



Chrysalis

Volume 20 Fall 2023

*Journal of
The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World*

Dear Reader,

When asked how we might serve the children at this time, Thomas Berry would say, “Tell them a story.” Any encounter with Thomas Berry was an encounter with the story of the universe as a great story encompassing vast reaches of time and space and also as an intimate story about you and me and him and the bluebird singing in the dogwood this very moment. In his presence one sensed the beauty of every aspect of life on earth; one felt the wonder of the extraordinary in every ordinary element of being; and one experienced our intimate kinship with all beings with whom we share the earth. When he spoke one was inspired by a sense of the place of the human in the story of the unfolding of time in the universe and by the moment of shared presence with a fern unfolding in springtime at one’s feet. In his own words we can hear again how Thomas wove the immediate into the grandeur of things and how he heard each note in time for its contribution to the unfinished symphony of the cosmos.

It was to Thomas Berry’s own words that we turned in 2014 to create a performance piece, *The Meadow Across the Creek: Words from Thomas Berry*, commemorating the 100th Anniversary of his birth. Performed at the Greensboro Historical Museum on November 7, 2014, we were especially grateful to Thomas’ sister, Dr. Margaret Berry, for meeting with us over the course of several months and introducing us to Dick Douglas, who also regaled us with stories of Thomas in his early years.

This year, with the publication of our new book, *The Place of Our Belonging: A Work for Children and Educators Mentored by Thomas Berry*, it seemed significant to publish the script of this performance created nine years ago. We opened the performance with the following welcoming remarks, as we welcome you to read the script today:

“A full November moon has guided us on our way here this evening as we gather to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of Thomas Berry’s birth.



The Center for Education, Imagination
and the Natural World

STAFF

Peggy Whalen-Levitt, Director

EDUCATOR COUNCIL

Renée Eli
Mary Hartsell
Catherine Hines
Andrew Levitt
Marie Nordgren
Sally Pamplin
Tom Roepke
Colette Segalla

FOUNDER

Carolyn Toben

Chrysalis is published twice yearly.

Copyright 2023, The Center for Education, Imagination and
the Natural World.

Wood Engraving by Ilya Schor

EDITOR: Peggy Whalen-Levitt

DESIGN: Peggy Whalen-Levitt

LAYOUT: Arrowhead Graphics

PRINTING: Arrowhead Graphics

By becoming a Friend of the Center, you receive two copies of
Chrysalis a year.

The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World
P.O. Box 41108

Greensboro, NC 27404

Email: beholdnature@aol.com

www.beholdnature.org

The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World
is a non-profit organization recognized as tax-exempt by the
IRS under section 501(c)(3).

While the life and work of Thomas Berry is being celebrated all over the world this weekend, there is a particular significance to our celebration here.

Thomas was born just ten blocks from where we are seated tonight at St. Leo's Catholic Hospital on Summit Avenue, operated by the Sisters of Charity. He attended St. Benedict's Catholic Church and School, just two blocks away.

Thomas was to spend the first 14 years of his life in Greensboro before he went off to boarding school in Maryland. He returned to Greensboro in 1995 to spend the last 14 years of his life here. This was his home, his place of family and deep belonging at the beginning and end of his life.

It was here in the foothills of North Carolina that Thomas Berry had formative experiences as a child that influenced his thinking throughout the rest of his life.

And it was here in the foothills of North Carolina that Thomas wrote his last four books.

During his last years, Thomas also wrote an unpublished essay called "Goldenrod" in which he reflected back on the meaning of his life and work.

Many of the words you will hear this evening come from that essay, as well as from his unpublished poems and published books. All of the words you will hear tonight are Thomas' own. As the script by Andrew Levitt unfolded, Scott Walker made musical selections that echo and resonate with Thomas Berry's words.

We hope you will glean from this evening's performance a sense of the destiny of this wise and visionary man. Thomas seemed always to be awake to an awareness that something numinous operates in our lives that calls us forth beyond personal history into a future yet to be created.

Come walk with Thomas Berry. See with new eyes.... Hear with new ears....”



May Thomas continue to remind us of who we truly are,

Peggy Whalen-Levitt

Peggy Whalen-Levitt, Director

The Meadow Across the Creek: Words From Thomas Berry

Performed at the Greensboro Historical Museum

November 7, 2014

Commemorating the 100th Anniversary of the Birth of Thomas Berry

Script and Recitation: Andrew Levitt

Solo Cello and Guitar: Scott Walker

All the words of this performance are Thomas Berry's own, drawn from an unpublished autobiographical essay, unpublished poems, and excerpts from his books.¹ We are especially grateful to Thomas' sister, Dr. Margaret Berry, for meeting with us over the course of several months and introducing us to Dick Douglas, who also regaled us with stories of Thomas in his early years.

Opening Music

Prelude

Opening

Children of the Forest

(August 1995. Inspired by the drawing of a woodland scene by a young student of Public School 240, Brooklyn, New York)

(In meadow)

We are all children
of the forest. Here
we are sheltered from
the sun as we watch
the squirrels climb through
the trees, the deer browse
the small budding branches.

¹ We are grateful to Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, executors of Thomas Berry's literary estate, for permission to include several of Thomas Berry's unpublished poems and excerpts from his unpublished essay, "Goldenrod," here.

Here in the forest
we listen to the wind
as it rustles the leaves
of the great oak trees.
We listen and we learn
to make music on our
flutes and our drums.

We are all children
of the forest. Here
the rain drips down
gathers into streams
then into rivers
that flow far away into
the deep blue sea.

The squirrels and the rabbits
the winds and the rain
we dance and we sing
and we all play together
the trees the flowers
the butterflies, the birds
the chipmunks, the bear
and the deer.

All of us, children of
the forest. We whirl
and we tease and we chase
one another until the western
sky glows in the golden
light of evening. Then
we lie down to sleep
beside each other in
the warmth of the night
that covers us with
its blanket of darkness.

Then the stars come
out and sing to us
as we drift far away
far, far away
into dreamland.

Musical Interlude:

Jan's Song, Cello, S. Walker

(Cross to Lectern)

Here Is Where We Are

(At lectern)

Orientation in Time

This is an auspicious occasion. It required ten billion years for the universe to bring the Earth into existence and another 4.6 billion years for the Earth to shape itself into the splendor of this moment. (GW, 27)

“Some 65 million years ago the Cenozoic era began, the period when life as we know it took shape. During the Cenozoic the life systems of Earth brought forth their most entrancing beauty. This was the period of flowers in their unnumbered variety and in all their gorgeous colors and fantastic shapes. A wildly creative period of divine fantasy and extravagant play. This was the period of music, of winds through the trees, the call of the mockingbird, the song of the whales in the sea; this period saw the flight of the osprey, the colorful patterns on the wings of the butterfly, the fireflies in the evening. ...

“Ritual enabled humans to enter into the grand liturgy of the universe itself...

“This was a period of wonder and creativity that was to shape the human future until our times... The human experienced itself in integral relationship with the surrounding forces of the universe. ... (ET, 49-50)

“Now toward the beginning of the 21st) century we are giving to the next generation amazing powers of nuclear energy, of space travel, of instant computer command over an infinite amount of data, of immediate communication with anyone anywhere on the globe. We are providing an understanding of the universe in its large scale as well as its small scale structure and functioning. Yet we are also giving the next generation a plundered planet, a planet with its natural beauty severely disfigured and with profound disruption of its natural capacity to renew itself.” (Gr, 2)

“We are at the end of the Cenozoic era in the biological history of the Earth and moving into the beginning of the Ecozoic,”(ET, 49) “... the coming period when humans (will) be present to the Earth in a mutually-enhancing manner.”(Gr, 4)

Musical Interlude

Wind on the Water, Cello, S. Walker

The North American Continent

In these opening years of the 21st century
...we reflect
in a moment of quiet, on our dwelling place
here on this continent.

...We come
to reflect on how, centuries ago,
we might have joined the community of life here,
we might have established an intimacy
with this continent in all its manifestations.
We might have seen this
as divinely blessed land to be revered
and dwelt in as a light and gracious presence.

We might have felt the divine in every breeze
that blew across the landscape, seen
in every flowering plant, wondered at
in every butterfly dancing
across a meadow in daylight,
in every firefly in the evening.

But if in the past we have not been sensitive
to the deeper meaning of this continent,
we come here today as pilgrims,...

Pilgrims, penitent, we bring with us
the promise of dedicating ourselves
to relieving the oppression
we have imposed in the past
and beginning a new era
in our presence here today.

We begin to understand that the way
to the world of the sacred is through
the place of our dwelling.

We are finally awakening to the beauty of this land.
We are finally accepting the discipline of this land.
We are finally listening to the teaching of this land.
We are finally absorbed in the delight of this land...

Today we begin to relieve an ancient wrong.
We wish especially to restore to this continent
its ancient joy. For while much of what
we have done is beyond healing, there is
a resilience throughout the land that only
awaits its opportunity to flourish once again
with something of its ancient splendor.

So far as we are able, we wish to evoke
these powers to their full expression
so that the primordial liturgy of divine praise
that once arose from this continent might again
burst forth in a new brilliance of expression.

We are concerned for the children,
the children of every living being
on this continent, the children
of the trees and grasses,
the children of the wolf,
the bear and the cougar,
the children of the bluebird
and the thrush and the great raptors
that soar through the heavens,

the children of the salmon
that begin and end their lives
in the upper reaches
of the Western rivers,
the children, too, of human parents
for all the children are born
into a single sacred community.

It is increasingly clear that none
of the children, nor any living being
on this continent or throughout
the entire planet has any integral future

except in alliance with every
other being that finds its home here.

... we come here as pilgrims to this continent
to beg a blessing from its mountains and valleys
and from all their inhabitants. We beg a blessing
that will heal us of the responsibility
for what we have done,
a blessing that will give us the guidance
and the healing that we need.

For we can never bring a healing
to this continent until we are first
blessed and first healed by this continent.

To make ourselves worthy of this blessing
is the task to which we dedicate ourselves
in these opening years of the 21st century,
that all the children of Earth
might walk serenely into the future
as a single sacred community.

(Unpublished poem)

Musical Interlude:

Thomas Berry Theme, Cello, G. Schreiner

(Cross to desk)

Beginning the Story

(At the desk with shawl)

Beginning the Story

(Sitting) “Tell me a story. How often we said that as children. Tell me a story. Story illumined the world for us in childhood. Even now we might make the request: tell me a story...A story of where we are and how we got here and the characters and roles that we play. Tell me a story, a story that will be my story as well as the story of everyone and everything about me...”(DOTE, 171)

(Rise and go to Center stage) “Children need a story that will bring personal meaning together with the grandeur and meaning of the universe. ...” (DOTE, 131)

(Center stage) “This intimacy with the universe can be seen in the initiation ceremony of the Omaha Indians. When an infant is born, the child is taken out under the sky and presented to the universe with the invocation ‘O Ye Sun, Moon, Stars, all Ye that move in the heavens, I bid you hear me. Into your midst has come a new life. Consent Ye, we implore, make its path smooth that it may move beyond the first hill.’ After this invocation to the heavenly powers, the invocation is made to the atmospheric powers, to the clouds, the wind, the rain, and the snow, with a similar petition that these powers too would accept the child and guide it on its way. So too an invocation was made to the powers of living beings on the Earth, and then to the Earth and the insects and to all those beings that live within the Earth. In this manner the covenant of Earth was affirmed. Humans asserted their intimacy with the Earth and acknowledged their dependence on the larger community for whatever they needed in life.” (ET, 115)

“...now in our modern scientific age, in a manner never known before, we have created our own sacred story, the epic of evolution, telling us, from empirical observation and critical analysis, how the universe came to be, the sequence of its transformations down through some billions of years, how our solar system came into being, then how the Earth took shape and brought us into existence.

“This is our sacred story. It is our way of dealing with the ultimate mystery whence all things come into being. It is much more than an account of matter and its random emergence into the visible world about us...

“To appreciate the numinous aspect of the universe as this is communicated in this story we need to understand that we ourselves activate one of the deepest dimensions of the universe.

“In ourselves the universe is revealed to itself as we are revealed in the universe...it is within our own being that we have our own unique experience of the universe and of the Earth in its full reality.”(GW, 31-32)

Musical moment:

Courante, from Cello Suite No. 1 in G, Cello, J.S. Bach

(Return to desk, shed blanket)

Thomas' Story

(Sitting) “Perhaps...younger folk, whose lives will be lived in the 21st century, can obtain some insight into how their world here on the North American continent came to be as it is, if I give them some indication of how one person responded to his life situation in the 20th century.” (Gr, 2)

“To understand my own life it is somewhat necessary to appreciate the city of my childhood, the city to which I have been profoundly dedicated throughout the course of my life. The city where I feel

most myself. This city has fascinated me from my earliest days of consciousness. In a sense I am returning to this city in the things that I write now for, at the end of life, there seems to be a desire to return to our beginnings.” (Gr, 5)

“Sometime in the year 1913 or early 1914, (my father) William Berry with (my mother) Elizabeth Vize got off the train in the small town of Greensboro, North Carolina, and walked across the street to the old Clegg hotel. As he said later, he came to town with two children and two dollars.” (Gr, 5)
“A day or so later he rented a house on Edgeworth Street just below Greenhill Cemetery.” (Gr, 5)

The Move to Colonial Avenue

(Rise and move to front of desk) “In the late summer of 1920 when I was six years old the family moved to a house on Douglas Street at the southeast corner of Macon, in the southeast part of the city. I remember vividly the Sweet Gum tree in the small back yard. The yard itself was mostly bare, but beyond the house across Macon Street a small stream ran through a meadow on down to South Buffalo Creek. Willow trees grew alongside the stream while along the road there were white oaks. Often I sat by the stream and simply watched the flow of the water, especially in those places where it flowed over rocks to make a tiny waterfall. This was not wilderness. Yet it was away from houses and away from people. A mysterious place, I found here something beyond what I experienced elsewhere. It was a healing place. It affected my thinking throughout the years to come. **(Rise and go to meadow)** In January of 1927 we moved from Douglas Street to the Kirkwood section of the city along the northern border of the city.” (Gr, 10)

PAUSE

(At meadow)

The Olde House

(For Merse on Her 80th Birthday)

Musical Accompaniment:

Incidental Music, Guitar, S. Walker

(Standing in meadow)

There were lilies
in the field across
the creek when first
we came to the old
Kirkpatrick Place
along the northern border

of Greensboro
beyond Irving Park.

There were lilies in the field that spring
the first time I saw
them blooming above
the thick grass. Crickets
were singing everywhere.
Mules with a drag pan
had dug out the basement.
The wooden frame was set
in place. Then brick
was laid. Tapestry Brick
it was called because
of the deep colors
baked into the clay.

It was 1927
a year after Ben was born
we moved from Douglas Street
in January, it was
a few months before
Lindbergh flew the Atlantic.

There the house stood
on Colonial Avenue
off Cornwallis Drive maybe
eight miles from
the battlefield where
Cornwallis fought the
farmers of the region
under General Greene.
It was two years before
the Depression broke
over the land. The Jefferson
building on the corner
of Market and Elm gave
a certain lofty feeling
to the town of twenty
thousand. I was in
the seventh grade.

St. Benedict's School
opened that year...

We bought our first radio
listened to Amos and Andy.
Mary Elizabeth, at school
in Emmitsburg, came home
on the Crescent Limited.

So many things a person
forgets as the years pass
the books we read, the
movies seen at the National
or Imperial or Carolina theaters:
Douglas Fairbanks, Mary
Pickford, Greta Garbo,
Valentino, Chaplin,
and Keaton and Harold Lloyd,
and William S. Hart, the
original two-gun Western hero.

So much we forget. The long
breakfast room table
the large kettle over
the open fire in the backyard
on washday. Merse's
five-gaited horse Prince
with his graceful
Plantation Walk.

We played
drop-the-handkerchief
Sunday mornings when
the generations chased
each other around the circle
together with friends each
brought home from church
for breakfast.

It was a gracious time.
We wondered about

our future but not often
there were meals to be served,
lessons learned. Now it is
all a deep feeling of time
gone by. It was a floating
world, a drifting through
each day, surviving
presently. Somewhere
there was meaning.

(Unpublished poem)

PAUSE

The Move to Colonial Avenue (continued)

(Sit on stump) "...After we moved across town, I found more extensive range for my roaming through the woodlands north of the city where I could camp out on occasion on the shores of a nearby lake. Meadows and creeks and woodlands, mockingbirds and red-winged blackbirds, and the sound of crickets in the fields were always nearby in summer; while in the winter there was the stillness of the land, only the sound of the wind flowing through the pines. There was an infinite distance between these realities and the realities that impinged on my awakening consciousness from the human world. I wondered why the mysterious attractions of the natural world were missing in the human world. **(Rise)** I needed a way of life integral with these modes of life expression.... **(Turn upstage to desk, then turn back at desk front as if remembering.)** Among my most vivid memories are those of the bluebirds coming through in the last week of February or the early days of March and resting on a nearby fence-rail before continuing their journey." (Gr, 10)

PAUSE

The City

(Return to front of desk) "The story of Greensboro is the story of many cities in North America, places that began in a certain delightful setting in nature and which were gradually drawn into the industrial-commercial world of modern times and which are now reflecting on what has happened to them over the course of the years. Wonderful things have happened as well as less desirable things." (Gr, 3)

"During my lifetime (Greensboro) has grown from a small town of 12,000 to a city of some 200,000 people." (Gr, 7)

"Greensboro was developing a consciousness of itself in its status as a prosperous commercial city. This was the promise and the expectation." (Gr, 7)

“We were told the story of infinite and unending progress with America as the leading force in our human entry into Wonderland.” (Gr, 3)

Musical Accompaniment:

Incidental Music into Wind on the Water Theme, Cello, S. Walker

“All too easily Greensboro became a commercial center for the region. To be connected with establishments outside the region was preferred to connections inside the region. Production and distribution now depended on jobs tied in with outside markets and production centers. It was an exciting time. There was money to be made.” (Gr, 8)

“It was a typical small town moving through the sequence of transition phases beginning with a certain self-sustaining economy and a sense of local community, on through the more advanced stages of professional life largely through the medical and legal professions and education. Then advancing through the period of streetcars, railways and country roads to automobiles, paved streets, shopping centers, parking lots, industrial parks and extensive corporation headquarters in extensive surroundings sometimes designated as campuses.” (Gr, 8)

Musical Accompaniment:

Bowing, S. Walker

(Rise) “The area occupied by the city was extended again and again. Large areas of land were scraped clear of their topsoil, wooded areas were cleared – all for industrial development projects. So too the inner city lost its position as a central retail center to a succession of shopping centers and later malls. These could offer endless expanses of parking space. **(PAUSE)**

(Move behind desk and standing) “There was at the time no way of giving a critique of this process. (To) be against development was to be unintelligent or simply an obstructionist. Rejection of the commercial possibilities was the central evil to be avoided since it was obvious that life was improving for the people generally. Yet Greensboro was becoming alienated from the genius of its place. (Gr, 10)

Musical Interlude (Sit in desk chair):

Wind on the Water, Cello, S. Walker

Deepening the Sacred Sense of the Story

(Sitting at desk)

The Wild

(Sitting) “I wished to escape from (the) reengineered world into what can only be identified as the wild, not simply the wild of the outer world, but the wild of the inner world.” (Gr, 12)

(Stand behind desk) “Religion I always associated with the wild. In church I was entranced with... the manner in which the transition moments in the daily and yearly cycles of nature were sacred moments. **(Move to front of desk, sit on front of desk)** I wished for some understanding of the stars in the night sky. One of the most ecstatic moments of life was when I learned that prayer in the morning and in the evening was associated with...natural phenomena...That dawn and sunset were moments when the deep mysteries of the universe become present to us with special depth of feeling was evident to me from my earliest years. It was evident to me that this relation of human activity to the cosmological order should be the controlling context and the basic value in the total course of human affairs.” (Gr, 16)

Yet “the natural world as a realm with its own inherent rights to existence (did not) fit in with the religious piety of the period.” (Gr, 21)

“...There existed, it seems to me from the foundation of this country a certain autism as regards the relation of humans to the natural world. The difficulty is not simply that the older generation of my time and my own generation have been autistic to the natural world and have done such enormous damage to the integral structure and functioning of the planet; the difficulty is that they did this with good intentions, to make life better for themselves and for those who would come after them.

“The account of how I became increasingly aware of (the) cosmological and biological dimensions of existence is the story of my life. My quest for understanding this larger context of things conditioned all the decisions I made about my life. I saw life with its larger context, eventually within the context of the universe itself.” (Gr, 24)

“My role, it seems, has been to tell the story of the culture into which I was born and to foster a newly emergent historical-cultural period that I refer to as the Ecozoic Era, the Era when humans will be present to the Earth in a mutually-enhancing manner.” (Gr, 24)

“The entire span of my life has been required for me to understand even in some faint manner just what was happening. But already in early childhood, during the early 1920s, the essential aspects of the cultural pathology had become evident.” (Gr, 24)

“How to respond to this situation without going into a negativism or an inner disintegrating experience, how not to lose the joy of life, how to appreciate the positive accomplishments of the period, how to benefit from the education presented by the society without being absorbed into its illusions; these were the questions from early childhood. I never doubted that there were answers, that they would be communicated somehow through the course of my life, provided I was willing to engage in the quest for understanding.

“I had to trust and follow my own inner spontaneities while avoiding disturbing confrontation whenever possible. The outer supports for my own instinctive judgments were minimal. That I was

able to do this, to some extent at least, was undoubtedly due to the positive elements in the family setting of my life, in the religious traditions that I was heir to, to the education I received, to the persons that I met.” (Gr, 25)

(Move to back of the desk standing) “As I see it now, I was appealing ultimately to the wilderness, even perhaps to the lost wilderness, as the source of my support, but even more to the wilderness within the deep recesses of my own being. The destiny of the other living beings, was also my own destiny.

“The wonder of the sky and clouds by day and the stars at night, all these remain with me, the streams, the fish, the small flying squirrels, the rabbits chewing on the grasses, the long black snakes, the butterflies, the rising and falling of the late summer music of the insects that pervaded the countryside.

“This presence to the natural world has been the saving dimension of my life. **(Sit at desk)** Although I could not name it at the time I was aware of some absorbing mystery present throughout the natural world. This I experienced at all times but more profoundly while lying on my back in a meadow or along a nearby lake and watching the clouds as they would take on such playful shapes in the sky. This was no experience of the Rocky Mountain peaks or of Mount Rainier, or even the experience of Mount Mitchell in the Southern Appalachians. It was no experience of the Sonora desert of the southwest. Nor the coasts of Maine. Yet it was my childhood wilderness.” (Gr, 25-26)

Musical Interlude:

Jan’s Song, Cello, S. Walker

The Monastery

“Just how I came to leave my close association with all this to venture into the monastery and its enclosure is more than I can say. I knew that I needed to leave my home town. To me it was a suffocating context of life. There was no context for anything other than a commercial career or that of law or medicine within the newly developing technological world. There was the career of teaching but that too was questionable as regards just how to get the training and even what to teach.

(Start to rise) “It was the shamanic dimension of my own psychic structure that required that I go into some manner of inner experience in association with the natural world. This was not simply to enter into some form of the spiritual life but to take on a social role. As I envisage it now, this role was closer to the shamanic role. (Gr, 26) **(Go to front of desk in pause)**

(Sitting on front of desk facing right) “More than any other of the human types concerned with the sacred, the shamanic personality journeys into the far regions of the cosmic mystery and brings back the vision and the power needed by the human community at the most elementary level. The shamanic personality speaks and best understands the language of the various creatures of the earth. (DOTE, 211-212)

“My experience of the natural world was limited at the time. Yet already I had, it seems, the experience I needed. It was sufficient to awaken in me a mystique of the natural world... The volume of such experiences may not be the determining thing. It may be rather the quality of the experience.” (Gr, 26)

“My path was not that of John Muir or of Aldo Leopold, or of Rachel Carson. It was rather closer to the medieval mystics who lived an intensive existence within a limited space until the time came to take on a larger role.” (Gr, 26)

Musical Break:

Incidental Music, Cello, S. Walker

“... at the end of high school I was still wondering just what direction to take.” (Gr, 35)

“After an additional year of study, in 1934 I entered a monastery where I began a long period of thought and reflection. These were years of isolation from the wider life of the society, years of rising at two o’clock in the morning for chanting the night liturgy and for meditation...

“The psalms sung in these various moments of the day-night cycle celebrated the cosmological sequence of dawn, noon, afternoon, evening and night moments. These moments that gave to life its deep meaning. So, too, the cycle of the year, the solstice moment of Christmas, the resurrection-renewal moment of springtime. There still existed a continuity between the cosmological and the human. Despite all the trivialization observable throughout the tradition, something immensely significant was still available in this carrying out of the age-old effort of humans to bring human life into accord with the great liturgy of the universe. That the universe itself was the primary liturgy just as it was the primary scripture I never doubted.” (Gr, 35-36)

The Great Work

(Face left while sitting) “At this time I began to understand my life as a dedication to some Great Work, first to identifying the destructive tendency of my times in its misunderstanding of the Great Work to which it was called; then to the authentic Great Work of shaping a viable world for the future.

“For myself I needed a sense of the Great Work of the historical moment. My life quest has been to identify this. Just what this Great Work is or the precise pattern of its achievement has never been entirely clear. For me identifying this work and finding my own role in achieving it has been itself the journey. I found this in the monastery world. For me this was the appropriate context for the type of thinking that I needed to do. **(Stand)** I needed time, I needed solitude, I needed to live in a religious context as I sought out the comprehensive wisdom of the human heritage. This would require a lifetime. But I considered that it was possible.” (Gr, 27)

“There is now a single issue before us: survival. (**Move to meadow**) Not merely physical survival, but survival in a world of fulfillment, survival in a living world, where the violets bloom in the springtime, where the stars shine down in all their mystery, survival in a world of meaning.” (SU, 172)

(At meadow)

Musical Accompaniment:

East of Easter, Guitar, S. Walker

A Wedding Ode

(For Danny and Anne Martin)

(**Standing at meadow**)

Here amid the rolling hills
of the southern Appalachians
there is a stillness
in the evening.

In the dark night sky
the stars shine down
over the silhouetted landscape
while mist settles in the valleys.

The fragrance of the fields
the dark surrounding woodland
these create a pensive mood
deepened by the swelling
sounds of the cicada and
the distant coo of the mourning dove.

Such experience awakens in us
a sense of the Great Liturgy
that enfolds every living being
however fragmented the natural world
of our times, nothing can escape
this grand ceremonial of the universe.

Nature will never let go
this embrace we experience
in the great arc of the sky over us

in the sunlight that enfolds us
in the dawn and the sunset
in the rain and the wind.

These bring us the flowering fields
so magnificent. We are embarrassed
at such prodigal dispersal of beauty
beauty so precious
beauty freely granted us
beauty we never merited in any way.

We are embarrassed by our unworthiness
as we walk through such a wonderworld
embarrassed with a touch of foreboding
as we walk alone through the deeper
woodland forest and feel our inadequacy.

This feeling of inadequacy extends
to a vast loneliness of soul
as we look up at the night sky.

This loneliness without solace
we bear with us until we find
someone else who also has looked
out over the universe and has experienced
a similar loneliness of soul.

Then the whole of creation
rings out with joy.

This liturgy of the universe
is experienced as
the true wedding ritual.

...We are, I say,
lifted up to that superabundant
joy that heaven bestows on all

who live their lives
in the wonder and praise
and resonance with that universe

wherein the divine and the human meet
in their most intimate fulfillment.

(Unpublished poem)

(Cross to Lectern)

Musical Interlude:

Foggy Dew, Guitar, Traditional Irish

Recognizing the Strength of Origin

(At the lectern)

The Sense of the Sacred

(As if formal presentation) “It is clear that there will be little development of life here in the future if we do not protect and foster the living forms of this continent. To do this, a change must occur deep in our souls. We need our technologies, but this is beyond technology. Our technologies have betrayed us. This is a numinous venture, a work of the wilderness...

“The universe is the supreme manifestation of the sacred. This notion is fundamental to establishing a cosmos, an intelligible manner of understanding the universe or even any part of the universe. That is why the story of the origin of things was experienced as a supremely nourishing principle, as a primordial maternal principle, or as the Great Mother, in the earliest phases of human consciousness...

“We must remember that it is not only the human world that is held securely in this sacred enfoldment but the entire planet. We need this security, this presence throughout our lives. The sacred is that which evokes the depths of wonder. We may know some things, but really we know only the shadow of things. **(Step to left side of lectern. As if in spontaneous reflection, less formal)** We go to the sea at night and stand along the shore. We listen to the urgent roll of the waves reaching ever higher until they reach their limits and can go no farther, then return to an inward peace until the moon calls again for their presence on these shores.

“So it is with a fulfilling vision that we may attain – for a brief moment. Then it is gone, only to return again in the deepening awareness of a presence that holds all things together.” (SU, 175-177)

(Back behind lectern, again formal presentation) “...We misconceive our role if we consider that our historical mission is to ‘civilize’ or to ‘domesticate’ the planet, as though wildness is something destructive rather than the ultimate creative modality of any form of early being. We are not here to control. We are here to become integral with the larger Earth community.

(Step left of lectern again) “We might reflect on this sense of the wild and the civilized when the dawn appears through the morning mist. At such times a stillness pervades the world – a brooding sense, a quiet transition from night into day. This experience is deepened when evening responds to morning, as day fades away, and night comes in the depth of its mystery. We are most aware at such moments of transition that the world about us is beyond human control. So too in the transition phases of human life; at birth, maturity, and death we brood over our presence in a world of mystery far greater than ourselves.” (GW, 48-49)

Faith and Hope in This Time

(Back to lectern) “As humans we need to recognize the limitations in our capacity to deal with... issues of the earth’s functioning...”

“Our best procedure might be to consider that we need not a human answer to an earth problem, but an earth answer to an earth problem. The earth will solve its problems, and possibly our own, if we will let the earth function in its own ways. We need only listen to what the earth is telling us.” (DOTE, 35)

“We must feel that we are supported by that same power that brought the Earth into being, that power that spun the galaxies into space, that lit the sun and brought the moon into its orbit. That is the power by which living forms grew up out of the Earth and came to a special mode of reflexive consciousness in the human. This is the force that brought us through more than a million years of wandering as hunters and gatherers; this is that same vitality that led to the establishment of our cities and inspired the thinkers, artists, and poets of the ages. Those same forces are still present; indeed, we might feel their impact at this time and understand that we are not isolated in the chill of space with the burden of the future upon us and without the aid of any other power. (GW, 174-175)

Musical Break:

Thomas Berry Theme, Cello, G. Schreiner

(Cross to meadow)

The Meadow Across the Creek: Re-reflected

(Sitting on stump) “My own understanding of the Great Work began when I was quite young. At the time I was some eleven years old. My family was moving from a more settled part of a small southern town out to the edge of town where the new house was being built. The house, not yet finished, was situated on a slight incline. **(Rise. Music begins as pizzicato of Thomas theme)** Down below was a small creek and there across the creek was a meadow. It was an early afternoon in late May when I first wandered down the incline, crossed the creek, and looked out over the scene.

(Bowing of theme begins) “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 a clear sky. It was not something conscious..... that happened just then. **(Music ends)** I went on about my life as any young person might do.

“Perhaps it was not simply this moment that made such a deep impression upon me. Perhaps it was a sensitivity that was developed throughout my childhood. Yet as the years pass this moment returns to me, and whenever I think about my basic life attitude and the whole trend of my mind and the causes to which I have given my efforts, I seem to come back to this moment and the impact it has had on my feeling for what is real and worthwhile in life.

“This early experience, it seems, has become normative for me throughout the entire range of my thinking. Whatever preserves and enhances this meadow in the natural cycles of its transformation is good: whatever opposes this meadow or negates it is not good. My life orientation is that simple.” (GW, 12-13)

“...in this little meadow the magnificence of life as celebration is manifested in a manner as profound and as impressive as any other place I have known in these past many years.” (GW, 14)

(Sit on stump as music begins)

Musical Break:

Arioso, Cello, J.S. Bach

A Moment of Grace

This Moment of Grace

(Sitting) “As we enter the twenty-first century, we are experiencing a moment of grace. Such moments are privileged moments. The great transformations of the universe occur at such times...” (GW, 198)

(Rise to standing) “...Something new is happening. A new vision and a new energy are coming into being.” (GW, 198)

“We are now experiencing a moment of significance far beyond what any of us can imagine...The mythic vision has been set into place. The distorted dream of an industrial technological paradise is being replaced by the more viable dream of a mutually enhancing human presence within an ever-renewing...Earth community. The dream drives the action.

“But even as we make our transition into this new century we must note that moments of grace are transient moments. The transformation must take place within a brief period. Otherwise it is gone forever. In the immense story of the universe, that so many of these dangerous moments have been

navigated successfully is some indication that the universe is for us rather than against us. We need only summon these forces to our support in order to succeed. Although the human challenge to these purposes must never be underestimated, it is difficult to believe that the larger purposes of the universe or of the planet Earth will ultimately be thwarted.” (GW, 201)

PAUSE

Returning to Our Native Place (reformatted from the prose text)

(Standing)

“We are returning
to our native place
after a long absence,
meeting once again with
our kin in the earth community.
For too long we have been
away somewhere, entranced
with our industrial world
of wires and wheels,
concrete and steel,
and our unending highways,
where we race back
and forth in continual frenzy.

Musical Accompaniment Begins:

Incidental Music, Cello, S. Walker

“The world of life,
of spontaneity, the world
of dawn and sunset
and glittering stars
in the dark night heavens,
the world of wind
and rain, of meadow flowers
and flowing streams, of hickory
and oak and maple
and spruce and pineland forests,
the world of desert sand
and prairie grasses, and within
all this the eagle and

the hawk, the mockingbird and
the chickadee, the deer and
the wolf and the bear,
the coyote, the raccoon,
the whale and the seal,
and the salmon returning
upstream to spawn – all this,

the wilderness world recently
rediscovered with heightened
emotional sensitivity, is an experience
not far from that of Dante
meeting Beatrice at the end of
the *Purgatorio*, where
she descends amid
a cloud of blossoms.” (DOTE, 1-2)

PAUSE

“The excitement of life is in the numinous experience wherein we are given to each other in that larger celebration of existence in which all things attain their highest expression, for the universe, by definition, is a single gorgeous celebratory event.” (DOTE, 5)

(Focus on individuals in audience) “What do you see? What do you see when you look up at the sky at night at the blazing stars against the midnight heavens? What do you see when the dawn breaks over the eastern horizon? What are your thoughts in the fading days of summer as the birds depart on their southward journey, or in the autumn when the leaves turn brown and are blown away? What are your thoughts when you look out over the ocean in the evening? What do you see? (SU, 170)

(What do you hear?) “We need only listen to what the earth is telling us.” (DOTE, 35)

The Evening Moment: The Wild, the Holy, the Sacred

Listen! There are the sounds of the wild members of the earth community now: the inviting call of the whip-poor-will that comes from the meadows in the night and the haunting, hypnotizing hollow sounds of the owl’s cry as it hunts through the forest and the fields. They are the voices of the near wildness in the night calling to us now to listen.

We ask who are the heroes of today? They are the heroes. In the meadows and the woodlands and the wetlands, they are the heroes who sustain the creative wildness of the planet.

When we stand tonight in the light of the blazing stars here in this place in the universe, we will know that “this is a numinous venture, a work of wilderness” (SU, 176) in which we are now engaged. “We need to awaken...to the wilderness itself as a source of a new vitality for its own existence. For it is the wild that is creative...The communion that comes through these experiences of the wild, where we sense something present and daunting, stunning in its beauty, is beyond comprehension in its reality, but it points to the holy, the sacred.” (SU, 176)

Closing Music:

Wind on the Water, Cello, S. Walker

Originally completed by Andrew Levitt, September 21/22, 2014, Autumn Equinox, in Greensboro, NC

Andrew Levitt holds a BA in English from Yale University and a PhD in Folklore from the University of Pennsylvania. He trained as a mime with Marcel Marceau and with Paul J. Curtis at The American Mime Theatre. In his career life, he has worked with silence and words. He performed and taught mime professionally for over thirty years. He then helped found the high school at the Emerson Waldorf School in Chapel Hill, NC where he taught Humanities and directed theater for seven years. As Dr. Merryandrew, he worked as a cosmic clown in the Pediatric unit at Moses Cone Memorial Hospital in Greensboro, NC for nine years until the onset of the COVID pandemic.

Scott Walker taught strings in the Greensboro area for over 30 years. Now living in Asheville, Scott plays fiddle, guitar and cello and founded The Walker Family Band in 2002, which has delighted audiences throughout the Southeast with a distinctive take on traditional styles. His career has been dedicated to teaching young musicians in a variety of public and private schools, and as a private instructor of Suzuki music technique on cello and violin. Scott’s love of traditional Irish fiddle tunes resulted in the founding of Walker Street Fiddlers in 2009.

References

Published Works:

DOTE: *The Dream of the Earth*. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988.

ET: *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community*. Ed., Mary Evelyn Tucker. San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 2006.

GW: *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*. New York: Bell Tower, 1999.

SU: *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century*. Ed., Mary Evelyn Tucker. New York: Columbia University Press, 2009.

Unpublished Works:

Gr: *Goldenrod: Reflections of the Twentieth Century*, unpublished manuscript by Thomas Berry

Poems: Unpublished poems by Thomas Berry.



Please consider becoming a Friend of the Center by making a donation today. All Friends of the Center receive two issues of our newsletter, *Chrysalis*, per year. To donate online, go to our website at www.beholdnature.org or send your check, payable to CEINW, to:

CEINW
P. O. Box 41108
Greensboro, NC 27404

We deeply appreciate your support of our work!

Center for Education, Imagination and The Natural
World
P.O. Box 41108
Greensboro, NC 27404