

## UNCLE BROTHER AND THE CELTS

By Peter Berry

I have recently been reading the biography of Thomas by Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, and Andrew Angyal. I was intrigued to see that his essay “The New Story” was published in 1978. A year prior to that as a college freshman in New Orleans, I received a large envelope in the mail from my “Uncle Brother” as we all called him. In it was a mimeograph copy of “The New Story” along with a note saying, “Here’s some of my propaganda.” I found the essay very inspiring indeed. I am writing this account over 40 years later. I want to highlight how my uncle’s life’s work has inspired my own.

Based on a combination of Thomas’s vision for the reinvention of the human presence on the Earth for a mutually enhancing relationship with other life forms and life systems and my Uncle Jim Berry’s circulars from the Center for Reflection on the Second Law (of Thermodynamics), I for the past decade have led a study group called “Seedbearers: Living between the No Longer and the Not Yet.”

Here is how I have described this group to potentially interested newcomers:

Signs of the decline of our western industrial civilization are apparent everywhere. What is the optimum mode of human presence on the planet that we can envision to replace the outmoded one as it falls away? Guided by cosmologist Thomas Berry’s statement that “The Universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects,” we’ll spend the monthly sessions looking at diverse sources of inspiration and guidance. These will include ancient Egyptian examples and insights of humans living in a civilization based on communion with the divine. I’ve been deeply inspired by two trips to Egypt I’ve taken in recent years. We’ll also consider modern practical experiences and spiritual approaches to connecting with the consciousness of the natural world in order to reinvent the human presence on the planet for the future . . . a future in which we have a mutually enhancing presence with the other life forms and life systems of Earth.

The course will draw upon sources of information and inspiration from science (astronomy and physics), cosmology, mystical poetry, and the works of a variety of contemporary authors focused on the transformations humanity is experiencing.

Reading lists will be provided for both required and suggested (optional) reading, but the class sessions will have an experiential focus, and our priority will be exploring consciousness connections together through meditation and mediation.

We will use meditation and other simple practices taught to me by R.J. Stewart and Anastacia Nutt to come into communion with the spiritual powers within the heart of all things. We'll attune to specific primal energies and consciousness in shared responsibility and collaboration. We will learn and use effective techniques that anyone can use in daily life to deepen their personal attunement to Divinity. This work is ongoing, and the participants report deep value in participating.

I would like to share a spontaneous connection of others with my uncle's inspiration that took place in Ireland a number of years ago. In 2005 I was "harper in residence" for a tour of ancient and sacred sites for a small group of Episcopalian women connected with a retreat center near Greensboro, North Carolina. (I play the Irish harp.)

We went to the Holy Well of Brigit at Kildare where Thomas Berry had planted an oak tree in a ceremony ten years prior. The nuns went absolutely berserk with excitement when they found out I was his nephew. I suspected something like that might happen, so I was trying to be low key and was not going to mention it, but when a friend was taking my photo next to the oak tree, she mentioned to the head nun I was his nephew and all hell broke loose! What happened after the nuns calmed down was really special. They took us to the "real" healing well of Brigit which is more private and secluded, and then took us into their home where the flame of Brigit burns and gave us votive candles ignited from that special flame and we all received very special individual blessings pertinent to our work in the world. It was an amazing afternoon and was very meaningful for everyone in our small group of pilgrims. As I was handed my ignited candle by Sister Mary (the head of the order called Solas Brigh—Light of Brigit) she looked into my eyes and said, "Peter, don't let your uncle die without YOU being ready to carry on his work in your own way."

After telling a friend of mine about my experience at Brigit's Well, she gave me the image of a priest and priestesses going to the sacred temple—he to visit the ancestral oak (a male aspect) and they to visit the sacred well (a female aspect). (Druid would be another word, and it derives from *dara* for oak! *Cill Dara* in Gaelic is "church of the oak" and

is anglicized as Kildare). The notion of “ancestral oak” was literally true in this case since the tree at the well was planted by my uncle who is my ancestor in the sense of being a mentor as well as my ancestor by being my father’s brother.

In our pilgrimage to this sacred site, we, the Druids and Druidesses, were granted admittance into the inner temple of the flame as well as the secluded true healing well of water through the intercession of the ancestral oak. In ancient Druidic understanding, the oak is a special teacher of humanity. In our experience, the oak did indeed open the door for us to gain admittance into the inner sanctum where we each received special blessings for our life’s work, blessings given by a woman whose life is dedicated to the spiritual vision of Thomas Berry.

My commitment to the “reinvention of the human species on the planet so that we have a mutually enhancing relationship” with the other life forms and life systems of Earth is undiminished and is ongoing. My gratitude to the Center for Ecozoic Studies for continuing to bring Thomas’s work to the attention of the world!