

THOMAS BERRY

The

GREAT WORK

Our Way into the Future



THREE RIVERS PRESS • NEW YORK

About the Author

THOMAS BERRY, a historian of cultures, comes from the hill country of the Southern Appalachians, where he was born at the beginning of the First World War. In 1934 he entered a monastery. He received his doctoral degree in Western cultural history at the Catholic University of America in Washington, D.C., in 1948. In that year he went to China to study Chinese language, culture, and religions. After Mao Tse-tung came to power, he returned to the United States to continue his Chinese studies and begin his study of the Sanskrit language and the religious traditions of India. He has taught at the Center for Asian Studies at Seton Hall University and at the Center for Asian Studies at Saint John's University in New York.

He was the director of the graduate program in the history of religions at Fordham University from 1966 until 1979. Founder of the Riverdale Center of Religious Research in Riverdale, New York, he was its director from 1970 until 1995. During this time the Center's major concern was to clarify the role of the human community within the more integral community of the Earth and with the universe itself. He was president of the American Teilhard de Chardin Association from 1975–1987. In 1995 he returned to North Carolina, where he is continuing his writing on ecological issues.

In 1968 he published *Buddhism* and in 1972 *The Religions of India*. He has also published a number of articles on the more significant human issues of the twentieth century. For the past fifteen years his writings have focused on the disturbed ecological situation of industrial societies. *The Dream of the Earth*, published in 1988, won a Lannan Award for nonfiction in 1995. *Befriending the Earth*, a series of conversations on religion and the Earth, with Thomas Clarke, was published in 1991. *The Universe Story*, with Brian Swimme, was published in 1992.

"Maybe once every 100 years does someone emerge from the shuddering mass of humanity who speaks to us with a kind of clarity that is universally profound. Thomas Berry is such a figure. *The Great Work* will, I believe, be remembered as the touchstone, the 'bible' whose wisdom laid the groundwork for our continued healthy existence here on Earth."

Thomas Rain Crowe, *The Bloomsbury Review*

"Thomas Berry has demonstrated once again that he is one of the few great religious minds to be reckoned with."

Wes Jackson, president of the Land Institute

"Great Work indeed! Thomas Berry offers us the benefit of a lifetime of clear-headed, clear-hearted reflection. And by so doing he shows us where our task lies, shows us the particular test that we must face just as our ancestors faced their own great challenges. It's a work to stir the blood."

Bill McKibben, author of *The End of Nature*

"Thomas Berry is the bard of the new cosmology. He unerringly finds the mythic dimension and the moral significance behind the scientific facts."

Theodore Roszak, author of *The Voice of the Earth* and *Ecopsychology*

"How different American society might be if every high school student were exposed to the ideas contained in this book. One can only sigh in gratitude for this comprehensive and cautionary cultural history, and raise a cheer for those members of the human community already engaged in the truly Great Work."

Virginia Baron, *Parabola*

THE WISDOM of science, as this exists in the Western world at the beginning of the twenty-first century, lies in its discovery that the

universe has come into being by a sequence of evolutionary transformations over an immense period of time. Through these transformation episodes the universe has passed from a lesser to a greater complexity in structure and from a lesser to a greater mode of consciousness. We might say that the universe, in the phenomenal order, is self-emergent, self-sustaining, and self-fulfilling. The universe is the only self-referent mode of being in the phenomenal world. Every other being is universe-referent in itself and in its every activity. Awareness that the universe is more cosmogenesis than cosmos might be the greatest change in human consciousness that has taken place since the awakening of the human mind in the Paleolithic Period.

This earlier awakening of the human mind took place in a spatial mode of understanding. The universe, as originally experienced by the human mind, moved in an ever-renewing sequence of changes that easily coordinated with the changes in the natural world, with the daily cycle of dawn and dusk, with the yearly cycle of the seasons. In this context the great journey toward life fulfillment is the journey portrayed in the mandala symbol where the human journey toward fulfillment is toward the center where the divine, the cosmic, and the human worlds become present to each other in mutual fulfillment. The small self of the individual reaches its completion in the Great Self of the universe.

A constant awareness of this spatial context of life gives to human life a deep security, for this ever-renewing world is both an abiding and a sacred world. To live consciously within this sacred world is for the personal self of the individual to be integral with the Great Self of the universe. To move from this abiding spatial context of personal identity to a sense of identity with an emergent universe is a transition that has, even now, not been accomplished in any comprehensive manner by any of the world's spiritual traditions.

This change in human consciousness had its beginning in the sixteenth century with Copernicus. At this time both the value and the difficulty in the work of Thomas Aquinas became apparent.

Copernicus and his followers such as Kepler and Galileo could not have done their work with such confidence unless Thomas had authenticated the reasoning function of the human mind in Western tradition. The difficulty was that Thomas had done his work too well, for he had established Christian revelation so fully within the scientific perspective of Aristotle that it now appeared that any discoveries made that opposed the view of the universe as described by Aristotle must necessarily be false. If they were false then they could not be coherent with revealed teaching, since one of the perspectives of Thomas was that any error concerning the natural world would endanger the authentic understanding of the world of faith.

Because the religious commitment to Aristotle was so intense it was unavoidable that a conflict should occur once such new developments in science began to take place. It was not simply a commitment to the science of Aristotle, it was a commitment also to the deductive processes of reason that tended to dominate all such earlier thinking. Only very late in the history of human thinking did the full appreciation of empirical research science come into being. When it did come into being it reacted with understandable intensity against traditional deductive processes. The reaction was not only to the mode of thinking and to the structure of the world presented, but it was extended even to the denial of the spiritual realm.

For the first time in human history the spirit world, the world of soul, was considered an unreal emotional or aesthetic experience of the human psyche. As a subjective illusion, without acceptable evidence it had no objective validity. Scientists took over both the intellectual and moral guidance of the society through their control over the human mind in the educational program. By its inventive genius science also brought forth an endless number of new technologies that gave to humans amazing power over the phenomenal world.

Francis Bacon, in the early seventeenth century, proposed that through experiments with nature, we could learn more about just how nature functions and through this knowledge we could control nature

rather than be controlled by nature. While this was a profound encouragement to the idea of experimentation, it was not Francis Bacon but Galileo Galilei who first performed thoroughly controlled and mathematically measured experiments. His work, together with that of Johannes Kepler, who had first observed that the planets move in elliptical rather than circular orbits, set the background for the work of Isaac Newton who came to understand the laws of gravitation in relation to the movement of the heavenly bodies. His description provided the dominant Western concept of the universe until the time of Albert Einstein and Max Planck in the twentieth century.

Newton, however, had no idea of the evolutionary nature of the universe. This insight came later through continued studies of the universe, but also of the geological structure and biological systems of Earth. These studies eventually led to an awareness that not only Earth but the entire universe had come into being through a long sequence of evolutionary transformations over an immensely long period of time. The important thing about all these discoveries is that they led to an awareness of the unity of the universe within itself and with each of its components. It also led to a realization that each component of the universe is immediately in contact with each of the other components of the universe. In this manner it could be said that in a scientific as well as a religious sense the small self of the individual finds its Great Self in the universe. These somehow exist for each other.

Because this story is a single story and the components of the universe are so intimately related, the story must account for human intelligence. If we consider that human intelligence is a psychic faculty, then the universe from the beginning must be a psychic-producing process. To find a place for the human is the difficulty of those who would maintain that the universe is simply a material mode of being without an intelligent dimension.

If the unity of the universe is one aspect of the wisdom of science, another aspect is the emergent nature of the universe. The third is the existence of human intelligence as an integral component of the uni-

verse. The story of the universe becomes the epic story of our times. It narrates something that can be considered in analogy with the epic of the *Odyssey* and with the other epic stories such as the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana* of India, or the *Nibelungenlied* of the Germanic world.

AFTER CONSIDERING the wisdom of indigenous peoples, the wisdom of women, the wisdom of the traditions, and the wisdom of science, it seems quite clear that these all agree in the intimacy of humans with the natural world in a single community of existence. The human emerges from the larger universe and discovers itself in this universe. This we find expressed throughout the life and thought and ritual of indigenous peoples. In the wisdom of women it is found in the description of the universe as a mutually nourishing presence of all things with each other. Such is the view of the universe presented in the Goddess figure and other symbolisms. After being excluded from so much of the human world over the centuries, women are revealing the disaster of androcentrism to our society for the first time in Western history.

So too in the classical traditions, the basic teaching in all of the traditions is the fulfillment of the human in the larger functioning of the universe. This we find in Hinduism in the unity of the individual self with the *Atman*, the Great Self of the universe. This is also present in the Buddhist teaching that every mode of being participates in the Buddha Nature. In the Chinese expression of the "One Body" we are told by Wang Yang-ming in the sixteenth century: "Everything from ruler, minister, husband, wife, and friends to mountains, rivers, heavenly and earthly spirits, birds, animals, and plants, all should be truly loved in order to realize my humanity that forms a unity, and then my clear character will be completely manifested, and I will really form one body with Heaven Earth, and the myriad things."

In the Western world the unity of humans with the other components of the universe in a single integral-entity universe finds

expression most clearly in the cosmology of Plato as expressed in the *Timeaeus* (par. 36e), "Now when the creator had framed the soul according to his will, he formed within her the corporeal universe, and brought the two together and united them, center to center." Yet it was the Stoic philosopher, Chrysippus, with his idea of the great city of the universe, the *Cosmopolis*, that most clearly expressed this Western sense of oneness of the universe within a single community of being by a political analogy. Throughout the medieval period the unity of humans with the larger universe was founded more on the creation story of Genesis and on the cosmic dimension of the Christ presence in the universe as expressed by Saint Paul in his *Epistle to the Colossians* where he indicates that in the mystical Christ "all things hold together."

A new basis for the unity of humans with the larger earth community is found in the discoveries of modern science. The more clearly we understand the sciences and their perceptions of the universe, the more clearly we appreciate the intimate presence of each component of the universe with every other component. This unity is realized both in our studies of the large-scale structure and functioning of the universe and in the geobiological systems of the Earth.

A similar unity is found in the science traditions of the Western world. The more clearly we understand the sciences and their perceptions of the universe, the more clearly we understand the intimate presence of each component of the universe with every other component. This unity is realized in a unique manner in the geobiological systems of the Earth.

It becomes increasingly evident that in our present situation no one of these traditions is sufficient. We need all of the traditions. Each has its own distinctive achievements, limitations, distortions, its own special contribution toward an integral wisdom tradition that seems to be taking shape in the emerging twenty-first century. Each of the traditional modes of understanding seems to be experiencing a renewal. For the first time the indigenous traditions are accepted as setting the basic model for

human presence to the universe. We need such intimacy with the natural world as that presented in the Great Thanksgiving Ceremony of the Iroquois Indians as they made formal recognition of their existence as the gift of the various powers of the universe. The Harvard-based Forum on Religion and Ecology, which grew out of a three-year series of conferences on the world's religions and their views of nature, is an important new direction for examining the wisdom of the religious traditions for guidance into the next century.

For the first time also we begin to understand that the human project belongs in the care and under the direction of both women and men. This was a movement out of a patriarchal society into a truly integral human order. So too the traditional Western civilization must withdraw from its efforts at dominion over the Earth. This will be one of the most severe disciplines in the future, for the Western addiction to economic dominance is even more powerful than the drive toward political dominance.

Then, finally, there is the epic of evolution, the contribution of science toward the future. The universe story is our story, individually and as the human community. In this context we can feel secure in our efforts to fulfill the Great Work before us. The guidance, the inspiration and the energy we need is available. The accomplishment of the Great Work is the task not simply of the human community but of the entire planet Earth. Even beyond Earth, it is the Great Work of the universe itself.



The liturgy of abundance, the myth of scarcity

by Walter Brueggemann

THE MAJORITY OF the world's resources pour into the United States. And as we Americans grow more and more wealthy, money is becoming a kind of narcotic for us. We hardly notice our own prosperity or the poverty of so many others. The great contradiction is that we have more and more money and less and less generosity—less and less public money for the needy, less charity for the neighbor.

Robert Wuthnow, sociologist of religion at Princeton University, has studied stewardship in the church and discovered that preachers do a good job of promoting stewardship. They study it, think about it, explain it well. But folks don't get it. Though many of us are well intentioned, we have invested our lives in consumerism. We have a love affair with "more"—and we will never have enough. Consumerism is not simply a marketing strategy. It has become a demonic spiritual force among us, and the theological question facing us is whether the gospel has the power to help us withstand it.

The Bible starts out with a liturgy of abundance. Genesis I is a song of praise for God's generosity. It tells how well the world is ordered. It keeps saying, "It is good, it is good, it is good, it is very good." It declares that God blesses—that is, endows with vitality—the plants and the animals and the fish and the birds and humankind. And it pictures the creator as saying, "Be fruitful and multiply." In an orgy of fruitfulness, everything in its kind is to multiply the overflowing goodness that pours from God's creator spirit. And as you know, the creation ends in Sabbath. God is so overrun with fruitfulness that God says, "I've got to take a break from all this. I've got to get out of the office."

And Israel celebrates God's abundance. Psalm 104, the longest creation poem, is a commentary on Genesis I. The psalmist surveys creation and names it all: the heavens and the earth, the waters and springs and streams and trees and birds and goats and wine and oil and bread and people and lions. This goes on for 23 verses and ends in the 24th with the psalmist's expression of awe and praise for God and God's creation. Verses 27 and 28 are something like a table prayer. They proclaim, "You give them all food in due season, you feed everybody." The psalm ends by picturing God as a great respirator. It says, "If you give your breath

the world will live; if you ever stop breathing, the world will die." But the psalm makes clear that we don't need to worry. God is utterly, utterly reliable. The fruitfulness of the world is guaranteed.

Psalm 150, the last psalm in the book, is an exuberant expression of amazement at God's goodness. It just says, "Praise Yahweh, praise Yahweh with lute, praise Yahweh with trumpet, praise, praise, praise." Together, these three scriptures proclaim that God's force of life is loose in the world. Genesis 1 affirms generosity and denies scarcity. Psalm 104 celebrates the buoyancy of creation and rejects anxiety. Psalm 150 enacts abandoning oneself to God and letting go of the need to have anything under control.

Later in Genesis God blesses Abraham, Sarah and their family. God tells them to be a blessing, to bless the people of all nations. Blessing is the force of well-being active in the world, and faith is the awareness that creation is the gift that keeps on giving. That awareness dominates Genesis until its 47th chapter.

In that chapter Pharaoh dreams that there will be a famine in the land. So Pharaoh gets organized to administer, control and monopolize the food supply. Pharaoh introduces the principle of scarcity into the world economy. For the first time in the Bible, someone says, "There's not enough. Let's get everything."

Martin Niemöller, the German pastor who heroically opposed Adolf Hitler, was a young man when, as part of a delegation of leaders of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, he met with Hitler in 1933. Niemöller stood at the back of the room and looked and listened. He didn't say anything. When he went home, his wife asked him what he had learned that day. Niemöller replied, "I discovered that Herr Hitler is a terribly frightened man."

Because Pharaoh, like Hitler after him, is afraid that there aren't enough good things to go around, he must try to have them all. Because he is fearful, he is ruthless. Pharaoh hires Joseph to manage the monopoly. When the crops fail and the peasants run out of food, they come to Joseph. And on behalf of Pharaoh, Joseph says, "What's your collateral?" They give up their land for food, and then, the next year, they give up their cattle. By the third

**Consumerism
has become
a demonic
spiritual
force. Does
the gospel
have the
power to
help us
withstand it?**

year of the famine they have no collateral but themselves. And that's how the children of Israel become slaves—through an economic transaction.

By the end of Genesis 47 Pharaoh has all the land except that belonging to the priests, which he never touches because he needs somebody to bless him. The notion of scarcity has been introduced into biblical faith. The Book of Exodus records the contest between the liturgy of generosity and the myth of scarcity—a contest that still tears us apart today.

The promises of the creation story continue to operate in the lives of the children of Israel. Even in captivity, the people multiply. By the end of Exodus 1 Pharaoh decides that they have become so numerous that he doesn't want any more Hebrew babies to be born. He tells the two midwives, Shiphrah and Puah (though we don't know Pharaoh's name, we know theirs), to kill all the newborn boys. But they don't, and the Hebrew babies just keep popping out.

By the end of Exodus, Pharaoh has been as mean, brutal and ugly as he knows how to be—and as the myth of scarcity tends to be. Finally, he becomes so exasperated by his inability to control the people of Israel that he calls Moses and Aaron to come to him. Pharaoh tells them, "Take your people and leave. Take your flocks and herds and just get out of here!" And then the great king of Egypt, who presides over a monopoly of the region's resources, asks Moses and Aaron to bless him. The powers of scarcity admit to this little community of abundance, "It is clear that you are the wave of the future. So before you leave, lay your powerful hands upon us and give us energy." The text shows that the power of the future is not in the hands of those who believe in scarcity and monopolize the world's resources; it is in the hands of those who trust God's abundance.

WHEN THE CHILDREN of Israel are in the wilderness, beyond the reach of Egypt, they still look back and think, "Should we really go? All the world's glory is in Egypt and with Pharaoh." But when they finally turn around and look into the wilderness, where there are no monopolies, they see the glory of Yahweh.

In answer to the people's fears and complaints, something extraordinary happens. God's love comes trickling down in the form of bread. They say, "*Manhue?*"—Hebrew for "What is it?"—and the word "manna" is born. They had never before received bread as a free gift that they couldn't control, predict, plan for or own. The meaning of this strange narrative is that the gifts of life are indeed given by a generous God. It's a wonder, it's a miracle, it's an embarrassment, it's irrational, but God's abundance transcends the market economy.

Three things happened to this bread in Exodus 16.

First, everybody had enough. But because Israel had learned to believe in scarcity in Egypt, people started to hoard the bread. When they tried to bank it, to invest it, it turned sour and rotted, because you cannot store up God's generosity. Finally, Moses said, "You know what we ought to do? We ought to do what God did in Genesis 1. We ought to have a Sabbath." Sabbath means that there's enough bread, that we don't have to hustle every day of our lives. There's no record that Pharaoh ever took a day off. People who think their lives consist of struggling to get more and more can never slow down because they won't ever have enough.

When the people of Israel cross the Jordan River into the promised land the manna stops coming. Now they can and will have to grow their food. Very soon Israel suffers a terrible defeat in battle and Joshua conducts an investigation to find out who or what undermined the war effort. He finally traces their defeat to a man called Achan, who stole some of the spoils of battle and withheld them from the community. Possessing land, property and wealth makes people covetous, the Bible warns.

We who are now the richest nation are today's main coveters. We never feel that we have enough; we have to have more and more, and this insatiable desire destroys us. Whether we are liberal or conservative Christians, we must confess that the central problem of our lives is that we are torn apart by the conflict between our attraction to the good news of God's abundance and the power of our belief in scarcity—a belief that makes us greedy, mean and unneighborly. We spend our lives trying to sort out that ambiguity.

The conflict between the narratives of abundance and of scarcity is the defining problem confronting us at the turn of the millennium. The gospel story of abundance asserts that we originated in the magnificent, inexplicable love of a God who loved the world into generous being. The baptismal service declares that each of us has been miraculously loved into existence by God. And the story of abundance says that our lives will end in God, and that this well-being cannot be taken from us. In the words of St. Paul, neither life nor death nor angels nor principalities nor things—nothing can separate us from God.

What we know about our beginnings and our endings, then, creates a different kind of present tense for us. We can live according to an ethic whereby we are not driven, controlled, anxious, frantic or greedy, precisely because we are sufficiently at home and at peace to care about others as we have been cared for.

But if you are like me, while you read the Bible you keep looking over at the screen to see how the market is doing. If you are like me, you read the Bible on a good

Walter Brueggemann is McPheeters Professor of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur, Georgia.

CULTIVATING THE MISSIONAL CHURCH

1999 Summer Seminars

The world is changing. The old patterns of ministry are no longer either faithful or effective. Yet the forces that threaten the wholeness of human life and the integrity of creation are still active and powerful. Cultivating missional communities that proclaim and embody the Good News of Jesus Christ calls for more than techniques that accommodate a marketing and success orientation. Representing God in a missionary engagement with culture requires theological insight, biblical grounding, and practical skills for leading profound change - all of which contribute to a new identity and vision for the church in the 21st century. These seminars, which grow out of the Center's 31 years of consulting and teaching experience, will help you develop the insight, grounding, and skills for more faithful and effective patterns of ministry.

● Two and One-Half Day Seminars ●

- July 7-9 Engaging the Culture with the Gospel
- July 12-14 Becoming a Learning Community
- July 14-16 Building Leadership Teams in the Missional Church
- July 19-21 Evaluating Performance in the Missional Church
- July 21-23 Cultivating a Stewarding Community

● Five Day Seminars ●

- July 26-30 Consulting for Profound Change:
From Establishment Church to Missional Church
- August 2-6 Discerning God's Vision Together
- August 9-13 Shaping Missional Communities

● Specialized Training Seminars ●

- April 19-21 Survey-Guided Leadership Team Development
- Oct. 18-29 Advanced Consulting Skills for Shaping
Missional Churches

the Center
for Parish
Development

For information and registration materials, call today

Phone 773-752-1596 • Fax 773-752-5093

5407 South University Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60615

day, but you watch Nike ads every day. And the Nike story says that our beginnings are in our achievements, and that we must create ourselves. My wife and I have some young friends who have a four-year-old son. Recently the mother told us that she was about to make a crucial decision. She had to get her son into the right kindergarten because if she didn't, then he wouldn't get into the right prep school. And that would mean not being able to get into Davidson College. And if he didn't go to school there he wouldn't be connected to the bankers in Charlotte and be able to get the kind of job where he would make a lot of money. Our friends' story is a kind of a parable of our notion that we must position ourselves because we must achieve, and build our own lives.

According to the Nike story, whoever has the most shoes when he dies wins. The Nike story says there are no gifts to be given because there's no giver. We end up only with whatever we manage to get for ourselves. This story ends in despair. It gives us a present tense of anxiety, fear, greed and brutality. It produces child and wife abuse, indifference to the poor, the buildup of armaments, divisions between people, and environmental racism. It tells us not to care about anyone but ourselves—and it is the prevailing creed of American society.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if liberal and conservative churchpeople, who love to quarrel with each other, came to a common realization that the real issue confronting us is whether the news of God's abundance can be trusted in the face of the story of scarcity? What we know in the secret recesses of our hearts is that the story of scarcity is a tale of death. And the people of God counter this tale by witnessing to the manna. There is a more excellent bread than crass materialism. It is the bread of life and you don't have to bake it. As we walk into the new millennium, we must decide where our trust is placed.

The great question now facing the church is whether our faith al-

lows us to live in a new way. If we choose the story of death, we will lose the land—to excessive chemical fertilizer, or by pumping out the water table for irrigation, perhaps. Or maybe we'll only lose it at night, as going out after dark becomes more and more dangerous.

Joshua 24 puts the choice before us. Joshua begins by reciting the story of God's generosity, and he concludes by saying, "I don't know about you, but I and my house will choose the Lord." This is not a church-growth text. Joshua warns the people that this choice will bring them a bunch of trouble. If they want to be in on the story of abundance, they must put away their foreign gods—I would identify them as the gods of scarcity.

Jesus said it more succinctly: You cannot serve God and mammon. You cannot serve God and do what you please with your money or your sex or your land. And then he says, "Don't be anxious, because everything you need will be given to you." But you must decide. Christians have a long history of trying to squeeze Jesus out of public life and reduce him to a private little Savior. But to do this is to ignore what the Bible really says. Jesus talks a great deal about the kingdom of God—and what he means by that is a public life reorganized toward neighborliness.

As a little child, Jesus must often have heard his mother, Mary, singing. And as we know, she sang a revolutionary song, the Magnificat—the anthem of Luke's Gospel. She sang about neighborliness; about how God brings down the mighty from their thrones and lifts up the lowly; about how God fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty. Mary did not make up this dangerous song. She took it from another mother, Hannah, who sang it much earlier to little Samuel, who became one of ancient Israel's great revolutionaries. Hannah, Mary and their little boys imagined a great social transformation. Jesus enacted his mother's song well. Everywhere he went he broke the vicious cycles of poverty, bondage, fear and death; he healed, transformed, empowered, and brought new life. Jesus' example gives us the mandate to transform our public life.

Telling parables was one of Jesus' revolutionary activities, for parables are subversive re-imaginings of reality. The ideology devoted to encouraging consumption wants to

shrivel our imaginations so that we cannot conceive of living in any way that would be less profitable for the dominant corporate structures. But Jesus tells us that we can change the world. The Christian community performs a vital service by keeping the parables alive. These stories haunt us and push us in directions we never thought we would go.

PERFORMING WHAT the Bible calls "wonders and signs" was another way in which Jesus enacted his mother's song. These signs—or miracles—may seem odd to us, but in fact they are the typical gifts we receive when the world gets reorganized and placed under the sovereignty of God. Everywhere Jesus goes the world is rearranged: the blind re-

Join us ...

Lancaster Theological Seminary

for the

1999 Harwick Workshop
on Biblical Stewardship



*Holy and Unholy
Stewardship*

The Reverend John C. Haughey, S.J.

*Professor of Religious Ethics ~ Loyola University of Chicago
Author of Virtue and Affluence*

Saturday, April 17, 1999

9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. ~ Hafer Center

No cost for workshop. Modest fee for box lunch, upon request.

To register or for additional information, please contact:

Lancaster Theological Seminary

Office of Continuing Education

555 West James Street ~ Lancaster, PA 17603

717/290-8747 ~ 800/393-0654, ext. 140 ~ ce@lts.org

ACADEMIC PROGRAM IN THE ART OF

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

WITH INDIVIDUALS, GROUPS, CONGREGATIONS.

A seminary course of studies to prepare men and women to be Spiritual Directors, particularly within Protestant contexts.

- 24 SEMINARY COURSE CREDITS
- D.MIN., M.DIV., MATS, STM, OR ACADEMIC CERTIFICATE OPTIONS
- LOCATION: SAN FRANCISCO THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, SAN ANSELMO, CA. — JANUARY, 2000
LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY, GETTYSBURG, PA — JUNE, 2000

(APPLICATION DEADLINE IS NOVEMBER 15, 1999).

Currently in its seventh year, this program is part of San Francisco Theological Seminary's Program in Christian Spirituality and is now offered in conjunction with Lutheran Theological Seminary (ELCA), Gettysburg, PA and The Upper Room of the United Methodist Church. *In alternating years, courses are also held in Gettysburg.* For application forms and information, please write or call Carole C. Allen.

SAN FRANCISCO
THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
Presbyterian Church (USA)



2 Kensington Rd, San Anselmo, CA 94960-2905
Tel: (415) 258-6538 • Internet: www.sfts.edu

ceive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor are freed from debt. The forgiveness of debts is listed last because it's the hardest thing to do—harder even than raising the dead to life. Jesus left ordinary people dazzled, amazed and grateful; he left powerful people angry and upset, because every time he performed a wonder, they lost a little of their clout. The wonders of the new age of the coming of God's kingdom may scandalize and upset us. They dazzle us, but they also make us nervous. The people of God need pastoral help in processing this ambivalent sense of both deeply yearning for God's new creation and deeply fearing it.

The feeding of the multitudes, recorded in Mark's Gospel, is an example of the new world coming into being through God. When the disciples, charged with feeding the hungry crowd, found a child with five loaves and two fishes, Jesus *took, blessed, broke and gave* the bread. These are the four decisive verbs of our sacramental existence. Jesus conducted a Eucharist, a gratitude. He demonstrated that the world is filled with abundance and freighted with generosity. If bread is broken and shared, there is enough for all. Jesus is engaged in the sacramental, subversive re-ordering of public reality.

The profane is the opposite of the sacramental. "Profane" means flat, empty, one-dimensional, exhausted. The market ideology wants us to believe that the world is profane—life consists of buying and selling, weighing, measuring and trading, and then finally sinking into death and nothingness. But Jesus presents an entirely different kind of economy, one infused with the mystery of abundance and a cruciform kind of generosity. Five thousand are fed and 12 baskets of food are left over—one for every tribe of Israel. Jesus transforms the economy by blessing it and breaking it beyond self-interest. From broken Friday bread comes Sunday abundance. In this and in the following

account of a miraculous feeding in Mark, people do not grasp, hoard, resent, or act selfishly; they watch as the juices of heaven multiply the bread of earth. Jesus reaffirms Genesis 1.

When people forget that Jesus is the bread of the world, they start eating junk food—the food of the Pharisees and of Herod, the bread of moralism and of power. Too often the church forgets the true bread and is tempted by the junk food. Our faith is not just about spiritual matters; it is about the transformation of the world. The closer we stay to Jesus, the more we will bring a new economy of abundance to the world. The disciples often don't get what Jesus is about because they keep trying to fit him into old patterns—and to do so is to make him innocuous, irrelevant and boring. But Paul gets it.

In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul directs a stewardship campaign for the early church and presents Jesus as the new economist. Though Jesus was rich, Paul says, "yet for your sakes he became poor, that by his poverty you might become rich." We say it takes money to make money; Paul says it takes poverty to produce abundance. Jesus gave himself to enrich others, and we should do the same. Our abundance and the poverty of others need to be brought into a new balance. Paul ends his stewardship letter by quoting Exodus 16: "And the one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little." The citation is from the story of the manna that transformed the wilderness into abundance.

It is, of course, easier to talk about these things than to live them. Many people both inside and outside of the church haven't a clue that Jesus is talking about the economy. We haven't taught them that he is. But we must begin to do so now, no matter how economically compromised we may feel. Our world absolutely requires this news. It has nothing to do with being Republicans or Democrats, liberals or conservatives, socialists or capital-

ists. It is much more elemental: the creation is infused with the Creator's generosity, and we can find practices, procedures and institutions that allow that generosity to work. Like the rich young man in Mark 10, we all have many possessions. Sharing our abundance may, as Jesus says, be impossible for mortals, but nothing is impossible for God. None of us knows what risks God's spirit may empower us to take. Our faith, ministry and hope at the turn of the millennium are that the Creator will empower us to trust his generosity, so that bread may abound. ■

Pittsburgh Theological Seminary Continuing Education Featuring

Certificate in Spiritual Formation
In partnership with Columbia Theological Seminary
and Austin Theological Seminary

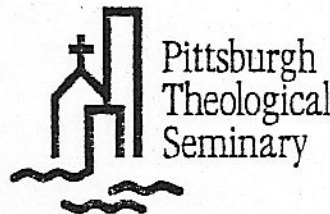
Interim Ministry Training
Cosponsored with the Synod of the Trinity

Concert Series

Lectures with:
Marcus Borg, Jerome Berryman, Dana Robert

The 57th Annual Summer School of Religion
cosponsored with
The World Mission Initiative
of Pittsburgh Theological Seminary

For more information contact:
Mary Lee Talbot



616 North Highland Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15206-2596
(412) 362-5610

mltalbot@pts.edu
www.pts.edu