

Ecological Spiritual Conversion

After having perused the study guide for the book *Christ in Crisis*, the book seems to be a response to the current political climate and a call to bring Christ, through reading, prayer and scripture back into issues of social justice. It will certainly be a good springboard into a discussion of what ecological spiritual conversion requires.

Ecological spirituality requires changes in spiritual practice. Michael Buckley's response in his book to Laudato Si, Judy Cannato's ideas on how the new cosmology is transforming spirituality and Ilia Delio's discussion of St. Francis' spiritual conversion and the "theology" behind his "Canticle" inform "my" definition of ecological "spiritual conversion".

Cannato, in *Fields of Compassion*, says that modern scientific discoveries have created a narrative called the Universe Story. She explains scientific truths uncovered by astrophysicists and quantum physicists and finds hope for our species if we accept that the universe is a single evolutionary process, dynamic and organic, of which we are a part. No one thing is separate from the whole. Our connectedness is so essential that the movement of one part affects the whole.

In essence, if we are to make an ecological spiritual conversion, we need to learn about the new science and become part of what she calls "a newly emergent consciousness." We must study self dissolution that leads to self transcendence. Knowing, really knowing that we are part of a single organic whole must integrate with living differently, participating in our own evolution.

In addition, she defines and explains the concept of morphogenetic fields operating within and around us. Furthermore, she demands that we must participate consciously in strengthening the morphogenic field of the new consciousness. She explains, "As we evolve, as our consciousness grows, so does our understanding of the ground of our being, that which we call God....it is through understanding the fundamental unity of the material and spiritual dimensions that we can understand the unity of all created things." She quotes Robert Thurman, "by transforming our consciousness, we participate in the transformation of the world. She claims that through meditation we can best transform our consciousness.

She concedes that it is difficult to respond to the environmental crisis of our time, but she insists that we must actively focus on it, make choices and make sacrifices in doing so.

* * * * *

In a chapter in one of his books entitled, "Ecological Education and Spirituality", Buckley identifies the problem that brought us to our climate change crisis. He says, "We lack awareness of our common origin, of our mutual belonging and of a future that belongs to everyone. Developing our awareness will enable us to develop new convictions and attitudes to meet a cultural and spiritual challenge that will start us on a long path to renewal".

He explains that consumerism leads to a feeling of instability and uncertainty, which leads to greed and selfishness. Our obsession with a consumerist lifestyle is not attainable for all and leads to violence and mutual destruction.

He reminds us, however, that no system can completely suppress our openness to what is good and beautiful. He further states, "Purchasing is always a moral- and not simply economic act." We need to overcome individualism and assess the impact of our every act and personal decision.

He explains that to overcome consumerism, we need to debunk our myths of modernity in America (individualism, unlimited progress, competition, consumerism and the unregulated market.)

We need to teach how to develop ecological ethics and create ethological citizenship. Making moral choices such as eliminating plastic can be seen as an act of love which expresses our own dignity. These ethics need to be taught within the family. Ecological citizenship requires a change in thinking about human beings, life, society and our relationship with nature.

Buckley insists we need to become "protectors of God's handiwork, and this is essential to a life of virtue and is not optional or a secondary aspect of being a Christian. But, this also requires community conversion.

* * * * *

In her book, *The Humility of God*, Delio explains that Francis' encounter with the crucified Christ in the brokendown church of SanDamiano so impressed him that his life radically changed. He was able to turn away from self concern and from the ego's grasp and pass over into the infinite goodness of God. As a result, he found his identity in God and others. Francis likewise came to see the love of the crucified Christ impressed on every level of creation. God's creation became his family. St. Francis was able to realize relationship with others and creation because of his intimate relationship with Christ.

From there, she goes on to discuss "The Canticle". "Although it is not apparent to the reader, this is a hymn of cosmic incarnation. The song is enclosed by the mystery of God humbly bent down in love for creation. The Most High bends to embrace each and every element of creation in and through the Word incarnate, Jesus Christ."

She then quotes Kathy Warren. "Humans do not appear in the first nine verses because they do not enjoy this harmony. They are weak, limited and vulnerable and live in division. To be part of the song of creation, is to accept the human condition and its weaknesses, to pardon, forgive and accept the suffering that is part of being human. Those who follow this path of reconciliation are freed from their blindness and can see the presence of the Most High in the simple things of creation."

She references Duns Scotus who called us to be aware of "thisness", what makes something "this and not "that". He called us to see things for what they truly are in their individual creation, each uniquely loved into being by the humble love of God.

Delio puts it this way. "When we can read the language of creation, then we know the love that God has for us."

So, how do we make an ecological spiritual conversion?

1. Take small steps to change our practices and prioritize caring for our common home.
2. Practice gratitude; it's essential. Try a gratitude journal. Or, keep a small pad of paper near your bed, and before going to sleep, write down 5 things from the day for which you are grateful. Read them at the end of each week to see how richly you have been blessed. Or keep a large glass Ball canning jar in your kitchen. In the morning when you pray, write on small paper slips blessings from the previous day. Wad them into a small ball and fill the jar! No time to write? When you are standing in line to check out, waiting at a traffic light, stuck in traffic...think of as many blessings as you can
3. Study new science that leads to the Universe Story.
4. Read more from Buckly, Cannato and Delio and others and discuss with a group.
5. Create a deep and loving awareness that we aren't disconnected from other creatures. This means all of nature and each creature reflects something of God and has a message for us.
6. Simplify, in what we own and do to be extremely present to small things, knowing that when you are fully present, you realize God has created this just for you.
7. Become spiritually detached from our things. (Practice one thing in - one thing out rule). Get rid of things that don't bring you joy.
8. Develop healthy humility and accept the human condition, its weakness and its suffering.
9. Become more contemplative and develop balance and inner peace by practicing meditation or centering prayer as a part of your daily routine.
10. Become less distracted and focus on nature to look for and uncover the presence of the Creator in our world. Spend more time in nature. Consider this a form of prayer.
11. Practice social love, to live together and promote a culture of care. Pray for the grace to take risks to try new ways in which to engage with people. Pray for all you meet, including those who are difficult to love.
12. Be open to hearing when God is calling us to intervene, recognizing this action as part of our spirituality.
13. Realize that The Eucharist joins Heaven and Earth and is a source of motivation for our concerns for the environment. Participate in Eucharist often. Attend more than Sunday mass.

14. Make Sunday a day of rest in which we can become receptive to what God is telling us in our inactivity. We can go out in nature and become reflective on it; similarly, we can volunteer to limit the effects of climate change on the poor.
15. Read/ discuss to understand what St. Francis meant when he said, "each creature bears in itself a specifically Trinitarian structure".
16. Enter into relationship with creatures. Participate in animal rescue. Donate blankets and food to pet shelters.
17. Rethink our American values of: individualism, unlimited progress, competition and consumerism and the need to project ourselves onto the other. Speak with others about the need to rethink these in relation to what we know God is acting of us.
18. Practice generosity. Consider joining our team or participate in our sponsored events. Volunteer to do one small thing in preparation for or post events.
19. Maintain joy and hope. Visit gardens and sit for a few minutes to see joy and hope. There are two on the All Saints campus as well as many beautiful plantings all around the grounds. Or visit a grotto at Holy Family or St. Joe's in Camillus. Take a walk in one of our state parks or forests. Visit a waterfalls.
20. Pray for inspiration and strength.