

A History of the Forum on Religion and Ecology

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Background: Motivation and Intellectual Context:

Our work for a sustainable future is motivated by a profound concern regarding the unraveling of the ecosystems that support the life of the planet and is contributing to the extinction of some 20,000 species a year. In addition, climate change and the pollution of water, air, and soil have reached a critical threshold threatening the sustainability of civilization itself. In short, the environmental crisis, with its many aspects, may be the largest challenge humans have ever faced. Our concern, then, is to identify and encourage the ways in which the religions of the world respond to this crisis that clearly has moral and spiritual dimensions.

As founders and co-directors of the Forum on Religion and Ecology, we have organized conferences, published books and articles, and established a major international website over the last dozen years related to cultural and religious understanding of environmental issues. The Forum arises from our academic training as Historians of Religions with Mary Evelyn's specialty being Confucianism in East Asia whereas John's special field is Indigenous Religions, especially among Native North American Peoples. Central to our work we undertook graduate work with Thomas Berry (1914-2009) who had established a comprehensive History of Religions program at Fordham University. John did his Ph.D. at Fordham with Thomas while Mary Evelyn did an MA with him. She then pursued her Ph.D. work at Columbia with Wm. Theodore de Bary, one of the pioneers in Asian studies in the West, a noted scholar of Confucianism, and a close friend of Thomas Berry.

For some 25 years while Thomas directed the Riverdale Center of Religious Research along the Hudson River just north of New York City we met there for meals and conversation. For many of those years we organized a lecture series from September to May that brought in speakers on religious and environmental issues. Each summer Thomas would hold a conference where he would present his latest thoughts on topics ranging from ecological spirituality, to ecological economics, to the conditions for viable human-Earth relations. Even after he retired to his home in Greensboro, North Carolina in 1995 we kept in close touch and he participated in many of the conferences we organized at Harvard.

Inspired by the extraordinary teachings and insights of Thomas Berry and Ted de Bary, after we finished our PhDs we asked ourselves what contribution could we make as Historians of Religions that might help stem the tide of environmental degradation. From Mary Evelyn's perspective a burning question focused on the rapid economic and industrial modernization of China and India and how their traditional values might contribute to an Asian environmental ethics. From John's view, the diverse and recurring insights of indigenous knowledge continue to raise questions regarding the many ways that human communities have known, interacted with and used the world in sustainable and affective manners.

Our ongoing work, then, has been the rich legacy of thought from Thomas Berry and Ted de Bary. Indeed, Thomas and Ted had become colleagues in 1948-1949 when they studied in China and they remained life long friends. On their return to New York they taught courses in Asian religions and philosophy and established the Oriental Thought and Religion Seminar at Columbia. Thomas founded the Riverdale Center of Religious Research and created a unique History of Religions program at Fordham University. Ted de Bary was instrumental in establishing courses in Asian classics, history, and civilizations at Columbia. To provide texts for these courses, he helped translate and edit, along with numerous scholars, major works on the Sources of Indian, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese Traditions for Columbia University Press. In addition to this remarkable achievement, his comparative studies of human rights in China and the West have been a source of great inspiration.

Over many years we assisted Thomas in compiling his essays for publication. Most recently we edited and introduced his final collections of essays. The first, titled *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality and Religion in the 21st Century*, was published by Columbia University Press in 2009. The second, *The Christian Future and The Fate of Earth* was published by Orbis Books also in 2009. This joins a third book of Thomas' essays that we finished in 2006 that includes a biography of Thomas. It is titled *Evening Thoughts*, published by Sierra Club Books and the University of California Press.

The Seminal Influence of Thomas Berry and the Study of World Religions

Poetic, insightful, and playful, Thomas Berry introduced students to the diverse religious traditions with a profound empathetic feel for the pulse of their spiritual dynamics. He would remark, in light of the Vatican II document *Nostra Aetate* that spoke of a “ray of that Truth” in the world’s religions, that, indeed, they held floods of illumination and truth. John recalls afternoons after class in the late 1960s when a group of students would gather with Thomas in the Fordham campus coffee house and discuss the Pali texts of Buddhism, the Sanskrit scriptures of Indian *dharma*, and the enigmatic

turn of hexagrams in the *I Ching*. Rather than dwell on the divinatory dimension of the *I Ching*, he urged us on to deeper reflection on the lines of the text. We still ponder the possibility that our driven, acquisitive world might eventually embrace the insight of the hexagram, “the small get by” (*hsiao kuo*).

Those graduate school days focused on historical and textual development in the world's religions. Thomas especially oriented us towards exploring the cosmology of religions, namely, the ways in which the power and beauty of the surrounding universe evoked from peoples a response in story, symbol, and ritual. Under his guidance we reflected on the correlations between rituals, texts, commentarial teachings, and stories of creation. We mused on metaphysical speculations about the world as it was perceived and articulated in these traditions. Students struggled to understand the history, anthropology and sociology of religions embedded in those stories. Thomas forged ahead, articulating "cultural codings," as he called them that related to our hidden, unconscious, embodied "genetic codings." All civilizations, he conjectured, responded to these configurations with cultural practices integrally woven into basic human mammalian urges to mate, to eat, and to breathe. Successful cultures established profound linkages, he believed, between these basic genetic drives and cultural practices expressing those drives.

Gradually, we students sensed some of his feel for cosmology as a depth reflection on human participation and orientation in the world, as well as a narrative that opened its audience to profound affective relationships with local place and subsistence practices. “With a story,” he would say, “people can suffer catastrophe and survive. With a story, they gather the energies to change their lot.” He mused that the West was between stories (scientific and religious) and he cited Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, Christopher Dawson, and Eric Vogelin to give nuance to his historian's view. Stitching his arguments together with a sense of the ages of the human, he drew from Giambattista Vico for perspectives on our age and its transformations.

In connecting cosmology to the environmental issues of our day Thomas saw how radical cultural change brought about transformations in all the forms of life. These insights came slowly, maturing like a fine wine connecting in its own unique ways with the texture and taste of soils, sun, grapes, airs, and aging. To a large extent, he accomplished this as a contemplative thinker and scholar. Students thrived on the challenges he presented: learn the textual language of at least one tradition, know the history of many, feel the bass notes of spiritual wisdom in a tradition, and read widely in an interdisciplinary fashion so that the living context of the religions might unfold. We students struggled to grasp the history and languages of a chosen religion especially those dynamic contexts that were typically masked by the term, tradition.

Teilhard de Chardin and the Story of Evolution

But just as Thomas brought us to those shores of history of religions, he was sailing off to new uncharted territory. Sensing his way forward, he drew increasingly on the thought of the French Jesuit paleontologist, Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), for reflection on the emerging, evolutionary universe. Teilhard had first articulated his intuition regarding the unfolding universe while serving as a chaplain on the battlefields of World War I. This perspective provided Thomas with a radical, new story for our times. In this way, Thomas pushed beyond Teilhard by reading widely in the contemporary scientific literature to focus on the growing environmental crisis. His unique contribution was to articulate the conjunction of cosmology and ecology, namely, the story of evolution and our interdependence within Earth's systems.

Thomas' penchant was to explore at the edge of his intellectual horizon. And that horizon was not simply as an existential being-in-the-world, but increasingly as a participant in a living, evolving world. For Thomas, the world presents itself not simply as a collection of objects but as a communion of subjects. In addition, Thomas' maturing years of reading the sacred texts and studying the world's religions brought him to a sense of the felt depths of this new story in the diverse intuitions of religious traditions. For Thomas this affective sense of cosmology was never about foregrounding the scientific data as the exclusive story. Rather, the world revealed itself for cultural tellings and our historical context gave expression to evolutionary unfolding in new and creative ways. When flying back from the Seychelle Islands looking down over the great expanse of the Nile River he came to the realization that he was a "geologist." That is, he was a person who arises from the great ages of Earth's history to be a self-reflective part of this process. This is a crucial dimension of what he would call the "new story."

In expressing the new story, Thomas favored phenomenology in his philosophical turns - but he was wary of the over-conceptualizing, world-transcending directions of philosophical language. Reaching into his own past he recalled his boyhood experience of a meadow with lilies and increasingly expressed his thought in mythopoetic forms. He sought for a deep affectivity and authenticity imparted by the Earth and evident in local biodiversity. It was in the late 1970s that these ideas coalesced in his term "ecozoic era." This was his way of naming the terminal destruction of Cenozoic life in the industrial-technological drive of consumer acquisitiveness. But rather than leaving his audience in despair, his idea of the ecozoic imaged an emerging period in which humans would rediscover themselves at the species level.

Such a primal rediscovery carried forward his earlier thinking about genetic and cultural coding that could place and orient human communities in the world. Through

these poetic images, Thomas has sought his own philosophical position on the question of consciousness (read: cultural coding) and embodiment (read: genetic coding). Or, as he would often muse, the relationship between intimacy and distance. Thomas' thought in this regard remains a superb example of Edmund Husserl's *epoche*, the phenomenological "reduction," namely, the effort to distinguish, but not separate, the natural embodiment that we are and the conscious disclosure of the world in which we humans are engaged. Thomas reverses Husserl's *epoche*, which reduces toward the transcendental constituting mind, and bends it back towards the natural attitude, namely, our deep affectivity for the world that forms us in our very embodied being. This affective dimension of the human is what Thomas hoped to generate - both in feelings toward nature and toward other humans.

Pressing Environmental Issues and the Quest for a Sustainable Future

Our work has clearly been prompted by this deep affectivity and by our concern regarding pressing environmental issues. The global environmental challenges that we face are becoming better understood by science, but it is often difficult to break through the media for larger public awareness. The anthropogenic, or human induced, character of the environmental crises remains difficult to comprehend and, hence, it is challenging to mount a significant response that would reverse or diminish the deleterious effects of our current consumer, petroleum-driven cultures. We currently affect the Earth on a macrophase level, yet we continue to think about our presence on the Earth in microphase cultural contexts. We face global challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and population pressures. On every side we see the degradation and diminishment of soils, air, renewable energy, and clean water especially for local, indigenous, and marginalized peoples

The complex nature of our global environment crisis is increasingly evident as weather patterns are becoming more severe, as species are becoming endangered and going extinct, as nonrenewable resources such as oil are being wantonly used up, as forests and fisheries are being depleted, and as water is becoming polluted or scarce.¹ The problem of climate change is becoming more visible to a larger public, while the massive extent of species extinction still remains invisible to most people. Yet these two global challenges suggest that our burgeoning population and industrializing presence is altering not only the face of the planet and its climate, but also the process of natural selection itself. Which species will live and which will die are now in our hands. This is

¹ This section of the paper and the concluding section on the emerging alliance of religion and ecology draw on an article published in *Worldviews* (Autumn 2008).

because in the twentieth century we exploded from two billion to six billion people and increased the pace of economic development beyond the boundaries of what is sustainable.

As the developing world attempts to raise its standard of living with unrestrained industrialization and rapid modernization, there is an inevitable impact on the environment and natural resources. The result is that severe pollution of water, air, and soil is becoming more widespread in places such as India and China. Similarly, the high level of consumption of energy and resources by the developed world is causing serious problems of equity and justice. The tension between environmental protection and economic development is thus a source of increasing conflict between the developed and developing world. Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992 there have been a series of major UN conferences and negotiations to redirect the course of development to be more equitable and sustainable. Ironically, the worldwide increase in military spending, especially by the United States, means that less money is available for the pressing issues in the Millennium Development Goals regarding poverty and the environment (www.un.org/millenniumgoals).

Sustainability: The Integration of Ecology and Justice

Thus, the human community is still struggling to reinvent the idea of “sustainable development”. It is becoming clear that a broader definition is needed for more effective practice – one that integrates efforts at poverty alleviation with environmental protection. Many religious communities have been involved in efforts to mitigate poverty, hunger, and disease, but now they are recognizing this cannot be done adequately without attention to the environment, which is deteriorating rapidly. Sufficiency of food, shelter, and health for humans will depend on a thriving biosphere to support life for the Earth community. This linking of environmental and justice concerns can be seen in the book series called Ecology and Justice that we have edited from Orbis Books. The aim of that series is described as publishing books that “seek to integrate an understanding of Earth as an interconnected life system with concerns for just and sustainable systems that benefit the entire Earth.”

This link of environment and justice is ever more evident. The litany of environmental and development problems is well known, but what is becoming ever more clear is that they cannot be solved by science, technology, law, politics, or economics alone. That is because we are more aware that environmental and development issues are, in large measure, social issues. Thus “fixing” the environment through technology or regulating development through legislation will not be sufficient.

These are necessary approaches, but more is needed, especially the connections around eco-justice. We are being pressed to see the linkage between environment and people, between healthy ecosystems and healthy social systems, between environmental protection and poverty alleviation.

The challenge, then, is to create whole communities, where humans are not dominating nature, but rather recognize their profound dependence on the larger community of life. In this spirit, economic growth needs to be redefined and a broader ethical perspective needs to be articulated so as to integrate ecology and economy. In short, new indicators of “progress” need to be developed. The world’s religions can play a role in this redefinition with an ethical articulation of a path toward a flourishing Earth community. This has been a major aim of the Forum on Religion and Ecology, which has from its inception been concerned with both ideas and practice, changing worldviews and transformative action.

Economics and Ecology: the Search for Common Ground

A huge challenge has been the misperceived conflict between economics and ecology. Neo-classical economic thinking has equated economic growth with progress, despite any harm to the environment. While this thinking drives our industrial processes, economists are shifting, however gradually, to a realization that the environment can no longer be seen as an externality to be ignored. While profits have been the principle traditional indicators of economic growth, ecological economists are developing a new field of study and practice, pioneered by Herman Daly, Robert Costanza, Richard Norgaard, Hazel Henderson and others. They have formed an International Society for Ecological Economics (www.ecoeco.org). They are challenging models of economic growth and development along with conventional methods of cost accounting that disregard the environment. Thus, they are pressing economics to include, not only financial profit, but also environmental health and social well-being. New measurements are being developed for this triple bottom line. This includes calculating “ecosystems services”, namely estimating the value of natural processes for assisting the human economy. Ecological economists have estimated that it would cost some \$33 trillion dollars to replicate nature’s services. (Robert Costanza, Gretchen Dailey et al, “The Value of the World’s Ecosystem Services and Natural Capital”, *Nature*, 15 May 1997.)

Thus, in discussing the topic of sustainability and the contribution of religions, we may need a broader basis for analysis than simply “sustainable development”. That is because sustainable development may still be viewed too narrowly as measured by economic indicators of growth. As defined by the Bruntland Commission report, *Our Common Future* (Oxford University Press, 1988), it is development that meets present

needs while not compromising the needs of future generations. This ethics of intergenerational equity is a necessary criterion, but may not be fully sufficient. That is because while it emphasizes balancing environmental and economic growth, it does not always take into account the full range and interaction of human-Earth flourishing. Such a broad context may be enhanced by the contribution of the world's religions, both in theory and in practice regarding poverty alleviation and environmental protection. We may be able to draw on shared values as well as diversified practices of the religions.

In terms of general principles and values that the world religions offer to sustainability discussions, they can be described as broadening the category of sustainable development to include past, present, and future concerns. In short, large-scale and long-term perspectives will be needed to envision sustainable ecosystems that have developed over billions of years, sustainable living for humans at present, and a sustainable future for all life. They correspond to six key “values for human-Earth flourishing” shared by the world religions as they are being challenged to envision a viable future for the Earth community. These values include: reverence and respect, restraint and redistribution, responsibility and renewal.

Conference Series at the Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions

These values for human-Earth flourishing were first identified as the result of a three-year conference series at Harvard on World Religions and Ecology from 1996-1998. The conferences that we organized were intended to explore elements of the world's religions that highlight human-Earth relations in scripture, in ritual, and in ethics. A major goal of the series was to begin a process of retrieving, reevaluating, and reconstructing the ecological dimensions of the world's religions so as to contribute to a sustaining and flourishing future for the Earth community. Over 800 international scholars and theologians of world religions participated in the conferences that included the western religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), the Asian religions (Jainism, Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism, and Shinto), and Indigenous religions. We served as series editors for the ten volumes published by the Harvard Center for the Study of World Religions as a result of these conferences (1997-2004).

Our final gathering at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences was a culminating conference in spring 1998 that brought together scientists, economists, and policy people along with historians of religion and theologians. Throughout the conference series we had considered them to be our dialogue partners. That autumn the Forum on Religion and Ecology was formed at the culminating conference at the United Nations and the American Museum of Natural History where more than 1000 people attended.

In 1999 the Forum organized a conference at the Harvard Yenching Institute on Religion and Animals that was later published as *A Communion of Subjects* by Columbia University Press. Paul Waldau and Kimberly Patton were the conference organizers and editors of the volume. Paul has gone on to found the Religion and Animals group at the American Academy of Religion along with Laura Hobgood Oster. The Humane Society of the US was instrumental in this as well as the conference series as a whole. This is due to the leadership of Rick Clugston who directed the Center for Respect of Life and Environment at HSUS.

We also convened several conferences at the American Academy of Arts and Science in Cambridge, MA. These included one with major nature writers and religious thinkers in 1999 and two others that prepared a volume focusing on world religions and climate change in 2000 and 2001. This resulted in the first issue of *Daedalus* to be published both in the journal and on-line.

(See *Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change?* *Daedalus*, Fall 2001 www.amacad.org/publications/fall2001/fall2001.aspx).

The Field of Religion and Ecology

One of the outcomes of the conference series at Harvard and the ongoing Forum work now based at Yale is the emerging alliance of religion and ecology both within academia and beyond. Over the dozen years since the conference series began, a new field of study has emerged in colleges and secondary schools. Moreover, a new force has arisen within the religions from leaders and laity alike. Both the field and the force are contributing to a broadened perspective for a future that is not only sustainable, but also flourishing.

To support this newly emerging academic field one of the first tasks of the Forum was to create a major international website to assist research, education, and outreach. This took more than seven years and is still being updated. (www.yale.edu/religionandecology).

The website contains detailed information on the religious traditions of the world and their ecological contributions including: introductory essays, annotated bibliographies, selections from sacred texts, environmental statements from religious communities, and engaged projects of religious grassroots environmental movements. To facilitate interdisciplinary dialogue, there are resources that address environmental issues related to ethics, economics, policy, gender, and evolutionary and ecological sciences. To enhance teaching, the website includes syllabi, lists of educational videos and CD-

ROMs, links to programs and institutions related to environmental education, and a variety of other resources for educators. To assist research there is a sophisticated search engine that allows one to find annotated bibliographies on books and journals. There is a monthly online newsletter for which there is a sign up section. The newsletter provides current information on news, publications, and events related to religion and ecology and to climate change.

The field of religion and ecology is growing within academia, assisted by this website, the Harvard volumes, and many other publications. Religious studies departments are now offering classes in this area. Divinity Schools and seminaries, focused on training Christian ministers, are including courses (www.webofcreation.org). High school teachers have developed creative curriculum as well (www.rsiss.net.rsissfore.html). There are graduate programs being offered at Drew University and the University of Florida, as well as a joint Master's degree program in religion and ecology at Yale. Moreover, many environmental studies programs are encouraging the participation of religious studies and the humanities in what have been predominantly science and policy oriented programs. Moreover, a two-volume encyclopedia on religion and nature has been published and two academic journals have been launched. A Society for the Study of Religion, Nature, and Culture has been formed and a Forum for the Study of Religion and the Environment has been created in Europe. Canada has created a partner organization called the Canadian Forum on Religion and Ecology (www.cfore.cs).

Carrying forward this desire to help set up a new field of study, we have established the work of the Forum on Religion and Ecology in multiple dialogic settings at Yale University. That is, we have appointments at Yale's School of Forestry and Environmental Studies, Yale Divinity School, the Department of Religious Studies, and the Center for Bioethics at the Institution for Policy and Social Studies where there is growing interest in ethics for the biosphere. At Yale, we teach courses on World Religions and Ecology and advise students in the joint degree Master's program between the Schools of Forestry and Divinity.

The Force of Religion and Ecology:

Within the religions, statements on the environment or on eco-justice have been released by the major world religions and indigenous traditions and are posted on the Forum website. Leaders such as the Ecumenical Patriarch, the Pope, and the Dalai Lama have spoken out regarding the urgency of these issues. The Patriarch, Bartholomew, has presided over six international symposia focused on water issues (www.rsesymposia.org). Rowan Williams, the head of the Anglican Church in England has written sermons on

this topic (www.archbishopofcanterbury.org) and the US Presiding Bishop for the Episcopal Church, Katherine Jefferts Schori, has testified before Congress on the risks of climate change. Moreover, ministers and lay people are organizing projects such as fighting mountain top removal, educating children in ecology, conserving energy in the Interfaith Power and Light project (www.theregenerationproject.org). Many of these activities are depicted in the film, *Renewal* that features eight case studies of religious environmentalism across the United States (www.renewalproject.net). Moreover, the Catholic nuns have been especially active in projects on sustainable agriculture and ecological literacy (www.sistersofearth.org, www.genesisfarm.org, Green Sisters: A Spiritual Ecology, by Sarah McFarland Taylor, Harvard University Press, 2007). In addition, the National Religious Partnership for the Environment has been working for fifteen years with Jewish and Christian groups in the United States (www.nrpe.org), while the Alliance for the Conservation of Nature in England has established numerous ecological projects around the world (www.arcworld.org).

The Growing Role of Religions and the Collaboration with Science and Policy:

As this field and force have expanded there is a growing recognition from many quarters of the importance of the participation of the religions in environmental programs and concerns. For some years, for example, scientists have been asking for the religious communities to play a more active role in environmental issues. They recognize the large number of people around the world who are involved with religions. There are one billion Muslims, Christians, Hindus, and Confucians, respectively. They observe that moral authority has played an important role in many transformations of values and behavior, such as the abolition of slavery in 19th century England and in the civil rights movements by religious leaders in the United States and South Africa in the 20th century.

Moreover, scientists such as E.O. Wilson have called for an alliance between religion and science in a shared concern for the future of the environment. This was articulated by more than 2000 scientists in "A Warning to Humanity "in 1992 and more recently in Wilson's book, *The Creation: An Appeal to Save Life on Earth* (Norton, 2006). Similarly, the biologists Paul Ehrlich and Donald Kennedy have proposed a Millennium Assessment of Human Behavior (Science 2005). In addition, policy think tanks, such as Worldwatch Institute in Washington DC, have encouraged the role of religions. One of their principal researchers, Gary Gardner, has published a chapter on this topic in the State of the World report of 2003 and a book called *Inspiring Progress: Religious Contributions to Sustainable Development* (Worldwatch Institute, 2006). Moreover, the policy expert and the Dean of the School of Forestry and Environmental

Studies at Yale, James Gustav Speth has also called for the participation of the world's religions in his book, *Bridge at the Edge of the World* (Yale University Press, 2008).

In this mix, then, of programs and policies for sustainability that have emerged around the world, there is a growing recognition that cultural and religious values may have a significant role to play in helping to shape a sustainable future. While religions have their problematic dimensions, including intolerance, dogmatism, and fundamentalism, they also have served as well springs of wisdom, as sources of moral inspiration, and as containers of transforming ritual practices. Thus their tendency to be both conservators of continuity and agents of change are both apt descriptions. Religions have always played this role of conserving and transforming, balancing the dynamic tension of continuity and change for cultures over long spans of time. Indeed, human cultures are profoundly shaped by this dialectic and civilizations endure by navigating the delicate balance between tradition and modernity. Moving too deeply into traditional ways leads to fossilization and fundamentalism, while going too far into modernity can lead to superficial and inadequate responses to change.

A central challenge of our present moment is to bring to bear the depths of the world's religious traditions into meaningful dialogue with modernity. Such an effort needs especially to be focused on the growing environmental crisis in its multiple aspects. This is a key task of religions to contribute to a sustainable future. It reflects the growing calls for spiritual insight and moral energy to be brought to bear in the discussions on sustainability. It is important to note that many significant groups focusing on sustainability are seeking just such intersection with values and ethics. These include Mikhail Gorbachev's Green Cross, which has sponsored a series of conferences on "Earth Dialogues: Is Ethics the Missing Link?" Also the Club of Rome (www.clubofrome.org) and the Tallberg Forum (www.tallbergfoundation.org) are interested in defining the moral boundaries and conditions for a sustainable future. Moreover, there was a significant effort made by the World Bank under James Wolfensohn to create a discussion with religions around development issues called World Faith Development Dialogue (www.wfdd.org.uk).

International Outreach:

The force of religion and ecology in dialogue with science and policy is evident in a series of conferences and engaged activities that have occurred over several years. We continue to speak in these venues such as those held during 2007 and 2008: the Symposium on "Religion, Science, and Environment" led by the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew, in Greenland; the Club of Rome Conference in Turin co-sponsored by the World Political Forum chaired by Mikhail Gorbachev; the Tallberg Forum in Sweden; a

week-long seminar at Schumacher College in England on “Religion and Ecology,” and the World Conservation Congress of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) in Barcelona where we organized the first panel on "Spirituality and Conservation" featuring presenters from the world's religions.

Interest in the work on religion and ecology is growing significantly in East Asia. In the spring of 2008 we participated in conferences in Korea, China, and Japan. In Korea the Academy of Korean Studies hosted a conference titled, “Global Forum on Civilization and Peace.” In Japan we participated in a conference featuring the Earth Charter. In January 2009 we participated in a conference at the major academic center in Taiwan, the Academia Sinica, which featured Confucianism and ecology.

Several major international conferences occurred in 2009. For example, in October the Japanese government held a conference called “Policy Approaches for Realizing a Sustainable Future: Building a New Framework on Climate Change.” (www.gea.or.jp/top_en.html) At the opening session the Crown Prince, Naruhito, spoke eloquently regarding the interdependence of life. The new Prime Minister, Yukio Hatoyama, also called for Japan to reduce greenhouse emissions by 25% by 2020. The other sessions included green policies, technologies, and finance for a sustainable energy future. However, the session that received the most discussion was on the challenge to create a new educational and ethical framework for the transition required. The Forum's contribution was well received in this context. We highlighted the shared values of religion and environmental ethics, namely, reverence and respect, restraint and redistribution, responsibility and renewal.

In October 2009 the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew, convened his 8th Symposia on Religion, Science, and the Environment. Titled " Restoring Balance: The Great Mississippi River," it brought together people from the fields of science, engineering, public policy, media, and religion. It focused on past efforts to control the Mississippi River and the problems this created when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans. (www.rsesymposia.org) The Forum assisted in chairing several sessions including one that featured the film we are working on with Brian Swimme titled "Journey of the Universe." This film provided a large-scale context for these discussions as it narrates the story of Universe-Earth evolution pointing toward our ecological roles in that story.

Finally, 2009 concluded with two significant interreligious events. The first, held at Windsor Castle in England, was hosted by Prince Philip and UN Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon and was organized by the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC). It featured environmental commitments of selected representatives from the world's religions. (www.windsor2009.org) The second, sponsored by the Council for the Parliament of World Religions, was held in Melbourne, Australia titled "Making a World

of Difference: Hearing Each Other, Healing the Earth." The Forum organized panels on world religions and ecology, the Earth Charter, Thomas Berry's thought, and the films "Renewal," "Numen," "The Arctic: The Consequences of Human Folly," and "Journey of the Universe." (www.parliamentofreligiions.org)

The Forum also organized an interdisciplinary meeting in India in focused on the pollution of the Yamuna River. It was sponsored by the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale along with The Energy Research Institute (TERI) directed by Dr. R.K.Pachauri, and Friends of Vrindavan led by Acharya Shrivatsa Goswami who is head of Sri Radharaman Temple.

The Harvard volumes on Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism have been translated into Chinese and published in the People's Republic of China. There are plans underway to translate the other volumes as well. We also are exploring a conference on "Traditional Thought and Ecological Civilization" with the Institute for World Religions at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. This will be in collaboration with our Forum colleague, Professor Tu Weiming, formerly of Harvard and now directing a new Institute for the Humanities at Beijing University.

Conclusion:

It is thus at a moment of immense significance for the future of life on the planet that the world's religions may be of assistance as they move into their ecological phase. The common set of values for human-Earth flourishing identified from the Harvard conference series on World Religions and Ecology can be seen as a critical contribution to a sustainable future. This integration of the virtues for human-Earth flourishing of the world's religions provides a unique synergy for rethinking sustainability. Such a synergy can contribute to the broadened understanding of sustainable development as including economic, ecological, social, and spiritual well-being. This broadened understanding may be a basis for long-term policies, programs, and practices for a planetary future that is not only ethically sustainable, but also sustaining for human energies. For at present we face a crisis of hope that we can make a transition to a viable future for the Earth community. The capacity of the world's religions to provide moral direction and inspiration for a flourishing community of life is significant.