

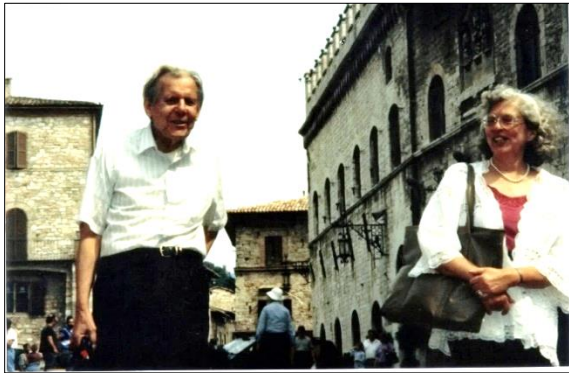
A Study-Guide for  
**THE GREAT WORK: OUR WAY INTO THE FUTURE**  
THOMAS BERRY

*Three Rivers / Random House, 1999, 241 pages*

To help in studying this important book by Thomas Berry, this study-guide gathers verbatim excerpts or paraphrasing of excerpts from it. Bold font has been added for key concepts and themes. Also, note that Thomas' book is written from a U.S. North American perspective.

In addition, this study-guide presumes familiarity with Thomas's earlier 1994 book with Brian Swimme:

THE UNIVERSE STORY: FROM THE PRIMORDIAL FLARING FORTH TO THE ECOZOIC ERA -  
A CELEBRATION OF THE UNFOLDING OF THE COSMOS.



*Thomas walking to 1991 S.A.F.E. Program in Assisi,  
with music composer Maia Aprahamian*

## INTRODUCTION

**T**he subject of this book is the human presence on planet Earth in the opening years of 21<sup>st</sup> century, where we are, how we got here, and how we need to move forward with our historical destiny to create a mutually enhancing mode of human dwelling.

We expected a scientific, technological, commercial wonderworld, but have caused immense ruin in world around us. Now instead, we need to reflect on the **wonder of Earth** as a garden planet of the universe, and to develop a **new intimacy with the North American continent**.

**European settlers** came here to conquer this continent and reduce it to human use. But we need the guidance of the continent's **indigenous peoples** as indispensable.

All earlier human periods were concerned with divine-human relations; our destiny rests on intimacy in **human-Earth relations**. Institutions should guide us.

**The university** has a special role through teaching in various professions, but its purpose has become to train personnel for exploiting our Earth.

Like an artist first envisioning something in a dream, this book proposes **an entrancing vision of a future Ecozoic Era**, in which humans become a mutually beneficial presence on Earth. We need to understand the **universe** as made up of subjects for communion, not objects for exploitation.

With "use" as our primary relationship, all sciences and technologies, and all institutions, have become dysfunctional. Instead, we need intimacy with Earth in wonder and beauty, with nourishment of both the outer body and the inner spirit.

## CHAPTER 1 THE GREAT WORK

**H**istory is governed by overarching movements that give shape and meaning to life by relating the human venture to the larger destinies of the universe.

Creating such a movement is the **Great Work** of a people. Examples abound from Classical Greece, the Western humanist tradition, Israel, Rome, the Western medieval period, India, China, and the First Peoples of America and especially their ritual ceremonies.

**The European occupation of this continent was flawed from the beginning.** Scientific insight and technological skills led to devastation of the continent. The new industrial age disturbed the biosystem in a depth never known before.

Under the leadership of the Western World, **industrial civilization has plundered Earth in its deepest foundations**, with awesome impact on its geological structure, chemical constitution, and living forms.

This leads to **the terminal phase of the Cenozoic Era**, which has been a time of incredible creativity and beauty for life.<sup>1</sup>

The deepest cause of that devastation is **the modern mode of consciousness** with radical discontinuity between humans and other beings, and rights only on humans. In reality, Earth is a single integral community, with all beings having rights that are limited and interrelated.

*(Thomas sketches a chronology of the devastation of planet Earth, which worsened in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Because of its detailed nature, it is omitted here to save space.)*

The devastation then became global through establishment of **transnational corporations**.

Older roots of the devastation may be traced to the Crusades, which began in the eleventh century. They began the historical drive that led European peoples in their quest for religious, cultural, political, and economic conquest of the world – **the Western drive toward limitless dominion**.

Yet the later medieval period also had Francis of Assisi, Thomas Aquinas, and Dante Alighieri. Further, the so-called Dark Ages, like other similar periods, was a creative period. There are also examples from China with Buddhist monks and Confucian scholars and artists.

**The Great Work** is the transition from this period of human devastation to a mutually beneficial presence with Earth. Our special role, which we will hand on to our children, **is managing the arduous transition from terminal Cenozoic Era to emerging Ecozoic Era**. This contemporary Great Work is work of all the

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<sup>1</sup> The Cenozoic Era is the current geological era. It reaches back some 65 million years to the extinction of the dinosaurs. Thomas proposes that the Cenozoic Era is now being terminated by industrial

people, aligning personal work with the Great Work. We cannot doubt that we have been given resources for it.

## CHAPTER 2 MEADOW ACROSS THE CREEK

*(Thomas here describes the mystical moment when, at eleven years old, he became fully aware of the beauty and wonder of nature. The description is too long to briefly summarize here.)*

**R**eligion has its origin in the experience of deep mystery revealed by such settings.



*Bryan Swimme, close colleague of Thomas, teaching physics in the field of San Damiano, Assisi 1993*

The universe is full of meaning, but such meaning is lost to people following the industrial way of life. Instead, we live in a Disney dreamland of concrete and steel, wheels and wires. Modern sciences (until recently) have thought of the universe only as a collection of objects, rather than as a communion of subjects. **We are disengaged from nature, and even predatory to it.**

Children no longer learn to read the great Book of Nature. Maria Montessori's book, *To Educate the Human Potential*, sees childhood education as beginning only when the child is able to identify its own center with the center of the universe.

**Our celebrations, rituals, and liturgies need to be rooted in this deeper and wider meaning of the universe.** That had been the case since Paleolithic times.

civilization, and he proposes a new future ecological period that he names the "Ecozoic Era" -- to follow the termination of the Cenozoic Era.

For example, ancient rituals of dawn and sunset experience them as mystical moments.

The indigenous peoples continue this mystical awareness of nature. So too John See, Joanna Macy, Paul Winter, and Genesis Farm (founded by Miriam MacGillis). **All humans need to join in the work of healing by (re)discovering the mystical nature of our planet.**

### CHAPTER 3 THE EARTH STORY

**O**ur Great Work has to do with a new understanding of our garden-planet Earth. (*Thomas next offers a brief description of its beauty and vastness.*) In recent times, we have experienced the Earth in its spherical fullness as a privileged planet.



*Thomas with Spirituality & Sustainability Conference participants, Assisi, 1996*

Earlier for humans, Earth was a more intimate reality, with humans and other animals seen as relatives. Rituals celebrated the grand liturgy of the universe.

Those were **periods of wonder and creativity**, with the human experience conceived in terms of cosmic events. The Chinese tradition especially celebrated the human-cosmic link. So too the indigenous traditions, as in *Black Elk Speaks*.

**Similarly, the early Christian liturgies celebrated the cosmos and the cycles of the seasons**, and so did the Christians mystics (Hildegard, Richard of St.

Victor, Eckhart, John of the Cross) and the monastic tradition.

Christianity also had an historical tradition, which made the Western world so powerful and eventually led to the the concept of the natural world for "use," rather than the manifestation of a numinous presence.

**Now we need to ask where to find resources for a reevaluation.** For this, there are three basic commitments: 1) observational science; 2) a developmental universe; 3) capacity for inner-self organization. Plus, our earlier human experiences of the numinous presence manifested in the great Cosmic Liturgy.

**First, the observational sciences are now now moving beyond the mechanistic-objective understanding of the past few centuries of Newtonian physics.**

We now know that our subjectivity activates one of the deepest dimensions of the universe, that everything needs to be understood holistically, and in its beauty and mystery.

**Matter is also mind, soul, spirit, and consciousness. Mind and matter need to be understood as two dimensions of the single reality**, which comes into being in an immense diversity of expression throughout the universe by some self-organizing process.

Second, the universe is now revealed to us as an irreversible **emergent process** (evolution) – not simply as cosmos but more dynamically as **cosmogenesis**.

Third, at every level – physical, biological, and reflexive-conscious – there exists a basic tendency toward **creative self-organization**.

Although we lost the poetry of the universe, we began to change when the astronauts came home stunned with the immensity and beauty of what they had experienced. For example, Edgar Mitchell became aware of a "purpose-fullness of flow, of energy, or time, of space in the cosmos."

(*Thomas then provides a brief description of the new "Universe Story," within it of the "Earth Story," and within it of the "Human Story" up to the late Cenozoic.*<sup>2</sup>)

**In our modern scientific age, we have our own sacred story, the epic of evolution**, which is an

<sup>2</sup> Thomas narration of the Universe Story is not summarized here, since this study-guide (as noted earlier) presumes that readers are already familiar with Thomas' earlier book, written with Brian

Swimme, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era: - A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos*, Reprint Edition (Harper One, 1994).

emergent process – neither random nor determined but creative. Within that process, we need to understand ourselves as one of the deepest dimensions of the universe (though our reflective consciousness).

#### CHAPTER 4 THE NORTH AMERICAN CONTINENT

*(Thomas narrates the history and beauty of the continent. Again, because of this description's complex detail, it is too much to summarize here.)*

**T**he historical and cultural accomplishments of the continent's indigenous peoples need to be appreciated. They have much to teach us and contributed much.

*(Thomas summarizes here parts of Jack Weatherford's important book, *Indian Givers: How the Indians of the Americas Transformed the World*. Again, it is a complex and detailed description which cannot be easily summarized.)*

The arrival of Europeans marked the beginning of the assault the continent and its peoples. To the settlers, the continent had no sacred dimension. What we see now is a continent in devastation.



*Thomas with Rashmi Mayur and Hilda Jackson during break of Spirituality and Sustainability Conference, Assisi, 1997*

#### CHAPTER 5 THE WILD & THE SACRED

**T**o dwell in our planet, we need to know about Earth. We are not here to control, but to become integral with the larger Earth community. Earth and every creature within it has a wild component, which is a creative spontaneity as its most profound

**mystery.** *(Thomas reflects more on this wildness and mystery.)*

The world of mechanism, however, has alienated us from the wild beauty of the world around us. Amidst the termination of the Cenozoic, we now need to tap our creative power for our hope for the future of a new dawn, which will become the **Ecozoic Era**.

#### CHAPTER 6 THE VIABLE HUMAN

**T**he universe has brought forth planet Earth, its living forms, and its human intelligence. The human mode of conscious self-awareness is a most elaborate manifestation of the universe's deepest mystery.

**In human consciousness, the universe reflects on and celebrates itself.** Humans bring intellectual, emotional, and aesthetic sensitivity as part of the natural world, which has a physical and psychic mode. Earth is a bio-spiritual planet.

The great illusion of the industrial age is to seek advancement for the human by plundering the planet in its geological and biological structure and functioning.

**The present industrial-commercial mode is fundamentally opposed to the ecological mode.**

To understand the order of magnitude of this opposition, we need a more specific analysis of the problem and then specific programs for a viable human situation on a viable planet.

*(Thomas next cites important transformations required for law, language, and education needed for a viable future, as well as pioneering efforts at such transformations – again, all too many to summarize here.)*

There is in our (Western) tradition a **hidden rage** against those inner as well as outer forces that create limits on our activities. Some ancient force in the Western psyche seems to perceive limitation as a demonic obstacle to be eliminated, rather than as a strengthening discipline.

**Media and advertising**, supported by the great industrial establishments, are particularly responsible for blocking transformation.

At the deepest level are **primordial archetypal symbols** that we need to recover: the journey (now of the universe); the symbol of the Great Mother (Mother Earth); the Cosmic Tree or the Tree of Life; and the Death-Rebirth symbol.

Among the controlling professions, the **educational and religious professions** need to be especially sensitive to what is happening. But both are trapped in past fundamentalist or future New-Age programs that are often trivial in their consequences. Both need to ground themselves in the story of the universe.

## CHAPTER 7 THE UNIVERSITY

**T**he university has a central role in the direction and fulfillment of the Great Work. It is one of four basic establishments that determine human life in its more significant functioning. These four are:

1. government
2. religious traditions
3. university
4. commercial-industrial corporations

All four – the political, religious, intellectual, and economic establishments – are failing in their basic purposes.

They presume a radical discontinuity between the nonhuman and the human modes of being, with all the rights and all the values given to the human. This has brought about a devastating assault on the non-human world by the human.

In contrast to earlier human traditions which experienced a profound intimacy with and deep spiritual exaltation in the natural world, **modern civilization experiences only alienation from the natural world.** In addition, our many great writers about the natural world have no role in forming the basic orientation of the university.

As it now functions, the university prepares students for their role in extending human dominion over the natural world, not for intimate presence to the natural world.

**This is the awesome cultural disorientation which is sustained intellectually by the university, economically by the corporation, legally by the Constitution, and spiritually by religious institutions.**

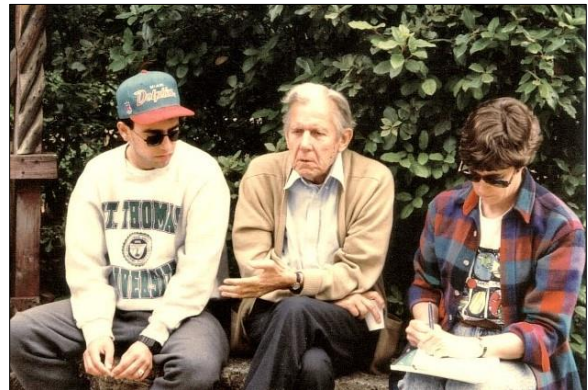
No comparable devastation of the life systems of Earth has happened since the termination of the Mesozoic Era 65 million years ago.

In the **economic establishment**, the separation of the human economy from the Earth economy is now moving to **biocide and geocide**, under the illusion that it is improving the human situation.

In the **political establishment**, the American Constitution has no legal protection for the natural world. Only a jurisprudence based on concern for an integral Earth community is capable of sustaining a viable planet.

There are, however, important international legal initiatives like the United Nations 1982 **World Charter for Nature** and the **Earth Charter** prepared for the United Nations in 2002.

In the **religious establishment**, there is no current teaching that the natural world is our primary revelatory experience (the Book of Nature). Emphasis is on verbal revelation to neglect of the manifestation of the divine in the natural world, with an excessive emphasis on redemption to the neglect of creation.



*Thomas teaching in Assisi's park, 1993*

**But economics, jurisprudence, and religion are all subjects taught by the university. For this reason, the university may be one of the principal supports for the pathology that is ruinous to the planet.**

There are, however, four significant movements to transform these four basic establishments:

1. **Society for Ecological Economics**, for transforming the commercial-industrial establishment

2. **The Earth Charter**, for transforming the government establishment
3. **The Forum on Religion and Ecology**, for transforming the establishment of religious traditions
4. **The Tailloires Declaration**, for transforming the university establishment

Yet there is still a deeper source of difficulty in the university. **The humanities center value exclusively on the human.** The humanities distort the human's place and role in the structure and functioning of the universe.

We fail to realize that the various components of the universe exist for each other – primarily for the integrity of the universe. **The sacred community is the universe community, not simply the human community.** Thus, Thomas Aquinas wrote: "*The whole universe together participates in the divine goodness and represents it better than any single being whatsoever.*"

An initial break with that ancient tradition took place when the **Great Plague** struck Europe in 1347-1349. It led the Western cultural tradition to a deep aversion to the natural world.

A definitive stage in that aversion came with **René Descartes** in the early seventeenth century. **He desouled the world**, through his division between mind and matter as extension, understood only as mechanism and available for limitless human exploitation.

**The Romantic period tried to resist mechanism with a return to organicism, but scientists (until recently) insisted with ever-greater vehemence that the universe can only be understood as the random action of minute particles with no direction or meaning.**

It should have been obvious that our empirical inquiry into the structure and functioning of the universe reveals a magnificent world beyond anything that we could have dreamed. **But my generation has been autistic in relation to the natural world.** This mental deficiency has brought us into the terminal phase of the Cenozoic Era.

The religions are too pious, the corporations too plundering, and the government too subservient, to provide any adequate remedy. The universities, however, should have the insight and the freedom to provide the guidance needed by the human community.

**The university needs to see the universe as the primary university**, just as the universe is the primary lawgiver, the primary economic corporation, the primary technologist, the primary healer, the primary revelation of the divine, the primary artist, the primary teacher, and indeed the primary source, model, and ultimate destiny in all earthly affairs.

**The human university needs to become the context in which the universe reflects on itself in human intelligence and communicates itself to the human community. Education at all levels needs to become understood as knowing the universe story and the human role in the story.**

The story can fulfill its role only if the universe is understood as having a psychic-spiritual and well as physical-material aspect from the beginning.

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.

**The universe story is our story.** And it does not diminish, it rather enhances, the earlier story that we have though the Book of Genesis, which was related to the ancient Mesopotamian stories of the universe.

Our universities have never experienced anything like the transition that is now being asked of them. The difficulty cannot be resolved by adding a course or program in ecology. **Ecology is the foundation of all courses, all programs, all professions.**

**The universities must decide whether they will continue training persons for temporary survival in the declining Cenozoic Era, or whether they will begin educating students for the emerging Ecozoic Era.**

## **CHAPTER 8 ECOLOGICAL GEOGRAPHY**

**G**eography is an integrating study of the Earth in its comprehensive extent as well as in its various regional integrations.

Earth is a single reality composed of a diversity beyond all understanding. We estimate that there are at least **ten to twenty million or even more species living on the Earth.** The interaction of these species with

their geographical location constitutes a major phase of land formation.



*First Occasional Seminar: The Earth Charter, with plenary address by Thomas Berry, flanked by Elisabeth Ferrero, Roberto Tagliaferri, Sr. Cathy Arata, SSND, and Joe Holland. Generalate of School Sisters of Notre Dame, Rome, 2003*

Then came **the human**, a being with a genetic mandate to shape a cultural mode of being of its own design but with a dependence on all the other forces shaping the continents. What distinguished the human mode of being was its sense of spirit powers throughout the geographical region.

In recent times, what **industrial civilizations** have failed to realize is that, in the particular place of their dwelling, the well-being of the Earth was a necessity for their own well-being and fulfillment.

Earth came to be understood only for **utilitarian** purposes, and humans assumed unlimited "**property rights**." Western Civilization came to be dominated by **cultural arrogance**.

For a time, **industrial civilizations** thought they could dominate the Earth, while avoiding their own extinction. But now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are beginning to realize the need to renew intimacy with our bioregion, with the North American continent, and with planet Earth. Doing his will require what Robert Muller, a former United Nations adviser, called a "total earth science."

Some beginnings of that understanding are found in the **Gaia hypothesis**, which sees the Earth as having the capacity for self-regulation in homeostasis.

Yet it is difficult to appreciate the full extent of the power possessed by industrial civilizations to disrupt the integral functioning of the life systems of the Earth.

**Humans are now altering the planet on a scale that can be compared with the glacial periods.** Our capacity to extinguish life-forms has even been compared with the forces that terminated the Mesozoic.

The human has refused to accept **limits** imposed from without or even from within its own being. By bringing humans into existence the Earth has created a supreme danger to all other components of the Earth community. Survival now requires that humans recognize the limits of its actions.



*Thomas with Elisabeth Ferrero, Roberto Tagliaferri, Joe Holland, the Ambassador of Japan, the Japanese artist Yumiko, and the Italian artist Sabino Ventura at the official presentation of the book LA CARTA DELLA TERRA: MANUALE DI RIFLESSIONE PER L'AZIONE, by Elisabeth Ferrero and Joe Holland, translated by Giovanni Principato and Paolo Diotallevi, Rome, 2003*

Humans have refused to accept the **law of limits**, which is among the most basic of all cosmological, geological, or biological laws. In the Hindu tradition, it is recognized as *rita* in the cosmological order or as *dharma* in the moral order. In the Chinese world it is *tao* in an earlier phase or *li* in the later neo-Confucian period. In the Greek world it is *dike* as the order of justice or *logos* establishing the intelligible order of the universe.

Yet in the modern world, this sense of limits imposed by the natural functioning of the universe has to some extent been overridden, at least in a temporary manner by industrial processes. **Our entire industrial system can be considered as an effort to escape from the constraints of the natural world.**

**Our present alienation** is such that we have little concern for where our food comes from, or our clothing, or more widely raw materials. Moreover, there is

frequently exploitation of the labor of those who grow our food and make our clothes.

We live psychically with no attachment to our natural place in the world. And we give little attention to it in the education of our children. Geography is included, if at all, only for human purposes.

Yet the great modern geographer, Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859), in his five-volume work *Cosmos*, studied the world in its ecological fullness. So too did his immediate followers.

The last period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were the **high point of imperial dominance over the Earth by the Western powers**. It was also the time of support for global political-military dominance.

Only in the 1960s did the "global *problematique*" begin to gain attention with the Club of Rome report, and later with the 1972 *Limits to Growth* study. Then came in 1979 the study titled *Global 2000: A report to the President*, commissioned by President Carter. But Ronald Reagan soon suppressed its publication by the Government Printing Office.



*Thomas with the Japanese artist, Yumiko  
at book presentation in Rome, 2003*

**In the future, no ecological studies will be adequate without a better geographical context of understanding the planet.**

In addition, the more humanistic realms of **poetry and the natural-history essay** are important. We need

them to establish the emotional-aesthetic feeling for the wonders of the natural world.

We also need them and to awaken the psychic energy needed for dismantling our present destructive technological-industrial-commercial structures and creating a more benign mode of economic survival for the entire Earth community.

Here the concern with "**Earth Literacy**," developed especially by David Orr and Chet Bowers, is helpful. So too the older writings of John Muir on the Yosemite Valley in California. We can also learn from the continents indigenous peoples.

**Only intimacy with our natural surroundings can save us from our present commitment to a plundering industrial economy.**

## CHAPTER 9 ETHICS AND ECOLOGY

**T**he 1912 sinking of the "unsinkable" Titanic is a parable for us. The daily microphase concern for its passengers suddenly shifted to the more urgent macrophase concern for the ship's survival.

**Now our concerns for the human community can be fulfilled only by a concern for the integrity of the natural world. The planet cannot support its human presence unless there is a reciprocal human support for the life systems of the planet. This is the macrophase of ethics.**

**Yet the classical ethical traditions are proving inadequate in dealing with the disintegrating influence we are now having on the life-systems of the Earth.**

In particular, traditional European languages carry the anthropocentrism of our past orientation. So too, religious persons are constantly asserting the high spiritual nature of the human, while denying any spiritual dimension to the natural world.

Further, in recent times, as our **religious traditions** have diminished in their influence over our lives, it is the human that dominates the scene.

Our **legal system** also fosters a sense of human rights, with other-than-human beings having no inherent rights.

Our **economic systems** is in turn based on our mechanistic exploitation of the Earth in all its geobiological



systems. Commercial rights to profit prevail over urgent need of natural systems for survival.

The **traditional religious orientation of Western society** has made us vulnerable to superficial attitudes toward the difficulties we experience. We see that especially in the growing otherworldly emphasis on the apocalyptic literature of the Bible.

That same alienating spirit carried over into the millennial humanism that shaped the philosophies of Francis Bacon and René Descartes.

**From those distortions, there arose the mechanistic view of the world that encouraged industrial plundering.**

**That culminated in the 1880's establishment of electric and chemical research centers and the first modern commercial and industrial corporations.**

**Their objective was to make human societies as independent as possible from the natural world, and to make the natural world as subservient as possible to the human. As a result, we now find ourselves closing down the Earth's functioning in its major life-systems.**

Yet our ethical traditions do not know how to deal with the reality of **biocide**, which is the extinction of the vulnerable life-systems of the Earth, and with **geocide**, which is the devastation of Earth itself. Here we are dealing with a profound reversal in our perspective on ourselves and the universe about us.

**But our genetic coding is more comprehensive than our cultural coding.** Human genetic coding is integral with the whole complex of species coding whereby the Earth system remains coherent within itself and capable of continuing the evolutionary process.

Our cultural traditions are constantly grappling toward their appropriate realization within the context of an emerging universe. As things change, the traditions are forced into new expressions, or into an impasse that demands a new beginning.

**Perhaps a new revelatory experience is taking place, an experience wherein human consciousness awakens (again) to the grandeur and sacred quality of the Earth process.**

## CHAPTER 10 NEW POLITICAL ALIGNMENT

**T**he older tension in human affairs between conservatives and liberals, based on social orientation, is being replaced with the tension between developers and ecologists, based on orientation toward the natural world. This new tension is becoming the primary tension in human affairs.



*Thomas Berry with the Ambassador of Japan and the artist Sabino Ventura who created the Murano glass Coppa della Fraternita' given to Thomas Berry. Rome, 2003*

So too the political tension between **empires** and the **colonies** is being replaced by an economic tension between **village peoples of the world** with their **organic agriculture** and the **transnational corporations** with their **industrial agriculture**.

**Oppression of the natural world by the industrial powers has so interfered with the functioning of natural forces that we are already into an extensive disruption of the biosystems of the planet, at the expense of the health and well-being of both humans and the natural world.**

Yet we are so committed to the **exploitative mode** of relating to the natural world that those in control of the **great corporations** can hardly think about modifying the exploitation. Even official movements toward "**sustainable development**" must be recognized as efforts to avoid the basic issue.

These corporations, in alliance with **governments of the world**, are now related to or organized into such establishments as the World Bank, the International

Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organization, the International Chamber of Commerce, the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, and the International Organization for Standardization.

It is increasingly difficult to escape their control over the various nations and cultures of the world. So influential is the present commercial-industrial order that **our dominant professions and institutions**, and not merely our economic system, are functioning in this context.

**We seem not to know how to live in any other way.**

In the industrialized nations the automobile, the highways, parking lots, shopping malls, all seem to be necessary for survival at any acceptable level of human well-being.

**We continue creating chemicals, clear-cutting the forests, polluting the waters, piling up enormous waste heaps, destroying wetlands. We do this even though the industrial bubble is already dissolving. The end of the petroleum-based economy is in sight. Yet even now the commercial-industrial world insists that this is the only way to survive.**

Also, the tendency is to insist that ecologically oriented persons accept the existing situation with some slight modifications. The system itself must continue in the existing pattern of its functioning.

Deep ecological transformation is too unsettling. Even books like Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* are still considered too extreme.

**The tensions can only increase.** Tensions between capitalism and socialism, between liberalism and conservatism, are disputes over minor differences in comparison with the issues now before us. Both capitalist and socialist regimes are committed to ever-increasing commercial-industrial exploitation of the resources of the planet.

**Physical degradation of the natural world is also the degradation of the interior world of the human. It is a loss of soul.**

*(There now follows a brief analysis of the modern ecological devastation of the North American continent, of the polarization between "developers and ecologists," and of the rise of new and powerful reactionary forces. Again, this section is omitted because of its complex and detailed length.)*

**Again, what is required is a reorientation of all the professions.** The legal profession is still preoccupied only with human rights, property rights, and the right to exploit. The university is still preparing students for careers in the industrial-commercial world, even as this world continues its planetary destruction. The medical profession is only beginning to recognize that we cannot have healthy humans on a sick planet.

A new awareness is beginning to arise. We see this in the phrase "**sustainable development**," which became current with the 1987 report *Our Common Future*, and later became central for the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro.

**A more realistic response, however, is that development is simply not sustainable. What is needed is a sustainable way of life.**

Writers like Paul Hawken and David Korten are working toward such a depth understanding of present situation.

Yet the more ultimate question has to do with the "**soul**" of the future, as this finds expression in the single life principle of the planet Earth.

**I am concerned with the inner vision of a single global community of life as the central issue of the Great Work.** Only it can counter the profoundly degraded ecological situation of the present which reveals a deadening or paralysis of some parts of human intelligence and also a suppression of human sensitivities.

The publications of the business world – *Fortune*, *The Economist*, or the *Wall Street Journal* – reveal **an addiction to a way of life disposed to biocide and geocide.**

What we propose here is not a solution of the issue but a clarification of the fact that the **real issue** before us is the **ecologist** on one hand and the **commercial-industrial establishment** on the other.

## CHAPTER 11 THE CORPORATION STORY

**A**mong the more significant concerns of the transition into the 21st century (again, with the Great Work being the transition from the Cenozoic to the Ecozoic) must be the modern industrial, commercial, and financial corporations. We need to

understand the larger significance of these corporations in American society, in the human community, and in the functioning of planet Earth.



*Thomas receiving gift from Mayor of Bari, Italy in 2003*

**The corporations, in their ambivalent commitment to financial profit while making progress in human affairs and providing comfort and security for people, are among the principal instruments for devastating the planet.**

They are the organizing centers directing the discovery of **modern science and technology** in the quest for human benefit and financial gain by exploiting the living and nonliving resources of the planet.

As long as these corporations continue in their relentless exploitation of the planet, the entire range of life development for the past 65 million years will be threatened. For that reason, the dominant profit motive of the corporation needs to be replaced with a dominant concern for the integral life community.

While the corporations have alleviated human misery in many ways, Vandana Shiva from India has pointed out the deleterious consequences of **the so-called Green Revolution**. She shows that, since the 1970s, it has ruined land that could have produced much more food, and that a third of India has become wasteland.

Within the United States, the corporations have legally gained the rights of citizens without assuming proportionate responsibility. They have devastated the natural environment of the North American continent, corrupted the government, dominated the landscape with the visual pollution of advertising, and denied working people their fair share of profits.

**Further, they have taken possession of human consciousness in order to evoke the deepest of psychic compulsions toward limitless consumption.**

So basic have they become to contemporary life that a central purpose of contemporary education has become to prepare younger persons for jobs within the corporate context.

They now own or control most of the natural assets of the planet, and they insist on receiving "corporate welfare." Yet, for the most part, they are responsible to no one except themselves and their shareholders.

**The transnational corporations are now the dominant power on the national and now global scale.**

Their control had its beginning when the European colonial powers assumed the right to invade, possess, and exploit the entire planet for the benefit of the religious, political, and economic powers then in control of the nations of Europe.

The North American continent, occupied by the English in 1606, became the foremost in its influence over the modern world.

*(Thomas briefly narrates the English colonial development of the corporation from its original form of a royal charter and its links to land speculation. Again, the narration is omitted here because of its complex and detailed length.)*

This development led to the tension **between the utilitarian approach to the natural world**, on which the corporations based themselves, and the more aesthetic and cultural intimacy that gave rise to **the environmental movements** throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. There have been various phases in this tension between the corporations and the environmental movement

1. In **the first phase**, naturalists like Henry Thoreau and John Muir established a more intimate association with the natural life systems of the North American continent. At the same time, others saw preservation of natural areas only in utilitarian terms – to be saved for "use" by future generations.

2. **The second phase** emerged with the building of canals and railroads into the continental interior, in order to integrate rural agriculture with financial and industrial urban centers. It produced the great corporate fortunes of Astor, Vanderbilt, Hill, Harriman, etc.

That phase made the entire continent available for intensive industrial and continental development.

3. **The third phase**, which produced the full national scale of the modern corporation, began after the Civil War with the ever-increasing discovery of oil and the invention of electrical, petrochemical, and automotive industries. These technological achievements providing the energy and engineering for a new type of control over the continent. **The United States soon became an urban industrial society.**

Two significant movements consequent to the corporate advance occurred at this time. The first was the beginning of **the conservation movement**. The other was the **social protest** against exploitation of working people.

*(Thomas here list a number of books that are critical of this period, as well as historical events in labor history. Again, the list is omitted here because of its detail and length.)*

At the same time, there emerged **Charles Darwin's evolutionary theory** based on natural selection.<sup>3</sup> Darwin's teaching was popularized by Herbert Spencer in the phrase "**survival of the fittest**." That teaching was Advanced in the United States by William Graham Sumner, who began teaching at Yale University. In this view, to aid the weak would produce a negative effect on human evolution.

**In this period, there was a mythic claim that the industrial process under corporate control, driven by the survival of the fittest, was the predestined means for fulfillment of human historical destiny.**

Industrial-technological development was to be manifest through economic competition within a free market. Further, such progress required control over nature (and over labor).

In 1886, in a railroad case, the United States Supreme Court declared that the corporation was a "person" before the law.

The corporation story of the twentieth century up to World War II is the story of continued expansion by appropriating the wealth of the continent and the labor of the people for private gain and limitless possessions – all supported by public subsidy.

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<sup>3</sup> Though Thomas does not mention it here, the Darwin family became central to creation of the modern movement of Eugenics.

4. **The fourth phase** of the corporation began with the ending of World War II in 1945. This led to global concern, as seen in the establishment of the United Nations in 1945, as well as associated economic organizations like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. A new global context was established.

This period in turn led for the United States to three developments, which David Korten describes in his 1994 book, *When Corporations Ruled the World*:

1. **Corporate libertarianism**
2. **Corporate welfare**
3. **Corporate colonialism**

*Corporate libertarianism* refers to the insistence of the corporation to carry on its work in any manner not legally forbidden. Pollution from the waste of its extraction or production is left as a public problem and cost (an "externality"). For example, agricultural corporations are 'free' to disrupt the biosystem through chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides, while the ecological damage is considered not their responsibility.

*Corporate welfare* means that the government uses public resources to support industrial or commercial corporations, with minimal regulation by government. This is particularly true of the nuclear and communication industries, along with others. Thus, corporations see government as helpful when it provides public funding for their support, but then charge government with being "corrupt" when it seeks to regulate corporate behavior. Big corporations require big government (to support them, but not to regulate them).

5. Now a **new global phase** in the economy is developing, as the national economy becomes inadequate. This is a new form of *corporate colonialism*. Through 'free-trade' policies, the former political colonies have become economic colonies, largely controlled by the transnational corporations through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

In recent history, the nation-state became the supreme human institutions. **Now, the corporations have become the primary (global) power centers.** The nation-states have become subservient to the economic

corporations. As a result, the globalization of the human project, as well as the globalization of the Earth economy, is now reaching its (ecological) limits.

**This fifth phase of corporation history needs to become a period of transition: from a devastating phase of corporation economics to the period when the corporations recognize that a human economy can only exist as a subsystem of the Earth economy. Corporations can only survive within the limited resources of the natural world.**

Such recognition began with the 1972 Stockholm Conference of the United Nations. Then, in 1982, the United Nations approved the **World Charter for Nature**, which had been proposed by Zaire. It is the finest official statement of human-Earth relations thus far from the world community.

Later, in 1983, the United Nations appointed the World Commission on Environment and Development, chaired by Gro Harlem Brundtland. Its 1987 report is titled *Our Common Future*. From that report came the phrase "**sustainable development**." That became the subject of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, which produced its *Agenda 21*.

While the phrase sustainable development is something of a contradiction, it has been modified into "**sustainable future**," a more acceptable phrase.

**CEOs and other corporate officials still insist that they know how to direct the destinies of the planet and its human community better than the natural forces that have until now controlled the functioning and destiny of both the planet and its human presence.**

They insist that **only large-scale programs** (e.g., World Bank, International Monetary Fund, World Trade Organization, etc.) can carry this out.

**Opposed to this view are a multitude of competent persons committed to the view of the (late) British economist E. F. Schumacher that "*Small is Beautiful*," meaning that the deepest answers and the most viable economic programs into the future are those that have an intimate relationship with the land.**

To realize this path, we will need to recover **the traditional craft and farming skills** that provided a relationship between the human community and the

natural world – in a way that is immensely more bountiful and less destructive than that of large-scale business projects.

When we hear of corporations "feeding the world" as a global enterprise, we can only reflect that **feeding themselves belongs to each local community**. It belongs to any people to be intimately related to the region of their dwelling.

As we reflect on this imposition of the immense global corporations trying to take responsibility for "feeding the world," we can only wonder at the reduction of the peoples of the Earth to a condition of being nurse-maided by some few corporation enterprises. We might conclude that Mother Monsanto with her sterile seeds wishes to take over the role of Mother Nature.

**Village people everywhere**, indeed all of us, need assistance within the pattern of our own inventive genius, not being reduced to a franchise of some distant corporation.



*A moment of humor with Stefano Parmigiani and the Mayor of Bari On the occasion of Thomas Berry receiving the 2003 Federico II Award for Peace from the City of Andria, Bari, Italy in 2003*

## CHAPTER 12 THE EXTRACTIVE ECONOMY

**W**ithin our historical destiny, three historical moments have been defining moments that led to the situation at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

1. **The first historical moment** was when the biblical-Christian emphasis on the spirituality of the human joined with the traditions of Greek humanism to create an anthropocentric view of the universe.

The earlier Christian tradition had preserved an integral relation of the human with the rest of the natural world. It saw the natural world as a manifestation of the divine and a meeting place for divine-human meeting. Now, however, there is a (spiritual) discontinuity between the human and the non-human components of the planet.

2. **The second historical moment** for this spiritual-humanist alienation was the Black Death in Europe, which occurred from 1347-1340 and in which a third of the population died. Faced with such tragedy, the peoples of Europe intensified devotion and sought redemption out of the world.

3. **The third historical moment** occurred in the last two decades of the twentieth century in the United States, namely the transition from an organic economy to an extractive economy. An organic economy is by its nature an ever-renewing economy. An extractive economy is by its nature a terminal economy, as well as a biologically disruptive economy.



*Elisabeth Ferrero translating Thomas' presentation at the Federico II Award for Peace, the Coppa della Fraternità, given to Thomas for his life-long dedication to a holistic paradigm respecting all forms of Creation. Castel del Monte, City of Andria, Bari, 15 March 2003*

*(Thomas now narrates the historical development of the extractive economy, and particularly the central role within it of petroleum and the corporation. He tells the story of how the whole society, including science, law, and education, became re-oriented to its misguided dream. Unfortunately, the summary of this chapter must pass over Thomas' narration of this important history, since it is too extensive to report here.)*

As a result of these developments, the natural world (and the human family) came to be seen as commodities for manipulation and profit, with little or no regard for ecological integrity. Even "sustainable development" presumes this framework.

Since the dominant corporations would exist beyond the control of any nation, they would be self-referent in their structure, functioning, and objectives.

The good of the corporation becomes identified with the well-being of the community, since it provides the jobs, pays the salaries, and produces the goods that people buy with their salaries.

**A kind of global company town comes into being. The political order becomes a subsidiary function of the corporations.**

A so-called democratic-based market economy controlled by corporations with bases of operations in mot of the nations of the world is presented as the new way to peace, prosperity, and all good things. Education of the young is largely to prepare students for their role in the corporate world.

**We are in a new historical situation.** Yet what is happening fulfills the deep historical commitments of Western culture. Our Western culture long ago abandoned its integral relation with the planet on which we live.

**The alternative to this disintegrative framework is to accept that the universe, and the Earth within it, is primary.** Further, the universe is not uniform or standardized but rich in its creative diversity. Yet, amidst this diversity, all is related. Nothing exists in isolation. No living being nourishes itself.

**Disruption of the biological integrity of the planet is the indictment that must be brought against the extractive economy. Only a restoration of the biological integrity of the planet with its various bioregions can assure the integral survival of Earth into the future.**

Yet the present industrial drive for uniform, standardized processes destroys this integrity. At the same time, as we realize how vast is the destruction, some begin to dream of abandoning Earth and colonizing Mars. But that is like Aesop's fable of the dog with the bone seeing his image in the water, and then diving into to get the bone imaged there.

Instead, we need to esteem this planet and its functioning in the depths of their mystery.

### CHAPTER 13 THE PETROLEUM INTERVAL

*(This chapter tells the story of the development and proximate end of the petroleum age, in which petroleum became the world's most profitable industry. The historical narration is omitted here, however, to save space, but key points are noted below.)*

**T**he story of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and the entire 20<sup>th</sup> century has been largely the story of petroleum. Those years, the glory years of the industrial period and the devastating years of the Earth, might be designated as the Petroleum Interval. The consequences of those years in extinct species, toxic residue, and disturbed ecosystems will remain into the indefinite future.

Though we are now so conditioned by our dependence on petroleum that we can hardly imagine life without them, the story of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be the story of the terminal phase of petroleum and the invention of new patterns of human living in relation to Earth's resources.

There are already viable experiments in an alternative, non-petroleum-based, and ecological way of living at the local level. Some examples are in the village of Gaviotas, east of the Andes in Columbia, and in the state of Kerala on the southwestern coast of India. Further, Amory Lovins in his 1997 book *Soft Energy Paths*, has outlined a **post-petroleum future**.



*Reception for Spirituality and Sustainability Conference by the Franciscan Friars Commission for Justice, Peace, and the Safeguarding of Creation, Assisi, 1997*

### CHAPTER 1 REINVENTING THE HUMAN

**T**he historical mission of our times is to reinvent the human – at the species level, with critical reflection, within the community of life-systems, in a time-developmental context, by means of story and shared dream experience.

At the species level, **radical new cultural forms are needed**, with the primary source of guidance in our genetic coding and drawing on ancient symbolic archetypes like the Heroic Journey, Death-Rebirth, the Sacred Center, the Great Mother, and the Tree of Life.

1. As regards economics, we need **local subsistence economies**, and not simply national and global economies – with schools of business preparing students for such local economies.
2. We need a jurisprudence providing **legal rights for the geological and biological**, as well as for the human.
3. We need critical reflection with critical competence to make our **sciences and technologies coherent with the natural world**.
4. We need to reinvent the human in relation to the **diverse bioregions** of our planet Earth.
5. We need to understand the human within a **time-developmental context** that has three basic principles:
  - a. **Differentiation:** The basic direction of the evolutionary process is toward constant differentiation within a functional order. (Yet the modern world is directed toward corporate-consumerist monocultures.)
  - b. **Subjectivity:** Each individual carries its own inner articulation, which is the subjective sacred depth of the universe's numinous mystery.
  - c. **Communion:** The entire universe is bonded together in such a way that the presence of each individual is felt throughout its entire spatial and temporal range, which is a gorgeous and comprehensive unity.

**This is our story of the universe** – from galactic expansion to Earth formation, to life emergence, to self-reflexive consciousness. This story continues the

mythic accounts of ancient times, but we have moved from cosmos to cosmogenesis.

It is at once the journey of the universe and the journey of each individual being. The present imperative is **to continue the story** in the integrity of the unfolding life-systems of Earth, which presently are threatened in their survival.

**We need to continue this story by means of the shared dream experience. The creative process, both human and cosmological, is too mysterious for easy explanation.**

But we must also realize that few things are so destructive as a dream or entrancement that has lost the integrity of its meaning and entered a destructive manifestation. This has happened often enough through political ideologies and religious visionaries. The result today of such destructive dreams is the destruction being wrought by industrial civilization.

**Healing that destruction requires deep cultural therapy.** Such is our present situation. It requires a new revelatory experience to reawaken human consciousness to the grandeur and sacred quality of the Earth process – the dream of the Earth.<sup>4</sup>

## CHAPTER 15 DYNAMICS OF THE FUTURE

**A**s we enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we observe a widespread re-awakening to the wonder of the Earth. The human venture depends absolutely on this quality of awe and reverence and joy in the Earth and all that lives and grows upon the Earth.

None of our machine-made products, none of our computer-based achievements can evoke that total commitment to life from the **subconscious regions** of our being. When we are presented with the notion of Earth as a collection of commodities to be bought and sold, the very meaning of the Earth is involved.

Our present peril is not the first that the Earth and living beings have endured. But **the present danger** to the planet, with its conscious intrusion into the natural rhythms of the Earth process, is something **radically different**. Because of our need to fuel the

industrial world, **we have created a technosphere incompatible with the biosphere.**

In the **Paleolithic and the Neolithic periods**, also in the earlier stages of the classical civilizations, we lived in an ocean of energy, which we perceived ultimately as spirit forces. During this period, the resources of Earth were little diminished.

From the unconscious, there came great visions. Earth was **the Great Mother**, heaven a comprehensive Providence. The ultimate mystery of things was celebrated in ritual worship.



*Luncheon gathering for participants in Spirituality & Sustainability with Thomas Berry, Assisi, Italy in 1997*

But the historical realism of Western civilization and our later scientific empiricism have weakened the conscious presence to the natural world that once guided and supported our psychic dimension lives.

In recent times, we have replaced these earlier mythic structures first with **the myth of "progress,"** and then with **the myth of evolution.** This new consciousness developed from Francis Bacon, to Galileo, up to the French encyclopedists of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**In this development, evolution came to be understood as a process governed only by chance and without any meaning – as Richard Dawkins proposed in his book *The Blind Watchmaker*.**

**Yet a different interpretation of the data of evolution is available. We need to understand that the evolutionary process is neither random nor determined but creative. It follows the general pattern of all creativity.**

<sup>4</sup> Thomas' first and perhaps most powerful book on ecology was titled *The Dream of the Earth*.



While there is no way of fully understanding the origin moment of the universe, we can appreciate the **direction** of the complexity in structure and from lesser to greater modes of consciousness.

We can also understand the **governing principles** of evolution in terms of its three movements toward differentiation, inner spontaneity, and comprehensive bonding.

With this understanding, it would be difficult to over-emphasize the **magnificence of this evolutionary doctrine**. It provides a grandeur in our view of the universe and our human role in it that is overwhelming.

**Indeed, in its human expression, the universe is able to reflect on itself and enjoy its grandeur in a special mode of conscious self-awareness. This evolutionary vision provides the most profound mystique of the universe.**

Only in the context of an emergent universe will the human project come to an integral understanding of itself. We must, however, experience the universe in **its psychic as in its physical aspect**.

**In the end, the universe can only be explained in terms of celebration. We recall the manner in which the indigenous peoples and the peoples who shaped the earlier civilizations sought to coordinate every human activity with the seasonal renewal movements of the natural world.**

Within such celebrations, the **dance** is one of the most dramatic forms of cosmological integration of the human within the universe.

While we need to continue such seasonal-based liturgies like those of the indigenous peoples and the classical traditions, we need to **create new liturgies** based on the transformation episodes of the evolutionary sequence in the physical, geological, and biological stages of development.

**There is a significant difference between physical energies and psychic energies.** Physical energy is diminished by use. In contrast, psychic energies are increased by use and by the number of those who participate.

Along with a new appreciation of the psychic dimension of life, **we now see a strengthening of the ancient symbols of the human community**, which leads

to a deeper experience of the self – especially through the archetypal symbols of the unconscious.

**The symbols of the Great Journey, Death-Rebirth, the Cosmic Tree, and the Sacred Center (plus the Earth Mother) provide contact with underlying energies that guide and sustain the human soul.**

- **The Journey symbol** in its fullness must now be understood as the great journey that the universe has made from its primordial flaring forth until the present.
- So too **the Death-Rebirth symbol** in its fullness must now be understood in relation to the universe's moments of transformation
- In the same way, **the other deep symbols** must acquire a new depth of meaning, without diminishing their prior meaning, in light of the Universe Story.

**The other force that needs to be mentioned is the force of will.** Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, in his *Human Energy*, saw clearly that we must consciously will the further stages of the evolutionary process. Our responsibility to the Earth is not simply to preserve it, but in some sense to guide and energize the next transformation.

**But the human will can do this only through an acknowledged union with the Earth.** Central to this process is our contact with the sacred and vast range of Earth's psychic dynamism.

**Spiritual disciplines are once again renewed** throughout the world by experiencing the ultimate mystery in the inner self, in the human community, in the Earth process as part of the Universe Story.

**We humans are that reality in which the entire Earth comes to a special mode of reflexive consciousness.** We are ourselves a mystical quality of the Earth. In this way, the human acts as a pervading *logos*.

**The destiny of the Earth is our own destiny. Exploitation of the Earth is exploitation of the human.** We do not serve the Earth or ourselves by blasting the mountains apart for mineral resources. For in losing the wonder and awesome quality of the mountains, we destroy an urgent dimension of our own reality.

We are not lacking in the dynamic forces needed to create the future. We live immersed in a sea of energy

beyond all comprehension. **This energy is ours not by domination but by invocation.**



*S.A.F.E. students in Thomas Berry's Dante course in Sacro Convento, Basilica di San Francesco, Assisi, 1993*

## CHAPTER 16 THE FOURFOLD WISDOM

**I**n the opening years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, as the human community faces a difficult situation in its relation with the natural world, we might reflect that a fourfold wisdom is available to guide us into the future:

1. **The wisdom of indigenous peoples**, extending back into the Paleolithic period and surviving today among the 200 million indigenous peoples.
2. **The wisdom of women**, having flourished in the Neolithic Period, is now experiencing its reassertion in new form.
3. **The wisdom of the classical traditions**, beginning some five thousand years ago in urban literate form as the most powerful force in human cultural formation, until it was challenged by the *modern scientific tradition*.
4. **The wisdom of science**, though having advanced since the 16<sup>th</sup> century, yet still only in its beginning phase.

**INDIGENOUS WISDOM** is distinguished by its intimacy with and participation in the functioning of the natural world. It is carried by the sacred personalities: elders as men and women, the chiefs, the shamans.

A primary accomplishment was occupation of the continents, the development of spoken languages (during the late Paleolithic and Neolithic Periods), the development of the arts, music, and literature.

Indigenous sensitivity to the powers of the universe experienced both benign and fearsome forces. **In America, the pervasive spirit presence was experienced as essentially benign and as a way of beauty.** The powers within natural forces are seen as personal in nature and are named and addressed.

In the modern European contact with the indigenous peoples of the world, **Western civilization can be seen as being weakened, both morally and physically.** It began to be revealed as estranged from the deeper realms of consciousness still cultivated by indigenous peoples.

In America, despite the past dispossession of their lands and the devastation of their former way of life, the Indian peoples possess, it seems, **an indestructible psychic formation** that will remain into the indefinite future.

Indigenous peoples have held on to their ancient wisdom traditions of which European-Americans have had little or no knowledge. **Dialogue with indigenous peoples is urgently needed** to provide the human community with models of a more integral human presence to the Earth.

**THE WISDOM OF WOMEN** is to join the knowing of the body to that of the mind, to join soul to spirit, intuition to reasoning, feeling consciousness to intellectual analysis, intimacy to detachment, subjective presence to objective distance.

Men in Western civilization have isolated women and have appropriated for themselves the human project outside the home. As a result, the human project in its Western manifestations has become a patriarchal establishment in quest for unlimited domination.

**Such patriarchal domination tries to appropriate the Earth for its own purposes, but in so doing renders the Earth dysfunctional.**

That androcentrism has also inflicted terrors on women, as if women existed only for the purposes of men. But women are now revealing the reality of Western civilization's patriarchal dominance. And the emerging assertive consciousness of women is also revealing the destructive path of Western civilization.

This manifestation of men to themselves and of Western civilization to itself might be considered the first

most dramatic manifestation of the wisdom of women.

Androcentrism and patriarchy bring down in ruins the finest aspirations of the religious and humanist traditions of Western civilization – and, it seems, most other civilizations.

**While men can assist by welcoming this new transformation, one of the first steps for women now is assertion of their role within the larger realm of human affairs.**

19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century pioneers of women's distinction in this larger realm include Madame Marie Curie in science, Maria Montessori in pedagogy, Rachel Carson in biology, and Barbara McClintock in genetics. Further, in the area of environmental renewal, Mary Joy Breton has listed the great contributions of women in her book *Women Pioneers for the Environment*.

The earliest and most profound human experience of woman in former centuries of human development is found in **identifying maternal nurturance as the primordial creating, sustaining, and fulfilling power of the universe**. This found expression during the late Paleolithic Period and in the Neolithic Period in the figure of **the Goddess** – particularly as shown in the work of Marija Gimbutas.

The primacy of the **male deities** did not arise out of this early historical context. Those frequently warrior deities arose later and became dominant throughout the Eurasian landmass. All this was the **beginning of the urban literate, patriarchal civilizations**, with the subordination or denunciation of feminine deities and the establishment of men as divine rulers or as rulers with divine sanction.

**THE WISDOM OF THE CLASSICAL TRADITIONS is based on revelatory experience of a spiritual realm both transcendent to and immanent in the visible world about us, and in the capacity of humans to participate in that world to achieve the fullness of their own mode of being.**

- **The Hindu tradition** of India is founded on the revelation of the unity of the deepest self of the universe, the *Atman*, with with the inner self of the human, a revelation received by the ancient *rishis* in the Upanishadic meditations.

- **The Buddhist tradition** is founded on the enlightenment experience of Gautama Buddha, for whom the universe was revealed as transient, sorrowful, and unreal. The immediate conclusion is expressed in the teaching of universal compassion.
- **The Chinese experience** moves less toward the transcendent world than to the spontaneities and the inner rhythms of the cosmos. The supreme experience is that of unity with the "One Boy" of all the components of the universe, "the ten thousand things."
- **The classical wisdom of the Western world** is focused on the existence of a monotheistic personal male deity, creator of the universe clearly distinct from himself, a deity communicating his directions for the human community. The personalities in communication with this deity were considered as prophetic personalities who speak for the deity – later appearing in the human form as teacher and savior.
- **The Greek humanist tradition** is another component of the Western tradition. Expressed in literary tragedies, philosophy (especially Plato and Aristotle), and architecture and sculpture, the Greek humanistic tradition came together with the (Semitic) biblical tradition to shape the intellectual and spiritual tradition of the West.

The Western revelation included a pattern of world-historical achievement to be accomplished by a chosen group. This historical dynamism has driven the course of the Western world globally to seek millennial fulfillment in historical time and a post-historical fulfillment in eternal transcendence.

In the fourth century, the Greek and Christian traditions fused with the Roman Empire, leading to a long period of internal and external strife. They eventually became a coherent cultural expression in medieval Europe, which also included the converted 'barbarian' (Germanic) tribes.

**The Western cultural synthesis would become the dominant power in the future. It would eventually seek to impose its technological dominion upon the natural world, with the consequence of disrupting the geological and biological systems of the Earth.**

Even though the religious tradition would be rejected in the later scientific age, the deep mind formation of the scientist, as well as the driving quest of Western civilization, would be derived from the original religious vision and intellectual tradition.

The outward movement of Western civilization in taking possession of the planet began in the ninth and tenth centuries, when the Frankish empire integrated by Charlemagne began its defense against the incoming Normans from the North, the Magyars from the east, and the Muslims from the southwest.

This movement of resistance then turned outward with the Crusades, a movement continued by the later exploration and colonization of the greater part of the planet.

**Most powerful in shaping the mind of Western civilization were the (Catholic) universities that were founded in the medieval period.** Among these were the universities of Paris, Oxford and Cambridge, Prague and Vienna, Salamanca, and Bologna.

These and other centers of learning have been among the most powerful institutions that have come down into our own times. **They provided the context in which later scientific learning could develop and be communicated to our times.**

Those with any knowledge of this expansive view of the past several thousand years can appreciate the manner in which the contemporary world is still guided by the understanding of the universe and the life interpretation provided by this immense heritage.

**Yet a harsh and bitter aspect of the entire period was endured by the peasantry** (depicted in T. S. Elliot's play *Murder in the Cathedral*). There was indeed the feeling of participation in some Great Work, but there was also frequent starvation, minimal protection from winter, oppression by those in power, the hardships of women, persecution of religious dissidents, and needless wars.

These gave to the period an ambivalence that it would carry throughout later times when **social critics such as Karl Marx and Peter Kropotkin** would identify the harshness endured by the populace for the grandeur experience by the elite.

**Yet, however betrayed, there were also noble ideals, enduring insights, and valid directions for the**

**human project – compassion for the oppressed and, willingness to endure suffering for others.** We see this in the early centuries of Mahayana Buddhism, in the gentle Taoist traditions of China, and in Francis of Assisi's intimacy with the natural world and commitment to the poor.

**Among the contributions of Western civilization, we need to list not only the historical realism but also the emphasis on human intelligence.** In the twelfth and thirteen centuries, the thought of Aristotle passed over from Islamic Spain into the Christian world of medieval Europe. Thomas Aquinas, brought to Rome from Paris in 1259, dedicated himself to the interpretation of biblical revelation within the context of Aristotelian cosmology.

**Thomas Aquinas taught that no authentic truth known by the human mind could be opposed to any revealed truth.** This commitment of the European world to intellectual truth made possible the succeeding age of science – though tension arose between modern empiricism and the legacy of Aristotle.

**THE WISDOM OF SCIENCE, as this exists in the Western world at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, lies in its discovery that the universe has come into being by a sequence of evolutionary transformations over an immense period of time.**

**We might say that the universe, in the phenomenal order, is self-emergent, self-sustaining, and self-fulfilling.**

Every other being is universe-referent in itself and in its every activity. Awareness that the universe is cosmogenesis might be the greatest change in human consciousness that has taken place since the awakening of the human mind in the Paleolithic Period.

**We are now in the transition from the earlier human sense of identity within a spatial (cyclical) understanding of the universe to this new sense of identity within an emergent universe.**

**But, even now, that transition has not been accomplished in any comprehensive way by any of the worlds spiritual traditions.**

This change in human consciousness had its beginning in the sixteenth century with Copernicus and his followers Kepler and Galileo. That change would

later reach its fullness in the work of Isaac Newton (considered the 'father' of modern physics).<sup>5</sup>

They could not have done their work with such confidence, unless Thomas Aquinas had authenticated the reasoning function of the mind in the Western tradition. But the new consciousness soon precipitated a break with the Thomist-Aristotelean tradition.

Later, out of this break, many modern thinkers would conclude that the spirit world and the soul were merely an unreal emotional or aesthetic experience of the human psyche.<sup>6</sup> As a subjective illusion, without acceptable evidence, they were seen as having no objective validity.

Scientists then took over both the intellectual and moral guidance of society through their control over the human mind in the educational program. But none of the founders of modern science, not even Newton, had any idea of the evolutionary nature of the universe.

**New discoveries linked to evolution also led to an awareness of the unity of the universe as a single story in which all the components are intimately related.**

While the unity of the universe is one aspect and its emergent nature another, yet a third is human intelligence as an integral component of the universe. The universe includes human intelligence. **Thus, if we consider that human intelligence is a psychic factor, then the universe from the beginning must be a psychic-producing process**

**In a similar but larger manner to earlier epic stories, the "Universe Story," in all its aspects, now becomes the epic story of our times.**

**ALL THE WISDOM TRADITIONS** -- those of indigenous peoples, of women, of the classical traditions, and of science -- all agree in the intimacy of the humans with the natural world in a single community of existence.

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<sup>5</sup> Editorial comment: This scientific transformation arose out of thinkers within the Christian tradition. Copernicus was a Catholic priest. Kepler had studied theology in a Lutheran seminary and was deeply committed to linking the spiritual with the physical. And Galileo, despite his conflict with the Catholic Church, was a close friend of the current pope and

- **The wisdom of the indigenous peoples** celebrates the human as existing within the larger universe.
- **The wisdom of women** celebrates the universe as a mutually nourishing presence of all things with each other, as presented in the Goddess symbol. (Women are now revealing the current disaster of androcentrism.)
- **The wisdom of the classical traditions** -- Hindu, Buddhist, Chinese, and Western -- all teach the fulfillment of the human in the larger functioning of the universe. (For example, the teaching about "Cosmopolis" by the Stoic philosopher Chrysippus, and the mystical Christology of St. Paul's Letter to the Colossians.)
- **The wisdom of science** now provides a new basis for the unity of the humans with the larger Earth community in the large scale structure and functioning of the universe and in its geobiological systems of the Earth.

The discoveries of science now give us a new basis for the unity of humans with the larger Earth community. But no one wisdom-tradition, not even that of science, is alone sufficient. **We need all the wisdom traditions.**

**In particular, for the first time, we begin to understand that the human project belongs in the care and under the direction of both women and men. This is a movement out of a patriarchal society into a truly integral human order. So too the traditional Western civilization must withdraw from its efforts at domination over the Earth.**

This will be one of the most severe disciplines in the future, for the Western addiction to economic dominance is even more powerful than the drive toward political dominance.

But we have to guide us the epic of evolution, the contribution of science toward the future. **The universe story is our story.** We can feel secure in our

his beloved daughter was a Catholic nun. So too, Newton, though probably what would be called a "Unitarian," remained a deeply religious Anglican with the largest part of his written corpus being on spiritual matters.

<sup>6</sup> Editorial comment: The word "psyche" is, of course, the Greek word for "soul."

efforts to fulfill the Great Work, which is at once the work of our human community, of our entire Earth community, and of the universe itself.

**CHAPTER 17  
MOMENTS OF GRACE**

**As we enter the 21st century, we are experiencing a moment of grace -- a privileged moment of great cosmological and historical transformation.**

*(Thomas now elaborates on earlier great transformations in the evolution of the universe, of Earth, and of the human family. Again, they are too many to summarize briefly here.)*

**This new moment of grace is different, however, from any previous human moment. For the first time, the planet is being disturbed by humans in its geological structure and and functioning. We are also altering the great classical civilizations and the indigenous tribal cultures.**

*(Thomas elaborates on the great destruction presently being inflicted. Again, the elaboration cannot be briefly summarized here.)*

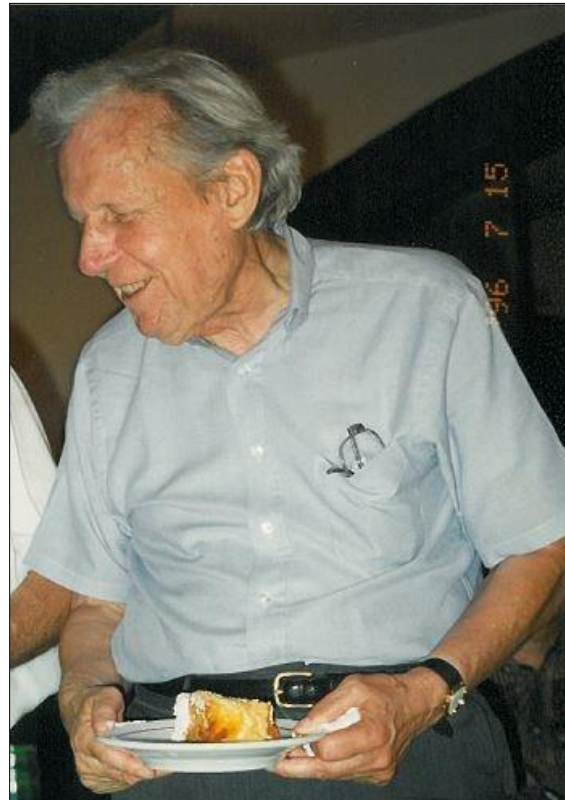
**We have hope, however, with the younger generation that is growing up with greater awareness of the need for a mutually enhancing mode of human presence to the Earth.**

We have even been told that concern for the environment must become "the central organizing principle of civilization." (Al Gore, *Earth in Balance*, p. 269)

In addition, there is now developing a profound mystique of the natural world. Beyond technical comprehension, we now experience the deep mysteries of existence through the wonders of the world around us. Our full entrancement is presented in literature, as we see in the writings of Loren Eiseley.

Although the human challenge must never be underestimated, it is difficult to believe that the larger purposes of the universe or of planet Earth will ultimately be thwarted.

**The distorted dream of a technological paradise is now being replaced by the more viable dream of a mutually enhancing human presence within an ever-renewing organic-based Earth.**



*Special sweet treats for Thomas  
by the chef of Hotel Posta, Assisi, 1996*

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**THOMAS BERRY IN ITALY:  
REFLECTIONS ON SPIRITUALITY & SUSTAINABILITY**

*(Pacem in Terris Press, 2017)*