

Spirit Earth

Ecology Is the New Theology

- by Michael Dowd and Connie Barlow

Thomas Berry died four years ago, but his guidance is needed now more than ever. Not only are the contours of “the Great Work” of our time becoming ever more compelling, but the spiritual work of shifting beyond our instinctive small-self concerns toward a Great Self identity is now an imperative. Only by expanding our sense of who we are might we fulfill our deepest and most urgent callings.

In times of turmoil, the small self reacts in fear, seeking shelter for oneself and one’s own. There is another way. The reach of our concerns can expand in space and in time, even as chaos descends. Thrust out of our sleepwalking comfort, we become global citizens, members of one body, a beloved Earth Community. We experience our own brief lives less as nodes of anxious concern than as links in an immense and sacred gradient of time. And thus we stand in a lineage of life, temporary caretakers of an evolutionary impulse, a green ball of fire passed joyously or effortfully hand-to-hand, from one generation to the next. The youngest among us have just received the green fire — and may be wondering what to do with it! — while the oldest are graciously tipping their hands toward the future so that the fire may roll ever onward.

Those who choose to occupy their precious slot in time with a Great Self perspective can thrive even through downturns and confusion by bearing in mind the sufferings and strivings of ancestors—both known and imagined. Equally, a Great Self perspective evokes gratitude for the achievements of Big History: from the elemental creativity of stars to the musical creativity of songsters in every

inhabited landscape. Consider what is commonly available today to readers of this publication: an immense assortment of musical delights digitally available on demand; hot water for cleaning and bathing at the mere turn of a tap; refrigeration; corrective lenses for aging eyes; fresh apples in February.

As well, we easily communicate with people twelve time zones away. We have immediate access to information and education on a dizzying array of topics. Thanks to science, we possess an expanding photo album of our Universe’s infancy and growth. Then, too, there is the heart-stopping realization that Earth itself is sensing and feeling and creating through our own mortal bodies and minds.

All these achievements, however, have come at a cost. As Thomas

Berry cautioned, humanity has now become a geological force — and a blundering one at that. It is humanity that is melting the polar ice cap, weakening the jet stream, amplifying the power of hurricanes. Indeed, none of us alive today can shirk this frightening fact: there are personal and collective actions that if taken — or not taken — will amplify for good or ill far into the future. On our watch, the green ball of fire will pass forward in a highly altered state.

That is why ecology truly is the new theology. “Earth is primary; humans are derivative.” This teaching of Thomas Berry’s must become the foundation of all religious and secular responses to the crises of today and tomorrow. Thomas urges us, moreover, to act not out of fear but with the calm certitude that, “The world we live in is an honorable world. To refuse this deepest instinct of our



EDITOR'S LETTER

"The Sacred Universe Award is given to the one whose life and work help to nurture a mutually enhancing relationship between Earth and humans."

John Surette, SJ

The Award was first presented to Thomas Berry in 1993 by John Surette and Mary Southard, CSJ, and continues to be given through The Well Spirituality Center to this day. For this edition of SpiritEarth, we asked past recipients to reflect on the work they were doing at the time they were given the Award and to share what they've been doing since. They were also asked to consider where they recognize the new consciousness emerging. Many generously shared their personal stories and reflections as well as their hopes and dreams for humanity and all creation.

Ever so graciously, Michael Dowd and Connie Barlow agreed to write the overview piece for us. Connie and Michael are itinerate evolutionary evangelists who have spent many years helping both religious and secular groups come to know the "sacred side of science." In their article, they inspire us to move "beyond our instinctive small-self concerns toward a Great Self identity...."

Michael and Connie will be presenters at the 5th Annual Summer Institute at The Well on Friday, June 14, and Saturday, June 15. Michael's topic will be "The Sacred Side of Science: Coming Home to Reality in the 21st Century," and Connie's presentation is entitled "Let's Play! Bringing the New Story to Children." In addition, Rev. Bruce Sanguin will offer "Interpreting Scripture through an Evolutionary Lens." I hope you can join us for this very special event. Please call The Well at 708-482-5048 to reserve your space.

Like Connie and Michael and the Sacred Universe Award recipients, may all of us actively participate in the aspect of "the Great Work" that most deeply stirs our hearts.

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SpiritEarth

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Mission Statement

SpiritEarth is a publication that expands and advances The Well's mission as a regional center for telling and engaging our Sacred Universe Story and fostering the evolving role of humankind in this great drama.



At Rivers Edge Spirituality Center 2012: (left to right) John Surette, SJ; Bridget Spurduto, Director, The Well; Denise Swimme; Brian Swimme, Sacred Universe Award winner 1994; Mary Southard, CSJ; Barb Foreman, Editor, SpiritEarth

The Inspiration Behind “Bright Wings”

- by Mary Southard, CSJ

There were times in the late '80's--early 90's that the awareness of the destruction we humans are bringing about to our planetary life systems, the great extinction we're in, would bring me to the point of great distress. This was especially true when others were so unconcerned, or not even wanting to know the magnitude of our situation.

It was in one of those moments of anguish that this poem by Gerard Manly Hopkins showed up. It referred to the magnificence of our awesome Universe, which was just beginning to be revealed to us. It then moved to our plodding human story and how we have become disconnected from and a blight on “God’s Grandeur.”

As I came to the last lines of the poem, I wept.... I was feeling a kind of relief, a being held close in The Presence. I felt within me the embrace of Mother-God’s warm breast, her loving bright wings encircling us with hope and healing, coaxing us to awaken to her beloved creation.

This image, this moment of “hope,” needed to be painted and sculpted and imprinted in my soul. What a blessing to gift Thomas Berry with this image for our first Sacred Universe Award.

God’s Grandeur (excerpt)

“The World is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
...Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man’s smudge and shares man’s smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.

And for all this, nature is never spent;
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things;
...Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.”

by Gerard Manley Hopkins



Sacred Universe Award winners receive the print “Bright Wings,” created by Mary Southard

Sacred Universe Award Recipients:

- 1993 Thomas Berry
- 1994 Brian Swimme
- 1995 Miriam Therese MacGillis, OP
- 1996 James Parks Morton
- 1997 Manna Jo Greene
- 1999 Elizabeth A. Johnson, CSJ
- 2004 Mary Evelyn Tucker & John Grim
- 2005 John F. Haught
- 2006 Patricia Mische
- 2007 Diarmuid O'Murchu
- 2009 George Coyne, SJ
- 2010 Judy Cannato & Paula Gonzalez
- 2011 Gail Worcelo
- 2012 Bill Plotkin
- 2013 Denis Edwards

Leading Us Onward - Voices for a New Consciousness



**John Haught with Bridget Spurduto,
Director of The Well and Pat Bergen, CSJ**

In 2005, when I received the Sacred Universe Award, I was still asking whether and how we might interpret evolution from a Christian perspective. I had become involved in such a project not only because of the inspiration of Teilhard de Chardin, whose vision has guided me for decades, but also because of the New Testament instruction that we should be prepared to give reasons for our hope. I realized then, as I do now, that there are two deeply entrenched ways of looking at the world that, in Teilhard's words, "clip the wings of hope." The first is the academically endorsed worldview known as scientific naturalism. It is the belief that the physical world available to science is really all there is. I now refer to this worldview as a "metaphysics of the past." It holds that life, mind, humanity, and everything else that we find wondrous about creation is nothing more than the elemental material "simplicity" of the physical past presently "masquerading as complexity" (Peter Akins).

The other worldview that clips the wings of hope is a religious "metaphysics of the eternal present." This is the traditional Platonic understanding of reality that enshrines the ideal of Perfect Timelessness in such a way as to render time, becoming, and hence evolution inherently pointless. This way of looking at the world still, at least tacitly, frames much Catholic thought and instruction. Following Vatican II, however, I believe that Christian theology is now called to develop a "metaphysics of the future." For me this means working toward an understanding of God that is consistent with the natural sciences as well as Teilhard's bold—and thoroughly biblical—claim that "the world rests on the future as its sole support."

John Haught

It is many years ago since I first observed a huge sycamore tree standing on its own in a field. Warm summer sunshine broke through the clouds, periodically illuminating the tree and casting a long dark shadow on the ground. The brighter the sunshine, the darker the shadow that was cast!

Years later I found this image helpful as I reflected on the great paradox of creation and destruction as explored by Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry in *The Universe Story*. Light and darkness are not opposites; they are complementary values and are manifest at every level of creation from minute bacteria to elegant galaxies.

Bridging the dualisms has been a life-long undertaking for me, and, sadly, I still encounter so many people and situations where dualistic splitting prevails. Particularly as we live through this rather chaotic time - economically, politically and ecclesiastically - we need to embrace both the light and the shadow, the creation and destruction. God is in both; evolution needs both. So, we humans need to be deeply imbued with the Eastern wisdom of non-duality to be able to appreciate, understand, and integrate the deep wisdom of our paradoxical times.



Diarmuid O'Murchu with Well Staff and Supporters

Diarmuid O'Murchu

The two days I spent with the community gathered at The Well have left me greatly encouraged. It gives me hope to know I will be in solidarity with this community at LaGrange, and all who are connected to it, from my home on the other side of the planet in Adelaide, South Australia.

All of us are part of a growing movement of people connected in a common love of Earth and its creatures, committed to respecting other species and enabling them to flourish, to conserving the forests, the rivers, the seas and land, and to handing on to future generations the bounty of our planet. At the heart of this planetary spirituality is the sense that Earth, with all its creatures, is a gift given by a generous and bountiful God. I am convinced that this emerging spirituality is the work of the Creator Spirit, breathing in us and through us.



Denis Edwards with Mary Southard, CSJ and John Surette, SJ

As a Christian, it seems important to connect this spirituality with our deepest faith in Jesus Christ. At the center of this, is the concept that Jesus is the Word or the Wisdom of God made flesh. The incarnation is the unthinkable extravagance of love in which God gives God's very self to creation. In Jesus, a living, breathing, fragile creature of our planet, like us the product of 3.7 billion years of evolutionary history, God takes matter and biology to God's self.

In the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, God forgives sin, adopts us as God's beloved children, and deifies us, transforming us by grace so that we might participate in the trinitarian life of God. And this deification involves not just human beings, but the whole emergent world of biological life: rain forests and insects, wallabies and whales, and the land, the seas, and the atmosphere that support life. God has become an Earth creature, part of the interconnected web of life, so that all of Earth's creatures might be transformed and fulfilled in God, each in its own distinctive way. The resurrection constitutes an unbreakable divine promise not just to human beings but to the whole creation, a hope "that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God" (Rom 8:21).

Denis Edwards

As a scientist and religious believer, I continue to explore the evolutionary universe and our place in it and God's role in the universe. This has increased my awareness that we, in a special way, share in the creativity that God desired the universe to have.

We are co-creators in God's continuous creation of the universe. We must be contemplatives in action and reinforce our relationship to God and to our fellow pilgrims by our reflections on the nature of the universe. Co-creators in the universe can realize their mission only if they are constantly united to God, the source of all creativity.

Our care of the universe, together with all of our sisters and brothers, is much more than what we do. It is bound intimately to the very nature of the universe, which drives us as co-creators to serve others in union with the Creator.

George Coyne



George Coyne, SJ, holds Sacred Universe Award

Voices for a New Consciousness continued

I remember screaming at the top of my lungs, "WE'RE MOVING! WE'RE MOVING!" as the Staten Island Ferry pulled away from the dock in the New York harbor. It was June 1963, and my six-year old voice joined the high-pitched cacophony of the other children. We were leaning over the railing of a boat on our way to Rye Playland, an amusement park whose mascot and iconic attraction was a giant wooden roller coaster called "The Dragon," boasting a dizzying height of 85 feet at its peak. It was our end-of-the-year school trip.

Little did I realize that the words I shouted as the ferry launched out into the Hudson River were the same ones captured in a passage by the late French Jesuit paleontologist Teilhard de Chardin in his collection of essays, *The Future of Man*, summing up the evolutionary spirit of our age. The conflict dates from the day when one man, flying in the face of appearance, perceived that the forces of nature are no more unalterably fixed in their orbits than the stars themselves, but that their serene arrangement around us depicts the flow of a tremendous tide--that day a voice rang out, crying to Mankind peacefully slumbering on the raft of Earth, "We are moving! We are going forward!" It is a dramatic spectacle, that of Mankind divided to its very depths into two irrevocably opposed camps--one looking toward the horizon and proclaiming with all its newfound faith, "We are moving," and the other, without shifting its position, obstinately maintaining, "Nothing

changes. We are not moving at all." (*The Future of Man*)

We are moving. We are going somewhere. I keep coming back to this fundamental insight that has been dawning on our awareness over the past 20 years as we come to understand ourselves as part of a vast unfolding universe. This slow--yet undeniable revelation--affects not only how we see the cosmos but how we understand ourselves and the future of humanity in the 21st century.



Gail Worcelo, sgm with
Bridget Spurduto, Director of The Well

My mentor, the late Passionist priest and cultural historian, Thomas Berry, pointed out that not only are we moving but moving towards deeper expressions of wholeness, unity, relationality, and love. "Evolution" he once said, "is an internal as well as external event; it is not just the outer world that is moving but the deep interior as well."

Most of us think of evolution as something happening "out there" in the cosmos, but this process is also happening in and between us as the

universe moves towards deeper expressions of relationality, unity, wholeness, and love. "Creative Unions" have been forged throughout the entire evolutionary journey. In our time and at this level of universe complexity, WE are the new "Creative Union," forging a "Higher We" with unprecedented potential for a new order of human relatedness.

We can no longer deny our profound connection to each other. I belong to a group of spiritually adventurous men and women from around the world called the Evolutionary Collective. Together we are exploring the emerging edge of consciousness within the powerful relational Field of mutual influence and commitment. We are giving ourselves wholeheartedly to the most powerful emergence of consciousness and Creative Union possible. We realize that the capacities for higher relating, once stabilized as structures in consciousness, will start to change the world because the evolution of consciousness and the evolution of culture are inextricably linked. The Evolutionary Collective is a co-creative Field of consciousness that calls out the best and highest in everyone for the sake of the Whole.

I think Teilhard de Chardin sums up our experience in these words: "There is almost a sensual longing for communion with others who have a large vision. The immense fulfillment of the friendship between those engaged in furthering the evolution of consciousness has a quality impossible to describe."

Gail Worcelo, sgm

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being, to deny honor where honor is due, to withdraw reverence from divine manifestation, is to place ourselves on a head-on collision course with the ultimate forces of the Universe."

As educators, activists, artists, farmers, caregivers, and other participants in the Great Work of our time, we all will do well to calibrate our efforts as Thomas advised, "Only the sense of the violated honor of Earth, and the need to restore that honor, will awaken in us the energies needed to renew the planet in any effective manner."



Thomas Berry with John Surette, SJ and Pat Bergen, CSJ at The Well Spirituality Center 1993

“If the dynamics of the Universe from the beginning shaped the course of the heavens, lighted the sun, and formed Earth; if this same dynamism brought forth the continents and seas and atmosphere; if it awakened life in the primordial cell and then brought into being the unnumbered variety of living beings; and finally brought us into being and guided us safely through the turbulent centuries—there is reason to believe that this same guiding process is precisely what has awakened in us our present understanding of ourselves and our relation to this stupendous process. 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.”

Thomas Berry (1914-2009)

That we live in an evolving universe in which “everything is connected to everything else” is still not “mainstream” thinking. However, I have watched – with wonder and delight - the growth of this concept around the globe. From Teilhard de Chardin, I have learned that “for those who have eyes to see, nothing is profane – everything is sacred.” Helping others awaken to this integral ecospirituality has been my mission over the past 40 years. Many workshops and retreats later and through practical projects – such as converting an old chicken barn and a garage into solar-heated buildings – I can only hope that more people can see themselves called to be co-creators of a different tomorrow.

Paula Gonzalez



Paula Gonzalez with artist Mary Southard, CSJ



Judy Cannato - Sacred Universe Award recipient 2010, pictured with Pat Bergen, CSJ

It is evident to me that Judy's work has proved to be very fruitful. The books she wrote introduced many people to what Judy called the "New Cosmology" or the relationship between science and spirituality... and really much more. The evidence that Judy's writings continue bear fruit in our ever expanding universe came home to roost recently when I received a package from her publisher, Ave Maria Press, that contained four copies of the Korean edition of her book *Radical Amazement*. Needless to say, Judy has continued to amaze!

Phil Cannato (husband of the late Judy Cannato)



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SpiritEarth

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Thank you for your support!

Voices for a New Consciousness - continued from page 7

Asian religions in general and Confucianism in particular have been special areas of study for me. I have been fascinated by the sensitivity that Asian cultures have to the mystery and nature of



the cosmos. More recently I have immersed myself in the scientific story of our evolutionary and mysterious universe. How does the human come out of this creative story? How are we formed by it and how do we respond to it with awe and reverence as we study its complexity? The work of cultural historian Thomas

Berry and cosmologist Brian Swimme in telling the Universe Story has given me—given us—an awakening, a new sense of meaning and connectedness to the Universe.

All of the above has been carried forward into the present time in the form of a film titled “Journey of the Universe.” Written by Brian Swimme and me, the film presents the epic story of cosmic, Earth, and human emergence and transformation. It has received an enthusiastic worldwide response. Drawing on the discoveries of modern science as well as the wisdom of the world’s cultures, “Journey of the Universe” tells a compelling story that reveals our profound connection to the Universe, Earth, and the Web of Life.

Mary Evelyn Tucker (from www.journeyoftheuniverse.org)

5th Annual Summer Institute at The Well

**The Sacred Side of Science:
 Jesus in Evolution**

Friday, June 14: 7:00-9:00 p.m.
 Saturday, June 15: 9:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Featuring:

Rev. Michael Dowd -

“The Sacred Side of Science:
 Coming Home to Reality in the 21st Century”

Connie Barlow -

“Let’s Play! Bringing the New Story to Children”

Rev. Bruce Sanguin -

“Interpreting Scripture through An Evolutionary Lens”

COST: \$125 (includes lunch on Saturday)

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(Limited overnight space on Friday is available
 for an additional \$50 charge.)

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