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**THE CHRISTIAN FUTURE
AND THE FATE OF EARTH**

By Thomas Berry

Edited by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim

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The Universe as Cosmic Liturgy

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Each morning we awaken as the sun rises and light spreads over Earth. We rise and go about our day's work. When evening comes and darkness spreads over Earth we cease our work and return to the quiet of home. We may linger awhile enjoying the evening with family or friends. Then we drift off into sleep and that dream realm beyond consciousness where our lives are renewed after the exhaustion of the day. As in this day-night sequence, so in seasonal sequence we experience changes in our ways of being. In autumn our children may spend their days in school and we alter our daily regime accordingly. In springtime we may go out more freely into the warmth of sunshine where some of us plant gardens. In summertime we may visit the seashore to find relief from the limitations that winter imposed upon us. In each of these seasons we celebrate festivals that give human expression to our sense of meaning in the universe and its sequence of transformations.

Our concern in this essay is to offer an overview of the many ways in which the integral dimension of the universe is manifest in different human communities throughout the Earth community. Just now the human community has a remarkable scientific understanding of the universe and of the planet Earth, yet, humans seem not to have the intimate rapport with the universe that earlier humans once had. Rather than fostering a

mutually enhancing relationship with the other members of the Earth community, we have been responsible for causing dysfunction throughout the entire planet. Yet, along with our anthropogenic alterations of Earth's climate, soils, and waters are alternative visions of human-Earth relations, some of which are quite old while others appear dimly on the horizons of our future. Echoes of an ancient human-Earth relationship are evident among indigenous peoples, many of whose sustainable life ways have been significantly altered by contacts with modern industrial cultures.

The ethnography of the Omaha peoples, formerly living as a tribal group in the northern plains of North America, records a personal relationship with the larger universe that was ritually established at the time of each child's birth. Among these peoples a newborn infant was taken out under the sky and presented to the cosmos:

Ye sun, moon, stars, all ye that move in the heavens,
I bid you hear me! Into your midst has come a new life.

Ho!

Consent ye, we implore, make its path smooth
that it may reach the brow of the first hill.

Ho! Ye winds, clouds, rain,

All ye that move in the air

I bid you hear me, into your midst has come a new life.

Consent ye, we implore, make its path smooth
that it may reach the brow of the second hill.

The invocation continues to address the hills, rivers, trees and all that lives on Earth with a corresponding request that the child be protected to reach the third hill. The birds that fly in the air, the animals great and small, that dwell in the forests, the insects that move among the grasses—all are invoked. Then a final petition asks that all creatures everywhere will take care of the child, that it may travel beyond the four hills. This legacy remains a significant expression of the Omaha sense of the cosmos as liturgical presence.

Assistance from the entire universe is needed if a person is to have both the psychic and the physical powers needed to live through the perils of earthly existence. While invocations like this one are ways of locating the human mode of being within the complex of powers throughout the universe, there are other ways in which the structure of human life and human society is formally coordinated with the movement of the cosmological order through the seasons.

Indeed the unity of the universe can be observed in the vast array of rituals carried out by diverse indigenous peoples around the planet as well as by the agricultural and literate societies, especially in their founding stages. The human cultural project in all its phases is authenticated by ritual insertion into the great seasonal sequence whereby Earth is constantly renewed. Thus a calendar of events is established and cosmic rituals are performed at their appropriate times.

Both personal and community affairs are validated by ritual integration of the human venture with the natural world. As with the cycle of the seasons, the periods of transformation in the cosmological order are celebrated by corresponding rituals in the human order. This is evident in the annual Thanksgiving celebration of the Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois, confederacy of the St. Lawrence River valley in North America. In their elaborate recitations these communities honor, through ritual acknowledgments that continue into the present, the beings layered throughout the natural world. For the Haudenosaunee the human community fulfills its roles in relation to all the various elements that sustain human life. While the winged creatures, four-legged creatures, insects, and all realms of life may be described as "spiritual" in our outsider effort to understand the ritual, what seems more important is that ongoing relationships are established and reaffirmed with these realms of being. Ritual relationships are acknowledged with the rain and the winds, with the mountains, the valleys, the plants, the animals, the homelands, the stars, and the sun in the heavens.

Personal intimacy with cosmic powers also finds expression among other peoples of North America such as the Siouan-speaking nations with their sweat-lodge ceremony and vision

quest. The initiate, under the guidance of a shamanic personality, spends several days fasting and praying for the strength and orientation needed for future life. At this time the basic symbols that guide and protect a person are awakened in the consciousness of the initiate. A special name may be communicated that relates a person to some guardian life form. A song to be sung at the time of death may be received, a song that will enable the person to pass safely through the perils encountered at this time.

A remarkable example of intimacy with cosmic powers is found in the life story of Nicholas Black Elk, the Lakota *wichasha wakan*, or healer. When he was nine years old he had an astonishing vision relating to his specific historical situation and the destiny of his tribe. Special attention was given to the role of Black Elk himself in guiding the destiny of his people. In his vision he saw the six grandfathers representing the four directions, the sky, and Earth. At one moment in the prolonged vision, a great stallion in the heavens sang a song that rang out throughout the universe. In the words of Black Elk as narrated to John Neihardt:

His voice was not loud, but it went all over the universe and filled it. There was nothing that did not hear, and it was more beautiful than anything can be. It was so beautiful that nothing anywhere could keep from dancing. The virgins danced, and all the circled horses. The leaves on the trees, the grasses on the hills and in the valleys, the waters in the creeks and in the rivers and the lakes, the four-legged and the two-legged and the wings of the wind—all danced together to the music of the stallion's song.¹

If we look back to earlier, preindustrial times we see that the human relationship with the planet was different. There

¹*Black Elk Speaks*, as told through John G. Neihardt by Nicholas Black Elk (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2000 [originally published in 1932]), 35; and Raymond J. De Mallie, ed., *The Sixth Grandfather: Black Elk's Teachings Given to John Neihardt* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1984), 133.

was never a time, certainly since the beginnings of the Neolithic agricultural period, when humans did not have some effect on the ecosystems of Earth. Yet there continued into the agricultural period a relationship whereby humans sought to authenticate their existence by entering into the cosmic cycle in the form of ritual celebrations. In this manner the ontological unity of the universe was recognized. Existence itself was celebrated. A pervasive consciousness of the sacred was established. Preservation of this relationship was a primary cultural motivation. Moreover, this was also an all-pervasive personal attitude that provided both cultural and individual identity with a personalized other. As suggested by Henri Frankfort in *Before Philosophy*, the natural world in the full diversity of its articulation was addressed as "thou," not as "it." The human community and the other life communities were all experienced as a single integral community of distinct personalities.

As we look back over the course of human affairs we find among the most significant and universal of human cultural developments is the effort to relate human affairs to the universe through ritual celebrations at certain moments in the annual sequence of the seasons, in the diurnal cycle, as well as in the life cycle of birth, maturity, and death. These events relating human affairs to the ever-recurring events of the natural world provide an authentication of the human mode of being. There is great significance in the coordination of human events, habitation, and communal architecture with the seasonal and astronomical cycles, because such coordination necessitates some awareness of time reckoning, of archaeoastronomy, and of a measured calendar. It led in some societies to precise observation of the phenomena of the sun and moon, the stars, the planets, and the natural phenomena.

In ancient China the cosmological order and human affairs were seen as existing in profound synchronicities and correlations. These relationships were so close that the entire range of political and social activity of the human world was arranged in accord with seasonal sequences in the natural world. Instructions in the meaning of the rituals are given in the liturgy book known as the *Book of Rites (Li Chi)*. In this text the rit-

ual observances for each season are prescribed. One entry gives the following warnings about resulting dilemmas if inappropriate seasonal rituals are performed:

If in the first month of spring the governmental proceedings proper to summer were carried out, the rain would fall unseasonably, plants and trees would decay prematurely, and the states would be kept in continual fear. If the proceedings proper to autumn were carried out, there would be great pestilence among the people; boisterous winds would work their violence; rain would descend in torrents, mountain spinach, tufted grasses, ryegrass, and southernwood would grow up together. If the proceedings proper to winter were carried out, pools of water would produce destructive effects, snow and frost would prove very injurious, and the first sown seeds would not enter the ground.²

The object of all appropriately performed ceremonies is to bring down the spirits from above, and even the ancestors, in order to rectify relations between ruler, ministers, the bioregion, and the larger cosmos. The rituals maintain the generous feeling between father and son, and ensure the harmony between elder and younger brother. They adjust the relations between high and low, and give their proper places to husband and wife. The whole may be said to secure the blessing of Heaven. Humans are seen as the heart and mind of Heaven and Earth, and the visible embodiment of the five elements. They live in the enjoyment of all flavors, the discrimination of all notes, and the engagement with all colors.

In each one of these instances the integral relationship between the human and the universe was recognized and celebrated within a single community with plural expressions. The relationship was not primarily one of exploitation. The ritual

²*Book of Rites, Li Chi*, Book IV, Section I, part 11, "The Yueh Ling," trans. James Legge (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1967), 257.

was a bonding of all the diverse components within a single, coherent whole and the purpose of the ritual was the flourishing of the entire range of beings within the universe. The understanding was that the human response was crucial for sustaining an integral functioning of all the diverse relationships throughout the bioregion, the cultural setting, and the larger cosmos.

In some societies, the annual ceremony was a reenactment of the creation of the universe. In Mesopotamia, for example, during a particular historical period the legend of Marduk and Tiamat was reenacted. Tiamat, the divine embodiment of the waters of chaos, was slain by the warrior deity, Marduk, and in their struggle the structure and diversity of the universe were established. In the Hindu tradition of India the patterns of ritual relationship of humans and the cosmos are expressed in the *Laws of Manu*. This book embodies ancient oral traditions that came down in several versions from the Vedic period when the Aryan peoples came into India around 1500 BCE. Eventually the traditions found literate expression in a single text. Here the acceptable pattern of human affairs was given in relation to cosmic order, or *rita*. Along with this, increasingly complex cosmological traditions were expressed in the early writings called the Vedas. The Vedas conclude in wisdom teachings called the *Upanishads* or Vedanta, the “end of the Vedas.” Here the individuated self, or *atman*, was integrally linked to the larger universe in the form of the cosmic person, or *Brahman*. On every auspicious communal and individual occasion there was an effort to establish personhood at the center of the universe. The cosmic center, symbolized in script or icon or ritualized sound, such as *OM*, is where all things were validated, all things found their meaning and their security.

From this it becomes clear that in antiquity the primary cultural referent as regards reality, value, and power for religious expression is the universe in its full plurality and integrity. Every mode of being is universe-referent. Most particularly, with regard to the vast range of created beings that are culturally described and individually experienced, Earth is the immediate basis of cosmological reality and value. The question to explore, then, is in what ways did this change over time?

The Turn toward Historical Consciousness

Western civilization has experienced many and diverse ritual developments in the monumental civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt, Greece and Rome. Interacting with these larger civilizations, regional cultures, such as that of Israel, developed their own revelatory expressions. Thus, in the religion of Israel, the textual traditions associated with the Hebrew scriptures present elaborate ritual prescriptions evident in the Torah, or first five books of the Bible (Pentateuch), and especially in four of these books, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. Many of the rituals are decidedly cosmological in their emphasis on seasonal celebrations related to animal husbandry and herding.

In the West, as Judaism and Christianity developed, the primacy of the universe shifted toward an increasing emphasis on historical events. This historical emphasis is clearly evident in the older Israelite religion, and especially in the Hebrew scriptures. A decisive moment in this regard occurred at Passover in the Exodus event that became the central historical and religious experience of Judaism. This complex and lengthy shift in the religion and thought of Israel was founded on the perceived historical intervention of divine deliverance from the servitude imposed on Israel during its enslavement period in Egypt. Deliverance of Israel at the Exodus was celebrated by the springtime cosmological festival, centered on Passover, but it was altered by a new emphasis on history. Passover becomes the first of a sequence of historical moments when divine communion with Israel is remembered as having occurred in place and time.

The immersion of the cosmos in the historical process was profoundly affected by a mythical-historical realism generated in the Hebrew Bible. For example, the Israelite priestly groups returning from exile in Babylon in the fourth century BCE measured creation itself in the historical passage of days. This sense of historical realism was reaffirmed with a creation narrative in which a numbered time-sequence of six days of creative

generation was followed by a seventh day of ritual rest, or Sabbath. The Priestly text in chapter 1 of the Book of Genesis provided a clarity that had not been known previously in Israelite creation narratives such as that found in the Adam and Eve account of Genesis chapters 2 through 4. This time-precision with regard to creation set the framework for genealogical records and enabled the Israelite peoples to pull together in deeper historical and social identity.

The turn toward viewing divine intervention as occurring in history can be seen, for example, in the case of “judges,” wise military leaders who were raised up at specific historical moments to assist Israel at times of need. So also the anonymous *nabi*, or bands of roving prophets, gave way to major named prophets who could see the divine hand in both cosmological happenings and historical events. One example is the prophetic visions of “the day of the Lord” at which time divine retribution would descend upon Israel for its transgressions. Described in mythic language and cast as a historical divination, these prophetic events occurred as particular, local happenings and were remembered as cosmic events in a sacred historical liturgy. Increasingly, the central liturgy of the Israelite people at the newly constructed temple in Jerusalem brought the cosmological vision of the psalms together with the prophetic focus on divinely ordained historical events.

This emerging historical consciousness was transmitted and incorporated into Christianity, especially in its emphasis on the incarnational event of Christ both as fulfilling the Jewish sense of sacred history and as giving rise to a new cosmological relationship. The historical realism woven into cosmological identity was emphasized by Saint John in his first epistle:

Something which has existed since the beginning, that we have heard, and we have seen with our own eyes; and we have watched and touched with our hands, the Word, who is life—this is our subject. That life was made visible: we saw it and we are giving our testimony, telling you of the eternal life which was with the Father and has been made visible to us. What we have

seen and heard we are telling you so that you too may be in union with us as we are in union with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:1–3)

A similar orientation, drawing attention to the physical realism of the incarnational experience, is evident in a passage of Saint Paul: “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For by one spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit” (1 Corinthians: 12:12–13). And, in a later passage, Paul asserts the significance of the physical risen body of Christ saying, “Now if the dead are not raised then Christ has not been raised, and if Christ has not been raised, you are still in your sins. If our hope in Christ has been only for this life, we are the most unfortunate of all people” (1 Corinthians 15:17–19). As regards the universe, then, Christ is considered to satisfy the need for both individual and universe identity, since Christ is considered the Cosmic Person through whom everything is sustained and given ultimate meaning.

The historical moment provides an underlying pattern for the four Gospels, each of which presents the incarnation in a distinctive way. The physical reality of Jesus, as we have noted above, is emphasized by both John the Evangelist in the opening verse of his first letter and by Saint Paul who in his Epistle to the Corinthians asserts that the physical body of Jesus is truly risen. The physical reality of the resurrection is emphasized. This Christian focus on the physical reality of Christ is important; the emphasis on the physical derives from the Jewish origins of Christianity. The sense of the human soul, which was to become a major metaphysical teaching of Christianity, was derived from Greek Platonic philosophy whose influences were felt throughout the Mediterranean region.

The emphasis on historical realism was given a special interpretation by Saint Augustine, bishop of Hippo in North Africa in the fourth century CE, in his autobiography, *The Confessions*, as well as in his masterwork, *The City of God*. Through these works, and in the emerging Christian tradition, the story of the

universe began to lose its comprehensive mythic content in favor of subjective accounts of a devoted life and the realistic historical narratives of the Bible.

The emphasis on historical realism and the commitment to religious salvation through association with the narrative of the Gospels and the sequence of the redeemed community gave an even greater realism to the entire Christian process. Throughout this process the earlier cosmological emphasis on the primacy of the universe as the central reference for reality and value was being altered to a non-renewing human historical reference within an ever-renewing universe. Thus, as Christianity entered into its medieval period, it retained a strong cosmological strain in its liturgies and architectural expressions. But the historical emphases on Christ as having endured the passion and the cross gradually took precedence over the understanding of Christ as cosmic redeemer. These developments in religious consciousness were also tied to the growing understanding of Europe as a holy land.

Medieval Europe was the holy land of Christianity in its physical sense. That is, sacred sites of the older pagan peoples of Europe provided places where Christianity established itself as a spiritualizing force of missionary zeal. The thought expressed by the theologians of the period established a holy land of the mind fixed on mythic-historical re-creations of the Christ event. Thus, the passion and resurrection of Christ could be associated both with the actual sites in and around Jerusalem and with places of iconic representations of crucifixion, entombment, and deliverance from death. Liturgically, the Christian Eucharist was altered from its earlier sense of a communal *agape*, or meal of the beloved community, into a remembrance of the historical passion of Christ who atoned for the sin of humanity. Simultaneously, the cosmological patterns evident in religious buildings and sacred symbols endured, but grew weaker in significance as the subjective experience of divine intervention in history grew stronger.

One important thinker in this medieval period was Thomas Aquinas who proposed that the universe be taken as the primary

referent in any serious discussion of the order of the universe. In his *Summa Contra Gentiles* (Book II, chapter 26) he says, "The order of the universe is the ultimate and noblest perfection in things." In his *Summa Theologica* (I, q. 47, a. 1.), in answer to the question of why there is such a vast diversity of things, Aquinas says that "Because the Divine could not manifest itself fully by creating another deity, he created the great diversity of things so that the perfection lacking to one would be supplied by the others and that the whole universe together would participate in and manifest the divine more than any single being whatsoever."

Both these quotations are supported by the passage from the first story of creation found in the Book of Genesis. After each day of creation God says that it is good, but after the last day, looking at the integral relation of things, he says that it is very good. In Christianity this would seem to indicate that whatever is done to heal some primordial fault in the universe by way of incarnation and redemption, that too would ultimately and most properly be intended to heal the entire universe in its wonder and its splendor.

As we have observed, the historical challenge to the cosmological worldview that we find in the Gospels was initiated at the time of the Exodus, when a cosmological experience of the divine was transformed into a historical experience. This might be considered the foundation of the importance of the sense of historical realism in Western civilization. Moreover, the commitment to the superiority of the human over the natural world set in motion those forces of alienation that would eventually lead in the West to our strong sense of anthropocentrism.

Still, the celebration of creation in medieval Christianity retained its place in the visions, the paintings, the writings, the songs, and the liturgies of many persons and religious communities. The natural world was exalted as containing modes of divine presence. We find expressions of this in forms of Celtic animism, in Benedictine stewardship liturgies, in the devotions of Hildegard of Bingen, in the fraternal prayer of Francis of Assisi, and, in the contemporary period, in the evolutionary

model of Teilhard de Chardin. The greater presence of the universe, celebrated in dawn and evening observances and in the seasonal cycles, was the central liturgy as ordered in accord with the movement of the heavens. Later, the French Victorines and the German Rhineland mystics expressed a Neo-Platonic devotion to vestiges of God in the natural world. In their diverse ways they sought an emptying of consciousness, especially of all images, while still exalting the world of natural forms.

It was against this background that the realism of the modern scientific inquiry emerged. With the Renaissance shattering of the older Ptolemaic map and design of the universe, the historical emergence of the universe in its structure and functioning and the place of the human in this context began to be dominant. Here is where the alienation of the human from the natural world became a new religious vision and a new economic possibility. The bonding with the universe that had survived for fifteen centuries in the Christian world began to be undermined. From modest beginnings the scientific understanding of the universe would radically alter religious perspectives. Sciences such as geology and physics, which had very little to do with each other, began to develop and to establish new ways of thinking about the known world.

Throughout Europe and in the newly discovered worlds of the Americas, Asia, and the Pacific, religious rituals continued to meld these two great drives in human consciousness, the historical and the cosmological. It was not difficult for European Christians to move out over the planet in a geographic extension of the mythic connection between Europe and the Holy Land centered on Jerusalem. However, there was another difficulty as European and Euro-American peoples began to shape a new world of the mind completely alien from the consciousness formed by the Greek and Latin heritage of the Mediterranean world. In succeeding centuries of encounter with diverse bioregions and peoples, the Western mind became thoroughly absorbed in the discovery it was making of New Worlds.

After Renaissance thought had turned toward classical patterns of order and rational design, the developments now described as the Enlightenment eventually gave rise to a science

that perceived an emergent universe and the evolving life forms of Earth. This evolutionary story of life on Earth came to shape people's sense of the universe throughout the literate world. In effect, science rather than a sense of salvation history came to dominate cosmological thinking. The religions, for the most part, maintained ancient cosmological symbols in their liturgies, but effectively retreated from cosmological knowledge of reality. These two worlds, namely, the world of historical change and the world of the sacred cosmos, became two separate realms with little rapport with each other.

In many religious settings, sacred teachings became preaching about the sacraments and the sacred calendar. These teachings remained as they had been throughout the earlier Christian centuries. Belief statements and catechetical training also remained cast in an earlier terminology. A residual scholastic thought that endured from the medieval period did take note of the cosmological relationship of the world to the creative energies of the divine. However, after Thomas Aquinas, Christianity did not produce a thinker until Teilhard de Chardin who could integrate Christian emphasis on salvation history with Christian attention to the incarnational sense of the sacred in matter.

Thus, the Western religious traditions all continued their centuries-old manners of salvific quest expressed in liturgies that often had powerful cosmological symbols. One such biblical idea, that of a people chosen by God in relation to land, lost its cosmological anchor and became an affirmation of humans apart from Earth. The particularization in the biblical stories of the chosen people was transmuted into new religious and political ideas. For example, the term "world" was often considered to carry derogatory connotations. Humans tended to think of themselves as blessed precisely because they were distinct from other creatures and had the intellectual capacity for self-reflection. Moreover, having been given the revelation of the Bible and having been called to share the blessings that come through the Christian faith, many religious communities began to think of themselves as composing an elite community of the saved, forever separated from those not saved.

In this context we need to reexamine the entire question of “chosenness.” Christianity has lived through the centuries with a sense of being particularly blessed with a saving belief in a redemption brought about through the special presence of the divine in human form. In this sense, Christianity’s experience of being chosen has been a major force in establishing Western civilization. Nevertheless, it seems that a Second Exodus has been in the making since the time of Copernicus. Is it possible that we are being called to make an Exodus out of one sacred community locked in its historical self-salvific identity into the larger sacred community of life? Can we experience an Exodus from a mode of oppression that we humans have become to the planet to a form of enhancement for the Earth community?

A Second Exodus

One of the basic insights of the historian Eric Voegelin, in his work entitled *Israel and Revelation*, is that of a Second Exodus. Israel, after the primary Exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land, needed to return to Egypt in a second Exodus to bring the salvation experience in Jerusalem back into the world from which Israel had been delivered. Salvation was not to be contained simply in any limited portion of the human community. This responsibility was a challenge experienced by the Christian community with its sense of universal evangelization.

The dynamic of Christianity that has insisted on redemption out of the original world of nature into the sacred world of grace should now lead us to return to the natural world to bring a new understanding for the entire planet. This could be an explanation for the remarkable scientific venture of the past few centuries. This return has not yet brought Christianity into full relationship with the natural world because we have not fully embraced modern science and its understanding of evolution.

The earlier modes of understanding the universe and celebrating planet Earth involved thinking in terms of an ever-renewing

seasonal sequence. But then more precise observation by Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton provided new ways of thinking about the universe. With the thought of René Descartes and Francis Bacon, a broadened intellectual worldview emerged, one that gradually reimagined itself in terms of a much older process. Humans moved from the ever-renewing world of Ptolemy to the cosmological world of Copernicus. We might think of this process as a Second Exodus made possible by science.

The Christian world of our times needs to make its own Second Exodus out of its medieval Ptolemaic background into the modern world by adopting the story of the universe as this is now available to us. This does not involve abandoning the ever-renewing world of historical times. The planet will always pass through its ever-renewing cycles of the seasons. We will remain grounded in the Christian context of renewal as this existed before the empirical sciences began their discoveries. The evolutionary and the cyclical do not negate each other. They only need to integrate each other.

To do this will require the adoption of liturgies based on the universe story from its beginning some fourteen billion years ago throughout its sequence of transforming episodes whereby the universe and Earth have come into existence. One of the great differences in our present sequence of liturgies is that traditional liturgies have been adopted into the ever-renewing seasonal cycles. These will necessarily continue even while we move into celebration of the evolutionary transformation moments, which might find annual expression of one-time events just as the life story of Christ narrates one-time events that are now celebrated annually.

This Second Exodus will bring about a deep psychic transformation in the Christian world. The principle of comprehensiveness is central to the sacred story. Absorption of the universe into the sacred realm of the human and absorption of the human into the sacred realm of the universe is required for any satisfactory way into the future. Only when we begin to think of the emergent universe as the comprehensive realm of the sacred will we be able to overcome our present assault on the

universe in its Earth manifestation. Signs of this Second Exodus out of our destructive industrial mode are already observable.

An Emerging Sense of Limits

After World War II there was evidence that the industrial world of the human was wreaking havoc throughout the natural world. Observing this situation, Aurelio Peccei, an official in the Fiat Automobile Corporation, toured the world to consult with the most competent persons he knew of to seek out some effective way of dealing with the situation. The result was a call to Rome of some forty persons to discuss ways of dealing with what came to be called the "Global Problematique," that is, the issue of shaping a viable mode of human presence on the planet.

After a meeting in 1968 this group decided to call itself the Club of Rome. The group commissioned a number of studies of industrial production processes and their consequences to local bioregions and to Earth as a whole. They explored what might be done to shape a more viable future for human relationships with the planet. The first of these studies, published in 1972 under the title *Limits to Growth*, shocked the world at that time. The dissemination of the ideas contained in the study marked a decisive moment in human awareness of what was happening to Earth and how a disastrous future could be avoided. That same year, the Stockholm Conference on environmental issues was convened by the United Nations. It was the first time that the various nations of the world gave official recognition to the disturbed situation of the planet Earth. One of the results of the conference was that most of the nations represented there subsequently established the first national environmental protection agencies.

These developments give some sense of the initial attempts to awaken a sense of urgency and to establish a more viable rapport between the human community and the more comprehensive Earth community. However, in the decades since these events took place, while some progress has been made, there has not been sufficient action taken by the four basic human estab-

lishments: the political, economic, educational, and religious communities. They appear to be either incompetent or unwilling to consider the magnitude of the ecological problems we are facing. All four establishments are failing for the same reason. They all place a discontinuity between the human and the other-than-human modes of being. They give the basic values and rights to the human. No basic values and rights are given to non-human modes of being. The human is the primary referent in all questions, whether of law, economics, education, or religion. This question of the primary referent must be the basic issue up for discussion. Until this question of the human as our basic referent is reconsidered, there is no adequate way to proceed.

At present there is a devastating relationship between the human community and the Earth community. That humans, with all their intelligence, should be so destructive is something of an anomaly. Yet the disruption that is being effected throughout the planet is occurring through human agency. A remedy needs to be found.

The destruction is the result of scientific technologies whereby the resources of Earth are being exploited for human benefit without regard for the consequences on the life systems of the planet. A mystique of use as our primary relationship with the planet has been developed and is being deployed with ruthlessness beyond understanding.

This represents a great contrast with the earliest phase of human development when Earth and the solar system, with its planets and the stars beyond, were considered to be manifestations of sacred, even divine powers. In this period the human project was validated by ritual celebration of those great moments of transition in the ever-renewing seasonal cycle when the numinous world was experienced as especially present to the human community.

The entire universe was experienced as a cosmic liturgy. There was the daily sequence when at dawn and at sunset the numinous presence was more available to human perception. Then there was the yearly cycle. The annual cycle of death and rebirth occurred as the sun declined to its nadir at the winter solstice and then was reborn in the springtime when a renewal of

life came forth with dramatic manifestations. This was an ever-renewing seasonal sequence. What was born, died. What died was born again. If there was a never-ending tendency toward death, there was also the inevitable life-renewal.

The liturgy of the Christian world was woven over the years into cosmological patterns. Liturgical celebrations were coordinated with the hours of the day, especially with the dawn and sunset, as well as with the seasons of the year. The nativity was coordinated with the solstice. The resurrection was celebrated at the time of the spring equinox.

Much of this could not easily survive the series of later scientific discoveries of the structure and movements of the formerly astrological bodies. The change of consciousness and mental commitment needed to move from a direct divine disposition of the universe at the moment of creation with Earth at the center was too demanding. Moreover, it was a shock to the ancient cosmological understanding that undergirded the historical worldviews upon which political power rested. It was especially challenging to traditional religious thought when scientific discoveries began indicating that the planet Earth was much older than the five thousand years indicated by calculations based on a reading of the Bible. Scientific insights led to an alienation from the former sense of the cosmos as the locus for the meeting of the divine and the human. This became especially clear as science went on to discover that the universe was a self-emergent and a self-organizing process.

At this time the sacred character of the universe was overshadowed and even lost. The universe was seen as the expression of random forces which had evolved over a vast period of time. While the sense of the universe as sacred had been diminished with the Christian focus on the presence of the divine reality in the person of a human being, a cosmological underpinning provided stability, especially in the deep psychic commitments of Christian liturgy.

During the modern period, however, the Christian faith has lost a significant part of its vigor. Its mission to establish a divine presence within the human community has become

exceedingly difficult. The current scientific understanding of the universe and of human life does not seem to welcome a religious interpretation. The devastation of Earth we are experiencing and the loss of a sense of the sacred seem to be profoundly related. Just how this sense of the sacred can be restored requires a new depth of understanding on the part of the Christian world. Unless a sense of the sacred is restored, the doctrine of use embedded in our economic system will continue to devastate the planet.

My suggestion is that just as Christianity in its developing phase established itself in intimate relations with the structure and functioning of the universe in its liturgical processes, so now there is a need to adopt a new sense of a self-emergent universe as a sacred mode whereby the divine becomes present to the human community. If an ever-renewing universe was what first emerged in human consciousness, this need not be negated, since this is one of the most basic patterns of the solar system and of the planet Earth. The solstices and the equinoxes will remain dominant experiences for all living forms on Earth.

With regard to the new cosmic-based rituals that will be involved, we might consider the moment of emergence of the first photons, the primary movements of differentiation, inner-spontaneity, and the bonding of all things with each other. Then we might consider the formation of the galaxies, as well as the emergence of the first molecules, microbes, cells, and animals.

We need to think of the universe in its comprehensive dimensions, for indeed the universe is the only self-referent mode of being in the phenomenal world. Every other mode of being is universe-referent in its structure and in its functioning.

We need to understand that the purpose of the universe is not focused on any one single being, but depends upon the entire multiplicity of beings. This view accords with that indicated in the first creation story in the Book of Genesis, where after each day of creation God says that it is good, but after the last day of creation he sees the world complete and so he says that it is very good.

It follows from these reflections that whatever is done by the power that brought the universe into being is done primarily for the perfection of the entire creation, not for any individual within creation. Thus revelation, incarnation and redemption are primarily for the entire universe, not primarily for any group or individual being within the universe.

Acceptance of the universe as a self-emergent evolutionary process is one of the greatest challenges faced by Western civilization in establishing an integral intellectual and religious life orientation. Yet it is critical, in the light of present data, to embrace the science of evolution in our efforts to establish an acceptable cosmology. Although we have had such amazing scientific insight into the structure and functioning of the planet, we have been without any meaningful interpretation of the data. We have therefore lost whatever intimacy we had previously with the surrounding universe.

What is proposed here as a necessary development is to once again establish an awareness of the unity of human affairs with the functioning of the universe and Earth. This unity finds expression in the threefold cosmological cycles: daily, seasonal, and planetary. There is the daily cycle that passes from sunrise to sunset, the dawn and dusk bringing the community out of the mystical period of awakening consciousness when the dreams of the preceding night are narrated for the guidance that they might offer to the community. Then there is birth, maturity, and death in the seasonal cycle of each living form, reflected in the winter solstice, the springtime renewal, the summertime fullness, the autumnal harvest. Finally there is the planetary cycle of Earth's orbit around the sun. While no society had its full expression of these various moments of grace in which the human communed with the cosmos, they each had their intimacy with the larger community of life. Now we are called to our Second Exodus, our return to the universe as vibrant cosmic liturgy.