

Saving the planet requires that we rethink the way we live out our faith

Interview with a Catholic leader who promotes the pope's call for an "ecological conversion".

By Youna Rivallain | France

Pope Francis has emerged as one of the world's most outspoken advocates for saving the planet from ecological disaster.

In his encyclical *Laudato si'* he says the current "ecological crisis" is also a "summons to profound interior conversion".

Marie-Hélène Lafage, an urban planner in the French city of Lyon, says the pope is right to call Christians to "an ecological conversion."

A leader in the Boys Scouts and Girl Guides of France, she is also local policy consultant on ecological transition and vice president of "Altercathos", an association of lay Catholics in Lyon who are committed to promoting the Church's social teaching.

Lafage recently traveled throughout France to see the various ecological initiatives that have sprung up within the Church.

She told *La Croix's* Youna Rivallain that she has become more and more convinced that the much-needed ecological transition requires immediate action and a rethinking of the way we live out our Christian faith.

La Croix: Are we seeing in the Church an upsurge in favor of ecological conversion?

Marie-Hélène Lafage: For the past two years, the term "ecological conversion" has been used in place of "integral ecology".

Conversion implies taking action: many parishes and movements have organized working sessions, as with the *Entrepreneurs et Dirigeants Chrétiens* (Christian Entrepreneurs and Leaders) or the Scouts and Guides of France.

On this question, Christians have found themselves in tune with societal movements.

The subject of ecology has been brought to the forefront through heat waves, forest fires in the Amazon and in Australia, then the climate marches, the scores of ecologists in municipal elections, etc.

Ecological conversion is being introduced into the life of the Church in many different ways, and initiatives are emerging, such as the "Green Church" label, or certain places of communal life that are organized around ecological conversion.

What initiatives have particularly struck you?

The Dominican Sisters of Taulignan (Drôme) are precursors; they have set up very interesting initiatives.

Ecology is gradually taking root in religious communities.

At the Simone in Lyon, we have tried to appropriate a place to translate this conversion into action, to anchor it in the life of the neighborhood with an AMAP (associations for the maintenance of peasant agriculture), composting, clothing sales, and a project for the greening of public spaces.

It's a neighborhood experience. Many of my friends also have plans to create Christian eco-sites.

How do you go from ideas to concrete action?

What gives strength to our experience is the community and collective dimension of ecological conversion, which must take root in groups and places.

And the Church is teeming with unused places that could be used for projects! But ecology is not just action, it is an inner conversion of our relationship with life, which must be transposed to create connections and social action.

The change must be collective, societal.

What are the difficulties in putting ecological conversion into practice?

There is an enormous gap within the Church between Catholics who have embraced Laudato si' and those who are just beginning to discover the subject.

In the Church, there is a tendency to reflect first and act later.

Action must be present from the beginning of the reflection! Let's stop with the "we have to get started" attitude!

Often, ecology is reduced to a commitment outside the Church.

But it is a real conversion: changing our way of looking at the world, changing our relationship with others, with ourselves, with God.

Ecology questions our way of living our faith, our relationship to God.

What is the role of the spiritual in this conversion?

First of all, ecological transition sometimes turns our life choices upside down, which requires spiritual guidance in order to ask ourselves the right questions.

Secondly, ecological conversion implies a cultural transition that must be carried out even in our theology.

It is not a question of turning it into shamanistic worship, but we cannot protect God's work if we never hear about creation in the Church!

Christians are confused in their vision of nature.

Of course, nature is not God, but it tells us something about God.

God continues to work through creation. We have to stop seeing humanity as being above creation: we are part of it.

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