

In the Darkness Grows the Green: Thomas Berry's Contribution to Contemporary Theological Conversations Concerning Human Suffering

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Introduction

The eco-theological work of Thomas Berry spans several decades and includes several ground breaking texts such as *The Dream of the Earth* (1988),¹ *The Universe Story* (1992),² and *The Great Work* (1999).³ In these texts and numerous other articles and essays, Berry provides a set of foundational ideas and principles for the transition from economic-industrial civilization to ecological-cultural civilization. In 1987 Berry wrote an article for *Cross Currents* that offered twelve principles for reflecting on the universe, and among these he formulated his crucial fifth principle: “The universe has a violent as well as a harmonious aspect; but it is consistently creative in the larger arc of its development.”⁴ This fifth principle is not systematically addressed in any of his texts, but nevertheless it is interwoven into Berry’s cosmology. Only in the final chapter of

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1. Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988).
 2. Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Beginning of the Eozoic Era—A Celebration of the Unfolding Cosmos* (New York: HarperCollins, 1994).
 3. Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999).
 4. Thomas Berry, “Twelve Principles for Reflecting on the Universe and the Role of the Human in the Universe Process,” *Cross Currents* 37, no. 2-3 (1987): 176-177. This list is repeated in Thomas Berry, “Twelve Principles For Understanding the Universe and the Role of the Human in the Universe Process,” in Anne Lonergan and Caroline Richards, eds. *Thomas Berry & the New Cosmology* (Mystic: CT: Twenty-Third Publications), 108-09.

several of his texts does he explicitly engage this idea of violence and creativity inherent to cosmogenesis. For example in the chapter “The Cosmology of Peace” in *The Dream of the Earth* he grapples with the struggle and violence inherent to Earth’s creative processes.⁵ Also in *Befriending the Earth*, Berry engages the coupling of suffering and grace,⁶ a theme he continues, albeit briefly, in *The Great Work*.⁷

To flesh out and develop Berry’s fifth principle and re-imagine human suffering, several preliminary tasks need to be undertaken. The first task is to explore classic theological interpretations of human suffering and connect them to the cosmology out of which they came. Next, one must articulate how humanity can awaken “to the numinous powers present in the phenomenal world”⁸ and become well-versed in Earth’s many bio-spiritual narratives. To accomplish this, a synthetic and historical portrait of the emergence of “Earth literacy” in both science and theology needs to be articulated. This portrait will use as its many hues, the many narratives of all Earth’s subjects—from the galactic to the quantum levels of life. The third and final task is to construct a new ecological theological anthropology (ETA) from the Earth-centered terminology, metaphors, images, and narratives provided by humanity’s newly acquired Earth literacy. This novel framework, which my research has determined to be a four-pillared structure, will describe our relation with Earth and God and inter-human relations in new ways. This in turn will enable more fruitful theological engagement with the mystery of human suffering.

This tri-fold set of tasks is too extensive to completely explore here; it is the undertaking of my doctoral thesis project (2014). For this essay, however, one vital aspect will be explored: the ancient kenotic-kinetic animating cosmogenesis that is the cornerstone of a distinctly ETA. This term, kenotic-kinetic, will be introduced to develop what Berry articulates in his fifth principle. It will also be proposed that when human sufferers appreciate the ancient kenotic-kinetic animating cosmogenesis, they will be better able to under-

5. Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 216-223.

6. Berry and Clarke, *Befriending the Earth*, 131-142.

7. Berry, *The Great Work*, 196-201.

8. Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 211.

stand how their personal human suffering is intimately connected to, and held in a dynamic tension with, the macrocosmic suffering, sacrifice, and grace manifest in the larger creative arc of the sacred universe story. This is a new horizon of hope that Thomas Berry is guiding humanity toward.

Four Pillars of an ETA

As Berry realized, we are in between stories, and our evolutionary Earth context has yet to become the living matrix out of which our understanding of God, creation, and the human creature emerges—including the experience of suffering.⁹ When Earth began to become the context (rather than merely the content) of scientific endeavours, we developed what environmentalist David Orr called “ecological literacy”—the shift towards a truly “ecological consciousness” and affectivity that allows an individual to merge their “landscape” with their “mindscape.”¹⁰ When this ecological literacy is situated within the larger 13.8 billion year universe story and the spiritual dimensions of Earth subjectivity are attended to,¹¹ then a new planetary

9. Ibid., 123-37. Berry affirms this when he indicates that our greatest need is to create a functional cosmology (cultural coding), told in its physical dimension by science, that tells of the numinous and consciousness dimensions from primordial moment. To achieve this, Berry indicates that new cultural coding must emerge from the source of all coding, namely divine revelation expressed in the “curvature of the emergent universe.” This new sensitivity to, critical appreciation of, and participation in the universe story is the foundation for total range of human activities in the Ecological Age, including ethical engagement with the mystery of human suffering.
10. David W. Orr, *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992), 86.
11. Mary Evelyn Tucker, “Education and Ecology: Earth Literacy and the Technological Trance” in *Teilhard in the 21st Century: The Emerging Spirit of Earth*, ed. Arthur Fabel and Donald St. John (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003), 95-96. Tucker uses the term Earth literacy in her essay. She indicates that the basis of Earth literacy is the appreciation of human intimacy with the Earth and argues that human beings are “a planetary species that can move toward the enhancement of life or its radical diminishment for future generations.” Ibid., 90. Ursula King, “Earthing Spiritual Literacy: How to Link Spiritual Development and Education to a New Earth Consciousness?” *Journal of Beliefs & Values* 31, no. 3 (December 2010), 258. King attends

consciousness—or Earth literacy—emerged. Thus, humanity began to imagine our bio-spiritual Earth as our “primary source” of intelligibility and value in both our planetary and human ecologies—including religion.¹²

Once “Earth literacy” or planetary consciousness emerged in religious studies, Berry was able to use these new literary tools (e.g., language, metaphors, and images offered by Earth’s many narratives) to direct how humanity engaged the three fundamental mediations: the significant relationships between the human and the Divine; between humans; and between humans and the rest of creation. He argued that while humanity has given due attention to the mediations between humans and the Divine and between humans, we have neglected the third mediation, namely, the important relations between humanity and the rest of creation.¹³ By addressing the atrophied relationship between humanity and Earth a new theological anthropology—an ETA—can be constructed. Thus contemporary eco-theologians, those tooled with a robust Earth literacy, have been able to offer three pillars to an ETA: Eschatological Hope; Intrinsic Worth of Creation; the Numinous-Cosmic Communion.¹⁴ In addi-

to this in more detail by her nomenclature “earthing spiritual literacy” and argues that when our spirituality is rooted in Earth we can discover “the zest for life that fosters the flourishing of people and planet.” Thus King employs the term “earthing” and “spiritual” to represent a coupling of the spiritual and biological in her understanding of literacy. This bio-spiritual understanding of Earth grounds what the term Earth literacy represents in this thesis.

12. Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 88.
13. *Ibid.* We are entering into a period that might be identified as the period of the Third Mediation. For a long period the divine-human mediation was the dominant context not only of religion, but of the entire span of human activities. Then, for some centuries of industrial classes and nation-states, a primary concern has been inter-human mediation. Now the dominant mediation can be identified as earth-human mediation. The other two mediations will in the future be heavily dependent on our ability to establish a mutually enhancing human-earth presence to each other.
14. Some ecotheologians who have contributed to establishing these three pillars include Thomas Berry, Elizabeth Johnson, Larry Rasmussen, Dieter T. Hessel, Rosemary Radford Ruether, Mark Wallace, Sean McDonagh, Matthew Fox, Ursula King, Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grimm, Gordon Kaufman, Catherine Keller, James Nash, Ilia Delio, Heather Eaton, and many others. This is not an exhaustive list but a snapshot of some significant

tion, my research into human suffering has revealed that Berry's fifth principle speaks of a fourth pillar to an ETA: Kenosis as the Kinetic of Cosmogensis.¹⁵

Kenotic-Kinetic

Contemporary conversations concerning suffering have demonstrated that Berry's attention to the violent and harmonious character of our unfolding universe has often inspired others to do the same. It has at the very least contributed to a shift in modern theological discourse toward a deeper appreciation of the coupling of novelty and cruciformity inherent in Earth's creative processes.¹⁶ For example, philosopher Holmes Rolston III writes poignantly of the cruciformity inherent to our constantly complexifying, evolutionary world: "Biological nature is always giving birth, regenerating, always in travail. Something is always dying and something is always living on.... This whole evolutionary upslope is a calling in which renewed life comes by blasting the old. Life is gathered up in the midst of its throes, a blessed tragedy lived in grace through a besetting storm."¹⁷

Christian contributors.

15. As will be demonstrated later in this essay, these two adjectives are coupled to represent the movement of receptivity that animates cosmogenesis. It is dynamic (kinesis) sacrificial creativity (self-giving and self-building kenotic disposition) that motivates this unique nomenclature.
16. Robert John Russell, "Groaning of Creation: Does God Suffer with All Life?" in *The Evolution of Evil*, ed. Gaymon Bennett et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 120-121. Russell presents a brilliant literary exposition of the coupling of the creative and cruciform. See also: Jay McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans: A Theology of Reverence for Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989); Denis Edwards, "Every Sparrow that Falls to the Ground: The Cost of Evolution and the Christ-Event," *Ecotheology* 11, no.1 (2006): 103-123; Jay McDaniel, "The Passion of Christ: Grace Both Red and Green," in *Cross Examinations: Readings on the Meaning of the Cross Today*, ed. Marit Trelstad (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2006), 196-210; Iliia Delio, *The Unbearable Wholeness of Being: God, Evolution and the Power of Love* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books 2013); Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).
17. Holmes Rolston, "Kenosis and Nature," in *The Work of Love: Creation as Kenosis*, ed. John Polkinghorne (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub., 2001), 58-59.

Biologist Ursula Goodenough also writes of the costliness of Earth's innovation: "Death is the price paid to have trees and clams and birds and grasshoppers, and death is the price paid to have human consciousness."¹⁸ Theologians Niels Gregersen and Gloria Schaab affirm that this cosmic suffering can be imagined as part of the birthing woes of nature's "unstoppable creativity,"¹⁹ and Elizabeth Johnson attests that "without pain, no further exploration of life's potential forms; without death, no new life. These afflictions arose as essential elements in a tremendously powerful process that created and continues to create the magnificent community of life on this planet."²⁰ Thus Berry's fifth principle, a foundational piece of the sacred universe story, requires that theological attention be paid to how the shadow side of our creative, unfolding universe is never uncoupled from the creative. Both the violence and harmony of creation must be substantially addressed within eco-theological discourse in order to have meaningful interpretations of, and responses to, human suffering. I propose that the phrase "kenotic-kinetic" does just this.

The nomenclature "kenotic-kinetic" is novel, but I join these two adjectives as a literary way to represent the dynamism of cosmogenesis—kinesis—and the sacrificial receptivity at the heart of cosmic creativity—kenotic. The term *kenotic* is derived from *kenosis*, the unique movement of Christ's pure receptivity and self-emptying, and Christ's consequent self-affirmation as the second person of the Trinity. In Paul's second letter to the Philippians, both movements (affirmation and emptying) are articulated in tandem: the dynamic

18. Ursula Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1998), 151.

19. Niels Henrik Gregersen, "The Cross of Christ in an Evolutionary World," *Dialog: A Journal of Theology* 40, no. 3 (Fall 2001), 198. Schaab imagines God as transcendent Mother birthing "the incarnate cosmos through the immanent creativity of the cosmos itself." Gloria L. Schaab, "Midwifery as a Model for Ecological Ethics: Expanding Arthur Peacocke's Models of "Man-in-Creation"," *Zygon* 42, no. 2 (June 2007), 491.

20. Johnson, 185.

of descent or self-emptying²¹ and ascent or self-affirming.²² Thus in his self-emptying Christ affirmed his true self: “born in human likeness” and “Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”²³ However, due to our finite nature, humans and other-than-humans are unable to achieve kenosis per se. We do, however, participate in the cosmic kenotic disposition that is uniquely manifested by Christ. The Incarnation can be our gateway for glimpsing the kenotic self-affirming/self-emptying receptivity of the Trinity, and this is reflected, albeit dimly, in the dynamic of costly creativity that is animating cosmogenesis.²⁴ *Kenotic* is a term that engages both the shadowy and luminescent aspects of cosmogenesis within its unique dialectic of self-actualization and self-giving (for example, creativity and cruci-

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21. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. Phil. 2:5-8 (NRSV).
22. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Phil. 2:9-11 (NRSV).
- 23 Phil. 2:7, 11.
24. Robin Ryan, *God and the Mystery of Human Suffering: A Theological Conversation across the Ages* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2011), 287. In his exploration of Elizabeth Johnson’s theology with respect to human suffering, Ryan indicates Johnson affirms that “the self-emptying that is affirmed of Christ in the New Testament (Phil. 2:6-11) is characteristic of God from the beginning of creation.” Thus, cosmogenesis is the process of God is emptying Godself kenotically, making space, i.e., *zimzum*, for that which is non-divine. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1992), 234. This, Johnson asserts (via the work of her teacher William Hill), is not unlike what Aquinas affirms in his description of the relationship between God and creation. See also William J. Hill, *The Three-Personed God: The Trinity as a Mystery of Salvation* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 76, n.53. *Zimzum*, also *tsimtsum* (Heb., ‘contraction’). Jewish kabbalistic doctrine. The kabbalists taught that, in order that creation could take place, God had in some sense to make a space for it.” John Bowker, “Zimzum,” *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of World Religions* (1997), <http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O101-Zimzum.html>.

formity; harmonious and violent).²⁵ Each of Earth's subjects—each in their own way according to their unique nature—participates in this cosmic dialectic that couples creativity (self-affirmation) and cruciformity (self-emptying) modelled on the Incarnation and the Trinity.

The term *kinetic*²⁶ was chosen in order to be faithful to the inherent dynamism of cosmogenesis understood theologically as *creatio continua* and *concursus*, as in God's ongoing creative activity in the history of the universe that enables and nurtures creation's own creative impetus.²⁷ This term pays theological attention to the evolutionary or dynamic nature of our cosmos and identifies the tension or force generated by creation's "powerfully pulsing drive, to become something more;"²⁸ namely, the creation of newness or the emergence of novelty arising from the disintegration or destruction of the old. This kinetic is what animates cosmogenesis. This cosmic movement toward differentiation and complexity requires a descriptive term that is associated with movement or dynamism, and thus the term *kinetic* is apt.

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25. Both self-actualization (i.e., creation, growth, development, flourishing) and self-giving (i.e., destruction, disintegration, diminishment, extinction) can occur at the individual level (i.e., self) but also occurs at the community and planetary level. This novelty could also occur at the morphological, behavioral, or psychological level.
 26. Kinetic is derived from the Greek term *kinein*, meaning "to move" and is defined as relating to or resulting from motion, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/kinetic>.
 27. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 183. Johnson indicates that although God is continuously creating, "God does not act like a bigger and better secondary cause determining chance atomic events, or initial conditions of chaotic systems, or genetic mutations. Rather, divine love empowers the structure of creation which operates with its own integrity... God lets the world be what it will be,...not intervening arbitrarily in its evolution but participating, lovingly, in its becoming."
 28. *Ibid.*, 184. Johnson insists that the emergence of novelty in our evolutionary world can only occur "because it has been endowed by its Creator with an inner tendency, a quiet, powerfully pulsing drive, to become something more."

Fourth Pillar of an ETA: Kenosis as the Kinetic of Cosmogensis

For this pillar of an ETA, the term kenotic-kinetic recognises the inextricable coupling of self-emptying or self-sacrifice (manifest as loss of identity, death, diminishment, and disintegration associated with entropic events) with genesis, innovation, and the emergence of newness. Each member of our Earth's communion participates in this cosmic dialectic due to our emergence from and participation in cosmogenesis. Thus a kenotic disposition is part of our genetic and/or cultural coding²⁹ but is revealed in different ways.³⁰ The kenotic-kinetic describes the incalculable suffering and death that is a natural and necessary component of our universe's 13.8 billion year history of genesis—the bringing of newness and harmony out of death, disintegration, violence, and destruction. The question remains, however: How does this connect with human suffering?

If the kenotic-kinetic is the animating force of cosmogenesis, then every created subject—including humans—in the cosmic 13.8 billion year history is intimately connected via their kenotic disposition. However, this cosmic dialectic of violence and harmony

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29. Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 195-196. Berry speaks about genetic coding as the norm of reference and inherent authority. The invention of our cultural coding (human cultural constructions) is secondary and dependent on the imperative of our biological genetic coding.
30. There are many examples of this cosmic kenotic disposition and the following only names a few: the self-giving of the first stars during a supernova offered the matter for the creation of new life forms; solitary hydrogen atoms with unique forms and functions lose their individual identities as hydrogen and couple with oxygen to form an innovative new molecule—water; a carrot's disintegration and ingestion (i.e., entropic experience) enables the transfer of energy and materials within a complex food web; a predatory bacteria sacrifices motility and independence for a new symbiotic relation within a eukaryotic cell and enables an innovative form of life (mitochondria) to emerge; a male praying mantis is consumed by his hungry partner after copulation to nourish her and the fuel the gestation process; the second, "backup" pelican chick is displaced from the nest and left to die to ensure the survival of the other chick. See: McDaniel, *Of God and Pelicans*, 19-21; the painful procedure of donating human bone marrow potentially enables a human person battling leukemia to live and prosper; the death and disintegration of a human body releases vital molecules and minerals back to Earth's life-systems.

is expressed in a variety of ways, and thus nomenclature must be employed that can differentiate between the many experiences and expressions of the kenotic-kinetic. Pre-sentient beings experience the kenotic-kinetic when they participate in entropic events—events of disintegration and loss of identity. When a rock undergoes disintegration to become sediment in a stream or a star explodes creating and distributing new elements and molecules, or when hydrogen bonds with oxygen and loses its individual identity as a hydrogen molecule to become water, these are expressions of the sacrificial-creative kenotic-kinetic. Sentient beings, however, are not only participating in the kenotic-kinetic, but some are also aware that they are experiencing the kenotic event. The evolution of physiological and behavioural capacities in sentient beings to detect, interpret, and respond to noxious, painful, or lethal stimuli or threats enables sentient beings (even those without a central nervous system) to resist both that which thwarts well-being and that which prevents the seeking of its fullness of being. Earth literacy in science has revealed how even our very distant biotic cousins such as *Paramecium* (unicellular eukaryotic organisms) display a tendency to avoid negative stimuli and move away from noxious or less than optimal environmental conditions. Advances in plant physiology have shown us that many plants have generalized defence mechanisms to detect and avoid pathogens.³¹ Earth's sentient, self-conscious creatures also participate in Earth's creative-cruciform cadence in ways that are appropriate to their evolutionary heritage and unique ability to be both aware of this participation and communicate this awareness. After primates diverged from other mammals 85 million years ago and early bipeds (such as *Homo habilis*) emerged approximately

31. For more information concerning *Paramecium* and avoidance behavior see: Eric Russell, "The Biology Classics: *Paramecium*—Behavior," accessed April 2014, www.ebiomedia.com/the-biology-classics-paramecium-behavior.html. For information concerning plant growth and defence mechanisms against stressors, see Peter H. Raven and George B. Johnson, "How Plants Grow in Response To Their Environments," in *Biology*, 6th ed. (Columbus, OH, The McGraw Hill Companies, 2001), 807-836, http://www.mhhe.com/biosci/genbio/raven6b/graphics/raven06b/other/raven06_41.pdf. Video depicting the rolling up of a leaf of a *Mimosa pudica* plant in response to wind pressure or touch, see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_rLb5v5nIM.

two million years ago, Earth's creative processes continued, giving rise to even further complexification of this hominid genera: more pronounced encephalization and larger body sizes; more developed central nervous systems; more complex behavioural adaptations to stimuli. This augmentation of pleasure and pain receptors, larger brain size to process this information, and new coping skills (including language and social skills) allowed for novel expressions of Earth's cadence of violence and harmony (again, kenotic-kinetic). As a result, when *Homo sapien sapiens* emerged approximately 200,000 years ago, a new level of innovation in how the kenotic-kinetic was expressed also emerged—that is, human suffering. Thus the kenotic-kinetic succeeds in identifying how a great proportion of suffering in creation is tragic, undeserved, disconnected from sin, and outside the “theological grid of guilt and punishment.”³²

Earth-literate artisans of science and theology have offered new ways of appreciating intrinsic worth, purpose, subjectivity, and connectivity inherent to our universe. They are also beginning to reveal a kenotic-kinetic that interconnects the cosmos in time and space, animating the costly, creative cosmic processes. This new appreciation will broaden how the term suffering is employed, enable new ways of understanding the connectivity within our planetary communion of compassionate subjects, and deepen how theology articulates God's presence, transforming power, and compassionate love for our world today. Reawakening to our participation in the kenotic-kinetic pulsating through the cosmos will be a painful and humbling experience because we have spent centuries denying our rootedness in, and emergence from, Earth. The kenotic-kinetic decentralizes humanity's experience of suffering as the only form of suffering (or the only morally valuable form) and repositions human suffering within a larger cosmological context. In return, however, this new appreciation of the cosmic kenotic-kinetic will strengthen humanity's acuity to the unique manifestations of the kenotic-kinetic in pre-sentient and sentient beings, and the interconnectedness and interdependency of all who are subjects dwelling in Earth's

32. John Haught, “Evolution and the Suffering of Sentient Life,” in *The Evolution of Evil*, eds. Gaymon Bennett et al. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008), 203.

many ecosystems.

It is important to note that a unique facet of human nature is our capacity to choose not to embrace this inherent kenotic-kinetic and attempt, in vain, to reject or deny our participation in this innate dynamic. Today, distorted belief in our ability to deny, transcend, or ignore this inherent kenotic disposition has been fueled by what Berry calls our “deep cultural pathology”—a consumeristic, industrial-driven, technological entrancement.³³ This “mythic addiction” has devastated our world. Another attribute of this “psychic fixation” is that it has compounded the experience of human suffering; the entrancement has disconnected human sufferers from both the creative and cruciform cadence of the sacred universe story. As a result, humans are disconnected from Earth as a profound and powerful source of healing and transformation. The kenotic-kinetic confronts this pathology and inspires hope rather than paralysis; the sacred universe story unceasingly supplies humanity with moments of transformation, harmony, and grace that emerge from sacrifice, violence, and death. This essay asserts that by becoming attuned to the sacrificial-creative cadence of creation (via a robust Earth literacy) human sufferers understand, in ways far deeper than merely an abstract, intellectual comprehension, how all subjects in Earth’s planetary communion participate in the universal dynamic of self-actualization and self-giving.

This new cosmological context or horizon of meaning for engaging the mystery of human suffering can help cultivate more adequate descriptions and interpretations of that suffering, as well as more compassionate responses to suffering in our midst. More specifically, theological Earth literacy contributes much depth to how we understand the uniquely human expression of the kenotic-kinetic by connecting the human kenotic disposition with the loving movement of self-actualization and self-giving that ground the doctrines of creation, Incarnation, the Trinity, and the resurrection. Thus when humanity becomes fully “literate” to the sacrificial-creative cadence of the sacred universe story and embraces its participation in this eternal dialectic of violence and harmony, human sufferers are promised much hope—that death is not the end and we are

33. Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 38.

never “godforsaken.” The cosmos is eternally narrating how profound moments of transformation, new life, harmony, and grace are inextricably coupled with suffering, disintegration, violence, and death. This is the wisdom at the heart of Berry’s fifth principle.

Conclusion

If the “Great Work” articulated by Thomas Berry is to reinvent the human in the twenty-first century, then this process must include more adequate descriptions, interpretations, and responses to human suffering. This is the instruction of Berry’s fifth cosmological principle. To achieve this objective, we must cultivate an openness to Earth as a primary source of revelation. We must adequately and faithfully appreciate the shadowy, violent side of our constantly creative, evolutionary world. This essay engaged Berry’s principle in new ways in order to reorient theological discourse concerning the mystery of human suffering. The reorientation involves moving away from merely reiterating traditional interpretations of suffering (atonement and expiation for sin) toward a deep theological appreciation of the cruciformity and creativity inherent to the entire 13.8 billion year history. Our sacred universe story has made the narrow, purely retributive understanding of suffering untenable as the predominant way of comprehending human suffering. In addition, this myopia—a symptom of our cultural pathology—has contributed to the social apathy, cultural intolerance, private piety, and blissful ignorance that is destroying Earth’s many human and other-than-human ecologies.

The fortitude needed to address the suffering in our world today will come from the immense psychic and spiritual energy of the sacred universe story. It is cultivated by embracing wholeheartedly our intimate participation in the ancient cosmic cadence: the kenotic-kinetic.³⁴ Those who choose to courageously follow God of the cosmic cross and travel beyond traditional anthropocentric horizons of meaning for suffering, can become witnesses to the green that grows in the darkness that is never overcome. This, I believe, is what Thomas Berry meant when he asserted that the universe “has a

34. *Ibid.*, xi, 42, 131, 161, 187.

violent as well as a harmonious aspect; but it is consistently creative in the larger arc of its development.”

Human sufferers, those deeply formed by Earth-literacy, are able to recognize their immersion within the ancient and sacred, powerful and costly, kenotic-kinetic animating cosmogenesis—a recognition that brings comfort, strength, and hope in their dark night of the soul. This awakening affirms how the universe is an interwoven communion of compassionate subjects—rather than an atomised collection of anaesthetised objects.³⁵ It is this truth that can lead human sufferers “away from despair and into the light.”³⁶

35. Thomas Berry is well known for his statements “The universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects,” and “The human is derivative, Earth is primary.” The depth of meaning behind these quote is the subject of his many texts. For the purpose of this essay I have added “compassionate” and “atomised” and “anaesthetised” to this phrase.

36. Elizabeth Dreyer, “Suffering in Christian Life and Experience,” *Suffering and the Christian Life*, ed. Richard W. Miller (New York: Orbis Books, 2013), 144.