

The Call to Ecological Conversion

Session One – The Context for Ecological Theology and Spirituality

Introduction

Spirituality is a characteristic of the human being; it is about the meaning and purpose we attribute to our lives; it encompasses our relationship to self and others, to the world and to the Transcendent. I like this particular description by the American theologian, Sandra Schneiders: “it is an ongoing and coherent approach to life as a consciously pursued and ongoing enterprise”(Schneiders 2003, 167). Of course, there are many, many different ways we can speak about it. The Australian theologian, David Ranson, says this: “Spirituality is a certain attentiveness to life – an attentiveness which contains within itself a certain desire, a certain hopefulness, a certain anticipation. *Spirituality is attention combined with intention* (Simone Weil). Attention animated by desire, or attention become intention, awakens within us the awareness of a deepened relationship with ourselves and with others, with the world and with some greater sense of meaning” (Ranson 2002, 17).

I think that if you are here today listening to me, you already have a lived experience of what spirituality is. You know how restless is the human heart and how much we seek to be transformed. *Christian* spirituality has always been about the theory and practice of the Christian life, but both theory and practice constantly undergo change, not only in observable history, but in the hidden transformations of our own lives. Our beliefs change and with them our spiritual practices. We are always searching. There is always something new to crack open our hearts a little wider.

In the course of this week, I would like to explore with you ecological spirituality (or eco-spirituality as it is often called), in the hopes that you might find yourselves changed in the process. As with any spirituality, it finds expression in the totality of one’s lifestyle. Broadly speaking, it is based in a belief in the sacredness of the entire created universe, in the Divine Mystery being not only the source of all creation but also the sustaining power within it, and in the belief of the interconnectedness of all life. It is about living a life that seeks to care for the earth, that engages with the environmental crises of our time and place, and that longs for and works for justice for all creatures. And it is marked by attitudes of reverence, wonder and gratitude. Clearly it is a spirituality that finds a home in all the religions of the world. And of course there exist non-religious eco-spiritualities.

What I want to look at over the next few days is eco-spirituality within the Christian tradition. There is a vast and growing field of ecological theology that seeks to marry the Christian story with the story of the universe told by science. I would like to talk to you about some of the significant themes that are emerging out of this theology and how they are changing the Christian theological landscape. This theology is unashamedly written with a very clear agenda: the survival of the human species on a flourishing earth. It calls for radical action,

but it also recognizes that such action is only possible if there is first of all a radical transformation of our hearts and minds. And they unfailingly tell us that such a transformation is only possible through some kind of contemplative practice. *In other words, it is our ongoing spiritual transformation that is the sine qua non of the radical changes in lifestyle that the earth requires of us if we are to continue to flourish as a species.*

What is the foundational context of ecological theology and spirituality?

We know that all theology is contextual. Once you start reading some of the literature (and there is plenty to choose from), you begin to see that there are two fundamental stories that underpin the whole enterprise. The first has been called the story of wonder: this is the “new story” of the cosmos as told to us by science, the story of how the universe came into being and how it evolved from the first moment of what is usually called the Big Bang and how it is still evolving to this very day. This is the story that underpins what is sometimes called creation theology, the story that provides a new revelation of God and is seriously studied and contemplated as such by theologians who try to articulate new insights into who or what God is and how God operates.

This story, the Universe story, has the capacity to make us feel profound wonder and joy. The other story is filled with horror and despair. It is the one we see when we look at the world we live in, when we make an audit of what we have done to the earth, particularly in the last two to three hundred years, when scientists talk about fragile and failing biosystems or extinction of species on an unprecedented scale, when we see how the poor and vulnerable of this earth are suffering from the way we have mistreated our earth-mother and our fellow human beings. This is the story of humanity’s thoughtless exploitation of creation for individual gain.

Eco-theology holds these two stories in a creative tension, providing grounds for hope in the face of overwhelming devastation. But the hope lies with *us*, human beings, and theologians are not always optimistic that we will see the light and change ourselves. Some openly countenance the possibility that we will become extinct as a species.

I would like now to examine these two stories in a bit more detail as they are so important to our understanding of any kind of ecological theology or spirituality. I am going to start with the horror story of the ecological crisis we find ourselves in today. You will find this reiterated in all the literature; indeed, it is the pivotal motivation for eco-theology, the “signs of the times” that have brought this particular contextual theology into being. One of the most moving accounts of this story is to be found in Chapter 9 of *Ask the Beasts* by American theologian Elizabeth Johnson. With powerful empathy she evokes its tragic dimensions and concludes that “the ongoing destruction of life on Earth by human action, intended or not, has the character of deep moral failure” (Johnson 2014, 255).”

Pope Francis starts his first encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, with this story. In Chapter One, entitled “What is Happening to Our Common Home,” he states: “Our goal is

not to amass information or to satisfy curiosity, but rather to become painfully aware, to dare to turn what is happening to the world into our own personal suffering and thus to discover what each of us can do about it" (19). You will note that Francis' starting point is what is happening to our common home and his end point or goal is that we do something about it. But look at how we are to get there. We are to *dare* to make the suffering of the world our *own* suffering. Francis asks of us what all the eco-theologians ask for: a radical shift in consciousness that will change the world. How we actually, practically, achieve that shift in consciousness is what eco-spirituality is all about.

What does Francis mention in Chapter One? He speaks of pollution, waste and the throwaway culture, climate change, the issue of water, the loss of biodiversity, decline in the quality of human life and the breakdown of society, and, finally, global inequality. It is a tragic account of human failure. There are many more environmental issues he could have addressed, and no doubt each and every one of us holds particular ones to heart. I would like to point your attention to just one this morning – the issue of loss of biodiversity. I have chosen this because I think that it is often considered of lesser priority than those issues that most obviously impact on human lifestyles, such as climate change and global warming. And yet, Francis has spoken at length on this issue. Perhaps that is not surprising when you consider that it is anticipated that between one-quarter and one-third of the world's animals and plants may be extinct within the next 100 years. I would just like to read with you now a few parts:

Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost for ever. The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right (33).

But a sober look at our world shows that the degree of human intervention, often in the service of business interests and consumerism, is actually making our earth less rich and beautiful, ever more limited and grey, even as technological advances and consumer goods continue to abound limitlessly. We seem to think that we can substitute an irreplaceable and irretrievable beauty with something which we have created ourselves (34).

Because all creatures are connected, each must be cherished with love and respect, for all of us as living creatures are dependent on one another (42).

Francis finishes Chapter One with this sobering assessment:

But we need only take a frank look at the facts to see that our common home is falling into serious disrepair. Hope would have us recognize that there is always a way out, that we can always redirect our steps, that we can always do something to solve our problems. Still, we can see signs that things are now reaching a breaking point, due to the rapid pace of change and degradation;

these are evident in large-scale natural disasters as well as social and even financial crises, for the world's problems cannot be analyzed or explained in isolation. There are regions now at high risk and, aside from all doomsday predictions, the present world system is certainly unsustainable from a number of points of view, for we have stopped thinking about the goals of human activity. "If we scan the regions of our planet, we immediately see that humanity has disappointed God's expectations" (61).

Thankfully, there is another story to be told. In 1992, Brian Swimme, a cosmologist, and Thomas Berry, a cultural historian and theologian, co-wrote a ground-breaking book. It was called *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era--A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos*. This book tells the new creation story. The evidence for it is empirical and scientific, and while much of this knowledge was readily available, what Swimme and Berry did was, first of all, to tell it as a story and then to contextualise the scientific story in a meaningful framework. In so doing they produced some significant interpretive insights. Most significant of these, to my mind, was that this new creation story does not belong to any specific religious tradition but to the whole of humankind; as such it has the potential to unite us by making us see that as creatures we share a common origin and a common destiny. Their great hope is that humankind will appropriate this new story as the new "creation myth" and so find ways to work together to bring in a new age. They call this age the Ecozoic Age; it's also often called the Ecological Age and it is imagined as one where we will find a new way of being human in which together we care for the earth and all her life systems and live in harmony with her.

The trouble is, we *think* we know the evolutionary story of the cosmos. But I believe that Genesis is still far more firmly planted in our Western psyche. If the cosmic story is to have any traction at all, then it also needs to find root in our collective psyche. We need to hear it over and over again; we need to imagine it, reflect upon it, stand in awe before its magnificence and mystery. We have not had our fill of this story. So I am going to tell it to you once again.

The Story of the Universe (slide show)

The observable universe stretches out from Earth in all directions for about 14 billion light years. It all began about 13.7 billion years ago, as an incredibly tiny, incredibly dense and exceedingly hot "singularity" (that is the scientific term), which rapidly began to expand like a balloon. The Big Bang is the metaphor that scientists have chosen to describe this initial moment.

Three minutes later the universe was an expanding and cooling mix of hydrogen and helium nuclei, with small amounts of other elements mixed in. It took another 377,000 years for the first atoms of hydrogen and helium to form.

A billion years later, the still expanding and cooling universe formed clouds of hydrogen and helium, and these evolved into the first galaxies.

The first stars were born and they lit up the universe. Nuclear reactions in these stars produced all the elements we find on earth (excluding hydrogen and helium). “Every atom of every body found on Earth originates in a star. Life is intimately related to the stars. If there were no stars there could be no trees, flowers, kangaroos, or human beings. We are all made from stardust” (Edwards 2004, 13).

There are about 100 billion stars in our Milky Way galaxy, and scientists estimate between 100 and 200 billion galaxies in the observable universe.

About 4.6 billion years ago the Sun was born in the Milky Way and the Solar system of planets formed around it. The Earth was formed.

The first life on earth, appearing around 3.7 billion years ago, were simple cells of bacteria without a nucleus (prokaryotes). A billion years later the eukaryotes appear – single-celled creatures with a nucleus. This was a huge evolutionary step.

Over several billion years the earth’s atmosphere became oxygen-rich due to the photosynthesis of blue-green bacteria. Brian Swimme calls photosynthesis “deep magic.”

Multicellular animals came into being and there is an outburst of creative life. The fossil records show an abundance of diverse life forms in the seas during the Cambrian period (545-495 million years ago).

About 375 million years ago, the first land animals appeared.

248 million years ago there was a terrible extinction of most of the earth’s animals, followed by an era of dinosaurs, flying reptiles, marine reptiles, and mammals in the Triassic (248-206 million years ago) and the Jurassic (206-144 million years ago) periods.

In the Cretaceous period (144-65 million years ago), birds and flowering plants appeared. At the end of this period the dinosaurs became extinct and mammals began to diversify and flourish.

The first hominids evolved from apes between 4 and 2 million years ago in Africa. *Homo erectus* emerged about 2 million years ago and *Homo sapiens* emerged from *Homo erectus* about 180,000 years ago, also in Africa. From there they spread to Australia (60,000 years ago), western Europe (35,000 years ago), eastern Asia (30,000 years ago) and North America about 12,000 years ago.

Diarmuid O’Murchu describes the story thus:

“It is a long, complex narrative full of surprises, occasional failures, and several paradoxes, baffling, mysterious, and mind-blowing. And we have not reached the end yet – if indeed there ever will be an end. Other creatures, perhaps

unimaginable to our minds today, will evolve in due course. There are no limits to the power of creative Spirit” (O’Murchu 2002, 63).

The good news is that this story is readily accessible to anyone who wants to find it. Many documentary films and tv series on the evolution of the cosmos and the wonder of the universe have been made in recent years and they have all been immensely popular. People want to hear this story. This is a very hopeful sign because this story has the power in our day to reawaken in us our sense of wonder, to tell us who we are in the great scheme of the universe and to point the way to a new way of being in the world. We need to hear it imaginatively retold over and over again.

I have given you the briefest of sketches of what this story is about, and you will have observed that I have told it as a series of physical processes. Which, of course, it is. But it is much more than that. Swimme and Berry wrote their book to demonstrate that “the evolutionary process is from the beginning a spiritual as well as a physical process” (Berry 1990, 87). They contend that if life on earth was able to evolve into a species that had psychic and spiritual attributes, then the universe must have had a psychic/spiritual dimension from the very beginning. In *The Dream of the Earth*, written a few years earlier, Thomas Berry wrote this:

Empirical inquiry into the universe reveals that from its beginning in the galactic system to its earthly expression in human consciousness the universe carries within itself a psychic-spiritual as well as a physical-material dimension. Otherwise human consciousness emerges out of nowhere. The human is seen as an addendum or an intrusion and thus finds no real place in the story of the universe. In reality the human activates the most profound dimension of the universe itself, its capacity to reflect on and celebrate itself in conscious self-awareness (Berry 1990, 131-2).

Diarmuid O’Murchu, another well-known ecological theologian, expresses it this way: *the universe is alive*. He writes about it as blessing and extravagant gift, he sees it as an alive universe that requires a relational response, not an exploitative one. His writing is lyrical and passionate as he tries to make us see the world in a different light. This is the task of all those who are writing about ecology today.

Berry’s ultimate analysis of the Universe Story is this:

Although as yet unrealized, this scientific account of the universe is the greatest religious, moral, and spiritual event that has taken place in these centuries. It is the supreme humanistic and spiritual as well as the supreme scientific event. The sublime mission of modern education is to reveal the true importance of the story for the total range of human and earthly affairs (Berry 1990, 98).

All Christian eco-theologians would agree with this view today. But as I said before, this story belongs to us all. Susan Murphy is an Australian Buddhist and Zen teacher who has written a book called *Minding the Earth, Mending the World*. For her, the Universe story has the power to “ignite the imaginative capacity in

human beings to take in what is being made painfully clear by the earth right now, and to respond” (Murphy 2004, 7). The old stories are no longer adequate to help us – in fact, they have contributed to the devastation we now face – and Murphy is passionate about handing on this new story as a way of changing hearts and minds. She is clear eyed about what it takes: conscious intention and effort, which for her translates into the practice of full awareness that is called meditation. What Murphy hoped to achieve in her book was to help us recover our entrancement with the natural world, help us “re-establish ourselves psychically within the reality of the unfolding cosmos,” and to become aware of the connectedness of all life (Murphy 2014, 128).

I highly recommend Berry’s *Dream of the Earth*. It is a book that was prophetic for its time (written in 1988) and it has certainly changed many of my perceptions. I have chosen some paragraphs from Chapter Five, “The Ecological Age,” for you to reflect on.

I propose now that we have a ten minute break in silence, for you to think about what I have said, read, reflect, and then we will have a short time for discussion. My question to you at this point is: are you feeling challenged yet?

What we have looked at so far this morning is our current world reality calling us to change. And when I say “us” I don’t mean Christians in particular, I mean every human being on the planet. That is why Francis addresses his encyclical to the whole human family. “We require a new and universal solidarity,” he says. Let’s briefly consider some secular responses to this current world reality. There is despair, there is indifference, there is denial, there is scepticism, there is lethargy and paralysis, there is blind trust that technology will deliver us. There are individual and local communal efforts at mitigating the damage we have done and continue to do to the earth: think of recycling, solar panels, renewable energy, public transport systems, carbon taxes and emissions schemes and so on. There are lots of small, practically invisible groups of concerned citizens trying to make a difference. There are global initiatives on some environmental issues, climate change in particular, though these have often proved disappointing. There are prophetic non-religious voices.

I would like to mention one such prophetic voice. Naomi Klein, a secular Canadian Jewish feminist, also a journalist, political analyst and social activist, came to Australia last September for the Festival of Dangerous Ideas. She recently wrote a book called *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs the Climate*. I heard her speaking on the radio in Sydney and she said, “We find ourselves facing only radical options...There are no non-radical options on the table” (ABC radio program, *Late Night Live*, Sept 2, 2015). What she meant is that if we do nothing about climate change, our lives will be radically altered by climate change anyway. But if we face the problem and tackle it, it will also require of us radical changes in our lifestyle. She is a powerful and passionate advocate for a different future, and Pope Francis invited her to the Vatican to speak at a press conference on *Laudato Si’* and to participate in a two day conference called “People and Planet First: the Imperative to Change Course.” This was at the start of July last year (2015). Such interesting alliances are bound to continue.

Ecological theologians write often of the urgency of the moment we are living in. There is no time to lose, they say. But this is what Mark Carney, the Governor of the Bank of England, had to say on 29th September 2015, in a speech he gave to Lloyd's of London on climate change and financial stability: "While there is still time to act, the window of opportunity is finite and shrinking."

That the Pope, the leader of the Catholic Church, has written an encyclical addressed to the whole world on the urgency of ecological conversion is nothing less than amazing. It truly is a game changer in the world sphere. Up until that moment, there had certainly been prophetic Christian voices raised up in defence of the earth and the ecological movement as a whole was, I believe, quietly gathering momentum. However, what Pope Francis has done is to bring ecology from the margins into the mainstream. Catholics, at least, can no longer say that this is not a grave moral issue. It is, in fact, being presented as the most pressing moral issue of our times.

In 1967 there appeared an article in an American magazine called *Science*, entitled "The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis." The writer was Lynn White, Jr., a historian, and his article rocked the Christian theological world. In his relatively brief analysis he laid the blame for the ecological crisis on Western Christianity, declaring that it bore "a huge burden of guilt" for its anthropocentrism and its arrogant indifference towards nature. It is certainly true that Christianity has much to answer for. However, it is also true that there have always been strands of Christian thought, theology and practice that have stood out against the dominant model. (If you interested in reading more on this particular topic, Elizabeth Johnson has an excellent article entitled "Losing and Finding Creation in the Christian Tradition" in *Christianity and Ecology*, ed. Dieter Hessel and Rosemary Radford Ruether, 2000.)

Lynn White's critique of Christianity obviously disturbed a lot of theologians and made them critically re-examine their theology. But they weren't just interested in defending Christian theology as it stood. They began to look for new ways of articulating it in such a way that it would give us new understandings of God, of creation, of what it means to be human, and of Jesus Christ as the Incarnate Son of God. And running through all this work that candidly sought to change our worldview and to bring us into communion with the natural world, there is a common thread of recognition that this knowledge is not enough. It has to become a lived knowledge, a living faith. The future of the earth depends on it. Over the next few days, I will be looking at some of these theological voices and some of the important themes that we find in eco-theology.

Some of the important (English-speaking) voices in this field: Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, Denis Edwards, Elizabeth Johnson, Sean McDonagh, Diarmuid O'Murchu, Sallie McFague, Ilia Delio.

I want to finish today's session by asking you to reflect on yourselves, on your own relationship with the two stories that I have put before you this morning. How much are you aware of the state of the planet? Do you need to find out

more? How much do you care? Could the Universe Story speak to you more deeply? In what ways could you engage with the Universe Story so as to let it ignite your imagination and change your consciousness? Do you believe that we have a pressing moral responsibility to care for the earth right now, or do you see things quite differently? (A few minutes for silent reflection.)

Guided Meditation: Coming Home to the Incarnation in Creation (Delio, Warner and Wood 2008, 56-60).

Find a comfortable position and close your eyes. Bring your attention to your breath and allow your body to relax. Scan your body, your heart and your mind. Without judgment, notice where you are today. Letting go of any activities you have done or things yet to do, just settle into this present moment. Watch as thoughts come and go. As they arise, imagine them as a leaf or a feather, letting go as they float gently on the breeze to settle onto the earth.

Now notice the weight of your body against your chair. Some parts of your body rest more heavily against the chair than others. Imagine each of these points of contact relaxing a little and melting towards the earth. Feel the solidity of the earth and the way it holds you. Relax into this, letting gravity help you turn your tension over to the earth. As the earth absorbs your tension, and your muscles relax, feel gravity working on you and holding you safely against the earth. God desires our closeness and connection with the earth, which holds us close like a mother through its gravitational pull. Every planet and star, every human and animal, every rock and tree and plant, every molecule and every atom are attracted to one another through this basic force that binds the universe together into one big cosmic family. Now listen to your heart beating and relax even more into this solidity.

Saint Francis of Assisi loved the earth; he walked respectfully over the land as holy ground. When he walked over rocks, "he would walk with fear and reverence out of love for Him who is called 'the Rock.'" We too are called to tread lightly on our planet, always supported by our Earth home, which has been created to sustain us in every moment.

Now bring attention to your breath. Simply notice your breath, with no need to change it in any way. When your mind wanders, gently nudge it back to the breath, letting it rest there. Let your mind stay passive yet alert as your body begins to relax. Bring to your awareness the fact that your breath happens by itself. Even when you are not mindful of it, the Spirit of Life breathes through you in every moment of your life. Spend some time now nurturing an awareness of this miracle of breath. Now bring to mind the air that extends out from your breath, moving beyond you to fill the whole sky, joining with the great winds that encircle our planet. From the oceans to the deserts to the wind over high alpine meadows, our home planet is refreshed by this life-giving air, which moves across its surface in currents of wind and weather. Our thin layer of atmosphere miraculously protects the fragility of life on this planet. With Francis, we can dance with Brother Wind, and gaze upon Sister Moon and the stars, contemplating the vastness of God revealed to us in our universe home. We can be mindful that this precious air connects us to one another, across the globe and through the ages. This same air we breathe was breathed by our ancestors, by saints and sinners throughout time, by Francis himself. It will continue to

circulate in this way until our children and great-great-grandchildren also breathe it through their lungs, so that they too may be filled with life.

Now picture the sun wherever it is in the sky. Each morning our planet turns toward the sun, soaking in its warmth and suckling its life energy. In each second our great, generous sun offers up four million tons of itself, transformed into radiant light and energy daily, free for all of life on Earth to use. Green plants have evolved to take in this energy from the sun and convert it to food and energy for themselves. By doing so, plants feed all of life on this planet as they make that energy available to humans and other mammals to ingest when we eat. All life depends on energy, and all energy has the sun as its ultimate source. With Francis, we too revel in the miracle of Brother Sun, whose life-giving energy courses through our own bodies too: warming our hearts, igniting our dreams and fueling our work in the world.

Now bring to mind the element of water in our blue-green planet home; the great oceans that cover two-thirds of its surface, the streams and rivers and lakes. Picture, too, the huge glaciers and snow-capped mountains that hold our water in reserve for us, releasing it slowly over time for the use of all living beings, and the ice caps that cool our poles and play such a key role in the circulation of air and water throughout our planet. Give thanks for the water cycle that draws all this water into our atmosphere, circulating the water across the world, bringing the cleansing rains that feed all of life. We take in this water: it composes 70 percent of our bodies and is contained in each and every cell and in our blood and our tears. Those who lived with Francis tell of him reverencing water by choosing to wash his hands “where the water would not be trampled underfoot after washing.” With Francis, we marvel at the wonder of water and honor the lifeblood of our bodies and our bounteous earth.

Like all living creatures, we humans need food, a home and a family, and none other exists for us or any other living creature than our planet Earth. Walking with Francis through God’s house, honoring each of the elements of creation, we are awed by the amazing hospitality of our planet home. We prodigal sons and daughters can learn to fall in love again with our planet home, and come to more fully appreciate our utter dependence on its bounty. We can follow Francis’ example of remembering that the earth is not our home alone, but is first and foremost God’s house. We can build anew bonds of love, care, concern and companionship with not only our human brothers and sisters, but with the house of creation that sustains us and is kin to us all. We can walk in God’s Incarnation daily, remembering that the face of the Divine shines through each and every thing, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant. Through creation, the ineffable is made tangible, and we can sense the radiance of God in the beauty of the natural order.

Now sit for a few minutes in silence, letting yourself rest into the experience of this meditation with a grateful heart for all that our Creator has given us. Bring your attention back to your breath, resting it there for a few moments, and when you are ready, open your eyes.

“I believe that Saint Francis is the example par excellence of care for the vulnerable and of an integral ecology lived out joyfully and authentically” (Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’*, 100).

Session One Reading

Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*: Chapter Five, "The Ecological Age"

Our present awakening from this enchantment with technology has been particularly painful. We have altered the earth and human life in many irrevocable ways. Some of these have been creative and helpful. Most have been destructive beyond imagination.

Presently we are entering another historical period, one that might be designated as the ecological age. I use the term *ecological* in its primary meaning as the relation of an organism to its environment, but also as an indication of the interdependence of all the living and nonliving systems of the earth. This vision of a planet integral with itself throughout its spatial extent and its evolutionary sequence is of primary importance if we are to have the psychic power to undergo the psychic and social transformations that are being demanded of us. These transformations require the assistance of the entire planet, not merely the forces available to the human. Otherwise we mistake the order of magnitude in this challenge...It is a radical change in our mode of consciousness. Our challenge is to create a new language, even a new sense of what it is to be human. It is to transcend not only national limitations, but even our species isolation, to enter into the larger community of living species. This brings about a completely new sense of reality and value. (41-42)

The ecological age fosters the deep awareness of the sacred presence within each reality of the universe. There is an awe and reverence due to the stars in the heavens, the sun, and all heavenly bodies; to the seas and the continents; to all living forms of trees and flowers; to the myriad expressions of life in the sea; to the animals of the forests and the birds of the air. To wantonly destroy a living species is to silence forever a divine voice. Our primary need for the various lifeforms of the planet is a psychic, rather than a physical, need. (46)

At present, however, we are in that phase of transition that must be described as the groping phase. We are like a musician who faintly hears a melody deep within the mind, but not clearly enough to play it through. This is the inner agony we experience, especially when we consider that the music we are creating is the very reality of the universe. (47)

What is clear is that the earth is mandating that the human community assume a responsibility never assigned to any previous generation. (47)

Questions for Reflection

I want to finish today's session by asking you to reflect on yourselves, on your own relationship with the two stories that I have put before you this morning. How much are you aware of the state of the planet? Do you need to find out more? How much do you care? Could the Universe Story speak to you more deeply? In what ways could you engage with the Universe Story so as to let it ignite your imagination and change your consciousness? Do you believe that we have a pressing moral responsibility to care for the earth right now, or do you see things quite differently?