A Reflection from the Conference
“Thomas Berry and the Great Work”
at Georgetown University, October 30-31, 2019

The two-day gathering at Georgetown University was a remarkable celebration of Thomas Berry’s life and thought, honoring his call for a “Great Work.” The conference marked the tenth year of his passing in 2009 and the publication of *Thomas Berry: A Biography* (Columbia, 2019).

Insights were developed by the speakers such as an emphasis on Berry’s struggle to find his larger historical voice in settings that were challenging. Speakers also drew out salient connections to the thought of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and the many ways that Berry drew on his cosmological perspectives.

One speaker with long-term commitments to Teilhard’s vision, Sr. Kathleen Duffy, emerita professor at Chestnut Hill College, reminded the audience of the use by both thinkers of the phrase “Great Work.” Teilhard mentions “great work” in his essay, “Cosmic Life,” written during World War I. Teilhard opens this essay with a call for “a communion with God through earth” (*Writings in Time of War*, 1968:14). He continues:

> The true summons of the cosmos is a call consciously to share in the great work that goes on within it; it is not by drifting down the current of things that we shall be united with their one, single soul, but by fighting our way, with them, towards some term still to come (*Writings in Time of War*, 1968: 32).

Teilhard’s emphasis on “a call consciously to share” suggest an awareness of this interior cosmological summons to be united with the emerging soul of evolutionary matter-spirit. It involves a struggle to find a new language in which cosmic union finds expression.

It is remarkable that Berry came to a different but synergistic understanding in his use of “Great Work.” Berry observed in his book with that title:

> The Great Work before us, the task of moving modern industrial civilization from its present devastating influence on the Earth to a more benign mode of presence,
is not a role that we have chosen. It is a role given to us, beyond any consultation with ourselves. We did not choose. We were chosen by some power beyond ourselves for this historical task (*The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*, 1999: 7).

How remarkably resonant are the distinct voices of these two cosmological thinkers. Another speaker at the conference, Daniel Scheid, professor at Duquesne University, explored that resonance when he mused on Teilhard’s stunning sense of spirit-matter with regard to Berry’s thought:

Spirit and mind did not enter the universe simply when human beings arrived. Rather matter and spirit operate together from the very beginning. In this way, Teilhard was instrumental in intensifying Berry’s appreciation of the interiority, or the subjectivity, of matter. Already as a young boy, Berry had a sense of the aliveness of the natural world, intuiting that the creatures around him were not just inanimate matter but had their own interiority.

The suggestion here that something in Berry’s childhood was activated by “a call consciously to share” finds expression in Berry’s own recollection of an event in his youth. He wrote in his essay, “The Meadow Across the Creek”:

My own understanding of the Great Work began when I was quite young...eleven years old. My family was moving...where a new house was being built...on a slight incline. Down below was a small creek and there across the creek was a meadow. It was an early afternoon in May when I first wandered down the incline, crossed the creek, and look out over the scene. The field was covered with white lilies rising above the thick grass. A magic moment, this experience gave to my life something that seems to explain my thinking at a more profound level than almost any other experience I can remember. It was not only the lilies. It was the singing of the crickets and the woodlands in the distance and the clouds in the clear sky (*The Great Work*, 12).

Berry’s experience of the meadow is reminiscent of Teilhard’s childhood search for the enduring, the unchanging. Each of their experiences are distinct and different, but both are evocative of an understanding of a great work to which each was called. Teilhard observed of his childhood:

A memory? My very first! I was five or six. My mother had snipped a few of my curls. I picked one up and held it close to the fire. The hair was burnt up in a fraction of a second. A terrible grief assailed me; I had learnt that I was perishable...What used to grieve me when I was a child? This insecurity of things. And what used I to love? My genie of iron! With a plow hitch I believed myself, at seven years, rich with a treasure incorruptible, everlasting. And then it turned out that what I possessed was just a bit of iron that rusted. At this discovery I threw myself on the lawn and shed the bitterest tears of my existence! (*The Heart of Matter*, 3)

Teilhard’s experience is of impermanence that set off a search for the unchanging. Eventually this brought him to cosmogenesis, namely, the constancy of an emerging, changing universe. Berry’s experience was, as he says, of a life orientation acknowledging that: “Whatever preserves and enhances this meadow in the natural cycles of its transformation is good: whatever opposed this meadow or negates it is not good” (*The Great Work*, 13). There are many connections here between the youthful experiences of these two thinkers. For example, the changing character of the world as itself revelatory, the interiority and subjectivity of the world as speaking of itself and to the human, and the communion of the whole cosmos in and through the process of its interdependent parts.

What seems interesting to me now, as we in the northern hemisphere move into the depths of winter and the seasonal accent on childhood, innocence, and authenticity is that each thinker
realized the depth of their youthful experiences as a cosmic dimension of their lifework. Moreover, that realization required a life of struggle to bring to fruition. The language that Teilhard and Berry used to describe and evoke their insights both masked that struggle and gave expression to it amidst communities that often were unreceptive.

My sense is that something similar happens to all of us in that we have experiences of the world that opened us as youth and which we closed into ourselves through cultural education, tasks of maturing, and aging. That enduring empathetic call to mutual resonance and reciprocity arises in the world as it arises in the human. We see this call to responsible commitment by young people around the planet now as they awaken to their climate future. This is the allure of the living Earth community in which we dwell. It is here that we sense the mysterious expression of what Brian Thomas Swimme calls “comprehensive compassion.”

Full information on the Georgetown Conference and video from the event can be found online at http://thomasberry.org/life-and-thought/georgetown-conference

Teilhard de Chardin

By Kathleen Duffy, SSJ, PhD

During this conference, we celebrate Thomas Berry’s remarkable achievements and express gratitude to him and to all who are keeping his message alive and vibrant, especially Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, and Brian Swimme for making The Journey of the Universe, available to the world. At the same time, we also take these few moments to remember Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, whose religious essays, particularly his major opus The Human Phenomenon, served as a primary inspiration for Berry’s most famous work, The Universe Story, written in collaboration with Brian Swimme.

Thomas Berry has had a significant impact on my work. As far back as 1980, we invited him to address a large gathering of sisters and associates of my congregation, the Sisters of St. Joseph of Philadelphia. At the time, he challenged the scientists among us to tell the story of the universe. This was some time before he and Brian had published The Universe Story. A recent PhD in Physics at the time, I was attempting to discover my unique contribution to the ongoing story, looking for ways to use my degree for the life of the world. I joined peace activists and environmental groups and spent 8 years teaching physics in the Philippines, hopefully doing good work, but always looking for a more integrated way of acting in the world. I found the idea of telling the story inviting, and so I began with small steps, focusing initially on Earth spirituality.
The year after I returned to Chestnut Hill College, my artist friend, S. Margie Thompson, who for many years had been creating art inspired by evolutionary themes, joined the faculty. Together, we decided to respond to Thomas’ challenge and developed our own version of the story, modeled somewhat on the then recently-published Swimme/Berry *Universe Story*, but from our own perspective. We illustrated our script, using slides of Margie’s paintings and other images, and eventually transferred the slides to PowerPoint. We also had the sound recorded professionally with a particularly effective musical setting.

One of our goals was to have our viewers become familiar not only with the facts of this amazing story but also with the impact it could have on our spiritual lives. We presented lectures, workshops, as well as a weeklong retreat based on our presentation. We have shown our 30-minute version, “The Universe Story: Our Story,” many hundreds of times both alone and together, to students, to congregations of sisters and associates, in parishes of several denominations, at conferences, at retreat houses, and even at one diocesan office. At one conference, Thomas Berry viewed our version and seemed to like it very much. This became our contribution to the “Great Work,” a phrase we find in Teilhard’s essay “Cosmic Life,” written while he served as a stretcher-bearer in World War I and one that Thomas popularized over the years, applying it particularly to care for Earth and efforts to stem the environmental crisis that besets us today.

During the first phase of this process, Teilhard tried, as best he could, to free himself from any theological beliefs about the world so that he could discover his deepest intuition about the way things are. He descended into himself, back through his ancestors and into the early universe to discover what holds everything together. The descent, like any form of analysis, left him with disconnected fragments—swarms of elementary particles without structure. So instead, he reversed his direction and embarked on an ascent through the eons of time. Like any synthesis, this journey helped him understand how these disconnected fragments, found at the beginning, had come together.

In “Cosmic Life,” Teilhard tells us, “the true summons of the cosmos is a call consciously to share in the great work that goes on within it” (*Writings in a Time of War*, 32). For Teilhard, the evolutionary process demands of those of us gifted with the ability to reflect on our actions, much more than assent to evolution’s certainty or simply sentiments of awe and wonder, although these are certainly welcome outcomes. Rather, since evolution influences every aspect of our lives, it should also inspire us to participate in the ongoing Great Work of the cosmos.

For Teilhard, details of the evolutionary process had implications for aspects of the theology and spirituality of his day, with which he was quite uncomfortable. Not only did their theories lack the dynamism of evolution. Based on a matter/spirit dualism, they actually dampened efforts to work for change: matter is evil; spirit is good; flee the world; work to attain heaven and nurture a personal spirituality away from worldly activity. Teilhard thought long and hard about this problem and eventually found a link between the evolutionary story and the theology of Incarnation, a connection that satisfied both his heart and his mind. Two strands that had nourished his early spirituality, Communion with God and Communion with Earth, merged for him into a single approach to the world: “Communion with God through Earth.” He shares the steps of the process he used to arrive at this synthesis of Evolution and Incarnation in his essay, “How I Believe” (“How I Believe,” in *Christianity and Evolution*. New York: Harvest/HBJ book, 1971: 96).

Examples abound. Hydrogen fuses into helium; nuclei unite with electrons to form atoms; atoms form molecules. For example, this water molecule has properties very different from its
constituent atoms, hydrogen and oxygen; the force of gravity continues to draw together and hold billions of stars in its grasp as these galaxies whirl in spirals. What is significant about Creative Union is that individual elements become more when they unite; in fact, Matter cannot exist without interacting. Given its 13.8 billion-year success at complexification, Teilhard knew that Creative Union would continue to generate novel forms. His faith in the evolutionary process was so profound that, as a result of his inner journey, he knew for certain that if he ever lost his faith in God, he would always believe in evolution. This was his fundamental belief, one that he would never deny.

In the second phase of his process, Teilhard took a more intimate look at the details of evolution only to realize an aspect and parallel process that he had missed—evolution’s inside story. He noted that over time, both matter and spirit complexify not as separate entities but as two aspects of a single phenomenon. This implied that consciousness has been present within cosmic Matter throughout its slow but gradual advance toward complexity. Contemplation of this reality lead him to set forth the law of Complexity-Consciousness: as matter becomes more complex, it becomes capable of generating and sustaining more developed forms of consciousness; as consciousness increases, it encourages the further complexification of matter. This principle guides the cosmic becoming. Matter and Spirit, indivisible and mutually effective, engage in a process of mutual complexification.

We find examples in the physical world. A molecule has more degrees of freedom and more potential for union than the atoms that compose it. Now it can bond with other molecules, and when it does, it again becomes something more—a crystal, a polymer, a cell, each with more degrees of freedom and thus more potential for union.

When starlings swarm, they exhibit something called flock intelligence. As the swarm expands and contracts, soars up and dives down, it acts as a single organism but without a single leader. Researchers have found that interaction among the birds as a whole creates this cohesive movement and that this graceful movement happens because the birds follow two rules: first, each bird stays equally distant from its seven nearest neighbors. This actually constricts the flock so that it tends to fly as a whole in the same general direction. And, second, birds at the edge of the flock tend to bunch closer together. Since the distance between birds is not fixed, the shape of the flock is flexible and can expand and contract as needed.

Swarm behavior is a creative and effective strategy that enhances starling survival. A pressing need, escape from a predator, drives the starlings to respond and to interact coherently. Each individual bird accepts a goal larger than itself and by doing so encourages the flock to cooperate in a highly organized way. Greater consciousness emerges from the flock as a whole. Let’s contemplate the beauty and flexibility of this starling swarm. Note that the choice of an activity focused on union leads the birds as a whole to greater consciousness.

During the third phase of his contemplative journey, Teilhard considered the cosmos as a whole. Plotting its ever-complexifying fragments in four dimensions—both space and time—and attempting to extrapolate into the future, he senses a direction. As the processes of Creative Union and Complexity-Consciousness continue to propel matter/spirit forward, the phase plot begins to resemble a four-dimensional tapestry, one whose knots have become ever more complex, conscious, and capable of ever-greater novelty. This convinces him that the universe will continue to complexify and to become ever more conscious.

Up to this point, Teilhard has avoided referring to theological descriptions of reality. However, in the fourth phase, he searches scripture
for helpful connections. John describes the Incarnation in terms of the Word plunging into matter at the beginning. Paul speaks of the Cosmic Christ alluring creation toward union with the Divine. Viewing incarnation through the lenses of scripture and evolution, Teilhard found the Divine Presence both immanent and transcendent. The processes of Incarnation and Evolution became dynamic and complementary phases of a single movement, forming together a Cosmic-Christic stream that leads to ever-growing unity and ultimately toward total communion with the Divine.

Another characteristic of the evolutionary process as a whole is the pattern of death/resurrection that Christians call the Paschal Mystery, a pattern found even in cosmic and Earth processes. Although a volcanic eruption seems purely destructive, after a number of years, the soil at the bottom of the volcano becomes wonderfully enriched—a joy for future farmers. Again, when a massive star explodes as a supernova, rather than being wasted, the material from the dying star that is spewed out into space is eventually gathered gravitationally to form new stars, richer in elements than the original star.

Often what seems like chaos is instead a wakeup call to action. I am reminded of the playful way that Swimme and Berry talk about one particularly critical wakeup call in Earth’s story. According to Brian, before the eukaryotic cell emerged, prokaryotic cells were already engaging in photosynthesis and breathing out so much oxygen that Earth was in danger of a great conflagration. However, the evolutionary movement towards greater consciousness propelled the emergence of eukaryotic cells that breathe oxygen and, not only averted a disaster, but also contributed to Earth’s balance and diversity.

Throughout his life, Teilhard applied this triad of Creative Union, Complexity-Consciousness, and Death-Resurrection to his life. Instead of rebelling by tearing himself away from his Church and his Jesuit Order, he lived out the principle of Creative Union by remaining within the institutions and by attempting to reform them from the inside. And although he was hampered on all sides by a promise not to publish his religious ideas, he did find ways to share them with many. Most of his friends and colleagues knew what he was up to and though few understood the entirety of what he was trying to say, they appreciated his efforts. Some even helped him to revise the way he was articulating his thought so that perhaps publication might be possible. He understood the slowness of the evolutionary process. He would be comforted today to see that many more people take evolution seriously, not simply as a scientific theory but as a theory that has implications for the inner life and for the life of the world.

Teilhard also valued the pattern of Complexity-Consciousness, desiring always to experience the enhanced creativity that is available when life and thought are shared. The resonance he experienced with students and young seminarians, who flocked to his lectures in Paris because of the freshness of his thought, encouraged him to continue to develop a synthesis that was not only vibrant but also vitally necessary for his time.

Finally, Teilhard’s mystical relationship with the Cosmic Christ supported him. Throughout his life, he suffered so deeply that the paschal mystery became a vivid reality for him: his exile from Paris, the rejection of his thought by the Church, difficult living and working conditions—none of this was too much of a burden for him to bear since he did not bear it alone. He knew his work would survive his short life, that eventually others would understand it, enhance it, and drive it forward.

Teilhard’s times were not easy. And neither are ours. Yet, Teilhard believed that we are made for these times, that our 13.8-billion year journey has prepared us to do the Great Work needed for this moment in history. In fact, the world is waiting for catalysts to ignite the fire that will move humanity, beyond its present state, to a state that is more alive, more conscious, more loving. Teilhard believes that we are up for the challenge! And hopefully, so do we!
I. Introduction

Thomas Berry remains a foundational inspiration for those of us striving to guide humanity into a mutually beneficial relationship with the Earth. One of his principal contributions to rethinking humanity’s relationship to the planet is his emphasis on the “new story of the universe.” In their biography of Thomas Berry, Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, and Andrew Angyal explain that Berry’s life quest was “to articulate an engaging evolutionary narrative that would respond to the overwhelming ecological and social crises facing the human community.”

In this quest, Berry was heavily influenced by and indebted to the theological vision of the Jesuit paleontologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. A president of the American Teilhard Association for many years, Berry learned from Teilhard the centrality of evolutionary theory and the need for “an integrated story that could evoke for humans their role in the arc of Earth and universe time.” Both Teilhard’s and Berry’s writings are suffused with a sense of awe for nature and nature’s ability to mediate the divine. Teilhard and Berry point to a key element of human participation in this cosmic story: the experience of wonder.

In my remarks today, I want to move in three parts: first, a brief overview of two central ideas that Berry absorbed from Teilhard about the story of the universe; second, three key dimensions of Berry’s description of the cosmic story; third, how this is expressed in the film and project inspired by Berry’s work, The Journey of the Universe. Throughout I want to highlight how the human capacity for wonder at this miraculous story is an important legacy of Teilhard’s and Berry’s work for us today.

II. Teilhard and Berry

Thomas Berry absorbed a vital orientation to his worldview from his study of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Teilhard’s unique theological interpretation of the story of the universe as it was being described by modern sciences.

From Teilhard, Berry developed two noteworthy commitments: first, that the universe is simultaneously a physical and a psychic reality; indeed, each is implicated in the other. In opposition to a purely materialist and mechanical view of the universe, which separates the physical from the mental, Teilhard viewed the development of the universe as simultaneously physical and psychic. Spirit and mind did not enter the universe simply when human beings arrived. Rather matter and spirit operate together from the very beginning. In this way, Teilhard was instrumental in intensifying Berry’s appreciation of the interiority, or the subjectivity, of matter. Already as a young boy, Berry had a sense of the aliveness of the natural world, intuiting that the creatures around him were not just inanimate matter but had their own interiority. As Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim explain about Berry, “the allure of the cosmos penetrated his psyche. He understood the interior presence of things.”

A second related dimension of Teilhard’s work that influenced Berry is that the human must be understood as part of, and integral to, the cosmos and to cosmic order. If there is no sharp separation of the physical and the psychic, then

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1 Tucker/Grim/Angyal, Thomas Berry: A Biography, xvii.
2 Tucker/Grim/Angyal, Thomas Berry, 221.
3 Tucker/Grim/Angyal, Thomas Berry, 119.
human self-consciousness is not an aberration, a sudden latecomer, or even a happy accident. From Teilhard, Berry learned that the human is central to the story of evolution because the seeds of human self-consciousness are integral to the universe itself.4

Thus, for Berry, the journey of the universe, as described by all the major contemporary sciences, is the most important discovery of the twentieth century.5 The “epic of evolution,” he says, is “our sacred story.”6 Following Teilhard de Chardin, Berry views evolutionary theory not simply as a scientific fact but as a new condition for humanity’s self-understanding.7 Just as Copernicus altered humanity’s sense of place within the universe, so too did Charles Darwin, Edwin Hubble, and others help to revise our conceptions of time. Mary Evelyn Tucker expands, “For Teilhard and for Berry, then, the perspective of evolution provides the most comprehensive context for understanding the human phenomenon in relation to other life-forms.”8 The story that humanity tells about itself, including its relationship to God, must be understood within this broader and more encompassing narrative, and this story can then become the basis for social and cultural change. As evident in their writings, Teilhard and Berry believed that the retelling of the cosmic story must be done in a way that will evoke wonder. As a sacred story, the epic of evolution should occasion awe at the living cosmos around us and our human place in the midst of it all.

II. Cosmic Story
I now turn to Berry’s description of the cosmic story, with some attention to how his vision was shaped by Teilhard’s thought. Along with his collaborator, physicist Brian Swimme, Berry weaves the scientific data into a singular mythic and revelatory story that possesses the power to transform humanity and our relationship to the Earth. Here I want to draw out three aspects of the cosmic story: the emergent character of cosmogenesis, its creativity, and its celebration.

II.2.1. Cosmogenesis
First, Berry highlights that the universe is emergent and multiform rather than static and uniform. Following Teilhard, Berry uses the term “cosmogenesis,” and this term reveals significant implications that the term “cosmos” may conceal. Cosmogenesis denotes that the universe changes, develops, and emerges over unfathomable stretches of time, even as it appears to our limited human powers of comprehension as stable, solid, and even eternal, as it was for the ancient Greeks. Yet at every level of existence, the universe is marked by change and growth. From the quivering strings that make up subatomic quantum existence to the lingering evanescence of a young star that will reach its life span only over billions of years, the cosmos is active and in motion. Cosmogenesis stresses that the universe is constantly in flux and is shifting in discrete yet unpredictable and novel directions.

Berry owes this critical insight to Teilhard, who did not see the cosmos as “a determined thing in which everything exists”; or as an inert setting for mechanical processes, waiting for human self-awareness to arrive. Rather, the universe is a “dynamic and unfolding process of evolutionary development.” Again, the physical and the psychic, matter and spirit, coexist from the very beginning.

Furthermore, cosmogenesis does not merely describe the macrophase process by which the universe functioned in the past, or proceeds now. Teilhard and Berry view cosmogenesis as a process that takes place within each being; Tucker and Grim explain, “cosmogenesis became the action of evolution at every moment, in every Western Spiritual Tradition,” in Thomas Berry, Dreamer of the Earth, ed. Ervin Laszlo and Allan Combs, 16–31 (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2011), 20.


4 Tucker/Grim/Angyal, Thomas Berry, 208.
5 Berry, Great Work, 163.
6 Berry, Great Work, 31.
7 Matthew Fox comments that evolution was in some ways a vocation for both Teilhard and Berry, such that Berry’s work is a “journey with evolution and its profound and meaningful gifts to our sense of the whole.” Matthew Fox, “Some Thoughts on Thomas Berry’s Contributions to the
place, and in every being that exists.” Teilhard and Berry possessed a sense of “the whole of the cosmos manifest in particular forms of existence.”

The term cosmogenesis has further theological significance because it credits the universe for being its own source. Cosmogenesis does not undermine the classical Christian doctrine of God the creator, God who undergirds creation as its constant source, preservation, and ultimate goal. In using the term cosmogenesis, though, Berry directs our attention back to the power of the universe itself, rather than pointing us beyond to a further, divine source.

Through the process of evolution, the universe transforms itself by self-governing mechanisms over immense spans of time. The universe, Berry claims, “is self-emergent, self-sustaining, and self-fulfilling.” The “primordial flaring forth,” which Berry and Swimme use to describe the beginning of the cosmic journey, initiated a process of cosmogenesis that continues even unto now.

The ability of the cosmos to develop into its current state, Berry suggests, is worthy of contemplation and awe. Telling the story of the emergent universe ought to heighten our human appreciation of our place in the cosmos: certainly it might lead us to an awe of what Berry terms “that numinous mystery that pervades all the world”; or what a Christian might describe as praise of the Creator and gratitude for the gift of existence. But cosmogenesis also ought to imbue us with a sense of awe for the mysterious cosmos itself. The power of the cosmos to unfold over time and to stretch in unimaginable directions orients and stimulates our wonder.

II.2.2. Creativity
Second, Berry emphasizes creativity in the emergent cosmogenesis. Creativity lies in the balance between discipline and wildness, the two guiding forces of the universe. Via Teilhard, Berry perceives in the somewhat chaotic process of evolutionary development a sense of order and general progression. In the curvature of space and the force of gravitational attraction, there is a constant interplay of law and chance and therefore the possibility of a creative disequilibrium. For example, the planet Earth represents how an ideal balance between the forces of discipline and wildness allows the possibility of creativity. An excess of discipline results in the hard rock form of Mercury, with no possibility of fluidity or change, while Jupiter represents too much gaseous wildness, without the chance for stability. Discipline and wildness yield a cosmic process that leads from lesser to greater complexity, and from lesser to greater consciousness, which are the marks of vigorous creativity.

Scientists caution us not to read intentional creativity into this process. The theory of natural selection demands that changes happen unpredictably. Still, in Berry’s telling of the cosmic story, the flowering of life on Earth manifests how this self-organizing process of cosmogenesis has clearly been fantastically fruitful, bringing forth manifold instances of novelty and innovation. Creatures of unimaginable color, size, and inclination point to powers of creativity that can only be described as awesome. Again, in a more conventional theological and theocentric framework, one could easily see in this story the traces of divine intentionality and ingenuity. Regardless, the inherent and vehement creativity of the universe to forge something new can and should stimulate our wonder.

II.2.3. Celebration
Third, the story of the emergent and creative cosmogenesis is fundamentally a story of celebration. Berry calls us to see the universe in...
its vastness and through its many transformations as a “single, multiform, celebratory expression.” Or again, “Each of the events in the natural world is a poem, a painting, a drama, a celebration.” Berry draws on artistic metaphors such as a poem or a drama to describe the universe for a variety of reasons: first, there is the obvious link between the creativity of an artist and the creativity of the universe itself. Second, Berry links the universe’s creativity to the wonder and joy that we experience in significant artistic encounters. We celebrate inspiring works of art because of their inherent beauty, because they communicate joy at being alive. Berry describes the Earth “as an entrancing celebration of existence in all its alluring qualities.” The universe (and more locally and more intensely the Earth) allures, entrances, and enwraps us in its own celebratory movement of existence. A celebration does not exist for further ulterior purposes; a celebration is its own justification—it is its own purpose.

Now, the human role amidst this cosmic celebration is not to discover and to celebrate the wonder of the universe as it presents itself to us. That alone would render us mainly observers, and it would limit the joy of celebrating the universe to human self-consciousness. Given Teilhard’s and Berry’s insistence that the physical and the psychic are conjoined, we should say more properly that the human celebration of the Earth’s beauty, of the cosmos’s beauty, is the human participation in the universe’s own preexistent and ongoing celebration. That is to say, celebration did not emerge only when human self-consciousness appears in the cosmic story. It is a feature of the cosmos itself. Celebration is multiform; it encompasses a variety of expressions. Yet it is also singular; it stems from the universe’s origins even unto now.

Finally, likening the universe to a poem or a work of art is helpful because art demands an interpretation that appreciates the wider context in which it appears. Berry calls human beings to approach nonhumans as reverently as we might a work of art, and to perceive our own participation in life as one element of the universe’s drama. Berry compares cosmogenesis to a symphony: “We need to see the Earth in its sequence of transformations as so many movements in a musical composition.” Later musical notes and themes, such as humanity itself, make sense only in the context of what precedes them. Berry calls human beings to understand themselves as part of the drama of life, rather than the sole act. All the world’s a stage, but all cosmic creatures are the players.

IV. The Journey of the Universe
For Berry, the story of the universe is a summons: a call to return us to our cosmic identity, an appeal to return our gaze to the stunning beauty of the Earth and the incomprehensibly creative cosmos. Berry and his collaborator Brian Swimme authored The Universe Story, which strives to narrate this creative and self-celebratory cosmogenesis in a way that people can appreciate the various transformations of this cosmic symphony. This vision guided the production of the award-winning film, Journey of the Universe, produced by Brian Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker. This film represents the most sophisticated effort to date to bring the new story of the universe into the humanities, and to express the deeply human dimension of this story.

Throughout the film, Swimme as narrator articulates the various phases of cosmic evolution, and at each stage he explains in accessible terms not only what the sciences tell us but also why this

See “Co-Creator or Creative Predator? James Nash’s Contributions to Catholic Social Teaching on Ecological Ethics,” Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology 18, no. 2 (2014): 99–121. Still, I think such a critique is valid only in the context of the overarching primacy of the cosmic story and the need for humanity to view it as good and to incorporate their own self-understanding within it. Thus, the criticism is a valid addition and correction to Berry’s cosmocentric worldview, but it does not replace it.

17 Berry, Great Work, 17.
18 Berry, Great Work 61
19 Berry, Great Work, 27.
20 The Journey of the Universe is a project that includes not only the film but also a book, Journey of the Universe (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014), and recorded conversations with multiple leading thinkers. See https://www.journeyoftheuniverse.org. In this paper I will focus on the film.
matters for our human self-understanding. This amazing story places human identity in full continuity with cosmic development. The essence of the universe story, Swimme tells us, is that “stars are our ancestors.” From them all life emerges.

For example, remarking on the huge pulsating spiral arms that form the Milky Way, Swimme comments “We live in the midst of this intense creativity.” Human creativity, he suggests, is a particular form of an already existing galactic and cosmic creativity. Later, Swimme asks how we might understand the process of photosynthesis. Some might see it simply as an engineering project, perhaps, but Swimme also offers the metaphor of two lovers, who meet in an exchange charged with energy and promise. Similarly, when discussing the development of compassion, Swimme asserts that scientists postulate this began hundreds of millions of years ago in the ocean with ancient fish. Mother fish frightened away predators rather than eat their own young. This was a new behavior. It was taken up and expanded by mammals, where babies are not just protected from predators but are nourished directly by their mothers. Further on, mammals communicated survival information to their young, and in some cases this requires years of training. Caring, Swimme concludes, broadened over hundreds of millions of years prior to the arrival of human beings. Creativity, love, compassion: what some might champion as uniquely human traits and capacities, the Journey of The Universe film upholds as the result of untold generations of planetary and cosmic development. These are not human traits; human love and compassion are human expressions of cosmic traits, planetary inheritances. “We are not just similar to animals, we have been shaped by them,” Swimme concludes. Rather than diminish our humanity, this link strengthens our human belonging to a wider community. Cosmogenesis is not inimical or indifferent to human flourishing, but indeed human self-consciousness is an expression of the universe itself. Two of Berry’s most famous quotes are pertinent here: “The universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.”

The film ends on a note of ambivalence: with the emergence of human symbolic consciousness, human beings begin to take control over the systems of life on Earth, and now we are as powerful as the planet itself. How should we use our unprecedented powers to develop ourselves in a way that enhances the well-being of the planetary community as well? Swimme asks, “Is there any deep wisdom that might help us align our consciousness with the grain of cosmic evolution? Wonder will guide us,” he answers. Our deepest yearning is not to consume and enjoy the Earth’s resources or to control it for our benefit. Rather, it is “for wholehearted participation” in the cosmic story, to experience ourselves as the “mind and heart of the universe.” At the end of the film, Swimme expresses the essence of the universe story in poetic terms, evoking the kind of wonder he hopes can guide us: “Over the course of 14 billion years, hydrogen gas transformed itself into mountains, butterflies, the music of Bach, and you and me.”

Brian Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker continue the work initiated by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry, which is now a pressing task for all religious communities and for the human family as a whole: narrating the story of the universe in a way that expresses its beauty and inherent goodness; and that articulates our human purpose within this universe so that we might reorient our cultures in a way that is sustainable. An indispensable part of this story, I propose, is wonder: wonder at the immensity of time and space in the universe’s story, wonder at the universe’s countless creative developments, wonder at our deep continuity with these cosmic processes, and wonder at our capacity to embody and to express this awe on behalf of the universe itself.

I’d like to conclude with the words of Thomas Berry, who voices this sense of wonder at our shared cosmic story in a brief poem in which

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21 Berry, Evening Thoughts, 17.

22 http://thomasberry.org/assets/attachments/Berry_Twelve_Principles.pdf
he asks various beings what he should say about them:

I asked the moon what should I say and the moon said “Tell them my story”
And I asked the wind what should I say and the wind said “Tell them my story”
And I asked the clover out on the lawn, what should I say and the clover said “Tell them my story.”

My story, the mountain story, the river story, your story, the indigenous story, the great story.....

Love at the Heart of the Cosmos

The Institute for Religion and Science at Chestnut Hill College recently collaborated with the Omega Center at Villanova University to present a national conference, *Love at the Heart of the Cosmos: Living in Relational Wholeness*, which took place December 6-8 in Philadelphia. Information on that event can be found here: https://omegacenter.info/conference2019/

The Institute for Religion and Science at Chestnut Hill College will also be hosting a lecture on March 23, 2020 by Donald Wayne Viney of Pittsburgh State University titled “Evolution's God? Teilhard de Chardin and the Varieties of Process Theology.” Full information on that event can be found here: http://irands.org/event/evolutions-god-teilhard-de-chardin-and-the-varieties-of-process-theology/

You can view videos of past lectures and other events on their YouTube channel here: https://www.youtube.com/user/institute4rs

They also hold monthly afternoon and evening reading circles to discuss books related to Teilhard and the intersection of science and religion. For more information on those, contact Institute4RS@chc.edu.

Historical Tidbits

We recently came across a copy of the Annual Report of 1940 for the American Museum of Natural History in New York, where Pere Teilhard de Chardin is listed as a “Corresponding Foreign Member.”

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Theology for the Third Millennium
YouTube Interview

A recent episode of “New Thinking Allowed” with Jeffrey Mishlove should be of interest to ATA members. In "Theology for the Third Millennium,” he interviews Peter B. Todd, the author of the Spring 2013 Teilhard Study: Teilhard and Other Modern Thinkers on Evolution, Mind, and Matter. You can read an excerpt of that study here:

http://teilharddechardin.org/mm_uploads/66-
Teilhard_and_Other_Modern_Thinkers.pdf

Todd is a psychotherapist with a Jungian orientation and the author of The Individuation of God: Integrating Science and Religion. In this interview, he reviews the outlines of what he believes could become a new theology, open to both mystical experience and modern science. He builds upon the evolutionary, process theology of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. He also emphasizes the unification of particle physics and depth psychology as revealed in the explorations of Carl G. Jung and Nobel laureate Wolfgang Pauli. Additionally, he pays homage to the concept of the "implicate order" in the work of physicist David Bohm.

The full interview is available here:
https://youtu.be/_yRH0419hCQ or by searching “New Thinking Allowed Peter Todd” on YouTube.

New Thinking Allowed host, Jeffrey Mishlove, PhD, hosted and co-produced the original Thinking Allowed public television series. He is a past vice-president of the Association for Humanistic Psychology; and is the recipient of the Pathfinder Award from that Association for his contributions to the field of human consciousness exploration.

Icons of Threatened and Endangered Species

ATA Board member, Angela Manno was recently featured in ENDANGERED EARTH, an exhibit at the Ceres Gallery in Manhattan. But you can still view her new icons of threatened and endangered species on her website here:

http://www.angelamanno.com/icon/endangered.php

Angela writes: “[this is] a project I have been dreaming of ever since I began my training in traditional Byzantine-Russian iconography over twenty years ago. Like my traditional icons, these new works are executed in the same liturgical iconographic method and materials that originated in the monasteries of 14th-16th century Russia. My aim in creating these contemporary icons is to elevate non-human species to their rightful and equal place in the community of being and to symbolize our urgent need to transition from an
anthropocentric worldview to a biocentric norm of reference.”

50% of the sales of each of these works goes to the Center for Biological Diversity.

Notable Books & Publications

Jean Maalouf. Teilhard’s Proposition for Peace: Rediscovering the Fire. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2019

Cambridge Scholars Publishing are proud to announce the release of Teilhard’s Proposition for Peace: Rediscovering the Fire by Jean Maalouf. It is, by all accounts, one of the definitive pieces of scholarship on the philosopher written in English to date and, in the words of author Leo W Zonneveld, “one of the most complete books to appear in recent times with regard to the available personal and bibliographic data on Teilhard.”

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), called “the greatest prophet of this age,” intended to write a definitive volume entitled The Book of Peace. In the end he failed to do so, instead sowing the seeds of peace throughout his writings. Maalouf distils the thought and principals of the great philosopher with erudition, providing us with the essence of the case Teilhard made for the cause of peace.

“There is no doubt that Teilhard’s readers have noticed how difficult his thought can be, and how puzzling it appears at times. The volume navigates the complexity of those labyrinthine roads, inviting the reader to confidently “see” the basic unity which underlies all that is. When we recognise that we live in the Divine Milieu, where we witness the transforming presence of the divine in human consciousness, we will existentially realise the truth of the principle by which Teilhard wanted us to live.”

Jean Maalouf is a prolific writer and internationally renowned expert on Teilhard. He is the author of more than forty books, including Le mystère du mal dans l’œuvre de Teilhard de Chardin (1986) and Teilhard de Chardin: Reconciliation in Christ (2002). Maalouf’s latest and most comprehensive offering is “a complete and masterfully accomplished look at Teilhard,” according to Dr Robert Brown, and is a text in which those “seeking relief about the ‘real’ meaning of life” will find both direction and guidance.

To purchase this volume by Jean Maalouf, go to: https://www.cambridgescholars.com/teilhards-proposition-for-peace.

To read an excerpt from the book, go to: https://www.cambridgescholars.com/download/sample/64970
Annual Meeting will be held
Saturday May 2, 2020
Lunch: 12:00 p.m; Talks: 1:30 p.m.

In Synod Hall at
The Cathedral of St. John the Divine
1047 Amsterdam Ave., New York, NY
Enter at the Corner of Amsterdam and 110th Street

Our program will be:

Voices of the Great Work Inspired by Teilhard

This year’s meeting will celebrate some of the remarkable work done by contemporary Teilhardians. This will include educators, Jennifer Morgan & Kathleen Deignan; artists, Imogene Drummond, Angela Manno, Mary Coehlo; musicians, Sam & Paula Guarnaccia; religious leaders Rev. Nancy Wright & Br. Kevin Cawley; and play producer, Sant Aranda.

Due to the renovation at Union Seminary, we will no longer be able to use the space that has been the home to the ATA meeting for over 50 years. Moreover, the high price of other rental space in Manhattan has made it cost-prohibitive for us to find an appropriate alternate long-term location.

Therefore, this will be the last American Teilhard Association annual meeting in New York City.

To pre-register, please complete the following form and mail with check or money order to:
American Teilhard Association c/o John Grim, 29 Spoke Drive, Woodbridge, CT 06525

Name______________________________
Address____________________________
City, State, Zip_______________________

I wish to reserve ______ places for the Luncheon and Talk @ $30.00 ea $______________________
I wish to reserve ______ places for the Talk only @ $10.00 ea $______________________
I enclose a contribution to the Hospitality Fund $______________________

Or register and pay online at: http://www.teilharddechardin.org/index.php/event
Please note that no tickets will be sent; names will be held on the reservation list at the door.
Teilhard Perspective
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TEILHARD PERSPECTIVE is published by the American Teilhard Association, a non-profit organization whose goals are to explore philosophical, scientific, religious, social and environmental concerns in light of Teilhard’s vision and to clarify the role of the human phenomenon in this emerging understanding of the cosmos.

We welcome suggestions of relevant ideas, books, news, events and contributions of articles for this newsletter. The editor is Tara Trapani. The Teilhard Perspective newsletter along with the biannual Teilhard Studies pamphlet and Annual Meeting notices are available through membership. Please contact us at: American Teilhard Association, c/o John Grim, 29 Spoke Drive, Woodbridge, CT 06525. Annual membership is $35.

The Association President is Dr. John Grim, School of Forestry and Environment Studies, Yale University, 195 Prospect Street, New Haven CT 06520. Email john.grim@yale.edu. Vice Presidents are Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker, maryevelyn.tucker@yale.edu, and Dr. Brian Thomas Swimme, California Institute for Integral Studies, 1453 Mission Street, San Francisco, CA 94103. For Publications and other information, please email Tara Trapani at: tcmk@aya.yale.edu.

American Teilhard Association, Thomas Berry, and Journey of the Universe Websites

At the ATA site www.teilharddechardin.org can be found a Biography, List of Writings, Pictures and Quotes, Life Timeline, ATA Events, Teilhard Studies with first page, recent full Teilhard Perspectives, Membership info, Links, and a Brian Thomas Swimme interview on Teilhard.
