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A PROPHETIC VOICE: THOMAS BERRY

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Introduction

Whenever Thomas Berry looks out over the Hudson River from his home at the Riverdale Center for Religious Research, he experiences anew "the gorgeousness of the natural world." The Earth brings forth a display of beauty in such unending profusion, a display so overwhelming to human consciousness, he says, that "we might very well speak of it as being dreamed into existence."

But this passionist priest and cultural historian - who calls himself a geologist - also reflects on the disastrous damage humans have wrought on the Earth. What is happening today is unprecedented, it is not just another change, he says. We are changing the very structure of the planet. We are even extinguishing many of the major life systems that have emerged in the 65 million years of this, the Cenozoic period - a period that has witnessed a spectrum of wonders, including the development of flowers, birds, and insects, the spreading of grasses and forests across the land, and the emergence of humans.

The Earth is changing, and we ourselves, integral aspects of the Earth, are being changed, he says. Religion must now function within this context, at this order of magnitude. But Western religion has been assuming little or no responsibility for the state or fate of the planet. Theology has become dysfunctional.

As a member of a Roman Catholic order, Berry directs much of his criticism at the tradition he knows best, Christianity. But his intention is to address people of any belief, and his searching mind and wide acquaintance with Chinese, Indian, Southeast Asian, Native American, and other cultures - indeed, the entire pageant of cultural history - make him catholic in the, non-sectarian sense of the term. His whole lifetime has been devoted to pursuing an understanding of the human condition and the condition of other beings on this planet.

Of course, he is thinking of present-day human beings who live under the spell of Western culture when he writes: "We have lost our sense of courtesy toward the Earth and its inhabitants, our sense of gratitude, our willingness to recognize the sacred character of habitat, our capacity for the awesome, for the numinous quality of every earthly reality." For Berry, the capacity for intensive sharing with the natural world lies deep within each of us, but has become submerged by an addiction to "progress." Arrogantly we have placed ourselves above other

creatures, deluding ourselves with the notion that we always know best what is good for the Earth and good for ourselves. Ultimately, custody of the Earth belongs to the Earth.

In the past, the story of the universe has been told in many ways by the peoples of the Earth, but today we are without one that is comprehensive. What is needed is nothing short of a new creation story, a new story of the universe, he asserts. Creation must be perceived and experienced as the emergence of the universe as both a psychic-spiritual and material-physical reality from the very beginning.

Human beings are integral with this emergent process. Indeed, the human is that being in whom the universe reflects on and celebrates itself in the deep mysteries of its existence in a special mode of conscious self-awareness.

Everything tells the story of the universe - the wind, trees, birds, stones. They are our cousins. Today it is harder to hear them. Berry has concentrated over the years on listening to the story told by the physical sciences, the story narrated by human cultures, the story recounted through cave paintings, visions of shamans, the pyramids of the Egyptians and Mayans. Each narrative is unique. But ultimately, they all tell the same story too.

We need a narrative that will demonstrate that every aspect of the universe is integral with a single organic whole, he insists. Its primary basis is the account of the emergent universe as communicated through our observational sciences. The universe as we know it today not only has cyclical modes of functioning, but also irreversible sequential modes of transformations. From the beginning of human consciousness, all cultures experienced the cyclical modes: the ever-renewing sequence of seasons, of life and death. But today scientists and some others have begun to move from that dominant spatial mode of consciousness to a dominant time-developmental mode, time as an evolutionary sequence of irreversible transformations. We are beginning to recognize that our might can do temporal damage that is also eternal damage.

The new narrative will encompass a new type of history, a new type of science, a new type of economics, a new mode of awareness of the divine - in the very widest sense, a new kind of religious sensitivity. Such ideas as these do not always sit well with traditional Christians, nor with the followers of some other religions.

We realized on our first meeting with him at the Riverdale Center that Berry does not fit the common image of a nonconformist. A man with a gentle smile, bright eyes, and tousled whitening hair opened the door of the three storey brown house and introduced himself simply as "Tom Berry." It was a little hard to imagine that this retiring man, dressed in an old shirt and subdued in his speech, could write so passionately of the dance, song, poetry, and drumbeats through which human beings have expressed their exultation and sense of par-

ticipating in the universe as a single community. He led us through the inside of the house, which appeared to be one vast library with special collections of books, many in original languages, on Hindu, Confucian, Buddhist, Shinto, and Native American cultures. He then seated us on the plant-filled sun-veranda overlooking the Hudson. Despite his shy manner, he responded easily to our questions, and sometimes took the initiative.

Noticing that our eyes had been drawn to the majestic red oak outside the window, he told us that it had endured more than four hundred years of Nature's buffets, and had withstood even human-made disasters, like the massive tremors from a gas tank explosion that uprooted its fellow oak several years ago. To him it stood as a symbol of hope. Indeed, it was to this tree that he had dedicated *The Dream of the Earth*: "To the Great Red Oak, beneath whose sheltering branches this book was written."

As we listened, occasionally looking across the river at the Palisades, we sensed that the Riverdale Center, set in the valley that had witnessed a story that included the emergence of the Palisades, the appearance of trees and birds and bears, then the long habitation by Native Americans is a fitting place to contemplate the fate of the Earth. It seemed fitting, too, that scientists, educators, environmentalists, and people of many faiths from all over the world could gather here, in small groups, to dream a new vision of the Earth into being.

Although clearly reticent about personal matters, he told us that his own life story began in 1914 in Greensboro, North Carolina. The third of thirteen children in a middle-class Catholic family, he managed to develop a congenial relationship with his parents, but at the same time a certain distance.

This trait of distance, combined with a growing attachment to the land, surfaced often as he talked of his boyhood. The family had a horse, cow, chickens, and dogs; he felt close to the animal world. He often roamed the hills alone, except for the companionship of a collie, sensing the freedom of the woodlands and delighting in the clear streams, the songs of the birds, the subtle smells of the meadows. "But even at the age of eight," he recalled, "I saw that development was damaging Nature. At nine, I was collecting catalogues for camping equipment, canoes, knives, all the things I'd need to live in the Northwest forest. I felt the confrontation between civilization and wilderness, and I was acting on it."

At nineteen, Berry went on, he decided to enter a religious community that would offer the best opportunity for contemplation and writing. He wanted to "get away from the trivial." Sometimes he has wondered how he got through religious life, but he did, and yet managed to maintain that certain distance between himself and the establishment all the way.

After ten years in various monasteries, he pursued a doctorate in history at Catholic University in Washington, D.C., then spent a year studying Chinese in

Peking. After teaching at the Passionist seminary college, he became a chaplain with NATO in Germany; traveled in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East; and went to England to meet the distinguished historian of cultures, Christopher Dawson, who had helped awaken him to the role of religion as a powerful factor in shaping culture. Later he taught Japanese history at Seton Hall University, helped found a seminar on Oriental thought and religion at Columbia University and an Asian Institute at St. John's University, built up Fordham University's history of religions program, and for eleven years served as president of the American Teilhard Association. During these years he continued his search to discover out how people find meaning in life. Always drawn to Native Americans because of their sense of integrity and freedom, their bond with the riches of nature, he came to know many, including Sioux chief Lame Deer, Onondagan leader Oren Lyons, and the poet Paula Gunn Allen. He continued his studies of history and philosophy, and aided by knowledge of Sanskrit and Chinese, deepened his exploration of Eastern religious traditions. Over the years he also published a large number of papers and books on subjects ranging from Buddhism to the religions of India, the creative role of the elderly, the spiritual transformation of Carl Jung, and the thought of Teilhard de Chardin. Philosophers ranging from Confucius to Thoreau and Bergson; poet/visionaries extending from Dante to Blake and Chief Seattle; ecologists and scientists from Rachel Carson and Ilya Prigogine to Anne and Paul Ehrlich, all came to influence his conception of the Earth Community.

"But Teilhard had the greatest influence on what might be called your ecological vision?"

"Yes. As a paleontologist as well as philosopher, he had a grasp of the need for healing the rift between science and religion. I would say that he appreciated the important role of science as a basic mystical discipline of the West. He was the first great thinker in the modern scientific tradition to describe the universe as having a psychic-spiritual as well as a physical-material dimension from the very beginning. Teilhard had a comprehensive vision of the universe in its evolutionary unfolding. He saw the human as inseparable from the history of the universe. Also, he was keenly aware of the need in Western religious thought to move from excessive concern with redemption to greater emphasis on the creation process."

"And Teilhard's thought inspired you to delve into science?"

He nodded. "I needed some general knowledge of geology, astronomy, physics, other sciences. But I must emphasize that in an ecological age, Teilhard's framework has its limitations. Remember, he died in 1955. He believed in technological 'progress,' and saw the evolutionary process as concentrated in the human, which would ultimately achieve super-human status. He could not understand humans' destructive impact on the Earth. When others pointed it out, he could not see it. Science would discover other forms of life! Well, his work remains tremendously important. The challenge is to extend Teilhard's

principal concerns further, to help light the way toward an Ecozoic Age.”

”Teilhard posed the greatest challenge of our time: to move from the spatial mode of consciousness to the historical, from being to becoming. The Church finds difficulty in recognizing the evolution of the Earth. For a long time it wouldn’t accept even the evolution of animal forms. To this day there is no real acceptance of our modern story of the universe as sacred story. As a child I was taught by the catechism that the Earth was created in seven days, 5000 years ago. There was no sense of developmental, transformative time in the natural world.”

”And the church, as so often, is behind the times instead of leading?”

He looked at us for a long moment. ”There is some concern, of course, but it does not go far enough,” he said slowly. ”The Vatican, for example, makes vague statements on being careful about the environment, but there is emphasis on making the natural world useful to human beings. So far, the most impressive Catholic bishops’ statement comes from the Philippines. It’s called ’What is Happening to our Beautiful Land?’”

Over lunch we learned more about the ever-widening scope of Thomas Berry’s activities and about some of the people who are helping to carry out his work. He told us that on occasion he spoke at New York’s Cathedral of St. John the Divine, which has become the most ecologically-minded church that he knows of, largely because of the enthusiasm of its Dean, James Parks Morton. He speaks on occasion at gatherings at Genesis Farm, a religiously-based center seeking to develop a model of bioregional community; at the California-based Institute in Culture and Creation Spirituality, headed by radical priest Matthew Fox; and at Grailville, an educational center and laywoman’s community stressing ecological living. He also has spoken at Au Sable Institute where practical and theoretical programs in ecology are integrated with biblical studies. He has participated in many conferences, including the seminal 1988 meeting of the North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology, the first (1988) Global Conference of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders on Human Survival, and international gatherings in Costa Rica at the United Nations University for Peace. He helped the Holy Cross Center in Port Burwell, Ontario build an institution for spirituality and ecology. In Puebla, Mexico, a Jesuit group has founded the Institute for Ecological Personalism, based on his ideas. Letters come in continually from people in countries all over the Earth.

During the afternoon our talks continued, touching on animism, Taoism, and Buddhism, as well as Buddhist ideas for human habitats, which Berry considered models of ecological functioning because they disturb the natural world very little.

Pulling the Strands of Berry's Thought Together

Since that day we have met Berry several times, studied his more recent writings, and gradually gained a clearer picture of the transforming vision he presents.

In 1988 Berry brought out a collection of his essays in a volume entitled *The Dream of the Earth*. In 1991 he and Jesuit priest Thomas Clarke published a dialogue, *Befriending the Earth: a Theology of Reconciliation Between Humans and the Earth*, which had appeared as a thirteen-part series on Canadian television. Years earlier, in 1982, he teamed up with Brian Swimme to begin a decade of work on a daring venture: *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era*.

Their partnership has been an unusual one. Swimme, a physicist and a mathematical cosmologist, is younger, and lives thousands of miles away, on the West Coast. Brian Swimme's early book is entitled *The Universe is a Green Dragon*. Now they have written the story of the universe as a single comprehensive narrative of the sequence of transformations that the universe has experienced. Grounded in present-day scientific understanding, it parallels the mythic narratives of the past as they were told in poetry, music, painting, dance, and ritual. Nothing quite like this coupling of science and human history has been published before. It appeared in 1992.

Planet Earth is surely a mysterious planet, say Swimme and Berry. One need only observe how much more brilliant it is than other planets of our solar system in the diversity of its manifestations and the complexity of the joy of its development. Earth appears to have developed with the simple aim of celebrating the joy of existence.

Through this story, they hope that the human community will become present to the larger Earth community in a mutually enhancing way. Our role is to enable Earth and the entire universe to reflect on and celebrate itself in a special mode of conscious self awareness. We have become desensitized to the glories of the natural world and are making awesome decisions without the sense of awe and humility commensurate with their impact. We need a new mystique as we move into the Ecozoic era, and this process will need the participation of all members of the planetary community.

The various living and nonliving members of the Earth community have a common genetic line of development, the authors tell us. It begins with the Beginning: the primordial Flaring Forth of the universe some 15 billion years ago. It starts as stupendous energy, and evolves into gravitational, strong nuclear, weak nuclear, and electromagnetic interactions. Before a millionth of a second has passed, the particles stabilize. From this point we are carried through the seeding of galaxies, and the appearance of galactic clouds, primal stars, the first elements, supernovas, and galaxies. These are magnificent spiraling moments,

carrying the destiny of everything that followed. They are moments of grace. Some five billion years ago the solar system forms, and a billion years later, the living Earth. We travel through the Paleozoic Era (in which vertebrates, jawed fishes, and insects appear); the Mesozoic Era (witnessing the first dinosaurs, birds, and mammals), and the Cenozoic (beginning with the emergence of the first rodents and bats, and carrying through to the arrival of various orders of mammals and humans, up to today.

After the emergence of the first humans, *Homo habilis*, some 2.6 million years ago, the new species evolves to *Homo erectus*, and then to *Homo sapiens*, with its marvelous new gifts of expression - ritual burials at first, then language, musical instruments, cave paintings, and other skills and artifacts that we associate with human civilization. *Homo sapiens* evolved through periods of the Neolithic village, classical civilizations, the rise of nations, and the "modern revelation."

The latter refers to a new awareness of how the ultimate mysteries of existence are being manifested in the universe. This revelation, a gradual change from a dominant spatial mode of consciousness to perception of the universe as an irreversible sequence of transformations, might be called a change from "cosmos" to ever-evolving "cosmogogenesis". It can be seen as beginning with the discoveries of Copernicus, and embracing those of Kepler, Galileo, Francis Bacon, Descartes, Newton, Kant, Darwin, Einstein, Whitehead, Teilhaul, Rachel Carson, and many other scientists and philosophers.

Throughout the book the two men write from a unified point of view as they present some cardinal principles. Among them, that the birth of the universe was not an event in time; time begins simultaneously with the birth of existence. There was no "before," and there was no "outside." All the energy that would ever exist erupted as a single existence. The stars that later would blaze, the lizards that would crawl on the land, the actions of the human species, would be powered by the same mysterious energy that burst forth at the first dawn.

Another cardinal principle is that the universe holds all things together, and is itself the primary activating power in every activity. It is not a thing, but a mode of being of everything. Recent scientific work has shown that it is not workable to think of a particle or event as completely determined by its immediate vicinity. Although in practical terms their influence may be negligible, events taking place elsewhere in the universe are directly related to the physical parameters of the situation. It is beyond the scope of this summary to present the authors' account of this phenomenon. However, it underlines their conclusion that "since the universe blossomed from a seed point, this means that a full understanding of a proton requires a full understanding of the universe."

Articulating the new story so that humans can enter creatively into the web of relationships in the universe will require, to some degree, reinventing language and the meaning we attach to words. For example: what is gravitation? In classical mechanistic understanding, a particular attraction things have to each

other. Newton called it *force*, and Einstein, the *curvature of the space-time manifold*. But the bond holding each thing in the universe to everything else is simply the universe acting. Therefore, to say "The stone falls to the Earth" misses the active quality of that event. To say that gravity pulls the stone to Earth implies a mechanism that does not exist. To say that Earth pulls the rock misses the presence of the universe to each of its parts. It is more helpful, say Berry and Swimme, to see the planet Earth and the rock as drawn by the universe into bonded relationship, a profound intimacy. "The bonding simply happens; it simply is. The bonding is the perdurable fact of the universe, and happens primevally in each instant, a welling up of an inescapable togetherness of things." Thus we can begin to grasp what is meant by the statement that gravity is not an independent power; it is the universe in both its physical and spiritual aspects that holds things together and is the primary activating power in every activity. We can begin to understand the idea that the universe *acts*, that it is not a thing, but a mode of being of everything. Each process, then, is ultimately indivisible.

Primal peoples of every continent understood this bonding, this intimacy, although obviously not with the tools and complex theories developed by modern science. Recent centuries have witnessed a concerted effort to rid scientific language of all anthropomorphisms. Instead, it has become mechanomorphic and reductionist. But let us consider the Milky Way. Its truth cannot be realized by focusing only on its early components, helium and hydrogen. Its truth also rests on the fact that in its later modes of being it is capable of thinking and feeling and creating - of evolving into creatures such as human beings. The Milky Way expresses its inner depths in Emily Dickinson's poetry, for Emily Dickinson is a dimension of the galaxy's development. In the long process of evolution, the sensibility of a poet derives from the Milky Way, and her or his feelings are an evocation of being, involving sunlight, thunderstorms, grass, mountains, animals, and human history. They are the evocation of mountain, animal, world. Poets do not think on the universe; rather, the universe *thinks itself*, in them and through them.

Thus, the vibrations and fluctuations in the universe are the music that called forth the galaxies and their powers of weaving elements into life. Our responsibility is to develop our capacity to listen. The eye that searches the Milky Way - the eye of humans or that of telescopes - is itself an eye shaped by the Milky Way. The mind searching for contact with the Milky Way is the very mind of the Milky Way searching for its inner depths.

The appearance of humans on this planet brought with it a new faculty of understanding, a consciousness characterized by a sense of wonder and celebration, and an ability to use parts of its external environment as instruments. Even in the time of *Homo habilis* (2.6 million to 1.5 million years ago) an intimate rapport between humans and the natural world was developing. And in the much later period of classical civilizations (3500 BCE to 1600 CE). The human

social order was integrated with the cosmological order. Neither was conceivable without the other.

Yet while there was a great deal of teaching about humans' relationship with the natural world in the Western, and especially the Eastern classical civilizations, there was also great devastation. Many Chinese philosophers and painters, for example, depicted that intimacy in eloquent terms, but endless wars and striping the forests for more cultivation despoiled the countryside.

In the West, particularly, there developed an exaggerated anthropocentrism. When the Plague struck Europe in 1347, this changed to theocentrism, for since there was no germ theory to explain such a calamity, humans concluded that they must be too attached to the Earth and should commit themselves to salvation from the Earth, absorption into the divine. Anthropocentrism and theocentrism, however, both denied the unity between the natural, human, and divine world. The mystical bonding of the human with the natural world was becoming progressively weaker. Closely associated with this insensitivity to the natural world was an insensitivity to women; patriarchal dominance reigned.

Since the late eighteenth century, the West has considered its most important mission to be that the peoples of the Earth achieve their identity within the democratic setting of the modern nation-state. Nationalism, progress, democratic freedoms, and virtually limitless rights to private property are the four fundamentals of this mystique. That unless their limits are recognized these might bring catastrophe upon the natural world was not even considered. Land becomes something to be exploited economically rather than communed with spiritually. Wars of colonial conquest are related to the mission of propagating Western bourgeois values.

The "modern revelation" - characterized as it is by gradual awareness that the universe has emerged as an irreversible sequence of transformations enabling it to gain greater complexity in structure and greater variety in its modes of conscious expression - is a new mode of consciousness. This change in perception from an enduring cosmos to an ever-transforming cosmogenesis has awesome implications that humans have not yet come to grips with. Our predicament is itself the result of a myth - the myth of Wonderland. If only we continue on the path of Progress it tells us, happiness will be ours - happiness virtually equated with the ever-increasing consumption of products that have been taken violently from the Earth or that react violently on it.

We need a new myth to guide human activity into the future. It should be analogous to the sense of mythic harmonies that suffused the fifteenth century Renaissance. At the beginning of the scientific age the universe was perceived as one of order and harmony, in which each mode of being resonates with every other mode of being.

Somehow this sense of an intelligibly ordered universe has directed the scientific

quest, say Swimme and Berry. But only recently have we been able to comprehend the depths of these harmonies, and thus fully recognize the mission of science. The scientific meditation on the structure and functioning of the universe that began centuries ago has yielded a sense of what can be called "the curvature of the universe whereby all things are held together in their intimate presence to each other." Each thing is sustained by everything else.

We are on the verge of the Ecozoic Era. What will it mean? This is a question explored in *The Universe Story* and *Befriending the Earth*, and in essays on economics, technology, law, bioregionalism, education, and planetary socialism in *The Dream of the Earth*. The basic answer begins to be found when we question some of our implicit assumptions:

- The assumption that we need constant economic growth, for example. How could we believe that human well-being could be attained by diminishing the well-being of the Earth? That we could achieve an ever-expanding Gross Domestic Product when the Gross Earth Product is declining? Since the threat to both economics and religion comes from one source, the disruption of the natural world, should economics not also be seen as a religious issue? If the water is polluted, it can neither be drunk nor used for baptism.
- The implicit assumption that we could cure sick people by technologies and by focusing on their present problems. How can we have well people on a sick planet?
- The widespread idea that the primary purpose of education is to train people for jobs. We need jobs, certainly, but is it not more important for people to be educated for a diversity of roles and functions? Is it not more realistic, in the long run, to view education as coming to know the story of the universe, of life systems, of consciousness as a single story - and to help people understand and fulfil their role in this larger pattern of meaning? Even in the arts, rather than focusing on producing specialized professionals, would it not be better if all of us played music, if all children painted and wrote poetry?
- The conviction that a democracy that is exploiting the natural world is the highest form of governance. The anthropocentrism of the word is implicit in the root; "demo" refers to people, not to all beings on Earth, beings whose fate we are controlling - in the name of human life, liberty, and happiness. We need a biocracy, a rule that will emerge from and be concerned with all the members of the community.

Re-evaluating these and other "truths" that we hold as "self-evident" should enable us to realize that the Earth is primary, while the human is secondary, that the universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects. We

should be enabled to step back a little from our diligent efforts to impose our will on life systems. We will then be free to listen to the natural world with an attunement that goes beyond our scientific perceptions and reaches the spontaneous sensitivities in our own inner being.

All human professions need to recognize that their primary source is the integral functioning of the Earth community. It is the natural world that is the primary economic reality, the primary educator, the primary governance, the primary technologist, the primary healer, the primary presence of the sacred, the primary moral value. The professions do not have the words for the type of transformation required; we need a new language. We need to transform the legal profession, for instance, and invent a new language in law, and then move from the ideal of democracy toward the more comprehensive paradigm of biocracy. One example: a constitution that recognizes not only the human on this continent, but the entire North American community, including animate beings, geographical structures, life systems.

Religion needs to appreciate that the primary sacred community is the universe itself. Our ethical sensitivities need to expand beyond suicide, homicide, and genocide, to include biocide and geocide.

Interwoven in all this is the need to fully recognize women's gifts and their roles in the future, both for themselves and for the well-being of the Earth. The need to limit human population is modifying the traditional roles of women and men, indeed the entire human situation. As women are liberated from the oppressions they have endured in most traditional civilizations, a new energy should be released throughout the Earth.

Albeit slowly, changes are already happening, as divisions of learning begin to overcome their isolation. Fundamental to a real sea-change, however, will be the move from a human-centered to an Earth-centered language. Words like good, evil, freedom, society, justice, literacy, progress, praise should be broadened to include other beings of the natural world.

A basic principle of the emerging Ecozoic Era is that the universe requires two modes of understanding: it has cyclical modes of functioning, yes, but also irreversible sequential modes of transformation. The law of entropy must evoke a certain foreboding in human consciousness.

The Cenozoic Era emerged quite independent of human influence, but *Homo sapiens* will enter into virtually every phase of the Ecozoic Era. We cannot create trees, fish, or birdsong, but they could well disappear unless we choose to temper our awesome power with humility. We must follow three basic axioms in our relations with the natural world: *acceptance, protection, fostering*.

* Acceptance of the given order of things. Protection of the life-systems at the base of the planetary community. Fostering a sense of active responsibility for

the larger Earth community, a responsibility that devolves upon us through our unique capacity for understanding the universe story.

Our fundamental commitment in the Ecozoic Era should be to perceive the universe as a communion of subjects rather than as a collection of objects. A major obstacle to this is our reluctance to think of the human as one among many species. Moreover, the change in consciousness required is of such enormous proportions and significance that it might be likened to a new type of revelatory experience.

In the new era we shall need to recapture the basic principle of balance. Its prototype lies in the awesome reality that the expansive original energy of the primordial Flaring Forth keeps the universe from collapsing and gravitational attraction holds the parts together, enabling the universe to flourish. So, too, on Earth. The balance of containing and expanding forces keeps the Earth in a state of balanced turbulence.

In the industrial age, however, humans have upset the equilibrium. In the Ecozoic Era the task will be to achieve a creative balance between human activities and other forces on this planet. When the curvature of the universe, the curvature of the Earth, and the curvature of the human are in proper relation, then the Earth and its human aspect will have come into celebratory experience that is the fulfilment of Earthly existence.

Where does God fit into this story? This is a word that Berry rarely uses. It has been overused, and trivialized, he says. The word has many different meanings to people. His principal concern is to reach the larger society, including people who would not call themselves religious.

Although Berry does not say it in so many words, he implies that in the West, especially, we spend too much time defining God and arguing over definitions rather than recognizing - in both theological and experiential ways - the ineffable. The term "God," he says, refers to the ultimate mystery of things, something beyond that which we can truly comprehend. Many primal peoples experience this as the Great Spirit, a mysterious power pervading every aspect of the natural world. Some people dance this experience, some express it in song, some find it in the laughter of children, the sweetness of an apple, or the sound of wind through the trees. At every moment we are experiencing the overwhelming mystery of existence.

Berry prefers to speak of the Divine, of the numinous presence in the world about us. This is what all of us - child or elder, Christian or Muslim or Buddhist or agnostic, can experience; this is the ground that all of us can truly know.

Since the universe story is the way the Divine is revealing itself, humans *become* sacred by participating in this larger sacred community. The gratitude that we feel in this experience, we call "religion." For Berry, it would seem, all this is

more real and less abstract than theology, because it emanates from experience of the emergent universe, an experience so basic that it is shared by other members of the Earth community.

Perhaps because of his comprehensive Weltanschauung, embracing non-theistic faiths, Berry never speaks of a God who commands, judges, rules over a paradisiacal afterlife, or watches over human actions. He does not go into traditional religious questions like good, evil, Heaven, Hell, or individual salvation. Yet he points out that his position follows quite directly from Saint Paul's Epistle to the Romans. In the first chapter Paul declares that "Ever since God created the world, this everlasting power and deity - however invisible - have been there for the mind to see in the things He has made."

In our discussions with Berry, he has stressed that his primary interest is that humans come to see the visible created world with whatever clarity is available. In his writings he does not go into all the basic theological questions like that of ultimate origins, but the first step, as Saint Paul suggests, is perception of the created world. In Berry's view, God is not our first clear perception. Rather, the sense of God emerges in and through our perception of the universe. Just how the divine is perceived obviously varies among different peoples. In any case, it seems that the divine is perceived "in the things He has made." The *knowledge of God* emerges in the human mind not directly, but through this manifestation.

Perhaps a major difficulty for many believers lies in Berry's view that the universe is not a puppet world without an inner power through which it functions. Rather, God enables beings to be themselves, and to act in a way to bring themselves into being - not independently of deity, but still with a valid inner principle of life and activity. This activity of creatures is known as Second Cause, while the deity remains First Cause. These causes are not "real" in the same way, nor do they function in the same manner. But to deny the reality of the created world and the validity of its proper mode of activity, is to deny the capacity of the divine origin of things to produce anything other than ephemeral appearances. Ultimately our perception of the divine depends precisely on our perception of the *reality* of the visible world about us.

Speaking of the universe as a single multiform sequential celebratory event and of the human as that being in whom the universe reflects on and celebrates itself in a special mode of conscious self-awareness, is speaking in and of the "created" order. That it says nothing directly about "God," does not to Berry indicate any denial of the divine. It is, rather, the proper way of speaking to our times without getting into a preaching mode that would do more damage to religion than anything else. Humans can participate in the great celebration that is the universe itself, and the celebration is ultimately the finest manifestation of the divine. It is our way of seeing the divine "in all things that are made." This great celebration might also be considered the Grand Liturgy of the universe, the shared liturgy that we enter into through our own humanly contrived pluralistic

liturgies.

As we have seen, Berry is highly critical of many aspects of Christian doctrine and practice, since all of Western civilization has been profoundly affected by the biblical Christian tradition. Thus Christianity is involved not as a direct cause of our ecological crisis, but as *creating the context*. To summarize briefly:

- The first problem is the emphasis on a transcendent, personal divine being, as clearly distinct from the universe.
- A second related problem is Christianity's exaltation of the human as a spiritual being as against the physical nature of other beings - the human is so special that the human soul has to be created directly by God in every single case.
- The third problem is that redemption is seen as some kind of out-of-this-world liberation.
- The fourth is the idea, developed particularly by a devout Christian named Descartes, that the world is a mechanism.

All these "transcendencies" - transcendent God, transcendent human, transcendent redemption, transcendent mind - foster entrancement with a transcendent technology which shall liberate us from following the basic biological laws of the natural world. In this manner we create a transcendent goal, a millennial vision harkening back to the Book of Revelation, with which to go beyond the human condition, says Berry.

While the Christian tradition until the Renaissance included elements of seeing the natural world as having a soul, since the time of Descartes, particularly, there has been a progressive loss of the cosmic dimension. Although there have always been strands in the tradition that deal well with the natural world, this is not emphasized in Christianity as it is preached. There is no adequate emphasis in the catechism, or Biblical commandments concerning the natural world.

The Bible introduced an emphasis on the divine in historical events. Its historical realism stimulates a dynamism toward developmental processes.

Like many other religions Christianity, with its intense monotheism, tends toward narrowness. Among religious people, the more intense the commitment, the more fundamentalist they tend to be. What is needed today is not intensity, but expansiveness. By the same token, humans should have moved beyond the idea that any one religion has the fullness of revelation.

Narrowness also is evident in the traditional Christian hostility to animism. Saint Boniface, for example, cut down sacred oak trees. Today that would seem absurd. Could we not entertain the idea that instead, the future of Christianity will involve assimilating elements of paganism?

In view of all this, Berry makes the startling suggestion that we consider putting the Bible on the shelf for perhaps twenty years, so that we can truly listen to creation. One of the best ways to discover the deep meaning of things, he says, is to give them up for a while. Thus, we would be able to recover the ancient Christian view that there are two Scriptures, that of the natural world and that of the Bible. We would be able to create a new language, more adequate to deal with our present revelatory moment. Unfortunately, at present we are still reading the book instead of reading the world about us. We will drown reading the book.

Organized religion is frequently a destructive force - yet religion in the more basic sense is an important part of our being, he asserts. Among other things, it brings us together in celebration, and gives us the gift of delighting in existence.

We must recognize that the revelations of most religions as they are practiced today are inadequate to deal with the task before us. The traditions of the past cannot do what needs to be done, but we cannot do what needs to be done without all traditions. The new story does not replace them; it provides a more comprehensive context in which all the earlier stories can discover a more expansive interpretation.

It is of pivotal importance, Berry says, to be open to ongoing revelations, including those emerging from the scientific venture. Science does not reduce the mystery of the world, but actually enhances it. Indeed, in a broad sense scientific understanding is the key to the future of religion.

It is too early to appraise Berry's influence, especially in a period when economic growth, land development, invention of mega- technologies, and winning computerized wars against Third World upstarts continue to define our nation's measures of might and our sense of personal power. The full import of Berry's message may not sink in for many years.

But some of his influence is clearly visible. He cannot keep up with requests for speaking engagements. The demand for his writings grows every year, and his work is now being translated into other languages. During the course of our own travels, in conversations with people as diverse as Buddhists in Japan, Muslims in Egypt, and agnostics in Russia, speaking of Berry has always provoked great interest and requests for copies of his work.

One criticism of his thought is that he exaggerates the extent to which the Bible provides a context for an exploitative attitude toward the Earth. Another is that the challenges we face are more complex than rediscovering an integral relationship with the Earth, and inevitably involve specific, personal, economic, and political questions about our own communities. A frequent objection is that his biocentric vision denies the chosen status of "man," vice-regent of God. Berry listens to such criticisms, sometimes adapts his thought to accommodate them, sometimes replies with a helpful rejoinder.

Even critics admire his realism, sweeping synthesis, imaginative insights, and courage to confront the narrowness of traditional theology. They also respect the fact that although he often uses abstract terms, he always lends them a vivid - at times biting - concreteness. He describes environmental, economic, and political problems with down-to-earth examples. When looking to the future, he illustrates his ideas with examples ranging from methods of appropriate technology to bioregionalism or steady-state economics. He even proposes, not entirely tongue-in-cheek, running every other truck on our highways into a ravine. It is not that he eschews all technological advances. But our new technologies must harmonize with natural processes, which operate on self-nourishing, self-healing, self-governing principles.

It is our observation that Berry, contrary to conventional wisdom, is becoming not less but more radical as he advances in years - and sees the time left for saving the planet running out. He is "radical" in the original sense of the word, harkening back to the Latin word *radices*, roots. It is as if he is driven by the thought "They just don't get it." They don't comprehend how deeply rooted it is, the crisis that confronts us!"

Sometimes one can hear the anger in this gentle man as he speaks of "the order of magnitude of the present catastrophic situation." It is, he says, "so enormous, so widespread, and we don't know what we are doing." The people who built the automobile, the people who built the nuclear program, the people who dreamed up the Green Revolution in agriculture, were unable to make the connection between these and their adverse effects. Vandana Shiva says the Green Revolution initially produced great increases in India's food supply - but in the end, it devastated the whole agricultural system. We made 50,000 nuclear bombs, and now we don't know what to do with them!

We fool ourselves into thinking that recycling cans and papers will do it. Of course we must recycle. But basically that is designed to keep the system going. It can help mitigate the problem, but only until we can do the fundamental changes. Meanwhile, when ecology groups try to protect the last bit of our first-growth forest, the entrepreneur types say these radicals are trying to do away with jobs. If these are the only jobs we can imagine, it is a sick society, and we need cultural therapy. We can't solve this crisis by meliorism.

Yet Berry sees hope in the upwelling of movements and modes of perception that suggest an awakening. He points to the growth of bioregional movements, Green political organizations, and confrontational movements launched by activist groups such as Greenpeace and Earth First! He talks about shifts of consciousness revealed in New Age thinkers, countercultural writers, and feminist, antipatriarchal movements. On the international level, he has been encouraged by shifts within the World Bank toward more viable programs, and the addition of an environmental department; the spread of vital information through organizations like The International Union for the Conservation of Nature, the World Resources Institute, the Worldwatch Institute, and various United Na-

tions programs; and even stirrings among some national and multinational business organizations.

Our awesome power spells our danger - but it also presents our opportunity, an unparalleled opening to a larger creativity, he observes. The danger lies in the mystique that pervades our patriarchal, plundering industrial society. It is a mystique that could propel us not into an Ecozoic Era, but into one that could be called Technozoic, led by people - epitomized in the corporate establishment - who are committed to an even more controlled order. In the future, the dominant struggle will be the struggle between Entrepreneur and Ecologist. Our task is to reinvent the human, at the species level. Basic to this task is creating a new integration of the human with the forces of the natural world - and celebrating that integration.

Who will lead us into the future? The intimacy with the cosmic process that is needed describes the shamanic personality, a type that is emerging again in our society. As in earlier cultures, today the shaman may be woman as well as man. Certainly, to fulfil the function of healers, shamans must represent the feminine principle, embodied in the growing scientific perception of our planet as a single organism, alive, self-governing, self-healing. True, nurturance is not the only role for women. Nurturing roles, however, are the key to the future; they are epitomized in the archetype of woman but reside in the capacities of each one of us.

Taking our cues from earlier peoples, we can create, or recreate, renewal ceremonies. We need to celebrate the great historical moments in the unfolding of the universe, cosmic events that constituted psychic-spiritual as well as physical transformations. Such celebrations might begin with the primordial Flaring Forth and the supernova implosions, moments of grace that set the pattern for emergence of this planet. They might go on to include the beginning of photosynthesis, followed by the arrival of trees, then flowers, then birds, and other aspects of this wondrous evolution.

Once we begin to celebrate this story we will understand the fascination that draws scientists to their work. Without entrancement in this new context it is unlikely that humans will have the psychic energy needed for renewal of the Earth.

That entrancement comes from the immediate communion of humans with the natural world. We are rediscovering our capacity for entering into the larger community of life. Every form of being is integral with this story. Nothing is itself without everything else.

Berry's shamanic voice raises a challenge. Is the human species viable, or are we careening toward self-destruction, carrying with us our fellow Earthlings? Can we move from an anthropocentric to a biocentric vision - and more importantly, actualize it in a biocracy? How can we help activate the intercommunion of all

members of the Earth community? What shall we be leaving the children - the young of our own families, our own species and of other species whose fate we share?

Can we find the guidance we need in religions as they exist today?

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