is already the beginning of knowledge. [...] Without a certain fondness one knows no one and nothing!”[2]

In this perspective, knowledge is synonymous with “recognizing,” being open to mystery, growing in wisdom and love. As pope Benedict XVI says: “intelligence and love are not in separate compartments: love is rich in intelligence and intelligence is full of love.”[3] True knowledge is always open to love and, in turn, love leads to deeper knowledge, because “where reason no longer sees, love sees.”[4]

Spirituality and contemplation are essential in our technocratic world, which is “incapable of seeing the mysterious network of relations between things” (LS 20). Consumerism bewilders “the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment”. Instead, spirituality purifies our hearts and our relationships, offering us values and motivations for a more authentic, sober, fraternal, and satisfying way of living. With practices such as fasting, abstinence, and almsgiving, it helps us to live “in communion with all that surrounds us” (LS 216), to understand that “less is more,” and to grow in “the capacity to be happy with little” (LS 222).

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[1] Benedict XVI, «Address at the opening of the 12<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops» (Oct. 6, 2008).

[2] Benedetto XVI, «General Audience» (Dec. 2, 2009), in *OR* (Dec. 3, 2009) 1.

[3] CV 30. «Non est perfecta cognitio sine dilectione, ergo ne perfectum verbum sine amore» Bonaventure, *1Sent.* d.10 a.1 q.2 f.1 (*Quaracchi* I 197a).

[4] Benedict XVI, «General Audience» (March 17, 2010), n. 2.