Educating for Ecological Conversion:

An Ecstatic Pedagogy for Christian Higher Education amid Climate Crisis

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Timothy Hanchin and Christy Lang Hearlson

Villanova University

I. Introduction: Reading Wendell Berry in Costco

In an arresting anecdote, Protestant theologian James K.A. Smith writes,

> [a] funny thing happened on the way to the grocery store. I discovered a significant gap between my thought and my action. This hit home to me one day while I was immersed in reading Wendell Berry's delightful anthology, *Bringing it to the Table.* As I paused to reflect on a key point and thus briefly took my nose out of the book, I was suddenly struck by an ugly irony. Here I was reading Wendell Berry in the food court at Costco. There are so many things wrong with that sentence that I don't even know where to begin (Smith 2013, 8).

Smith concludes that while he gave "passionate intellectual assent" to Berry's environmentalist ideas, his actions and habits had not yet been "converted." Underlying his actions and habits, he argues, are deeper orientations to the world and dispositions that must also be converted. Such a conversion process, Smith later suggests, will require "sanctifying perception" (Smith 2013, 8).[1]

In his encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis has called for the *ecological conversion* of the church and of all humanity. This term, used also by Pope John Paul II (Pope John Paul II 2001), has a predecessor in the work of Catholic eco-feminist Rosemary Radford Ruether (Ruether 1993, 91), as well as echoes in the contemporary work of Elizabeth Johnson (Johnson 2014, 259), all of

[1] Admittedly, Smith works with a different set of philosophical and methodological tools than we will use in this essay, but his point about dispositional conversion stands.

whom call upon the biblical idea of *metanoia* to signal the deep change that must occur for the sake of the planet and our fellow creatures. *Metanoia,* variously translated repentance, as well as "transformation, conversion, renewal, and change" is "a process that affects one's entire existence...and that requires far more than just a single or even a repeated act of thinking, feeling or willing" (Ratzinger 1987, 55). Conversion that is ecological thus means, in Elizabeth Johnson's definition, "falling in love with the earth as an inherently valuable, living community in which we participate, and bending every effort to be creatively faithful to its well-being, in tune with the living God who brought it into being and cherishes it with unconditional love" (Johnson 2014, 259). Her definition echoes Francis's description of St. Francis of Assisi:

> Just as happens when we fall in love with someone, whenever [St. Francis] would gaze at the sun, the moon or the smallest of animals, he burst into song, drawing all other creatures into this praise. He communed with all creation… His response to the world around him was so much more than intellectual appreciation or economic calculus, for to him each and every creature was a sister united to him by bonds of affection. That is why he felt called to care for all that exists (Pope Francis 2015, 11).

St. Francis showcases the alternative to Smith's predicament of intellectual appreciation apart from dispositional reorientation. In this view, ecological conversion moves toward *ecstasis*, a way of being both mystically connected to the world and self-transcendent. Arriving at such an ecstatic orientation to the world requires a fundamental change of our basic dispositions, affect, and imagination.

In *Laudato Si',* Francis imagines that individuals and communities might support ecological conversion in others as they undergo it themselves. He calls on "all Christian communities" as well as schools and other institutions to join in the effort of environmental education (Pope Francis 2015, 213–14). In particular, he underscores the role of theological pedagogy in educating for ecological conversion: "Environmental education should facilitate making the leap

towards the transcendent which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning. It needs educators capable of developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care" (Pope Francis 2015, 210). Following this call, this essay suggests ways that Christian higher education might appropriate *Laudato Si*'s call for an ecstatic pedagogy of ecological conversion.

Our proposal for an ecstatic pedagogy of ecological conversion unfolds in three parts: First, we discuss challenges a pedagogy of ecological conversion faces in Christian higher education. Second, with appreciation for prior work by Neil Ormerod and Cristina Vanin on ecological conversion, we introduce Bernard Lonergan's description of conversion in its intellectual, moral, and religious dimensions. Robert Doran augments Lonergan's typology with psychic conversion. We emphasize ecological conversion as psychic, because it deals with the dispositions and orientations that must be transformed for the sake of an ecstatic relationship with the earth. Third, we propose pedagogical strategies that respond to the cultural challenges and instigate or support ecological conversion on the psychic level.

II. Cultural Diagnostics

The effort to support ecological conversion faces challenges in the university setting. Three such features include 1) the place and practice of environmental education in the university, 2) worries about the appropriateness of "conversion" efforts in a university, and 3) consumerism as the dominant cultural-economic system in students' lives (and our own).

1. The Place and Practice of Environmental Education in the University

The discipline of environmental studies has been the primary way in which universities and colleges have sought to respond to the ecological crisis. Every discipline, including those in the liberal arts, can respond substantively to climate change, but instead, study of the environment and the human relationship to it is often quarantined in the hard sciences. As Charles Saylan and Daniel Blumenstein have argued, environmental studies as a hard science is appropriate, but when the hard sciences is the only home of inquiry about ecology, the result is a dominant empirical epistemology and siloed approach, with neglect of other ways of knowing the world or responding to it, as well as a lack of integration across the curriculum (Saylan and Blumenstein 2011). Lamenting what he calls "fast education" that ignores ecologically connected knowledge, David Orr describes "a crisis of mind and perception" in which students cannot see the interconnectedness of their learning, their lives, and planetary crisis (Orr 1994, 95).

For such reasons, environmental educator Richard Kahn calls for eco-pedagogies that more fully integrate ethics, critical politics, literature, and spirituality and religion (Kahn 2010), while C.A. Bowers invites the critical recovery of ancient stories, traditions, and social structures that that escape the modern myths of progress and individualism (Bowers 2001). In addition, nature writers Michael McCarthy (McCarthy 2015) and Robin Kimmerer (Kimmerer 2013) argue for environmental education that awakens the imagination and the heart, and that, in the words of David Orr, helps us "to join intellect with affection and loyalty to the ecologies of particular places" (Orr 1994, 95). This essay aims at such an integrating approach.

2. The Question of Conversion

A second challenge to ecological conversion is concern about the appropriateness of doing anything related to "conversion" at a university. There are three forces at work here. One is the role of commodified education, which reduces education to a transaction in which students trade their efforts for the promise of a lucrative career, rather than pondering difficult questions or being equipped for the work of world-transformation. A second force is a rationalistic approach to education, which worries about the presence of emotion in the classroom and judges all knowledge according to empirical or rationalistic standards. A third force is an understandable concern about the deeply troubling history of conversion efforts. After all, the Christian church's record includes tragic stories of coercion, manipulation, and cultural destruction. As Katherine Turpin has shown, Christian education was historically used not only to educate, but also to maintain racism (Turpin 2017). In light of such a troubling history, is it not arrogance to seek anyone's "conversion" to anything, especially in a university setting, where freedom of thought should be most prized? Such questions demand a longer response, but here we offer two points.

First, transformation of the self and the world is central to the mission of Catholic and Christian higher education. Bernard Prusak, summarizing a host of other thinkers in Catholic higher education, has defended the transformative aims of Catholic education, noting that all education is ultimately formative, a fact we can admit and deal with responsibly (Prusak 2018). Catholic religious educator Thomas Groome has argued that ongoing conversion, which Groome understands with Bernard Lonergan as "a radical turning toward authenticity and self-transcendence" (Groome 1981, 488) is the goal of Christian religious education. Groome expresses the role of the teacher as a "sponsor" of others' conversions: we do not cause

conversion, but with humility, and while undergoing conversion ourselves, we may support others' journey toward a more conscious, loving, and responsible life (Groome 1981, 492).

Second, some who argue most eloquently today for pedagogies that convert people to new ways of seeing and acting have felt the harm of past conversion campaigns. Robin Kimmerer is a Native American botanist whose *Braiding Sweetgrass* beautifully weaves together indigenous wisdom and scientific knowledge. Kimmerer laments the annihilating role of Christian missionaries who eradicated her people's culture, language, and identity. Yet she also argues for education that transforms. She envisions education that cultivates dispositions of gratitude and reverence toward the natural world (Kimmerer 2013, 35), coaches us to hear the "songs" of plants (Ibid 43) teaches the "grammar of animacy" (Ibid 48), trains schoolchildren in grateful reciprocity with the natural world (Ibid 116), replaces the paralysis of despair with the work of restoration (Ibid 328) and invigorates the imagination with "the vision of the economy of the commons" (Ibid 376). She advocates education that alters our affective dispositions, dominant images, and habitual ways of perceiving. Her work suggests that while humility is in order, Christian teachers can justifiably join in the educational efforts she outlines.

3. Consumer Culture

As Smith's example of sitting in Costco suggests, a third challenge to ecological conversion is consumer culture. University students, especially at expensive institutions like the one where we serve, are embedded in consumer culture, where status is linked to acquisition and display of the right consumer goods. Consumer culture militates against the efforts to be more environmentally aware and responsible, for it constantly forms us into habits of overconsumption and waste. This

leads to unacknowledged gaps between personal aspirations and actual practices, so that it is in fact no surprise to find oneself "reading Wendell Berry in Costco."

But the problem goes beyond our personal hypocrisies. We are, in fact, constantly formed not to know or notice realities, not to perceive connections between ourselves and the world of production and waste. Ensconced in a world created by advertising, relative wealth, and the vast distances of the global economy, consumers are protected from the discomfort of knowing too much about the origins of our stuff—often exploited peoples and places—or about its destinations—landfills, waterways, oceans, and incinerators. We are, as William Cavanaugh says, formed in the dominant mood of consumerism: detachment (Cavanaugh 2008, 33ff).

Moreover, if we decide to be attentive to questions about the true costs of consumer goods, the information we desire to know is often hidden. As Tom Beaudoin has described, a phone call to a multinational clothing corporation asking about the manufacture of one's clothes leads to endless evasions and platitudes, even to indignation (Beaudoin 2003, xiii–xiv). The system of late-consumer capitalism is intentionally opaque, confounding attempts to acquire, understand, and evaluate pertinent knowledge, and thus to act responsibly.

III. Psychic Conversion

1. Lonergan and Ecological Conversion

The call to ecological conversion raises questions about how we understand conversion itself, including its dimensions and processes. Here, we argue that Bernard Lonergan's proposal for

conversion, especially as amplified by Robert Doran, equips theological educators with the foundations to support ecological conversion.

Lonergan describes conversion in its intellectual, moral, and religious or affective dimensions (Lonergan 2003, 238–43). The three forms of conversion are integrally related in one process towards self-transcendence. Robert Doran augments Lonergan's description with the addition of psychic conversion, the central concern of this essay. Lonergan provides a rich description of conversion:

> By conversion is understood a transformation of the subject and his world. Normally it is a prolonged process though its explicit acknowledgement may be concentrated in a few momentous judgements and decisions. Still it is not just a development or even a series of developments. Rather it is a resultant change of course and direction. It is as if one's eyes were opened and one's former world faded away and fell away. There emerges something new that fructifies in inter-locking, cumulative sequences of developments on all levels and in all departments of human living (Lonergan 2003, 130).

Conversion, in general, relates a problem of desire to a problem of horizon (Wilkins 2018, 66). Lonergan employs the metaphor of horizon to indicate the limit of one's field of vision. Objects that lie beyond the horizon are not visible, at least currently. The horizon bounds one's knowledge and interests. Within it lie objects of interest and knowledge, while beyond it one knows and cares not. Jeremy Wilkins remarks: "The old self not only does not love the right things; the old self cannot even properly conceive them; they fall outside the horizon, the effective range of openness, interest, and concern" (Wilkins 2018, 66) We think of a student who once wrote that she had never considered environmental concern "her thing," treating it as though it were one among many possible personal interests. As she could not conceive of planetary crisis as a situation in which she was intimately involved, it fell outside her horizon of openness, interest, and concern. Caring about it was someone else's hobby.

As this example demonstrates, we need more than a change of interest. We need an entirely new way of conceiving of the problem and ourselves in relation to it. Following Joseph de Finance, Lonergan thus calls conversion a "vertical exercise of freedom," because it dismantles the previous horizon and establishes a new one, giving life to new desires, new interests and concerns (Lonergan 2003, 237). As our desires and horizon inform each other, conversion entails the gift of a new heart and a new world. Conversion remains an ongoing and precarious process. It almost always occurs incrementally, possibly with dramatic moments, and for most of us it requires continual renewal. Conversion entails deliberately making oneself within the dialectic of "human solidarity in sin" and "divine solidarity in grace which is the mystical body of Christ" (Lonergan 1993, 27). Thus conversion, in addition to being ongoing and precarious, is both personal and communal.

Drawing on Lonergan's categories and *Laudato Si',* Neil Ormerod and Cristina Vanin have approached ecological conversion as intellectual, moral, religious, and, borrowing Robert's Doran's term, psychic (Ormerod and Vanin 2016). Their account enriches *Laudato Si's* description of ecological conversion, which is dominated by conversion's religious dimension (Omerod and Vanin 329). As *intellectual*, ecological conversion confronts the modern crisis of normativity that obscures the affirmation of objectivity in truth and values apart from arbitrary personal preference and the politicization of knowledge. By facilitating the shift from descriptive or 'common-sense' to explanatory knowing, ecological conversion as intellectual demands a more differentiated understanding of the interconnectedness of all things (Ormerod and Vanin

2016, 344). It therefore counters distortions of reality present in our hyper-anthropological culture.

As *moral*, ecological conversion overcomes the paralyzing resistance to the choice of genuine values over self-referential satisfaction (Ormerod and Vanin 2016, 336–334). Deeply ingrained patterns of routine and comfort disregard the ecological impact of human decisions despite overwhelming evidence documenting the resulting destruction of human and non-human life. Ecological conversion as moral considers the delicate ecological balance at stake as humans make themselves socially, culturally, and personally.

As *religious*, ecological conversion expands the scope of our loving to closer approximate the universe. Ormerod and Vanin remark: "Being in love with God opens up the possibility not only of loving God, but of loving *all* that God loves, and loving *as* God loves. Our human knowing has the potential to become unconditional. Religious conversion pushes the boundaries of that unconditionality to include the whole universe" (Ormerod and Vanin 2016, 334). Religious conversion supports the self-sacrificing love required as humans change their ways of living based on uncritical production and consumption to a fundamental gratitude for all that exists. St. Francis of Assisi epitomized ecological conversion as religious in "the inseparable bond between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace" (Pope Francis 2015, 10). As religious, ecological conversion beckons us to universal communion and intimacy, because "God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement" (Pope Francis 2015, 89).

2. Psychic Conversion

While recognizing the interrelatedness of the four dimensions of conversion, in this essay we wish to highlight ecological conversion as psychic, the least developed of the dimensions in Ormerod and Vanin's work (Ormerod and Vanin 2016, 346–49). "Psychic conversion" is Robert Doran's addition to Lonergan's schema. With this term, he builds upon Lonergan's understanding of the pre-conscious psyche that selects which sensations, memories, and images will emerge into consciousness as empirical data for the intentional conscious operations exercised in the process of knowing (Lonergan 2008, 3 of the Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan:192). The conscious operations include: inquiring into the data of our experience in order to understand it, weighing the evidence to determine if the understanding checks out, making judgments, raising questions for deliberation, and executing decisions for action. We would argue that the tacit, unconscious criterion for the psyche's selection of certain sense data is *pertinence:* does this matter? Is it pertinent?[2]

The performance of the intentional operations and the sensitive stream of consciousness, or what Doran calls "the neural undertow" (Doran 2011b), mutually influence one another and can do so constructively. We cannot, after all, pay attention to all sense data; attention thus functions as an important filter, allowing us to think and act upon the world. But our thinking and acting in turn influence what captures our attention, as anyone who has explored a new hobby can attest: the world is suddenly full of butterflies or postage stamps, depending on one's practiced hobby. The constructive role of the psyche, Doran suggests, is evidenced when one habitually performs the

[2] This is distinct from the question of value that emerges later in the conscious operation of judgment.

operations of *intelligent* inquiry and insight, *critical* reflection and judgment, *responsible* deliberation and decision, and love (Doran 2016, 54).

However, the relationship of the conscious operations and the neural undertow can, Doran explains, become pathological, and the psyche can come to function repressively, so that we fail to notice certain sense data. For example, urban dwellers who never experience the brightness of stars against the backdrop of a truly dark sky may cease to wonder about their connection to the cosmos. They may remain blissfully unaware of the effect of light pollution on the vast number of nocturnal species in our environment. Repression can also be a matter of denial, so that when we are presented with information about the planetary crisis, we dismiss it as "just one opinion" or a hoax.

Psychic conversion, according to Doran, reestablishes the constructive connection between the psyche's primordial flow and the existential and intellectual acts that emerge from it. Doran arrives at a definition of psychic conversion "as the transformation of the psychic component of the censorship exercised in our orientation as dramatic subjects – a censorship over images for insight and over concomitant feelings – from a repressive to a constructive role, thus enabling simultaneously the participation of the psyche in the operations of intentionality, and the embodiment of intentionality through the mass and momentum of feeling" (Doran 2016, 63). Doran explains that "the reason for establishing or re-establishing that connection, in terms of authenticity, is that affective self-transcendence is frequently required if we are going to be self-transcendent in the intellectual, moral, and religious dimensions of our living" (Doran 2011a, 6) Psychic conversion thus leverages the psyche's sensitive stream as an ally in the quest for self-

transcendence. It is observable as a shift in one's "dispositional immediacy," that is, in the "disposition or mood or self-taste that accompanies all our intentional operations" (Doran 2011b, 15).

3. Ecological Conversion as Psychic in Omerod and Vanin

The "neural undertow" includes the images that guide us, often outside our conscious awareness. Psychic conversion involves, among other things, unearthing such images, becoming aware of their power, and developing new images that open possibilities for different ways of life. Ormerod and Vanin argue that ecological conversion as psychic, in the first instance, deals with the influence of our own psyches on "the mechanistic image which profoundly affects how we relate to the natural world, and especially the extent to which we regard the natural world as a machine made up of a diversity of parts, each of which we treat instrumentally" (Ormerod and Vanin 2016, 347). This mechanistic image is the result of our alienation from "the rhythms and flows of the natural world" (Ibid). Ecological conversion as psychic signals the shift from entrenched alienation to growing communion with the rhythms of the natural world and with other creatures of the planet, "not to mention with the beauty, awe, and immensity of the story of an unfolding 13.4 billion-year-old universe" (Ibid).

Ecological conversion as psychic, Ormerod and Vanin also explain, entails heightening attentiveness to what we have chronically neglected due to our "alienation from the natural world," an alienation "so extensive that we are not even aware that we are alienated" (Ibid). For example, Ormerod and Vanin cite Thomas Berry, who writes about the alienation of children: "For children to live only in contact with concrete and steel and wires and wheels and machines

and computers and plastics, to seldom experience any primordial reality or even to see the stars at night, is a soul deprivation that diminishes the deepest of their human experiences" (Berry 1999 cited in Ormerod and Vanin, 347). Without such experiences, children do not learn to pay attention to the stars at night in the first place. Psychic conversion is the change in horizon that allows such attentiveness to that which we "habitually disregard" (Ormerod and Vanin 2016, 347), and attentiveness in turn illuminates the new horizon.

Ormerod and Vanin also note that attending to the "rhythms and flows of the natural world" (Ibid) is not reducible to intense solitary excursions into the wild. Rather, urban contexts daily present opportunities to connect with the natural world in the mundanity of our lives. They cite Lyanda Lynn Haupt, who reminds us that "it is in our everyday lives, in our everyday homes, that we eat, consume energy, run the faucet, compost, flush, learn and *live*. It is here, *in our lives*, that we must come to know our essential connection to the wilder earth..." (Haupt 2009, 13 cited in Ormerod and Vanin, 348). Attending to the natural world in our midst quickens psychic conversion by "overcom[ing] alienation and reestablish[ing] connections between our psyches and our intellectual and moral operations" (Ormerod and Vanin 2016, 348). Ormerod and Vanin conclude their description of ecological conversion as psychic by citing *Laudato Si'*: "'We can come to feel the close bonds of universal communion and know, intellectually *and* affectively, that 'nature cannot be regarded as something separate from ourselves...we are part of nature, included in nature, in constant interaction with it'" (Pope Francis 2015, 139 cited in Ormerod and Vanin, 349). In this essay we use the term 'ecstatic' to highlight this relational quality as a fruit of ecological conversion, particularly in its psychic dimension.

4. Theological Perspectives on Psychic Conversion: Incarnation and Trinity

Working from a Christian perspective informed by the historic Christian tradition and by contemporary eco-feminism, we wish to frame theologically the experience of ecological conversion in the psychic dimension. As Ormerod and Vanin hint in their observation that we "habitually disregard" the natural world (Ormerod and Vanin 2016, 347), we argue that psychic conversion of whatever sort poses the question: "What am I attending to?" Underlying our attending is a criterion of *pertinence*: we do not pay attention to that which we assume has no bearing.[3] In its ecological form, psychic conversion reveals the pertinence of our relationship with the biotic family and calls us to attend to it. When psychic conversion is *Christian* and *ecological*, the attention we give to the natural world is a divine gift enlivened by the Holy Spirit that unfolds in relation to the *incarnation* of God in Christ and the *Trinity*.

Christian tradition celebrates the incarnation of God in Christ. In light of the incarnation, attention to the natural world becomes a form of attention to God. Elizabeth Johnson (Johnson 2015; 2014), Celia Deane Drummond (Drummond 2009), and Denis Edwards (Edwards 2014) have developed the notion of "deep incarnation," as coined by Niels Henrik Gregersen (Gregersen 2010). Deep incarnation takes its cues from the gospel writer John's claim that the Word became *flesh* (Jn 1:14), not simply human, and thus, extends "into the very tissue of biological existence, and system of nature" (Gregersen 2001). Their vision of deep incarnation echoes St. John Paul II: "The incarnation of God the Son signifies the taking up into unity with God not only of human nature, but in this human nature, in a sense, of everything that is 'flesh': the whole of humanity, the entire visible and material world" (Pope John Paul II 1986, 50).

[3] Again, pertinence is distinct from value, which Lonergan says we evaluate at the level of judgment. Pertinence is simply the criterion by which something emerges into our consciousness.

Inspired by Gregory of Nazianzus' axiom that "what is not assumed is not redeemed," deep incarnation encompasses Jesus' solidarity with the material conditions of all biological life forms and the sense experience of creatures. Johnson writes, "The flesh assumed in Jesus Christ connects with all humanity, all biological life, all soil, the whole matrix of the material universe down to its very roots" (Johnson 2014, 196). Psychic conversion redirects our attention to the pertinent reality of this interconnected matrix.

Lest "deep incarnation" separate the mystical work of the Trinity from the economy of salvation in history, we also look to the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. In *Laudato Si'*, Francis points to Jesus' way of attending to the natural world: "The Lord was able to invite others to be attentive to the beauty that there is in the world because he himself was in constant touch with nature, lending it an attention full of fondness and wonder" (Pope Francis 2015, 197). Taking Jesus as model, the psychic dimension of Christian ecological conversion consists in attending to the world as Christ attended, which, as Francis notes, means practicing the preferential option for the poor *and* the earth.

Likewise, Elizabeth Johnson forwards the "christic paradigm," as developed by Sallie McFague. The christic paradigm attends to the life and ministry of Jesus in history as divine revelation, concluding that "liberating, healing, and inclusive love is the meaning of it all" (McFague 1993 cited in Johnson 2014, 201). Such love, Johnson, argues, must extend to the earth. She thus proposes "deep ministry" as the pastoral manifestation of deep incarnation (Johnson 2015, 143–45). Deep ministry begins in Jesus' particular concern for the poor and marginalized and extends that concern to the exploited earth. This extension finds a reflection in *Laudato Si'*, in which

Francis urges an integral ecology that links love of neighbor and care for the earth as mutual expressions of love for God (Pope Francis 2015, 10).

Ecological conversion as psychic is also *Trinitarian*. Noting that the world is "created according to the divine model" of Trinitarian relations, and calling on Bonaventure's claim that the whole world and each creature bear the imprint of the Trinity, Francis writes, "[T]hroughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven relationships" (Pope Francis 2015, 240). He adds, "Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity" (Ibid). To perceive such interconnectedness is not necessarily easy, a fact that Bonaventure attributed to sin. Yet, Francis notes, we are still challenged to "read reality in a Trinitarian key" (Ibid 239).

A change in the way we "read reality" is a change at the level of the psyche; it is a call for psychic conversion. Ecological conversion on the psychic level demands that we repudiate ways of reading reality that allow us to damage creation without considering the consequences. Instead, pondering our own attention, we begin to ask about every action and item, "To what else is this connected, and how, and what does such connection have to do with the way I now live?" This new way of living becomes *ectastic* insofar as it invites us into self-transcendence, recognition of the interconnectedness of reality, and joy in the beauty of God's creation.

IV. Pedagogical Suggestions

We wager that a majority of theological educators in higher education today, including the authors of this essay, share the predicament of James Smith. We unequivocally affirm the truth

articulated in *Laudato Si'*, but we continue to use the McDonald's drive-thru. This is likewise the quandary of our students at large. The foregoing account of ecological conversion outlined the philosophical and theological foundations for a pedagogy that invites healing into our fractured relationship with the biotic family. Above we noted two major elements involved in the psychic dimension of ecological conversion: 1) the establishment of a reflective discourse between the psychic flow and the conscious operations so that we can attend more responsibly to our sense data and 2) the shift in desire and horizon so that we come to see what we previously did not, so that we recognize what has been actively hidden from us by forces such as consumer culture, or what we simply could not see due to our social location or historical, cultural context. We now present "ectastic" pedagogical suggestions that may promote ecological conversion as psychic and contribute to St. Francis' self-transcendent union with the cosmic world.

1. *Reestablishing Connections*

If ecological conversion on the psychic level involves establishing the inner connection between the psychic flow and the intentional conscious operations, what pedagogical approaches might support this connection? In *Women's Ways of Knowing,* Mary Field Belenky urge what they call "connected teaching." In connected teaching, the teacher confirms the student as 'independent, a subject'" (Belenky et al. 1997, 224). We would add that it is also important to acknowledge students as "feelers." They do not merely *know.* Acknowledging and dealing with feeling is important to healing the pathological rifts or imbalances between our psychic flow (our images, emotions, sensations, memories, desires) and our intentional conscious operations (our understanding, inquiring, evaluating, and acting).

In a rationalistic classroom, we fear emotion and seek to dampen it. But in a connected classroom, feelings can be a source of knowledge, a motivator to know more, and an object of reflection. Strong feelings are in fact a healthy response to overwhelming stories of environmental and species destruction. Yet in college classrooms, students are often asked to move on quickly from their feelings about the situation to analysis of the problems. We contend that education for ecological conversion on the psychic level must encourage students to notice their feelings and reflect upon them.

One of us has developed an exercise for a freshman class to facilitate this process of inner reconnection. In this course, students read the devastating stories of oppressed workers around the world and also see news stories and documentaries about the environmental destruction in which consumer culture is complicit. These stories increase emotional engagement, but they can also lead to paralysis. Often strong emotions are accompanied by strong statements, such as, "What can we do?!" or "It's hopeless." Hearing such statements, the educator announces that a thought has flown through the room and writes two columns on the board labeled "Thoughts" and "Feelings." Writing down the words a student has just said ("What can we do?"), the educator then asks the students to consider what feelings accompany this question. Students respond: Guilt. Fear. Anger. Impatience. Discouragement. The class further talks about the relationship between emotions and thoughts and the relation of both to our action in the world. The goal is to help students bind up the rift between their feelings and conscious operations, as well as to equip them to take responsibility for the unfolding relationship between psyche and conscious operations.

As we noted above, psychic conversion also involves unearthing the images that guide us and developing new images that open possibilities for different ways of life. A second exercise used in the above-mentioned class is aimed at unearthing such dominant images. Near the beginning of the course, students are asked to draw a picture of themselves "living a good life." The students, mostly freshmen, often draw pictures of a large house, a small family, sometimes a lucrative job, and frequently the symbols of expensive leisure activities. Together, the class analyzes these pictures: Who is in them? What activities are represented? What resources are being used? Students note that our pictures of a good life tend to be centered on personal gratification. Through such an exercise, we unearth the subterranean images that establish us as unreflecting consumers. Such excavation makes way for replacement images that might guide us.

Laudato Si' offers the "replacement image" of interconnectedness. Pedagogies of ecological conversion as psychic can help students see the interconnectedness of the world. One of us asks students in an introductory theology course to trace the origin of one mass-produced item they own. In the process, students discover a vast web of economic, labor, and resource relationships that intersect in them as a consumer, a web on which we then reflect ethically and theologically. Fiction can also help students perceive connections that might not otherwise be apparent, as well as affect them emotionally. Barbara Kingsolver's novel *Flight Behavior* is a good choice, offering a story of one woman's journey into ecological consciousness (Kingsolver 2012). The novel makes visible the strands that connect human behavior to species survival, as well as the connections of family, community, nation, and culture in a specific place. Reading such works allows students to reflect on the connections of their own world.

2. Changing Horizons

Psychic conversion, as an aspect of ecological conversion, is also a change in horizon so that we can see what we did not see before. To support this shift, Omerod and Vanin recommend increasing our attentiveness to the natural world—an attentiveness the educator can support. But the choice to pay attention at all is based on a prior noticing. If something seems immaterial or unimportant to us, we are unlikely to attend to it, and if, as in the case in consumer culture, many of the world's realities are actively hidden from us, we will never consider certain facts or questions at all. Thus a second pedagogy for changing horizons is *encounter*, in which the educator invites learners to discover what they had previously failed to notice. Encounter challenges living at its very roots. Lonergan adds, "Encounter is the one way in which self-understanding and horizon can be put to the test" (Lonergan 2003, 247).

Above we noted that the preferential option for the poor and the earth instantiates Christ's "deep ministry." In a world structured towards severe economic inequality that inevitably distorts the disinterested desire to know and limits our horizon, the preferential option for the poor and earth creates the conditions for the possibility of ecological conversion (Gutiérrez 1988). The option, as expressed through our attentiveness, invites us to encounter those who do their knowing, deciding and loving within distinct horizons marked by the experience of poverty or oppression.

Encounters with the poor and the exploited earth can reveal our tacit anthropological, cosmological, and moral assumptions, inevitably informed by biases, which order our horizon. Rohan Curnow highlights Robert Doran's innovation of psychic conversion as an expression of the option for the poor: "In psychic conversion, the images for needed insights, subsequent

judgments, and decisions, are admitted to consciousness, along with the appropriate concomitant feelings that function to reinforce intentional operations" (Curnow 2012, 146). James Marsh adds the category of political conversion as a "more consistent expression of the option for the poor. The true God is not a God that protects and legitimizes the bourgeoise status quo, but a God that liberates us from such a status quo – Jesus Christ the Liberator" (Marsh 2014, 126). If a middle-class or wealthy student enters into the world of the poor with honesty, he or she is more likely to radically question the habits of the heart that inform the identity of North American upwardly mobile subjects informed by a culture of bourgeois individualism. Speaking from the perspective of the privileged, Dean Brackley explains:

> Letting the poor crash through our defenses usually provokes a wholesome crisis that leaves us shaken and disoriented. If we stay with the poor – listening, observing, interacting – our horizon opens. Our worldview gets reconfigured. What is really important (life itself and love) moves from the margins toward the center of the canvas, displacing what is less important (Brackley 2008, 6).

It follows that education for ecological conversion should include such encounters with others and the earth—especially encounters that clarify the devastation and vulnerability of the earth—as integral to its curriculum.

Encounter can happen face-to-face, through interviews, field trips, and travel. But encounters can also be virtual and include documentaries, news stories, and fiction. For example, one of us asks students to watch the documentary *The True Cost*, which is about the effects of the fashion industry on workers and the environment (Morgan 2015). Through the film, students "meet" garment workers in Bangladesh, a Texas organic cotton farmer, and activists for ethical fashion. Having watched this moving film, students often remark that they suddenly recognize the *reality* of workers on the other side of the world—these are real people, with real lives and desires.

Students also note a change in their own desires: suddenly, the cute, cheap consumer item seems so much less appealing. Here, we discern the beginnings of psychic conversion: students begin to see the situation of poor and oppressed people, as well as the plight of the earth, as bearing on their own lives. From there, they begin to pay attention, to ask questions, to evaluate situations, and to make decisions to act.

V. Conclusion: An Ecstatic Pedagogy

The climate crisis is the greatest existential threat and most pressing moral issue of our time, and responding adequately to it will require fundamental change. The mission of Christian universities obligates them to respond to this crisis with an education that transfigures our relationship with the biotic family. Ecological conversion entails an existential shift from a relationship with the earth marked by possessive, wasteful consumption to one marked by delight in creation, concern for its suffering, and preservation of this divine gift. We must understand, feel, and behave as though *everything is connected*. Such a conversion toward *ecstasis*, which is always a mystery beyond any educator's power to produce, finds support in teaching strategies that heal inner connections and enable encounter. Through such means, the Spirit may transform our fundamental orientations and dispositions towards self-transcendent union with the earth.

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