

Praise for
Becoming Planetary People

Poet, teacher, writer, and voice of the earth, Jim Conlon evokes profound wisdom in his new book, a tree of wisdom reflecting the rich fruits of his lifelong learning and loving the earth. His work shows a “deep catholicity,” a consciousness of wholeness and wholemaking. Jim’s insightful book is helpful to those seeking a deeper sense of passion and connectivity, not to the exclusion of knowledge but the inclusion of knowledge in the expansion of the heart. I highly recommend this book to those ready to love anew.

— **Ilia Delio, OSF**, Georgetown University

How education can become an action for liberation in our Planetary Age is the challenge Jim Conlon undertakes in this book. With a creative use of story, poetry, and the wisdom of the new cosmology, he pushes the encounter between science, spirituality, and eco-justice to new levels of understanding and engagement. A refreshing and challenging read.

— **Diarmuid O’Murchu MSC**

In his new book, *Becoming a Planetary People*, Jim Conlon lays out a transformative vision and process of prophetic action. At the heart of this process is a new global way of thought that integrates the Christian faith of crucifixion, resurrection, and redemption with evolutionary science and cosmology. Communities inspired by this vision are called to arise and become empowered to work to renew selves, society, and the world toward redemptive health, harmony, and peace.

— **Rosemary Radford Ruether**
Claremont Theological School and Graduate University

Visionary and educator Jim Conlon shows here the goal of personal fulfillment can be approached in combination with nurturing of faith, promotion of social justice, and working toward ecological integrity. Richly informed by recent accounts of the new cosmic story, Conlon offers a provocative synthesis of science and faith, and he does so with poetic grace.

— **John F. Haught**

Prof. Emeritus, Department of Theology
Georgetown University

The discovery that we have been constructed by an ongoing cosmic process is the greatest of the modern scientific endeavor. When Thomas Berry recognized that an epochal transition in human consciousness was underway, he became convinced that a reinterpretation of the world religions within this new evolutionary cosmology was the most significant spiritual challenge of our time. For three decades, Jim Conlon has been exploring this reinterpretation especially of Catholicism. Jim is a wonderful guide and his work is highly recommended.

—**Brian Thomas Swimme**, co-author with
Thomas Berry of *The Universe Story*

Becoming Planetary People

*Celebrations of
Earth, Art, and Spirit*

Jim Conlon

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DEDICATION

To my family, friends, colleagues, and mentors—
who are themselves planetary people.

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A Consecration

The creative energy of the divine that manifests this universe
often seems distant and inaccessible.

It is like someone hiding in the shadows—
a hidden presence, always elusive.
Yet it is palpable. It is present.

Prayer is mysterious.

We may feel as if we are talking to a stranger.
We may feel as if we are being held in a soft embrace.
Yet we wonder, will there ever be an answer?

Will it be yes or no?
I often wonder during the night,
swept on by an undulating energy that tosses me to and fro
at the portals of new life.

Then I hear a silent voice whisper guidance:
Listen, listen deeply in the silence.
Someone has a word for you.

The word is this:
Trust the sacred one.
Stay open and wait.
Embrace the mystery,
the dynamics of a hidden life.
Even in your sorrow,
life will arise again
in each new moment.

Listen, listen.
Let the newness in.

Foreword

It has been almost four decades since Thomas Berry coined the phrase “the new story.” To those of us who are familiar with it, there’s a sense of surprise that the concept has yet to break into the mainstream. You don’t hear taxi drivers or baristas talking about it. The conversation remains on the fringes of American Catholic theology, from which it emerged.

In the introduction to her book, *An Aquinas Reader*, Mary T. Clark reminds us that in the fourth century, even the bakers in cities touched by the Christian message were hotly debating Christology. What will it take to make the new story mainstream?

Part of the problem has been that the new story is too new. One of the surprising things about the Occupy movement that swept across New York City and then the world in 2011 was that the organizers went into Zuccotti Park with no formal agenda. It wasn’t like so many protests in the past, where a particular injustice, such as Jim Crow or the spraying of pesticides on California fields filled with unprotected migrant workers, drew protesters into the streets. At some point *during* the Occupy sit-in, an agenda emerged: justice for “the 99 percent.”

Before Zuccotti, people on Main Street were scratching their heads and asking, “What are those damn kids doing?” Afterwards, they were writing letters to the editor demanding that something be done about the “1 percent.” Taxi driv-

ers started spewing their views about the “1 percent” all over town.

In a similar way, the new story has lacked definition. Or, it has been defined by what it is not. So, what is the new story? It is founded on the idea of the *master narrative*. A master narrative is the story we tell ourselves about who we are. For most of the past 2,000 years, the master narrative of the Western world has been the story of the fall of Adam and Eve and redemption through the suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thomas Berry, who was a Catholic priest, boldly confessed that this master narrative is no longer believable or even relevant to most people. He also observed that the main corollary of the story—that this life is a test run for the afterlife—has become downright dangerous due to the effects of pollution and environmental neglect. More and more people are beginning to agree with him.

Those familiar with Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme’s work know the history of how we got to this point—where our old story no longer serves. It begins with the enormous paradigm shift initiated by the astronomers of the Renaissance, who proved that the sun does not rotate around the Earth. It continues through the seismic shifts initiated by Darwin and the evolutionists of the nineteenth century. And once Einstein and the quantum physicists came onto the scene, there was no going back.

If the old story is interpreted as one of fall and redemption, what then is the new story? To this point, attempts to create a new story have been largely about infusing the scientific story of our origins (i.e., the Big Bang) with the sort of heightened rhetoric that one finds in religious texts. The scientific narratives have been poeticized. The results have been quite moving. When I contemplate the new story, a scene from the

incredible movie *The Right Stuff* comes to mind: as astronaut John Glenn orbits the Earth, we see Aboriginals in Australia dancing around a bonfire. The camera pans upward as embers from the fire circle up to the sky, reaching out to the tiny capsule.

And still, few people are getting out of bed in the morning inspired by the wonder and beauty of the new story. The problem lies with the Big Bang itself. It's really difficult to make the connection between it and my life. The idea of a mass of energy that existed before time and space were created is too distant and abstract. I have found that the only way I can approach the Big Bang is through the concept of the Creator God found in the scripture—or at the very least, through the “first cause” found in philosophy.

It is important to note here that nostalgia for a lost master narrative is not entirely helpful. In fact, millions of activists and good-hearted people have taken up the cause of the Earth sphere, without worrying about first fixing a broken narrative. Thankfully so. The threats of global warming, toxic waste, and species loss, and a million other heartbreaking threats to this planet Earth are too urgent.

Implicit in environmental activism is a master narrative of its own: we are given but one life, and this planet is our home. If we do not take care of her, then the air, water, and food with which she has sustained us during our lives will not be available to future generations. Those blessed people who have become vegan or climbed trees to protect the owls have required nothing but their own consciences and innate sensitivity to move into this narrative. All sensitive people participate in it to some degree.

While fixing the old narrative—or finding a new one—may seem absurd to those who are already being nurtured by

the environmental movement, there are still too many people operating under the beliefs implicit in the biblical narrative. In order to rescue the Earth, we must continue the master narrative “rescue operation” begun by Berry, Swimme, and their companions. That is exactly the project of this book.

When Jim Conlon first approached me about doing a book on the implications of the new story for humanity at this time in our history, he described it as a kind of catechism. His idea was to harness this method of translating complex theological concepts into digestible chunks that could be used by generations of Catholic parents and educators. Additionally, Jim saw his project as a historical corollary to the *Summa Theologica* of St. Thomas Aquinas. In St. Thomas’s day, the philosophy of Aristotle was emerging as a rival to the philosophies of Plato and Augustine, upon which church doctrine had rested for a millennium. Thomas’s stroke of genius was to accept Aristotelian philosophy on its merits and incorporate it into the tradition. Ironically, Thomas’s great synthesis paved the way for the scientific revolution—which is the reason we’re in this muddle in the first place.

Berry, Swimme, and their successors have been at pains to avoid couching the new story in the biblical narrative. The reason, I suppose, is they felt that doing so would do violence to both. The Bible makes no mention of the Big Bang, and the Big Bang need make no mention of the Bible. With *Becoming Planetary People*, Jim Conlon is attempting to cross the beams, so to speak.

In St. Thomas’s day, Aristotle was like a sticky piece of food caught in the throat of the Catholic church. Likewise the new story today. The church at first pushed back hard against modernism, which in the nineteenth century chiefly meant rational approaches to reading and interpreting the Bible, but

also included political ideas, such as democracy, and scientific ones, such as Darwinism. Over the course of the last two hundred years, the church has slowly, imperceptibly stepped aside from its condemnation of most of the discoveries and innovations of modern secularism. But to step aside from is not the same as to fully embrace.

Becoming Planetary People carries forward Thomas Berry's project of infusing the scientific version of our origins with the poetry and majesty of ritualized religion. You will find in every corner of this little book rapturous psalms penned by Conlon. More importantly, the book adds to the growing chorus attempting to incorporate the beating heart of the new story into the theological body of classical Christianity. In this sense, the title of the book, "Becoming Planetary People," can be seen as an updating of the concept of "catholic"—a word that no longer automatically carries its own original meaning of "universal."

Today, a small minority of people (and that includes people of all religions and sects) believe that the evolution of humanity into a planetary people or society is inevitable. As this happens, nation states will fall away, as will instances of famine and genocide and the worst aspects of the global poverty-riches divide. We do not believe, however, that this will happen automatically. Only by working together and in concert with the Spirit of God, which we adore, will this be accomplished.

Becoming Planetary People is an important step in realizing this vision. And as Jim shows us, the renewal we long for need not leave behind the faith traditions in which we live, and from which we derive so many vital aspects. As such, the Christian and Roman Catholic motifs that the book calls upon should be taken symbolically, not literally, and be seen

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as one way of incorporating scientific narratives into a faith tradition.

In our longing for heaven, we Christians neglected one of the Bible's original commands: to be fruitful and shape the Earth into a just and livable planet for all. The incontrovertible facts of environmental degradation and global warming are forcing people of faith to wake up from our glorious dreams of heaven and attend to things on this earthly plane. It's important to remember that the scientific project comes with no internal stops. The implicit message of *Becoming Planetary People* is that our faith traditions—and people of faith—have a vital role to play as bearers of conscience and witnesses to a Creator God.

—John Tintera, Executive Director, Trowbridge & Tintera

PART I

Introduction

Chapter 1

To Ignite Our True Destiny

Becoming Planetary People is the result of personal reflections and studying the work of Thomas Berry and Teilhard de Chardin and many others who have explored the integration of science, art, and mysticism and the implications for us today.

I assembled these pages with a vision hovering softly in my mind. It is a vision of hope for the emergence of a new global civilization. And it is a call to become instruments of a planetary culture that can bring healing to the world.

This vision is the natural outgrowth of my prior work. The lessons I have learned over the years are still with me today. As I review them now, I see how each has served as a stepping stone to reach the place where I now stand. May the future be populated by seekers whose sacred trust and destiny are guardians that bring vitality and beauty to the planet and its peoples.

Foremost in my mind as I ponder a global civilization are the concepts I developed that I call geo-justice and an engaged cosmology. These concepts are the main building blocks of this book.

Thomas Berry writes, “In relation to the Earth, we have been autistic for centuries.” We were not able to experience the exaltation of listening to and speaking with the mountains, the rivers, the meadows, the birds, the cicadas and crickets on

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summer evenings. Finally, however, we have entered a new period in which this is possible.

The statesman and poet Vaclav Havel says,

“Either we have hope within us or we don’t. Hope is a dimension of the soul, and it is not particularly dependent on some observation of the world.... [Hope] is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense regardless of how it turns out.”

My hope for each of you who read these pages is that you will keep hope alive and have faith in a future that is vibrant and flourishing. May we together activate our souls, as once again we ignite our true destiny so that what is best in us and the world around us can be amplified and enhanced, and so that the culminating vision of a new global civilization will become present and possible in each of our lives.

The Quest

There is an updraft, a turbulence
that settles in the landscape of my soul.

These upstart springs,
with their problems and their promise,
inscribe a path of higher hope,
the legacy of every trodden path.
The quest of each searching heart
goes forward
to discover and activate
the verbs that animate our soul,
to tell our story
with the universe in mind.

Chapter 2

Our Continuous Journey

Thomas Berry, a Catholic priest and member of the Congregation of the Passion (CP), felt his work was to address the wider community; rarely did he frame his writing in classical theological terms. At the same time, his writings were compatible with the Catholic tradition. In one of his best known books, *The Great Work*, he sets forth a beautiful vision for living one's life. According to Berry, the great work is how we are able to create meaning in our lives. We can do this, he suggests, by discovering how our lives and work are related to the larger destiny of the universe itself.

Like many involved with the great work, I understand that my vision has emerged and is continually emerging from my background and experience. There is a particularity to my version of the great work that has been shaped by the circumstances of my life and the era into which I was born. By the same token, the great work of your life is unique, smelling of the Earth, weather, and fire of your life and being.

My mother's family lived in a French settlement in Canada. The French had been conquered by the British in a battle on the Plains of Abraham, and as a result, the French became a conquered people. To preserve their culture and their language, they lived together in French settlements. My mother could not speak English until she started school.

My father's family had immigrated to Canada from Ireland

to escape the famine. In many ways, they were unwelcome visitors in a new land. The mantra “No Irish need apply” named the reality that most Irish immigrants faced when they sought employment.

My French/Irish roots profoundly influenced my early years and the choices I felt called to make. I was moved to engage in justice making and to respond to the injustices that had been inflicted on my ancestors. I identified with the marginalized, and began to develop projects to help the poor, homeless, and unemployed. I wanted to provide them with the basic necessities that my French and Irish ancestors had longed for and wanted for their own lives.

Following ordination, my early years of ministry found me involved in the work of social justice. Through my parochial assignments, I became involved in programs to house the homeless, feed the hungry, and shelter the elderly and the young. I enrolled in programs to support and focus my justice work. Urban Training Centers in Toronto and Chicago, the Industrial Areas Foundation, and the Saul Alinsky Training Institute provided education in community organization and development. Study with Paulo Freire and his colleagues in the Institute for Cultural Action shined a light on his signature work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, and provided me with new insights into the process of human transformation. Another influence is Msgr. Jack Egan. Jack Egan was man who loved people and loved justice, and who loved his hometown, Chicago. Margery Frisbie told his story in *An Alley in Chicago*. The title for her book came from a comment Msgr. Patrick Molloy made at a celebration, which Jack attended, of the fortieth anniversary of Molloy’s ordination. During his remarks, Molloy said, “I have seen the great boulevards of the world But I would rather have an alley in Chicago than

any one of them.” When Jack heard that, he thought it a fitting descriptor for a book about his own work. Jack taught a generation of people to inform and support those working for justice. I was privileged to be one of those people. I tell more about his story and remember his lessons later in this work.

When I arrived in California in 1984, my life took a leap forward. On the West Coast, I was introduced to the work of Thomas Berry and the new story. As a result, I began to strive to make connections between what I was learning about the universe and my justice work in community organization, popular education and communication therapy, and consciousness research. This effort led to the approach I termed *geo-justice*.

Geo-Justice

On a bright summer day in 1989, I was in Costa Rica to attend a conference on Seeking the True Meaning of Peace. Many spiritual leaders, authors, and activists were present—among them the Dalai Lama and Thomas Berry. The host was Oscar Arias, president of Costa Rica and Nobel laureate for his dedication to world peace. Of all the many fine presentations made at the conference, one remains indelibly imprinted in my memory: that by Robert Muller, former United Nations assistant secretary general and chancellor of the UN University of Peace. He stood at the podium and said that we need to learn to think cosmologically and at the same time to act both globally and locally.

This simple yet profound statement was foundational for my development of *geo-justice*. It led me to rethink everything I had previously thought about the personal and social spheres of our existence.

After I wrote my first book, *Geo-Justice: A Preferential Option for the Earth*, in 1990, I sent a copy to Patricia Mische, co-founder of Global Education Associates. She responded by saying that the three components of geo-justice—global, local, psycho-social—corresponded to the three principles of the universe found in the writings of Teilhard de Chardin and Thomas Berry. These principles are differentiation, interiority, and communion.

I began to see that the work of geo-justice was governed by these three dynamic principles of the universe. Differentiation reveals that nothing is the same; that there is no duplication in the universe. Interiority teaches us that there is a subjectivity, a “withinness,” a personality, a soul present in all of life. Communion tells us that everything in the universe is connected to everything else.

As I expanded my understanding of geo-justice, I began to explore how the work of community organizing, global education, and popular education was reflected in these three dynamic principles. The result of this reflection was as follows: Differentiation is present in the universe; the universe honors difference. In geo-justice terms, I call this the local component. Here, each person, neighborhood, and culture is respected for its intrinsic identity and purpose. Community organization is the vehicle through which we can foster diversity, justice, and equality in each particular local setting.

Interiority gives expression to the psycho-social component of geo-justice. Each person and each gathering has its own inner articulation, its mysterious interior presence and gift. By honoring this sense of presence, we honor and celebrate the soul life of each person and community. We make connections between each individual’s personal life and societal experience.

Communion reminds us that the universe is a communion of subjects; that is, a communion of real people, each with infinite value in the eyes of God. As a result of this experience of communion, I proposed that the dynamic interconnectedness in the universe points to the global component of geo-justice.

I wrote about these principles in my next book, *Earth Story/Sacred Story*. The following is a graphic representation of the components of geo-justice and their relationship to the basic principles of the universe:

Universal Principle	Geo-Justice Component
Differentiation	Local/community organization
Interiority	Psych-social component, popular education and communication therapy
Communion	Global engagement, global education

As a result of my continued pondering of Robert Muller's invitation to think cosmologically, I began to think about my fascination with science and its implication for justice and Christian spirituality. I felt unexpectedly seized by a fresh, hope-filled vision; in my imagination, the membrane between the cosmos and the soul was dissolving. With new energy, I set out to create a dynamic integration between the universe and the psyche, and from that place, to contemplate questions that had hovered in my heart for many years.

Engaged Cosmology

Thomas Berry dedicated his life to alleviating the pain of the planet and its people, yet to a large degree he left it to others

to put his vision into practice and transform the culture. As I pondered how best to accomplish this and to explore the connection between cosmology and justice, my mind turned to the work of the Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh. He refers to his work as *engaged Buddhism*. I concluded that in a parallel fashion, we could call our work *engaged cosmology*. In a sense, engaged cosmology is a synthesis of what I learned from Jack Egan and Robert Muller. It was born out of the felt need to connect my newfound understanding of the universe to a set of practical strategies that could bring harmony, balance, and peace back into the world.

As my reflections deepened, I also began to see how communion, differentiation, and interiority could be understood as the ways in which the Christian doctrine of the Trinity is manifest in the world around us. Communion gives expression to the Spirit God; differentiation manifests the Creator God; and interiority the Word of God, the Son. In this way, we are able to view the universe as permeated with the divine presence. Through the work of geo-justice and engaged cosmology, we translate these principles into practical applications. Harmony and beauty flood the Earth, and the divine becomes incarnate, present throughout the Earth and all its peoples.

With *Becoming Planetary People*, I am seeking to reorient the poles of religion and cosmology. What if we were to view the Paschal mystery of Jesus' incarnation, death, and resurrection leading to Pentecost as a great cosmic narrative? In this way, incarnation expands to include the sprouting of a grain of wheat in the soil, the dawn of a new day, the vitality of a child. The crucifixion becomes a cosmic event that incorporates the encroaching death of a rainforest or a species, the poverty of a people, and the devastation of the planet.

Resurrection becomes the beginning of spring, the birth of a movement, and the fresh newness of a global civilization born out of the unleashing of the collective imagination of a people called forth at this defining moment.

By the same token, we can begin to ask ourselves how we understand the Bethlehem (incarnation), Gethsemane (crucifixion), and Easter (resurrection) moments in our lives.

Engaged cosmology involves a new synthesis of the universe story, whereby the narratives found in our sacred texts and each of our personal stories are revealed in and through our actions in the world. Engaged cosmology happens when our actions flow out of the essential connection between personal, planetary, and sacred stories.

Engaged cosmology is empowered by reflecting on the full spectrum of theology. This involves a dynamic relationship between contemplative, liberation, and creation theology. For example, we explore the longing of the soul in contemplative theology, the longing of the other in liberation theology, and the longing of the Earth in creation theology—as we reflect on the experience of mystery, creativity, and compassion

Earth, Art, and Spirit

As my notion of justice continued to evolve, I began to focus on the nature of beauty. I was inspired when I heard Brian Swimme talk about beauty as another word for justice, a notion that is also expressed in the writings of Alfred North Whitehead. I asked myself, what if we were to equate the notions of justice and beauty? We know from experience that the reverse is true: injustices are by nature ugly, repellent. They fill us with anger. I saw the need for us to transform our understanding of justice making such that we were not ad-

dressing the question “What am I angry about?” but instead asking, “What do I want to create?” With this book, I hope to further shift the conversation about justice so it can embrace the need for each member of the Earth community to find his or her personal great work. When this happens, beauty will shine forth and justice will reign supreme.

To this end, I have integrated two additional components into the concept of geo-justice. The first is personal story. Each person has a story to tell, and all stories matter. Our stories remind us of pain, celebrate joy, and consecrate sorrow. We are all called to transform the pain in our lives with what will be fuel for the liberating work of justice making. The second is the embrace of each person’s faith and cultural traditions. As a Christian, I reflect on these words of the prophet Isaiah:

“He will never waiver nor be crushed
Until true justice is established on Earth.”

The combination of geo-justice, engaged cosmology, personal story, and faith is the backbone of this book. In my own life, I have arrived at a new vision of cosmic energies and the interconnectedness of everything with everything else. I now see that the new cosmology provides a vision of reality that invites us to redefine our understanding of the divine, humanity, the meaning of life, and the universe itself. No longer do I see God as a distant judge, but rather as a benevolent presence who gives expression to compassion.

It is my hope that this new perspective will evoke in you acts of justice and healing for the Earth and its peoples. Each person can now be understood as a participant in this amazing evolutionary process. I see, with Fritof Capra, a global civilization that is a living organism made of thousands upon thousands of self-organizing networks. We move forward, en-

ergized by a unifying vision, a tapestry of relationships woven into a cosmic dance of holistic relationships.

We share a common origin and are all cousins and kin. In our interconnectedness, all barriers are removed. We become one people bound together in a mystical prophetic movement of justice, compassion, and peace. With intuition and imagination, we honor beauty as our goal.

As we look to the future, we see an evolving culture and spirituality that are deeply connected to the Earth. We see the flowering of a global movement that is growing out of the transformation of human consciousness. Out of this flows a profound cultural therapy to make possible a mutually enhancing human presence on Earth.

The culminating vision of this work of justice-making is expressed in the mantra, "Another world is possible." We understand this world as "a new kind of civil society" and understand that this new society will be global in its scope and organization. Communities will be formed at the grassroots level, linked through electronic networks formed around the world. I view the future global civilization as an emergent network rather than a machine. And I look to the future with an enduring hope that the dramatic transformation of society and soul awaits us.

Celebrate

Embrace cosmos and soul.
Celebrate the power of love,
the possibility of connection.
Experience creation's beauty,
aspirations of the heart.

Explore mystery.

Engage the adventure
of an unfinished life.

Amidst the beauty and the sorrow,
a new capacity is born.

Uncover each day
greater possibility of joy, of healing.
Create a new global civilization.

Chapter 3

Historical Context

Throughout history, many prophetic voices have resounded. Worldviews have changed and evolved. As Leonardo Boff states, “Each great turn of history introduces a new paradigm. This means that new forms of perceiving and interpreting reality emerge, and that we are obliged to redefine the fundamental concepts that orient our social and personal lives, including our concepts of God, human beings, history, the meaning of existence, and the universe.”

During the Middle Ages, Aristotle’s worldview began to exert a profound impact on the Western world, and a shift in consciousness took place in the West. The Christian leaders of the West invited the Dominican friar Thomas Aquinas to Rome, the seat of Christianity in the pre-reformation world. His task was to examine the Christian perspective on life in the light of Aristotelian cosmology.

Aquinas undertook his task with great vigor and intellectual insight. The result was the production of many volumes of theology, now understood as the *Summa Theologica*. Those with roots in the Christian tradition will be familiar with the writings of Aquinas. Others may wish to delve into this rich piece of our history. Thomas Berry often quoted Aquinas in his talks and writing; in fact, when he joined the Passionist Community, he took the name Thomas because of his connection to Aquinas.

In the wake of Aquinas's transitional moment, members of the believing community began to develop ways to pass on their tradition, now seen through the lens of Aristotle's work. To do this, they composed themes central to their tradition.

For a long time, I have been fascinated with the writings of Aquinas because I feel he accomplished in his time what in many ways we are challenged to accomplish in ours. The challenge is to create a dynamic integration between our worldview and our Christian tradition. It is a challenge that is very much needed today, as the mundane world in which we live and the world of faith seem to be growing further and further apart.

Thomas Berry clearly articulated the relevance of his name-sake's work for our world today:

“As Thomas Aquinas gave vigor to the Christian faith through his interpretation of Aristotle, so now a new vision and a new vigor are available through our modern understanding of the origin and development of the universe and the emerging ecological age. If creating the new cultural coding is the next phase of the American experience, creating this new cultural coding may well be the next phase of the Christian tradition.”

It is both our privilege and our challenge to engage in the process of imagining the Christian message filtered to us through the eyes of evolutionary science and the new cosmology. Aquinas was able to do this in the past, and the result was a revitalized Christianity. In our life time, however, we have seen a decline in interest in the Christian life because our Christian story has been overshadowed by the dominance of the consumer-driven culture. Moreover, the medieval perspective of Aquinas remains with us, dictating our philosophy

and theology, as it did when I was in the seminary. We are frozen in a static dogma, which is inadequate to capture the integration of spirituality and science that is needed to reinvigorate our tradition.

Teilhard de Chardin warns in no uncertain terms, “Christianity will never cease to stagnate, will never begin once more to spread with the vigour of its early days, unless it makes up its mind to gear itself to the natural aspirations of the Earth.” And Ilia Delio names the problem this way: “Christian theology no longer has an effective cosmology that enables believers to relate to the world in its physical character in a way that is consistent with religious symbols. We have yet to reframe our hopes in light of an expanding universe.”

With many others, I share the challenge presented by Ilia Delio. I, too, feel deeply the decreased relevance of the Christian faith in the modern world. As a result, I want to contribute to a new integration between the Christian world—which seems somehow to have become frozen in time, and is now viewed as a medieval church in a postmodern world—and the world as we see it today, through the lens of evolutionary science.

John Grim writes, “Aquinas exemplifies an archetypal pattern of architectonic thinker in the thirteenth century who drew on the newly arrived classical thought of Aristotle to creatively synthesize the thought of his age.” In Aristotelian thought, Aquinas found the means to articulate the philosophic version of the story for his time.

During the Great Depression, Peter Maurin and Dorothy Day cofounded the Catholic Worker, an organization designed to support the working poor and spread awareness of social justice. Their newspaper of the same name still sells for one penny a copy. In her autobiography, Dorothy describes

Peter's desire to make Christianity relevant for the times: "He wanted to make a new synthesis, as St. Thomas had done in the Middle Ages, and he wanted to enlist the aid of a group of people in doing this. He was no more afraid of non-Catholic approach to problems than St. Thomas was of the Aristotelian."

It is this desire that I share with many others today. I want to affirm that Christianity need not fear new worldviews or science; rather, we can interact without fear of the new ideas present in science and culture. Much as Thomas Aquinas delved into the earlier worldview of Aristotle, we are challenged to delve fearlessly into the new worldview today, as revealed by evolutionary science, and use it to invigorate the world of faith and the Christian tradition.

We are entering a new era that invites religious people to be more sensitive to those from different cultures, races, and creeds. It is time to actively embrace science, and even to apologize for the harm our religious traditions caused—directly and indirectly—when they refused the wisdom flowing from empirical observation. We look back and remember that our forbearers put Galileo in jail. We have denigrated some of the world's greatest scientists and thinkers, such as Edwin Hubble; Albert Einstein; and even Teilhard de Chardin, who was unable to publish theological writings during his lifetime.

Today, a new sense of enthusiasm is dawning in the lives of those who embrace both the wisdom of science and their spiritual tradition. For this to happen on an even broader scale, our challenge is to reimagine our inherited traditions within the narrative of contemporary science. We can now reflect on what we have learned from Galileo, Einstein, and others and see how their wisdom actually enhances the sacred-

ness of the Earth's story. We are challenged to ponder deeply the key components of our tradition and re-envision them in the light of what science reveals to us today. Mary Evelyn Tucker states, "We now have the capacity to tell a comprehensive story, drawing on astronomy and physics to explain the emergence of galaxies and stars, geology and chemistry to understand the formation of Earth, biology and botany to trace life evolution, and anthropology and history to see the rise of humans."

We take up the challenge to foster and make shareable with new vigor a spirituality informed by modern science. We are able to articulate a fresh understanding of spirituality that flows from the insights of evolutionary science.

Nor is this a one-way street. Just as spirit moves toward science, so too must science move toward spirit. We are indeed fortunate to live in an era when these two mighty oceans are flowing into one another. As Brian Swimme states,

"Enormous technology wielded by a single species without cosmological wisdom is degrading life everywhere. But even at this nadir of human history, a remarkable reversal has begun to take place. After science has roamed about destroying the traditional cosmologies through every continent, it is now beginning to be assimilated in a new cosmological wisdom.... We have before us the possibility for a radically new orientation in the universe... a synthesis of the evolutionary universe as discovered by science with the sacred universe as understood by our spiritual traditions."

Here at the threshold of a new beginning, we feel stirred in our depths by the conviction that our vocational destiny is to bring beauty into the world, to open our hearts to the invitation to make all our lives matter, and to become people

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of generosity and justice. We take both science and religion as companions as we set out to bring beauty, peace, and justice more fully into the world.

Listen

Goodness is our inheritance,
wisdom is our guide,
the stars our trajectory,
sunshine our power.

Listen carefully
to all that you may hear.
Listen to the inner voice
that calls out so loud and clear.

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Join the Becoming Planetary People community, watch videos with Jim Conlon (including a half-hour video that is a companion to this book and can be used for teaching and discussion), and find out the latest news at:

www.becomingplanetarypeople.com



Also by Jim Conlon

Sacred Butterflies: Poems, Prayers and Practices

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