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Young Global Activists and their interconnectedness with Earth

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'I've always loved the planet because of the wildness it inspired in me, in an age where humans commonly have the ability to dominate all other life forms, it's a relief to know that we are not the rulers of everything but simply one of many chess pieces. There is a power greater than us, something that we will never conquer, and that is nature. Growing up, I experienced this with ocean waves so big they would knock me off my feet and mountains so tall I marvelled at how anyone had ever made it to the summit. My relationship with God's creation is one of wonder, respect and comfort, and I never feel so alive as when I am interacting with the Earth'¹

The above powerful reflection is an excerpt of an article written by Mercy Student, Cate Kelly from Omaha, USA. I chose to feature her words because it reflects a relationship with earth and community that is the heart of Integral Ecology. Read in its entirety, Cate extends her reflection by describing her journey to global action. Her action is rooted in a deep spirituality in which she reveres earth and embraces not only her experience with creation but also the accompanying scientific evidence that indicates dire consequences for earth and its people unless radical change is implemented. Citing the latest climate report from the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) she describes her anguish.

'I remember feeling a wave of grief wash over me, a feeling of utter panic. I read the scientific report...I sobbed the entire way home. ..I retreated under the covers for the rest of the evening and imagined my future, imagined how much environmental destruction was happening at that very moment and how much was to come. I felt completely helpless and, above all, I felt disgust and anger.'²

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is the United Nations body for assessing the science related to climate change. The IPCC does not conduct its own research; rather it locates agreement across the scientific community on topics related to climate change. In that sense, it guarantees objectivity and transparency. To access the latest report of the IPCC click [here](#). One key takeaway from the most recent report is that limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees compared to 2 degrees Celsius will considerably reduce the risks of water scarcity, ill health, food insecurity, floods and drought, extreme heat, tropical cyclones, biodiversity loss and sea level rise.

¹ Kelly, Cate. "Rallying for the Planet and the Future" Sisters of Mercy, October 21,2019, <https://www.sistersofmercy.org/blog/2019/10/21/rallying-planet-future/>

² Ibid

The science is clear and there is no room for scepticism. Many young people throughout the world are acknowledging and responding to the science. Greta Thunberg is the world's most recognised advocate on the climate crisis with her success in mobilizing students throughout the world to undertake climate protests by striking from school. In a statement she made to the press, in response to criticism that she is too young to be an activist, she responded:

"I don't care about age. Nor do I care about those who do not accept the science. I don't have as much experience, and therefore I listen more. But I also have the right to express my opinion, no matter my age. Being young is a great advantage, since we see the world from a new perspective and we are not afraid to make radical changes'.³

Like Greta, Cate Kelly has become a climate activist. She powerfully channelled her emotions of anger and grief into action, rallying for the planet and the future. She started small, establishing a climate council at her university with the idea of changing the narrative in the community about climate and our relationship to earth. She believes that this activism was in response to a call and part of a plan that God had laid out for her. Forming an official youth led organization called 'Students for Sustainability', the Mercy student organised Omaha's first climate strike. This was the first of many other active steps she initiated in relation to the climate crisis.

What astounds me about Cate's journey is her honest claim that it was 'prayer and guidance by my higher power, as well as frequent spiritual direction' that kept her motivated and energized as an activist. She concludes her article by stating

'This fight for our planet is one that is long term and that requires massive structural change, from how we treat one another and the planet on an individual level to how we get energy and power our cars. I am not sure where this journey will lead me or how it will continue, but I am confident in that by paying attention to my intuition, my heart and where God is calling me, it will work out far better than I can even imagine'.⁴

Cate Kelly is living and acting from what has often been described as an Integral Ecology. She first defines her own relationship with earth as one of reverence, echoing Pope Francis sentiments in the encyclical *Laudato Si'* in which he writes 'Everything is related, and we human beings are united as brothers and sisters on a wonderful pilgrimage, woven together by the love God has for each of his creatures and which also unites us in fond affection with brother sun, sister moon, brother river and mother earth'⁵

³ Smith, Ali. 2019, July 21. 'Greta Thunberg: They see us as a threat because we are having an impact' *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2019/jul/21/greta-thunberg-you-ask-the-questions-see-us-as-a-threat>

⁴ Kelly, Cate. "Rallying for the Planet and the Future" Sisters of Mercy, October 21, 2019, <https://www.sistersofmercy.org/blog/2019/10/21/rallying-planet-future/>

⁵ Pope Francis. (2015) Encyclical Letter *Laudato Si': On Care for our Common Home*. http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html

By acting to create a new narrative on climate with her local community, Cate also responds to the call of the late Thomas Berry, cultural historian and eco-theologian who claims 'It is clear that there will be little development of life here in the future if we do not protect and foster the living forms of this continent. To do this, a change must occur deep in our souls... We need a transformation...we need to awaken to the wilderness itself as a source of a new vitality for its own existence.'⁶

Global Activists, Greta Thunberg and Mercy student Cate Kelly are among many young global activists who are crying out for a new vision of our world; one that embraces an integral ecology. In an article entitled 'The Greening of the Self' Eco-Philosopher and Spiritual Activist Joanna Macy claims, "Something important is happening in our world...the conventional notion of the self with which we have been raised and to which we have been conditioned by mainstream culture is being undermined. ..It is being replaced by wider constructs of identity...termed the ecological self, co-extensive with other beings and the life of our planet. It is what I like to call 'the greening of the self.'⁷ Joanna Macy continues to talk about evolutionary maturity in which individuals experience anguish at planetary destruction and recognise a profound interconnectedness, moving collectively to act for radical change.

This is the call for all of us globally, to let go of any illusion that we as human beings are separate from the planet and to respond with moral integrity to the degradation of earth and displacement of peoples, recognising that we are one with the earth community. I give thanks for the work of global Mercy activist Cate Kelly, who has responded to a deep call and inspires us all to action, whether it be through small local steps or large global movements.

⁶ Berry, Thomas. 'The World of Wonder' *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, edited by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee. The Golden Sufi Center. 2nd Edition. 2016. P25

⁷ Macy, Joanna. 'The Greening of the Self' *Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth*, edited by Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee. The Golden Sufi Center. 2nd Edition. 2016 P153-55