

Earth Story, Sacred Story

Universe Story

by

Father Charles A.E. Brandt (Yde)

(This is the first part of a 4-part series on the Universe Story)

We explain things by telling their story- how they came into being and the changes that have taken place over the course of time, whether minutes or millennia...This is especially true in explaining those profound formative influences that have shaped our sense of the sacred. So writes Thomas Berry, co-author with Brian Swimme of *THE UNIVERSE STORY*.

In the midst of a desert you find a little patch of life, an oasis. Our earth is a fragile blue-green oasis, alive in the lifeless expanse of black space. The survival of our increasingly endangered oasis urgently requires an earth-human relationship in which people understand and respect the natural processes that keep the oasis alive. The coming into being of such an endearing relationship requires the union of the old and the new.

Since neolithic times (12,000 years ago) we have been working out of a human-divine, human-human set of relationships, to the almost total exclusion of a earth-human relationship. If we are to move into the future it is necessary to bring the human community into a greater presence of the natural world in a mutually enhancing manner to form a single sacred community.

Human assaults on the planet today are of a new kind and scale. Symptoms include depletion of the stratospheric ozone layer, which is essential to protect people and crops and ocean microlife from solar ultraviolet radiation; carbon dioxide buildup, threatening a global greenhouse effect and worldwide climatic changes; acid rain; increasing levels of chemical, radioactive and other toxic pollutants in water, air, soils contributing to a rise in cancers and other environmentally-induced diseases, health problems, and genetic damage; the loss of topsoil and increasing desertification, contributing to hunger and starvation for millions; chemical and biological, as well as nuclear weapons; and the massive destruction of rainforests, with the loss of vital watersheds and the depletion of the Earth's oxygen supply, further compounding the carbon-dioxide threat.

The life of the Earth is also threatened by the loss of millions of plant and animal species due to over-industrialization, deforestation, pollution, selective breeding, and monocropping. These life forms are part of us and our cultures; their loss will impoverish both the Earth and the human.

So ominous is this threat that some believe, as does Dr. David Suzuki as quoted recently

by Barry Peterson in the Vancouver Sun, "that humankind has already crossed the point of no return in the planetary disaster its behaviour is causing."

Thomas Merton, a monastic theologian, and the most widely spiritual writer of all times points out that we live in a state of alienation and confusion today:

"The curious state of alienation and confusion of man in modern society is perhaps more bearable because it is lived in common, with a multitude of distractions and escapes - and also with opportunities for fruitful action and genuine Christian self-forgetfulness. But underlying all life is the ground of doubt and self-questioning which sooner or later must bring us face to face with the ultimate meaning of our life. This self-questioning can never be without a certain existential 'dread' - a sense of insecurity, of lostness, of exile, of sin. A sense that one has somehow been untrue not so much to abstract moral or social norms but to one's own inmost truth."

Our "inmost truth" is our true self that sleeps within us waiting to be awakened by the Spirit. Transformation of consciousness is that movement from our false exterior self from which we operate most of the time - to the discovery of our deep true self, our inmost truth. It is important to realize that we can never arrive at this true self without a deep bonding and communion with every creature in the universe. We live in a universe which is a complicated web of interdependent relationships. The quantity of an atom is the entire universe since it effects every atom in the universe, and every atom affects it. John Muir, the great naturalist, said that when we break twig, we affect the most distant star. We can't become our true self without every other creature. If we don't have an human-earth relationship, as is mostly the case, we are doomed to a continuation of a life of alienation and "existensial dread".

So then the question arises, are we confirmed in the "fact that humankind has already crossed the point of no return in the planetary disaster its behaviour is causing". Definitely not! We live at a time in the unfolding of the universe where there is strong indication of a cultural rebirth and hope. And although we may be in deep pathology and in an apparent crash situation, we can make the choice between "dread" and hope, and in choosing hope can do our part in bringing about a greater presence of the human community to the natural world so that they embrace one another in a mutually enhancing manner, so that become a single sacred community.

And wasn't that one of our Decisions For Action statement in our recent dioscean synod when "We chose to become the kind of people who will: A.54: "Accept our responsibility

to protect and foster the health of the Earth, acknowledging the human community and the natural world as a single sacred community. In doing this, let us be guided by the wisdom of those who are spiritually in contact with our earth, e.g. Native people. - and encourage new models of community based on a relationship with the entire cosmos."

If we wish to have a relationship with the "entire cosmos" we must embrace a cosmology (a story that explains where we have come from and where we are going) that will give us adequate guidance. Hence the importance of the Universe Story.

A COSMOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY FOR A NEW MILLENNIUM was the title for a recent lecture\workshop held recently in Victoria. It was an important conference and an inspiring one with a surprisingly big turnout, this conference facilitated by Dr. Brian Swimme, a gravitational physicist and cosmologist from the California Institute of Integral Studies, which took place at S. Andrew's High School Hall, Victoria, August 1 and 2, 1994. Dr. Swimme, called a "mathematical mystic" brought to us a sense of awe as he lectured on the vast mystery of the cosmos. He is a scientific storyteller of the universe's unfolding, from the "primordial flaring forth" 15 billions years ago to the emergence of cosmogenesis (the awareness "that the universe is not just a big place, but a process, a cosmic event that's going somewhere") in our own time. As a scientist he sees the universe as a wondrous mystery, unfolding the presence of God in each moment of its emergence. Our own bishop, Remi J. De Roo, introduced Brian and stressed the importance of science and religion working hand in hand. "Science needs religion, and Religion needs Science: he stated. Indeed, the event was sponsored by the Centre For Studies in Religion and Society, University of Victoria and by New Perspectives Forestry Society.

(Parts two and three of this article will explore the "Universe Story" and especially the discovery of cosmogenesis which Dr. Swimme and Dr. Berry consider the most important scientific discovery of all times. Then the question: what spiritual practice should accompany this vision of the universe. The answer, I think, is the practice of meditation, a type of meditation that is practised in the core of the soul rather than merely on the surface of the spirit. Meditation - or a similar and truly contemplative practice - becomes an absolute ethical imperative, a new categorical imperative, if we are not to mere siphon off past humanity's struggles.)

Fr. Charles Brandt is a hermit benedictine monk who lives in Black Creek on the Oyster River. On Jan 26-28, 1996, he will be facilitating a contemplative retreat, "Spirituality of the Environment" at Queenswood House of Studies, Victoria.

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Part II

When Dr. Brian Swimme, mathematical cosmologist, spoke at St. Andrew's High School Hall last year, he was enthusiastically received both by the catholic community of Vancouver Island and the greater community of the northwest. Brian in conjunction with Father Thomas Berry has devoted many years to the work of synthesizing current knowledge in the sciences in order to present an integral story of the universe.

Their recent book, **THE UNIVERSE STORY**, From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era, A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos, has been very well received. Matthew Fox, author of **THE COMING OF THE COSMIC CHRIST**, writes: "...At last!...A Common creation story that can awaken us from our inertia...The Basis for our new mythology is in this book - and it's arrived just in the nick of time." And Clarlene Spretnak, author of **STATES OF GRACE** remarks: "Illuminates (Universe Story) the nature of the Earth community and the entire cosmos...beckons us toward liberation."

From the big bang to the present and into the next millennium, **THE UNIVERSE STORY** celebrates the total community of existence as it unites science and the humanities through a profound and poetic modern myth. Grounded in contemporary scientific understanding and inspired by the world's great wisdom traditions, cosmologist Brian Swimme and cultural historian Thomas Berry meld the findings of contemporary science-cosmology, genealogy, biology, and sociology- with the human search for meaning. The resulting account articulates fifteen billion years of existence with awe, delight, and vision.

I consider their work the epic work of our time, a story that gives us an interpretation of the past, the identity of the present and a guide to the future. The Universe Story is the articulation of a vision of the order of magnitude that is needed to deal with the problems of our time.

So it was that I accepted with a certain amount of delight to be one of the keynote speaker at the Canada-wide conference of meditators held in Winnipeg of this year, October 27-29 at Villa Maria Retreat House in that city. Such a conference is held every two years, and draws participants that include meditators, group leaders, provincial coordinators, Benedictine oblates from across Canada. In the world today there are over 800 meditation groups in 35 countries with 24 centres following the teaching of Dom John Main, O.S.B. The keynote speaker who opened and closed the conference was of course our international leader and teacher, Dom Laurence Freeman, OSB, the successor to John Main. I was invited to speak on "Meditation and the Environment". Ten years ago I don't think meditators would have made this connection. It is my understanding that the national committee that arranged the conference was insistent that the environment receive attention and that the relationship between environment and meditation be explored.

I first heard of John Main while listening to some tapes of Ernest Larkin, O. Carm. on prayer. The name of John Main came up. There was a comparison of his teaching with other teachers. The thing that I recall is that Fr. Larkin liked John Main's insistence on the uninterrupted recitation of the mantra (Maranatha). His teaching reminded me of Dom John Chapman, OSB, Abbot of Downside, a teaching that I had subscribed to for many years, before discovering John Main in Winnipeg in 1981. I had substituted an apartment on the 21st floor of Holiday Towers for my hermitage on Vancouver Island, while I was under contract with the Manitoba Government to plan and setup a (state of the art) book, archival and fine art on paper conservation laboratory for the Provincial Government. This seemed a far cry from the temperate rain forest of the Oyster River, but in fact I perhaps found more solitude on that isolated 21st floor in a somewhat impersonal city than among the douglas fir along the Oyster River. My altar was St. Mary's Cathedral and workshop was the Provincial Archives where I learned to treat (as admonished in the Holy Rule) the tools of the workshop with the same respect as the vessels of the altar.

I am speaking now a great deal about Winnipeg where the national conference for meditation was just held. It was there-years before-that I first came to see that there was a direct connection between meditation and the bringing about a greater presence of the human community to the natural world. I recall the great flights of snowgeese:5 an exaltation of flight and song expressing the sheer joy of existence. The city was the home of Louis Riel, the Father of Manitoba; St. Boniface with its historic cathedral, and St. Norbert with its Trappist foundation. Manitoba (Swam Lake) is the home of my bishop, Remi J. De Roo. Especially do I recall Oak Hammock Marsh, a few miles from the city. It is one of the great flyways of migratory birds in North America. Many bird species are found there. Major Holland who often led us on bird trips there told me once how the numbers of birds was declining and some of the species once found were no longer evident. Not that they had disappeared completely, but were no longer observed. There is nothing so absolute as the disappearance of a species. Neither heaven or earth can bring it back. We will never again see the Passenger Pigeon, or the Carolina Parakeet, or the Ivorybilled Woodpecker. They are gone forever. We don't know for sure how many species of plants and animals there: over a million of the larger variety, of which we have only studied 500,000. If we count all the microbial forms, there may be as many as one hundred million species. But they are beginning to disappear, at the rate now of between 20 and 40 thousand a year. And we don't even know how they fit into our bio-diversity patterns, how they were needed by other species to maintain a balance of the complicated web of interdependent relationships. And we will never know.

My talk at the conference was SPIRITUALITY OF THE ENVIRONMENT. The title implies two things:

1) That there is a spiritual dimension to the Universe, and this from the very beginning, 15 billions years ago, at the primordial flaring forth of the universe. This magnificent story - it can only be told and understood as a "story"- is told in Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry's UNIVERSE STORY. It is important to know this Story, this

cosmology. If we don't know the story, we don't know ourselves, our sister and brother. We really don't know anything.

2) It implies some kind of spiritual practice. What type of Spiritual Practice or Discipline goes with or should accompany this type of vision of a universe which has a spiritual dimension and with the concept of universe that is still unfolding in its series of irreversible transformations that have brought us to this present moment in the universe's history. I believe that the spiritual practice that is needed is MEDITATION, a practice of a truly contemplative prayer that will lead to a greater harmony of the human community and the natural world.

CELEBRATION: a human being is characterized by wonder and celebration, as well as compassion, communion and creativity. That is a human's mode of consciousness. We could go a step further and say that life is celebration.

UNIVERSE: Brain Swimme and Fr. Thomas Berry describe the universe as a single, multiform, sequential, celebratory event, as implied in the designation of a flock of larks as an exaltation of larks, a title with implications of flight and song expressing delight in existence. Even the afflictions endured cannot diminish the songs that resonate throughout the natural world. The universe rings with a certain exultation and joy in being, while experiencing the sacrificial dimensions of a natural world.

OUR FUNDAMENTAL ROLE is to enable the earth and the universe entire to reflect on and to celebrate themselves, and the deep mysteries they bear within them, in a special mode of conscious self-awareness. The EARTH seems to be a reality that is developing with the simple air of celebrating the joy of existence.

COSMIC LITURGY, is what we might call this celebration. Certainly Shakespeare was aware of it when he wrote "...there's not the smallest orb which thou beholdst but in its motion like an angel sings..." And QUANTUM PHYSICS today speaks of the universe as a complicated web of interdependent relationships, a great dance of energy.

DOM MARMION, the great Abbot of Meredsous in Belgium, where Dom John Chapman went to be formed as monk when he was received into the Catholic Church, where he studied the Conferences of Cassian as the Holy Rule instructs and later became a great teacher on prayer, teaching a form of prayer very similar to that taught by Dom John Main in our time - Dom Marmion taught that everything is " ...for the PRAISE OF GLORY..."

PSALTER: daily we are admonished to "sing unto the Lord a new Song", to continue in this great act of celebration and praise. And not to sing someone else's song, but to sing that song that only we can sing, that radiates from the Ground of Love. And the song we sing must be authentic. We must become, not someone else, but become ourselves, and make that contribution to the unfolding of the Universe that only we can make, to take the responsibilities for those spontaneities that the universe has poured into us, and with God's grace assist in bringing about a greater presence of the human community to the natural world.

SADLY, instead of fulfilling our destiny to become love in human form and to celebrate the great beauty of the earth and universe,

we have become DESTROYERS OF THE UNIVERSE, destroyers -not cocreators.

The DEVASTATION of the planet that we are bringing about is negating some hundreds of millions, even billions, of years of past development on the earth: A momentous period of change, a change unparalleled in the four and a half billion years of earth history.

ENVIRONMENT: What is happening to it? I think that this is best summarized by the title of Rachel Carson' book, SILENT SPRING, a title taken from Keats: "The sedge is withered from the lake/and no birds sing." The book itself is dedicated to Albert Schweitzer, who tells us: "Man has lost the capacity to foresee and to forestall. He will end by destroying the earth."

We notice that the sky is not so clear today, the stars not as bright. The changes we are dealing with are changes on a geological and biological order of magnitude. The four great components of the earth - the LANDSPHERE, THE WATERSPHERE, the AIRSPHERE, and the LIFESPHERE, are being decisively and permanently altered in their composition and their functioning by the more recent sphere, the MINDSPHERE (you and me), altered, that is, in a deleterious, irreversible manner.

When the agricultural civilization began some ten thousand years ago, the human disturbance of the natural world was begun in a serious way. The damage was sustainable.

In our times, however, human cunning has mastered the deep mysteries of the earth at a level far beyond the capacities of earlier peoples. We can break the mountains apart; we can drain the rivers and flood the valleys. We can turn the most luxuriant forests into throwaway paper products. We can tear apart the great grass cover of the western plains and pour toxic chemicals into the soil and pesticides on the fields until the soil is dead and blows away in the wind. We can pollute the air with acids, the rivers with sewage and the seas with oil. We invent computers capable of processing ten million calculations per second. And why: to increase the volume and speed with which we move natural resources through the consumer economy to the junk pile or the waste heap.

CRASH SITUATION:

We are in a crash situation, a deep pathology. With any addiction, our first response is denial. But the fact is that we live between fear and hope. We have approached the bottom closely enough for us to begin to realize that we have to change. We sense that if do not change, the human species could very well disappear.

WE are unable to move from a conviction that as humans we are the glory and the crown of the Earth community to a realization that we are the most destructive and the most dangerous component of that community. Such is our denial.

CHOICE: We are confronted with a choice between death and abandoning our addictive mode of functioning. The crash that faces us is not simply the crash of humans, it's a crash of the bio-systems of the Earth; indeed, it is in some manner the crash of the

Earth itself.

(Part III of this article will examine why we are in a crash situation and have become a dysfunctional society. When did it begin. What can we do to become COCREATORS INSTEAD OF DESTROYERS of the environment?)

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Part III

Why have we become DESTROYERS of the Universe, instead of COCREATORS of the universe? There are several reasons:

DYSFUNCTIONAL SOCIETY: We have been functioning out of human-human, human-divine set of relationships "...to the exclusion of the whole community of the universe..." writes Miriam MacGillis. This is the source of our dysfunction we now face "...in what we have done to the earth and to ourselves..."

Gradually our ancestors formed the belief that we are separated out from the rest of creation, that we are the single species with intelligence and consciousness and a spiritual dimension; that we work out our destiny, our meaning, our purpose, against a cosmic background, and earth background, a natural world background, that is itself inherently physical and not spiritual. That we are individuated out of, separated out of, the rest of the cosmos. The human is alienated from the rest of the universe.

Whereas **OUR TRUE GOAL** should be: to enable the human community to become present to the larger Earth community in a mutually enhancing manner.

WE ARE IN BETWEEN STORIES: This is the 2nd reason why we are a dysfunctional society. We have the wrong cosmology. We don't know the New Story. We are out of touch with our true and larger self. We have not understood and integrated the religious dimension of the scientific story of the universe.

DISTORTED ASPECT OF THE MYTH OF PROGRESS: Though this myth has a positive aspect in the new understanding that we now have of an evolutionary universe, it has been used in a devastating manner in plundering the Earth's resources and disrupting the basic functioning of the life systems of the planet. The natural world has become a "resource" for human utilization. Progress has been measured not by the integral functioning and florescence of the Earth community, but by the extent of human control over the nonhuman world and the apparent benefits that emerged for humans. We believed that **HUMAN WELL-BEING** could be achieved by diminishing the well-being of the Earth, that a rising Gross Domestic Product could ignore the declining Gross Earth Product: this was the basic flaw in this Wonderland myth.

WORKING OUT OF A FALSE SELF: We cannot become cocreators unless we have at least begun to undergo the transformation that leads to our deep interior true self that lies sleeping waiting to be awakened.

FINALLY, WE DON'T HEAR THE VOICES: Every creature speaks itself, radiates itself. We are an autistic generation. We are hard of hearing. We don't hear the voices. We don't realize that the natural world is a community of subjects to be communed with, not a collection of objects to be exploited.

WHEN DID THIS DESTRUCTIVE PROCESS BEGIN?

Before the 14th century we had two bibles: The Holy Scriptures and the earth scriptures. The earth was considered revelatory, it spoke of God. St. Francis understood this well. Indeed, Cardinal Yves Congar, a great ecclesiologist and ecumenist, states that St. Francis offers the model. "He lived his life so perfectly as son of God that he was

brother and sister to all that is created. This was made possible for him through his literal acceptance of both gospel and creation...and for this, the liturgy gives him the magnificent title of Catholic."

The Black Death swept Europe in the mid-fourteenth century, killing off about a third of the population. There was no understanding of disease at the time. People thought they were being punished by God through the earth. The response on the one hand by the religious community was to seek redemption out of the tragic world, out of the earth that was considered evil and no longer revelatory. The other response was that of the scientific secular community. It sought to remedy earthy terror, not by supernatural or religious powers, but by understanding and controlling the earth process. Most of these scientists were deeply religious: men like Galileo, Rene Descartes, Francis Bacon and Isaac Newton. Newton was an outstanding theologian. But they came to the conclusion that the only spiritual entity (apart from God) was man's spirit or soul (*res cogitans*). Everything else in the universe was purely material (*res extensa*). A bird was purely a material mechanism, etc. This led to man's desire (especially Francis Bacon) to improve upon nature. It led to the industrial revolution, nuclear power (the atomic bomb, then the hydrogen bomb and finally to the use of nuclear fission for electrical power). Slowly we begin to close down our life support systems. More devastation was wrought on the earth in the past three centuries than in the preceding 4 1/2 billion years.

Coupled with this scientific approach to the earth's problem (some of which was very good) was a new spirituality which came into being at the time of the reformation. St. Ignatius was a great contemplative and there is a contemplative dimension at the heart of his famous Exercises. Indeed, he proposed three forms of prayer. Thomas Keating in his book, *OPEN MIND, OPEN HEART*, studies this matter. "...The unfortunate tendency to reduce the Spiritual Exercises to a method of discursive (thinking) meditation seems to stem from the Jesuits themselves. In 1574 Everand Mercurian, the Father General of the Jesuits, in a directive to the Spanish province of the Society, forbade the practice of affective prayer..", and allowed only discursive prayer. "...Many religious congregations founded in the centuries following this period adopted the Constitutions of the Society of Jesus. They received at the same time the spirituality taught and practised by the Society. Hence they also received the limitations imposed not by Ignatius, but by his enlightened successors." Contemplation, always considered the term of the ordinary spiritual life, has since almost completely disappeared in the western church, and only today is there a revival of its practice and place in the church.

Today, we are rediscovering the practice and deep meaning of meditation, not as a thinking process, but as a deeply contemplative dimension of our lives. There is no spiritual practice that leads us into communion with the natural world more effectively than the practice of contemplation. This deeper form of consciousness (which Hugo Lasalle calls fourth dimensional consciousness) is the gift of the Spirit, a gift the Holy Spirit wishes to bestow on each of us.

WHAT CAN WE DO TO BECOME COCREATORS OF THE EARTH INSTEAD OF DESTROYERS?

Actually, this process has already begun. It had its beginning with Einstein (1879-1955) who altered our understanding of time, space, motion, matter and energy. People like Heisenberg and the new breed of quantum physicists (Bohm, Bates and Capra) began to look upon the universe as a complicated web of interdependent relationships. Their understanding of the Universe was not unlike some of the earlier great religions, taking on a mystical approach. Capra explores this similarity in his great book, THE TAO OF PHYSICS.

Our responsibility now at the end of the 20th century which opens into a new millennium can only be fulfilled by assisting in the emergency of the Ecozoic Era (a term coined by the geologist, Thomas Berry) that is coming into existence out of the ruins of the Cenozoic (that period in the history of the earth beginning with the disappearance of the dinosaurs, 65 millions years ago). Our great WORK will be that of enabling the human community to become present to the larger Earth community in a mutually enhancing manner, to become a single sacred community.

The most important thing we can do is MAKE THE JOURNEY OF EXPLORATION, the journey of transformation. T.S. Eliot describes it in this way:

" We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time."

To know the place for "the first time" means we have to come to understand the Universe Story and our place and responsibility in this Story, our responsibility to carry the story forward into the new age of the earth, the Ecozoic Era, so that the human community and the earth community will become a single sacred community.

NECESSARY TO KNOW THE UNIVERSE STORY:

The Story has to sink in. When an insight or idea has sunk in, practice invisibly changes. The idea opens the eye of the soul. By seeing differently, we do differently.

I believe that the Universe Story has told by Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry (and for that matter told by every creature in the universe) is the Epic Work of our time. The Story speak of three time arrows:

- 1) The interpretation of the past
- 2) The identity of the present
- 3) The guide to the future

(The final part of this article will explore further the Universe Story with the central them of cosmogenesis, and how our understanding of this story coupled with the practice of meditation (a truly non-dual, objective form of contemplation) can lead us into a future, truly sacred community.)

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Part IV (Final Part)

In this series of articles we have been considering how we can best enable the human community to become present to the earth community in a mutually enhancing manner so that they might form a single sacred community, so that we might move into the Ecozoic Era from the terminal phase of the Cenozoic Era where humanity now finds itself. Paramount to this enhancement is an understanding of the UNIVERSE STORY, a story magnificently narrated by Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry: a story that interprets

the past, identifies the present, and gives us guidance into the future, a Story that I consider the Epic Work of our time. Also, we are considering the PRACTICE that should accompany such a vision of cosmogenesis that the STORY sets forth. The Practice that we are suggesting is the practice of Meditation, or a similar and truly contemplative practice. Such a practice will bring us into communion with the natural world. Such a practice becomes an absolute ethical imperative. Without it we will very probably contribute nothing to the ongoing story of the Universe - except our mediocrity.

Cosmogenesis: Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry consider that cosmogenesis is the most important discovery of Science of all time. It is the discovery that the universe is a developing reality; that it has a beginning; it develops; the Universe is going somewhere. It is not a static cosmos. Through the Universe Story we learn that we have a common origin in the primordial Flaring Forth of the energies from which the universe in all its aspects is derived. We discover that the universe is about something; that it is biased; that the universe evolved with intention and is creative. Chance and necessity exist, but nevertheless the universe proceeds with intention.

We are the first generation that is discovering its place in the story of the universe. No other generation will make that discovery for the first time.

BALANCED TURBULENCE: The earth is a balanced turbulence. All of the planets came from the same source: the explosion of a supernova, Tiamat. And yet Mars became rigid, Venus became vaporous. Only Earth remains in a turbulent, balance state so that the creative development continues. Cosmogenesis continues.

Humans want to continue and activate further the ongoing creativity of the universe. Our challenge is to learn how to interact harmoniously with the large scale dynamics of the planet and, in particular, in the local region where we each find ourselves so that the earth can continue to blossom, continue its creativity. That is why today we are interacting harmoniously in the particular bioregion in which we find ourselves: Carmanah, the Tatshenshini, Oyster River, Mt. Washington Copper and the Tsolum River, etc.

Gradually we are coming to realize that the universe is involved with its own creative development, that it has its own central values in its unfolding sacred story. Indeed we can turn to the universe and learn how to live ethically and morally. The central values or basic laws of the universe are differentiation, subjectivity, and communion. These laws identify the values of the universe and the direction in which the universe is proceeding. We have knowledge of these values through science:

1) Differentiation: No two beings are the same. No two snowdrops or humans are the same. From this universe value we learn the unique value of the individual being. From it flows respect for the individual, a deep regard for personal rights.

2) Subjectivity (or interiority). Every being has an in inner and outer dimension.

Every being has an inner spontaneity, from leaf to homo sapiens. Each being has the capacity to articulate its own inner structure, to declare itself to the entire universe and to be present to the universe in a comprehensive manner. A complicated web of interdependent relationships. From this follows the necessity of every being listening to the manifold voices; The necessity to enter into communion (loving relationship) with all beings. The natural world is a community of subjects to be communed with, not a collection of objects to be exploited.

3) Communion (bonding). Every being is bonded to every other being in the universe. As John Muir said, when you break a twig you affect the most distant star. Every living being of Earth is cousin to every other living being. The volume of an atom is the whole universe since it makes itself present to every atom and they to it. As Thomas Berry says: this bonding "...is the final expression of the curvature of space that holds all things together in a comprehensive embrace that is the universe itself."

As we come to understand the Universe Story we begin to change from a dominant spatial mode of consciousness where time is perceived in an ever-renewing, seasonal cycle to a mode of consciousness where the universe is perceived as an irreversible, sequential series of transformations. We call this time-developmental consciousness.

Our challenge today is to see how we, as humans, are capable of carrying to a further degree of achievement these primordial desires that are layered into the nature of the time developmental universe. The ultimate aim of the universe is a fullness of differentiation, the deepest subjectivity, and the most intimate communion. Whatever we do that enhances these three values is good; whatever we do that hinders their development is detrimental.

To become COCREATORS of the Earth, instead of Destroyers we must become familiar with the New Story. The Story gradually sinks in, both in its physical and spiritual dimensions. And when an idea has sunk in, practice invisibly changes. The idea opens the eye of the soul. By seeing differently, we do differently.

And apart from knowledge of the Universe Story, and before we speak about the importance of Meditation, here are a few of the and concepts and practices (just briefly here alluded to) that will assist us in becoming Cocreators of the Universe:

KNOWLEDGE OF THE NEW PHYSICS. Hugo Lasalle in his book, "Living in the New Consciousness" writes: "...One thing is certain. If you wish to get any sort of general grasp on the spiritual world situation, you can no longer ignore the latest developments in physics." He would especially recommend such writers as Frijof Capra and his "Tao of Physics". And Jean Gebser in his "The Ever-Present Origin" writes,

"...The mechanical worldview of classical physics that was valid up to 1900 has been more thoroughly destroyed than one would have expected..."

KNOWLEDGE OF FIRST NATIONS SPIRITUALITY: As our Synod decision for Action statement A.54 states, "...let us be guided by the wisdom of those who are spiritually in contact with our earth (e.g. Native people) and encourage new models of community based on a relationship with the entire cosmos."

KNOWLEDGE OF WOMEN'S PLACE IN THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT: Here in British Columbia women have taken the lead in environmental reproachment: Vicki Husband, Tzeporah Berman, Coleen McCrory. In earlier times women like Julian of Norwich and Hildegard of Bingen who contributed their nurturing and healing gift to a wounded ecosystem, led the way in an almost totally patriarchal society which had been exploiting the natural world from early neolithic times. Today, more than ever before, more than the need for philosophers or even prophets - is the need for the type of shamanic personality who understands the language of the earth and its creature and is able to nurture them. Today this type of personality is emerging.

KNOWLEDGE THAT OPTION FOR THE POOR INCLUDES OPTION FOR THE EARTH: We embrace **OPTION FOR THE POOR**, but we have not in the past included other beings besides humans among the Poor. We embrace the truth that as Thomas Clarke puts it so well that "...the heart of poverty is 'cultural disparagement'" meaning by this that one human group says to another human group, "You have no worth." We deny the dignity of another human being. That is the heart of poverty. Option for the poor means reaffirming the dignity of the poor, of the disparaged. There should be no polarization between those dedicated to peace and justice and those dedicated to healing the earth. Every being in the universe, person or stardust, has dignity. We must say to the white clover, "You have worth". This is truly Option for the Poor.

TRANSFORMATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS: We cannot quite believe that such a transformation is possible, that it could take place within us. We yearn for transcendence, but at the same time we realize that to undergo this transformation (metanoia) that we have to die to our ego-self. And this we are reluctant to do. We would like to maintain our false-self and add to it a touch of transcendence, a contemplative dimension. And since we will not accept the necessary death of our separate-self sense, we go about seeking transcendence in ways that actually prevent it and force symbolic substitutes.

Historically and cosmosgenitcally the transformation of human consciousness has been taking place over many thousands of years: archaic, magical, mythical (beginning with neolithic man), rational, and now, as described by Lasalle, "fourth dimensional consciousness. This he believes and points out the evidence for -is already in orbit: a consciousness that perceives reality aperspectivally, holisticly. It is a stare of mindfulness, in which we live fully in the present moment.

This begins to occur as we begin to discover our true self, our inner child. The most important thing that we can do for the whole universe is to discover our true self, to become who we are -not someone else, but to be come that differentiated interiority that is bonded with every other differentiated interiority. Not some phony imitation, but to become the absolutely unique person whom we are, with those spontaneities that the universe has poured into us.

Meditation: "...and if we -you and I-are to further the evolution of mankind..." writes Ken Wilber, "...and not just reap the benefit of past humanity's struggles, if we are to contribute to evolution and not merely siphon it off, if we are to help the overcoming of our self-alienation from the Spirit and not merely perpetuate it, then Meditation - or a similar and truly contemplative practice - becomes an absolute ethical imperative, a new categorical imperative. If we do less than that our life then becomes, not so much a wicked affair, but rather a case of merely enjoying the level of consciousness which past heroes achieved for us. We contribute nothing; we pass on our mediocrity."

In the words of John Main whom Dom Bede Griffiths, OSB, considers the greatest spiritual teacher of our times, "We find Christ in our hearts and then we find ourselves in him, and in him, in all creation." Ultimately, it is through opening our human consciousness to the resurrected, infinitely expanded human consciousness of Christ - which consciousness is in loving communion with every created being - that we too enter into communion with all beings and close the gap between the human community and the natural world forming one single sacred community.

And again, to realize our unity with all beings -which is perhaps the most important step we can take towards halting the environmental destruction that is taking place in the universe - we enter into silence and stillness and simplicity, and via the sacred word, we expose our human consciousness to the resurrected, transcendent, infinitely expanded human consciousness of Christ and through the Holy Spirit are carried to the Father, and to every creature in the universe.

A transformation process has begun that is leading us into the new age - not the age of crystals - but the new age of the earth, into the Ecozoic Age. This transformation begins with the human heart, in the core of the spirit. We begin to detect a wellspring welling up in our heart. Perhaps it is now only a trickle. But it will never run dry. Sometimes it runs more clearly and evenly. At other times it seems to have gone completely underground ("Between the Vision and the Act lies the Shadow"). It is a life force that on our part needs to be purified so that it will flow continuously. It will lead to a transformation of our hearts and minds that will enable us to realize the unity of all beings and enable us to reach out with love to every creature in the universe, and so fulfil our destiny, which is to become love in human form.