

From Tourists to Pilgrims: Recovering a Sense of the Sacred*

One could say that the whole of life lies in seeing...
the history of the living world can be reduced to the
elaboration of ever more perfect eyes....

*Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Human Phenomenon**

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?

*Thomas Berry, "The World of Wonder," *Spiritual Ecology*, p. 15*



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Indian author Satish Kumar says there are two ways of seeing the world around us. *Pilgrims* see Earth, indeed the entire universe, as imbued with the divine, full of wonder and mystery and permeated through and through with spirit. For pilgrims, the world is a sacred place to be engaged with reverence and gratitude. *Tourists* view Earth and its riches as “resource” – a font of goods and services for human consumption and pleasure. Its value lies solely in usefulness to us.

Pause and reflect for a moment.

- ✧ *What do **you** see when you look at the world around you? Do you see primarily with eyes of a pilgrim or eyes of a tourist?*
- ✧ *Has your vision shifted over time? If so, what influences have stimulated this change?*
- ✧ *How does your culture see and relate to nature and the material world? How might that color your vision?*



For more than 99 percent of our history, we humans walked on Earth as pilgrims, at home in a living, inspired cosmos and intimate with the greater community of life. But with the advent of the Scientific Revolution and Enlightenment, all of that changed.

Shifting scientific understandings exorcised spirit from matter and the material realm came to be seen as dead, inert “stuff” for humans to exploit and consume. We began to define ourselves as radically separate from and superior to nature; the universe was increasingly viewed as a cold, hostile place to be conquered and controlled. A living, rooting pilgrim cosmology was gradually replaced by a mechanistic tourist cosmology of domination and exploitation, with dire consequences for us and all our disavowed kin.

We have lost our connection to the deeper reality of things. We now find ourselves on a devastated [planet] where nothing is holy, nothing is sacred. We no longer have a world of inherent value, no world of wonder, no untouched, unspoiled, unused world. We have *used* everything. (Thomas Berry, “The World of Wonder,” *Spiritual Ecology*, p. 16)

Although we seldom realized it, losing a living cosmology left us adrift, with a great ache. Feeling homeless and alone, separated from one another and from the cosmological community, we have sought to fill that void with a surrogate cosmology of consumption (*Tao of Liberation*, p. 137). Earlier humans gathered under the stars or in caves or cathedrals to discern the meaning of life and the universe. But as cosmologist Brian Swimme has observed,

Now, we gather and watch TV ads. Every ad is a cosmological sermon – the universe is a collection of objects to be fashioned into items for our consumption, and the role of humans is to work and buy objects. (*The Sacred Balance*, p. 20)

Reflection:

- ✧ *What consequences of the shift to a tourist cosmology do you perceive?*
- ✧ *What connections do you see between manic consumption and the loss of a living cosmology?*

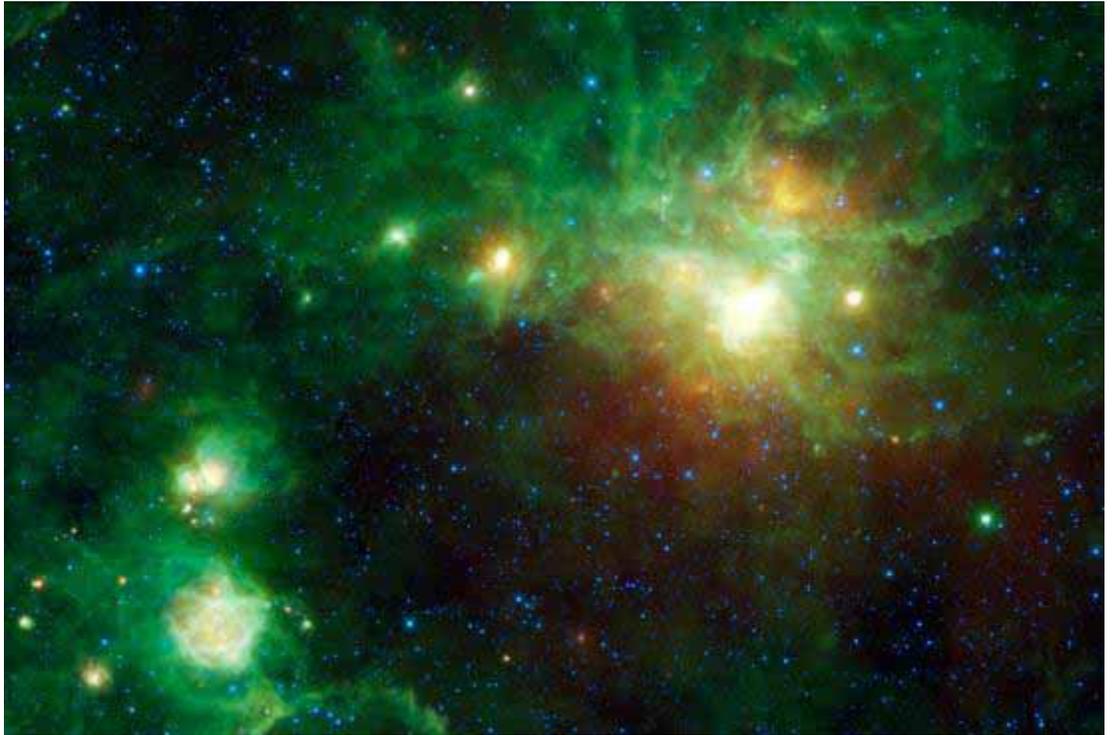


For the past 400 years or so, the scientific enterprise and the cosmology it birthed have ruled, producing tremendous benefits, but also horrendous harms. But a new pilgrim cosmology, grounded in the scientific story of the universe, is now slowly coming to birth.

Over the past century, a new vision of the cosmos has been emerging from the very sciences that

pronounced matter “dead”. For the first time, powerful new technologies are enabling humans to see deeply into the realm of atoms as well as the realm of stars. What scientists are discovering is astounding: the more deeply they peer, the more complex, subtle and mysterious reality becomes.

At every level, the cosmos is seen to be radically relational and interconnected. Rather than “static” and “dead,” matter itself is revealed to be a dynamic dance of energy and relationality. Once again, Earth and the entire cosmos are seen to be in some sense “alive,” bursting with creativity and emergence, and overflowing with spirit. Science is validating what mystics like Teilhard de Chardin and Tagore have long grasped,



Everything glows, expands, is impregnated with...the Absolute. [E]verything is animated with a flow of Presence and Love. (*The Future of Mankind*, chapter 3)

The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures. (*Gitanjali LXIX*)

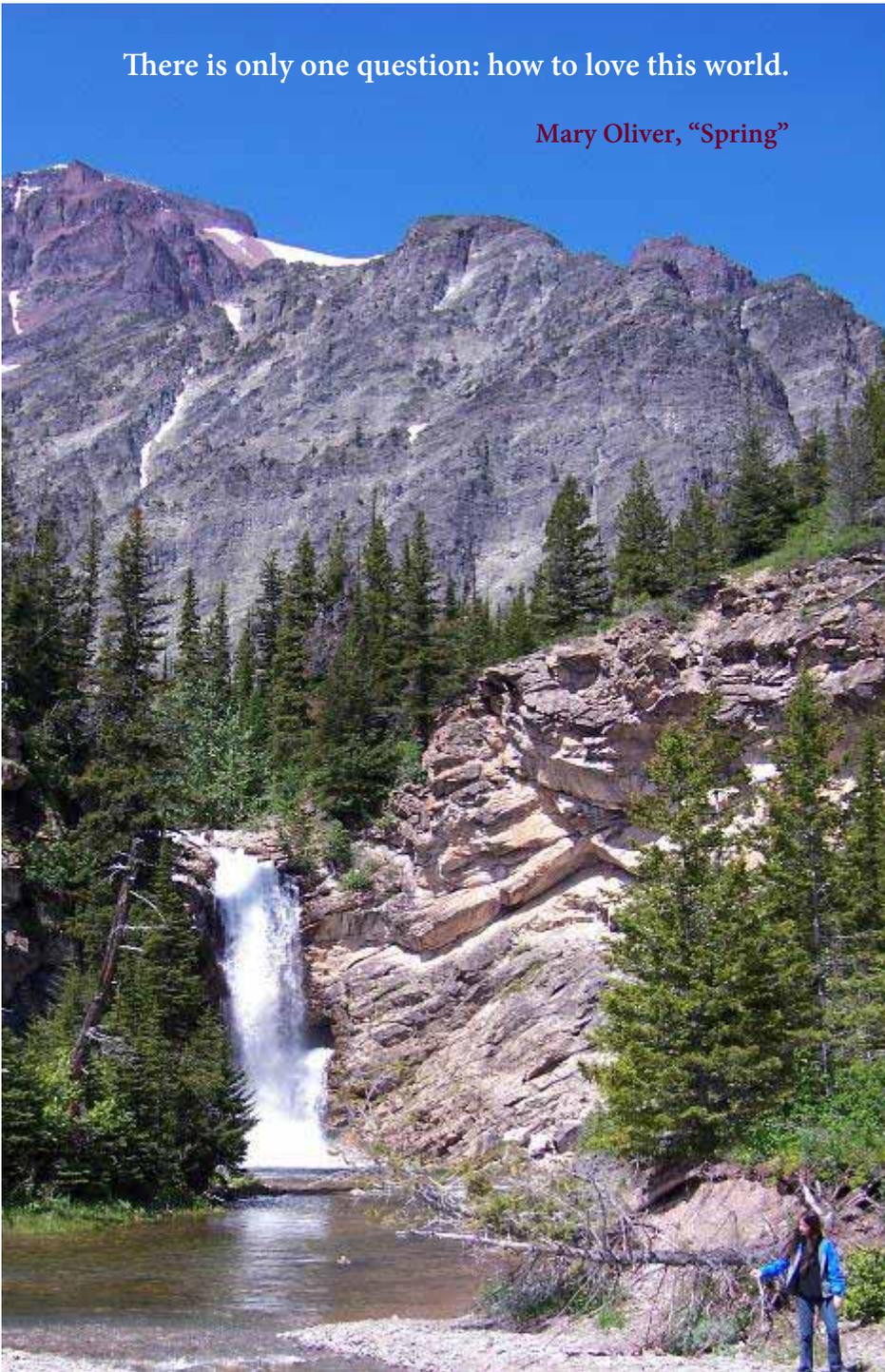


Reflection:

- ✧ *What feelings does a living universe pulsing with the Divine evoke in you?*
- ✧ *What questions, what responses arise?*

There is only one question: how to love this world.

Mary Oliver, "Spring"



Pilgrims are people who love this world. In a living universe in which everything manifests the Divine, that is the only authentic human response. How that love is expressed is unique for each pilgrim, but certain contours of pilgrim life do emerge.

Pilgrims have a profound sense that they are not merely on Earth...they are Earth itself that, in this phase of its evolution, has begun to feel, think, love, wonder, and care (*Tao of Liberation*, p. 333).

Pilgrims recognize their deep need to listen to, commune with, and learn from the more-than-human world in order to become fully themselves.

Pilgrims root themselves in place, delving into the secrets of their own locale, becoming keenly aware of all that makes that place special and unique: its history, its lore, and most especially, its more-than-human community.

Pilgrims are acutely materialistic – materialistic not in the sense of the dominant culture, but in the sense of deeply revering the world, attending to it lovingly, frugally and wisely using its gifts, and conserving, protecting and

healing it in whatever ways they can.

Reflection:

- ❖ *How do you express your love for this world? What practices support your personal transition from tourist to pilgrim?*
- ❖ *What ways have you discovered to commune with and learn from the more-than-human world?*
- ❖ *How rooted are you in your locale? What might you do to deepen those roots?*
- ❖ *How can we facilitate a societal transition to a new materialism of reverence for Earth and the entire Earth community?*

Resources for further reflection:

BOOKS

The Cosmic Pilgrim: A Spiritual Exploration of the New Story of Science and Religion. Macintyre, Margaret. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2010.

The Cosmic Pilgrim is an introduction to the world of eco-theology. Based on the vision of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, it describes the nature of reality in our Cosmos that is continually unfolding within our expanding consciousness, and the journey, the pilgrimage of the universe through space and time toward its consummate destiny within the fullness of God.

The Living Universe: Where Are We? Who Are We? Where Are We Going? Elgin, Duane. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2009.

Duane Elgin brings together extraordinary evidence from cosmology, biology, and physics to show that the universe is not dead but rather uniquely alive, an insight that, he shows, is in harmony with all of the world's major spiritual traditions. Elgin argues that, in order to transform our planetary crises, we need to move past a paradigm of separation and exploitation and learn to live sustainably on the Earth, in harmony with one another, and in communion with the living universe.

Recovering a Sense of the Sacred: Conversations with Thomas Berry. Toben, Carolyn W. Whitsett, NC: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary Press, 2012.

This thoughtful and poignant memoir recounts Carolyn W. Toben's spiritual journey with renowned scholar, author and cultural historian, Thomas Berry. For ten years, Carolyn spent many hours in deep discussions with Thomas Berry about his transformational thinking for healing the human-earth relationship through recovery of a sense of the sacred. This book is based on her personal notes, practices and reflections from these conversations.

The Sacred Balance: Rediscovering Our Place in Nature. Suzuki, David. 2nd edition. Vancouver, BC: Greystone Books, 2006.

The economy and global competitiveness are the bottom line for society and governments, or so says conventional wisdom. But what are the real needs that must be satisfied to live rich, fulfilling lives? This is the question David Suzuki explores in this wide-ranging study. Suzuki demonstrates that people are genetically programmed for the company of other species, and suffer enormously when we fail to live in harmony with them. He analyzes those deep spiritual needs, rooted in nature, that are also a crucial component of a loving world.

Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth. Vaughan-Lee, Llewellyn, editor. Point Reyes, CA: The Golden Sufi Center, 2013.

Showing the deep connection between our present ecological crisis and our lack of awareness of the sacred nature of creation, this series of essays from spiritual and environmental leaders around the world shows how humanity can transform its relationship with the Earth. Combining the thoughts and beliefs from a diverse range of essayists, this collection highlights the current ecological crisis and articulates a much-needed spiritual response to it.

The Tao of Liberation: Exploring the Ecology of Transformation. Hathaway, Mark and Leonardo Boff. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books., 2009.

Today, humanity stands at an historic crossroads. Deepening poverty and accelerating ecological destruction challenge us to act with wisdom and maturity: How can we move toward a future where meaning, hope, and beauty can truly flourish? Drawing on insights from economics, psychology, science, and spirituality, *The Tao of Liberation* seeks wisdom leading to authentic liberation a path toward ever-greater communion, diversity, and creativity for the Earth community.

FILMS

Force Of Nature: The David Suzuki Movie. Entertainment One, 2010.

David Suzuki, iconic Canadian scientist, activist, environmentalist, broadcaster and educator, delivers a last lecture -- what he describes as a distillation of his life and thoughts, his legacy, what he wants to say before he dies. In his lecture he articulates a core, urgent message: we have exhausted the limits of the biosphere and it is imperative that we rethink our relationship with the natural world. The lecture itself is conceived as a memory box, where ideas, powerful images and his urgent message are delivered as a stunning theatrical event, captured by multiple cameras.

Journey of the Universe: An Epic Story of Cosmic, Earth, and Human Transformation. Dir., David Kennard and Patsy Northcutt. Shelter Island, 2013.

This film connects such big picture issues as the birth of the cosmos 14 billion years ago – to the invisible frontiers of the human genome – as well as to our current impact on Earth's evolutionary dynamics. Through Brian Swimme's engaging and thoughtful observations, audiences everywhere will discover the profound role we play in this intricate web of life.

Interested in these resources?

DVDs may be borrowed free of charge from the Justice Resource Library (e-mail: dtaylor@cscsisters.org; phone: 574-284-5500; fax: 574-284-5596.

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“Recovering a Sense of the Sacred” refers to Carolyn Toben’s *Recovering a Sense of the Sacred: Conversations with Thomas Berry* (2012), a memoir based on Carolyn’s personal notes, practices and reflections from these conversations. We are grateful to Carolyn Toben for her generosity in granting us permission to use her material.

Logo, page 1:

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