

## **Biography of Thomas Berry**

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To fully understand Thomas Berry's presentation of the New Story it is helpful to highlight some of the major intellectual influences on his life and thinking. In this way we can more fully appreciate the nature and significance of the New Story itself. In this intellectual biography we will first discuss Berry's studies of western history, Asian traditions, and indigenous religions. We will then describe the early and sustained influence of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin on Berry's philosophy of evolutionary history. Finally, we will outline some of the major features of the New Story as Berry has described it.

### **From human history to Earth history**

It is significant to see Berry's contributions initially as a cultural historian whose interests have spanned both Europe and Asia. He did his graduate studies in western history and spent several years living in Germany after the Second World War. In addition, he read extensively in the field of Asian religions and history. He lived in China the year before Mao came to power and published two books on Asian religions, which have been reissued from Columbia University Press (*Buddhism* and *Religions of India*).

From this beginning as a cultural historian Berry has moved in the last twenty years to become a historian of Earth. Berry sees himself, then, not as a theologian but as a geologist. The movement from human history to cosmological history has been a necessary progression for Berry. He has witnessed in his own life time the emergence of a planetary civilization as cultures have come in contact around the globe, often for the first time. At the same time, the very resources for sustaining such a planetary civilization are being undermined by massive environmental destruction.

It is out of these kinds of concerns for the future direction of human-Earth history that Berry has developed the New Story. Indeed, *The Universe Story* which Berry has written with Brian Swimme represents a fruitful convergence of his interests in both human history and evolutionary history. Berry's aim is to evoke the psychic and spiritual resources to establish a new reciprocity of humans with Earth and of humans to one another. As Berry has frequently said, there can be no peace among humans without peace with the planet. This, in short, is the intent of the New Story. The underlying assumption is that with a change of worldview will come an appropriately comprehensive ethics of reverence for all life. With a new perspective regarding our place in this extraordinary unfolding of Earth history will emerge a renewed awareness of our role in guiding the evolutionary process at this crucial point in history.

### **Historian of Western intellectual history**

Thomas Berry began his academic career as a historian of western intellectual history<sup>(1)</sup>. His thesis at Catholic University on Giambattista Vico's philosophy of history was published in

1951. Vico outlined his philosophy in *The New Science of the Nature of the Nations* which was first published in 1725 after some twenty years of research (2). Vico was trying to establish a science of the study of nations comparable to what others had done for the study of nature. Thus he hoped to make the study of history more "scientific" by focusing on the world of human institutions and causation.

At the same time, Vico intended to demonstrate how this new science should manifest a "rational civil theology of divine providence." In other words, Vico wished to show that providence was at work not only in sacred history but also in "profane" history. Consequently, pattern and order are operative and discernible in history. Moreover, in contrast to Descartes' concentration on rationalization Vico emphasized the poetic wisdom and creative imagination needed for the future.

In his study, Vico used large, sweeping categories to describe major historical periods since the time of Noah and the flood. Looking at human history from a macrophase perspective he identified three ages: the age of the gods, the age of the heroes, and the age of men. Corresponding to each age are different kinds of customs, laws, languages, arts, and economies embracing quite distinctive cultures. Moreover, in each stage a different human faculty dominates, namely, sensation, imagination, and intellect.

In the first period, the age of the gods, a theocratic government supported by mythology prevails. In the second period, the age of the heroes, an aristocratic government dominates along with class conflict and slavery. In the third age, the age of humans, democracies appear and the power of reason and human rights emerge. Vico sees this cycle as recurring at different points in human history as we move from myth to rationality and from savage to civilized states. In each of these periods the role of natural or poetic wisdom and intuition has been crucial in founding institutions which have given rise to the nations. Yet the movement through history is punctuated by disintegration and dissolution. Vico called these the periods of the "barbarism of reflection." In passing through such phases of entropy history moves toward a "creative barbarism of sense."

Vico's thought has clearly been seminal for Berry. This is evident in several respects: the sweeping periodization of history, the notion of the barbarism of reflection, and the poetic wisdom and creative imagination needed to sustain civilizations. With regard to periodization, Berry has defined four major ages in human history namely, the tribal shamanic, the traditional civilizational, the scientific technological, and the ecological or ecozoic age. He observes that we are currently moving into the ecozoic era which he feels will be characterized by a new understanding of human-Earth relations. Nonetheless, he acknowledges that we are in a period of severe cultural pathology with regard to our blind yet sophisticated technological assault on the Earth. In other words, we are in a time of a "barbarism of reflection". Vico's description of people in the midst of such a barbarism is uncannily reminiscent of contemporary western societies:

... such people, like so many beasts, have fallen into the custom of each man thinking only of his own private interests and have reached the extreme of delicacy, or better pride, in which like wild animals they bristle and lash out at the slightest displeasure. Thus no matter how great the

throng and press of their bodies, they live like wild beasts in a deep solitude of spirit and will...[\(3\)](#)

To extract ourselves from this cultural pathology of alienation from one another and destruction of Earth Berry calls for a New Story of the universe. By evoking such a deep poetic wisdom he feels we may be able to create a sustainable future. He calls for reinventing the human at the species level which implies moving from our cultural coding to recover our genetic coding of relatedness to Earth. By articulating a new mythic consciousness of our profound connectedness to Earth we may be able to reverse the self-destructive cultural tendencies we have put in motion with regard to the planet.

In so doing we will create the-basis for long range economic and ecological sustainability. This is, no doubt, the best hope for moving toward more equitable and just societies. This coming together of environmental concerns with social justice issues is at the heart of the broadened perspective of the New Story. Without such an enlarged picture of our historical past and our planetary roots it is more difficult to chart our way into a viable future. In the west, especially in the twentieth century, individual alienation, despair, ennui, and destructiveness has continued to spread with a deteriorating sense of communal ties or ethical responsibilities to the natural or human worlds.

Above all, then, the New Story provides context and perspective for implementing the specific kinds of social, political, and economic changes that will be needed to sustain and foster life on the planet. It's intent is not simply to tell a story that is comprehensive and personally enriching. It is also to provide a basis for change. The assumption is that when one's worldview shifts to understand the interrelatedness of all life one's ethics likewise will be affected to work for human justice and environmental sustainability.

Influenced by Vico, then, Berry has developed a comprehensive historical perspective in periodization, an understanding of the depths of contemporary barbarism, and the need for a new mythic wisdom to extract ourselves from our cultural pathology and deep alienation. Berry has described contemporary alienation as especially pervasive due to the power of the technological trance, the myth of progress, and our own autism in relation to nature. With the New Story and the Dream of Earth Berry hopes to overcome that alienation and evoke the energies needed to create a viable and sustainable future.

### **Historian of Asian thought and religions**

When Berry set out for China in 1948 on the boat leaving from San Francisco he met Wm. Theodore de Bary, now considered to be one of the premier scholars in Asian studies. De Bary was on his way to China as a Fulbright scholar of Chinese studies. Berry intended to study language and Chinese philosophy in Beijing. Their time in China, while fruitful, was cut short by Mao's Communist victory in 1949. After they returned to the States they worked together to found the Asian Thought and Religion Seminar at Columbia. De Bary helped to establish one of the nation's seminal programs in Asian studies at Columbia. In addition, he supervised numerous translation projects of individual texts and edited six volumes published by Columbia University Press on the Sources of Indian, Chinese, and Japanese Traditions, respectively. The friendship

between de Bary and Berry has lasted nearly 45 years with many collaborative projects and exchanges of ideas on Asian thought.

Berry began his teaching of Asian religions at Seton Hall (1956- 1960) and St. John's University (1960-1966) and eventually moved to Fordham University (1966-1979). He also offered courses at Columbia, Drew, and the University of San Diego. Berry's graduate program in the History of Religions at Fordham was the only one of its kind at a Catholic university in the United States. It lasted for over a decade and at its height in the early 1970s it attracted more students than any other division in the theology department. Its graduates are now teaching at colleges and universities throughout the United States. During these years Berry wrote numerous articles on Asian religions in addition to two books, one on *Buddhism* (1966) and the other on *Religions of India* (1971).

What was distinctive about Berry's approach was his effort not only to discuss the historical unfolding of the traditions being studied, but also to articulate their spiritual dynamics and contemporary significance. This made his classes and his writings on Asian religions remarkably stimulating and memorable. Equally important in his approach has been his balance in highlighting the distinctive contributions of both the western traditions and the Asian religions. In addition, he has had a long-standing appreciation for the spirituality of indigenous traditions in both Asia and the Americas.

In a short monograph written over 25 years ago and published in 1968 Berry demonstrates the originality of his interpretations of the spiritual dynamics of Asian religious thought. Titled "Five Oriental Philosophies" (4) he describes the phenomenological essence of each tradition as well as outlines its historical unfolding. He includes Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Taoism, and Zen in his discussions. Before multiculturalism was fashionable he speaks of the need to include Asian thought in textbooks entitled "World Philosophy". His concern for embracing pluralism and diversity of thought is eloquently expressed:

Diversity is no longer something that we tolerate. It is something that we esteem as a necessary condition for a livable universe, as the source of Earth's highest perfection... To demand an undifferentiated unity would bring human thought and history itself to an end. The splendor of our multicultural world would be destroyed."(5)

In describing the original impulse of the principal Asian systems of thought Berry succeeds in highlighting a significant dimension of their spiritual essence and avoiding layers of complexity which tend to obfuscate rather than clarify. A few examples will illustrate his phenomenological method which he later supplements with a historical discussion of the development of the particular tradition.

Of Hinduism he writes: "Hinduism is founded in a most intensive experience of divine being. It is an experience of the One beyond all Multiplicity..." (6)

Of Buddhism he observes: "Buddhist thought originates in an unusual experience of the sorrows of time. No abiding reality is here, no lasting peace, no fit condition for human life. The first and final wisdom is to recognize the insubstantial nature of all things."(7)

Of Confucianism he notes: "Confucian thought originates in the experience of an all-embracing harmony of the cosmic and human orders of reality. This intimate relationship between the cosmic and the human is expressed and perfected in an elaborate order of ritual and etiquette which, in a certain manner contains and harmonizes both the cosmic and the human."[\(8\)](#)

Of Taoism he reflects: "Taoism arises from an experience of the dynamic force immanent in the universe which gives order and life and meaning to all reality and which in China is known as the Tao. This experience is not radically different from that which produced the Confucian tradition of thought, but while the Confucian scholars gave their attention to the moral qualities of the Tao and to the social and political structure of society, the Taoist visionaries turned to the contemplation of the Tao itself and the mysterious manner in which it wrought the succession of changes in the universal order of things."[\(9\)](#)

Of Zen he writes: "... the total effort of Zen is to keep the intellectual and cultural life of humans in a state of elemental simplicity with all the vigor that is associated with the spontaneous and instinctive."[\(10\)](#)

These examples may help to illustrate the breadth of historical, cultural, and religious perspective that Berry brings to the development of his idea of the New Story. He spent several decades studying both western and eastern intellectual history before arriving at his comprehensive vision of the Universe Story. He has been able to appreciate the deep spiritual impulses and devastating human sorrows which have given rise to the world's religions. From this perspective he has been able to discern what spiritual resources we need to utilize for creating a multicultural perspective within the Earth community[\(11\)](#). Tolerance of diversity of religious ideas is comparable to protecting diversity of species in the natural world. For Berry human diversity and biological diversity are of a continuous piece.

Perhaps the most significant Asian tradition for Berry's thinking has been Confucianism. He has written numerous articles on Confucianism and the Chinese tradition at large. He has noted that in East Asia: "Confucianism provided the dominant cultural form of the society, the basic human ideals, the political structure, the social discipline, the educational institutions, the comprehensive style of life."[\(12\)](#) Its influence is not limited to China, but has been strong in Korea, Japan, Taiwan, Vietnam, Hong Kong, and Singapore as well.

Confucianism has been important because it emphasizes the cosmological dynamics of the universe in which Heaven, Earth, and human form an interconnected triad. As Berry frequently says, for the Chinese, the human is the "understanding heart" (*hsin*) of the universe. Thus the role of the human to be in harmony with nature is critical and the responsibility of the rulers and ministers to establish benevolent government is essential.

As humans cultivate themselves they begin to affect the larger social and political order. At the heart of such moral and spiritual cultivation is education. Confucianism has an optimistic view of human nature as essentially good and capable of self improvement through education. Personal self transformation will thus result in social transformation.

For Berry, Confucianism has had significance because of its cosmological concerns, its interest in self-cultivation and education, and its commitment to improve the social and political order. With regard to cosmology Berry has identified the important understanding of the human as a microcosm of the cosmos. Essential to this cosmology is a "continuity of being" and thus a "communion" between various levels of reality- cosmic, social, and personal. (This is similar to the ideas of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Alfred North Whitehead, and other contemporary process thinkers.)

He writes:

According to Confucian teaching, a mutual attraction of things for each other functions at all levels of reality as the interior binding force of the cosmic, social and personal life. More than most traditions, Confucianism saw the interplay of cosmic forces as a single set of intercommunicating and mutually compenetrating realities. These forces, whether living or non-living, were so present to each other that they could be adequately seen and understood only within this larger complex... Because of the intensity with which the Chinese experienced this interior, feeling communion with the real, they set themselves on perfecting humans themselves and the universe by increasing this sympathetic presence of things to each other within a personal and social discipline rather than by intellectual analysis and understanding. Indeed, the Confucian ideal of knowledge was that of an understanding heart rather than a thinking brain.[\(13\)](#)

Confucianism has remained for Berry a dynamic, vitalistic tradition with important implications for current environmental philosophy. Berry notes, however, that there is a disparity between theory and practice in the case of China. He recognizes that China, like many countries, has been involved in deforestation and desertification over the centuries. Furthermore, the contemporary record of China on the environment is far from ideal. Nonetheless, the comprehensive cosmological framework of Confucian thought can be a valuable intellectual resource in reformulating a contemporary ecological cosmology with implications for environmental ethics.

### **Indigenous Religious Traditions**

In addition to a remarkable ability to appreciate the diversity and uniqueness of the great "world" religions, Berry has a lively interest in and empathy for Native religions. He taught several courses at both Fordham and Columbia on American Indian religions and has published a number of articles on the topic. He encouraged his graduate students to write dissertations in this area and several of them have been published[\(14\)](#). He has been warmly received by various Native groups, including tribes on the northwest coast and the Cree and Inuit Indians in northeastern Canada who have been struggling against the massive James Bay hydroelectric project. Overseas he has spent time with the Tboli people in the southern Philippines.

In addition to his own research, writing, and teaching in the field of Native American religions, Berry's appreciation for Native traditions and for the richness of their mythic, symbolic, and ritual life has been enhanced by his encounters with the ideas of Carl Jung and Mircea Eliade. Jung's understanding of the collective unconscious, his reflections on the power of archetypal symbols, and his sensitivity to religious processes has made him an important influence on



Berry's thinking. Moreover, Mircea Eliade's studies in the history of religions has been enormously useful in Berry's understanding of both Asian and Native traditions. This is due in large part to Eliade's ability to interpret the broad patterns of meaning embedded in comparable symbols and rituals across cultures.

Within this larger framework of interpretive categories, then, Berry is able to articulate the special feeling in Native traditions for the sacredness of the land, the seasons, and the animal, bird, and fish life. Native peoples respect Creation because they respect the Creator. They have a deep reverence for the gift of all life and for human's dependency on nature to sustain life. They have perfected some of the ancient techniques of shamanist, ritual fasting and prayer to call on the powers in nature for personal healing and communal strength. They have cultivated an ability to use resources without abusing them and to recognize the importance of living lightly on Earth. This is not to say that Native peoples were the ideal ecologists, either. As in the Chinese case, abuses certainly have occurred. However, for Berry these two traditions (Confucian and Native American) remain central to the creation of a new ecological spirituality for our times.

The first peoples, then, are not merely to be romanticized or idealized as a segment of the past. Rather, their way of life may have much to teach us as we are learning, rather painfully, the limits of natural resources and the consequences of mindless growth. In developing a spirituality of Earth as part of the New Story clearly we will be returning to examine the rich symbols and rituals in the Native American religions. The principal question will no doubt be how to appreciate and understand these symbols and not simply appropriate them as some New Age groups have sometimes unwittingly done.

### **Thomas Berry and the New Story: Teilhard's Influence**

In formulating his idea of the New Story Berry is much indebted to the thought of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. In particular, Berry has derived from Teilhard (and from other writers such as Loren Eiseley) an enormous appreciation for developmental time. As Berry writes frequently, since Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* we have become aware of the universe not simply as a static cosmos but as an unfolding cosmogenesis. The theory of evolution provides a distinctive realization of change and development in the universe which resituates us in a huge sweep of geological time. With regard to developmental time, Teilhard suggested that the whole perspective of evolution changes our understanding of ourselves in the universe. He writes:

For our age to have become conscious of evolution means something very different from and much more than having discovered one further fact... It means (as happens with a child when he acquires the sense of perspective) that we have become alive to a new dimension. The idea of evolution is not, as sometimes said, a mere hypothesis, but a condition of all experience."[\(15\)](#) For Berry the New Story is the primary context for understanding the immensity of cosmogenesis. It is similar to what Loren Eiseley refers to as "The Immense Journey" or "The Firmament of Time"[\(16\)](#).

From Teilhard Berry has also derived an understanding of the psychic-physical character of the unfolding universe. This implies that if there is consciousness in the human and if humans have evolved from Earth, then from the beginning some form of consciousness or interiority is present

in the process of evolution. Matter for both Teilhard and Berry is not simply dead or inert, but a numinous reality consisting of both a physical and spiritual dimension. Consciousness, then, is an intrinsic part of reality and is the thread that links all life forms. There are various forms of consciousness and, in the human, self-consciousness or reflective thought arises.

Berry has also obtained from Teilhard an appreciation for his law of complexity-consciousness. This suggests that as things evolve from simpler to more complex organisms, consciousness also increases. Ultimately self-consciousness or reflection emerges in the human order. The human as a highly complex mammal is distinguished by this capacity for reflection. This gives humans a special role in the evolutionary process. We are part of not apart from Earth.

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. This implies for Berry that we are one species among others and as self-reflective beings we need to understand our particular responsibility for the continuation of the evolutionary process. We have reached a juncture where we are realizing that we will determine which life forms survive and which will become extinct. We have become co-creators as we have become conscious of our role in this extraordinary, irreversible developmental sequence of the emergence of life forms.

Yet Berry has also critiqued Teilhard's overly optimistic view of progress and his apparent lack of concern for the devastating effect that industrial processes were having on fragile ecosystems. He has pointed out that Teilhard was heir to a western mode of thinking which saw the human as capable of controlling the natural world, usually through science and technology. Teilhard's challenge to "build the Earth" reflects some of the unrestrained optimism of humans whose faith in science and technology had no bounds. This overly anthropocentric and blindly optimistic view is something Berry has frequently critiqued.

In addition, Berry has noted Teilhard's surprising lack of appreciation for Asian religions or indigenous traditions despite his long residence and extensive travel in Asia. His attachment to the unique revelation of Christianity and his criticism of Asian religions is reflective of the contemporary theology of his times. It may also be explained as the absence of the opportunity for communication with Chinese scholars of traditional Chinese religions while he resided in Beijing. This may have been due to language barriers, wartime constraints, or lack of time or interest due to other scholarly commitments.

Berry's approach, then, has been much more inclusive in terms of cultural history and religion, while Teilhard has been remarkably comprehensive scientifically. These two approaches have come together in Berry's book written with the mathematical cosmologist, Brian Swimme and called *The Universe Story* (17). Here for the first time is the narration of the story of the evolution of the solar system and Earth along with the story of the evolution of the human and of human societies and culture. While not claiming to be definitive or exhaustive *The Universe Story* sets forth a model for the telling of a common creation story. It marks a new era of self-reflection for humans, one that Berry has described as the "ecological age" (18) or the beginning of the "ecozoic age" (19).



In telling the story of evolution Berry has also tried to keep his language not exclusively Christocentric as Teilhard did. Berry's intent has been to appeal not only to the Christian community but beyond. He is aware of the barriers theological language sometimes creates in the secular world, particularly among environmentalists and people of different faith commitments. He hopes to appeal to a wide variety of individuals who are responsive to the paradigm shift in worldviews that is beginning to take shape in human consciousness. It is a shift that transcends religious or national boundaries and helps to create the common grounds for the emergence of an Earth community.

### **The Origin and Significance of the New Story**

Berry's ideas on the New Story began in the early 1970s as he pondered the magnitude of the social, political, and economic problems we were facing in the human community. His articulation of the need for a new orientation and direction was motivated by his deep concern for the almost suicidal path of humans in their destruction of Earth and in their violence and indifference to one another. The need for a New Story or a functional cosmology, then, arose not as an abstract idea, but as a response to the sufferings of humans in a universe where they saw themselves as deeply alienated<sup>(20)</sup>. This alienation was, no doubt, a particular experience of the west in the post war years as expressed in existentialist philosophy, the death of God theology, and the theater of the absurd. Nonetheless, the spirit of disaffection, ennui, and alienation has spread to other parts of the world due in part to western cultural influences. Berry's New Story provides an important antidote to this disillusionment and despair. It creates, above all, a new context for connection, for purpose, for action. It is an idea with direct implications for providing the human energy needed for positive social, political, and economic change.

Berry first published the "New Story" in 1978 as the initial booklet of the *Teilhard Studies* series in 1978. It was published nearly a decade later by Cross Currents. It was revised slightly for its publication in the *Dream of the Earth* in 1988. Berry originally subtitled the work "Comments on the Origin, Identification and Transmission of Values." The story, then, is intended to be a new orientation and perspective which would provide a moral basis for action. In other words, it is seen as a comprehensive basis for nurturing reciprocity between humans and for fostering reverence between humans and Earth.

Berry opens his essay by observing: "We are in between stories." He notes how the old story was functional because: "It shaped our emotional attitudes, provided us with life purpose, energized action. It consecrated suffering, integrated knowledge, guided education."<sup>(21)</sup> This context of meaning provided by the old story is no longer operative. People are turning to new age novelties or to religious fundamentalism for orientation and direction. However, neither of these directions will ultimately be satisfying. We are confronted with dysfunctionality in both religious communities and in secular societies. Berry proposes a new story of how things came to be, where we are now, and how the human future can be given some meaningful direction. In losing our direction we have lost our values and orientation for human action. This is what the New Story can provide.

Berry cites the Black Death of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as a watershed in the development of western thought. On the one hand, there arose the believing redemption

community while on the other there emerged the scientific creation community. The division between these two has remained strong down to the present. In fact, in our own time the split between the creationists and the evolutionists has been quite heated. On the other hand, there is also emerging a new dialogue between science and religion which is attempting to overcome this dichotomy.

With the spread of the Black Plague in Europe there arose a need to have the intervention of supernatural forces to mitigate the awesome power of death. Because of the vast numbers of people who died (between 1/3 and 1/2 of the population) Christianity embraced a strong redemption oriented theology. To be redeemed and saved out of this world of suffering was the hope held up for all believers. To be assisted in this redemption from suffering by the power of Christ's suffering and death was the aim of the Christian message. Something was lost in this exclusive focus on redemption. Creation theology was subsumed under redemption theology. As Berry wrote: "The primary doctrine of the Christian creed, belief in a personal creative principle, became increasingly less important in its functional role. Cosmology was not of any particular significance." (22) Berry claims that the Christian Story is a sectarian story. It is no longer the story of Earth or the integral story of humankind.(23)

On the other hand, the scientific, secular community sought to remedy the terror of natural events by studying the processes of Earth itself, rather than seeking supernatural intervention. The heavens and Earth were studied with the aid of the telescope and microscope. The scientific endeavor was aided by the 18th century Enlightenment philosophers' celebration of reason and the sociologists' articulation of the progress of the human mind. The biological understanding of development which began in the 19th century was a significant addition to this. It is now being completed by the astronomer's and physicist's exploration of the expanding universe.

The significance of the sense of developmental time for the New Story should be highlighted. The Copernican revolution changed our whole sense of our spatial orientation in the universe. No longer was Earth considered the center of reality. In a similar manner, the Darwinian revolution is altering our sense of time. For the first time it is dawning on human consciousness that Earth is part of an irreversible developmental sequence of time. In other words, life has evolved from less complex to more complex forms. Species did not always exist as they are now; they are derived from early life forms. In other words, "Earth in all its parts, especially in its life forms, was in a state of continuing transformation." (24) This is the first implication of the New Story: we live not simply in a cosmos but in a cosmogenesis.

Secondly, as this reality of developmental time begins to dawn on the human community (although still fiercely resisted by creationists) a realization of the subjective communion of the human with Earth likewise begins to be felt. As Berry expresses it: "The human emerges not only as an Earthling, but also as a worldling. We bear the universe in our beings as the universe bears us in its being. The two have a total presence to each other and to that deeper mystery out of which both the universe and ourselves have emerged."(25) This subjective presence of things to one another is one of the most distinctive features of Berry's thought. In *The Divine Milieu* Teilhard writes of this interior attraction of things in the following passage: "In the Divine Milieu all the elements of the universe touch each other by that which is most inward and ultimate in them."(26) Berry has suggested that the importance of the awareness of the subjective dimension

of the universe story cannot be underestimated. Indeed, he writes: "...the reality and value of the interior subjective numinous aspect of the entire cosmic order is being appreciated as the basic condition in which the story makes any sense at all."[\(27\)](#)

Berry states, then, that to communicate values within this new frame of reference of the Earth story we need to identify the basic principles of the universe process itself. These are the primordial intentions of the universe towards differentiation, subjectivity, and communion. Differentiation refers to the extraordinary variety and distinctiveness of everything in the universe. No two things are completely alike. Subjectivity is the interior numinous component present in all reality also called consciousness. Communion is the ability to relate to other people and things due to the presence of subjectivity and difference. Together these create the grounds for the inner attraction of to the presence of subjectivity and difference. Together these create the grounds for the inner attraction of things for one another. These are principles which can become the basis of a more comprehensive ecological and social ethics that sees the human community as dependent upon and interactive with the Earth community. Only such a perspective can result in the survival of both humans and Earth. As Berry has stated humans and Earth will go into the future as one single multiform event or we will not go into the future at all.

Berry closes his essay on "The New Story" with a powerful passage evoking a confidence in the future despite the tragedies of the present. He writes:

If the dynamics of the universe from the beginning shaped the course of the heavens, lighted the sun and formed the 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.[\(28\)](#)

This then is Berry's New Story, born out of his own intellectual formation as a cultural historian of the West, turning toward Asian religions, examining indigenous traditions, and finally culminating in the study of the scientific story of the universe itself. It is a story of personal evolution against the background of cosmic evolution. It is the story of one person's intellectual history in relation to Earth history. It is the story of all of our histories in conjunction with planetary history. It is a story awaiting new tellings, new chapters, and ever deeper confidence in the beauty and mystery of its unfolding.

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## Notes

1. For a comprehensive discussion of Berry's philosophy of history see John Grim, "Time, History, Vision" in *Cross Currents* Vol. XXXVII, Nos. 2-3, 1987, pp. 225-239.
2. The second edition was published in 1730 and the third edition in 1744 six months after Vico's death. The third edition is available in a revised edition translated by Thomas

Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch, *The New Science of Giambattista Vico* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970).

3. *The New Science of Giambattista Vico*, p. 381.
4. Thomas Berry, *Five Oriental Philosophies* (Albany: Magi Books, 1968).
5. Ibid. PP. 45-46.
6. Ibid. pp. 8-9.
7. Ibid. p. 15.
8. Ibid. p. 21.
9. Ibid. p. 28.
10. Ibid. p. 28.
11. For a comprehensive view of resources within the traditional world religions and within contemporary ecological perspectives see M.E. Tucker & J. Grim, eds. *Worldviews and Ecology*, (Maryknoll: NY Orbis Books, 1994).
12. Thomas Berry, "Affectivity in Classical Confucian Tradition," in *Confucian Spirituality* vol. 1 ed. by Mary Evelyn Tucker (New York: Crossroads, 2003), p. 96.
13. Ibid. pp. 1-2.
14. See for example John Grim, *The Shaman* (Norman- Oklahoma University Press, 1988).
15. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Science and Christ*. (New York- Harper & Row, 1968) p. 193.
16. See Eiseley's books by these titles, *The Immense Journey* first published in 1946 and *The Firmament of Time* published in 1960.
17. Published in 1992 by Harper San Francisco.
18. See Berry's essay with this title in *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988).
19. Berry has written an unpublished essay with this title.
20. For a discussion of Berry's project of articulating a functional cosmology see Brian Swimme, "Berry's Cosmology" in *Cross Currents* Vol. XXXVII, Nos.2-3, 1987, pp. 218-224.
21. Thomas Berry, "The New Story". *Teilhard Studies* no. 1 (Chambersburg, PA. Anima Press, 1978), p. 1.
22. Ibid. p. 2.
23. Ibid. p. 3.
24. Ibid. p. 4.
25. "The New Story" as revised in *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988) p. 132.
26. *The Divine Milieu* (New York- Harper & Row, 1960) p. 92.
27. "The New Story" in *The Dream of the Earth*, p. 135.
28. "The New Story" in *The Dream of the Earth*, p. 137.