

Creating the Spiritual Context of the Ecological Age

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CENTER FOR ECOZOIC STUDIES

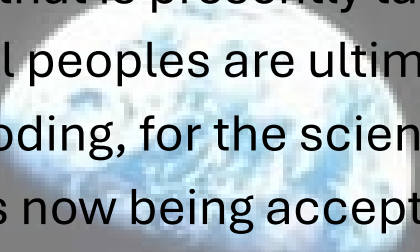
- CES is a thought, inspiration, dialogue, and action center located in Chapel Hill NC.
- I have been part of a study group talking about ways to bring the ecozoic age into being. Ecozoic = Household of Life
- We have covered topics such as economics, politics, energy production, social structures, and architecture. I chose to work on the topic of spirituality, as found in Thomas Berry's work.





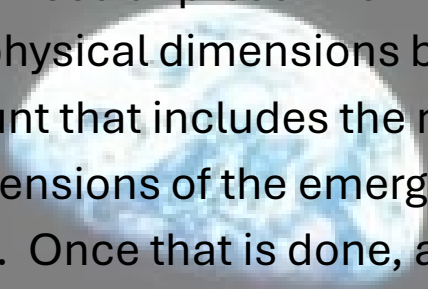
QUESTIONS

- How can we help create the spiritual context of the ecological age?
- What can we do or emphasize?
- What reasons do we have for being optimistic about the future?



“...one of the historical roles now being assigned to our generation is the role of creating, in its main outlines, the spiritual context of the ecological age, the next great cultural coding that is presently taking on its effective form. Yet all peoples are ultimately involved in this new cultural coding, for the scientific basis of the new origin story is now being accepted as the context for education everywhere on the planet.”

[Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, 119-120]



“The greatest single need at present is the completion of the story, as told in its physical dimensions by science, by the more integral account that includes the numinous and consciousness dimensions of the emergent universe from its primordial moment. Once that is done, a meaningful universe, a functional cosmology, is available as a foundation for the total range of human activities in the ecological age.”

[Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, 120)



SPIRITUALITY

“is a mode of being in which not only the divine and the human commune with each other, but through which we discover ourselves in the universe and the universe discovers itself in us.”

(Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, 74)

HOW DID WE GET HERE?

PHASES OF DEVELOPMENT OF THE HUMAN

TRIBAL-SHAMANIC PERIOD

CLASSICAL PERIOD

SCIENTIFIC-TECHNOLOGICAL PERIOD

EMERGING ECOLOGICAL PHASE

(Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts*, 72)



TRIBAL-SHAMANIC PHASE

“In the tribal-shamanic phase, the human experiences its deeper inspiration as coming from the mystery of the universe. Thus we have the revelatory experiences of the natural world and cosmos that shaped human societies in this earlier period.”

(Thomas Berry, Evening Thoughts, 72)



CLASSICAL PERIOD

“...a cultural coding developed that had extensive similarities throughout Eurasia and the Americas. At this time an extraordinary sense of the divine coexisted with sacrificial rituals, revelatory experience, clearly articulated theologies, and extensive spiritual disciplines whereby the world human attained liberation from the world of phenomena and entered into an absolute mode of being.”

(Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts*, 73)



SCIENTIFIC-TECHNOLOGICAL PHASE

“Amazing capacity for transforming the human community and the entire planet. New capacities for travel, communication, and transportation have joined the total Earth process in a new web of relationships both psychic and physical.”

Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts*, 73



PERIOD OF CREATIVITY IN OUR TIME

“Most important just now is the task of creating a conscious integration of the entire range of all these codings that govern the living and nonliving systems of the universe.”

(Thomas Berry, Evening Thoughts, 74)



“WE DISCOVER THE EARTH....

through participation, not through isolation or exploitation. We are most ourselves when we are most intimate with the rivers and mountains and woodlands, with the sun and the moon and the stars in the heavens; when we are most intimate with the air we breathe, the Earth that supports us, the soil that grows our food, with the meadows in bloom. We belong here. Our home is here. The excitement and fulfillment of our lives is here. However we think of eternity, it can only be an aspect of the present.”

(Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, 95)

WHAT IS NEW....

What is new about this mode of consciousness is that the universe is now experienced as an irreversible time-developmental process, not simply as an eternal, seasonally renewing universe. We are focused not so much on cosmos as on cosmogenesis. Now our knowledge of the universe comes through our empirical, observational sciences rather than through intuitive or deductive reasoning processes.

(Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, 117)





SPIRITUALITY AND THE NATURAL WORLD

“The identification of the divine as transcendent to the natural world makes direct human-divine relationship possible, but also we negate the natural world as the locus for the meeting of the divine and the human.”

(Thomas Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 113)



SPIRITUALITY AND THE NATURAL WORLD

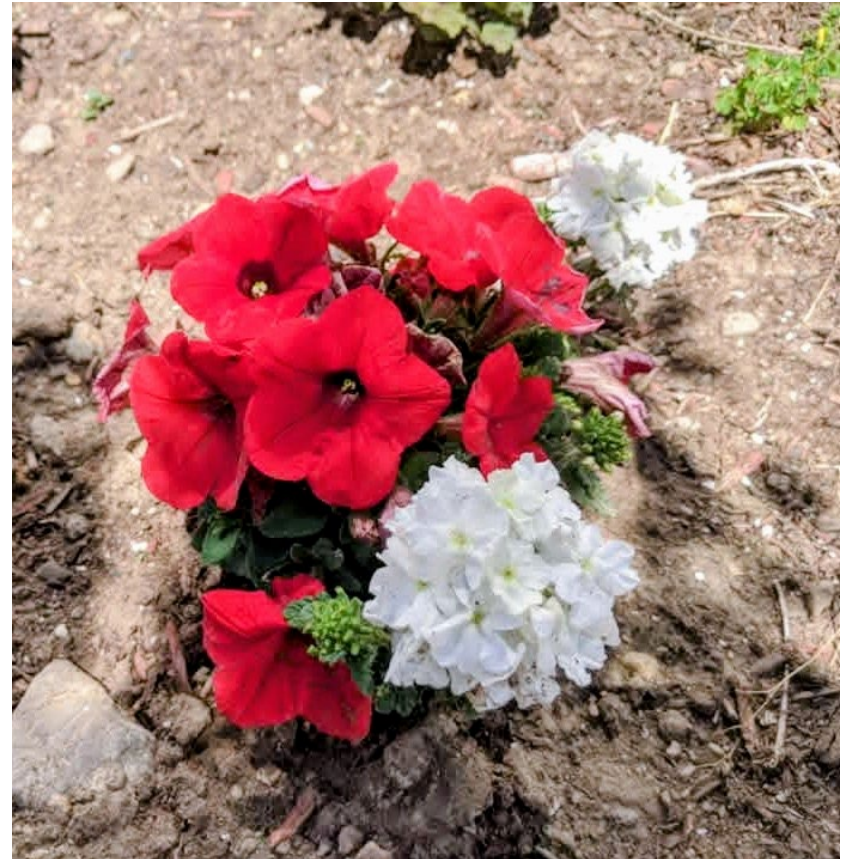
....the ultimate basis of our ecological difficulties lay in our spirituality itself, as it has come down through the centuries, a situation that could be remedied only by a more intimate human association of the natural world in its evolutionary unfolding.”

(Thomas Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 116)

CREATIVITY

This myth of progress supplanted the earlier myths of personal presences manifested throughout the natural world. At this same time we lost the world of meaning in an evolutionary world governed by chance without direction or higher significance, a world of emergent process that would eventually come to be spoken of as the work of a “blind watchmaker,”...Yet a different interpretation of the data of evolution is available. We need merely understand that the evolutionary process is neither random nor determined but **creative**. It follows the general pattern of all **creativity**.

(Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*, 169)



ORIGIN MOMENT OF THE UNIVERSE

While there is no way of fully understanding the origin moment of the universe we can appreciate the direction of evolution in its larger arc of development as moving from lesser to great complexity in structure and from lesser to greater modes of consciousness. We can also understand the governing principles of evolution in terms of its three movements toward differentiation, inner spontaneity, and comprehensive bonding.

(Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*, 169)



EVOLUTIONARY VISION

With this understanding it would be difficult to overemphasize the magnificence of this evolutionary doctrine. It provides a grandeur in our view of the universe and our role in it that is overwhelming. Indeed, in its human expression the universe is able to reflect on itself and enjoy its grandeur in a special mode of conscious self-awareness. The evolutionary vision provides the most profound mystique of the universe.

(Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*, 169-170)



GREAT SELF/INDIVIDUAL SELF

As physical resources become less available, psychic energy must support the human project in a special manner. This situation brings us to a new reliance on powers within the universe and also to experience of the deeper self. The universe must be experienced as the Great Self. Each is fulfilled in the other; the Great Self is fulfilled in the individual self, the individual self is fulfilled in the Great Sel

(Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*, 170)



CELEBRATION

Alienation is overcome as soon as we experience this surge of energy from the source that has brought the universe through the centuries. New fields of energy become available to support the human venture. These new energies find expression and support in celebration. For in the end the universe can only be explained in terms of **celebration**. **It is all an exuberant expression of existence itself.**

(Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*, 170)





FOURFOLD WISDOM AS GUIDE TO THE FUTURE

- WISDOM OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES
- WISDOM OF WOMEN
- WISDOM OF CLASSICAL TRADITIONS
- WISDOM OF SCIENCE

(THOMAS BERRY, *The Great Work*, 176-77)

WISDOM OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES



“As the years pass it becomes ever more clear that dialogue with native peoples here and throughout the world is urgently needed to provide the human community with models of a more integral human presence to the earth.”

(Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*, 180)



WISDOM OF WOMEN

“The wisdom of women is to join the knowing of the body to that of the mind, to join soul to spirit, intuition to reasoning, feeling, consciousness to intellectual analysis, Intimacy to detachment, subjective presence to objective distance. When these functions become separated in carrying out the human project then the way into the future is to bring them together.”

(Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*, 180)

THE GREAT MOTHER

“What is needed is to bring back the ancient symbol of the universe as the Great Mother... This symbolism has at times been interpreted more at the level of the planet Earth than in the more comprehensive sense of the universe. This is the proper role of the Great Mother: to be the primordial source whence the vast diversity of beings in the universe comes into existence.”

(Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, 46)



THE GREAT MOTHER

“It is a challenge for contemporary Earth studies to narrate the story of the birth of the human from our Mother the Earth. Once the story is told, it immediately becomes obvious how significant the title Mother Earth really is...Until recently, the child was taken care of by the mother. Now, however, the mother must be extensively cared for by the child. The child has become an adult.”

(Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, 77)





WISDOM OF THE CLASSICAL TRADITIONS

“Another major component of Western tradition is the Greek humanist tradition as expressed in their literary and artistic accomplishments; also as expressed in the tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles, in the teachings of the philosophers, especially of Plato and Aristotle, and in the architecture and sculptures of the Parthenon.”

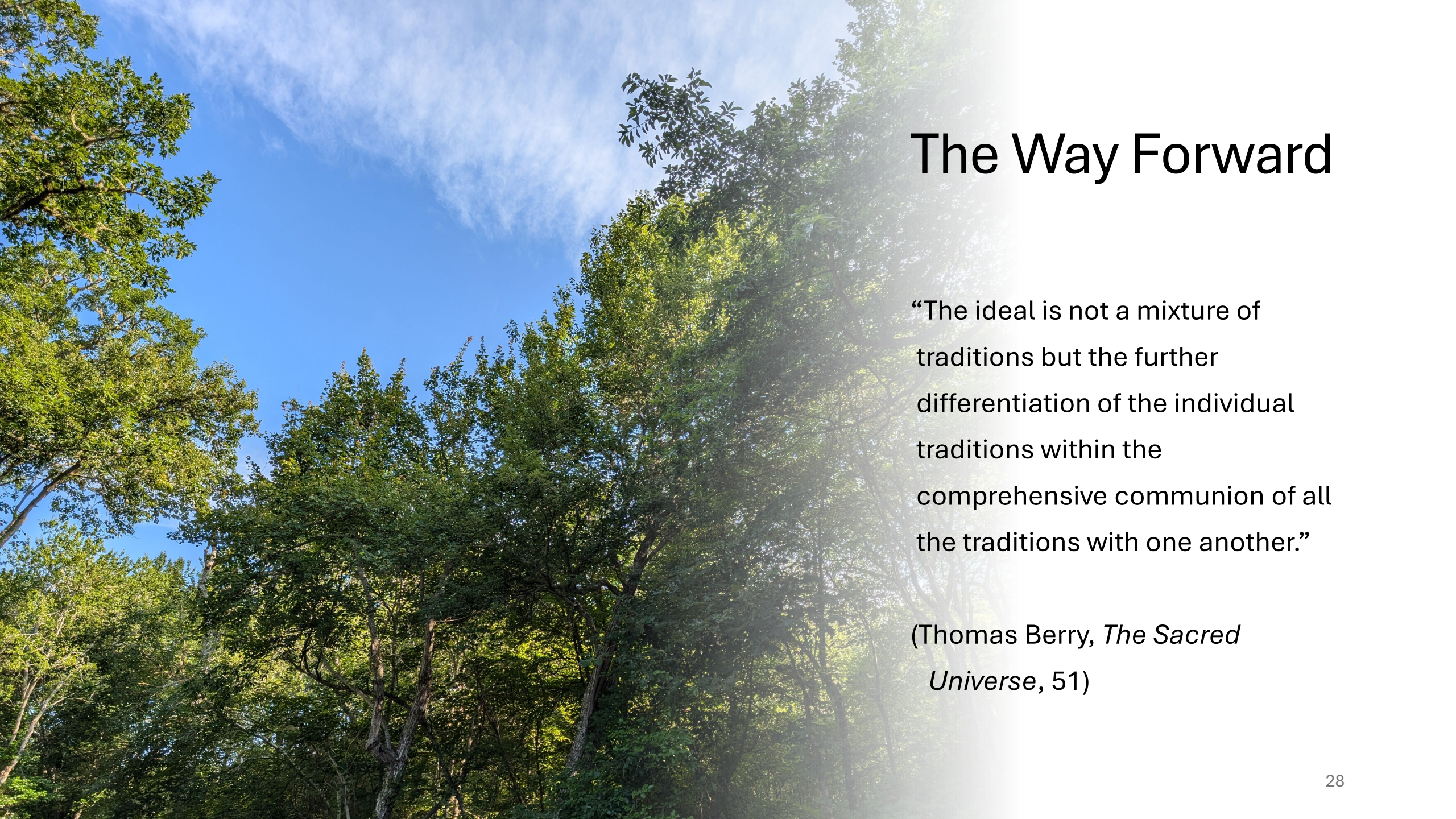
(Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*, 186)

WISDOM OF SCIENCE

“The primary contribution of science at the beginning of the twenty-first century is the discovery that the universe has come into being by a sequence of evolutionary transformations. ...the universe, in the phenomenal order, is self-emergent, self-sustaining, and self-fulfilling... Awareness that the universe is more cosmogenesis than cosmos might be the greatest change in human consciousness that has taken place since the awakening of the human mind in the Paleolithic Period.”

(Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*, 189-190)





The Way Forward

“The ideal is not a mixture of traditions but the further differentiation of the individual traditions within the comprehensive communion of all the traditions with one another.”

(Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe*, 51)



“In moments of confusion such as the present, we are not left simply to our own rational contrivances. We are supported by the ultimate powers of the universe as they make themselves present to us through the spontaneities within our own beings. We need only become sensitized to these spontaneities, not with a naïve simplicity, but with critical appreciation.”

(Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, 221)

Summary of key points:

- The universe has a spiritual quality from the beginning.
- Spirituality is not just an individual's relationship with God.
- Spirituality is a connection with the universe, and everything in it.
- We know the Divine through our connection with the universe.
- The evolutionary perspective of cosmogenesis is essential to the story.
- We live in a community of subjects, not objects.
- It is through creating the spirituality of the ecological age that transformation is possible.





QUESTIONS

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