

The Intellectual Roots of Thomas Berry's Proposal and the New Story

Heather Eaton

General Background

Thomas Berry, born William Nathan, was the third of thirteen children in a prominent Catholic family from the Appalachians, and later Greensboro, North Carolina. Raised in a vibrant and well-educated family, Berry was a pensive, introspective, and intellectually gifted child. Berry often described himself as a brooder, and said there were two ideal locations for those who brood: prisons or monasteries, and that he chose the latter. He entered the Passionist Order at the age of 20 and was ordained at 28, when he took the name Thomas after Thomas Aquinas.

Berry's early formation was deeply Catholic, meaning that he was immersed in the vast intellectual themes of classical theology. He had intimate knowledge of the tomes of Thomas Aquinas and later Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. He also studied European intellectual and cultural history, as well as being attentive to interiority and spiritual practices. He completed a PhD at the Catholic University of America with a focus on Giambattista Vico's philosophy of history. He lived in China in 1948 during the rise of Mao Zedong, and keenly observed the mechanisms of the vast cultural shifts taking place.

Berry was a remarkably educated person, and a product of the intellectual climate. From Western thinkers, the works of Thomas Aquinas, Dante Alighieri, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade, Christopher Dawson, Maurice Blondel, and Carl Jung were influential. He found the discussions of religion by Clifford Geertz, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Paul Tillich, and Emile Durkheim to be valuable. From South Asian thought, the Vedas and Upanishads, the Mahabharata and Bhagavad Gita, as well as the writings of Ādi Śankarācārya, Aurobindo Ghose, and Mohammed Iqbal, among others, were persuasive. From East Asia, the clas-

sics attributed to Confucius, and Mencius, as well as Ch'ang Tsai (Zhang Zai) and the poetry of Tao Ch'en, Li Po and Tu Fu were important. He learned Latin, Italian, Spanish, German, Chinese, Sanskrit, and Pali. To some, Berry was known as a Christian thinker, which is reasonable as he was a Catholic priest. Few are aware that he was also a scholar of the two centres of Asian cultures, India and China, and knowledgeable of Hindu, Buddhist, Confucian, and Daoist traditions. In addition, Berry studied and collaborated with several Indigenous peoples in North America, and with the T'boli tribal peoples of the Philippines. Berry became a cultural historian of religions, integrating facets of phenomenology and anthropology of religions.

Over his lifetime Berry acquired extensive knowledge of politics, economics, natural sciences, and cosmology. He wrote countless essays on a vast array of topics, which became the *Riverdale Papers*,¹ and he published a dozen books, including works on Asian religions, *Buddhism*² and *Religions of India*,³ and his later well-known publications, *The Dream of the Earth*,⁴ *The Great Work*,⁵ and *The Sacred Universe*.⁶ During 1970-1995 he founded and directed, the Riverdale Center for Religious Research. From 1966-1979 he developed and chaired the history of religions program at Fordham University and from 1975-1987 he was president of the American Teilhard Association.

The richness and genius of Berry's thought are not rendered immediately evident in his published works. The breadth and depth

-
1. Thomas Berry, *Riverdale Papers*, vols. I-XI (New York: Riverdale Center for Religious Research, 1969-1994). In some places I refer to the *Riverdale Papers*, although many of these essays have been collected and published in his books.
 2. Thomas Berry, *Buddhism* (1966, repr. Columbia University Press, 1996).
 3. Thomas Berry, *The Religions of India: Hinduism, Yoga, Buddhism* (New York: Bruce-Macmillan, 1971).
 4. Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988).
 5. Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999).
 6. Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the 21st Century*, eds. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009)

of his comprehension of numerous fields of knowledge are astounding. His appreciation for many modes of knowing is characteristic of his thought and writings. Influenced by Vico, Carl Jung, and others, Berry probed beneath a hyper-rationalized knowing to the realm of dreams, myths, imagination, poesis, and symbolic consciousness. He understood that this myth-making aspect of human functioning, which includes religious processes, is the most potent, creative, fertile, and profound realm of human activity. It is through this capacity that humans not only make meaning, but also develop narratives saturated with symbols, values, ethics, and priorities within which communities navigate all dimensions of existence.

The ecological crisis, in all its manifestations, came to dominate Berry's concerns. The latter part of his life, some thirty years, was dedicated to responding to the socio-ecological crisis. Berry is still one of a few who have grasped the magnitude of this crisis, comprising the end of the Cenozoic era. To fathom the causes and to have any viable future, all aspects of human activities need to be addressed at the most profound point.

Influences on Berry's Thought

The following are glimpses of some specific influences that oriented his thought.⁷ It is not comprehensive or in depth, although it will assist in understanding the richness of his proposal. Berry wrote of himself:

I studied history and philosophy to find out and test how people found meaning. I wanted to go back through the whole human tradition and test the whole process, because it was obvious from the beginning, going into religious life, that the process was not working.... Our modern world is not working. Christianity in this sense is not working.... Religion is assuming no responsibility for the state of the earth or the fate of the

7. For an in-depth examination of various intellectual themes within Berry's work, see Heather Eaton, ed., *The Intellectual Journey of Thomas Berry: Imagining the Earth Community* (Lanham: Lexington, 2014).

earth.... Somehow, when I was quite young, I saw the beginnings of biocide and geocide.⁸

Giambattista Vico

A significant influence pertains to the ideas of Giambattista Vico, Berry's dissertation subject.⁹ Vico's own work was an attempt to respond creatively to the confusing and turbulent issues of his day. He was searching for a unifying resolution, a wholeness or an ultimate homogeneity to reality within the prevailing turmoil of world-view transition. He sought a pervasive wisdom, inclusive of scientific and religious truths; a wisdom which offered a consolidating principle of universal knowledge. Vico resisted intellectual trends that divided science, philosophy, anthropology, and religion.¹⁰

Vico scorned the direction of his time, particularly because of a connection he made between confounded intellectual inquiries and moral relativity. He criticized the delusive dreams of progress, which he feared could endanger civic values and end in barbarism. Vico's views of history, briefly condensed here, portray ages of consciousness in the emergence of human life. At each stage, the evolution is one of the prevalent consciousness developing towards increasing complexity, but not necessarily advancing. Thus to discern the stage of one's time and place, which is the task of intellectuals, one must know the evolutionary challenge of the era.¹¹

Parallels to Berry's work are evident. Berry also sought a unifying

-
8. Dunn and Lonergan, eds., *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation Between Humans and the Earth: Thomas Berry and Thomas Clark* (Mystic: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991), 143-144.
 9. Vico is most known for his controversial work *The New Science*, translation of the Third Edition (1744) by Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1968). Berry's thesis was published as *The Historical Theory of Giambattista Vico* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1949).
 10. See J. Samuel Preuss, "A New Science of Providence: Giambattista Vico," *Explaining Religion: Criticism and Theory from Bodin to Freud* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987).
 11. For a detailed discussion of Vico's influence on Berry, see Anne Marie Dalton, *A Theology for the Earth: The Contributions of Thomas Berry and Bernard Lonergan* (Ottawa, Ontario: University of Ottawa Press, 1999), 15-32.

framework in which to understand the prevailing and difficult problems. He maintained that it is the fallacious perceptions of ultimate reality, that is the cosmology or the macrophase aspect of worldview, which are causal to at least some of the dilemmas. Berry was critical of the formidable aspirations and seductions of an “industrial wonderworld,” which actually are creating a wasteworld.¹² He spoke of Eurowestern cultures as being in the grips of a cultural pathology that is manifested by an autism towards Earth’s destruction.¹³ In *The Dream of the Earth*, he wrote, “This pathology is manifest in the arrogance with which we reject our role as an integral member of the earth community in favor of a radical anthropocentric life attitude.”¹⁴

In order to reform a culture in decline, Berry agreed with Vico’s belief that the most adequate approach would be to consider the larger context of the historical/cultural emergence of humanity to be in stages of consciousness. Although Berry delineated the eras of human history differently than did Vico, both valued the primal or tribal shamanic cultures.¹⁵ Here the primordial experience of human consciousness was the awakening to an awesome universe, filled with mysterious power.¹⁶ Berry wrote: In our tribal phase we lived in an ocean of energy in which the physical and psychic forms of energy were intimately related.... In the unconscious depths of the human psyche the great visions took place.¹⁷ Berry identified this stage with an awareness of the ultimate and vital mystery of the universe—an awareness we must invoke if we are to enter this phase of cosmogenesis, which requires an alignment with the primordial thrust of the universe.

12. Berry, “The Seduction of Wonderworld,” *Edges*, no. 3 (June 1990): 9-14.

13. Berry, “The Dream of the Earth: Our Way into the Future,” *Dream of the Earth*, 205-216.

14. *Ibid.*, 208.

15. Berry makes numerous references to this time period of human development. For example, see “The Wild and the Sacred,” public address for the Sacred Arts Festival, (New York: Cathedral Saint John the Divine, October 1993); “The Fourfold Wisdom,” unpublished manuscript, 1992; “The Historical Role of the American Indian,” *Dream of the Earth*, 180-193.

16. Berry, “Creative Energy,” *Riverdale Papers I* (1977), 1.

17. Berry, “The Dynamics of the Future,” *Riverdale Papers I* (1974), 5.

Vico saw the primal era as “the age of the gods,” and appreciated the vast and pervasive sense of undifferentiated communion with the divine, cosmic, and human energies.¹⁸ The grand mythologies, creation stories, cosmic rituals, poetry, monumental architecture, and celebrations proclaimed this archetypical period of history, where the imaginative and creative powers moved the human venture into a larger phase of its own structuring. All the great religions, with their intense spiritual sensitivities to the universe, were conceived of within this period. For Berry, the context and impetus of this first formative period of human history was the universe, wherein the “dynamics of the earth took such a leap in the forms of magnitude of its expression.”¹⁹ Hence the human was understood and experienced as a dynamic of the universe itself, and of Earth in particular.

These energies have directed the course of human affairs until the present period where, in Berry's words:

Our secular, rational, industrial society, with its amazing scientific and technological skills, has established the first radically anthropocentric society and has thereby broken the primary law of the universe, the law of the integrity of the universe, the law that every component member of the universe should be integral with every other member of the universe and that the primary norm of reality and of value is the universe community itself with its various forms of expression, especially as realized on the planet Earth.²⁰

It is the current vision, from what Berry called the sane, rational, and dreamless people—those who rejected mythology in the name of progress—which is compelled by a most powerful dream that is of the order of a *supreme pathology*.²¹ Berry justified such forceful language by observing that:

18. Berry acknowledges Vico's influence here; “Creative Energy”, 2; “Dynamics”, 6.

19. Berry, “Dynamics”, 8.

20. Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 202.

21. *Ibid.*, 206.

The change taking place in the present is not simply another historical transition of another cultural transformation. Its order of magnitude is immensely more significant.... We are upsetting the entire earth system that has, over some billions of years and through an endless sequence of experiments, produced such a magnificent array of living forms, forms capable of seasonal self-renewal over an infinite period of time.... We are indeed closing down the major life systems of the planet.²²

It is a return to the macro-phase context, that of cosmology, which is required for any recovery. For Berry, to discuss macro-phase problems with micro-phase concepts will not be adequate to the task. This is a great difficulty of our time, as we are unaccustomed to reflecting at the macro-phase level and have few concepts from which to draw.

Thus, in periods of decline such as the present, it is a retrieval of the primordial archetypical experiences and visions, those now residual insights of the ultimate connections with the physical, psychic, spiritual and cosmic dimensions of both the universe and human life, which could realign human consciousness and reawaken an apprehension of a unifying essence of reality. Such a recovery is accomplished best through myth or cultural narrative.

Role of Cultural Narrative

Central to Berry's conception of a functional cosmology was his conviction that human communities function within narratives—stories that provide the macro-context for personal and communal self-understanding. Such stories are comprehensive and primary myths that provide for an ultimate context for societies. For Berry, myth originates in the numinous dimensions of the universe and is intuited in the deep structures of our psyches. Story is within the historical mode of consciousness and is related to concrete events.²³ It is the mythic aspects of cultural narratives that concern Berry,

22. Ibid.

23. Berry began to develop his usage of story, myth, and cosmology in an early essay, "The New Story," *Riverdale Papers V* (1970).

with a further interest in those stories that carry a cosmology—a story of the universe and the human place within the scheme of things. Nonetheless, the terms dream, story, myth, and cosmology are interchangeable for Berry.²⁴

Berry alleged that all societies live within some form of salvation narrative, that is to say nothing makes sense apart from the cultural narrative. Life itself has no meaning, no contours or parameters outside of the story. Further, the story renders the accounts of how the world came to be and how we fit into the grand scheme of things. It provides, guides, and shapes our personal and collective life purposes, actions, and interactions, and it offers ethical orientations. Outside the story, there is no context in which human life can function in meaningful ways.²⁵

While in China, Berry's experience of the period of the Chinese communist process and, in particular, the Long March, reinforced his certainty about the role of cultural narrative in human transformation. Berry perceived that the whole of this revolution was the most intensive period of cultural and psychic transformation in Chinese history. It was based on a transposing of mythologies. Although Marxist socialist movements seemed to be realistically based, they were actually structured on a mythology, a highly developed symbol system that evoked a powerful current of change, first in human consciousness, then in human affairs.²⁶ For Berry, the genius of Mao was in his evocation of the power inherent in the mythic depths of the unconscious. Through poetic vision and mythic form and style, the cultural symbolism was reconstructed in transposed dimensions and new objectives—a cultural revolution—

24. When asked to distinguish these terms, Berry said that dream is the ideal as it appears in pure form; vision is the dream applied to experience and is a mode of being; and story identifies the sequences of events and stages of religious transformations (Colloquium at Holy Cross Centre, Port Burwell Ontario, July 1994). Myth is the comprehensive context or cultural meta-narrative which bears archetypal symbols and narratives (creation stories, cosmogonies) carry revelations of the deepest realities of the universe. See Berry, "Dynamics," 6. In both his writing and speaking, however, Berry exchanges these terms without qualm.

25. Berry, "The New Story."

26. Berry, "Mao Tse-tung: The Long March," *Riverdale Papers* III (1974).

based on a refurbished salvific communal story. These experiences, related to China, enriched Berry's analysis of the elements necessary for effective cultural transformation, and the realization that human life functions within and is motivated by stories in mythic, symbolic form.

Myth, Story, Primal Cultures, and the Numinous Universe

Berry acknowledged that his thoughts about the function of cultural narrative have been influenced by the work of C.G. Jung and the understanding of archetypal structures which form the bases of psychic development.²⁷ In the manner of Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade, Berry accentuated the fact that the universe was the great manifestation of the sacred in primal cultures, and still is today for such societies.²⁸ Eliade proposed that what he termed "archaic societies" lived in close proximity to the sacred, that which revealed the numinous.²⁹ He used the term hierophany—a revelation of the sacred. In Eliade's words:

-
27. Berry often refers to Jung's work in passing, and uses Jung's notions of archetypal psychic structures to support his position that the human psyche has been structured from ancient primal experiences of the awesome powers of the universe prior to the differentiation between unconscious and conscious. The role of dreams and spontaneous images, the integration of the material and natural worlds and the coexistence of matter and spirit within the psychic-physical universe all reinforced Berry's search for the deepest human expressions of the cosmic forces out of which the human emerges in psychic and physical form. See Berry, "Alchemy and Spiritual Transformation in C.G. Jung," *Riverdale Papers IX* (1982).
28. Tu Wei-Ming suggests that the current primal traditions (Native American, Hawaiian, Maori and other tribal indigenous religious traditions) have a profound sense and experience of rootedness, intimate knowledge of their environment, and a style of human flourishing which is sustainable. There are obvious lessons in the averting of further unintended disastrous consequences of the Enlightenment mentality. See Tu Wei-Ming "The Mirror of Modernity and Spiritual Resources for the Global Community," *Sophia: Tradition and Pluralism* 34, no. 1 (1995): 86. Berry would add that indigenous peoples understand themselves in a living universe, thus have a functional cosmology within their cultural narrative.
29. Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*, trans., William Trask, (New York: Harvest Book, 1959), 11.

For those who have a religious experience all nature is capable of revealing itself as cosmic sacrality. The cosmos in its entirety was a hierophany.... The sacred is equivalent to a power, and in the last analysis, to reality. The sacred is saturated with being.... Religious man [sic] deeply desires to be, to participate in reality, to be saturated with power.³⁰

Eliade suggested that a desacralized cosmos is a recent discovery in the history of the human spirit and that this desacralization pervades the entire experience of the now non-religious people in modern cultures. Thus many people are presently incapable of experiencing the sacred in the very structure of the world and cosmic phenomenon. Berry and Eliade concurred that, in consequence, it is increasingly difficult to rediscover these existential dimensions,³¹ as we have lost our principal means of entering into the primordial directives and sustaining forces of the universe.³² Since, however, the greater part of human existence is fed by impulses that come from the depths of being, the unconscious, and that at the primal levels of culture, *being* and *sacred* are united,³³ and in so far as the unconscious is the result of countless existential experiences, potentially it is possible to reawaken a sense of a religious universe.

Eliade, Jung, and Berry commented that the contents and structures of the unconscious exhibit “astonishing similarities to mythological images,...in myths which are manifested in paradigmatic manners.”³⁴ Berry connected the primal awakening of humans to an awesome universe permeated with numinous energy to the primordial experience of human consciousness, and considers this to be the archetypical period of human history. Although the modern industrial myth presides over Eurowestern human consciousness, there are fragments of the primal sensitivities that still reside in the deeper realms of the unconscious. Berry believed it is because humans no longer experience a pervasive numinous presence that the modern

30. Ibid., 12.

31. Ibid., 13.

32. Berry, “Dream of the Earth,” in *Dream of the Earth*, 199.

33. Eliade, *Sacred and the Profane*, 210.

34. Ibid.

period is filled with angst and alienation from Earth, and a basic disenchantment with the world.³⁵

It is the recovery or reintegration of the primal numinous experiences of the universe, genetically encoded within the human psyche, which needs to be retrieved into consciousness. This can be accomplished best through myth, which connects the paradigmatic structure of the depth of the human psyche to the human context of cultural narrative. Berry wrote:

The mythic dimension of the ecological age is neither romanticism nor an idealism. It is rather a depth insight into the structure and functioning of the entire earth process.... The revelatory aspect of the ecological age finds expression in the ecological archetype which finds its most effective expression in the great story of the universe.... These archetypal symbols are the main instruments for the evocation of the energies needed for our future renewal of the earth.³⁶

Importance of World Religions

As a cultural historian and scholar of world religions, Berry studied the great cultural narratives and transformations and concluded that the mythic role of the cultural narrative (dream, story) is the vital piece. He understood religions to be forms of grand narratives for particular cultures, giving an overall containment of the sacred. Such stories oriented the people at the level of being and belonging. Berry's interest in world religions was essentially an existential and cultural one. It was existential due to Berry's assertion of the existential base of all religions and in terms of how people found meaning and cultural coherence particularly in moments of great transitions. It was cultural because Berry was persuaded that the larger world context was in profound transition, with a world culture emerging but without a macro-phase myth to sustain and guide this unique phase of human development.

Berry developed a deep appreciation for the penetrating and

35. Berry, "Creative Energy."

36. *Ibid.*, 4-5.

specific experiences that gave rise to distinct religious insights and traditions. This includes those based on an awareness of divine being (Hinduism), of the changing and sorrowful nature of reality (Buddhism), of an all-embracing harmony in the cosmic and human orders (Confucianism), of dynamic forces immanent in the universe (Daoism), and of a divine presence within history of the monotheistic traditions. Furthermore, although the originating experiences and subsequent interpretations are dissimilar, religions address experiences and themes within human existence: trans-human awareness, revelations, salvation, sacrifice, rebirth, virtues, sacredness, and rituals. Unlike Mircea Eliade, for Berry these are descriptive not normative forms. They are neither within all religions, nor equivalent in content. Berry claimed: "Religion takes its origin here in the deep mysteries of what we see, hear, touch, taste and savor." Religions provide the interpretative patterns to existence in narrative form. They are creative in form and salvific in purpose.

World religions, which, of necessity, developed the richness and particularity of expression of their revelatory experiences in isolation—a micro-phase period—now could either assist in the further development of each in a world context wherein "the full tapestry of revelatory experience can be observed," or could collapse into tribalism.³⁷ Berry perceived that the greatest need, in light of the ecological crisis, was to foster "a sense of the New Story of the universe as the context for understanding the diversity and unity of religions."³⁸ Such an era would become the macrophase period of development of most religious traditions, where, according to Berry, the traditions would be dimensions of each other. Further, the traditions themselves must move into this larger context of interpretation in order to maintain their ultimate orientation towards reality and value in a process of a transformation of their deep spiritual insights which "originate in an interior depth,...as revelatory of the ultimate mystery whence all things emerge into being."³⁹ Berry returned to the neces-

37. Berry, "The Catholic Church and the Religions of the World," *Riverdale Papers X* (1985), 5.

38. *Ibid.*

39. *Ibid.* In this article Berry delineates an understanding of the historical development of world religions, their uniqueness, and the necessity of each

sity of the larger context, the emergent universe, as the primary reality within which the religious traditions should situate themselves by telling their religious stories in their particular cultural contexts and narrating from the macro-phase cosmological story.

Indigenous Spiritual Traditions

In addition to a remarkable ability to appreciate the diversity and uniqueness of the great “world” religions, Berry had an ongoing and keen interest in and empathy for native religions. He studied and spent time with several tribes and communities in Canada and the United States, and with the T’boli people in the southern Philippines. Berry appreciated native traditions for embedding their sense of reverence and sacredness in the land, animals, plants, rocks, trees, and more. The living realms of all life are central to most Indigenous worldviews, thus there is a well-developed attentiveness to the natural world in all its manifestations, patterns, and seasons. These are central to a living spirituality in most Indigenous traditions. Berry wrote about the nature mysticism of North American Native spiritualities, and what he considered to be a numinous consciousness: that the mystique of the natural world is essential to their ways of life. Symbols, rituals, initiation ceremonies, sun dances, and vision quests are oriented to strengthening awareness of this mystique. For Berry, these communities and traditions maintained a living relationship with the natural world, kept alive through stories and ceremonies, to the degree that he often considered that they were the only people still carrying a functional cosmology within their psychic and social structures. Berry incorporated his deep appreciation for and insights from Indigenous peoples throughout his proposal for a functional cosmology.⁴⁰

for the next era. The structure of his interpretation is historical, looking towards an understanding of the role of world religions in this next phase of human/Earth development.

40. Berry, “The Historical Role of the American Indian,” *Dream of the Earth*, 180-193.

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was another significant influence on Berry's development.⁴¹ Teilhard de Chardin and Berry were concerned with the expanding rift between the religious traditions and the modern world, due to the lack of attention in those traditions, and Christianity in particular, to the needs, concerns and ideas of the modern world. They were both interested in how scientific developments affected changes in worldview or cosmology. Both took an interest in the evolutionary process and natural and human social history within a teleological perspective.⁴² Finally, both were affected intensely by the rise of technology and the subsequent effects on and transformations of Earth and of human life. Yet, even though profound interests were shared and Berry drew a great deal from Teilhard de Chardin's work, Berry dissociated himself from several of Teilhard de Chardin's assumptions and conclusions. The relevant aspects of this divergence will constitute the following section.

Each passionately pursued a grand synthesis of the universe as a whole. This included a sense of the great history of life, from cosmic beginnings to complex human sensibilities in an emerging, evolutionary process. This process culminated in human consciousness becoming cognisant of the evolutionary process itself. In Teilhard de Chardin's words:

Is evolution a theory, a system or a hypothesis? It is much more: it is a general condition to which all theories, all hypotheses, all systems must bow and which they must satisfy henceforth if they are to be thinkable and true. Evolution is a lamp illumi-

41. Their similar life choices are as striking as are their common intellectual pursuits. Both trained as priests and Catholic religious thinkers, lived in China, worked as army chaplains, taught university, had intense preoccupations with the evolution of the natural world and, most importantly, both sought comprehensive frameworks in which to honor the role of the human in the emergent cosmos.

42. Teleology in this sense means the orientation of cosmic evolution, from the less to the more complex. Berry's major concern is that the process of natural selection no longer is functional as it has been overtaken by human or cultural selection. (Conversation with Berry, Holy Cross Centre, July 1995.)

nating all facts.... The consciousness of each of us is evolution looking at itself and reflecting.⁴³

Teilhard de Chardin was acutely aware of the meaning of evolutionary theory when it was grasped in all its dimensions. The restitution of human development within this great Process, as he called it, was one of the major influences on Berry's work. Teilhard de Chardin reflected elsewhere on this revolution of awareness:

Any effort to understand what is now taking place in human consciousness must of necessity proceed from the fundamental change of view which since the sixteenth century has been steadily exploding and rendered fluid what had seemed to be the ultimate stability—our concept of the world itself. To our clearer vision the universe is no longer an Order but a Process. The cosmos has become a Cosmogenesis.⁴⁴

One finds similar statements throughout Berry's essays.⁴⁵

Berry acknowledged the substantial content and complexity of Teilhard de Chardin's thoughts and proposals, including the less known influences of the vitalist, spiritual, and immanentist traditions of the Renaissance, and in particular of the psychic-symbolic hermetic traditions. Berry's essay, "Teilhard: The Renaissance Connection," explored this influence on Teilhard de Chardin's approach, and why there was so much suspicion of and resistance to his thought.⁴⁶ Berry concluded that Teilhard de Chardin's work is predominantly mythic, with "an agenda that cannot be formed in words but which is revealed to some extent in the symbolism suggested by the words."⁴⁷ Until the mythic context is understood more clearly, Teilhard de Chardin's thought will have limited effi-

43. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (London: Collins, 1959), 241, 244.

44. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Future of Man* (London: Fontana, Collins, 1969), 274

45. For example, see Berry's "Threshold of the Modern World," *Riverdale Papers II* (1964).

46. Berry, "Teilhard: The Renaissance Connection," *Riverdale Papers IX* (1982).

47. *Ibid.*, 2.

cacy. Considering that Teilhard de Chardin created much of his own vocabulary to communicate this cosmogenetic leap of consciousness, it is no wonder that his work continues to be a source of fascination.

Berry's horizon of concern was the ecological crisis in light of the universe and planetary processes; thus he valued the contributions of Teilhard de Chardin's work in so far as they advanced a cosmology of recovery. Berry's article "Teilhard in the Ecological Age" delineated what Berry considered to be the central contributions and distortions in Teilhard de Chardin's work.⁴⁸ The following discussion summarizes Berry's position.

Berry observed that Teilhard de Chardin explored six major concerns. The first was the unique synthesis of the vast intellectual, social, and spiritual attainments of the twentieth century found in *The Phenomenon of Man*, which approached the material from an evolutionary framework that Berry associated with a governing myth for the future.⁴⁹

A second concern was the understanding of the human as the consciousness mode of the universe and as the fulfilment of the evolutionary process. Teilhard de Chardin outlined four phases of this great process: galactic, earth, life, and human evolution. The revelatory insight was to situate the human as neither an intrusion in nor addendum to the universe, but as integral from the beginning in the psychic-consciousness aspect of the evolutionary process. This perspective overcomes the material view of the universe associated with Newtonian cosmology.⁵⁰ Berry, however, disagreed with Teilhard de Chardin that humans were the fulfilment of the universe.

The third concern of Teilhard de Chardin, according to Berry, was with the sacred dimension of the universe. Berry was, however, more interested in the shifting of the theological focus from redemption to creation, and found the over-emphasis on redemption to be a root of the ecological problem. Teilhard de Chardin, in a stronger manner than Berry, was committed to and concerned with Christian

48. Berry, "Teilhard in the Ecological Age," *Teilhard Studies*, no. 7 (1982); see also "Teilhard in the Ecological Age," *Riverdale Papers* VIII.

49. "Teilhard in the Ecological Age," 2.

50 *Ibid.*, 2-3.

interpretations of the modern venture. The reinterpretation of the cosmic Christ as the central thrust of the emergent universe is a “powerful Christian position,” as Berry suggests.⁵¹ If the Christian story could identify with the cosmic story as told by modern science, Berry saw this as being “the beginning of a new era in both religious and secular history of our times.”⁵²

The fourth contribution of Teilhard de Chardin that Berry valued was his appreciation of psychic energy, the vast energy required to sustain the evolutionary process. In the realm of human affairs, new intensities of psychic energy will be essential for humanity to enter into the necessary transformation required at this evolutionary stage. Teilhard de Chardin perceived the diminishing of psychic energy and of existential angst to be accompanied by the sense of an absurd universe. There was a lack of a worthy object to justify the endurance of as much pain as would be necessary to enter this most significant transition. The escalation of inter-human violence, social, and cultural tensions, and a sense of boredom when there was no vast creative venture to be undertaken, were signs of the waning psychic energy. Berry saw Teilhard de Chardin as resituating the human within the immense evolutionary process—the source of the deepest energies.⁵³

The role of science was the fifth concern of Teilhard de Chardin. Berry wrote: “Advance in knowledge is absolutely essential to the total earth process. This process Teilhard saw as a vast psychic enterprise into which the human entered by research, thought, and reflection. Thus the fundamental nobility of the scientific endeavor.”⁵⁴

Berry saw Teilhard de Chardin as leading the scientific profession into the macrophase or largest horizon of its concerns, the greatest need for all branches of knowledge. Teilhard de Chardin and Berry were interested in this macrophase aspect of the evolutionary process. They insisted that the disciplines must also understand themselves in their macro- as well as micro-phases. Finally, Berry admired Teilhard de Chardin for evoking the mystique needed to “fulfil the

51. *Ibid.*, 3.

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*

54. *Ibid.*, 8-9.

destinies of the universe, the destinies which had been prepared over some billions of years in the galactic systems, advanced through the geological and biological formations of earth, and now were being activated in their highest expression in human consciousness.”⁵⁵

Berry, nonetheless, disagreed with some significant conclusions of Teilhard de Chardin. Perhaps the central point of divergence concerned the ecological crisis. Although the devastation of Earth was becoming evident during Teilhard de Chardin's lifetime and many ecologists were proclaiming warnings, he did not acknowledge this consequence of the industrial and technological exploitation of the planet. Entranced, as he seemed to have been, by the powers of science and technology and the human ability to master and harness such forces, Teilhard de Chardin saw ecological ruin as the necessary consequence of or sacrifice for the great Process. Everything was seen as progress and the damage to the natural world was incidental.⁵⁶

Berry was interested in the integral functioning of the entire planet, while Teilhard de Chardin was concerned predominantly with human progress. Berry's critique of Teilhard de Chardin's work was because of its lack of concern for the natural world, as well as of its profound anthropocentric emphasis rather than geo- or cosmic-centrism. Although Berry studied the complex of intellectual influences at work in Teilhard de Chardin's life and respected the contextual constraints, nowhere in Teilhard de Chardin's work did Berry find support for an ecological consciousness.⁵⁷ Teilhard de Chardin was immersed deeply in both the religious and humanist traditions of the West out of which the exploitative and imperial view of human-earth relations developed.

Berry was critical also of Teilhard de Chardin for failing to give sufficient attention to the benefits and limitations of the traditional civilizations and for not developing an adequate understand-

55. *Ibid.*, 4.

56. Progress here is not meant in a derogatory fashion. Teilhard emphasized the culmination of the great Process in human consciousness; thus Earth development and health were secondary to human development. He favored an organic-spiritual worldview over a mechanistic worldview, yet he accepted fully the industrial and technological exploitation of the planet as a desirable human venture. See Berry, "Teilhard in the Ecological Age," 10.

57. *Ibid.*, *passim*.

ing of the problems and questions of modern existence. Teilhard de Chardin was not interested in cultural developments, including those of primal cultures, and he paid no attention to the transition from the great civilizations to the modern world. For Berry, traditional cultural forms are exceedingly important. He wrote:

The very words we use with all the spiritual and cultural values they contain come from these traditional cultures, the ideals we pursue with our whole life effort, the deepest thoughts of our minds, our emotional responses to reality, our work and our worship, our music and our songs; all of these have been determined by the traditional cultures.... Even divine reality presents itself to us within these forms.⁵⁸

A further difference lies in their theological pursuits. Teilhard de Chardin, although attentive to the insights from Eastern traditions, remained Christian centered and the categories he used in the integration of science and religion often were Christian. While Teilhard de Chardin's primary theological orientation was to reinterpret Christianity for the modern age, Berry oriented his work to the larger society with language that "makes sense to everybody."⁵⁹ Berry's audience and concerns are not essentially Christian and he preferred some ideas and insights from other religious and humanist traditions.

Although Berry was critical of some basic orientations in Teilhard de Chardin's work, he appreciated the expanse of Teilhard de Chardin's pursuit and the acumen of his mind. Berry also suggested that the major thesis of Teilhard de Chardin's work can be extended and reoriented for an ecological age, although not without some key reappraisals.⁶⁰

58. Berry, "Threshold of the Modern World," 6-7.

59. Dunn and Lonergan, eds., *Befriending the Earth*, 10.

60. See generally Berry, "Teilhard in the Ecological Age."

The Role of Science

A further central influence on Berry's development of a functional cosmology was his acceptance of the findings of the empirical sciences, and in particular that of astronomy. Berry considered the discoveries of science to be of the order of a revelatory experience.⁶¹ In Berry's analysis of science, there were specific threads that he was tracking and to which he was giving meaning in light of his concerns. For example, he wrote:

This commitment to the order and intelligibility of the universe has been the basis of the past five hundred years of scientific inquiry. The idea that this intelligibility could be identified in the experiential order was the new sensitivity leading on through the transition phase to our present understanding of the universe. An understanding of this transitional sequence is most important, for only in this way can we appreciate the events that are taking place in these later times.... Each of the major figures was contributing something essential to a pattern of interpretation that would only become clear in the mid-twentieth century. Only now can we see with clarity that we live not so much in a cosmos as in a cosmogenesis, a cosmogenesis best presented in narrative; scientific in its data, mythic in its form.⁶²

As Berry's ideas coalesced, he saw the findings of science as being crucial to the task of transforming the cultural myth of the West, which he saw as necessary to the recovery of values in a culture that would resist ecological destruction and resituate the human in a living cosmos. Although Berry perceived that to recover from the period when culture is in decline is to retrieve archetypal elements which were more evident in primal phases of human existence, he was not interested in a return to a romanticized past or in the restoration of primal societies. He understood the universe process is an irreversible sequence of time-developmental transformations,

61. Swimme and Berry, "The Modern Revelation," *The Universe Story*, 223-240.

62. *Ibid.*, 228-229.

moving from a lesser to a greater complexity in structure and functioning, as well as to an increase in variety and intensity in its modes of conscious expression.⁶³ Thus it is the restoration of the primordial mode of human awareness, in a new context—not only in time and place, but also in consciousness—in view of how the ultimate mysteries of existence are being manifested in the emergent universe.

In the realm of science, Berry drew from several sources.⁶⁴ Further sources from science come from ecology, natural history, and nature writers. Authors such as Loren Eiseley are for Berry the “most impressive thinkers on the human situation within the rhythms and the mystiques of the earth.”⁶⁵ For Berry, however, science is not simply the accumulation of data. The great problem is not the lack of data, but in our capacity to understand the significance of the data that have come through empirical science. There are marvellous insights into the complex sequence of events that has brought Earth into being with its living world and human community. Berry writes: “There seems, however, to be little realization of just what this story means in terms of the larger interpretation of the human venture.”⁶⁶

For Berry, science was a cultural venture with spiritual dimensions. His orientation towards the efforts of science is interpretative, and is based on his concern for the assumptions and effects of the retrieval of values for an ecologically sound culture. He was critical, however, of the cultural values that imbue Eurowestern science. He suggested that it was the cultural context and orientation in which

63 Ibid., 223.

64. The work of Prigogine, Stengers, and Jantsch, and the self-organizing principle converge with Berry’s appreciation of the universe, and forms of the anthropic principle support Berry’s views. The Gaia theory of James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis, which holds the view that Earth is a living organism, adds empirical evidence to the previous visionary source professing the same insight. Berry, “Human Presence,” *Dream of the Earth*, 22; “The Gaia Theory: Its Religious Implications,” *ARC* 22 (1994): 7-19

65. Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 228. See also Loren Eiseley, *The Unexpected Universe* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972); Loren Eiseley, *The Immense Journey*, (New York: Random House, 1960). Grassie notes that Eiseley is the closest model for Berry’s work. See William John Grassie, *Reinventing Nature: Science Narratives as Myths for an Endangered Planet* [dissertation] (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University, 1994), 154.

66 Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 228.

the entire development of science and technology has taken place that is precipitating the present difficulties.⁶⁷ Two central cultural commitments have oriented Eurowestern science: that humanity is transcendent to the natural world, and the belief in the infallible achievement by progress of a perfect age in which human life will surmount the restrictions that characterise the human condition.⁶⁸ Throughout his works, Berry developed his critique of these commitments.

Berry sought to interpret the findings of science within the limits and capacities of the Earth community, and upon which humanity is ultimately dependent. The task is to understand the findings of science as revealing a dynamic relationship between nature and human experience, and between science and culture.⁶⁹ In addition for Berry, the discoveries about the universe from science are mythic in dimension, and psychically archetypal. In fact, science itself is inherently mythic and mysterious, as Berry affirmed:

We emerge into being from within the earth process and enable the universe to come to itself in a special mode of psychic intimacy.... Any significant thought or speech about the universe finds its expression through [such] imaginative powers. Even our scientific terms have highly mythic content—such words as *energy, life, matter, form, universe, gravitation, evolution*. Even such terms as *atom, nucleus, electron, molecule, cell, organism*. Each of these terms spills over into metaphor and mystery as soon as it is taken seriously.⁷⁰

Therefore science can be resituated as that which enhances rather than reduces the mystery.⁷¹ For Berry, science illuminated the intrinsic spiritual dimension of the universe that is evident in the reverence for Earth processes as interpreted by scientists Prigogine,

67. Berry, "Science and Technology for Development: The Cultural Context," *Riverdale Papers VI* (1979).

68. *Ibid.*, 2-3.

69. This orientation echoes the work of Stengers and Prigogine and the joining of the new cosmology (new science) with the postmodern worldview.

70. Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 198-199.

71. Dunn and Lonergan, eds., *Befriending the Earth*, 26.

Lovell, Dyson, and Swimme.⁷² However, the norm of science is not thus. Berry's critique is summarized in the following: "Science and technology, if only they would cease their deadly assault on the earth and their poisoning of the planet, could be of transcendent value in assisting the human community and the nations of the earth in finding their proper role within this ever-renewing cycle of life."⁷³

The Need for a Functional Cosmology

"The deepest crises experienced by any society are those moments of change when the story becomes inadequate for meeting the survival demands of a present situation. Such, it seems to me, is the situation we must deal with in this late twentieth century."⁷⁴ Berry was interested in the story of the universe. He claimed that humanity has developed such an antagonistic relationship with Earth because we no longer have functional stories from which to interpret the past, adequately deal with the challenges of the present, and receive guidance for the future. We are unable to find such meaning and direction from our traditional religious stories. Further, functional cultural narratives of the past arose from contexts so dissimilar from today that they are dismissed as extraneous fables.

This is a critical assumption of Berry's, that the ecological crisis is a *consequence* of the breakdown between cultural narrative and cosmology. Berry and Swimme remarked:

Traditionally, the cosmological enterprise aimed at an understanding of the universe and the role of the human in the universe. But over the last three centuries cosmology has come to mean "mathematical cosmology."... Traditional questions concerning the role and meaning of human beings were thus relegated to others so that the scientific enterprise could concentrate without distraction on the physical facts of the matter.⁷⁵

72. Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 66-67.

73. Berry, "Science and Technology," 8.

74. Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, xi.

75. Swimme and Berry, *The Universe Story*, 22-23. Berry frequently addresses the history of cosmology, the factors which most affected Western cosmology,

Berry's definition of cosmology, while rooted in earlier understandings of the function of cosmology as that which seeks to understand the universe and the human role within the universe, was concerned with the emerging postmodern ecological worldviews that are grounded in an evolutionary natural science and emergent complexity theories of cosmology. His intention was the retrieval of particular values in view of the ecological crisis—a process necessary for cultural recovery. Berry contended that we need a cosmology wherein the natural world has intrinsic value as well as value to humans.

Berry thus sought a functional cosmology: one that unites the genuine human need for a story in which society finds meaning and direction with the story of the universe that the realm of science is discovering. He wrote:

Never before has the human community had such a profound understanding of the universe.... While this account is scientific it is also mythic. Almost every term used by science carries with it more mystery than rational comprehension. Although as yet unrealized, this scientific account of the universe is the greatest religious, moral and spiritual event that has taken place in these centuries.⁷⁶

Only the universe story, with the resulting implications for human priorities, is suitable to the tasks facing humanity in this era. This would be a functional cosmology.

We are entering a new era, what Berry called the Ecozoic era. In terms of human history, "the changes presently taking place in human and earthly affairs are beyond any parallel with historical change or cultural modification."⁷⁷ New historical visions are required to guide and inspire the course of human affairs through

and how this cosmology became distorted and dysfunctional, yet powerful enough to create a profound cultural pathology and autism towards the destruction of Earth. See *Dream of the Earth*, passim.

76. Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 98.

77. Berry, "The Ecozoic Era," *Eleventh Annual E.F. Schumacher Lectures* (Great Barrington, MA: E.F. Schumacher Society, 1991), 1.

these times of stress. The rise and fall of civilizations, or the great historical movements from the classical to the medieval to the modern periods are patterns of transition that require interpretation of and guidance through the sequences of transformations. These are necessary to steer humanity to a more creative future. The issues now, however, are of a much greater order of magnitude.

Berry believed that the magnitude of change that is occurring is comparable to the end of the Palaeozoic era, 220 million years ago, and the terminal phase of the Mesozoic era, 65 million years ago.⁷⁸ At both moments there was extensive extinction of life. Now in the terminal phase of the Cenozoic era, Berry sees humanity as altering the structure and functions of the planet to the degree that we are closing down the major life-support systems.⁷⁹ The consequences are absolute speculation. Nothing in our cultural visions has prepared us to face this transition. Berry stated that, “such an order of change in its nature and in its order of magnitude has never before entered either into earth history or into human consciousness.”⁸⁰ This reality is not essentially a matter of human survival or a decision of ethics, or a moment awaiting a spiritual transformation of our contemporary culture. Berry’s work continually returns to the question of the order of magnitude. It is necessary to be clear about the kind of transformation we are facing, with all its extreme distress, culpability, and unfathomable loss and waste of life of this planet.⁸¹ Berry suggested that a new depth of psychic energy must be released if we are to live creatively in the future conditions of a diminished earth. Few environmentalists and ecologists are able to comprehend the extent of the crisis. Those who do are often met with disbelief, denial, and a call for “more research.”⁸²

78. Berry, “The Bush,” paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion (Washington, DC: 22 November 1993), 9. John Livingston states that there have been four periods of mass extinctions comparable to the present, they being 65, 94, 213, and 248 million years ago. See *Rogue Primate: An Exploration of Human Domestication* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1994), 1

79. Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 206.

80. *Ibid.*, xiii.

81. *Ibid.*, 11-12.

82. Joni Seager laments the consistent denial of the severity of the ecological

Berry presented a vision that demands a radical change of consciousness in two ways in particular. The first is his consideration of the limits of our cultural traditions and the role they would play as we enter a new mode of consciousness. The second is that Berry sought to bend the mind in order to see the universe in an entirely new way. He endeavoured to “reinvent the human at the species level” in order to resituate the human within the community of life on Earth in a mutually-enhancing relationship.⁸³ The foundational guidance for this is within the story of the universe.

The two dimensions, considered to be the cultural and genetic circumstances, are necessary pieces of Berry’s thought on how a functional cosmology could assist in a cultural recovery in light of the ecological crisis. Berry presented the cultural and genetic codings for two purposes: to situate the human problematic in culture and to find guidance within the cosmogenetic structure.⁸⁴ Others have described similar facets or divisions as the dichotomy between nature and culture, first and second natures, intrinsic and extrinsic sources, and genetic and cultural coding.⁸⁵ For Berry, genetic and cultural are associated intrinsically,⁸⁶ although separated here to

crisis, particularly on the part of governments who have invested heavily in a reductionist, objective science. She writes, “If the world ends not with a bang but a whimper, the last whimper that will echo in the void will be a weak cry for ‘more research.’” Joni Seager, *Earth Follies: Coming to Feminist Terms with the Global Environmental Crisis*, 162 (New York: Routledge, 1993).

83. Berry, “Reinventing the Human at the Species Level,” *Creation* (Vol 3, Sept.-Oct. 1987): 24-27. For a full description, see “Reinventing the Human at the Species Level,” *Riverdale Papers XI* (1988).
84. Berry developed these notions of cultural and genetic codings over many years partially in reliance on Chinese Confucianism. He describes them in *Dream of the Earth*, 92-108, and 194-203, and in “Individualism and Wholism in Chinese Tradition: The Religious Cultural Context,” *Riverdale Papers IX* (1982).
85. The first and second nature discussion, although used by ecologist Murray Bookchin in his social ecology, see *Remaking Society* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1989), has roots in Platonic thought, see Mary O’Brien, *The Politics of Reproduction* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981). Intrinsic and extrinsic sources are terms used by anthropologist Clifford Geertz, quoted in Max Oelschlaeger, *Caring for Creation: An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), 85
86. Berry wrote, “The relationship between genetic coding and cultural coding is

assist in understanding what Berry is getting at.

Cultural Circumstances

Cultural Coding

“Inherent in the human situation is the problem of keeping our cultural expression integrally related to our genetic endowment.”⁸⁷ For Berry, humans are coded genetically for a further transgenetic cultural coding, wherein we “invent ourselves in the human expression of our being.”⁸⁸ Berry’s perspective on human viability was that humans, as a species, have a unique capacity for self-formation and for culture. It is this capacity for culture where Berry located the current problem that is causing the risks to Earth community. He defined culture this way:

The human in alliance with the earth is genetically encoded to invent a second level of its own being, a cultural realm freely developed in which the human gives itself its own identity in time and space and expands its activities in language and imagination and in the vast complex activities that we indicate by the term *human culture*.⁸⁹

Cultural coding, contained within and guided by the genetic coding, provides an orientation or a capacity for cultural development, although one in need of education. The content of the cultural coding, finding a variety of expressions throughout the human communities, is determined freely. It becomes the functioning norm of self-understanding, meaning, values, social ordering and guidance. This normative reference of reality is transmitted through language, symbols, familial and social education, rituals, and so on. For Berry,

among the most delicate of all issues in discussion of human thought modes and life disciplines.” See “Individualism and Wholism in Chinese Tradition,” 7.

87. Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 199.

88. *Ibid.*, 200.

89. *Ibid.*, 92 (italics in the original).

we invent ourselves in these cultural modes. The difficulty is that the cultural coding is capable of pathological content, which is indicative of the current state.

Berry has reflected extensively on the sources and process of the development of cultural systems. There is a danger if the cultural coding becomes insensitive to the genetic coding. Our present crisis has been caused by Eurowestern civilization setting itself “deliberately against our genetic coding, and the *instinctive tendencies of our genetic endowment* are systematically negated.”⁹⁰

Patriarchy

Berry, among others, studied the origins of patriarchy, and determined that our current cultural pathology has its roots in the development of the patriarchal period.⁹¹ Patriarchy, with its values of aggressive plundering, male domination, and distorted notions of progress is the deepest and most destructive cultural vision ever devised. It is, according to Berry, the manifestation of a supreme pathos. The entire course of Eurowestern civilization is vitiated by patriarchy. As Berry recognized, the pathology is an arrogant, anthropocentric, and inherently devastating vision that has resolutely gripped those formed within Eurowestern culture. It is “antifeminist, antihuman and antiearth.”⁹²

The critique of patriarchy that Berry offered is basically analogous to a general feminist appraisal.⁹³ The integral players in the drama of patriarchy, based on a script of male domination, are: androcentric cosmological structures; a male-dominated religious perspective

90. *Ibid.*, 202 (italics added). Berry's use of genetic and cultural coding is evident here where the genetic factor is manifested in the instinctive tendencies which can be temporarily overridden, not by the capacity to create culture, but by specific content.

91. Berry, “Patriarchy: A New Interpretation of History,” *Dream of the Earth*, 138-162.

92. *Ibid.*, 160.

93. Berry concurs with some feminists that the cultural vision of patriarchy contains inherently destructive elements. His critique is a basic assessment, and would not diverge from general feminist critiques of patriarchy, but Berry's is not a sophisticated and in depth study.

assumed to be natural in the cosmic, social, and moral orders; the supremacy of rational, disconnected thought; national sovereignty; the aggressive use of power for conquest and domination, and reliance on military security; and corporate myths of economic prosperity and stability. The patriarchal establishment is imbued with pathos in spite of the truly noble inventions, discoveries, and achievements that have occurred within this period.⁹⁴

Patriarchy was a powerful vision of a way of life that took possession of the human (male) imagination, but was built on a dream that was disconnected from our earthly roots. Berry viewed the discussion about patriarchy from within his framework of cultural narrative, and the role of myth or cosmology⁹⁵ in human consciousness, and not from a feminist perspective. Berry's belief was that the foundational pillar of patriarchy is an alienation from Earth.⁹⁶ In the patriarchal myth, humans do not belong to Earth community, we are not an integral part of the natural world, and our destiny is elsewhere in a better world. It is for this reason that Berry claimed that none of the revolutionary movements has prepared us for what we must now confront. None of our existing cultures can deal with this situation from its own resources.

Cultural Pathology

It is most difficult to awaken to the crisis situation while in the grips of this cultural pathology. The vision of progress has become the central story of the human community and it is becoming glob-

94. Ibid., 154-160.

95. Again, for Berry, the words dream, story, myth and cosmology are somewhat interchangeable.

96. This would be similar to a deep ecology position. Feminists situate the problematic in numerous patterns, such as in Gerda Lerna's, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). Some social ecologists see hierarchy as the root of all evils; see Murray Bookchin, *Remaking Society* (Montreal: Blackrose Books, 1989). Ecofeminism would link alienation from Earth with misogyny, ideologically constructed within a system of hierarchical dualisms; see Susan Griffin, *Woman and Nature: The Roaring Inside Her* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978). Hundreds of subsequent publications address this, but the specific origins of patriarchy are hidden in the past.

al.⁹⁷ Endless energy has gone into fulfilling this commitment to progress and to the sense of the unlimited growth that it evokes. Yet the vision is creating a desolate wasteworld, full of animosity towards the human condition, Earth, the human community, and other species.⁹⁸

Berry spoke of learning to resist the seduction of this vision.⁹⁹ We need to experience the depth of this crisis—the spoilage of Earth—and to realize concurrently that Earth is perhaps the most precious and glorious reality of the universe. Berry insisted on the need to perceive with accuracy what is actually happening, and begin to experience the repulsive aspects of modern civilization. A combination of terror and inspiration is needed which could act as catalysts that energize and empowering psychic energy. Berry wrote:

When we think of the order of magnitude of change taking place in human affairs, it is important to think of the physical basis of all things human. What do we smell?... We are not even smelling the odors that are around us. Our senses are becoming deadened. Such diminishment of our sensitivities kills off our religious sensitivities and diminishes our understanding. It dulls our imagination.... We are like persons suffocating in a closed environment...in a drugged state.... Discussing possibilities, in terms of religion or ethics cannot happen unless we are alive, unless our basic faculties are intact, unless we can respond with the sense of physical vigor required to undergo the needed adjustment. This is a type of human situation that has never existed before at this order of magnitude or with this type of addiction.¹⁰⁰

Berry observed that humanity has become the terminator and termination, not fulfilment, of the Earth process. Humans are the

97. Berry and Swimme discuss the progress myth in *The Universe Story*, 218-219, 241-242.

98. Berry, "Wonderworld as Wasteworld," *Cross Currents* 35 (Winter 1985-86), 408-422.

99. Berry, "The Seduction of Wonderworld," 8-14

100. Dunn and Lonergan, eds., *Befriending the Earth*, 95.

most pernicious mode of earthly being in terms of ecological wreckage. Further, and even in the best of times, it is difficult for humans to change basic commitments, . . . until the present historical moment such a complete reversal of values has not, however, been necessary for survival. To awaken to devastation is, as Berry noted, “a bitter moment, not simply for the human, but for the earth itself. . . . Our hopes were so high, our arrogance unrestrained even by simple modesty.”¹⁰¹ Worse yet, the origins of these actions are imbedded deeply in the spiritual and cultural traditions that give us meaning and direction, as well as melded intricately into all social, economic and political systems.¹⁰²

Finally, Berry is renowned for the following three declarations:

1. The glory of the human has become the desolation of the earth.
2. The desolation of the earth is becoming the destiny of the human.
3. All human institutions, professions, programs, and activities must now be judged primarily by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore, or foster a mutually enhancing human-earth relationship.¹⁰³

Genetic Circumstances

Berry made a significant contribution by distinguishing several dimensions within the context of humanity. He challenged the prevailing confidence that the most effective resources reside in our cultural traditions or any form of transformation from within. Berry recommended a realization that the true context for the human is Earth, and that the context of Earth is the universe. This universal context is encoded genetically in the psychic and physical structure

101. Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 204.

102. Berry has written about the values of antagonism towards Earth being embedded in the economic systems of the West, and now globally: “Economics as a Religious Issue,” *Riverdale Papers X* (1985); “Religions, Economics and Ecology,” *Riverdale Papers XI* (1986); “The New Political Alignment,” *The Great Work*, 107-116.

103. Berry, “The Seduction of Wonderworld,” 9.

of our being. He thus described:

Our genetic coding determines not only our identity at birth; its guidance continues also in every cell of our bodies throughout the entire course of our existence, a guidance manifested through the spontaneities within us. We need only to listen to what we are being told through the very structure and functioning of our being. We do invent our cultural coding, but the power to do so is itself consequent on the imperative of our genetic coding.¹⁰⁴

These physical and psychic structures contain the capacity to realize the extent of the crisis. Berry extended this to say that Earth carries the psychic structure and physical form of every living being on the planet.¹⁰⁵ He offered the following by way of explanation:

The universe carries the deep mysteries of our existence within itself. We cannot discover ourselves without first discovering the universe, the earth and the imperatives of our own being. Each of us has a creative power and a vision far beyond any rational thought or cultural creation of which we are capable. Nor should we think of these as isolated from our own individual being or from the earth community. We have no existence except within the earth and within the universe.¹⁰⁶

Core of Berry's Functional Cosmology

The most concise formulations of Berry's functional cosmology are a presentation of what could be called his presuppositions. His conviction that we must go back to the genetic imperative from whence human culture emerged, and from which we can never be separated without losing our integrity and survival capacity, ensues from the following observations and interpretations.¹⁰⁷

104. Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 194-195.

105. *Ibid.*

106. *Ibid.*, x.

107. For a concise rendering of what Berry means by these aspects of his functional

- The universe is the only text without a context. It is the great epic, the story from which *all* other stories depend and emerge.
- The universe is the only self-referent mode of being in the phenomenal order. All other beings are universe referent.
- We live in an emergent, time-developmental universe: an unfolding, irreversible sequence of transformations, an evolving, integral, creative reality—a cosmogenesis.
- The universe is the fundamental revelatory experience.
- Everything in the universe is genetically related.
- The three basic tendencies of the universe are differentiation, subjectivity and communion.
- The universe is a community of subjects, not a collection of objects.
- The primary intention of life is neither one of peace nor conflict, but creativity.
- The earth is a one-time endowment.
- The earth is primary, the human is derivative.
- Humanity is a celebratory species. The universe reflects upon itself through the human. We cannot discover ourselves without first discovering the universe, the earth and the imperatives from our own being. Humans are a dimension of the earth and the universe.
- The community of creatures on earth is of greater value than any particular part.
- The earth exists and can survive only in its integral functioning, it cannot survive in fragments any more than any organism can survive in fragments.

From these assertions one can derive Berry's understanding of both the nature of the reality in which we live and any hope for a viable future.¹⁰⁸

cosmology, see Brian Swimme, "Berry's Cosmology," *Cross Currents* 35 (Summer/Fall 1987), 218-224. Heather Eaton, "Feminists or Functional Cosmology? Ecofeminist Musings on Thomas Berry's Functional Cosmology," *Ecotheology*, (5 and 6, 1998), 73-94.

108. These assertions are basic to Berry's functional cosmology and are reiterated

A Viable Future

For Berry, survival is possible only within the Earth system itself. The integrity of Earth is what allows the human to live and flourish. Berry eloquently described how he understood the relationship of intimacy and dependency humans have with Earth. He stated that Earth is primary and the human derivative, meaning that every aspect of human functioning—imagination, refinement of emotion, thoughts, words, and capacity for intimacy and awareness of experiences of the divine—is due to the magnificence of Earth. He wrote: “If we lived on the moon, our mind and emotions, our speech and imagination, our sense of the divine would all reflect the desolation of the lunar landscape.”¹⁰⁹

The ecological crisis is a result of the dysfunctional cultural content that, for complex and perhaps enigmatic reasons, is disconnected from our genetic coding. We need to see beyond the cultural conditioning to our fundamental origins, to, as Berry said, “reinvent the human,” and to establish viable and mutually enhancing human-Earth relationships. Berry exhibited his proclivity for the insights of primal cultures, and the conviction that in periods of cultural decline, recovery is achieved best through retrieval of the primordial insights from elemental cultures or unconscious promptings.

Berry was adamant about the need for a vision of an attractive future that provides hope for, expectation of, and enticement to the possibilities of life. Much like an addict, we must be frightened sufficiently by a lethal situation, and at the same time be attracted by an appealing dream of an alternative life.¹¹⁰ Berry proposed a new cul-

throughout his work. In particular, see the following essays in *Dream of the Earth*: “The Earth Community,” 6-12; “Human Presence,” 13-23; “The Ecological Age,” 36-49; “The New Story,” 123-137; “The Dream of the Earth: Our Way into the Future,” 194-215; and Swimme, “Berry’s Cosmology,” 218-224.

109 Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 11.

110. Berry, “Creative Energy,” 4. Berry develops his comparison of the current cultural pathology to an addiction, in what he calls a mythic addiction, where “even when the consequences in a desolate planet are totally clear the industrial order keeps its control over human activities because of the energy generated by the mythic quality of its vision,” 4

tural myth: a cosmic creation story known through empirical observation. What Berry uniquely offered is an interpretation of *what it means*—its nuances, its intimate psychic and physical structure, and its ultimate guidance for our perilous future.

Berry delineated the conditions for an Ecozoic era that will assist in the change of consciousness necessary to enter this great stage of transformation. The reality is that future life will not flourish with the abundance and diversity of the present era. Too much has been destroyed. Berry, however, focused on a new self-understanding of humans as members of Earth community, which, with self-awareness, will consciously align humanity within the immense project of life within the universe. Berry maintained that all professions must be realigned to reflect this reality.¹¹¹ Thus economics, for example, must have as its first priority the well-being of the planet. The legal profession needs to be developed to include inter-species issues, biocide, geocide, and realities of ecological justice. We need to discover a new language, new definitions and understandings of what is happening. Our language systems are dreadfully inadequate to speak of the transformations required. The educational system must be adjusted to educate humanity to live with Earth. As well, Berry believed that all professions need to develop a sensitivity to life. He wrote: “We need to have religious sensitivity to the sacred, a deep, emotional, imaginative sensitivity to everything, from the bluebirds to the butterflies.”¹¹²

The Development of the ‘New’ or Universe Story

Berry was working within the parameters of Eurowestern culture. Although the universe story is “universal,” the language, concepts, philosophical and religious categories, and the researching and use

111. Berry reiterates the need for all professions and disciplines to be realigned with the natural world. See Berry, “The University,” public address at St. Jerome’s College (Waterloo, Ont., March 1995); “Ethics and Ecology,” public address at the Centre for Medicine, Ethics & Law, McGill University (Montreal, Que: April 1994); “The New Political Alignment”; “The American College in the Ecological Age,” *Religion and Intellectual Life* VI, no. 2 (Winter 1989): 7-28.

112. Dunn and Lonergan, eds., *Befriending the Earth*, 98.

of empirical evidence are all often from within the Eurowestern cultural heritage. While Berry travelled extensively and was cognisant of many religious and spiritual traditions, his main thrust was from and to the Eurowestern cultures, precisely because he considered these to be the most dangerous forces on the planet.¹¹³

A second reflection is that Berry does not accept a meaningless universe. He was baffled by those, such as Carl Sagan and Stephen Jay Gould, who consider any revelatory substance or purpose to the universe to be antiquated and illusory.¹¹⁴ Berry was stupefied by Weinberg's proclamation of a meaningless and pointless universe.¹¹⁵ For Berry, all life has meaning. The emergent universe is yielding the meaning.

Berry's work was immense in scope. It requires pondering to grasp the full implications of his vision. His intellectual inquiry had breadth and depth, with an astonishing capacity to integrate knowledge. Yet he only began publishing his thought in the latter half of his life. In 1978, when he was 64, Berry published his essay, "The New Story." This incorporated a skeletal version of what took him decades to understand and weave together. It is quite short, had no footnotes or references, and seems straightforward. If one is, however, aware of Berry's erudite history, then one begins to see the layers of learning and meaning that are not initially evident. "The New Story" has a lyric style. It is evocative, meaning it is appealing to mythic receptors: our dreams and desires, and our need for meaning and ultimacy. This essay indicates what became typical of Berry's style. It has breadth, depth, elegance, and clarity. It is incisive and profound.

My final comments concern Berry's essay, "The New Story," as related to his intellectual formation as previously described. The essay begins with the importance of cultural stories and our need for

113. *Ibid.*, 118.

114. The perspectives of Gould, Sagan, and Weinberg can be found in Haight, *Promise of Nature*, 12.

115. Weinberg, *The First Three Minutes*, quoted in Brian Swimme, "Cosmogogenesis," in *Worldviews and Ecology*, eds. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1994), 239. Berry often quotes this comment, and then questions how anyone could "live in such a world." Colloquium (Holy Cross Centre, July 1994), audio-cassette.

a story about how the world came to be. Then Berry discussed how such stories function by giving an account of the world and where we fit. These stories orient us, shape our sentiments, purpose, energy, offer emotional, aesthetic and spiritual fulfillment, consecrate suffering, integrate knowledge, provide a moral compass, and allow life to function in a meaningful manner. At first blush this seems reasonable, even simple. But when one ponders these dimensions of cultural stories, it becomes evident one has entered a rich, nuanced and profound arena of observation, knowledge, and wisdom. That is part of the genius of Berry.

The essay continues on the topic of the current story, and how it is dysfunctional, not able to deal with the demands of the era, and causing ecological ruin. Throughout the essay Berry described the pathos, dysfunction, cultural autism, and pathology connected to the current cultural orientation and story. There is considerable historical reference and background that provide context to his claims. Also, he wove in paragraphs about changes in the mode of human perception and social structures that accompany new understandings that are then incorporated into social narratives.

The breadth of historical overview in the first few pages of “The New Story” and the manner in which Berry presented it exemplifies his astonishing knowledge and integration of psychic processes, interior sensitivities, and religious emphasis (on redemption for example). He discussed the influence of catastrophic events such as the black plague, and the rise and significance of scientific discoveries. He presented these in the manner in which they function: their impact and consequences. At times Berry referred to Plato, Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Dante, and later Francis Bacon and Charles Darwin.

All of this is useful to Berry for his analysis of how we become aware of the current dysfunctions. He explained the need to assess these deep within our cultures, identities, life orientations, ethics, and religious beliefs and foci: what Berry calls the larger social or cultural dimensions. He delved into our modes of perception and knowing, exposing the preference for hyper-rational modes of knowing that make the mythic levels and insights invisible. This leaves us incapable of discerning the mythos from the pathos or the symbol

from the datum. Here Berry revealed his knowledge of Vico, Eliade, Jung, and Otto.

Throughout the essay, Berry directly and indirectly referred to the dynamics of the mind and consciousness. He discusses how, as well as what, knowledge is gained. The quest for knowledge about the universe and Earth has been an extraordinary psychic feat, and successful beyond dreams. Yet, we are at an impasse because the knowledge is not understood and therefore not integrated. Gains in empirical knowledge, which have been the most significant in the past few centuries, strengthen our sense of progress, and yet diminish our sense of reality. This is an astounding claim. The success of the human mode of perception defined by empirical examination has been unquestionably effective, and yet is filled with pathos. We are seduced and intoxicated by, and addicted to, its power. Berry, similarly to Eliade, wrote of our awareness being altered and weakened, and yet we do not perceive this diminishment.

There are large sections of the essay that examine the consequences of the commitments of the Christian tradition, including how and why, and what kind of religious orientation it is fostering. Berry was critical of these commitments: the Christian focus on redemption, the centrality of a person/saviour which together blind us to seeing the universe and Earth processes and developing a sense of the whole. Berry claimed that religious experience, using the term the *numinous* from Rudolf Otto, has been reduced to “being faithful.” He suggested that religions are not functioning, their stories are not adequate, their knowledge is fragmented, and they cannot integrate with scientific discoveries due to impaired and reified epistemologies. Religions have become sectarian, and narrow.

Berry then considered contemporary science. While it is clear that science is opening the possibility of a new revelatory experience in human consciousness, the reductionist interpretation of science is preventing this revelation from occurring. Science is dominated by quantitative aspects and objectivity, and ignores the experiential and qualitative aspects.

Thus Berry has led the reader to see that both religion and science are at an impasse—individually and together. Their sectarian horizons of interpretation are too constricted to see the inner impasse,

thus are devoid of self-understanding. A second consequence is that there is no deep communion between religion and science. Both traditions are trivialized, and the potential from these distinct modes of knowing is reduced. Berry wrote that it suits both to keep this division, as neither has been able to adequately deal with the other.

It is good to remember that Berry was attentive to experiences, values, modes of knowing, and depths of perception: the dream that drives the action. He showed that from these impasses, largely unrecognized, communities are unable to derive adequate values or a moral compass from religion. Scientific knowledge is not translating into a greater appreciation for the vastness and vital dynamics of the universe and the intricate workings of the biosphere. There is no integration. Societies live with fragmented knowledge and incoherent stories. No community can live without a unifying story, assumed Berry. Social and ecological problems are not resolved because this impasse is embedded into all facets of Eurowestern culture. We cannot perceive the psychic-spiritual dimensions embedded in the physical-material, and cannot appreciate the magnitude and magnificence of existence. Hence we are waking up to ecological ruin on a vast scale with few clues as to how we arrived here. The remedy is the new story.

The last third of the essay is Berry's development of the new story. With eloquence and meticulousness, Berry offers the outline of his proposal of an integral vision, from the new context of seeing the emerging creative processes of the universe to the transmission of human visions and values. He inferred that this is a story that gives a structure of knowledge for all knowledge systems, and is a sacred story for all religion. The content of the story is the universe as an evolutionary and creative process, and is what can provide an overall orientation for a viable future. If we can discover our role in the larger evolutionary processes, there is hope. Berry ended the essay with this phrase: "Sensitized to such guidance from the very structure and functioning of the universe, we can have confidence in the future that awaits the human venture."

Some Challenges

The remarkable contribution Thomas Berry made is only beginning to be discovered and disseminated. We cannot forget the extensive intellectual roots, and routes he took to learn, reflect and brood. Many people are attracted to Thomas Berry's work. Those who met him are likely to be cautious in assuming we have readily understood. For those whose access is only through his publications, there are recurring challenges that are evident. One is the tendency to simplify Berry's proposal, especially his notion of a new story or a functional cosmology. His writing style was clear, sharp, and reflective, and overall is in accessible language rather than academic jargon. There are no reference notes, and he did not reveal the decades of study that led to his thoughts. This is intentional. Berry wrote to a general rather than a specialist audience, and sought to arouse and inspire, rather than describe, explain, analyse, argue, or defend.

There is much confusion around what Berry intended by the new story, and what others are suggesting he meant. The debates around one versus many stories are tiresome. Knowing the intellectual roots to and meanings embedded within the new story should assist in realizing that this is not another hegemonic, imperialist narrative. If we are to promote Berry's work, it behooves us to understand it with depth and precision.

Learning about the universe, and how Berry interpreted it and our roles within it, evokes an awakening and celebration of self, life, Earth, and the universe of unusual power. To experience this is profound, life-changing, and rare. Some seek kindred spirits and communities dedicated to the new cosmology. While this is understandable, we can lose interest in the sufferings and complexities of the world. The larger and more difficult questions we must face, indeed the concerns that preoccupied and motivated Berry, were how to engage neo-liberal capitalism, corrupt or weak governments, corporations, free trade agreements, international concentrations of power, poverty, structural domination, education, and the religious traditions. He was immensely disturbed by human suffering as well as that of the Earth community. Much more work needs to be done, although it is good to take a pause here and celebrate Thomas Berry.