

Interview Carmody Grey / original version in English

Can you tell us a little bit about yourself for those who don't know you yet? Who is Carmody Grey?

I am first of all a mother of my beloved son Benjamin, and wife of my beloved husband Manuel. After that, I am someone who loves nothing more than to be out climbing a mountain, swimming in a lake, hiking in a forest, or working in my garden. I also think, talk, read, write, do philosophy, theology and ethics, and have a great love of the natural sciences, especially biology. And I am an English Catholic, with Protestant martyrs in my ancestry.

Where did your love of nature come from?

My grandfather was a famous vet – he was the central character in the famous James Herriot stories, which you may have read, or seen on television or in film. From him I learned that animals and plants are the worthiest object of our curiosity, fascination, reverence and a constant source of delight. I was lucky enough to grow up in a beautiful part of the rolling hills of the South Downs. There was nature everywhere.

My parents also taught me that curiosity is a virtue, and wonder is an obligation. The worst failing was not to be adequately amazed by the world; not to be surprised; not to be taken up in the astonishing glory of it all.

I am eternally grateful for this gift from my parents. Attention to the beauty around us is a discipline, one of the most important ones. It's a discipline the Scriptures will give us, and the liturgy. We are invited to carefully foster in ourselves a habit of gratitude, based in wonder and praise.

You are a professor of integral ecology at the Laudato Si' Institute at Radboud University. What does "integral ecology" mean? What is "integral" about it?

Integral ecology is a way of understanding the whole of reality, which is based on the idea that everything exists only through and in its relationships. There is no isolated 'entity', only networks of relations. Ecology is the science of relationships; and these relationships are 'integral' because they are implicated in one another. In the social teaching of the Catholic Church, the understanding is that we all exist through three relationships which are always intertwined: with one another; with nature; and with the divine.

So integral ecology is a programme that is moral and spiritual, and also intellectual and practical. It calls us both to live in a particular way, a way which respects that everything is connected, and also to think in a particular way, to understand things by looking at the relationships which make them what they are. In particular, integral ecology challenges the abstractive, analytical style of modern knowledge. Modern knowledge is based on the presupposition that in order to understand something you have to take it apart, literally, to analyse. Integral ecology tries to put things back together – to syn-thesise, to see things in terms of wholes and not just as assemblies of parts.

What appeals to you in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*?

Laudato Si' takes the Church's vision – a vision of God, creation and human life – and puts it to work in our contemporary moment, to show how deep and rich are its resources for meeting the challenges of our time. It brings spirituality, ethics, science, economics and politics, and theology itself, together, to illuminate what we are facing and how we can move forward. It is both sober and challenging, and also hopeful and joyful. I continue to think it is probably the 'best' thing ever written on our ecological crisis, in terms of an all-encompassing vision.

It has been 10 years since the encyclical was written. It seems as if we have learned little from it...

Yes. That was Pope Francis' own view as he expressed in the follow-up document he wrote in 2023, *Laudate Deum*. There he wrote that our progress in addressing the challenges of our time has been painfully slow. And he names the deep reasons for this slowness: myopia, denialism, a deliberate and sustained indifference, and a knowing collusion of the rich and powerful in the destruction of climate and nature. We talk a lot about *Laudato Si'*, but it's important also to talk about *Laudate Deum*. We need to be honest about our situation. We are facing the severest kind of collapse of our life support systems. Our joy and our hope need to be clear-eyed; and they need to spring from faith, not from a cheap optimism which simply believes that things will be ok.

We also need to recall that *Laudato Si'* was written as an invitation. Not as a solution, or an end-point. It was a call, a summons, an opening of a path. We need to walk down that path. We need to hear the summons, accept the invitation. That's a work that is ongoing and will not stop. This is particularly true insofar as ecological damage has now reached such a point that the consequences are already unavoidable. We need to consider how we will respond to the challenges that will come our way in the next decades, treating *Laudato Si'* as a gateway, not a final conclusion.

As a professor of integral ecology, what activity or subtopic did you tackle first? What has struck you so far?

At the moment I am thinking about how to give more depth and shape to the theme of integral ecology. The term has quite a diverse history, and sometimes its usage can seem vague and imprecise. I'd like to give it form and focus.

More deeply, I am trying to figure out what it would really mean to shift our paradigm. Pope Francis as well as many others asks that we go through a deep cultural, intellectual and social revolution. We need a new synthesis, a new paradigm. What would that look like? How can it be fostered, practically?

Once I was quite suspicious of this language. It seemed a bit far-fetched, a bit over-the-top. But that has changed. It now seems clear to me that the whole basis on which our civilisation was constructed needs revisiting. We need to step back, to see the pathologies of our civilisation – pathologies of endless consumption, self-absorption, failure to respect our finitude and our earthliness – and ask how we can grow as human beings into something more mature, more grounded, more whole. We need a new way of thinking about ourselves, about what constitutes

a worthwhile life, about what happiness is, about our place in nature, our responsibilities to it and to each other.

That rightly deserves to be called a paradigm shift. But new paradigms cannot just be invented. They need to be discerned through a shared process of listening and enquiry, and a deep openness to the creativity that is always flowing in reality itself.

So that's what I'm doing now: listening, learning, reading, trying to understand – how do we need to see differently, think differently, so that we can live and flourish as creatures of this earth. I don't have any answers. But I do know that we need to learn from those we have traditionally ignored. That means women, especially mothers; it means indigenous communities; it means communities in the global south. And yes, it means listening to animals and plants and ecosystems. They are always speaking, if only we would stop and listen.

But this contemplative receptivity needs to go together with a steely, gritty, fierce determination to apply political pressure to see actual change, especially at the global level. This is a difficult combination to pull off; but that's what we have to do. We really do have to be as wise as serpents and innocent as doves.

The theme of climate change has become politicised and polarised. How do we get out of this?

That is one of the toughest problems. The politicisation of climate change, especially its representation as a cause of the radical left, has been probably the single greatest obstacle to generating shared political will to tackle this problem. I am thinking about this a lot at the moment. We need to reimagine a language of the good, the true and the beautiful that actually unifies; a new vision of human life which crosses the political divide, which people from every political background can recognise themselves in. I think that means we need something like a new humanism. That's another thing I am working on at the moment.

Our theme for this year is “Sabbath life”. A life characterised by rest and connection, at least one day a week. Do you recognise that there is a great need for this?

Desperately. And it's harder than ever. The revolutions in communication and information technologies – smartphones, ChatGPT, AI and chatbots – these are genuine enemies. And I do mean that as strongly as I've said it. These forces deprive us of the very means of our life – real, sustained relationship with one another and with nature. Figuring out how to protect ourselves is a critical imperative right now. I hope Pope Leo will lead us in this.

As individuals, we have to put these technologies in their place in our lives: that is a very restricted, carefully circumscribed place. I hope for a future in which we see that smartphone use, or regularly employing ChatGPT in our ordinary work and leisure lives, is as damaging as smoking. And we have to figure out how to do this as a society as well. An integral ecology is also about this. Our real lives take place in three dimensions, in real space and real time. That's where we need to live, to build our meaning and our identity. If we try to live in the virtual space, we end up not living at all.

We need to fight for our Sabbaths. We mustn't wait to be given them. We need to fight for them. Rest is resistance – resistance to a prevailing paradigm of frenetic activity, constant pressure to

produce, to achieve, to go somewhere or do something. We need to notice that just to be a creature is already enough. We don't have to make ourselves. We are made and given to ourselves. We can dwell gratefully in our creatureliness, to see and give thanks for our own being and all the creatures around us. Not only can we, but we must. This is what makes action possible – not reaction, but true *action*. Because true agency, which is rooted in freedom. The Sabbath makes us free.

The ecological crises can be saddening. What gives you hope?

The ecological crises *should* be saddening. If we do not grieve, we are deceiving ourselves. We all need to find ways to grieve what we are losing. We need practices of mourning and lament; ways we can express our anger, our pain, our grief, our fear. I think this is more important than we know.

But hope is a wellspring that never runs dry. Why? Because true hope is not based on an optimism that things will turn out well. It is based on a faith that the grain of this world, the grain of reality itself, is towards the good; that nothing can extinguish that goodness. That no matter how things go in the coming decades, that goodness is deeper, more enduring. People of faith call this goodness 'God'. It is that which St Paul calls 'the reason for our hope'.

The greatest witnesses to Christian faith have been people who lived a radical hope like this. Dietrich Bonhoeffer is my favourite example. Even when all seemed hopeless, he still witnessed to the possibility of goodness, to human dignity and a sense of purpose and meaning, the worthwhileness of doing what is right - even in the darkest places, and even when it seemed it would make no difference.

This deep goodness of things, which is God, shows itself in our daily lives. We all sense those places where it is close to the surface, where it communicates with us. For me that is in the face of my son Benjamin. When I see Benjamin playing, when I hold him, I feel that inextinguishable beauty of reality; its endless dynamism and freshness. We all need these concrete encounters with the source of hope. For many, it is in their children. For others it is nature, or music, or friendship. And obviously this changes throughout our lives.

Each of us needs to identify those places, the places where we feel real life flowing, the energy of God, if I can put it like that. And stay close to those places.

What message would you like to convey to green churches and people who are committed to this?

Don't give up. Never give up. Never ever give up.