

Connecting Respect Life with Integral Ecology

by Susan Vogt

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In our Catholic tradition October is Respect Life Month. This is good. At the core of our Catholic Marianist spirituality is that life is precious, to be honored, preserved, and protected – just as Mary carried and cared for Jesus throughout her own life. So what does this all have to do with the environmental movement? Of course, we want to save trees and reduce pollution, but isn't protecting human life even a higher goal? Perhaps if we look only with our human eyes, one could say, Yes.

BUT, if we look with the eyes of God, the Creator, and run that through the eyes of our heart, the answer I get is – **Everything is connected**. To protect human lives we must protect the ground, the air, the water, the animals, the plants on which human life depends. Without clean water human life cannot survive. Without food we cannot survive. Without _____ (fill in the blank with your favorite thing or activity) my life would be meaningless – or at least less joyful.

Protecting ALL life is what Pope Francis in *Laudato Si'* calls "Integral Ecology." (Perhaps a better English translation is **Integrated** or **Comprehensive Ecology**.)

This brings me back to "Everything is connected" – humans from womb to tomb plus *all* of creation. We cannot protect human life without also protecting the rest of creation. It's an integrated package.

For example:

- The [Laudato Si' Movement](#) in [Climate Change, a Pro-Life Issue](#) describes:
 - How "pollution and harm to mothers and children, food and water stresses, more frequent severe weather events, and disease – directly threaten the Church's commitment to protect and defend human life and dignity."
 - While pursuing technological solutions to polluting fossil fuels, we must also look at lifestyle changes of over- consumption.
 - Also, it is "the youth, who will have to deal with the effects of our current disregard for the dignity of all of creation. Our pro-life stance calls us to ensure that every child reaches the fullness of their God-given physical health and intellectual abilities. Yet today nearly one out of every six babies born in the U.S. has harmful mercury levels...which affects developing children's brains."
- Burning coal and oil are a major source of mercury, so sustainable choices of reducing our fossil fuel energy use and encouraging energy efficiency and renewable energy such as solar and wind are part of a consistent life ethic.
- As Catholic Christians, we are called to value life "in all its stages." This means we are also called to value that which sustains life, which includes things like health care, food, and the environment, that is, creation. In fact, if we profess to be pro-life, we must necessarily be pro-creation. (Michael Wright, *Earthbeat*, [In the voting booth, weigh climate change as a pro-life issue](#), Oct. 2018).

As Pope Francis says, "We are called to live life and live it abundantly! I ask you, in the name of God, to defend Mother Earth!"

A Thought to Ponder:

If all the plants and animals were no longer on Earth, humans could not survive. However, if humans were no longer on Earth, the animals and plants would thrive. Therefore, who needs who? I pray for all of God's creation to live within their means and take no more than what they need. We are all connected and God has created us with purpose – to purposefully love. We don't really need that much. Our lives could be simple and all the more beautiful because of it. (Colleen D.'s comment on Fr. Richard Rohr's Oct. 7 Meditation on "Ensouled" Animals.)

Of course, we humans are important, but so are all the other parts of creation. October is one month to remember that all creation needs to be respected and honored. If we do this well, the rest of the months will reflect the Creator and feed our souls.

Additional Background resources:

- [*To Be Pro-Life, Be Pro-Climate*](#) by Kyle Rosenthal, June-2020
- [*Creation Care is Pro-Life*](#) from Catholic Climate Covenant