

The Celebratory Liturgy of the Universe

A Conversation between Thomas Berry and Miriam MacGillis of Genesis Farm
Riverdale Center, May 29, 1991

Summary

Thomas Berry provides an overview of the context in which he sets all of his thinking, namely, the ongoing devastation of Earth systems by the commercial-industrial economy, the incompetence of human institutions to deal with this devastation, and the emergence, in our time, of a new vision, a New Story, to address these issues.

Questions/Points for Discussion

1. Thomas argues that the root cause of human willingness to undertake and allow the devastation of Earth's natural systems is the lack of a deep human rapport with the non-human community of existence. He suggests that religions have been complicit in this failing by focusing their teachings only on divine-human and human-human relations, ignoring Earth-human relations. If our religions considered the Earth to be sacred would they permit such a desecration?
2. Humans have developed liturgies for many annually recurring seasonal events such as the arrival of Spring, Easter, harvest, winter solstice/Christmas, but have not yet acknowledged/developed liturgies for the events in the time-developmental story of who we are and where we come from. Thomas mentions a liturgy for the supernova which exploded and seeded the elements from which Earth is made. He also suggests a liturgy for the evolution of the first flowers. Can you think of other moments in our evolutionary cosmological past which could/should be celebrated in liturgy/dance/song?
3. Thomas observes that the seed has hidden capacities which are not fully revealed until placed in fertile soil. In a similar way, he notes that the Universe has, perhaps unexpectedly, exhibited the capacity to develop self-aware humans along with many other wondrous beings. He suggests that within the Universe there is a deep animating principle which ultimately transcends the material world. Are there perhaps other capacities of the Universe yet hidden from our view as visionaries like Teilhard de Chardin suggest?
4. Thomas is famous for saying that the Universe in its vast extent in space and development over time is a single multi-form celebratory event. Birds sing, rivers flow, stars shine, winds blow - celebration! He also states that humans are that being in whom the Universe reflects on and celebrates itself in its numinous origins in conscious self-awareness. Do you see humans and the Universe primarily as celebratory events? If not, why not?
5. Thomas sees our generation as a people of destiny - we were chosen to be here at this time - to be with these global issues. He talks of "the grace of the moment" - the confidence that we are provided with the guidance/energy necessary to deal with this crisis creatively. He also optimistically declares that "it's beginning to happen!" - solutions and new ways of thinking/being are emerging. Do you feel called in this moment of crisis in Earth's history? Do you feel that you, and the human species in general, have the psychic energy to successfully face these challenges? Where will this energy come from?