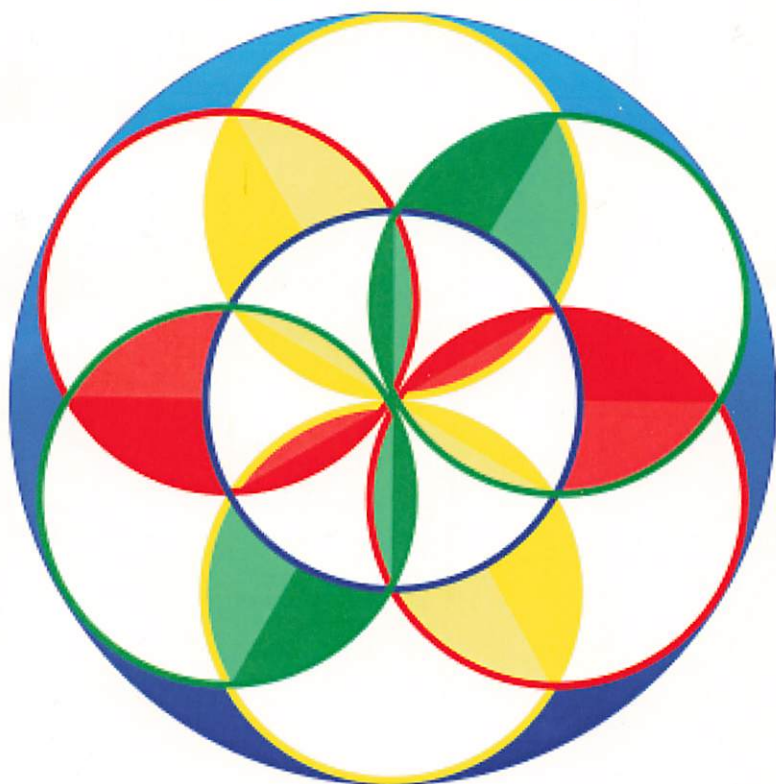


# Through Three Portals

*Helping Tomorrow Unfold*



*A Systematic Approach  
to Theology in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*

**F. Nelson Stover**  
Foreword by Rev. Marian Stewart

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A further description of the drawing is included in the Interlude Before Looking through the Portal of Human Community beginning on page 66. A simplified version of the drawing appears on the back cover.

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# Dedication

*Through Three Portals: Helping Tomorrow Unfold* is dedicated to Elaine, Tony and UUCG – each supported the writing process in their own way.

## Elaine

During the intense composition period, my wife of 47 years allowed the statement that “I’m going to write this morning” to serve as sufficient acknowledgement that I did not want to be disturbed for a while. She also listened while I tried to talk through some of the more subtle points. Once again, her careful editorial skills enhanced the clarity of many portions of the book.

## Tony

Our energetic foxhound knew how to determine when my creative juices were flowing (and he could rest patiently in his chair) and when the muse was blocked, at which time he suggested a game of chase the squeaky bone or a walk in the woods.

## UUCG

Over the past two decades, members of the congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Greensboro (UUCG) have encouraged me to keep thinking about these matters. Most recently, they listened attentively during the three sermons that I delivered in July 2013. The same sheets of paper from which I preached those sermons served as the outlines for the twelve codicils of this book.

## Acknowledgements

Over the past two decades, countless individuals have, either directly or indirectly, assisted in the process of bringing *Through Three Portals* to fruition. Without this envelope of care and support, the fresh thinking required for this task would not have been possible.

Personal conversations with Thomas Berry, during his final years in Greensboro, played a particularly important role in creating the foundation on which this work stands. His probing questions helped me sharpen my thinking, his monologues on various topics expanded my horizons and his affirmation of my poems and monographs encouraged me to continue putting my thoughts on paper.

Since the actual writing process began, several acquaintances have reviewed early drafts. The following people have read and commented on the document during its preparation: Rev. Margaret Helen Aiseayew, Rev. Bill Bailey, Annette and Bill Bingham, Nick Divitci, Ellen Howie, Robert L. Powell, Sr., Rev. Marion Stewart, Elaine Stover and Martha Jane Stover. Their editorial comments helped enhance the readability of the final product and their support for the ideas it contained motivated me to push it through to completion. I certainly appreciate the support and encouragement of each of these individuals. Anna Scott's digital graphics turned my manually done pieces into production-ready formats – her skill and persistence deserves special commendation.

Special mention must be made of the important role played by Nick Divitci. He has handled the details of getting the book published. More importantly, he has supported and encouraged me in this task and helped insure that I had the discipline to complete the writing and production process. Ever since I arrived in Greensboro, Nick has been a true friend. His assistance with this book project has produced practical results from deep personal bonds.

## Foreword

We are living in the remnants of a post-modern world where religious institutions – and even religion itself – are being discarded as if they have no meaning in today’s world. The action and shrill din of extremists have eviscerated the sanctity of faith that has buttressed lives for millennia. Yet, humans still need to find meaning in the ever-expanding cosmos. Religion needs an upgrade.

*Through Three Portals: Helping Tomorrow Unfold* offers a robust theological framework toward reshaping our religious understanding. Structured perfectly within the limitless bounds of sacred geometry, *Through Three Portals* develops a theology of wonder, beauty, and awe using rational and relational approaches in addition to reflection. At its heart, *Through Three Portals* presents a few succinct lines, a poem, that serves as a core theology. The rest flows seamlessly, expanding outward in logical form, giving the reader a gift – a very understandable, practical, and embracing guide to help hold all that is.

I have known Nelson Stover for two decades. I cherish the opportunities when he invites me into his world – a world of ever-evolving search for meaning. It is not that his life doesn’t have meaning – it does – but he is forever experimenting with ways to systematically convey his gleanings in a coherent format. Swiveling around in his well-worn office chair, visiting an Indian village, or walking the Universe Story Walk through the woods that

surrounds his house, he will look you right in the eye as if you are the only person alive and ask, have you ever thought about the meaning...

More than any person I know, Nelson uses the entirety of his life experience, including his theological training, living and working in many countries, and his enviable ability to network and make friends with deep thinkers and curious souls alike, to guide his thinking. *Through Three Portals* is a life achievement and a valuable offering in the discussion of religion in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Rev. Marian Stewart  
April 2014

[Rev. Marian Stewart serves as the settled minister of the Northlake Unitarian Universalist Church in Kirkland, Washington.]

## Preface

*Through Three Portals* serves two primary purposes, one personal and one both public and sociological. At a personal level, this work begins to provide answers to some of the foundational questions that I have been asking for most of my life. At the sociological and theological levels, it provides a new framework for enlivening individual and collective resolve to tackle the pressing issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

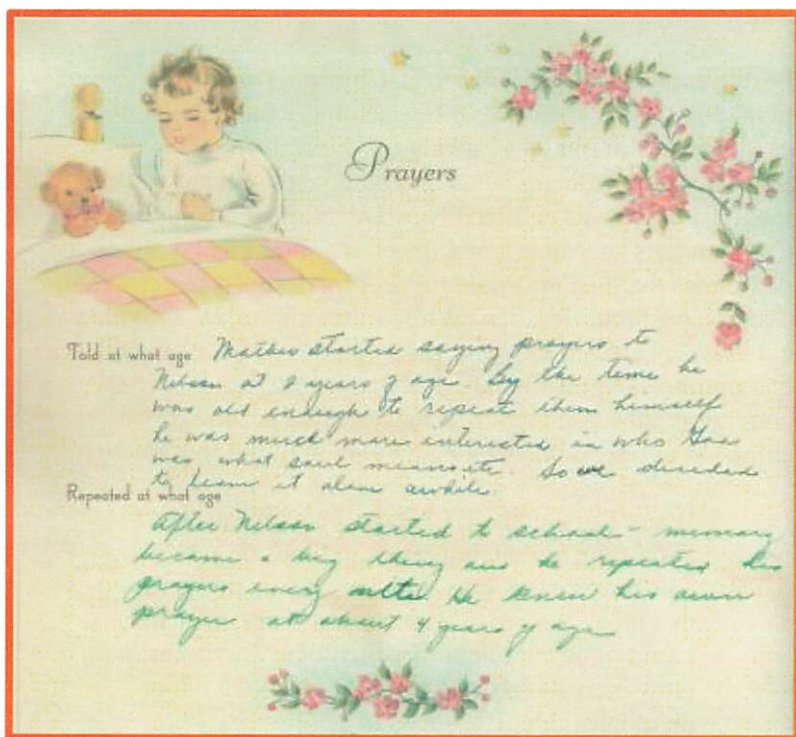


Figure 1: Nina May Stover's comments in Nelson's Baby Book

Shortly after my mother died in 1994, my brother sent me the Baby Book that she had kept for me through my early years.



The book had been in her collection of memorabilia and my brother thought I might appreciate having it. In the section on “Prayers”, shown above in Figure 1, she wrote:

Mother started saying prayers to Nelson at two years of age. By the time he was old enough to repeat them himself, he was much more interested in who God was, what soul means, etc. So we decided to leave it alone awhile.

Looking back from my current situation, I realize that even though mother set the questions aside, for me they did not go away.

Forty years after I graduated from Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS), the editor of the seminary publication wrote each member of our class asking for our reflections on the impact of our seminary education on our subsequent work. I looked at my thesis entitled “New Directions for Religious Communities” because I anticipated that in it I had outlined the guidelines that had informed my work in social transformation over the past four decades. While I was impressed with the correlation between the theoretical basis of social change that I had outlined and my actual experiences in doing grassroots community development over the next five decades, I was surprised to reread the opening paragraph of the Introduction:

When I first entered Chicago Theological Seminary, my intention was to focus on constructive theology and to write my thesis in that area. However, as the years progressed and I read more contemporary theological writings, I grew increasingly aware that most of the major theological breakthroughs of our [the 20<sup>th</sup>] century had preceded me by several years and

their authors – Niebuhr, Tillich and Barth were old or dead.<sup>1</sup>

While trying to answer the editor’s question, I realized that much of the work I had done over the ensuing years had shown that the guidelines for social change were solid. However, the frustrations encountered by intransigent situations and many of the new issues being raised in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century could not be resolved within the theological context that carried society, around the globe, through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Furthermore, I had the opportunity of living in highly diverse cultures – tribal, Hindu, Muslim, Buddhist and Christian – during which time I discovered that even simple social interactions have many varied interpretations and approaches. During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, I articulated four foundational principles that provided a new starting point for practical action and theological reflection. Together, these convey the essential elements of many complex analyses including contemporary works by Ken Wilbur and Thomas Berry combined with my practical experiences conducting grassroots social change projects with the Institute of Cultural Affairs. In the process of formulating a systematic and profound articulation that strives to make sense of all aspects of life in a contemporary framework, I wrote a poem entitled “I Do Declare”<sup>2</sup>. This poem contains four simple statements that provide a solid starting point for further thinking:

- a) Ours is an emerging reality,
- b) We live amidst a communion of subjects<sup>3</sup>,
- c) Each can experience the oneness of it all, and
- d) Each one participates in shaping tomorrow.

These provide the intellectual starting point for *Through Three Portals*. In the process of expounding upon them, I have found

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<sup>1</sup> Stover, F. Nelson, *New Directions for Religious Communities*, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Stover, F. Nelson, *Beauty, Awe and Wonder*, “I Do Declare”.

<sup>3</sup> Swimme, Brian and Berry, Thomas, *The Universe Story*, p. 243.

the answers to the questions my mother could not answer and which I bypassed when completing my seminary education.

Many recent events highlight the sociological urgency of understanding the depth issues outlined in *Through Three Portals*. In particular, the specifics of the 2012 United States presidential election provide a well-documented and widely known case in point. Generally, most people in the United States (US) agreed that everyone needed a job, that long-term debt was a big problem and that the US had an important role to play in shaping global affairs. The debate to determine the practical actions for **HOW** to meet these challenges, however, split the country nearly 50-50.

Personally, I took an active role in the 2012 campaign at the precinct and county level. I talked to prospective voters and spent long hours sitting outside polling places giving out campaign literature, promoting one political agenda and discussing options with people supporting alternative positions. In these conversations, I became clear that the values, perspectives and assumptions that guided people's decision-making process were grossly divergent. Frequently, people would express their opinions citing one reason or another, but underneath you could sense that powerful images and expectations were driving their mental processes for interpreting information and judging consequences. When disagreements arose, the roots of the conflict could often be traced to these conflicting underlying images, expectations and values.

Thus, the second impetus for writing *Through Three Portals* grows from the need for 21<sup>st</sup> Century society, at the global level and in each local situation, to find a common standing point from which to determine future actions. Over the past several years, I have done considerable personal thinking about these matters. I have also had extensive conversations with two of my elder mentors, Father Thomas Berry and Robert L. Powell, Sr. In this light, I have come to a foundational conclusion: the mental models, the fundamental assumptions and the overarching

conceptions about the structure of the Universe and the human role on Planet Earth that carried our species through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century are no longer adequate. The previous models and assumptions for dealing with the issues now facing the Planet, in and of themselves, do not have the capacity to meet the complex current challenges. No amount of adjustments, modifications or interpretations – I have concluded – will give us a solid standing point for making the changes in social behavior adequate for building the long-term sustainable future for our children and the non-human world that people so passionately desire.

Many people struggle to find a coherent, consistent and comprehensive answer to the simple, secular question “How does tomorrow happen?” Without a clear personal answer, people face tomorrow confused and apprehensive. Without a clear answer at the societal level, members of the human family struggle with one another in order to respond adequately to the challenges and opportunities that face them in political debates, business matters and in making community and family decisions.

*Through Three Portals*, then, is written for people who find the old answers to life’s deeper questions less than adequate within the framework their current understandings. It is written for individuals and groups looking for common ground on which to stand while sorting their collective responses to practical challenges. Readers will find the perspectives they need to help tomorrow unfold by looking through any or all of these three portals:

- a. By gazing at the *wonder* that fills the **natural world**,
- b. By experiencing *beauty* which shines through depth experiences of **social interactions** and
- c. By encountering the *awe* that pours forth from the **center of selfhood**.

F. Nelson Stover  
2014

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# Introduction

## Part A: Systematic Theology

While preparing to teach a constructive theology course at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Greensboro in the winter of 2012, I wrote a short poem called “I am I”. For some decades, I have wanted to write a rather more thorough systematic theology. When I finally sat down to write, I realized that the one poem really said it all. That, as I had written in February, “Everything else one says only describes a part of reality.” Thus, this book contains one poem and with a brief prose context on pages 24-26. Following the poem, a series of twelve codicils examine a particular part of the wholeness of which the poem speaks. The codicils are divided into groups of four, each of which examines the view through one of the three portals. The Preface and the four-part Introduction, which precede the poem, set the overall context in which the codicils have been written.

A common pattern overrides each of three sets of four codicils. The first describes, as objectively as possible, the way that the events of everyday living foster particular kinds of experiences and perceptions. The following codicil discusses the ways that people make sense of and reflect on these experiences – currently, previously and in the days to come. The third codicil in each section provides interpretations of these encounters that tie together the diverse kinds of experiences and attempt to make sense of them. Finally, the last codicil for each of the three portals returns to the present moment in ways that provide a fresh resolve to live fully in the now and thus foster creative involvement in helping tomorrow unfold.

During my three years at Chicago Theological Seminary in the early 1970’s, I took a course called Systematic Theology. We read several of the major systematic theologies of previous centuries and we studied Paul Tillich’s three-volume Systematic

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Theology written in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. In the course, we also had to write our own theological statement. Mine, I remember had four sections – God, Christ, Holy Spirit and the Church. Though the document has been lost in the intervening years, I clearly remember that each of the sections was organized into the same rational four-by-four chart as this current document. The first section focused on ultimate reality, the second on the manifestation of the divine in everyday life, and the third on the power that imbues people who affirm ultimate reality and manifest it in their everyday actions. The fourth section described how this activity goes on throughout history. The structure of this current Systematic Theology represents an adaptation and generalization of my original Christ-centered approach. After detailing the perspective through each of the three portals, I have indicated how this enlivens contemporary action and change.

The three sets of codicils focus on three distinct portals to the profound – the natural world, social relationships and the depths of the reflective self. The natural world includes all of the species and formations of Planet Earth as well as the stars and the galaxies spanning the cosmos. The tendency in recent centuries has been to attempt to reduce the natural world to the mechanical workings of a clever clock – yet wisdom teachers of many traditions have pointed to the wonder lying deep within every plant and particle. Looking through the portal of the natural world, one may see both the numinous presence that pervades time and space as well as the majestic grandeur of the complex structures that continually emerge to bring order out of chaos and constantly increase the overall complexity of the cosmos.

Looking through the social portal one focuses on the interactions of the individual elements. Within the human community, one sees the size of societies increasing over time from families to tribes to cities and nations. When the agrarian societies began to take control of the rivers that nourished their crops and the seedlings that would provide their food, special attention began



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to be given to the norms and guidelines for holding community together in profound and significant ways. Much of this wisdom was finally recorded in the various religions' Holy Books. While these writings remain valuable to global citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, new eyes are also required to recapture the beauty and meaning of human community that has become globally inter-connected. In the context of an ever-emerging exterior reality, new attention can be given to the dynamics of change and development within the human community.

Deep within one's own interior lies a third portal through which one can look to encounter the profound awe of existence. Since the beginning of recorded history, we can find evidence that shamans, mystics and priests were aware of sources of energy within the depths of their own being. Accessing these resources requires disciplines and practices beyond the capacities of most citizens. Like the numinous powers of the exterior universe and the indescribable bonds within the human community, this deep wellspring within the individual defies easy objective explanation. Thus, in every era, saints and sages develop new ways of expressing the effect of touching these depths and leading people on the journey beyond the surface of life. Likewise, old practices and metaphors are rejuvenated in light of new understandings, technologies and general living conditions.

In a series of papers published after his death, Thomas Berry observed the importance of these three perspectives in cultures over many centuries.

We do not awaken to consciousness in a blank universe. We awaken in a universe wherein the cosmic script is already written, a universe in which the written scriptures have already been composed, a universe in which we discover, ..., a third scripture imprinted within our own being. Each of these three scriptures – the cosmic, the written and interior awareness – responds to the others, evokes the reality of the others, and is

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interpreted in their light. These three together guide us in our self-creation, our humanization. Out of these three scriptures, the human cultures have been born and sustained and, when these cultures have declined, it is out of these three sources that they have been called back to life and renewed from century to century.<sup>4</sup>

Coming into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, masters in each of these three arenas had generally agreed to pursue their explorations as though each of the disciplines could be pursued independently of the other. This led many people to assume that science looked at some objective reality, that religion was looking at a spiritual reality and that deep within the individual psyche another unique kind of fulfillment and peace could be found. *Through Three Portals* assumes that each of the three perspectives, in fact, focuses on the same fundamental reality. Thus, this approach encompasses all three perspectives and provides ways to make them relevant for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, on a global scale.

## Part B: Global Problématique

In order to respond, adequately, to the challenges of any era, individuals and the society of which they are a part, must have a common analysis of the fundamental issues they face. In the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, H. Richard Niebuhr outlined his analysis of the global issues that must be addressed by people concerned with the depth issues of their time. He wrote:

In our time, with its dramatic revelations of the evils of nationalism, of racialism and of economic imperialism it is the evident responsibility of the Church to repudiate these attitudes within itself and to act as the pioneer of society in doing so. The apostolic proclamation

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<sup>4</sup> Berry, Thomas, *The Sacred Universe*, p. 23.

## Introduction

of good and bad news to the colored races without a pioneering repudiation of racial discrimination in the Church contains a note of insincerity and unbelief. The prophetic denunciation of nationalism without a resolute rejection of nationalism in the Church is mostly rhetorical. As the representative and pioneer of mankind the Church meets its social responsibility when in its own thinking, organization and action it functions as a world society, undivided by race, class and national interests.<sup>5</sup>

Today, the pressing underlying issues have shifted. As the global human community enters what is commonly called the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a different trio of underlying issues comprises the major matters that must be addressed. An updated list would include: a) the unmitigated disruption of the Planet's ecosystems by the human species, b) inadequate alternatives for viable means of individual livelihood and fulfillment and c) outdated systems for evaluating constructive social interaction.

During the approximately five billion years of the Earth's dynamic transformation, countless fluctuations and disasters have occurred. Asteroids and other massive objects from the Milky Way Galaxy have collided with the Planet; tectonic forces have broken continents apart and lifted up mountains. With the advent of life forms, a new level of decision-making arose. This leap to conscious responses to external situations allowed entities to buffer the immediacies of their reactions to stimuli. With the possible exception of the oxygenation of the atmosphere by the photosynthesizing plants, at no other time in the long sweep of history has a single species had such a dramatic effect on the entire ecosystems of the Planet. By exuding oxygen as a by-

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<sup>5</sup> Niebuhr, H. Richard, Chapter 5 The Gospel, The World and the Church ed. Kenneth Scott Latourette, 1946, Harper Bros.

## Introduction

product of photosynthesis, the early plants created an oxygen-dense atmosphere that, in fact, poisoned them.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, on a global scale and in diverse ways, the human species is disrupting the elaborate interconnected system by which the myriad of life forms interact and thrive. These impacts have been documented in a considerable amount of contemporary literature. Greenhouse gasses coming from burning carbon fuels and farm raised cattle production are changing the temperatures of the oceans and the flow of major air currents. Destruction of rain forests and other primal habitats are causing the elimination of species at historic rates. Likewise, byproducts from industrial processing and fertilization of soils are polluting the Planet's common supplies of air and water so that entire human settlements and forests have severely limited access to the basic needs for daily living.

That these kinds of results are coming from the actions of human beings is, in and of itself, problematic. However, more a complicating factor lies in the reality that many people do not possess a worldview that either highlights these problems or provides a meaningful way to resolve them. Thus, decades of writing about the problems have produced marginal progress in addressing them. The systematic theology provided in *Through Three Portals* provides a framework for changing the human relationship to the natural world. This contemporary worldview is designed to produce the motivation and impetus for cooperation between the human and non-human worlds.

A second point at which the human community struggles to find its creative role in the ongoing development of its home Planet arises when the burgeoning population seeks to find meaningful and viable ways of sustaining themselves. Fueled by a generally increasing standard of living and the availability of food resources, the Planet has seen a dramatic rise in the human population with the last few centuries. In earlier eras, the simple task of growing and hunting food for a family provided a full-time occupation for several generations of tribe and family.

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With the rise of industrialization and the expansion of large-scale agriculture, many people became dissociated from the land on which they lived and the seasonal rhythms of their environment. For about a century, the growth of industrial production facilities absorbed the growing population into energy consuming activities that were able to provide money for resources to meet their daily needs.

Now, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, many households have enough stuff; the economic production engine is slowing down. Furthermore, as energy and basic raw materials become scarcer, the ability to continue to increase the number workers in these occupations – especially on an international scale – becomes ever more difficult. However, many individuals lack the skillsets for inventing novel ways of self-maintenance. Furthermore, the social expectations for acceptable standards of living place burdens on families that often tend to precipitate frustration when they are unable to achieve such wealth.

The third fundamental challenge facing human civilization in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century centers on the lack of agreement for how to judge successful human interaction. In pre-agrarian times, a human community rose or fell depending on its ability to live in harmony with its environment. Change – both in the human and non-human worlds – appeared to happen slowly. Thus, complex rules for balancing the short-term needs of all the components of the human community and their immediate surroundings were developed, agreed upon and implemented.

With the advent of agriculture, the human community began to take a major role in shaping the plants on which it depended and even the flow of the rivers that carried water to the towns and fields. The focus of the norms of social interaction shifted from the natural to the human realms. These changes of perspective worked well as long as the human communities were generally isolated from each other and were small enough to have less than catastrophic impact on the Planetary, or even localized, ecosystem. Today, these conditions no longer apply but the

## Introduction

moral and legal framework for moving beyond the previous social systems has yet to be put in place. *Through Three Portals* provides a worldview and theology for developing an appropriate ethical and meaningful response to this new situation.

## Part C: Depth Journey

Joseph Campbell and others have done extensive work in unraveling the myths and symbols by which the human community has given expression to the depth experiences within their personal and collective experience. In every era – the adequate responses to the individual and societal challenges at hand come from deep within. Looking back, the sources of these understandings are often far from obvious.

While this kind of personal introspection must begin as an individual endeavor, those who seek to allow others to benefit from their travails from the arduous journey to the center of being often begin to seek others traveling similar roads. In attempting to share their experiences, they frequently develop ways of articulating insights and wisdom that can be shared with larger numbers of people. These fresh metaphors can provide a new foundation for enlivening societies and guiding decisions and actions at an individual and organizational level.

## Part D: Individual Resolve

Finally, any deep reflection, any productive spiritual journey, must lead to action through which interior transformation and enlightenment finds physical expression and takes on outward form. Likewise, any systematic theology must provide the solid foundation for actually doing something on a daily basis. In this light, *Through Three Portals* addresses two poles of a dichotomy blocking creative resolutions for the pressing issues of the 21<sup>st</sup>

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Century. Many progressive and liberal thinkers have countless creative solutions to the environmental and social problems they perceive but lack an authoritative framework to justify their actions. On the other hand, many social and religious conservatives validate the recommendations on outmoded interpretations of historic wisdom and thus exacerbate the very problems they seek to solve.

The systematic approach presented in summary on the following three pages, and elucidated in the 12 Codicil that follow, bridges this divide by providing a new starting point, a fresh cosmology that integrates the social, scientific and interpersonal research of previous centuries into a mutually enhancing perspective adequate for contemporary society. By dealing with both the everyday experiences of modern citizens and the depth realities seen through each of the three portals, this approach leads to fresh ways to reflect on the profound elements of human existence. Thus, *Through Three Portals* provides the outline for a systematic theology adequate to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## Our Common Story In Prose and Poetry

Throughout the long sweep of history, people of all ages and diverse stations in life have attempted to make sense out of the life they have before them. They have looked in three main places – through three portals. People have looked:


- a. At the natural world which surrounds them,
- b. Among their neighbors and in the social interrelations which arise and
- c. Deep within themselves.

By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, with billions of people looking with highly sensitive instruments and sharing perspectives around the globe with electronic communications at light-speed, each of the three portals provided new levels of clarity from a unique perspective. Some leaders in their respective fields wanted to claim superiority for their views; some thought they were looking at different realities.

The time has come to integrate these three perspectives, to update previous insights with contemporary data and to give meaningful names to the realities that surround each person, particle and plant. On the first hand, the big blue circle on the next page says everything that anyone can say using intransitive verbs (the equal sign of language). When one looks through a telescope to the outer reaches of space or through an electron microscope to the smallest particle of a molecule, one can only say: “All is All”. After that, as discussed in Codicils 1 through 4, people try to organize the sensory input in ways that provide guidance for decision-making and action. At the same time, wise ones seek ways to capture the wonder of every moment.

Whether gathering in wandering tribes or settled in cities and nations, people have attempted to order their communities in ways that provide safety, security and fulfillment. The poorest peasant and the proudest ruler, finally, must acknowledge the power and reality of that which lies beyond them. In whatever





**All is All,  
God  
means God  
and  
I am I.**

Everything  
Else you say  
Only describes a part  
Of reality.

language or mythology, all of the discussion, poetry and reasoning boil down to: **“God means God.”** After that, as discussed in Codicils 5 through 8, each person and society must give formal expression to the deep beauty that lies at the heart of social relationships. But, whatever is said about God, something is always lacking, left out or reduced.

In the eerie silence of the dark night or in the calm stillness of the grove of trees or in the illuminating moment of self-reflection, some people have touched the center of being that lies at the core of their own existence. Sages have taught pathways to the profound, saints have conducted training programs in their monasteries and everyday citizens have encountered transcendent moments at the most unexpected times. At these instances, when wisdom overflows intellectual boundaries, one realizes: **“I am I.”** After that, as in Codicils 9 through 12, everyone tries to put a face on the awe that transcends words.

Everyone lives in one common external reality; the global social web interrelates every person on the Planet. Each person, in the depths of their being, touches the same profound oneness. At the same time that a global sameness underlies all human experience, each unique individual, each cultural heritage and each geographic location gives rise to particular and unique interpretations of the overarching similarities. On the one hand, the poem on the preceding page says all that can be said; yet much more needs to be said to clarify the various particular aspects of individual experience. The twelve codicils of this book chart out ways that each person can make profound sense of their every-day experience. From this perspective, their self-conscious actions can have a significant contribution to the unfolding of the tomorrows that have not yet arrived. In this way, the codicils provide a framework for discussion and dialogue with historic perspectives and among people with diverse cultural heritages and viewpoints.

# The 12 Codicils: *Profound Descriptions of the Deeper Aspects of Reality*

## Prelude to Looking Through The Portal of the Natural World

### Gazing in Wonder

On a brisk summer evening in the summer of 1965, a group of camp counselors and I enjoyed relaxing camaraderie around a campfire on the banks of an Idaho mountain stream. Far away from city lights and the responsibilities of school and work, we relaxed and enjoyed the crackling fire and the still night air. I lay back on the sandy beach to look, really look, at the abundant stars in the deep black sky. In gazing at them one by one, I realized that my eyes were looking parallel to each other – that I was looking as far away as possible. A profound sense of Wonder filled every pore of my being, for then I knew intimately that everything and I were integral parts of a big, old, wild, emerging, numinous Universe. The memory of that Moment of Wonder has never gone away.

Everybody has their own kind of unforgettable *experience* when – often for the first time – the separation and fragmentation of existence fade away and they dwell in the sheer wonder of reality. *Remembering* this kind of moment helps illuminate daily activities and informs future decision-making. By *interpreting* these moments in ways that create patterns of significance, they become the driving force in one's life. When life begins to make sense to an individual, a person taps into a source of vitalizing energy. Sharing these moments with people who have had similar experiences helps build a community of people working

## Describing the Portals to Understanding

	Introduction	<b>All is All – Gazing in Wonder</b>
<b>The Objective Level</b> – The way experience comes to us	<i>Systematic Theology</i> – building a rational and intuitive framework for making sense of life	1. Emergent Reality <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Contemporary Cosmology</li> <li>• All Realms Participate</li> <li>• Modes of Understanding</li> <li>• Intentional Action</li> </ul>
<b>Reflections on Reality</b> – The images and stories that make sense of experiences	<i>Global Problématique</i> – clarifying the root causes of the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century problems in ways that point to new ways of resolution	2. Patterned Growth <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative Self</li> <li>• Life Urge</li> <li>• Profoundly Holy</li> <li>• Toward Complexity-Consciousness</li> </ul>
<b>Interpreting our Sensibilities</b> – Tying it all back together meaningfully	<i>Depth Journey</i> – charting the pathways through three portals to the depths of being and self-understanding	3. Embodied Differentiation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crash, Crack, Kaboom</li> <li>• Unique Potential</li> <li>• Messy Ambiguity</li> <li>• Wonder-filled Newness</li> </ul>
<b>Deciding to Act</b> – Moving into tomorrow with resolve	<i>Individual Resolve</i> – coming back to the current moment with fresh resolve to participate in unfolding tomorrow	4. Unfathomable Numinosity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beyond Words</li> <li>• Focus Between</li> <li>• Name the Experience</li> <li>• Celebrate Wonder</li> </ul>

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The Rational Structure Undergirding  
Through Three Portals

(The numbered boxes on this 2-page chart correspond to the 12 Codicils.)

<p><i>The Objective Level – The way experience comes to us</i></p>	<p><b>God means God – Experiencing Beauty</b></p>	<p><b>I am I – Reflecting Awe</b></p>
<p><i>Reflections on Reality – The images and stories that make sense of experiences</i></p>	<p>5. Communing Subjects</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planetary Family</li> <li>• Parallel Language</li> <li>• Unfolding Purpose</li> <li>• Fulfillment in Mission</li> </ul>	<p>9. Decisive Self</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Awakening to Self</li> <li>• Among Relationships</li> <li>• Separation Embodied</li> <li>• Directional Focus</li> </ul>
<p><i>Interpreting our Sensibilities – Tying it all back together meaningfully</i></p>	<p>6. Structured Relationships</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Fostering Uniqueness</li> <li>• Seeing Through</li> <li>• Coming Apart</li> <li>• Common Ground</li> </ul>	<p>10. Centered Creativity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinventing Self</li> <li>• Revitalizing Connectivity</li> <li>• Pain of Moving On</li> <li>• Strengthened Resolve</li> </ul>
<p><i>Deciding to Act – Moving into tomorrow with resolve</i></p>	<p>7. Enhancing Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Journey of Corporateness</li> <li>• Conscious Participation</li> <li>• Changing Images</li> <li>• Greater Complexity</li> </ul>	<p>11. Fulfilled Being</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowered Self</li> <li>• Fount of Energy</li> <li>• Reductionism Tempts</li> <li>• Radiance Manifested</li> </ul>
<p><i>Deciding to Act – Moving into tomorrow with resolve</i></p>	<p>8. Enlivening Energy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breaking Through</li> <li>• Expanded Now</li> <li>• Community Intensified</li> <li>• Celebrate Empowerment</li> </ul>	<p>12. Transforming Presence</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Catalytic Self</li> <li>• Empowering Center</li> <li>• Outpouring Energy</li> <li>• Bask in Radiance</li> </ul>

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together on a common task and thinking together toward a common understanding. In *acting* from this deeper perspective, the vitalizing powers of the Universe become manifested.

In order to build a systematic theology for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, *Through Three Portals* follows this same four-fold process – remember a moment, reflect on the experience, discern the larger significance of the particular experience and tap into the deep energy in ways that groups can join together in common action. The chart “Describing the Portals to Understanding” (on the previous two pages) organizes the twelve codicils of this book into these same four levels of discourse. The second column of the chart, labeled “Introduction” summarizes the four parts of the Introduction. The other columns show the numbers and titles of the twelve codicils and their respective four sub-sections.

## Codicil 1 – Emergent Reality

Codicil 1 provides a general introduction to the worldview from which all of the remaining observations are made. The fundamental insight in this codicil centers on the understanding that everyone lives in an emerging reality in which each person and particle participates in shaping the ever-unfolding tomorrows. Talking about the complex reality in which we live requires careful use of language in order fully to convey both the experiences and their meaning with others on life's journey. Finally, this codicil highlights the important role this cosmology plays as an influence on the way individuals act.

### Section A – A Contemporary Cosmology

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the daily experiences of living and the overwhelming scientific research point to the fact that the human species lives in an emerging Universe. Furthermore, the Universe has always been emerging and, as far as anyone can tell, it will continue to emerge. However, the pace of change has increased in recent decades so that many of the skills learned in high school become outdated before ending gainful employment. New technologies appear in ever more rapid succession. Not only does the pace of change affect individuals, entire organizations and societies frequently find themselves facing situations that they have never before encountered and for which they have non-existent or inadequate patterns of responses. The issue bigger than the need for new responses, however, lies in the fact that contemporary society does not possess clear and creative ways to comprehend, to respond to and to participate in these persistent and dynamic changes. Herein lies what I call the *Cosmological Conundrum of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*. Resolving this challenge comprises the major focus of this book.

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Throughout human history, individuals and societies have attempted to make sense out of the surroundings in which they live. They have sought to perceive, to understand and to name patterns of natural events. In so doing, individuals and societies were enabled to predict future events both to avoid calamity and to insure the safety and well-being of themselves and ones about which they cared. This composite of understanding, this big-picture overview, can be called their *Cosmology*. *Cosmologies* hold societies together. They are passed down from generation to generation and they allow individuals and communities to grow and to develop in a coherent manner.

Over the 40-60,000 year history of the human species for which any cogent artifacts showing interpretations and representations of their surroundings remain, at least four major cosmological understandings have been utilized. Early in the development of human consciousness, all aspects of the perceptual and experiential worlds co-existed in a single undifferentiated understanding. This can be called the *Synonymous Perspective*. In later times, the heavenly planes were divided from the earthly planes. This *Separated Perspective* was empowered by the willingness, in the Western world during the Middle Ages, to officially divide the “scientific” and “religious” disciplines into separate institutional jurisdictions. In recent centuries, as the worldwide human community became interconnected through trade and communication networks, many of the previously distinct worldviews began to intersect and collide. Thus, a *Simultaneous Perspective* appeared in which all ways of understanding the perplexities of religion, science and selfhood tended to acquire equal credence. This allowed some conflicts to be resolved, but masked the deeper truths that provided a common foundation. Centuries of work on the diverse pathways have led many to realize that the Universe is One; that All That Is simply Is. As global civilization enters the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the new operational worldview can be called the *Synchronistic Perspective* in which all elements of the emerging reality actively participate in shaping the unfolding tomorrow.



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From the forests and savannahs of eastern Africa, the earliest ancestors of modern humans set out to explore and eventually inhabit the planet. In each place that they settled down, they observed the cycles of the seasons, the habits of the plants and animals and they catalogued the terrain that surrounded them. Once in any location, the new inhabitants sought ways to fit in and to live in harmony with their environment. Their own dreams and longings became the dreams and longings of everything and vice versa. In this *Synonymous Perspective*, all the individual parts worked together for a purpose. The great creator put each creature in its place. The human community, too, had its place in the cosmic dance. Learning this dance enabled all participants to thrive.

This *Synonymous Perspective* worked well for the migrating bands of humans who followed the river valleys, crossed the mountains and explored the diverse plains of Planet Earth in the eon of the flowers and the mammals. When people came to new places with new patterns and experiences, they augmented the stories passed down from generation to generation to encompass the new elements. Once in a place, they enhanced the details of each story as new aspects of their environment became clear. Generally, however, as long as the tribe stayed in one locale, they did not experience much change from generation to generation. The great mountain ranges had been formed long before humans began to travel the globe. Human eyes never witnessed the great extinction – including the disappearance of the dinosaurs – that marked the beginning of the Cenozoic Era. While storms periodically raged and volcanoes frequently obliterated villages and landscapes, on a day-to-day basis the human species learned to thrive by living in balanced harmony with the cycles of the Planet. For most people living in this period of human history, everything was alive – like the humans – and a part of a vital and mysterious tapestry.

However, a cataclysmic shift in consciousness occurred when some bands of wanderers found it more effective for their own well-being to settle in one place and to remain along the banks of

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the great rivers. Between five and ten thousand years ago, these new human social relationship patterns began to thrive along the Yellow River in present-day China, the Ganges and Indus Rivers in the north of modern day India and the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers of Iraq. In a new way, people's fundamental experiences centered on their abilities to enhance food production by managing the planting and harvesting of crops and controlling the flow of water through irrigation. This agricultural basis for society allowed more people to live together in a single place and required a new complexity of social patterns. This novel mode of existence fundamentally changed the way that humans perceived their relationship to the environment in which they lived. In these situations, their actions did dramatically affect the outcomes of the non-human world.

At this point in human history, the cosmology that had carried them around the Planet no longer provided stability and order for understanding their new relationship with the world around them. As a hierarchical society formed to manage the crops and water systems and to provide security for territories and fields, classes of priests and rulers developed to oversee the workers and ceremonies. The divine powers that had resided within every component of each person's life became relegated to the heavens and were communed with by the holy ones. This bifurcation of understanding reached its institutional peak during the 17<sup>th</sup> Century in Western Europe as detailed by Steven Shapin. In his book, *The Scientific Revolution* Shapin details the growing detachment. He describes four major changes:

First, the mechanization of nature: the increasing use of mechanical metaphors to construe natural processes and phenomena; second, the depersonalization of natural knowledge: the growing separation between human subjects and the natural objects of their knowledge ... ; third, the attempted mechanization of knowledge making ... ; and fourth, the aspiration to use the resulting reformed natural

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knowledge to achieve moral, social and political ends ...<sup>6</sup>

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, this cosmology of a created reality with a heavenly divinity that transmitted holy wisdom through divinely inspired writings interpreted by priests had become institutionalized in virtually all religious traditions. The Protestant reformation in Europe expanded the divine mediators to include educated laity. Though it took different forms in the distinct cultural understandings of various peoples, the general pattern had gained common acceptance around the globe. In the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, Dante wrote an epic poem entitled *The Divine Comedy*<sup>7</sup>. Illustrated versions of this poem were widely available in homes, libraries, schools and churches by the mid-Twentieth Century. Many have argued that Dante conceived of the journey as a metaphorical one. Nonetheless, succeeding generations tended to take a more literal interpretation of the scenes he described. Consciously, or unconsciously, Dante's vivid descriptions of a passage leading into an underworld where fire and brimstone awaited those who had done evil provided the operating cosmology that sustained the western world for 700 years. Dante's mountain on the other side of hell that the virtuous ones could climb to meet God and his heavenly angels provided a picture of a hoped for place of eternal bliss.

The technological advances pioneered by Western nations in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century led to devastating wars and conflicts and rampant rises in population, standards of living and human expectations. The applied skills that were developed in educational institutions and corporate research laboratories became widely available to urban dwellers and rural residents regardless of their academic training or cultural perspective. Whereas explorers of previous generations had spent years on return journeys to distant lands, airplanes and telecommunications brought all members of the human family into daily contact and affordable interchange.

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<sup>6</sup> Shapin, Steven, *The Scientific Revolution*, p. 13.

<sup>7</sup> Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*.

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Although each of the various civilizations and cultures had grown up in their own distinct locales with their own distinct interpretations of how best to survive relative to their surroundings and their civilizations, each had stemmed from the same kind of *Separated Perspective*. In order to allow for the obvious differences, a kind of live-and-let-live perspective began to emerge. This *Simultaneous Perspective* tended to give equal validity to each individual and collective understanding of how society and the world function.

In his book, *A Theory of Everything – An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science and Spirituality* Ken Wilbur describes this acceptance of all perspectives as *Boomeritis*.<sup>8</sup> His overall analysis details the journey of consciousness through which each individual and societies as a whole progress. The details of his larger analysis are, in and of themselves, important and revealing about the historic development of human consciousness. His key insight about the recent rise of Boomeritis centers on this stance's ability to mask the need to move beyond the separation and compartmentalization of intellectual disciplines. This attitude provided a sophisticated integration of the previously separated elements of thinking and action but without any critical evaluation of the value of particular conceptualizations. The Boomeritis assumption that all perspectives had value limited its ability to evaluate the relative merits of one course of action compared to another.

During the closing decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, elements of a fresh new cosmology began to be formulated. This new perspective describes an emerging reality in which all elements are infused with the divine and participate in shaping the unfolding tomorrow. It describes a Universe that is old, big, wild, emerging and numinous. Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry provided a sweeping story of the Universe's 15-billion year journey in their book *The Universe Story: From the Primal*

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<sup>8</sup> Wilbur, Ken, *A Theory of Everything – An Integral Vision for Business, Politics, Science and Spirituality*, p. 26.

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*Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era, A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos.*<sup>9</sup> Although the research of subsequent decades has indicated the need for a billion-year shortening of the timeline, the epic narrative of their book provides a masterful context for understanding the reality in which everyone lives.

For several decades, I have been keeping up with the latest scientific articulations of the history and size of the Universe. National Geographic has had several maps of the Universe, the one printed in 1983 showed a 20-billion year conceptualization. Over time, science has moved the age of the Universe down to just under 14 billion years. In order to conceptualize the macro phases of the Universe's development, I described three stages in a *Guide to the Universe Story* that I printed in 1999 when Thomas Berry dedicated a Universe Story Walk on our property. More recently, I grouped the 14 one-billion year phases into seven steps, each with a two-word title. Thus, put succinctly, you can tell the whole story of the unfolding of the Universe by saying:

The Universe has embarked on three great endeavors during which it accomplished monumental feats on its 14-billion year journey into complexity-consciousness. During the **First Great Endeavor**, the Universe focused on **Turning Energy into Matter**. It spent about two billion years *Coalescing Clouds* of gaseous matter. The 2<sup>nd</sup> two billion years, saw the emergence of an abundance of *Exploding Stars*. For its **Second Great Endeavor**, the Universe focused on **Turning Matter into Systems**. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> two-billion year period, the *Foundational Principles* emerged (differentiation, communion and autopoiesis) that ensured its long-term vitality. During the 4<sup>th</sup> two-billion year period, *Complex Building Blocks* encompassed an Other World of

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<sup>9</sup> Swimme, Brian and Berry, Thomas, *The Universe Story*, p. 269.

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mystery, care and compassion. Finally, in its Third Great Endeavor, the Universe has been working on **Turning Systems into Consciousness**. The first stage in this task, the 5<sup>th</sup> two-billion years, involved creating a *Life-Giving Platform* with eight planets and a host of other objects around a mid-sized star. In the 6<sup>th</sup> period, particularly on Planet Earth, the Universe *Harnessed Energy* giving it bodily form. Now, in the 7<sup>th</sup> two-billion year epoch, all citizens of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are helping birth *Embodied Consciousness* with self-reflective capacities...and the future awaits.

The rest of this book details a cosmology of an emerging Universe, describes how this perspective informs and shapes the decisions and actions in diverse aspects of society and within individual's daily lives and, finally, provides metaphors that foster interaction with reality's pervasive numinous aspects.

### Section B – All Realms Participate

In the first instance, the picture that a creature has of the universe in which it dwells must come from within itself. Its model, its cosmology, may be informed by personal experience, guided by genetic coding and shaped by teachings and traditions. From whatever source, finally, each entity chooses or adopts an understanding of its environment through which to filter and evaluate its options and by which to determine the effectiveness of various responses. A part of the illusion perpetrated by some scientists in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century arises when they consider the understandings they have articulated to be eternally valid in and of themselves. Rather, as Thomas S. Kuhn pointed out so clearly in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, science creates paradigms, stories, frameworks, and cosmologies that make sense of existing data. However, times of crisis arise when existing understandings are unable to inform actions and

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experiences. “The significance of crises is the indication that they provide that an occasion for retooling has arrived.”<sup>10</sup>

Part of people’s frustration in the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century comes from the collapse of the fixed universe cosmology and the pain required for making a change to a new understanding. One of the themes proposed in many creation stories involves a blissful period that pre-dated present civilization. During this time, nature and people lived in uninterrupted harmony and individuals had few worries and concerns. Typically, some demonic figure creeps into the historical recounting to disturb the calm and inflict pain on the humans.

Modern telescopes show pictures of the pervasive violence throughout the galaxies – stars explode, supernovae obliterate their surroundings and even entire galaxies collide often swallowing one another. Around the Planet, earthquakes rip open chasms; tsunamis overwhelm lowlands without regard for nuclear power plants, weary anglers and young schoolchildren. Hardly a year goes by without substantial social unrest, even violence, somewhere within the human family. Whereas in centuries past, events in one locale went unnoticed by people in distant places, current electronic media brings disruptive events into the consciousness of a majority of the Planet’s citizens. The hope for the return to the undisturbed stillness has vanished; the Universe’s wildness has become a permanent and pervasive part of social structures and individual lives.

For me, this wildness struck close to home, literally, during the spring of 2006. I went to bed before the late news began and was unaware of the detailed weather forecasts on the local television. As I dozed off to sleep, I did hear some loud winds; but I can sleep through a lot of noise. In the morning while drinking my tea, the phone rang surprisingly early. An elderly friend of mine was on the line, she asked if I was OK. Nonchalantly, I replied, “Sure, why do you ask?” She informed

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<sup>10</sup> Kuhn, Thomas, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p. 76.

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me that she had seen on television that a tornado had struck the airport overnight. She was concerned knowing that I lived just across the highway from the end of the runway. When I looked out of my kitchen window, I was surprised to see that the deck furniture had been blown onto the roof of the doghouse and some of the trees in the forest were uprooted.

In the valley just 100 yards from our back door, dozens of trees were down. One particular oak tree had been twisted like the lid on a jar of salad dressing. Spindly spires of wood now rise where the trunk had been and the majority of the trunk and all of the branches were lifted straight into the air and deposited along the floor of the valley. Walking past the remaining trunk stub, even on a calm spring day, provides a chilling reminder of the ever-present wildness within the emerging cosmos.

Unfortunately, in times when a change of perspective becomes essential at a foundational level, no rational deductive logic applies. The reality of an Emerging Universe cannot be deduced from within the context of an externally created reality. The two propositions are opposed to each other; an emerging universe makes no logical sense in the framework of a created reality. Thus, people must look with fresh eyes on the world around them, must keep an open heart when meeting people unlike themselves and must listen with acute sensitivity to the still wind blowing across the interior harp strings that resonate to the songs of the eternal and discern new images of fundamental reality.

One of the unique characteristics of 21<sup>st</sup> Century society involves the widespread experience of the interconnected systems in which humans interact with each other and the natural world of which they are a part. Never before in human history have so many diverse cultures been able to interact so instantaneously and effortlessly across continents and social classes.

The exploration of the natural world by the scientific community began by embarking on elaborate endeavors to describe particular fragments of the Planet. This led to highly specialized



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bodies of knowledge focusing on frogs, or bacteria, or bones or flight or any other specific field. Within each, unique nomenclature was developed to describe particular phenomena. Colleges and universities created curricula to teach specialists in a particular field. Nonetheless, by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century multiple cross-discipline faculties began to unleash fresh creativity by juxtaposing interpretations from one silo of understanding on to analysis from another unrelated silo of knowledge. The concept of an emerging Universe became a helpful framework for interpreting data and experience.

New ways of looking at old data informed thinking and acting when the Emerging Universe Cosmology spread across intellectual and social disciplines. Starting from Darwin's insights about the evolution of the species, diverse scientific, sociological, and even theological disciplines used this new metaphor to lead them into new avenues of understanding.

## Section C – Modes of Understanding

From the 17<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries, the scientific, rational approach to understanding the natural world tended to dominate all modes of conversation, including religious dialogue. However, in previous times, other approaches to thinking, conceptualizing and communicating have been used within the human community. Even in modern times, these remain as viable alternatives by which to interpret experiences. Many people have come to rely on technology as their primary means for satisfying the basic needs of daily living. This leads to an increasing dissociation with the natural world and an increasing objectification of other people, themselves and the Planet. This need to quantify entities and to name interacting components has allowed many people to conclude that, in fact, everything can be quantified, uniquely characterized and named.

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In a private conversation<sup>11</sup>, Thomas Berry explained one important distinction that becomes important when attempting to move beyond the objectification of the natural world toward a deeper understanding. One must understand, he suggested, the distinction between *Metaphorical* and *Univocal* language. *Metaphorical* language involves images, similes and poetic expressions all of which are open to interpretation as communication passes from one person to another. *Univocal* language, on the other hand, conveys a precise meaning, the content of the message contains no ambiguity.

One example of these two kinds of languages can be seen in the pair of words “love” and “marriage” – as in “I love my wife” and “I am married to my wife”. The latter is a measurable, legal and objectified fact. During the decades of a marriage, the quality of love grows and deepens; the facticity of the marriage persists. Furthermore, the word “love” might be used in a variety of situations without compromising the meaning of the word in either context. Both the statements “I love my wife” and “I love chocolate pie” while having the same syntax and using the same verb clearly convey different meanings.

A great deal of confusion arises when metaphorical statements are interpreted univocally or vice versa. This problem becomes particularly acute when scientific thinking meets religious wisdom or when individuals from diverse religious perspectives attempt to communicate the depth experiences of their traditions. The simple distinction that science uses univocal language and that religion uses metaphorical language only leads to greater misunderstanding. Both perspectives use both modes of discussion. Therefore, care must be taken to distinguish which is being used in any particular expression.

Most specifically, this task of distinguishing the kind of language being used becomes critical when changing cosmologies.

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<sup>11</sup> Private conversation with the author during a visit to Thomas’ apartment at Well Spring Retirement Center during 2007.

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Cosmological conversations require both metaphorical expression and univocal descriptions. All of the great religions contain elaborate and detailed descriptions of the way the world began and how humans came onto the stage of history. The Abrahamic religious traditions have their story written down in the opening chapters of the Bible. In India, on the walls of the temples at Ellora, Hindu monks and masons carved elaborate representations of the creation of the Universe from the mind of God. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a new story of the beginning of time is being formulated which attempts to intertwine the visions from the great telescopes and the every-day experience of living in a global village with internet connectivity and technological acumen.

The progress of human civilization into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century will be severely impeded if:

- a) the various cultural and religious groupings attempt to hold on to univocal interpretations of their historic cosmological articulations, and
- b) the scientific community fails to understand that even its clearest and most accurate statements about the long-term history of the Universe include metaphoric expressions that attempt to convey both reports of actual events and their underlying significance.

When this clarity about the usage of metaphorical and univocal language by all disciplines occurs, then dialogue, understanding and new resolve can emerge. When confusion about the kinds of language being used enters into the conversations, then confrontation, misunderstanding and conflict will surely block the creative growth and development of individuals and social groupings.

## Section D – Intentional Action

Members of all species act; and they act in ways designed, at least in part, to insure their own well-being. Action involves

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making decisions about which option – out of a host of options available – will actually lead to the desired results providing individual success within the overall wellness of the surroundings. To evaluate the merits of the various options requires a mental model that allows calculations to predict alternative outcomes. This mental model contains both intellectual and emotional components. In so doing, wild ideas are evaluated by emotional sensitivities and emotions are balanced by care-filled reasoning. In a single word, an individual's overall mental model of the total universe in which they dwell can be called their *cosmology*. As discussed above, the prevailing cosmology of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century no longer provides adequate predictors of beneficial results – either at the national or individual level.

Two major deficiencies within the theological perspectives that carried many of the world's civilizations into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century involved the assumptions that: a) there were knowable “right responses” to the perplexities of daily living and b) that the objective reality of the scientific perspectives was separate and distinct from spiritual realities. These understandings helped fuel an extractive economy that treats the entire natural world as a resource for human use. They helped lead to political gridlock and social conflict stemming from divergent interpretations of previous articulations of appropriate responses to inter-personal relationships.

Acknowledging that now, and throughout time, individuals have lived in an emerging Universe provides a framework that more effectively guides individual and collective actions than the illusion of a fixed reality into which people must learn to fit. Likewise, including the aspect of the numinous within the realm of all entities, adds a sacred dimension to each part of the Universe. In so doing, the disjuncture between the religious and the secular gets bridged in ways that foster honor and respect among diverse species and modes of being. Thus, at a global level, and within each community and family, the awareness that we all live in an old, big, wild, emerging and numinous Universe

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provides a common context for evaluating collective actions – for deciding how to act responsibly – in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

In *The Universe Story*, Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme wrote, “The cosmogenetic principle states that the evolution of the universe will be characterized by differentiation, autopoiesis and communion throughout time and space and at every level of reality.”<sup>12</sup> This three-fold dynamic also informs the structure of this systematic approach to theology. In each of the three portals, one codicil deals most specifically with each of the three characteristics.

The next three codicils continue looking through the Portal of the Natural World. Codicil 2 explores how growth and change happen, how individual uniqueness unfolds into selfhood – the process of autopoiesis. In Codicil 3, specific attention will be given to the processes of differentiation in all realms of the cosmos and in particular how this dynamic is experienced by humans. Finally, Codicil 4 focuses on the Unfathomable Numinosity which pervades the living and non-living worlds and enlivens community turning togetherness into communion. To put these three explorations in theological language – these codicils focus on ways to see the Face of God in the natural world.

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<sup>12</sup> Swimme, Brian and Berry, Thomas, *The Universe Story*, p. 71.

## Codicil 2 – Patterned Growth

Unique entities become manifest when Wholeness takes on any particular form. Codicil 2 focuses on the opportunity that each self has to create itself, to play a particular role in the long sweep of history, a property that Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme call *autopoiesis*. *Autopoiesis* refers to the power each thing has to participate directly in the cosmos-creating endeavor.<sup>13</sup> When each entity, in and of its self, becomes an active participant in the creative process of the Universe, then each deserves honor and respect. In this way, both the human and non-human worlds, the animate and inanimate realms, have the opportunity of revealing the activities and aspects of the divine.

### Section A – Creative Self

One morning early in childhood, my mother added raspberries to my daily breakfast bowl of milk and cereal. These tasty morsels certainly livened up the regular routine for a few days during their short growing season when they were affordable and fresh. A year or so later, our family visited my great-grandmother who lived on a farm in central Ohio. In the early morning hours, before the summer sun got too hot, my mother took me outside to the berry patch. There she showed me the intricacies of picking raspberries – how to avoid the thorns, where to look for the berries, how to tell the ripe ones. Now that I have moved to North Carolina where black raspberries grow wild along the roadside, I make an annual pilgrimage to the various patches around my house. Frequently, I can pick four quarts in a morning before the sun makes it too hot to be out in the long pants and a long-sleeved shirt necessary for navigating the overgrown meadows and brambles.

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<sup>13</sup> Swimme, Brian and Berry, Thomas, *The Universe Story*, p. 75.

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One can say that life skills are learned in the same way that I mastered the art of raspberry picking. This learning process applies to simple skills and complex intellectual tasks. In many ways, building a cosmology and giving theological significance to daily living follows the same journey as mastering the acquisition of raspberries. First, you must experience reality at a level beyond the surface level. Second, you need to affirm this experience as one worth having. At this point, you become teachable and open to learning. Outside influences can augment personal experience; wisdom guides from both the human and non-human worlds can help you make sense of the wholeness of which you are a part. Finally, you can organize your own life patterns in such a way that these occasions are intensified, acknowledged, given significance and shared.

Codicil 1 outlined the details of the emerging reality in which we all live. This second codicil focuses on the change of perspective that arises when we understand that we live amidst a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects.<sup>14</sup> No arguable justifications will take a person from the perspective that they live in a fixed, created reality to the understanding that they live in an emerging reality. Likewise, no rational process will take a person from seeing a static and lifeless landscape among the rocks, hills and forests to seeing every plant, particle and person as a center of creativity and selfhood. However, *sometimes* a person glimpses the possibility of every fragment of the Universe existing as a creative self. Then they see each being in some way or another, actively or passively, shaping the future of the reality in which we all show up. When this radical awareness of new possibility pierces one's consciousness, everything changes. With this momentary illumination an individual may consider relating to every other being and entity in fresh, new and mutually enhancing ways.

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<sup>14</sup> Swimme, Brian and Berry, Thomas, *The Universe Story*, p. 243.

## Section B – Life Urge

When an individual decides to affirm the selfhood of all beings, one may begin to view the natural world from a new perspective. Instead of seeing trees as potential chairs and building materials, they become thriving entities with their own inherent worth. As life-filled entities, then, one can begin a dialogue with them and begin to give dignity and value to their own particular needs, functions and aspirations.

In the woods near my house are two particular trees that inspire me each time I pass them. Long before houses were constructed on our property near Greensboro's international airport, a stream began cutting a valley into the rocks that may have been lifted up as long ago as the Appalachian Mountains were formed. Along the fertile valley, the hardwood forest thrived with an abundance of oaks, poplar, maple and beech trees. These days, as I walk down into the valley I pass two poplar trees. Each juts out from the side of the valley, its trunk parallel to the horizon. Then, the trees each make a right angle bend and head for the sky. The 80-foot tall trunks are three feet in diameter at the base and hold on to the sidewalls of the valley without touching the ground below. I have often asked my engineering friends to replicate such a structure – but none has accepted my challenge.

When I encounter each tree, I try to imagine its life story. I suspect that each one started growing on flat ground; they were standing tall like their brothers and sisters. Then heavy rains or a hurricane filled the quiet little stream in the bottom of the valley until it became a raging torrent and washed away the soil beside the trees until they fell over. No longer tall, they found themselves nearly horizontal on the ground amid vines and fern. Nevertheless, the tree did not want to die; deep within it throbbed the urge to live, to overcome collapse and calamity, to readjust, to adapt and to find the sunlight. Then, from its now horizontal trunk, it sent up a shoot to get above the scrub and bushes that surrounded it. Eventually, the horizontal part of the original trunk died and decayed away while the shoot became a



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strong new trunk carrying nutrients between the leaves in the sunlight high above the valley floor and the roots that were going deep into the moist soil below. Now, when I pass the tree on my morning walks, I see more than a bent tree – I see a vibrant example of the unrelenting life urge that pervades the Planet. Each morning, I have the opportunity to decide, once again, to be at one with the world in which I live.

### Section C – Profoundly Holy

Ever since Descartes proposed the idea that the Universe functioned like a giant clock, ticking along with mechanical precision, generations of students and scholars have come to view the components of every situation as cogs within a larger mechanism. A completely different perspective unfolds when one begins to see every part of the whole as, itself, a center of creativity, as a self. Like the bent tree that embodies a deep-seated urge to live, each particular piece of the whole contains a bit of a unique property that allows newness and creativity to emerge from within itself.

Try as one might, the essence of this spark of creativity, finally, defies rational explanation or arithmetic calculation. Codicil 1-C detailed two modes of understanding and communication – univocal and metaphorical. Conversations with trees, and other entities, require both. At the metaphorical level, many alternatives have been tried to describe what shows through, what lies at the core of, the unquenchable urge to live. When a person says that they “saw the face of God” winking at them through the tree, they acknowledge the profound significance, the universal quality, the holy reality, of something that links each individual – each person, each plant, each animal, each entity. This kind of statement, however, involves metaphorical language.

During the Middle Ages, when the scientific and religious communities agreed to examine reality from two separate

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perspectives, with two unique sets of tools and languages, God became increasingly relegated to the heavens above and to a realm of life that existed somewhere other than on Planet Earth within the nations of men and women. The absence of the holy, of the divine, within the natural world fueled the engines of consumption of goods manufactured by the use of extracted resources that could not be replaced within the timeframe of their depletion.

Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the religious community in all cultures has the opportunity to give new sacred significance to every element of the Planet, to every life form, to every moment of creativity. A transformation in consciousness occurs when one takes the opportunity to pay attention to what really happens within the life and death of each creature, when one strives to see the similarities of the urges and struggles of each part of the Planet and the Universe and then gives this reality significance. The perspective changes the modes of action and enhances the vitality of each component part of the whole.

This change of perspective involves a choice, a decision. On the first hand this choice cannot be rationalized. The alternatives cannot be easily compared since from either perspective, the other appears to be nonsensical. Yet the consequences of each alternative vary widely for the individuals and for each component of the Planet.

### Section D – Toward Complexity-Consciousness

Careful observation of the creativity rampant in the Universe sheds light on another pervasive aspect of the urge to life, of the wellspring of creativity that throbs within each entity and creature. Besides simply living, each generation tends to add to, tends to move the Universe forward in a series of irreversible transformations. In earlier eras, the lack of scientific accuracy

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and historic documentation tended to blur the changes and mask the direction. By the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century, scholars from Teilhard de Chardin to Ken Wilber were fluently describing the history-long trend toward complexity-consciousness.

Codicil 1-A summarized seven great feats of the Universe. Each marked an increase in the level of complexity by which matter was organized. Each represented a step in the direction of increasing consciousness. Gas clouds are more complex than randomly moving particles; solar systems are more complex than gas clouds; and an assembly of nations is more complex than bands of roaming tribes. The long sweep of this trend toward complexity provides new clues as to where to look for the wonder and majesty of the creative forces with each entity and collection of entities.

Unbridled energy, wild creativity and intensified ambiguity can be expected when individual entities are pushing the boundaries of the level of complexity that had been achieved by others of their peers and predecessors.

Looking back at these moments with human eyes and voices, the question becomes “What do you say you see?” Do you see random chance playing out its lengthy hand or a machine chugging along the rails laid down before it? Alternatively, do you see the twinkling eyes of God grateful for ever-emerging newness? Each person must decide what they see, how they relate to it and what name they give to the reality they see.

Here and Now .... Look .... See,  
Expect the unexpected!  
Others look .... See too.<sup>15</sup>

Ellen Howie, 2013

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<sup>15</sup> Howie, Ellen, personal letter to author, 2013.

## Codicil 3 – Embodied Differentiation

Codicil 3 focuses on the second of the three cosmogenetic properties – differentiation. Differentiation, the process by which something begets something different, has been one of the major driving forces throughout the long sweep of history. Understanding how differentiation occurs allows self-conscious beings to participate actively in this universal process. First, self-conscious individuals can affirm that differentiation serves a critical role in the growth and survival of the cosmos and of every part thereof. This affirmation allows these creatures to take a fresh relationship to the pain, ambiguity and confusion that often accompany the acts which foster separation, birth and division.

### Section A – Crack, Crash and Kaboom

When a person lives in a created reality or a fixed cosmos into which an individual must learn to fit in, the question of how things come into being focuses on the nature and actions of the creator. Since unique beings are not in and of themselves creative, some outside force must make them. This applies at all levels from the whole cosmos to each particular creature and person. In this kind of reality, the fundamental life question focuses on right action. Intellectual pursuits center on knowing an entity's functions, features and what keeps it going.

In an emerging reality, three modes of transformation that fosters differentiation can be observed: a) something divides into two or more parts [crack], b) two or more things collide and become one thing [crash] and c) something explodes, disbursts or dissolves into seemingly isolated fragments [kaboom]. In watching the growth of individuals and organizations, each of these three types of instances can be seen. Knowing which of these is going on and understanding their particular

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characteristics can help foster a creative outcome or sustain an individual in the process of transformation.

With the underlying assumption that each entity has, within itself, the powers of creativity a person tends to ask themselves a set of questions that differ dramatically from the questions which arise when the assumption has been made that each entity was externally created for a specific purpose. Instead of asking how to fit in, attention can be given to how change and to participate in affecting future outcomes, both for the individual and for the larger society of which it is a part. Sharing experiences of the ambiguity of making decisions about direction and examples of values for choosing alternatives both become vitalizing experiences. Once this change of perspective occurs, a person may realize that their own deliberative processes, their frustrations and joys, are shared by countless others both in the human and non-human realms.

In addition to newness arising from entities separating into separate new modes of being, even seeming nothingness sometimes changes into something. At the macro level, astronomers have watched stars being born in the galaxies from clouds of hydrogen. At the micro level, physicists have watched particles simply appear in the fomenting plasma of massive cyclotrons. In both cases, the line from non-being to being was crossed; newness came from nothingness.

This question, the question of how things come into being, has a major impact on where one looks for the Face of God and the kinds of language that one uses for describing the reality in which they live. In an emerging Universe, one looks at those moments of change and creativity to see both the physical processes of change and the psychic/spiritual aspects that drive the creativity. In both of these places, the numinous element appears.

## Section B – Unique Potential

When the process of differentiation has been completed, each of the separate entities begins to take on its own unique characteristics. After nearly four billion years of active differentiation of the biosphere on Planet Earth, every nook and cranny is filled with creatures that have adapted and changed to meet their own particular environment.

Occasionally, a person has an opportunity self-consciously to appreciate unabashed differentiation. This happened to me at a nature preserve on the side of an active volcano in Costa Rica. The facility had all sorts of rescued animals – everything from frogs and sloths to pumas and hummingbirds. One outdoor room was designed as a caged home for toucans with entryways for humans. Several docents stayed with the birds while groups of tourists came and went through the people-only passageways. The toucans with their brightly colored beaks welcomed their visitors and proudly posed for pictures. During my brief passage through the home of the toucans, I was invited to allow one to perch on my outstretched arm. The toucan's eyes are located on the sides of their narrow heads, so someone looking at them can usually only see one eye at a time.

For a brief few moments, I, a man from the cities of the United States, stood gazing eye to eye with a rainbow beaked toucan from the Costa Rican rain forests. The silent dialogue allowed each of us to affirm our own distinct uniqueness – he with his beautifully curved beak and bright colored plumage, me with my intellectual curiosity and digital camera. I had no need for his delicate beak and he had no use for my camera – trading places was neither of our objectives. Yet, our eyes met in that deeply connected kind of way that allows the message to be communicated that you are you and I am I and we respect, honor and affirm each other.

## Section C – Messy Ambiguity

Any hope for a well-ordered creation will be recognized as an ethereal illusion within the context of an emerging reality. Within the perspective of a cosmology in which all of the entities were created from a preconceived plan, the task of each entity becomes one of finding its true place. In a created reality, moments of differentiation become times of shame, conflict and chaos. In earlier centuries, the pace of societal change moved slower. Then, the ability to study the long-term history of the natural world was limited to what the naked eye could see and an individual's memory could recall. At this pace, many people could consider the stability of natural forms and constancy of social patterns as the norm rather than the exception.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, however, global interconnectivity, rapidly changing technologies and the ability to look into the inner cores of distant galaxies and throbbing cells call into question previous images of long-term stability. The process of everyday living looks considerably messier – for atoms, ecosystems and societies – than previous hopes desired. Moreover, once the processes of differentiation receive affirmation as integral parts of the ongoing development of the Universe and Planet Earth, then rather than shying away from these times, individuals may choose wholehearted involvement in them.

Active participation in the process of creative differentiation requires support and guidance from an individual's internal skills (see Codicil 9), social sophistication (see Codicil 5) and operational worldview. The beginning years of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, themselves, manifest the differentiation occurring within the worldview – the cosmology – of individuals and societies around the Planet. Irresolvable tensions arise when metaphorical expressions developed in earlier eras to describe a particular group's external surroundings and to guide their social interactions begin to take on immutable literal definitions and are given the status of eternal truths.

## Section D – Wonder-filled Newness

In a cosmos in which autopoiesis, differentiation and communion represent ultimate, foundational and ever-present dynamics, each unique entity has its own rights, roles and responsibilities.

Rather than trying to determine a hierarchy of goodness in which some components have dominion over others, the cosmology of emergence highlights the wonder-filled newness that fills each particular differentiated part. Trees and rivers each play special roles in the overall process of growing the Planet. Trees have rights – the right to clean air filled with CO<sub>2</sub> by which to fuel their photosynthesis. Rivers have river rights – the right to collect run-off rainfall and carry it to the sea. Tree rights are no good to rivers; river rights are no good to trees and the rights of neither are helpful to growing children or mature societies.

Seeing the profound uniqueness of each particular part of the whole provides a window on wonder, a chance to see the face of God in the natural world. Thomas Aquinas wrote that the diversity of the species was necessary so that the fullness of the divinity could be expressed.

An important part of overcoming sectarian strife in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century may come from the enhanced ability to recover the natural world as a primary source of encountering the divine, of meeting the holy, of seeing the Face of God. As global climate change and increased awareness of pollution's disregard for political boundaries becomes ever more apparent, the fact that every human being shares in the common fate of the Planet also becomes more evident. Thus, the possibility of sharing, at a deep level, how we encounter the wonder of the natural world becomes increasingly possible.

My wife and I lived in India for five years in the early 1980's doing village development projects. I have returned for several weeks every other year since then to visit the people I worked



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with and to see the villages we lived in. In 2012, I returned by myself and spent a month living and working at a village school for tribal children. While I had my own apartment in a housing complex adjacent to the school, I ate all of my meals at the school and shared in many of the daily activities of the students and faculty. I was invited to take the “morning walk” with some of the staff and teachers. Each morning at about 6:00, several men walked from the school to the bridge over the creek and back – about 45 energetic minutes. In our daily lives, one of the men was the peon (porter) who carried messages and baggage, one was the primary school English teacher and the third managed the student hostel for 600 students. I was the international technical consultant to the science faculty. We had widely diverse educational backgrounds, language capacities and religious understandings. Nonetheless, when we stopped to watch the sunrise over the distant hills, we had a common experience of the majesty of the radiant glow of the red morning sky. When the cool morning air refreshed our bodies as we walked along the bumpy road, we had a common experience of exhilaration and gratitude for the Earth that cared for us. When we saw the smoggy haze hanging over the expressway filled with trucks carrying goods to waiting stores, we felt a common pain for the plants and birds that were being deprived of life-giving fresh air.

As we walked along the road, each of us knew that we did not have the vocabulary to express our deep experiences in words that the other could understand – and there was no point in trying. When we paused along our morning journey, we acknowledged to each other that these were times worthy of paying attention to, were moments when the mundane was transcended, when metaphors were required. This we all understood and knew that the others understood and that even in our native tongues no words were adequate to capture the experience.

## Codicil 4 – Unfathomable Numinosity

The last codicil in the section involving looking through the portal of the natural world focuses on the third pervasive property of the cosmos called communion, the drive of different things to get together, to cooperate. This process of working together does not involve objects crashing into each other to become one new thing; rather, through a creative tension established between two unique entities something greater than the sum of the individual parts comes into being. In this act of communion – which pervades the Planet and the cosmos – lies a wonder beyond objective description.

### Section A – Beyond Words

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century priest and paleontologist, wrote in *The Phenomenon of Man*, “The history of the living world can be summarized as the elaboration of ever more perfect eyes within the cosmos in which there is always something more to be seen.”<sup>16</sup> Chardin concludes the Foreword by challenging readers with the observation that: “The time has come to realize that an interpretation of the Universe – even a positivist one – remains unsatisfying unless it covers the interior as well as the exterior of things; mind as well as matter.”<sup>17</sup>

Human expression, using any language, encounters difficulties when trying to find words to convey to another person that which is unseen and probably unseeable. A part of the difficulty in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century lies in the fact that most of the words that have been popular and common in the past seem to fall short of capturing the essence of what the sensitive and astute observer perceives when more remains after all of the details have been

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<sup>16</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, p. 35-36.

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described in objective language. These first four codicils have been dedicated to capturing the wonder of every moment and to expound on the tautology that “All is All”. When looking through the portal of the natural world, finally, one sees the unfathomable; what may best be called the numinous.

In the act of seeing this, everything becomes sacred. Sages and mystics throughout the ages have attempted to express what happens when a person notices the numinous in the midst of the mundane. Robert Bly, the contemporary American poet and translator, included the following poetic expression by Kabir, the 15<sup>th</sup> Century Hindu Sufi in his short collection:

Between the conscious and the unconscious,  
The mind has put up a swing:  
All Earth creatures, even the supernovas,  
Sway between these two trees,  
And it never winds down.

....

Everything is swinging: heaven, earth, water, fire,  
And the secret one slowly growing a body.  
Kabir saw that for fifteen seconds,  
And it made him a servant for life.<sup>18</sup>

In the remainder of this book, Codicils 5-8 focus on the impact on a group of people that have a common experience of the numinous presence among them. Codicils 9-12 focus on the empowerment of an individual who, like Kabir, has seen that everything is swinging between the conscious and the unconscious. These first four codicils have tried to point to what lies between distinct elements of the Whole and of the parts any composite entity. Likewise, in the previous three codicils, attention was given to the largest possible context that encompasses any single element. When moving beyond the individual parts, when trying to look both between and around,

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<sup>18</sup> Bly, Robert, *The Kabir Book: Forty-Four of the Ecstatic Poems of Kabir*, p. 11.

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the discussion encountered situations that cannot be described with objective language. Thus, clues emerged that pointed to the Unfathomable Numinosity that pervades time and space.

### Section B – Focus Between

In order to begin to seek this numinous element, what people sometimes call the “Face of God”, in a self-conscious manner involves looking between. From the level of stars and galaxies to the microscopic level of protons and electrons, instead of focusing on either a particular this or a specific that, keep looking at the gap, at what’s in between.

In my capacity as an ordained minister, I have had the opportunity over the past two decades to officiate at several wedding ceremonies. Beyond the legal act of two people agreeing to form a unit technically called a family, it has been hard to miss that something profoundly non-legal is going on. The twinkle in the couple’s eyes, the shaking hands and trembling voices give clues to the presence of a power unique to this kind of situation. On several occasions, I have attempted to give poetic expression to the dynamics of the moment and thereby set the reality of the couple’s experience in the context of the larger dynamics of the Universe. For example:

The Universe is bound together  
By an inexorable drive  
For disparate entities  
To unite their energies  
In a mutually enhancing harmony.  
*Communion.*

The ever-rolling ocean waves  
Pound against the shifting sands of barrier islands.  
Neither ever fully overcomes the other.  
Together they create a verdant home  
For starfish, crabs, sharks, pelicans

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and office-weary tourists.

*Creativity.*

The rocky, cratered life-barren Moon  
Makes her monthly journey around the blue  
marbled Earth.

Spinning Earth's liquid bulges  
gently nudge Sister Moon to  
quicken her pace.

Moon's reflected light guides  
lovers on evening walks.

In fluctuating tidal ponds life moves  
between sea and land.

*Vitality.*

Scholars seek to name and harness  
The binding powers of the emerging Universe.

Poets try to proclaim the wondrous beauty  
Of the inexorable bonding

That fills the gaps between  
inseparable partners.

*Futility.*

Wise accountants know

No numbers can measure the majesty  
of this unifying power.

Sensitive artists know

No forms convey the thrilling happiness  
of this relationship.

Both know this can only be embodied in the  
deeds of daily living.

*Marriage.*<sup>19</sup>

The concept of increasing consciousness provides another way to describe the phenomenon of communion when looking through

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<sup>19</sup> Stover, F. Nelson, *Beauty, Awe and Wonder*, "Inexorably Bound".

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the portal of the natural world. When distinct entities unite – through marriage or hydrogen bonding – the new reality possesses a consciousness of its own. It has characteristics, needs, capacities and potentialities unimaginable before it came into existence. One might say that the new entity has a mind of its own.

### Section C – Name the Experience

Seeing and naming involve two different skills. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the human species has vastly exceeded all previous generations in possessing the skills for observing themselves and the elements of the environment in which they live. However, many of the dilemmas faced by previous generations involving how to name, and therefore to relate to, that which they perceived continue to influence people in today's society. For example, when you look at the space between you and the tree in your yard, there appears to be nothing there. Trying to figure out the properties of air, and how to describe it, has taxed some of the best scientific minds of many countries. On the first hand, one can usually say that there is nothing between the tree and me if they are only interested in walking around in the yard. However, if they are trying to drive a racecar at 150 mph, then they need to learn to discuss wind resistance. If fumes from airplanes or smoke from power generation stations pollutes the air then other considerations must be made. In either case, the statement that “there is nothing there” no longer suffices.

It makes a big difference what you call that which drives the process of on-going differentiation, that which energizes selves to grow and develop and which bridges the gaps between distinct entities as they commune with one another. Many options arise for naming this power – luck, chance, magic, mystery, fate, destiny, nature or who-knows. Historically, the human community has used the word “God” to point to something ultimate, transcendent and final. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, a person becomes connected to the great historical religious traditions of

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previous generations and enlivens present actions when they use the word “God” to describe the sense of power of which one is reminded by the twisted oak stump left after the tornado, that which is seen in the tall poplar tree that refuses to succumb to erosion and windstorm, and that in the toucan’s eye which lies far beyond pride in a colored beak.

Care must be taken to insure that the word “God” does not get used to point to just anything that is not clearly understood or anything not readily apparent in the gap between two big objects. When this happens, the reality of the word may become diluted and conversation may become meaningless. Bob Ouradnik, in his book *Growing Spiritually Without Getting Bugged Down in Religion*, goes in to great detail about the distinctions between spiritual experience and religious language. Both are important, but they are distinct. He writes, “This separation between spiritual experience and a later reflection upon that experience expressed in myth, rite and symbol, or in liturgy and dogma, is crucial to the thesis of this book. The former is what is of ultimate importance. The latter is essential to humanness but penultimate to the total event.”<sup>20</sup>

## Section D – Celebrate Wonder

Autopoiesis, differentiation and communion intertwine in a dance throughout time and space. Participating in this brings both joy and fulfillment.

Celebrating the wonder of a diverse, yet interconnected reality does not require language or self-conscious reflection. Our dog, Tony, exudes joyous enthusiasm when we come home and everyone is back together. His outdoor office includes a nice cabin surrounded by a five-foot tall fence. He stays in his office when Elaine and I are away for longer periods. When we return

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<sup>20</sup> Ouradnik, Robert, *Growing Spiritually Without Getting Bugged Down in Religion*, p. 64.

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he leaps wildly in the air until the gate opens, then jumps up on everyone in sight. His actions convey a celebration of selfhood, uniqueness and togetherness becoming manifest simultaneously in the present moment.

This effulgent joy arises throughout the natural world. The human species has the self-conscious decisional capacity to choose when and how to give form to this breaking loose and what name to give to the source of energy that comes in these situations. In this way, a contemporary understanding of the Face of God in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century becomes available within diverse cultures.



# An Interlude Before Looking through the Portal of Human Community

## Reflecting on Beauty

During an international conference in Mexico in the summer of 1988, I served as the host of a Zen master who had been invited to help conference participants enhance their meditative practices. Professionally, the master served as the Director of the Sitting Program at his monastery in Japan. Throughout the week of the conference, he led a 3-hour sitting session each morning before breakfast. During the day, he was to be available for discussions about the merits and practices of sitting. Each evening a group of us went out to various restaurants together.

One evening, a rather larger group of us were sitting around a long table on the out-door terrace of a small restaurant. The lively conversation was being conducted in Japanese, English and Spanish through a rough collection of hand gestures, translations and commonly understood words and phrases. After a while, the owner came out to inquire about our general experience of his establishment. His questions were translated as “How have you enjoyed your meal? Is the bill acceptable?” When the inquiry was translated to the Zen monk, he replied: “The cost of the food was quite fair; but, how much do you charge for the moonlight and the cool breeze?” The owner and diners all concurred that the monk had raised the real question, and that the beauty of the evening and the fellowship was, in fact, priceless.

Every now and again, in the natural world and in our interpersonal relationships, we experience the diversity being

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overcome with harmonious interrelationships. Beauty shines through.

On a more practical note, the figures used in this book require some explanation – thus the following brief diversion. The cover figure of this book portrays the intertwining of the viewpoints seen through the three portals. The colored version on the cover serves as the artistic representation of the titled figure on the following page. The blue circle that surrounds the diagram represents the undifferentiated totality of reality that while ever-present is rarely glimpsed as a whole.

Looking through the three portals works like looking out through clean window on a dark wintry night. The moonlight illumines the trees and snow-covered grass and yet the light in the room makes the viewer's immediate surroundings also appear as reflections in the glass. Just as the primary colors blend with each other to create all of the multitude of colors of the flowers and birds, so the primary aspects of reality interrelate to create the creatures, experiences and conscious awareness of Planet Earth. Three of big circles represent the three portals – **ALL** of the natural world, **GOD** which enlivens all beings and interactions in community and the deep **I** that every entity may come to know. Each of these three circles has a mirror image – *Wonder, Beauty and Awe*. These three describe the interior aspects that surround the person looking through the particular portal.

[Note: Additional descriptions follow on the page after the diagram.]

## The Interrelationships Of The Three Portals



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The petals caused by the overlapping circles are colored in the cover diagram; smaller interior sections link the larger outer ones. If the diagram is cut in half along any of the lines, any one half mirrors the other half in the same way that the interior and exterior are mirrored in the window. In the annotated version on the previous page, these sections represent the 12 codicils. The codicil titles appear on the annotated version. The codicils each contain specific details about the various intersecting aspects, the particular encounters with small portions of the totality of reality. The parts of the Preface and Introduction are listed in the central whitespaces.

Since 2001, I have been mentored in Sacred Geometry by Bob Powell, Sr. He has taught me the art of drawing with simply a compass and a straightedge. With these tools, patterns of points, circles and lines can be created like the cover drawing. The Universe, itself, also uses these three forms. Each entity or manifestation is like a small point. Around each entity are circles of energy and influence; new possibilities arise when circles intersect. An entity may either remain stationary or it may move in a line between here and there. Thus, in its own way, Sacred Geometry may be considered one of the foundational languages of the Universe.

During the compilation of this book, I realized that the circle drawing on page 67 and the triangle drawing on page 97 had great similarities. The pattern of points in the drawings are similar, in one the points are connected by lines, in the other by circles. The color-coding of the two annotated drawings has been designed to resonate with this similarity. This similarity is highlighted by the diagram on the back cover. A further discussion of this interplay lies beyond the scope of this book.

## Codicil 5 – Communal Subjects

Within the four codicils that look through the portal of community, specifically human community, Codicil 5 focuses on the autopoietic property within each entity, that quality which allows each entity to participate – in its own way – in shaping the ever-unfolding future. Throughout the Universe as a whole, and the human family in particular, each entity and individual has its own intrinsic properties of self-determination. Each self makes a decision, at some level, about the direction in which it will head and how it will contribute to the wholeness of which it is a part. This codicil examines the importance of the language that we use to describe the relationship between the human and non-human worlds. In this way, purpose and mission become vital elements in shaping each individual and group.

### Section A – Planetary Family

A key insight, a foundational principle, of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century centers on the fact that we live amidst a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects<sup>21</sup>. Much of the growth and affluence of 20<sup>th</sup> Century societies, driven especially by the Western nations, was fueled by an extractive economy in which the resources of the Planet Earth served primarily as raw materials for conveniences, amusements and enhancements for individuals and communities of the human species.

Changing cosmological conceptions correlate with changing relationships among individual humans and the natural world in which they reside. Among the earliest hunter-gatherers, all of the plants, animals, natural powers and seasonal events consisted of a seamless, stable sacred whole. With the growth of settled

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<sup>21</sup> Swimme, Brian and Berry, Thomas, *The Universe Story*, p. 243 (and also in other writings by Thomas Berry).

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communities, two new concepts took on added importance: progress and usefulness.

Along the great rivers, agricultural societies emerged between 5,000 and 10,000 years ago. Several formative changes occurred within the social fabric of these settled communities. They managed planting of crops and tending of fields. They developed irrigation systems and extreme specialization of labor emerged within the community. Jared Diamond, in his wide-ranging analysis of the changes in human society, describes five major factors that influenced this transition:

- 1) wild foods were becoming less available,
- 2) plant domestication became more rewarding as the climate changed,
- 3) technologies for processing and storing food were perfected,
- 4) population densities rose and finally
- 5) the better equipped food producers killed off the less organized hunter-gatherers.<sup>22</sup>

Within the agricultural societies, changes in organizational form and leadership structure began to produce changes that were not necessarily cyclical like the seasons. Furthermore, these changes occurred within timeframes remembered by a single generation. Thus, a new concept entered human consciousness – “Progress”. People began to realize irreversible changes were happening and that conditions could, and sometimes did, get better over time. Calamities and setbacks were also experienced in personal and social situations. This understanding also affected the religious celebrations that changed from celebrations of the seasons to celebrations of historical events. This transition from focusing on cycles to celebrating progress was led by the Hebraic traditions<sup>23</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> Diamond, Jared, *Guns, Germs and Steel*, p. 110-112.

<sup>23</sup> Berry, Thomas, *Sacred Universe*, p. 92.

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A second understanding that began to arise within the human family as it settled into agrarian communities involved the “usefulness” of particular natural features. Certain plants and minerals provided energy and structures needed for enhancing the productivity of individuals and groups. As methods of ownership and transfer of property evolved, societies began to develop ways to accumulate wealth. Individuals could accrue status within their communities based on their possession and control of goods and even other individuals. Eventually, this ability to control the natural world, including other human beings, became instituted into the mythologies and rituals by which actions were sanctioned and valued. The drive to make the natural world useful to the human community, in its extreme, has fueled the rampant consumerism of recent times.

Since the understanding that resources have been given to the human species for their “use” has become ingrained in the frameworks that guide understanding and action, many of the efforts to establish sustainable development plans in communities and countries get frustrated by apparent economic expediency. This impasse cannot be resolved within the existing thought patterns that separate the natural and human realms and then intimate a priority toward the human wellbeing. Rather, a comprehensive understanding of the essential interrelatedness of all aspects of the Planet (and the cosmos) will be required in order to move toward relationships from which all components benefit. Codicils 5-8 focus precisely on a matter that in religious language can be expressed as “Touching the Hand of God in Community.”

### Section B – Descriptive Language

A major part of the dysfunction of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century comes from the bifurcation of the natural and social worlds that had become politically and religiously institutionalized in many places and cultures by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. This led people to assume that one set of rules applies to the environment and

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another set applies to the human community. This split, then allowed the natural world to be treated as a commodity to be used, to be consumed. It also helped foster the illusion that the human community runs by a set of rules propagated by wise elders or powerful rulers.

The idea that the purpose of human community is to obey a set of rules in order to achieve perpetual happiness and harmony comes from the same illusionary misconceptions as those that fostered the story that the Universe, itself, popped into being and remained calm and cooperative until some bad people or wicked creatures fouled it up. Rather, learned people in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century are realizing that the same wildness, the same emergent properties, that pervade the natural world likewise inform and drive the human community and also propel each individual on their journey through life.

Words and names play an important role in human communication both among individuals and within each individual's consciousness. Most people today cannot say "all men" when they mean "all people". This verbiage was sorted out at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century during the Women's Revolution. Likewise today, when a self-conscious change has been made toward understanding the Universe and life on Planet Earth as an emerging reality, new words and phrases are required to insure that the dynamic nature of the world in which we live is perpetually reflected in the way we speak. This attention to meanings applies particularly when describing the relationship between the human and non-human worlds. The human community does not "own", "have dominion over" or have "responsibility for caring for the natural world". In the emerging reality of which the Planet is a part, the human community is tightly integrated to the non-human community; together all parts of the Planet Earth are becoming new – constantly.



## Section C – Unfolding Purpose

People living with the mental image that they live in a created reality understand that the powers that shaped their external world also put them on the stage of history to play a particular role. Each person, and creature, must find an answer to the question of “why am I here?” The answer to this question informs choices and evaluative processes to determine success and value. In long past generations, simply staying alive and having some reliable sense that one’s children and grandchildren could continue to exist provided a major challenge and offered a life-consuming task. For most people prior to the rise of agriculture and preliminary urban development, few choices presented themselves except to find food and to stay alive.

As the roles within expanding urban societies became more differentiated, people with varying specific skills proved more capable at some tasks than in others. Whereas in earlier generations most people assumed that a male child would take over his father’s work and a female child would find a spouse and raise a family generally like her birth family, the changing demands and technologies of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century often forced people to make decisions and changes for which they had not been equipped. Many of the educational systems were designed to equip people to fit in to existing social structures, especially to work in factories of mass production or in organizations with rigid performance requirements.

Sophisticated testing systems were developed to help people to find the way that they could best fit into society’s structures, though these often had their limitations. When I was in high school, I was given an aptitude test in order to help me determine which courses to take and which career opportunities to pursue. When I sat down to review the scores with the guidance counselor, I was advised that I could do just about anything I wanted to do with the exception of pursuing a career in music. Since I had just been invited to leave the string section of the orchestra because my violin was consistently out of tune, the

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counselor's advice was not exactly illuminating nor did the test really help in figuring out the future direction of my life and education.

From the perspective of an emerging reality in which each individual and social entity possesses innate powers of self-determination, the hope for finding a pre-defined purpose transforms into the opportunity for defining a task that helps shape the course of the unfolding future. For this task, no external sources can be definitive, internal resolve becomes paramount.

### Section D – Fulfillment in Mission

Individuals and groups in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century find fulfillment in participating in the epic sweep of history. At the macro scale, Thomas Berry proclaimed, “The historical mission of our times is to reinvent the human – at the species level, with critical reflection, by means of story and shared dream experience.”<sup>24</sup> This statement has two aspects – the importance of a historical mission and the focus of the contemporary historical mission on the task of reinventing the human. Though these two aspects are related, Codicils 5-8 focus on the first aspect, Codicils 9-12 on the latter.

Beginning in 1968, my wife and I became directly involved in the work of the Ecumenical Institute and its sister organization, The Institute of Cultural Affairs. In the first years, the organization focused on lay theological education – the recovery of religious discourse and action in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. As time moved on, many of the people who participated in the programs began to raise questions about how to put their new understandings into practice. The organization began the 5<sup>th</sup> City Community Development Project to give visible manifestation to the answers to peoples questions. By 1978, the 5<sup>th</sup> City Project

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<sup>24</sup> Berry, Thomas, *The Great Work*, p. 159.

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had been replicated in every time zone around the globe and plans were underway to create 12 demonstrations of hope in diverse communities within the United States.

I was assigned to a two-person team charged with the task of finding a West Virginia community in the Appalachian Mountains that would become a part of this nationwide program. Along with the other 11 teams, we were given a list of objective criteria by which to select the communities. Then, the wise old man, Joseph Wesley Mathews, who was laying out the overall plan said that, in the final analysis, we would know we were in the right place when our “hearts soared like a hawk”. My partner and I looked at each other in disbelief. We were certain that this would never happen to two rational white guys like us. We knew we would really have to rely solely on the detailed list of criteria that we had received during the orientation.

During the month that we drove to the end of one road after another in the mountains around Charleston, we calculated the variables on our list and wondered if this “soaring like a hawk” phenomenon would ever occur. Then, we drove down the steep hill on the dead-end road that leads to the heart of the village of Widen where once a thriving coalmine fueled a healthy local economy. We talked to a few of the people who remained and drove to the ends of the two streets. Then we looked at each other in disbelief, we had to agree that our hearts were soaring like a hawk and we had yet to pull out the paper with the criteria. [Author’s note: just writing this paragraph brings back memories of the moment and sends a chill down my spine.]

Giving rational expression to the interior realization that an individual or group has tapped into the on-going unfolding of the as yet unrealized tomorrow requires tools and language beyond the rational calculations of trends and probabilities or cost benefit analysis required for corporate well-being. Only metaphors suffice. One can say that their heart soared like an eagle – one can say that they have touched the Hand of God. Finally, either expression can only be understood by another

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person who has had a similar experience. When these kinds of experiences happen within a group of people, a fresh vitality enters their midst.

Shortly after my traveling partner, John Lindstrom, and I made our visit to Widen, our wives joined us in launching the Widen Community Human Development Project. The community provided us houses to live in and we worked with them for the next three years. After an initial community planning consultation, a variety of simple short-term projects and complex long-term ventures were undertaken. I have returned to Widen on several occasions. Some of what we did has evaporated; but the commitment of the people to live creative lives and to build a lasting vital community has not gone away. Nor has my personal passion for continuing to call others to do the same.

## Codicil 6 – Structured Relationships

Understanding how individual entities relate to one another provides clues for determining responsible and productive action. Observing the creative gap between distinct individuals provides opportunities for glimpsing the divine. This codicil focuses on the creative interaction that springs forth when differentiated entities unite in community as well as the inevitable dysfunction that pervades any structure. While emphasizing the importance of community and the longing for being together, invariably things fall apart. This process of differentiation within the portal of community often takes on negative connotations. *Through Three Portals* provides a context for affirming this universal property even though the process often carries with it anxiety, pain and psychic discomfort.

### Section A – Fostering Uniqueness

In their book, *The Universe Story*, Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme devote several pages to the emergence of multi-cellular animals. As they do throughout the book, they give first creatures names drawn from various mythologies. The first multi-cellular animal they call Argos, a Greek mythological being with eyes all over his body. About Argos, they write:

The surprise of the multicellular animal is not that cells would congregate together. ... A new cause had appeared in the world, a power that could not exist but for the intimate communion of those particular cells, but a power that, once allowed to exist, immediately set to the task of ordering the community in new and surprising ways. ... The first multicellular animals were as much a surprise as the emergence of the galaxies. For more than three billion years, the primary relationships had

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been among cells and between cells and the inanimate elements. Now Argos appeared with a mind of its own, training ten thousand cells on its own particular aims. Stupendous creativity had been required for the emergence of Argos, and now it fed with ease on individual cells, undoubtedly disrupting a great many ancient communities.<sup>25</sup>

For at least the past 40,000 years, human civilization, too, has been moving beyond a simple collection of distinct individuals to an organized amalgam of individuals each with their own particular contribution to be made. These increasingly complex organizations of human society both intensify the opportunities for individual specialization and require skills and adaptations for functioning as a part of the whole.

These opportunities and benefits of complex social organization became apparent to me during my final years of high school. Throughout four years of high school, I played an active role in the youth fellowship at Edgewood People's Church in East Lansing, Michigan. One day, the director of the adult choir came to our group's evening meeting to invite any of the older students that wanted to sing in the choir to come to the weekly rehearsals. Several girls volunteered to come, and so did I. They all said to me, "Why don't you teach Sunday school?" This ended my singing career, and set me on a teaching track. My role became increasingly distinct from the role of others – yet we participated in the same organization, learned to communicate from differing perspectives, and together built a system that accomplished more than any of us could on our own.

## Section B – Seeing Through

In Codicil 1.C, a distinction was made between *Univocal* and *Metaphorical* language. These two kinds of expression play an

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<sup>25</sup> Berry and Swimme, *The Universe Story*, p. 110-111.

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important role in allowing all facets of the natural world to be expressed. Especially when looking through the portal of human community, an additional skill is required. Most of the time conversation focuses on the objective happenings, on the surface realities. However, in order truly to understand the complexities of human interaction, one must master the skill of seeing through the mundane to the transparent.

Transparent seeing is similar to what happens when one looks at a paper bag being held over a flaming candle. If the bag is far enough away from the flame, there may only be a faint glow apparent to the viewer looking down. After a while, or when the bag and the flame approach each other, the bag may slowly begin to turn brown. Finally, the bag may burst into flame revealing the flickering light below.

This process of seeing through, of seeing that which lies beyond the surface of existence, was given expression by Edwin Abbott Abbott, one of the leading scholars and theologians of the Victorian era, in his charming little book called *Flatland*. The tale relates the experiences of a pentagon living in a two dimensional world. One day, the contented pentagon encountered a sphere – a three-dimensional shape in a two-dimensional world<sup>26</sup>. At first, the pentagon is frightened, then confused and then enchanted. After finally taking a trip above the plane into the third dimension, he returns and tries to explain the experience to his peers. The same problems which the pentagon encounters in trying to explain three-space to two-space companions are faced when those who have seen through the mundane activities of daily existence try to talk about the numinous elements in all entities to associates consumed with the material aspects of everyday life.

A great deal of creative fermenting goes on beneath the surface of the daily actions of groups and individuals within the human community. This same creativity bubbles within the non-human realms. The art of being able to see through, to discern the

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<sup>26</sup> Abbott, A. A., *Flatland*, p. 74.

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tensions and possibilities that underlie the surface actions, provides enlivening energy and tactical wisdom to people with eyes that see more than mundane activities.

The skill of transparent seeing becomes especially important when individuals have unique and distinct roles within the organization. The precise happenings may be experienced or perceived differently by specific individuals. Yet to those who can see beneath the surface, the wholeness begins to appear. As I learned in my high school youth group, the activities of presenting music at a morning worship service and teaching a curriculum to a classroom of students require different skills, environments and measurements of success. However, when the concepts, ideas, intentions and messages are aligned – when they resonate with each other – then all parts of the system grow and thrive.

### Section C – Coming Apart

In the same way that wild creativity emerges when distinct entities figure out how to cooperate and communicate across the gaps of their individual uniqueness, so does another kind of emergent possibility arise when collapse and confusion pervade a society. Within a healthy and thriving society, each member has some skills and gifts to contribute to the whole and gains some benefits from their participation in the collective unit. In this way, each individual member thrives while the larger society also grows. When particular parts of the whole begin to take advantage of other parts and to limit their vitality and growth potential, imbalances arise which eventually precipitate the reorganization of the whole into a new level of complexity and sophistication.

The presence of injustice in the social order first became apparent to me during the summer after my first year in high school. Our church youth group owned a school bus that we used to travel to our school's away football games and to take



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work camps during the summer. In July 1960, 18 students and their adult advisors set out to drive to Wadley, Alabama where we intended to do some construction projects for the United Church of Christ's college in that town. After passing through Indiana and Kentucky, we made a rest stop at a service station in Tennessee. To my surprise, there were **three** bathrooms – men, women and colored. Having grown up in Illinois, Indiana and Michigan, this differentiation of facilities for the basic human needs by race had never occurred to me.

Since my early years in Sunday school, I had loved to sing the words of John Oxenham's song that included the lines "In Christ there is no East or West, in Him no South or North, but one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth." Up until the rest stop in Tennessee, I had assumed that this was a description of a sociological reality. However, over the next few years, I would come to realize that at best this statement provided a vision for some reality that might come to pass. Certainly, not everyone was even committed to embodying this fellowship of love in the current society or the short-term future.

How a person relates to these situations of fragmentation within the social fabric is determined by the view of reality from which they are viewing the situation. In a created reality in which an original wholeness with perfection initially reigned, such situations represent an example of people acting against the eternal laws, of evil actions. From this perspective, somebody is wrong and a right course of action can be ascertained. The difficulty here lies in whose perspective of "the eternal law" can be relied upon. For example, in the specific case of racial injustice, for decades some people believed firmly that people with dark skin were created as an inferior race; while others were inclined to treat each person with equal respect; both sides often cited the same authoritative sources.

From the perspective of a perpetually emerging reality, these moments of social ferment provide opportunities for realignment and offer the possibility of new levels of social complexity

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wherein more individuals participate in the self-conscious shaping of their collective destiny. From this vantage point, times of turmoil and unrest are viewed not as periods to be avoided but rather as opportunities for new creativity. A different set of skills are also required; instead of enforcing existing modes of action, ways to evoke new social patterns become tools that are more effective.

### Section D – Common Ground

At any given time within a human community, some people focus on their own particular needs and see only the surface manifestations of the on-going activities of daily living. Others have the ability to see the entire planetary community and to look beneath the surface events to the deeper movements of the creative energy that empowers the Planet and the Universe. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century everyone on the Planet shares – either consciously or unconsciously – a common interest in fostering long-term ecological sustainability.

During the decades of the '60s and '70s in the United States, the issues of racial and economic injustice called for concerted social action. In the '80s and '90s, issues of gender equality became the central focus of much compassionate transformation. However, the scope of injustice in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has taken a major leap in scale, complexity and urgency. This book, however, does not focus on the details of the particular sociological issues of any one era, but on the deeper experience that arises when individuals and groups focus on and begin to grapple with the central issues of their time. When this deeper level of reality begins to gain peoples' attention, and they begin to deal with the ancient, the big, the wild, the emergent and the numinous aspects of their age and the society of which they are a part.

At this point, the concerns move from the practical to the profound.

## Codicil 7 – Enhancing Community

Within human community, individuals begin to find themselves in relationship to each other and then take a self-conscious relationship to the way they are interconnected. This happens within individuals as they mature and within societies as they grow more complex and sophisticated. Leadership and direction then become themes that require attention and common understanding. By focusing on the universal property of communion within the human realm, Codicil 7 provides a fresh way to understand the movement of the Hand of God within the contemporary human family.

### Section A – Journey of Corporateness

By watching how things grow, we can begin to understand how tomorrow happens. Each particular creature and entity has its own unique ways of actively participating in the unfolding of the future and ensuring its own survival. For example, the dogwood tree does not grow very tall and thus lives in the shadow of the taller oaks and maples. Because it will remain in the shade during the long summer, it flowers as early as possible in the spring before the taller trees have leaves, even before it pushes out its own leaves. In order to get a jump on its taller neighbors, the dogwood creates its buds in the fall with the last light of summer. The buds are covered in ways that allow them to survive through the ice and snow of winter and be ready for the first warm days of spring.

In previous centuries, thinkers have often focused on competition and struggle by observing how one creature overcomes or outlasts another. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, on Planet Earth, the question has become how can all of the components, the living and the non-living, as well as the human and the non-human, live in a mutually enhancing relationship with each other and with the Planet as a whole. Rather than trying to dominate

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and control others, the focus is now shifting to how to enhance the entire system and to call each entity to its own greatness.

Within the context of an emerging universe, the fundamental life question changes from “How do I fit in?” to “How do I help shape the future?” This changes the ultimate challenge from conforming to pre-established conventions and obeying accepted laws to enhancing the Planet and creating the future. In so doing, a new set of skills and practices become essential to individuals and organizations. Rather than learning about the way things are – about “is-ness” – people and communities need awareness of how things interrelate, grow and pass out of existence – about “becoming”.

In order to maintain the sanctity and health of societies functioning from a cosmology of a created reality, wise leaders and elders codified guidelines and conventions which seemed to lead to effective and stable societies. Over time, the more reliable of these documents took on the status of Holy Books. Each, in its own way, provided deep wisdom about how individuals could journey in their understanding of the deeper aspects of daily living and provided reliable rules for effective social interaction. An important task for people concerned with living deep and profound lives in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century centers on ways to recover the wisdom of these historic documents while transforming them in ways that remain relevant in the contemporary context. This involves changing the cosmological metaphors from a created to an emerging reality, applying the practical solutions to sophisticated technological civilizations instead of agrarian and pre-industrial societies and clarifying the distinctions between metaphorical and univocal language in both the original and the translated texts.

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### Section B – Conscious Participation

When looking through the portal of community, each individual entity faces a decision regarding how it will participate in the larger whole of which it is a part. At the simplest level, the choice becomes whether or not to enhance the general well-being. In some cases, this decision may be made with considerable deliberation and forethought. In other cases, gut instincts or snap judgments are utilized to inform one's actions. Either way, individuals' actions do influence those around them and continually shape the course of the future that has yet to take form.

Furthermore, each individual is perpetually ensconced in a web of relationships whether it chooses these or not. One of the unique characteristics of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century centers on the human species' ability to grasp self-consciously the global interconnection within the human community and to document experientially the interrelation of the human and the non-human worlds. This heightened awareness, at a global level, raises new possibilities for making choices in the largest possible context.

Defining all of the particular skills, competencies and understandings that will enable this mode of active participation in the future-creating process lies beyond the scope of *Through Three Portals*. The emphasis of the remainder of this book focuses on how this important practical work can be given ultimate significance in ways that motivate individuals and societies to accept the challenge.

### Section C – Changing Images

In his book, *The Fifth Discipline*, Peter Senge writes, "Perhaps for the first time in history, humankind has the capacity to create far more information than anyone can absorb, to foster far greater interdependency than any can manage, and to accelerate

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change far faster than anyone's ability to keep pace."<sup>27</sup> He continues in his book to discuss how mental models provide images of how to work together.

These internal frameworks, mental models or images, provide the interior contexts for interpreting reality, for diagnosing one's particular situation and ultimately for making decisions. Sometimes, however, the existing models prove inadequate for handling the experiences and for predicting the outcomes of actions. Sometimes in these situations, new pictures of reality can be created that result in more desirable outcomes.

Mental models range in scope from the mundane to the majestic – from how to enter a house through a door to how to find eternal peace through centering meditation. In each case, the more inclusive the picture, the more adequately it describes the reality of the situation and the more likely that it will provide a productive framework for effective action.

Within one's experiences and dealings with the human community a person can get beyond the practical levels of daily existence. Sometimes, especially when one mode of understanding has been shattered and another has yet to be fully formed, one has the opportunity to see the numinous presence which shines between individuals, in the gap between organizations and within the heart of established relationships.

*Through Three Portals* presents, in initial form, a way to integrate religious and scientific understanding in the context of 21<sup>st</sup> Century perspectives, understandings and sociological conditions. No attempt has been made to deal with all the complexities of a comprehensive theological articulation or practical action plan. However, by looking through each of the three portals – the natural world, human community and the depths of selfhood – all aspects of an overall perspective have been examined.

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<sup>27</sup> Senge, Peter, *The Fifth Discipline*, p. 69.

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The way that tunnels are dug through a mountainside provides one practical example of the kind of overview contained in *Through Three Portals*. Sometimes when a road needs to pass through a mountain, construction crews with large digging machines start from opposite sides of the hill. The two units aim at each other as best they can and begin digging. When they get close enough to each other underground, they stop their big units. One side uses a small drill to reach out to the opposite team. Maybe the drill from the center of one side comes through in the center of the other; maybe they are slightly out of alignment. Either way, the small hole provides the necessary guidance for uniting the two approaches and completing the larger passageway. This edition of *Through Three Portals* can be used as a connector that can be expanded upon to allow the wisdom of the past to move through to the future.

### Section D – Greater Complexity

One way of looking at the long sweep of the history of the Universe examines how the overall pattern has moved toward ever-increasing levels of complexity. From this vantage point, at the times when groups have encountered threats to their long-term viability they have found ways to reorganize in patterns that were more complex. Within conscious creatures, this response entails moving to higher levels of consciousness – utilizing more complex mental models.

This same phenomenon is occurring in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century relative to individuals and societies' experiences of both the practical concerns of daily living as well as the deeper issues of the significance of existence and encountering of the numinous presence. As when looking through the other portals, great care must be taken when relating to times when the numinous is encountered. What may initially be experienced as a fist shattering long-held understandings, may later be seen as the wild unknown opening up of new avenues for grasping and

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participating in the larger reality of which one is embedded. When it becomes apparent that practical conventions established by years of testing, no longer produce actions that enhance the well-being of the actor and the community of which they are a part, a choice arises. One option is to attempt to force the affected elements to accept the limitations. Another alternative involves discovering ways to conceptualize fresh patterns of action.

In moments like these, some may say they have “touched the Hand of God” in the midst of community. In this way, they connect themselves with the long line of saints and sages who have participated in enhancing community. Other people may choose to take credit for their own cleverness or write their new insight off to chance and luck. The following codicil explores the implications of these differing perspectives.



## Codicil 8 – Enlivening Energy

The four codicils in this second section focus on experiencing the beauty of fulfilling relationships. This may be expressed as Touching the Hand of God within Community because this wholeness occurs when the numinous presence of the Universe shines through particular individuals and fills even the spaces that separate them.

Whereas the previous three codicils dealt with particular aspects that pervade community, this eighth codicil deals with the profound experience of community itself. Something special happens when individuals and groups are self-consciously aligned among themselves within the context of the long sweep of history. Often, a wild, enlivening energy engulfs them. The group becomes aware that each of the individuals is contributing their own unique gifts to the larger task in which the group is involved and this task is playing a part in shaping the future of the Planet.

### Section A – Breaking Through

Breaking through from the mundane rhythms of everyday activity to the realm in which a group taps into the enlivening energy present within the process of societal transformation happens in three stages. First, a group of people develops a common hope for a fresh way of living in the future; or they figure out a creative new response to their daily patterns of existence; or they share similar perspectives on a common rending of the social fabric. Furthermore, they then come to understand that meeting this challenge or fulfilling this dream has long-term and widespread impact. Second, in committing their personal and collective efforts to creating a new response to the situation of which they have become aware, a fresh vitality infests both the individuals and the group as a whole. Third, the spaces between the individuals, between the parts of the larger

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whole, fill with new sinews of connectivity and new patterns of relationship emerge. In the midst of this, the overall energy and the impact of the actions of the total group exceed the total of the individual components – something extra intrudes, the numinous becomes manifest.

I am a person who woke up to social injustice in the 1960's. I first became aware of the vibrant energy that comes from participating in a history-changing endeavor within the civil rights movement, especially within churches working to end segregation and oppression of racial minorities. Many church groups and religious leaders were taking a stand on these issues and in so doing invigorating their congregations and their members. In the process of bringing about creative new responses, people were willing to risk their own individual lives. People who would not have thought of themselves as friends, worked together because they shared a larger common vision to which each was committed. Set within the long sweep of history, this work became a task in which I wanted to be involved – in a major way.

This changing of the direction of society and transforming commonly held understandings, requires courage and commitment far beyond the normal levels of resolve needed to follow widely held beliefs and accepted patterns of behavior. The commitment and resolve to participate in these activities, to be a part of groups involved in fostering significant new social forms, requires thought-filled decisions on the part of both individuals and organizations. The leap that is involved in changes like these is experienced as a discontinuous break, as a quantum leap. Just as changes of cosmology require a radical change of perspective that cannot be justified by rational means from the old framework, the invention of new social forms cannot be done solely using the guidance from previous eras.

The breakthrough going on in the early parts of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century has taken on a new level of significance because it involves integrating all the diverse cultural traditions of the human family

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along with the systems of the Planet itself in ways that include both the human and non-human components. Whereas the civil rights movement of the '60s involved integrating two races and the women's movement of the '80s dealt with the two genders, the changes of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century have taken on a scope unimagined in previous centuries. Many of the people who realize the magnitude of the contemporary global ecological challenges have been able to see that they are dealing with much more than their own particular concerns and needs. In touching these matters, it often seems that the future of the Planet, itself, turns on the decisions and actions of present generations.

### Section B – Expanded Now

Describing this phenomenon, this transformation that happens when the eternal becomes manifest in the present requires metaphorical language because whatever does happen exceeds the practical, external results of the occurrence. In his long poem "A New Heaven and Earth", D. H. Lawrence wrote:

I put out my hand in the night, one night, and my hand  
Touched that which was verily not me,  
Verily it was not me.  
Where I had been was a sudden blaze,  
A sudden flaring blaze!

Ha, I was a blaze leaping up!  
I was a tiger bursting into sunlight,  
I was greedy, I was mad for the unknown.  
I, new-risen, resurrected, starved from the tomb  
Starved from a life of devouring always myself,  
Now here was I, new-awakened, with my hand stretching out  
And touching the unknown, the real unknown, the  
unknown unknown.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Lawrence, D.H., *The Complete Poems of D.H. Lawrence*,  
Volume One, p. 259.

At the individual experiential level, either a person has had this phenomenon happen to them, they have seen it happen to others, or they have no way of grasping this breaking loose of the wildness of the Universe in the midst of everyday existence. At times like these, time seems to stand still; the instantaneous quality of the moment seems transfixed in eternal time.

A numinous presence lies within every element of the Universe. This same quality exists within every community of people. It can become manifest at any time; but it frequently happens at these kinds of transformative moments within societies and communities. When this breaking through happens, the particular actions of any single group take on larger significance and importance.

### Section C – Community Intensified

On the first hand, this kind of breaking loose of the numinous power of the Universe within human community is not limited to churches and religious communities. In the midst of any community that sees beyond its own particular needs and well-being lies the potential that deep transparent energies can erupt. Sometimes, when new possibility becomes manifested and a collective resolve is made to foster a new level of inclusive organization, a group taps into vitalizing energy beyond the reserves of its individual members.

However, this experience, this real happening within the human community, takes on new significance in the context of an emerging Universe. In a fixed Universe perspective, with a focus on right actions to fit into a preconceived design, emphasis is given to seeking periods of lasting harmony. Transformative moments come only as exceptions to expected stasis. Among groups self-consciously acting in the context of an emerging Universe, participation in transformative moments becomes a normal mode of being. In organizations with the skills to know

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when change is happening and how to foster new levels of complexity within social structures and among the various species, these experiences become opportunities to excel rather than warnings of impending disaster.

### Section D – Celebrate Empowerment

In this context, when the universal wildness becomes embodied within the actions of a community, celebrations take on new significance and are filled with unprecedented power and enthusiasm. When a group of people has a common perspective of the reality in which they live, when they understand that their collective actions are being made in response to the entire sweep of history of which they are a part and when they acknowledge that which is beyond even themselves, then they tap into a source of empowerment that exceeds the sum total of their individual capacities. Celebrations of these moments of awareness take on new vitality. Participating in these kinds of events enhances the cohesion and capacity of the entire group and of each of its individual members.

When the human community lived within the perspective of a natural world dominated by a cycle of seasons that regulated the activities of the tribes and societies, celebrations focused on honoring the changes of the sun, rivers and plants. When the human community began to form agricultural societies that had the capacity to control the rivers and tend to the well-being of the crops, celebrations focused on historic events and the accomplishments of rulers, armies and religious leaders. Some of these holidays and holy days of the human journey incorporated elements from previous nature-based rituals. In the technological global society of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, cultures have become interconnected through telecommunication and enhanced mobilization. The cumulative result of the overlapping of celebrations, the disconnection from the natural world and the changing cultural patterns left many individuals adrift in a sea of holidays without meaning and void of viable options for giving

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cosmic significance to the important activities of their daily lives.

Part of the essential work of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century involves creating vibrant new celebrations that give real meaning to living as a global community of people committed to creating mutually enhancing relationships among all species. These celebrations must acknowledge all aspects of reality and must look through all three portals to give poetic and artistic form to the big, old, wild, emerging and numinous elements that are seen and experienced by everyone every day.

Beyond these celebrations, the very functioning of the social institutions will be influenced. The transformation of the economic, political and cultural institutions of society in ways adequate to meeting the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century can only happen within the expanded context of the emerging universe. The religious institutions will understand profound reality as a numinous presence in all entities. The business institutions will understand their task as promoting activities that insure the mutual enhancement of all entities. The educational institutions will prepare students to become creative agents of change within each of the various careers that they choose. Finally, the political institutions will build local, national and international structures that allow the long-term vitality of all aspects of life on Planet Earth.

# An Interlude Before Looking through the Portal of the Interior Depths

## Experiencing Awe

Sometimes events within relationships can cause completely new understandings to emerge. Awe breaks into consciousness like being hit over the head with an umbrella when trying to hold on to old preconceptions.

During the school year when I was in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I served as a safety patrol. Each morning, noon and evening I stood by the side of a street to tell the smaller children when it was safe to cross on their way to school – everyone walked to school in my day. My school included grades one through eight, so the next year I would be among the oldest safety patrols. Everyone knew that one of the current seventh graders would have the honor of being Captain of the Safety Patrols next year. On one gloomy spring day that looked like the rain could come at any moment, I was walking back to the school with my classmate Jane. She and I were discussing the various options that we saw the school faculty had for choosing the Captain. We agreed that she, David and I had all equally long and stellar records as Safety Patrols. As this conversation was happening almost two decades before the Women’s Rights Movement began to change general cultural perspectives, I observed that: surely, the faculty would choose either David or me because a girl could not be the Captain. A swift whap on the head from her umbrella enabled an unforgettable idea to pop in to my consciousness – “maybe a girl could be the Safety Patrol Captain”.

Sometimes, when Awe breaks through consciousness, a new way of looking at reality – a new mental model – arises to make sense of experience and decisions. This kind of experience began

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happening to me in the 1990's as my sensitivities to the plight of the natural world heightened. Since the early 1970's, I had worked with two separate models developed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs and the Ecumenical Institute, organizations of which I had been deeply involved. The Social Process Triangles describe the basic function of any collection of individuals or entities<sup>29</sup>. The sister organizations had also developed mappings of the interior dimensions, though the two models were typically presented separately from each other<sup>30</sup>.

When Elaine and I returned to Greensboro in the early 1990's, we purchased a 5-acre piece of property. For the first time in our lives we stayed settled into one location long enough to gain an understanding of the local ecosystem. Having a place to call home, thinking about sustainable development for a bio-region and a family and wrestling with the intellectual perspectives of Thomas Berry and Ken Wilbur combined to foster an integration, readjustment and expansion of the mental models that had carried us through the previous two decades. The 13-triangle array at the top of the following page shows that all facets of reality have three dimensions – Exterior Manifestations, Social Processes and Interior Disciplines. Each of these dimensions can be described in a fractal manner, that is, each dimension has three facets, each of which has three facets. This fractal approach to reality provides an intellectual framework for understanding all aspects of reality from the smallest rock and bug to the macrocosmic scale of galaxies and clusters of galaxies, from individuals and families to states and international associations, from the crass and mundane to the exquisite and the holy. At all levels, the same dynamics intertwine, appearing in various strengths, creating all manner of different and wonder-filled manifestations.

[Note: Additional details about the figure are provided on the page after the diagram.]

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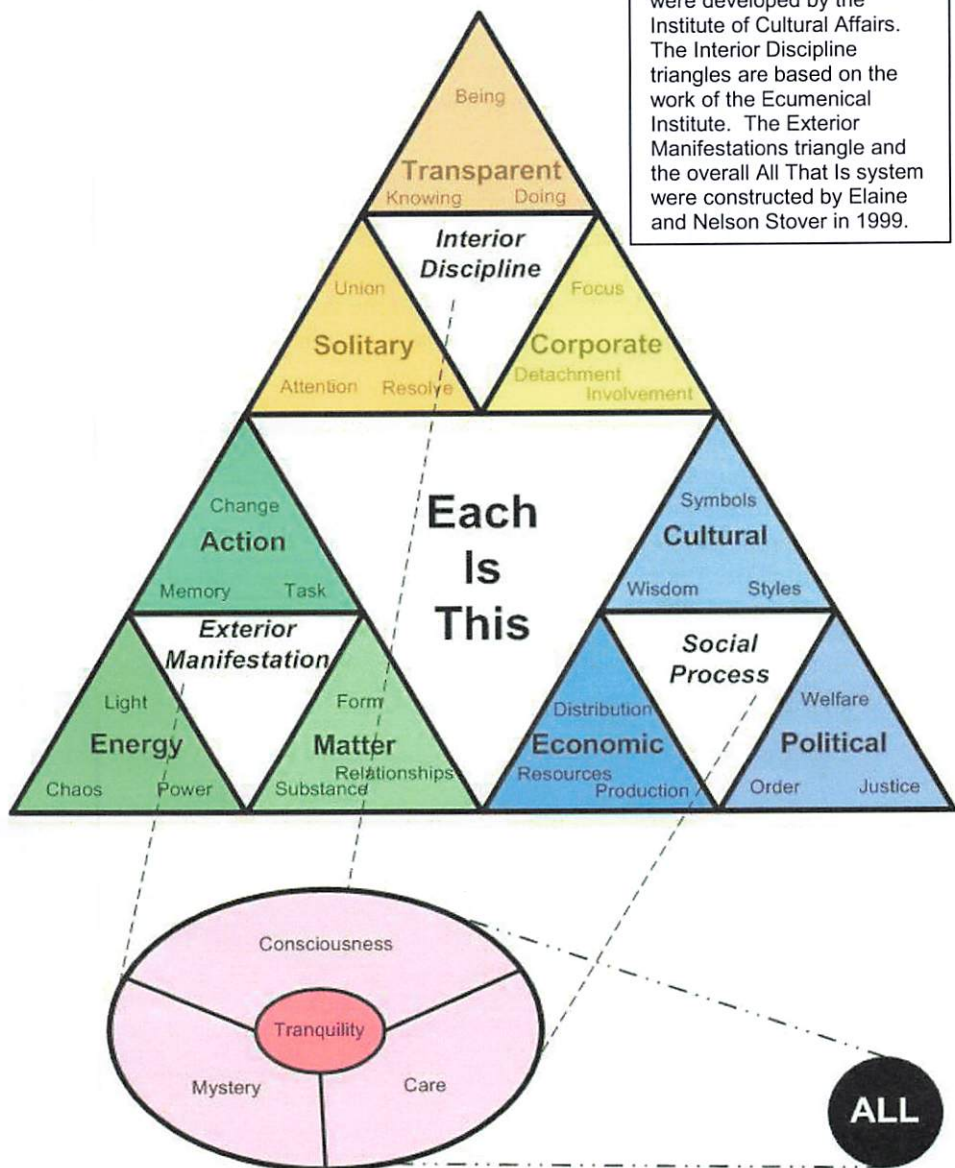
<sup>29</sup> Jenkins, John C and Maureen R., *The Social Process*

<sup>30</sup> Stanfield, R. Brian, *The Courage to Lead*



# All That Is

The Social Process triangles and the States of Being circle were developed by the Institute of Cultural Affairs. The Interior Discipline triangles are based on the work of the Ecumenical Institute. The Exterior Manifestations triangle and the overall All That Is system were constructed by Elaine and Nelson Stover in 1999.



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Looked at from top to bottom, the diagram shows that while each aspect of reality has three dimensions, beneath the surface of existence in our cosmogenic reality lies a realm of meaning. This circle of significance contains four aspects, Mystery, Consciousness, Care and Tranquility. While these aspects are categorically distinct from the Exterior, Interior and Social dimensions, they are nonetheless integrally related and are exposed in the process of seeing through the surface of daily existence.

Finally, as represented by the core at the lower right of the page, All of reality itself remains an integral and indivisible whole. As a cosmogenic reality, the Universe is in a constant process of becoming. Each tomorrow results from the cumulative energies, decisions and intentions of the presences of today moving into the uncharted waters of a time that is not yet.

This overall map provided the inspiration for the Three Portals conception of this document – the three portals are the three aspects of the larger triangle. Beyond this book, the conceptualization has guided my thinking since we put it together. In montage form, the chart has graced the wall of my office since 1999.

## Codicil 9 – Decisive Self

Codicils 1-4 focused on the natural world. They showed that each of us, now and throughout history, live in a Universe that is big, old, wild, emerging and numinous. No matter where we look – whether with the naked eyes seeing the autumn colors on the rolling mountains or through a telescope focused on distant galaxies or through a microscope at the wiggling creatures in a drop of water – wonder abounds. Within this cosmos, we saw the divine presence – the Face of God – calling forth the new in each moment. Codicils 5-8 focused on human community. They showed that, like the Universe, the human species is big, old, wild, emerging and numinous. Both within moments of ecstatic communion and social pain, the numinous presence beckons forth new social forms. In these ways, the human community grows in a mutually enhancing relationship with all of the species on the Planet. These last four codicils examine how an individual thrives as one who has seen through the surface experiences of everyday living both within the context of the natural world and their social community.

As in the previous sets of four codicils, each codicil focuses on a particular fundamental property that pervades the Universe. This codicil focuses on differentiation as experienced within the self. One way or another, each self becomes aware that it is in some way or another different from those around it.

### Section A – Awakening to Self

Each individual within the cosmos represents a unique and intentional self. The great religious traditions of the East have focused on probing the depths of the self in more intentional ways than have the western traditions. Each human awakens into a world. Throughout their life, they go on a journey. Nikos Kazantzakis provided an excellent description of the long

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journey in his book “Saviors of God”. He begins the narrative by writing:

We come from the dark abyss, we end in a dark abyss, and we call the luminous interval life. As soon as we are born the return begins, at once the setting forth and the coming back; we die in every moment. Because of this many have cried out: The goal of life is death! But as soon as we are born we begin the struggle to create, to compose, to turn matter into life; we are born in every moment. Because of this many have cried out: The goal of ephemeral life is immortality! ... Both streams well up from the depths of primordial essence.<sup>31</sup>

Each person embarks upon some kind of journey like the one Kazantzakis describes, at some level of self-awareness. Along this journey of awareness, there comes a time when the direction and purpose of life must be sorted out. These moments of discovery have been recounted in many different cultures. Within the Abrahamic religious traditions, the First Book of Samuel recounts the calling of the prophet Samuel<sup>32</sup>. He was sleeping and heard a voice in the night calling his name. Thinking it was his teacher, the elder Eli, he went to him at once. Twice this happened and each time Eli said it was not he who had called. The third time Samuel heard the voice and went to Eli, Eli said “Go and lie down, and if he calls you again, say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening’.” After hearing the voice of God again and responding, Samuel became a respected prophet within the Hebrew community.

This same kind of experience happened to me during my final year of high school. Our church youth group took its beloved bus from the white affluence of East Lansing to mid-town

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<sup>31</sup> Kazantzakis, Nikos, *The Saviors of God*, p. 43.

<sup>32</sup> See First Samuel 3:1:21 in any of the various translations of the Old Testament of the Bible.

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Detroit to visit a group of middle-class African American high school students. Our advisors had arranged for us to stay in the homes of the students. I was staying in the home of one of our host families along with the minister from our church. Three years earlier, I had seen the three restrooms in Tennessee and I had been reading in the newspapers and church magazines about the rampant racial injustices in cities and states across the country. Yet during our conversations with the students we were visiting, I had come to see young people just like me and my friends – intelligent, inquisitive, vibrant, exciting and looking forward to college studies and productive futures.

That night, I knew in my heart that I could not sit by and watch social injustice continue. I woke up the minister and we talked at some length about my alternatives. He helped me understand that I would need to complete my university studies and then attend seminary in order to be ordained into the ministry of the church, a social structure which at that time served as one of the leaders in the drive for social justice. I committed myself to this endeavor and he invited me to attend a high school student orientation session at his Alma Mater, Chicago Theological Seminary (CTS) in Chicago that spring.

Going to Chicago, meant telling my parents of my intentions. When I finally screwed up my courage to tell them, I went into the den of our family home one evening after my brother and sister were both in bed. I told them that I intended to become a minister. My mother said, “We taught you to go to church each Sunday, but we didn’t mean to take it this seriously.” Nonetheless, I did go to Chicago and was eventually ordained.

## Section B – Among Relationships

From birth, a person shows up in relationships. The expanse of these expands as consciousness evolves. Ken Wilber outlines

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this process in *A Brief History of Everything*.<sup>33</sup> As observed through the portal of the natural world, three processes pervade the unfolding of the universe: Communion, Differentiation and Autopoiesis. Autopoiesis refers to the power each thing has to participate directly in the cosmos-creating endeavor.<sup>34</sup> These same processes influence individual growth and development. Within an individual's network of relationships each person must discover and capitalize on their own unique talents and gifts and then figure out how these can be used, practically, in the overall process of helping tomorrow unfold.

### Section C – Separation Embodied

Invariably, each self recognizes that it is separated from others, that it is unique. This foundational characteristic of the Universe did not begin with any single human being, or even with humanity itself. Throughout all of time and space divisions have occurred, entities have taken on their own unique properties. This experience is a part, often a hard part, of life in the emerging Universe of which we each entity exists.

For me, once I had decided that I would be personally committed to addressing matters of social justice I saw quickly that I would be on my own. I made an arrangement with a church in Buffalo, NY for me and two girls from my youth group to spend the summer between high school and college working as volunteers within their summer youth program. This commitment exceeded the bounds that my parents would tolerate. My mother told me that if I headed to Buffalo, she would disown me and would not contribute any financial support to my out of state college tuition. I was committed to a direction of action and the three of us headed off through Detroit and across Canada to Buffalo.

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<sup>33</sup> Wilber, Ken, *A Brief History of Everything*, chart in front of book.

<sup>34</sup> Swimme and Berry, *The Universe Story*, p. 75.

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About two weeks after we began working with the kids in the inner city of Buffalo, I received a letter from my mother saying that she and my father had, on the spur of the moment, decided to take a vacation trip to Niagara Falls. Since she would be so close, my mother suggested, I might come up and have dinner with them. I showed the letter to the minister that I was working with and he said, "Don't go; tell them you are busy and invite them to dinner at my house." Mom and Dad showed up at the minister's house and were greeted by his African-American wife and 3-year old daughter. Both the minister and his wife were graduates of Howard University. Their daughter, like three-year olds around the globe, could charm anyone, especially my father. My parents awakened to a new possibility of interpersonal relationships across racial barriers and I maintained my commitment to use my life to address issues of social injustice.

As a footnote to this story, I can add that several years later when I recounted this story in the presence of my mother, she went on to add that when she and dad returned to their home they began telling their friends and neighbors that they had met some really wonderful African Americans. She encouraged them to consider that some of the social prodding for civil rights for non-whites probably had real justifications. Furthermore, when my father's employer needed a representative to the Black Businessmen's Association that was being formed in Detroit, they sent him as their representative. He was enthusiastic about his participation in the newly forming group.

This personal event, in which I decided to set out on my own, provides an example of the reality that differentiation, separation from those who care for you, is not – necessarily – a problem but rather an opportunity for growth and development not only for the single individual making the decision but also for the entire system of which they are a part. As such, this kind of activity is an essential part of the unfolding of the Universe.

## Section D – Directional Focus

Within the overall wholeness of the Universe, one by one distinct individual entities arise, separate from all others yet inexorably interrelated. These individuals make decisions based on the unique direction they have decided that they are headed. On the first hand, this decision comes totally from within – from the depths of being. The individual may be influenced by other people or circumstances; but finally, this is a solitary decision. In this way, from the perspective of the individual, autopoiesis, communion and differentiation are continually manifested throughout the cosmos.

At the macro level, the Universe has long-term momentum toward increasing complexity-consciousness as described by Teilhard de Chardin and documented by Ken Wilbur and others (see previous discussions in earlier codicils). At the individual level, each entity from the time it becomes separate from the environment that birthed it until it ceases to exist as a distinct reality journeys in a direction – either consciously or unconsciously.

The level of self-conscious reflection that goes into the choosing of the direction of growth, the purpose of life, has deep effect on the tenacity with which the individual stays on the course that they have chosen. Oftentimes, the easy choice is to follow the apparent direction of the majority of those around you. These patterns are usually difficult to disrupt. However, sometimes, in cases like Samuel and a host of other prophets throughout the ages, an individual hears a cry from a different source. Sometimes, rather than looking at the easy to see conventions, one sees the bigger view, one listens to the non-human world, to the suffering individuals with which one does not usually associate or to the deep winds of time. Heeding the cry from this council, one may envision a new direction both for one's self and for the larger society.



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The next three codicils focus on describing the experience of living as a person who has looked through all three portals, has seen to the deeper levels of reality and then has elected to respond authentically in ways that enhance the journey of each of the particular elements and the well-being of the whole.

## Codicil 10 – Centered Creativity

Codicil 10 focuses on communion, on the changes that occur to a self that has awakened to its distinctness and then decides to work with other individuals and finally with the whole Planet on which it lives. Codicils 5-8 focused directly on community and discussed properties that sustain and vitalize increasingly complex collections of creatures. This Codicil focuses on how the individual experiences the impact of adding its own particular creativity to the larger whole of which it is a part.

### Section A – Reinventing Self

A person who has looked through the natural world and seen the numinous presence in divergent sorts of places and particles often times begins to see wonder everywhere and notices interrelationships that are often missed. A person who has looked through human community and seen its deepest pain and most profound joy frequently finds a fresh passion for living and sees beauty in every individual. A person who in reflecting on their own life has seen the awesome oneness of all that is sometimes hears a voice from deep within beckoning them on to life of service and compassion. The occasion of seeing through the surface of life, sometimes, changes how the individual relates to others and to each experience and encounter. Sharing these diverse understandings about how each particular element actually participates in shaping the future enhances the wisdom of everyone with whom they come in contact.

Throughout societies in each period of history and each cultural heritage and geographic influence, people like this have stepped onto the stage of history. Sometimes they have been ignored, sometimes worshipped; sometimes nothing came of their brief presence in their community. At other times, their words and actions have transformed their societies and shaped the development of the global human community. The fundamental

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happening in the lives of these people involves touching the depths of existence and electing to give it practical form in the perpetual unfolding of the Universe.

Kazantzakis described this phenomenon as “hearing the Cry”. He wrote:

I hear the savage cry, and I shudder. The agony that ascends within me composes itself, for the first time, into an integral human voice; it turns full face toward me and calls me clearly, with my own name, with the name of my father and my race.

This is the moment of greatest crisis. This is the signal for the March to begin. If you do not hear this Cry tearing at your entrails, do not set out.<sup>35</sup>

This kind of experience can happen to anyone at any time. When it does happen everything is transformed – one’s perspective, one’s sense of self and one’s relationship to others. Conversely, unless a person has had this kind of life-changing experience, has seen through the surface of mundane reality, they will likely not have the resolve, courage, creativity and stamina to continue in the long task of transformation.

### Section B – Revitalized Connectivity

The fundamental change that occurs when the energy from the depths of being is tapped into alters the person’s major emphasis from just getting along to addressing depth human and ecological issues. The possibilities for this kind of awareness have become intensified in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century because technological advances have augmented individual capacities in the realms of understanding the natural world, of interfacing with

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<sup>35</sup> Kazantzakis, Nikos, *The Saviors of God*, p. 64.

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individuals of diverse cultural perspectives and of meeting the basic human needs in ways that allow time and energy for reflective activities.

At this point in the book, we will pause to look more at the structure of this systematic approach to theology than to the content. As indicated previously, the diagram on page 67 shows the three portals – green for the natural world, red for community and yellow for the depths of self. Each of the three is represented by two big circles – one is the external reality that is seen through the portal and the other is the reflection, the internal experience of the viewer. All of these circles overlap and the resulting petals are numbered to correspond to the 12 Codicils of this book.

On the chart, the petal for Codicil 10 is printed in yellow so it belongs to the portal of the depths of self. The petal lies inside the smaller blue circle indicating that deals with the more objective realities that are seen in this arena. Thus, the codicil discusses how one hears the Cry and where a person goes to encounter reality from this perspective.

Finally, this petal is bounded by the green and yellow circles and lies in the heart of the bigger red circle. Hence, this codicil focuses on where the self and the natural world interact in the midst of community. A similar mode of interpretation can be applied to each of the twelve petals in the diagram. In so doing, the reader can begin to anticipate the kinds of experiences and understandings being covered by each of the codicils.

## Section C – Pain Transcended

The change of perspective and the new potential that comes from touching the deeper levels of being partly involves a fresh understanding of the role of pain, struggle, confusion and chaos in the everyday process of living, in the journey toward helping tomorrow unfold. The voice within that beckons is usually not

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just a gentle whisper saying “Oh how nice you are”. The Breath of God is most often not akin to the warm soft breeze that blows on a summer evening after the sun has set in the west; though this is often what people hope for.

Rather, from deep within the self that has looked at their external surroundings and seen wild creativity in every plant and particle and then has seen through the trappings of the social order to observe the critical role that the human species now plays in influencing the direction of the Planet’s future comes a driving urgency. Empowered by energy beyond self-will and everyday desires, the person finds that they have a new strength to transcend mundane cares and transform their surroundings. In these people, a new vitality emerges. A life-giving creativity becomes available in every situation of which they are a part.

### Section D – Holy Places

On the first hand, these kinds of transformative experiences of the upwelling of the power from the depths simply occur unpredictably and unexpectedly. A source of strength from beyond the normal energies from food and companionship turns resolve to action. On the other hand, there are things that people do to enhance this coming, to transform times of doubt and confusion into moments of clarity and compassion.

In my travels around the globe, I have been to several renowned holy places. I have climbed Gebel Musa, the mountain on which Moses sat and received the carved tablets containing the 10 Commandments. For a year, I lived in the village just south of Cairo where Jesus’ family went rather than return to the king that sent the Magi to visit Bethlehem. Twice, I have crossed the waters at the southern tip of India at Kanyakumari to the rock on which Swami Vivekananda sat for three days during which he worked out his address to the First International Convention of Religions that convened in Chicago in 1899. In Sri Lanka, I visited the boa tree that the Buddha’s sister planted from a

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sapling from the tree under which he received enlightenment in Nepal. In each of these places even today, a person can sit quietly and listen to the wind. One can imagine that the people who ventured to these places in times long past took with them their profound understanding of the perplexities of their times and they understood their own limitations and inadequacies to meeting the challenges facing themselves, their communities and the Planet.

Thus, in this time when technological devices reproduce sounds and sights at the touch of a button with the potential of changing every place into any place, it behooves people who have heard the cry of the deeps, who have felt the Breath of God, to sit in the silence and listen to the wind. Sometimes, in moments like these, the doorway into tomorrow begins to open.

## Codicil 11 – Fulfilled Being

This codicil focuses on the personal impact of allowing the numinous presence to manifest itself in your everyday knowing, doing and being. This numinous aspect of the self, this divine presence within each individual, represents the same kind of reality that was described in previous codicils relative to the natural world and communities of beings. The theme of autopoiesis pervades time and space. This codicil focuses on its presence within the self. When a self-conscious entity embodies the universal theme of autopoiesis, the numinous and the embodied come together at a specific time and place.

### Section A – Empowered Self

Within the self, the numinous presence that pervades the Universe shines through when the individual moves beyond matters of everyday sustenance and sets aside matters of personal needs and desires. As a person begins to acknowledge that they are akin to each of the rocks in the mountains, plants on the hillsides and animals wandering in the forests and becomes further aware of their deep interrelationship with each of the other individuals and societies on the Planet, then their particular needs and cares diminish and the numinous fire within begins to shine through their exterior manifestations.

For an individual, this kind of moment feels like “all my prayers have been answered” or “it doesn’t get better than this”. When one’s individual aims and purposes become aligned with the creative directions of the Planet, society and the deepest aspects of reality then individual needs are transformed into personal fulfillment.

## Section B – Tempting Reductionism

Life is always easier when a person decides to be less than comprehensive. For a person simply to deal with the necessities of food and shelter takes less personal commitment than attending to the well-being of other individuals and species. All of the religious traditions relate stories telling of the temptations to reduce the call of the deep into a drive for self-satisfaction or power. Whereas the broadening of perspectives and care allows one to tap into the deep wellspring of energy that lies at the center of being, narrower perspectives require fewer ambiguous and difficult decisions. Without any doubt, life on the surface is easier than life in the depths.

In 1976, during a Religious Studies seminar that I conducted in Boston, Massachusetts for a group of high school students, I realized that they were all, consciously or unconsciously, systematically striving to escape the great mystery that was waiting to empower their lives. Based on my own experiences and other work underway within the systems of the Institute of Cultural Affairs, I created a list of four Great Escapes. The list of ultimate ways to escape the depths of being included:

- a. Finding ways to deny the reality of one's present situation,
- b. Choosing options that avoid claiming the promises offered by the unmanifested future,
- c. Taking actions that ignore or disguise the profound depths of every person and
- d. Practicing life styles that cut the person off from the wisdom available from their personal and cultural past.

These options continue to pervade society. Many people choose to reduce or evade the depths of self by actively or passively ignoring the past and future realities or belittling the existence of their own worth and depth. In so doing, people cut themselves off from the possibilities of their own greatness and reduce their capacity to become creative forces in shaping the future.



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### Section C – Depth Energy

Throughout this systematic approach to theology – this practical approach to finding significance, inspiration and meaning within the everyday process of living in which the scientific and religious perspectives are integrated – several special tools have been recommended. In the four codicils dealing with the portal to the natural world, the distinction was made between Univocal and Metaphorical language. Care was taken to clarify that metaphorical language is required to convey encounters with the numinous aspects of the natural world as well as all aspects of human existence. In the codicils that focused on human community, the concept of transparency was introduced to describe the phenomenon that occurs when the surface level of existence gives way to the deeper realities that lie beneath. When an individual examines their own personal experience, they become aware that, sometimes, a special kind of power swells up from deep within.

Talking about that which comes from deep within requires the same kind of metaphorical language relative to one's self that was required to discuss the numinous presence within the natural world. The experience of one's depth often happens when reflections on daily experiences occasion a moment of transparency, when the mundane evaporates in the presence of the profound. At times like these a person sees-realizes-intuits that vast domains lay beyond the veil of the material world.

In my poem, *Radical Nothingness*<sup>36</sup>, I related an experience of sitting on the front porch of my house on a brisk fall morning. I was looking up at my favorite galaxy – Orion – that has traveled with me in the night sky wherever I went. Many times Orion listened to my concerns and encouraged me on my ventures. On October 25<sup>th</sup>, 1998, I realized anew the vast emptiness of the black space in Orion's belt. When I breathed in, I was aware that after my breath reached the bottom of my lungs something

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<sup>36</sup> Stover, F. Nelson, *The Rocks Sang Om*, p. 46.

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kept going deeper – this was neither a physical reality nor an intellectual concept. As I breathed out, my breath condensed into a misty vapor that seemed to come from beyond the bottom of my lungs and could be traveling out through the gaps in Orion’s belt. For a moment, anyway, I realized a kind of depth both in myself and in the Universe as a whole. Memories of these kinds of moments do not easily fade; words to describe these kinds of insights do not come easily.

Some people are aware that these kinds of experiences have occurred in their lives. They may use religious language, secular language, art or silent non-expression to share or remember the moment – but once aware, the memory lingers. While no “who saw the deeps” measurement tool exists even in the most sophisticated laboratory, those conscious of their own depth experience can often perceive this awareness in others. It may show up in their eyes which when you look into them seem to be open to realms far beyond their pupil and retina. The deeps may show up in their smile that appears to convey a joy disconnected from the vicissitudes of their current situation. Likewise, it may show up in their everyday actions when compassion and care exude at levels beyond the economics of exchanging mutual benefits.

When I asked my mother “where the soul was” at age 3, she was probably wise beyond her own knowing when she simply ignored the question as she wrote in my baby book (see Preface page 7). In the contextual and experiential world of a three-year old, I had asked an unanswerable question. The soul cannot be contained in Christmas giftwrapped boxes or described in a textbook or museum. In the process of writing this explanation, I realize what she did do to help me find the answer to my question included: helping me smell the roses in grandma’s garden, taking me camping in the woods, teaching me to wash even the corners of the windows and making certain that I continued going to churches where the subject of soul and religious experience was at least being discussed. [PS – writing this paragraph brought tears to my eyes in gratitude for wisdom

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for which I never had the opportunity to thank my mother who died shortly before the poems that comprise *The Rocks Sang Om* were completed and decades before this book was written.]

Historically, religious communities have used a variety of metaphors for attempting to convey the experience of movement within the depth of human existence. Within the traditions of the Australian Aboriginals that live on the northwest coast near Mowanjumb, select artists paint the presence of the divine as Wandjina. Wandjina has eyes and a nose but no mouth. Wandjina, they say, communicates directly to the heart, to depths of the human beings who know of its presence. Within the traditions of the children of Abraham, images like “the Breath of God” and “in my soul” convey this same understanding of the depth experiences within the lives of individuals – of responding to that which lies beyond the material realms of daily living.

Whatever language or mode of expression that a person chooses to use to describe their encounter with the depths that pervade existence beyond the surface of things and events, the fact remains that memories of the experience of this reality often remain a powerful influence within the lives of these individuals. People who are self-conscious of this aspect of reality in their own lives are frequently more sensitive than others to the presence of the awareness of these moments in other people’s lives. Furthermore, some people are especially in resonance with this aspect of existence and are often helpful in guiding others to enhance their own capacity to participate in this deeper level of self-consciousness. Such people have been given a variety of titles including guru, minister, guide, teacher, priestess, shaman or wizard.

## Section D – Radiance Manifested

When people encounter a person who has self-consciously affirmed the depth of their life, who lives in this state of being, they may comment that the person had “fire in their eyes” or that

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“something got into them”. On the first hand, this condition is not about looks and appearances; it is not something that can be put on like a well-pressed shirt or a fresh haircut. Rather than something that is added from the outside, this presence from the depths shines through the exterior of individuals who have moved beyond the surface of daily life.

Touching the depths of being is akin to falling in love; oftentimes both are visible to others with sensitive eyes. This similarity leads some people to say, “God is Love”. A more accurate observer would note that falling in love lies in the same realm as Feeling the Breath of God. Both come from encounters with the numinous aspects present in the natural world, human community and the depth of self. Whereas this upwelling from the depths of an individual’s life sometimes comes as a balm on a longing for compassion and justice, at other times it comes like a jolting awareness of the urgency of risking security and credibility to call into question existing modes of action and long-held beliefs about life’s basic cycles and relationships.

A life lived attune to the depths of reality provides a transformative beacon to self and surroundings at any time and any place.

## Codicil 12 – Transforming Presence

This final Codicil describes the external manifestation of the numinous presence of the Universe shining through a self that has made a self-conscious decision to affirm that which it knows within its depths. This kind of presence has emerged in all cultures in all ages; it knows no bounds of historical period, gender or intellectual capacity. Such a presence can also shine in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Each person has the option to walk this path.

### Section A – Named Profound

These 12 Codicils detailed, both experientially and rationally, ways by which individuals and societies can see beyond the surface manifestations of daily living and encounter the numinous aspects of natural phenomenon, social interaction and the reflective self. One of the important themes repeated throughout these excursions centers on the fact that, in the final analysis, the reality that has been encountered – through any of the portals – is the same reality that has been encountered in each of the others. When a genuine and profound experience has been appropriated, no matter from which perspective, the depth reality remains the same.

The name that a person decides to give to what has been seen and felt plays a crucial role in determining the effect of the encounter on their being and doing. Some people say they have been lucky, some see chance happenings, some credit their own skill and prowess, some say they have seen the Face of God or Felt the Breath of God in the stillness. People who choose to call these experiences encounters with the divine become a transforming presence in every moment. They have the possibility of leading others to the depths of life. When the encounter has been named as only a chance event the person tends to go along waiting for another random event.

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### Section B – Empowered Center

This encounter with the divine in the midst of self can occur in many ways as described in the previous three codicils. In the eastern religious traditions, the practice of sitting meditation provides self-conscious ways to evoke this experience. On two occasions, I had the opportunity to study under Zen masters. At the first conference, the master had been asked by the organizers to provide a forum for people to understand and discuss the benefits and results of sitting meditation. He began his first session by saying that the only way to understand his words about the practice of meditation was to first experience sitting meditation. Thus, he began each of his discussion periods with extended times of sitting quietly. This allowed each of the participants to begin to experience, directly, the power that flows from their deep center. Even the initial inklings of this possibility can give clues for further self-conscious awareness of the wellspring of the divine in the midst of self. When a person has become self-consciously aware that they are deeply connected with the same divine reality that weaves together the natural, social and interpersonal realms, the center of their being emits power that effects even their seemingly mundane actions.

### Section C – Outpouring Energy

An amazing outpouring sometimes ensues when people tap into the deep energies present in their own lives. Like a volcano that spreads molten lava across the countryside, when the thin surface layer of soil and rock gives way to the pressures from within, all the surrounding entities are energized when someone in their midst becomes self-conscious of their own magnificence.

Throughout the ages, people have tried to give names to this effervescence that defies description yet remains unquestionably real. On the first hand, what happens at times like these cannot be circumscribed by the definitions of any particular religious tradition. People of all cultural and religious persuasions that

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have stood in this aura recognize others who are similarly empowered. Since the dawn of human consciousness, people have touched the depths of being and left reports of their experiences. These are understandable throughout the ages without regard to cultural overlays or technological particulars.

Though hard to name and impossible to quantify, these spiritual events have a unique form of reality. In this kind of moment, the holy has been encountered and the mundane has been transcended. When given expression within a community, these become the bonds that hold religious organizations together.

## Section D – Authentic Radiance

In conclusion, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century needs the kind of religious people that have looked through each of the three portals – the natural world, human community and their own interior – and seen the numinous presence, the Face of God, which is visible from each vantage point. In knowing that their own experience comes from the same source as every other individual's and from that which has enlivened individuals and entities throughout the ages, they find ways to communicate and cooperate across cultural divides and species barriers. By responding to the call that comes from far below the surface of everyday desires and individual whims, they participate actively in building mutually enhancing relationships among all aspects of existence.

Just a month before his death in 1955, the French Jesuit paleontologist and author Père Teilhard de Chardin crowned four years of work on his spiritual testament. He wrote:

Everywhere on Earth, at this moment, within the new spiritual atmosphere created by the appearance of the idea of evolution, there float – in a state of extreme mutual sensitivity – the two essential components of the Ultra-human, love of God and faith in the world. Everywhere these two components are “in the air”: generally, however,

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they are not strong enough, *both at the same time*, to combine with one another *in one and the same subject*. In me, by pure chance (temperament, education, environment) the proportion of each happens to be favorable, and they fuse together spontaneously. The fusion of the two is still not strong enough to spread explosively, but even so it is enough to show that such an explosion is possible and that, sooner or later the chain-reaction will get under way.

It is one more proof that if the truth appears once, in one single mind, that is enough to ensure that nothing can ever prevent it from spreading to everything and setting it ablaze.<sup>37</sup>

The chain-reaction that Chardin envisioned is happening around the Planet. People are looking deeply through each of the three portals and seeing beyond the practical manifestations of their everyday lives. By using a systematic approach like the one used here in *Through Three Portals*, people can begin to understand what is going on in these times and embody an authentic radiance in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This perspective combines of the best scientific wisdom and technological expertise with tested religious language and practices that allow the numinous aspects of the Universe to be acknowledged in ways that foster individual and collective creativity. The ancient wisdom has been combined with contemporary knowledge within the interconnected modern world.

In this integrated wholeness, each individual entity is blessed;  
All That Is is blessed.

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<sup>37</sup> Teilhard de Chardin, *Le Cristique*, 1955, quoted in *Teilhard de Chardin Album*, edited by Jeanne Mortier and Maris-Louise Aboux, Harper & Row Publishers, New York (1966), p. 210.



## Epilogue

With the completion of *Through Three Portals*, I can answer the two questions that my mother decided to leave alone awhile when her inquisitive young child asked the hard questions.

Any person can look in three places for the answers to the big, deep questions of life. By looking through the portal of the *natural world*, anyone can gaze upon the wonder of the Universe. They can see the galaxies in which stars are being born, watch a foxhound track a deer through the dew covered leaves and see a dogwood and an oak finding mutual ways to enhance each other's prospects of a long and productive life. By looking through the portal of *human community*, anyone can discern points of injustice that require care-filled action and see the beauty of love transfixing the gaze of a newly wedded couple. By opening the portal of the *depths of their own being*, anyone can see the awesome depths that lie beneath the surface of every day cares and concerns and can find the stillness that rests below the chaos of decisions and interactions.

How a person relates to what they see and experience through these three portals depends on their own decision. They can back away, close their eyes or otherwise try to shut out what lies beyond the surface of daily life; or they can keep looking ever deeper.

If a person has the sensitivities and language skills to create metaphors that encompass the

grandeur of the view, if they have the wisdom and perspective to see below the surface of the material world in which they live and if they have the patience and courage to reach to the deepest levels of their own existence then they may join with hosts of others before them that have come to know God. Once this happens, a person may find that interior place where the divine dwells in them and which resonates with the divine in each creature and particle – this place the ancients called the home of the soul. This part of each individual, too, can be cared for and nurtured.

By gazing through all three portals, the wisdom of the ages becomes accessible to anyone in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Then any person has the opportunity to play a self-conscious and active role in helping tomorrow unfold filled with depth and meaning.

Enjoy the journey.

Q.E.D.

F. Nelson Stover  
Greensboro, NC

## Annotated Bibliography

The books described in this bibliography provide clues for building a solid foundation for moving through the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Each of these works has informed the preparation of *Through Three Portals*.

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## About the Author

Born in the refinery town of Robinson in the oil fields of southern Illinois just days after the ending of WW II, Frederick Nelson Stover lived in three states before graduating from high school. Three of his sets of great-grandparents had been farmers in Ohio; the fourth established a preaching ministry in Kansas. His maternal grandfather graduated from Denison University and worked in a pharmaceutical company; his paternal grandfather worked his way up from mail clerk to Vice-President of Marketing for Ohio Oil Company. Nelson's father retired from a sales management career with Marathon Oil Company to become the gardener at the Village in Gatlinburg, TN where he also served in leadership positions in a Lutheran Church.

Nelson graduated from Purdue University with a BSc in Computer Science and minors in English and Philosophy. He married Elaine Kay Williams in June 1967. Three years later, he received his B. Div. from Chicago Theological Seminary. His thesis focused on the church's role in social change. Through the decades that followed, Nelson pursued endeavors that addressed contemporary social issues, integrated technological and sociological practices and enabled people of all perspectives to address depth human concerns.

The Stover family joined the Unitarian Universalist Church of Greensboro in 1992. Over the years, they have played an active role in the life of the congregation. Nelson served a 3-year term on their Board of Directors. He has conducted a variety of adult education programs and preaches periodically. In 2004, Nelson was appointed to the Board of Directors of the Institute of Cultural Affairs International (ICAI). In 2006, he was elected to a 4-year term as President of the Board. In 2012, Elaine and Nelson received the Greensboro Public Library's Thomas Berry Award for their various projects over two decades that helped give practical form to the thinking and writing of Greensboro native, Dr. Thomas Berry.

**F. Nelson Stover – Systems Integrator:** Nelson financed part of his graduate education writing computer programs for companies in Chicago and Detroit. Later, he combined his management and facilitation skills with his computer background to design and implement office information systems and web-based Constituent Managed Relationship programs for Belgian companies and North Carolina non-profit membership associations. For 18 years, his computer consulting career involved working as a Senior Technical Consultant with Intelligent Technologies, Inc. His MCSE qualifications, SQL programming skills and particular software expertise fostered an innovative blend of business practices combined with leading-edge technologies to meet the changing needs of a diverse client base.

**F. Nelson Stover – Cultural Engineer:** While living in Australia, Belgium, Egypt, India and the Appalachian Mountain region of the US, Nelson worked with businesses and villagers to catalyze comprehensive human development projects at the grassroots level. He facilitated planning and evaluation programs involving persons of diverse perspectives within non-profit organizations, multi-national corporations and village associations. In his work and travels, Nelson has befriended some of the world's poorest citizens and some of its wealthiest; he has dined on mud floors and at the most ornate hotel facilities. He has worked effectively with men and women of all educational backgrounds, economic levels and religious persuasions. Through these encounters, he learned to appreciate the perspectives that each bring to the situations at hand.

In 2013, he founded Emerging Ecology, Inc., a non-profit organization ([www.EmergingEcology.org](http://www.EmergingEcology.org)) that conducts contextual training programs and facilitates grassroots social change using the ICA's *Technology of Participation (ToP)*<sup>®</sup>. Emerging Ecology promotes a worldview for the next generations' solutions. Furthermore, he lectures and writes about foundational principles relevant for developing a mutually

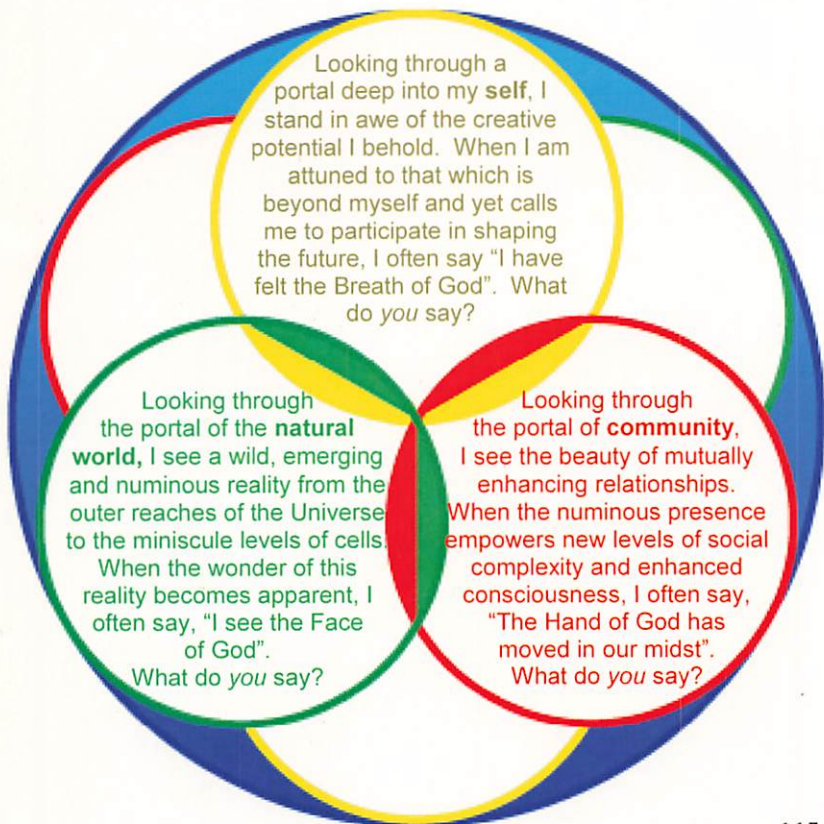


enhancing relationship between the human and non-human worlds.

**F. Nelson Stover – Ecumenical Guide:** After his seminary graduation, Nelson was ordained by the United Church of Christ and assigned to their social ministry. Having participated in religious studies programs conducted by the Ecumenical Institute between 1964 and 1970, Nelson and Elaine joined the staff of the Ecumenical Institute and its sister organization the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA). Nelson conducted a wide range of human development training programs for individuals at all levels of society on several continents. He officiates at wedding celebrations for couples from diverse perspectives and leads training programs focused on integrating science and religion in a common context – the emerging natural world. He worships with the Unitarian Universalist Church of Greensboro and plays an active role in that congregation. Through his affiliation with the church’s Justice Action Team, he helped found and lead, Environmental Stewardship Greensboro, an association of congregations promoting a spiritual understanding of ecological responsibility.

A child of the Universe and a citizen of Planet Earth with an American passport, Nelson has lived in: Robinson, Illinois; Fort Wayne, Indiana; East Lansing, Michigan; West Lafayette, Indiana; Hyde Park/Chicago, Illinois; East Lake/Atlanta, Georgia; Paddington /Sydney, Australia; Mt. Lawley/Perth, Australia; North Adelaide, Australia; Rochester, New York; Widen, West Virginia; Byculla/Mumbai, India; Chikhale Village, India; Ghorpurigaon/Pune, India; Bayad Village, Egypt; St. Josse/Brussels, Belgium and Greensboro, North Carolina.

F. Nelson Stover is a scholar, theologian, and scientist who lives in a creative and imaginative world. His work across the years has been one of concern for "the least of these" and at the same time concern for our Planet Earth. In **Through Three Portals**, religion and science converge into something that is adequate and satisfactory from both points of view. Nelson is one who has heard the Cry and has carried that commitment since early teen-aged years to present time. *Annette P. Bingham, Raleigh, NC – Science Teacher, Mentor, Consultant and Social Justice Advocate*



This book will be useful for me as I conduct retreats focused on Spiritual Direction. This multi-modal approach is accessible to people of many different walks of life. *Ellen Howie, Alta Mont, NY – Spiritual Director & RN*

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