

Spirituality of the Environment  
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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.

T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets

Humanity is set on a path of exploration that will lead to the realization of the oneness of the human community and the earth community. When that begins to happen and when it does happen we will truly know the place for the first time. We live in a dualistic, dysfunctional society that is intent on exploiting the natural world. We are in a crash situation, living between hope and despair. 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. There is an attraction force present today beckoning us away from the pit of despair to the hope of a better world. A transformational process has begun that is leading us into a new age, the age of the earth. This transformation begins with the human heart, in the core of our 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. It is a life force that 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.

In my teens I discovered Spinoza. At the time I was reading Thoreau, Emerson, Walt Whitman. Probably it was Spinoza who inspired me to believe that if I could get close enough to nature I would come close to ultimate reality as well. It was Henry David Thoreau who used to walk early in the morning and even late at night attempting to develop latent senses that we have lost track of. I always interpreted Spinoza's teaching as panintheism, not pantheism. But it led me to take long walks (I was an ardent birder) during which times I attempted to open my consciousness (unconscious?) to everything about me. This was an attempt to commune with nature, to enter into communion with all beings. This was my first attempt to get in touch with that mysterious wisdom that seemed to underlie all things. This affinity with the natural world led to my teaching natural history subjects at Osceola Boy Scout Camp deep in the Ozarks of Missouri. It was there that I first came to know a bit about the First Nations who had been the first inhabitants of the region, and where I was called to enter the honorary tribe of Mic-O-Say and to advance from Brave to Sachem. It was through Mic-O-Say that I came to have a deeper respect and love for the earth, and to respect more deeply the Spirit that fills the whole earth.

After an Air Force career (non-combatant) and after taking a science degree in ornithology from Cornell University, I begin to look more seriously at religion. Entering Nashotah House Episcopal Seminary in Wisconsin I completed a B.D. But my main interest it seemed was in the contemplative life, especially after reading Thomas Merton's SEVEN STORY MOUNTAIN in 1950. This led me to England as an Anglican Deacon to explore the contemplative religious houses in that country. Entering the Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield I was ordained by the Bishop of Wakefield to the Anglican Priesthood. Realizing that this was not the milieu for contemplative living I returned to the



New England states to live as an Anglican hermit under the guidance of the Holy Cross Fathers on the Hudson River. During these years I had been reading the Church Fathers and was drawn more and more to the Catholic Church. But it was not until I had entered the Anglican Benedictine Community at Three Rivers, Michigan that I was given the courage and grace to enter "heaven's gate".

Enter Bede Griffiths: At Three Rivers we read as novices only Catholic spiritual books (with the catholic imprimatur) and said and sang a latin office and mass. During the course of my time there someone asked me if I had heard of the new book by Dom Bede Griffiths called the GOLDEN STRING. The book eventually came into my hands though a gift from a friend. The book had been published in 1955. The prologue commences with a quotation from William Blake:

I give you the end of a golden string;  
Only wind it into a ball,  
It will lead you in at heaven's gate,  
Built in Jerusalem's wall.

The autobiography describes Bede's journey from Oxford, through his conversion to the Catholic Church, his entrance into the Benedictine Community at Prinknash and ends with his preparation for his journey to India. The latter part of his autobiography is found in a second book, RETURN TO THE CENTRE, in which he describes his India adventure and the discovery of "the other half of his soul", which was a balancing of the discursive and intuitive dimensions of his being.

Some ten years later after entering the Catholic Church and having spent eight years as a simply professed Trappist monk I was given permission to join the Hermits of



St. John the Baptist at Courtenay, Vancouver Island, British Columbia. Received by the hermits I was ordained to the Catholic priesthood with a mandate from the bishop to live the hermit life.

Sr. Pascaline Coffe, OSB, a friend who had given me direction, encouraged me to make a trip to India and spend some time at Fr. Bede's ashram, Saccidananda Ashram in Tamil Nadu. I had for years been actively concerned and involved in the environmental movement, especially since entering the Catholic Church, becoming a Trappist Monk and eventually a hermit monk, living in the temperate rain forest on the banks of the Oyster River on Vancouver Island immersed in the beauty of earth. I had taken rather bold stands against several of the logging and mining companies that seemed bound to destroy all that I had come to the rain forest for. It was apparent to me that there must be some better way of changing the destructive practices of the giant corporations than lying in front of their heavy equipment, or pointing out to others through writing and speaking what was actually happening to our life support systems. I knew that not only was a transformation of consciousness necessary in my own self, but that what was necessary was a new vision of reality that would bring about this transformation throughout the planet.

I had been reading Hugo Lasalle before I left Canada, his "Living in the New Consciousness", and had made notes on his thoughts. One day after the noon meal at Annada Ashram where those who were staying for a longer time at Saccidananda Ashram took up their residence, I was showing these reflections to Francis and Joanna Macy who had arrived several days before. I recall that Joanna asked me if I were acquainted with Deep Ecology. This was a new bit of terminology for me and through some questioning I attempted to come to some understanding of Deep Ecology. This eventually led me to the discovery of the writings of Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme. I



find it interesting that I had to go to the East to learn how to enter into communion and harmony with the earth community

Twenty five years ago I applied to the diocesan council of priests to attend an environmental conference in one of the prairie provinces. The answer came back to me that the environment was not one of the main concerns of the council. Just recently the churches have begun to look at the environmental destruction that is taking place and have begun to realize that there is reason to be concerned. People like Thomas Berry who have been preaching deep ecology in the wilderness for years are finally being taken seriously and listened to. He and Dr. Brian Swimme are more and more being invited to speak to the whole range of society, including the Churches. They are talking about the "New Story", the earth story, the universe story. Unless we can come to appreciate and understand this story, which is also our story, - they teach - unless we can begin to grasp this story - the human community may not go into the future.

In the depth of our being we have a longing to know the earth and its plan, to know the universe, and yes, ourselves in its depth and truest form, and to know Ultimate Reality. Somehow we suspect that if could only come to the discovery of our true self that we would arrive as well at the true meaning of the earth and universe. Especially today we want to understand the earth and its plan because there is deep lurking fear within us that the viability of the human species depends on a healthy relationship with the earth, that our destiny is tied in with her destiny, that somehow we have to free ourselves from an exploitive relationship and move into a loving communion with the earth and all of her creatures. We know that we can't simply intend this new relationship to occur. It lies more in the field of attention than in the field of intention. We sense that we have to undergo a transformation, a transformation that will lead us into a new mode of religious



consciousness, give us a new vision of reality. We long to be free from the tyranny of the ego, and to open ourselves at the point of our spirit to the Spirit that fills the whole universe. And we know that to undertake this transformation we must be willing to enter into a kind of death, a death to the tyrannical ego. But the one thing that we fear the most is death. We hesitate to make the entry into this new sphere of consciousness, partially out of fear because there is no guarantee that we will arrive, partially we do not know how to open ourself to the splendour that we suspect is there.

Today we are greatly concerned as to where we are going, the human community and the community of the natural world. We think of them as two communities, whereas in reality they are a single community, a single sacred community. Until we can come to see this unity we will continue to be diminished humans, since to be ourselves we need to enter into communion with all other beings. As well, until we come to the realization that we form a single sacred community we will continue to exploit and diminish all other beings. And so, the earnest question of our time continues to be, where are we going? What is our true destiny.

It is clear that we stand at a turning point. We are on the verge or already in the midst of creating a new mode of religious consciousness, a mode of consciousness that gathers up all previous forms of consciousness and then goes beyond them. We are in the midst of a transformation that rarely occurs, perhaps once in a thousand years. I speak of a transformation of consciousness. We are at a crossroads on our journey of exploration, between the old consciousness and a new mode of consciousness, a religious mode of consciousness. We look forward to a better world, a kinder world. The transformation that I speak of is already in orbit. It is occurring in our thinking, in the



perception of ourselves, and especially in the perception of our environment. The expression, "paradigm shift", might be used to express this change. Man, in his evolution, has travelled through various spheres of consciousness, developing from an archaic consciousness, through a magical, mythical to a rational consciousness. We are entering, in fact have already entered, into what Hugo Lasalle calls a new integral consciousness. This latter stage might be called "fourth dimensional consciousness" This is described as a totally new experience of reality with a freedom from the bonds of space and time. To enter this sphere we will have to overcome conceptual time -not eliminate, but overcome it. We will be led to know the place for the first time. We enter this sphere on the one hand through a deeper appreciation and wonder of the universe, and the other through the practice of meditation, a type of meditation that is non-objective, where we open our spirit in its depth to the ultimate Spirit, to that What Is.

Unless we undergo the transformation that leads us into this new consciousness our earth could suffer not only biocide but geocide as well. Our present crisis is a clear sign that warns us of the need for this new orientation. Being imprisoned by clock time allows this pathology to a great extent to imprison us and adds to our failure not to see things clearly. But we are on the verge of a new stage in human-earth development. The labour has already begun. We are being birthed into new levels of thinking that will result in the freedom that will allow us to fulfil our destiny, to become love in human form, to embrace all earth creatures as our sisters and brothers, and indeed our most distant sister stars as well. It will lead us from exploitation to the understanding that all creatures are a community of subjects to be communed with.

Our new thinking will be mystical thinking and we will come to develop an appreciation for the teaching of the great mystics such as Meister Eckhart, Saint John of



the Cross, and others. As well, we will come to appreciate more deeply the spiritual writers and teachers of our own time: Bede Griffiths, Thomas Merton, John Main, Thomas Keating, William Johnson, the Dalai Lama, Pascaline Coffe, Hugo Lasalle, Laurence Freeman, Simone Weil, Jean Vanier, and many others.

In the eternal birth that occurs in the core and innermost regions of the soul, God covers the soul with light, whereby the light grows so great in the core of our being that it overflows into the faculties of the soul and into the outer person.

{Meister Eckhart}

And there are the teachers who help us understand the dream of the earth: Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, Frijof Capra, Jean Gibser, Teilhard de Chardin.

It is early morning with its quiet and coolness. I walk out the old logging road to Catherwood Road. Catherwood is my connector to the outside world. My hermitage is located deep in the temperate rain forest, on the Oyster River, British Columbia. The logging road along with other trails through the forest is where I practice walking meditation. I do not think of the road as leading anywhere. It is the road to nowhere, the path on which I journey and have been journeying for a lifetime. When I walk this road I have no destination, no time table or estimated time of arrival. I simply place one foot in front of the other, let all my cares, anguish, angst, fears drop away. My breathing is in harmony with my pace, my pace is in harmony with the rhythm of the universe. And although this is the path of nowhere, in reality it is the way to everywhere, because it enables me to enter into communion with the whole community of beings, beings which are diverse, interiorized and each in communion with every other being in the universe. I become present to the most distant star, and she to me, the "complicated web of



interdependent relationships". Every atom of my being is present to every atom in the universe, and they to it.

In the distance, in the first light, a robin begins its canticle. The song is taken up by the Swainson's Thrush and then the finches, and finally, a solitary vireo. The forest suddenly becomes a celebratory event, exploding into song and motion and joyous exchange of the community of beings communicating and articulating themselves in a grand celebratory event. They speak the story of the universe from its primordial flaring forth: - the galactic story, the earth story, the life story and the human story - down to the terminal end of the cenozoic period where we now find ourselves. Because it is terminal we are fearful. We don't know yet whether or not we are a viable species, whether we'll make it or not, whether we will come to know the place for the first time.

There is a new story that is being told today. In actuality it is an old story. It is the universe story, the earth story. The story comes from science, from quantum physics. It is a story that Plato or Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, Galileo, Isaac Newton would not have know. It is a cosmological story that is just dawning on our minds and imagination. As Brian Swimme describes it: "This universe is a single multiform energetic unfolding of matter, mind, intelligence and life". The universe as a whole behaves more like a developing being. It is a single, multiform, sequential, celebratory event. And we are integral with the story. Indeed, it is our story as well as the universe story. This is the story we have to come to understand, the story which describes our true journey.

But we have not been paying attention to the story or to our part in the story. Otherwise we would not be suffering such widespread pathology. If we could learn to pay attention we would be able to go into the future. In recent times two thinkers have had a very an



important influence on our society: Simone Weil and Fritz Schumacher. And we could certainly include Alfred Whitehead. Simone Weil thought that the most important quality we could acquire in our lifetime was that which she described as "selfless attention." And Fritz Schumacher came to the same conclusion. The selfless attention that Simone Weil speaks of he calls simply attention, learning to attend. Whitehead speaks of the importance of the student paying attention to the leaf under the microscope, seeing what is there.

If only we could learn to pay attention and teach others to do the same. Then I think we could come to appreciate the story of the universe; could learn to commune with nature and the natural world, realizing that the natural world is a community of subjects to be communed with, not a collection of objects to be used and exploited; we would be able to get in touch with our own deep inmost self, and this primarily through meditation - for meditation is simply learning to pay attention - and finally we would come to discover our true cultural roots, roots which go back to the primordial flaring forth some fifteen billion years ago, and not just rest in our present cultural consumer coding.

We all have a sense of the sacred. From this sense of the sacred we shape our lives, our norms of social behaviour, our disciplines, even our explanation of life and how we relate to others about us and to the wider world. To develop our sense of the sacred it is imperative that we have a true cultural formation. Unfortunately, today the cultural formation that is being provided by our institutions is no longer offering proper and adequate guidance to our sense of the sacred. And this primarily because our institutions that are providing our cultural formation are unaware of the universe story. Our culture ultimately flows from the earth, the universe, from Ultimate Reality.



To know and understand the Story we have to return to the source. "To know the place for the first time." We make this return traditionally through the study of scripture or philosophy texts. But philosophy and scriptures tell us of creation in terms used many centuries ago. We can't neglect this earlier way of returning to the source because it is important. But our consciousness has developed enormously even since neolithic times. We have moved from archaic to magical to mythical to rational consciousness. Today we have a new way of understanding how things emerged in the beginning and the sequential transformations that have led us to the present. We understand that we are caught up in a cosmogenesis and that we are creating and developing a new mode of religious consciousness, one that Hugo Lasalle calls "Fourth Dimensional consciousness" or "Integral Consciousness." We do not lose or abandon earlier forms of consciousness. They are integrated by the integral consciousness, hence, its name.

One problem in this new way of understanding is that this very way of understanding has neglected its own deep inner meaning. This new way of understanding has taken it for granted that only quantitative measurements communicate things as they really are. But we have to understand there is another dimension, a qualitative dimension to the universe that has been there from the beginning. In the 16th and 17th centuries men like De Cartes and Sir Francis Bacon taught that the only spiritual reality was man's mind or spirit (*res integra*) and everything outside this was purely mechanical or materialistic (*res extensa*). But there is a spiritual dimension to the universe which we have neglected to recognize. Even from the primordial flaring forth there was a consciousness as well as a physical dimension to the universe. That the universe has produced imagination, sensation, thought and feeling is sufficient evidence that the universe has immense and wonderful powers beyond any quantitative measurement. In returning to the source we learn that the basic norms of human activities can be



discovered from within this deep spiritual process that is the universe itself, the universe that springs forth from ultimate reality.

Today we are living in a deep cultural trance. Mostly we are unaware of this pathology, a pathology that has infected us deeply. John Main speaks of this sickness when he describes man as having unleashed powers he can no longer control and of having exploited his natural resources so wantonly that he is in danger of exhausting them by the time his grandchildren have reached maturity. We are aware of the vast devastation that has been unleashed on the physical body of the Earth. Each minute more than an acre of rain forest is destroyed. Here on Vancouver Island we are becoming acutely aware that our forestry practices have been less than perfect. On the earth species are dying at an hourly rate. We don't know for sure how many species exist, perhaps one hundred and ten million of the larger species. If we count all of the microbial forms there may be as many as a hundred and fifty million species. By the end of this century we may have lost as many as twenty million species. And there is nothing so absolute as the

disappearance of a species. They can never be recalled. Never again shall we see the Passenger Pigeon or the Carolina Parakeet. They are gone forever. Irreplaceable topsoil is being washed into the ocean along with tons and tons of pesticides throughout the world. The ozone layer has been damaged to such an extent that we face the threat of deadly global radiation. At this very moment, the world in which we live is at risk. These are our current "social sins" in terms of cosmology. If we turn to science she cannot offer any quick fix. The relevance of most theology is challenged by what is occurring.

And this is only a very small fraction of the ruin we are exerting upon ourselves, spirituality, socially, economically, and psychically. And in the face of this our governments and leaders, our churches and institutions continue to behave as if these



very apparent signs of devastation are not the most crucial issues of our times and lives. We take it for granted that someone somewhere sometime will provide the answer, will solve the problem for us.

It is exactly the same as with any personal illness, first of all we have to admit that we are suffering. Since most of us prefer to remain in denial - it is difficult. It is essential to name the crisis that we live in and then learn to respond in an effective and healthy manner. This is perhaps our only hope, whether on a planetary or personal level.

Once we have come to terms with our denial and anger about the state of our health, a greater challenge faces us: how can we deal with the problem. How do we recognize and then change the habits that have been responsible for our poor health, all of the alienation and the deep pain? There is a place to begin. But first we have to realize what kind of a society we are living in and for which we bear the responsibility.

We are a society that is a dysfunctional one. For a lifetime, indeed for millennium, we have been functioning out of a human-human, human-divine set of relationships, to the almost complete exclusion of the whole community of the earth and the universe. This is where our dysfunction arises and which has caused the illness both of the earth and ourselves. Through time, our ancestors formed the assumption that we are separated out from the rest of creation, that we were that single species with intelligence and understanding and consciousness, and with a Spiritual dimension, and that we arrive at our destiny, meaning and purpose against a cosmic background, a world background, that is purely physical, without a spiritual dimension. That is where our dysfunction lies.

We have ignored a spirituality of the earth. We need to discover this and embrace such a spirituality. The earth is no longer revelatory for us as it was before the end of the 14th century. We then had two bibles: the earth and Holy Scriptures. They



both were considered revelatory. In the mid-fourteenth century Europe was decimated by the black death. Disease was an unknown quantity and not understood at the time. People thought they were being punished by God, that He was displeased by them. They begin to consider the earth as evil. It no longer spoke of God. They wanted to escape out of the world. That there is a crisis in our time is self evident. Not only must we become aware of this crisis and seek to alleviate it, but also we must open ourselves to the stunning beauty of the Earth. What is needed today is a healing of the earth. But if we ourselves are not healed, if we do not undergo the transformation of body, soul and spirit, this healing can never take place.

We do not cease from exploration. Our search is for something deeper than economic policies or political ideas. We seek a new way of life, a way of life that flows out of an awareness of the cosmic story and the holiness of the Earth. We have to change, to change the habits that have made us so very ill culturally. We have to discontinue the destructive, addictive, oppressive behaviour we have perpetrated on our planet.

We turn to the new story that is being told. This story is about a living universe. We have not understood that the universe is alive. How do we get in touch with the notion of a living universe. We do this mostly through story. We come to see the universe anew. We come to see that the universe story is our story also

There is something wonderful about telling a story. When someone tells his or her story, they invite us to enter in and share their lives. Also, it allows us to open ourselves to receive the beauty and message of the story. It is the same with the earth story. The story is being told. Every being is telling it as every being articulates itself.

The telling of this story should be the primary function of education. Indeed, we are not really educated if don't know the Story.

**WE NEED TO SEE OURSELVES AS THAT BEING IN WHOM THE UNIVERSE**



REFLECTS UPON, ACTIVATES, AND CELEBRATES ITSELF IN CONSCIOUS SELF-AWARENESS.

If we begin to experience ourselves in this manner, we see immediately how adverse is any degradation of the planet to our own well-being, physically, economically, and spirituality. If we allow such adversity to ourselves it is an indication that we do not love ourselves in the true and proper self. As Eric Fromm points out again and again in his writings, it is necessary to love ourselves, to love the gift of being .

To be human means to be in communion with the entire community of the planet. To be alienated from this community is become destitute of that makes us truly human. And since we are bonded with every being in the universe, we cannot be saved without the entire community. When we damage this community we diminish our own existence.

I mentioned earlier how twenty five years ago I did not receive permission from the diocesan council to attend an environmental conference because the environment was not considered of much importance to the church's thinking at that time. It was not one of her priorities. But recently when I requested permission and funding to attend a conference on Spirit and Earth in Seattle there was no hesitation in gaining such permission. We have moved a great distance in twenty five years. The environment is now on the agenda of the churches.

At this conference Thomas Berry was one of the keynote speakers. Dr. Brian Swimme also spoke eloquently as did Jonna Macy and Sister McGillis and others. The Sierra Club had just published Dr. Berry's DREAM OF THE EARTH. And Thomas Berry whose writings had for so long been circulated underground were now being accepted not only by his own religious order but looked on favourably by the churches. At long last the churches were beginning to move.



Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme at the conference stress the importance of knowing the Story, the New Cosmology. Our understanding of the origins the universe and the planet we call our home are growing, they stressed. And as this begins to happen we are forced to rethink both our personal and communal roles and relationships with the unfolding story of creation. We need this new story (in reality, the old story), a new way to see the cosmos. We need to enter into a human-earth relationship so that we can become a truly functional society.

Our traditional stories speak of a spatial-mode of consciousness, in which time moves in an ever renewing seasonal cycle. We have grown up with this story. Aristotle, for example, did not know whether he was closer to the Trojan Wars by going backward on the cycle or going forward. "What is, has been. What has been, is..."

Thomas Berry stressed the fact that we are living in a different world, which can be described as a TIME DEVELOPMENTAL WORLD, a cosmogenesis world, where we have an emerging universe that goes through a sequence of irreversible transformation episodes that brings us to where we are. This is the sorry that had to be told and understood. And there is no question that our single greatest need now is to understand ourselves as integral with this story. If we can understand the story it will help us move into the future.

In the words of Thomas Berry, we story a "new story" a revised cosmological underpinning, because " the Earth is mandating that the human community assume a responsibility never assigned to any previous generation. We are being asked to learn an entirely new mode of conduct and discipline.

The transformation that we are to make is a fantastic one. We are at the terminal phase of the Cenozoic, a period of 65 million years which is coming to an end. We have to move into an emerging "Eozoic", a term invented and coined by Thomas Berry. And



he states that if can go into the ecozoic age then we'll be in business. So the question remains, how do we get there? How do we GO INTO THE FUTURE? How do we know the place for the first time? In a deeper sense we are already there, only we don't realize it.

As we begin to understand the Story, there are certain things that, according to Thomas Berry, become clear and will enable us to move into the future, into the Ecozoic. Some of these are:

1) To understand the universe is a communion of subjects not a collection of objects. It is community of subjects to be communed with and not objects to be exploited. Earlier we wrote that the basic norms of our human activities can be discovered from the spiritual process that is the universe itself. Science tells us that there are three basic tendencies or laws of the universe: differentiation, interiority, and communion. These are values that are basic to the unfolding of the universe. From the value of differentiation we discover the absolutely unique value of the individual being, that no drops of water are same, no two pine needles. This value reaches its zenith in the human being. And then when we turn to other beings of the natural world we are led to respect each being and to enter into communion with it. We come to learn respect for the individual, a greater regard for personal rights. Everything has rights. Trees have rights. Fish have rights. Instead of exploiting these individual rights we learn to respect them and enter into communion with each differentiated being in the universe. Second, there is the inner spontaneity of each being, its interiority or subjectivity. Each being has a capacity to articulate its own inner structure, to declare itself to the entire universe, to be present to the whole universe. If we were sensitive enough we would detect this articulation, we would listen to every other being. We, especially we humans, need to listen to the countless voices of Earth and indeed the entire universe. Following on this



diversified interiority of each being is the bonding of each reality with every other reality in the universe. The volume of an atom, if we approach it from the point of view of where its presence is felt, is the whole universe, since every atom affects every other atom, and all atoms affect the individual atom. Truly a complicated web of interdependent relationships. It is really quite amazing when you realize that every atom in your body is in touch and affected by the most distant star. We dance together in the great dance of energy. This law of intimacy of things with one another is of immense importance. Thomas Berry says that it is the final expression of the curvature of space that holds all things together in a compassionate embrace that is the universe itself. And Brian Swimme hints that what constitutes love is that gravitational bonding of all beings. Not so much the strong or weak nuclear forces, or the electrical magnetic forces which together with the gravitational forces account for the deep principles of the universe. We back away from the thought of gravitational force being a bonding of love because we tend to think of these forces as purely material forces, forgetting that from the primordial flaring forth there has been a spiritual dimension to the universe as well as a mechanistic force.

2) To remember that the planet Earth is a one-time endowment. We don't get a second chance. There has always been the hope in the Judaeo-Christian tradition that we would enter into a millennial period of peace and justice and prosperity. A sort of heaven on earth. Or if things get too bad we can fly off to another planet. The fact remains is that as far we know, the earth is all that we have. There are no new life forms being activated today from pre-life forms. Our creation today points to a new mode of religious consciousness. We are creating a fourth dimensional consciousness, or rather, we are being caught up in this new consciousness.

3) To realize that the earth is primary, and that humans and all other beings are



derivative. The earth is primary health-wise. The first obligation of medicine is to bring about the health of the earth. You cannot have well beings on an unwell earth. Also, the earth is primary economic-wise. You ask what is the first obligation of economics. The answer, of course, is to bring about an integral gross earth product. We cannot have an increasing gross national product with a decreasing gross earth product. Such a situation would make no sense whatsoever.

4) To know that the Ecozoic era, what we might also call the age of the earth, is going to function very differently from the Cenozoic. The Cenozoic era lasting some 65 million years and now coming to an end did not consult us as to how many species of flowers and birds and insects we might desire or the nature of their song and beauty. All of this was given to us with no input on our part. All we can do is stand in awe and wonder at such magnificence, offer some appreciation, and perhaps sing a new song of praise. In the age of the earth, almost nothing is going to take place of any significance that will not in some way involve us and an intervention and decision on our part. And again, as Thomas Berry told us in Seattle, "We cannot make a blade of grass. In the future there is liable not to be a blade of grass unless we accept it, protect it and foster it." And he pointed out, using the exodus symbol: the human community and the natural world will go into the future as a single sacred community or we will both perish in the desert.

There have been several outstanding events that have encouraged us to move into the future, into the age of the earth. In 1969, from outer space, we saw the pictures of the "great blue marble" from Apollo 11. Since then the idea has been growing that there is something extraordinarily holy about this habitat we share with all other forms of life. And then in 1992 one of the most important discoveries about the origin of the universe was announced. Suddenly it would seem science and religion have moved closer together.



Scientists discovered wispy clouds or ripples of matter that indicate how matter that was uniformly spread out in the newborn universe may have started clumping together to produce stars. And the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro brought forth some magnificent statements. This 179 member nations conference approved the Rio Declaration, a 500-page "Agenda 21" program of action to guide international action into the next century. As well there were treaties dealing with global warming and biodiversity. Also there was the backing of a permanent commission for sustainable development. On the other hand, the Earth Summit was not a complete success. And this is because The Story of the Universe is not sufficiently known. It is the dream that drives the action. We are not sufficiently aware of the dream of the earth. Also, we have not really learned to commune with nature, nor have we undergone the transformation of consciousness that is necessary to see the unity of all beings and the non-dualistic nature of reality. And finally, and in my opinion the most important, we have not learned to pay attention: we have not learned to meditate.

Ken Wilber writes in UP From Eden:

"...And, if we - you and I- are to further the evolution of mankind, 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."

Today it is clear that we stand at a turning point. It is unquestionably the most critical turning point in the long history of the universe and of the earth. We are creating a



new mode of religious consciousness. Indeed this new consciousness is already in orbit. But very few have entered into this new consciousness. Until this begins to happen our earth will continue to be threatened as we close down our life support systems. To enter this new consciousness we have to enter into a death to the ego, the "I Maker". Our destiny is to bring about one of the greatest transitions in the story of the universe. Unless we enter into this transformation the next phase of the Story will never come about. We are living in a transitional moment. All such moments are sacrificial moments. So we are called to make the sacrifice. And the most difficult thing about this is that we must ask others to do the same. If properly understood others will accept this. We know that whatever is achieved has a price. We were given all the beauty of the universe. We make a response. We offer the gift of gratitude. We make the return for the gift of the universe. We undertake denial. And of course we have nothing to give except what was given. Ultimately we give back ourselves.

And we cannot just will the return and the sacrifice. It has to flow from love. That is where Ken Wilber is so wise when he says that "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..."

We need then to practice a truly contemplative form of prayer, a form of prayer that is objective prayer that will lead us away from our dualistic approach to reality. There are many forms of meditation, of prayer. In reality there is only one prayer: that is the prayer THAT IS, without beginning. It is the lifestream of Ultimate Reality. It is the stream of love that flows between Jesus and the Father, the Spirit of Love, the Holy Spirit. God is not a static monad. God is interpersonal relationship, interpersonal love. To the extent that we enter into that stream we are carried beyond and outside of our narrow selves,



into the very life and love of the Godhead, far removed from any dualism. As Christians we open ourselves, by way of mantric meditation, to the resurrected, glorified, infinitely transcendent human consciousness of Christ and through this consciousness enter into that same relationship of love with the Father that the Son experiences. This is our calling, our destiny, to become this love in human form. And because the resurrected Christ is the Cosmic Christ as well, in touch and in relationship with every created being, we enter as well- as we put on the mind of Christ - into a non-dualistic relationship of love with the entire human community and the community of the natural world. They become a single sacred non-dual community of love and sharing. In our journey of exploration we make the journey out of emptiness into the fullness of love. This is our calling. Herein lies our responsibility. The universe has poured into each of us those unique creative spontaneities that will carry us forward into the age of the earth, an age that even now is beginning to shine through as we create a new mode of religious consciousness. How necessary then it is to embrace those creative spontaneities which are unique to each unique being and place within us to move us forward so that one day we will truly know the place for the first time. We did not ask to be here. We were called to be here. Our gift of being is our most precious gift. As receivers of the gift we can but offer it back in gratitude.

There are many forms of prayer, of meditation, but only One Prayer. Up until the end of the renaissance it was taken for granted that all were called to enter into this One Prayer. This was a way of life. Prayer was like breathing. In the West we have had a long tradition of contemplative prayer which can be traced right back to apostolic times, leading forward then to the teaching of John Cassian in the 4th and 5th centuries. Cassian's teaching of mantric prayer became enshrined in the Holy Rule of St. Benedict in the 6th Century, while in the East the Orthodox Christians adopted a similar prayer



form that became known as the Jesus Prayer and immortalized in THE WAY OF A PILGRIM. The tradition continued in the 14th century as found in the CLOUD OF UNKNOWING. I discovered it first in the LETTERS OF DOM CHAPMAN, where he gives instruction to contemplative nuns in England who could no longer pray discursively to pray with a simple phrase repeated over and over again. In our own time it was Dom John Main, OSB, founder of the Priory in Montreal who devoted his life to teaching this form of prayer, he who had learned in India to pay attention to God who dwells in the heart - by praying the same form of prayer that Cassian had discovered being prayed among the hermits in the deserts of the middle east in the 4th and 5th centuries. Before travelling to India I had the privilege in 1988 of spending a length of time at the Montreal Priory learning from those who taught it this simple form of mantric prayer. And then to discover in India that Fr. Bede considered Dom Main the great teacher of our time. And it was Fr. Bede that distributed the books of John Main and Laurence Freeman to those visiting the ashram who had a thirst for contemplative prayer.

The practice and discipline (not technique) of John Main's teaching on what has come to be called "Christian Meditation" is very simple, but also very demanding. To meditate: Sit down. Sit still and upright. Close your eyes lightly. Sit relaxed but alert. Silently, interiorly begin to say a single word. We recommend the prayer-phrase, 'Maranatha'. Recite it as four syllables of equal length. Listen to it as you say it, gently but continuously. Do not think or imagine anything - spiritual or otherwise. If thoughts and images come, these are distractions at the time of meditation, so keep returning to simply saying the word. Meditate each morning and evening for between twenty and thirty minutes. This is John Main's teaching on Christian Meditation.

As to his theology of prayer it is summed up in his own words when he writes that there is really only one prayer: " The central message of the New Testament is that there



is really only one prayer and that is the prayer of Christ.

It is a prayer that continues in our hearts day and night. It is the stream of love that flows constantly between Jesus and his Father. It is the Holy Spirit.

It is the most important task of any fully human life to become as open as possible to this stream of love. We have to allow this prayer to become our prayer, to enter into the experience of being swept beyond ourselves into this wonderful prayer of Jesus - this great cosmic river of love.

In order for us to do this we must learn a most demanding discipline that is a way of silence and stillness.

It is as though we have to create a space within ourselves that will allow the consciousness of the prayer of Jesus to envelop us in this powerful mystery."

The question arises: What does meditation have to do with the transformation of consciousness that will enable us to cease closing down our life support systems. Ken Wilber clearly teaches that if we are to contribute to evolution...then meditation becomes an absolute ethical imperative. When he speaks of evolution he is speaking of creating a new mode of religious consciousness, a fourth dimensional consciousness, of moving towards the Omega Point.

The form of meditation that John Main proposes is non-objective meditation. As long as we continue to look upon beings of the natural world as objects to be exploited, instead of subjects to be communed with, we will continue our journey of destruction. Once we begin to enter the world of non-objective meditation, we begin to leave the world of dualism, the world of mine and yours. This rainforest is not my property, but God's creation. It manifests God's hidden Being.

In the words of John Main, "We find Christ in our hearts and then we find ourselves in him and, in him, in all creation."



Science today tells us that all things are interrelated, "a complicated web of interdependent relationships".

To realize our unity with all beings, and hence to leave the world of duality - which is perhaps the most important step we take towards halting the environmental destruction that is taking place on the earth and in the universe - we enter into silence and stillness, exposing our human consciousness to the resurrected glorified, infinitely transcended human consciousness of Christ and through Him are carried to the Father.

Through Christian Meditation we assist in the great transformation of human hearts and minds which leads the human community and the earth community into a single sacred community.

Dom Bede Griffiths wrote me in January 2nd, 1992: "Thank you very much for sending me the report on your hermit life in the Island Catholic News. I think that it is important that it should have public recognition in the Church. I trust that you find that the transformation continues, as Fr. Berry puts it, into a sense of oneness with the earth community and the human community. I think that this is the path on which we are being set..."