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On December 11, 2015, at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris, representatives from 195 nations reached an historic agreement that for the first time commits almost all countries to reducing their greenhouse gas emissions to help control global warming and limit its drastic effects. United Nations secretary general, Ban Ki-moon, praised the agreement as “truly historic,” giving us for the first time a “universal agreement on climate change, one of the most crucial problems on earth.” Pope Francis, who has made the fight against global warming a top priority of his papacy, praised the agreement and called for “a growing sense of solidarity” and “generous dedication by everyone” to assure its implementation. President Obama, who has committed his administration to controlling climate change, said the agreement shows that the “world has both the will and the ability” to achieve a “low-carbon future.” Scientists convinced of the great dangers of global warming tend to see the Paris accord as a positive first step, but point out that it will, at best, reduce greenhouse gas emissions by only about half enough necessary to keep atmospheric warming at 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit, the level some experts believe is necessary to ward off rising sea levels, severe droughts and catastrophic flooding, which would lead to food and water shortages.

Before the Paris Conference, a Yale University-sponsored study showed that 71% of Americans thought it was important to reach an agreement, while 64% said the U. S. should do more to address global warming. The opposition to the Paris Accord in the United States, however, is determined and powerful. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell noted that the Paris Agreement is “an unattainable deal based on a domestic energy plan that is likely illegal, that half the states have sued to halt, and that Congress has already voted to reject.” Furthermore, he reminded those celebrating the accord that it could be “shredded” when a new president is elected.

As Pope Francis has indicated, those concerned about global warming must work together, in a spirit of solidarity, to protect Mother Earth. The 2016 presidential campaign promises to include vigorous debate over the Paris Agreement. Supporters will need solid science and political wisdom to make the case for limiting our carbon output. The issue also has a spiritual dimension which takes into account our fundamental attitudes toward our common home, the earth.

In searching for a spiritual approach to global warming, we can find helpful insights in the work of the late cultural historian and Passionist priest, Thomas Berry (1914-2009), who developed an earth- friendly eco-spirituality rooted in the thought of the Jesuit scientist and religious visionary Teilhard de Chardin. According to Berry, the modern Western world suffers “spiritual autism,” a self-absorbed disconnect from the natural world, which allows us to pollute the earth and destroy species without conscious guilt feelings. Given the dangers of this detached attitude, we need a “spiritual awakening,” which fosters a sense of amazement and awe at the mystery dimension of the evolving world. This awakening is best accomplished by a common story that touches our imaginations and makes the insights of contemporary science available to ordinary people. To this end, Berry coauthored with a scientist friend, Brian Swimme, a book entitled *The Universe Story*, which was adapted into an award-winning documentary film, “Journey of the Universe.” The story of our universe began some 13.7 billion years ago with an original “flaring forth” of “primordial energy’’ that produced an expanding universe of galaxies and stars. About 4.6 billion years ago, gas and dust in the Milky Way galaxy condensed into our solar system centered on the star we know as the sun with its planets, including our earth, which was able to support life because it was a proper distance from the sun so it was not too hot or too cold and was the right size, not too large and gaseous like Jupiter or two small and rocky like Mars. Early in its history, simple cells emerged on earth with the ability to respond to their environment, which enabled the evolutionary process to grope its way forward, eventually producing a great variety of colorful flowers, singing birds and mammals that tended to their offspring.

In Berry’s universe story, our human ancestors emerged in Northeast Africa some 60 thousand years ago. They gradually developed the capacity for speech, symbolic expression, tool making, ritual actions, and extended family relationships. Having learned to walk on two legs, they were able to migrate all around the globe. For the most part they lived as hunter-gatherers until about 10,000 years ago when they established villages along great rivers, including the Tigris-Euphrates, the Nile and the Indus. These civilizations produced religious traditions, magnificent architecture, great art work and law codes that continue to influence us today.

Thomas Berry was convinced that the Universe Story has an inherent power to bind people together in a shared effort to protect our earth. The story suggests new ways of thinking about ourselves and our relationships to the material world. As Berry liked to put it, “We are stardust become conscious of itself,” able to appreciate the power and beauty of the evolving world and to be in communion with the cosmic forces. We are the product of a process that is neither random nor determined but is creative. Integral to the universe story, we humans are now the prime movers of the evolutionary process, bearing heavy responsibility for its next steps.

Berry insisted that we think of the universe not as a collection of objects but as “a community of subjects,” including human beings. From this perspective, the earth appears a ”a bio-spiritual planet,” a “life process” with a tendency toward “ever greater differentiation,” “a deepening spontaneity” and an “ever more intimate self-bonding of the component parts.” We humans are cousins to all the other species.

Since the Industrial Revolution, which began around 1760, we humans have not treated our earth with proper care and respect. When I took Berry’s course in Asian religions at Fordham in the late 1960s, I recall him saying that if all the species on earth formed a Parliament the first order of business would be to vote out the humans. Later in his life, he identified the essential problem as a mode of consciousness that views other beings only in terms of their usefulness to humans. In today’s world, this fundamental outlook is propagated by the major shapers of opinion, governments, corporations, religions and universities, producing a radical disconnect between humans and non-human creatures. Berry also understood that solving our ecological problems, including global warming, requires a fundamental change of consciousness that reestablishes our organic connection to the earth. Our fate is essentially tied to the fate of the earth. He believed that the majestic sweep of the Universe Story, with its unimaginable space time frame, could touch our hearts and move us to reimagine our relationship with the community of creatures.

In 1999, Thomas Berry published *The Good Work,* which offered suggestions on how to reverse the degradation of Earth and to cultivate a “sustainable way of life.” In general terms, he advocates holding in mind the large vision of the Universe Story while engaging in constructive activities at the local level. More specifically, he suggests ways to develop an eco-consciousness: take a good look at your hand and remind yourself that it took 13.7 billion years to produce that hand; pay attention to the wildness of nature, including hurricanes, floods and earthquakes, which can stimulate our religious imagination; stop viewing the earth and its resources as commodities; reflect on the great archetypal symbols, such as Mother Earth, the Sacred Center, the Cosmic Tree of Life, Death and Rebirth, and Life as a Journey; redefine the word “progress” to include spiritual development as well as economic growth; develop a ”macrophase ethics” that sees the wellbeing of humans within the larger context of the wellbeing of the comprehensive Earth community; recognize that the most important political divisions are not between liberals and conservatives but between developers who want to extend the current consumerist practices and the ecologists who favor sustainable development; be more attentive to the “sacred depth” of each individual creature and the comprehensive unity of the entire universe grounded in “the numinous mystery.”

Berry believed universities could play an important role in the whole effort to save our planet, but only with radical changes: less emphasis on training students for temporary survival in a consumerist world and more on educating them to be effective participants in the earth community. With that goal in mind, universities could offer thoughtful criticisms of destructive tendencies in our society: an economic system that promotes consumption at the expense of the natural world; jurisprudence that grants rights to humans and not to other members of the earth community; religions that focus on redemption from sin while neglecting the glory of creation; and the humanities that separate humans from the rest of creation.

The Paris Agreement has been hailed by many as a constructive step in controlling global warming. In the United States, implementation will be difficult, especially given the political climate in an election year. Those who support the accord can make a more effective argument by examining global warming not only as a practical problem but as a spiritual challenge. Thomas Berry, with his *Universe Story* and his *Great Work*, provides an eco-spirituality that sees our earth not as a resource to be exploited but as a communion of subjects worthy of respect and care.