

The 5th Anniversary of *Laudato si'*: Towards an integral ecology

# The Journey of EcoOne

An interview with EcoOne's coordinator, Luca Fiorani

Luca Fiorani, PhD, is the coordinator for the interdisciplinary EcoOne initiative. He graduated in Physics from the University of Padua and received his PhD at the Polytechnic of Lausanne in 1996. Since 2000, he has been a researcher at ENEA in Frascati and a professor both at Lumsa University (Rome) and Sophia University Institute (Loppiano). Author of a number of articles and patents, he has been interested in ecology since the 1990's. Recently, we spoke with Luca about the history and ongoing development of EcoOne.



*On November 26, 2020, the Kronos Academy, one of the first Italian environmental associations, awarded the Focolare Movement the 'I Do My Part Prize', in recognition of its commitment to the planet, through its EcoOne ecological initiative. What motivated this vast, well-known organization to honor an ecclesial movement in this way?*

I think the answer can be found in a 1949 writing by Focolare founder, Chiara Lubich, entitled, the *Resurrection of Rome*. Lubich was returning to Rome after a period in the northern Dolomite mountains of Italy, a period that was marked by particular insights and understandings. Arriving in Rome, she again saw many central parts of the city that had not yet recovered nor been rebuilt after the war. It was a stark contrast to the Dolomites – and today, too, decades after the rebuilding of Rome we could instead speak of the pandemic, the drama of migration, and that of climate change.

Yet, what was Chiara Lubich's response in the face of the reality she found before her? Hers was a paradoxical response, one that could almost seem spiritually detached: *Unite oneself to God within, and project His light onto the world through our gaze*. It is precisely this. Instead of light physically entering our pupils, it must

instead come forth. This is possible because hers was not an allusion to actual, physical light, but rather to God's light. In fact, in the final publication of this text<sup>1</sup>, Lubich inserted two further footnotes.

The first: "Man - in all his (or her) dimensions and human capacities - is not to be oppressed, but elevated. Alongside a renewed, "new" theology (based on Trinitarian life lived in the Mystical Body of Christ), there is also need of a new science, a new sociology, a new art, a new politics...: 'new' because of Christ, renewed by his Spirit. We need a new humanism, where (humankind) is truly at the center: This man who is first of all Christ, and Christ in man".

In a second note, she wrote: " Sometimes, it is said that the Gospel does not resolve all human problems, that it brings us to an understanding of the Kingdom of God only in a purely religious sense. But this is not true. It is certainly not an historical Jesus or Jesus as Head of the Mystical Body who resolves all these problems. It is Jesus-us, Jesus-I, Jesus-you who does this. It is Jesus in the human person, in that given person -- when His grace is in him (or her) - who builds a bridge, who paves a road. The true, deeper personality of each person is Jesus. Every man or woman (every Christian), in fact, is more a son or daughter of God (= another Jesus) than son or daughter of his or her own father. It is in being another Christ, a member of the Mystical Body, that each one brings his or her own typical contribution in every field: science, art, politics . . . "

*This is the thought of Chiara Lubich. But this prize refers to the EcoOne ecological initiative. Can you speak more about this?*

EcoOne is an international network of academics, professionals and citizens working in the environmental sciences. They want to complement their technical-scientific knowledge with a wisdom-based consideration of current ecological problems. Founded in 1999, it has a worldwide presence. More than a thousand people across five continents participated in its conference last October 2020, with some joining from as far away as the Wallis and Futuna Islands in the South Pacific.

Although EcoOne inspires concrete actions, its aim consists not so much in formulating technical solutions to environmental problems, but in dialogue with persons of all persuasions to elaborate an ecological culture in which humankind's role in nature is not one of exploitation (like a despotic master), but rather of care (like a loving steward). Since 2005, EcoOne's journey has been inspired by a prepared message sent that year by Chiara Lubich. Here are a few quotes from that message:

"We have always seen creation in its marvelous immensity as ONE, springing forth from the heart of a loving God who has stamped his imprint upon it. We sensed God's presence under all things. We saw God sustaining all things. And so, it was for all of humanity, as the flower of creation. Thus, we felt everyone was created as a gift for the other. Everything on earth was in a relationship of love with everything else. Men and women, endowed with intelligence, should collaboratively insert themselves into the realization of God's unitive design on the universe. But one must be Love to weave the golden thread between all beings. Humankind's progress is intimately linked to environmental progress . . . If a man or woman's aim is not economic interest or selfishness, but love for others and for nature, their contribution will serve for the Earth's transfiguration, until it becomes an earthly paradise."<sup>2</sup>

*For the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Laudato si', Pope Francis sent a message to your 2020 international conference. Can you tell us about it?*

Our EcoOne 2020 conference opened with a message from Pope Francis<sup>3</sup> affirming "the urgency of a new and more inclusive socio-economic paradigm "and the need to "implement practical measures [...] while combating "structural causes of poverty and working to

protect the natural environment." He reminded us that it is essential "to break with the logic of exploitation and selfishness and to promote the practice of a sober, simple and humble lifestyle." The pope's message should be read in light of *Fratelli tutti*, even if *Laudato si'* already encourages us to "listen to both the cry of the earth and the cry of the poor." (n. 49) *Fratelli tutti* seems to take a decisive step towards care for humanity: "[Saint] Francis felt himself a brother to the sun, the sea and the wind, yet he knew that he was even closer to those of his own flesh. Wherever he went, he sowed seeds of peace and walked alongside the poor, the abandoned, the infirm and the outcast, the least of his brothers and sisters." (n. 2).

*What is on the horizon for EcoOne?*

Precisely in light of *Fratelli tutti*, it seems to us that EcoOne now has two guideposts: the message of Chiara Lubich in 2005 and Pope Francis' message in 2020. In a sense, Lubich's message reflects the meaningful, expansive framework in which we journey ahead, an unfolding horizon that speaks to the relationality of nature and the presence of God beneath all things. The Pope's message directs us towards concrete action, oriented to search for new socio-economic paradigms, starting from living a more sustainable lifestyle.

In the future, we propose further exploration of *Laudato si'*, and a delineation of *Fratelli tutti's* contribution to integral ecology. In this way, we will foster further cultural dialogue with people of all convictions which is the founding principle behind EcoOne. We also plan to continue collaborating with other organizations such as the United Nations, the Dicastery for Promoting Integral Human Development and the Global Catholic Climate Movement, to work together to visibly foster the universal fraternity to which *Fratelli tutti* calls us.

**Interview by Maria do Sameiro Freitas**

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<sup>1</sup> *Nuova Umanità*, 17 (1995/6), pp. 5-8.

<sup>2</sup> The full text was published in: L. Fiorani, *Il contributo di EcoOne alla riflessione ecologica*, in *Nuova Umanità*, 34 (2012/1), pp. 50-51.

<sup>3</sup> See: [http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco\\_20201023\\_messaggio-meeting-ecology.pdf](http://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2020/documents/papa-francesco_20201023_messaggio-meeting-ecology.pdf) (accesso 12.2.2021).