

Grounds for Hope

—John Surette, SJ

The Universe/Earth is the matrix of everything. It surrounds and nurtures us. It is the context that stimulates our artistic and intellectual lives. It carries our elemental sense of God. It is unfolding, evolving, in process. In that unfolding are dimensions of the Divine which wait to be revealed!

EARTH'S DIMINISHMENT

In our worship we often begin with an expression of our personal brokenness. I need to begin with the destructive relationship presently existing between the human community and the rest of the natural world. I was eleven years old in 1945 when the U.S. dropped the Atomic Bomb on Japan. Since then an awareness of the power of evil has been prominent in my consciousness. Observing the environmental diminishment of our Earth, I'd say that a more perilous bomb has already gone off.

I've come to discover Earth as a living system of which our lives are a part and on which our lives depend. Earth places definite limitations upon us. Our human activity is consuming resources and producing wastes at levels far in excess of sustainable limits. The consequences of our behavior include extinction of species, global warming, deforestation, desertification, ozone depletion, pollution of land, air and water. It's not that we are doing it on purpose. In fact, we think we are making "progress."

Those of us who are not in denial—and I find myself in denial some days—are aware of the magnitude of the problem facing Earth and of the choices facing the human. Some what we have done is irreversible. Some can be corrected if we act quickly. Experts differ in the estimates of how much time we have.

I foresee collapse of biosystems within the lifetimes of my nieces and nephews. The quality of life for the more complex life-forms that survive will be

significantly lessened. It will be hard on all of us humans but especially hard on the poor. The Scriptures of the natural world will lose much of their beauty and that which is noble in humankind will be correspondingly reduced. Earth will speak less to us of the Sacred. It will be less "Good News." Faith will become more difficult for us.



Photo by Tom Schemper

EDITOR'S LETTER

Dear Spirit Earth Friends,

Someone asked me recently, "What is it that brings you joy?" What brings me joy is the experience of being in a real presence with others, sensing a shared yearning behind our faces, hearing the different tones of our words, feeling the love that unites us and sensing hope rising in our hearts. I also experience joy when I am able, in the words of poet William Blake, "To see a world in a grain of sand and heaven in a wild flower, hold infinity in the palm of my hand and eternity in an hour." And, especially in those rare, indescribable moments when joy arises out of deep Silence. All of this brings me hope.

John Surette, Pat Bombard and Rita Petruziello keep us mindful of hope rising in our world as they invite us in their articles to join them in being "pioneers of hope."

Pat Irr, OSF, a pioneer of hope for SpiritEarth readers, is moving on to fulfill new responsibilities for her religious community. We will greatly miss the colorful and meaningful meditations she contributed to our journal. Thank you, Pat. We wish you well.

Let us keep hope rising together, more than ever!

Warmly,
Judith Cauley, CSJ
Coordinating Editor

Hope is not the same as joy that things are going well,...but rather an ability to work for something because it is good.

—Vaclav Havel

SpiritEarth

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Mission Statement

SpiritEarth is a publication that expands and advances The Well Spirituality Center's mission as a regional center for telling and engaging our Sacred Universe Story and fostering the evolving role of humankind in this great drama.

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In sharing all of this I do not seek to be a prophet of gloom and doom. I do know that I am moving out of illusion and into what is Real...where Life waits to be chosen and the Divine waits to be encountered.

HOPE

First of all, I find hope in the Universe/Earth itself! My contemplation and study have revealed a Universe that is self-organizing. It presents itself as a Universe in which everything that exists is different from everything else, everything that exists has its own 'voice,' and everything that exists is in communion with everything else that exists. Within this Universe the Divine presence is an evocative power rather than a controlling One. It evokes within us a valuing of the differences, a hearing of the 'voices,' and a nurturing and celebrating of the communion. The invitation is before us. Universe/Earth waits for us to enter a window of creativity. What will we humans choose?

Second, I find hope in our new origins story—the New Cosmology—that modern science offer us! Thomas Aquinas valued a serious dialogue with the best science of his day and the result was a great enrichment of Christian thought. A similar dialogue with the story of our 13.8 billion year old Universe is possible today and promises an even greater enrichment.

For didactic purposes the 13.8 billion year history of the Universe is often compressed into a single year. It goes something like this: January 1, the primordial energy event; May 1, origin of our Milky Way galaxy; September 14, the formation of Earth; September 25, origin of life in the ocean; December 20, plants move onto land; December 26, the first mammals appear; December 31 (late in the day), modern humans emerge.

We begin to sense that the Universe is not so much a cosmos as a cosmogenesis, not so much a place as an ongoing event...a Story. The Story unfolds us. Millions of years of biological trial and error have contributed to our formation. The atoms in us once floated in a galactic cloud which resulted from a stellar explosion. We are literally made of stardust. All the protons that constitute us were made in the primordial heat at the beginning of the Universe. If we experience a spiritual dimension within ourselves now, then there has been a spiritual dimension throughout the process. The spiritual is not an addendum injected by the Creator when humans arrived on the scene. This Story is a sacred one! When I hear it I am saved from what theologian John Haught called "cosmic homelessness."

Third, I find hope in women! Our scientists, with their patriarchal mindset, have named the beginning of the Universe as the "big bang"—explosive, mechanistic, violent. Could it not also be designated as the "cosmic egg"—fertile, organic, life-giving? By "patriarchal mindset" I mean one in which men are valued more than women, technology more than nature, hierarchy more than equality, separation more than communion, and control more than freedom.

Our Universe values differences. It consists of individual different things—from atoms to galaxies, bacteria to humans—each expressing who they are. Our past 5000 years of patriarchy have enabled us to look at everything that is different from us and to say: You are less than we are. We then oppress them, enslave them, or simply annihilate them—whether they be Native American, African American, Iraqi, or a million species of plants and animals.

Our Universe values communion. Every different individual is held together in the embrace of the whole. To be is to be related. It is this communion of all life that enables our human lives. Within patriarchy we have come to see ourselves as the spiritual ones and therefore essentially above all else in Creation. We conclude that we are not bound by the laws that apply to everything else within the communion. We use our technology to circumvent those laws and do whatever we want to the natural order. Hence Earth's diminishment.

I think it was Albert Einstein who said that no problem can be solved out of the same consciousness that brought about the problem. Women offer us a way to understand the mistakes we have made, not repeat them, and move into a more sustainable future with a new consciousness.

Finally, I find hope in the Christian community and its concern for justice! The New Cosmology provides us with a new context within which we can assist people to shape their lives and cultures. It is a context in which all of us become more human by participating in the ongoing creation and evolution of the cosmos. It is a context in which our human plans and programs are totally implicated in the functioning of Earth and its life community.

Justice for the Earth community is the larger context of justice for the human community. The environmental issue is not just another social issue among many. It is foundational. I have come to see this so clearly. It is impossible, for example, to have healthy humans on a sick planet. Our national economies will continue in their deficit mode as long as Earth's economies continue to be disrupted and destroyed. A fundamental option for the poor and a fundamental option for Earth constitute one option.

Can we imagine Earth and human community involved in a mutually enhancing relationship and begin to live that way now? Some say that we humans will only learn to change our destructive behavior as a result of environmental catastrophe. My observation is that such catastrophe is already well underway and we continue in our denial. Others say that what we need is more and better education. One can hardly disagree, but education alone is not enough. Also needed is a rediscovery of the sacredness of the natural world which will be able to evoke within us a response adequate to the magnitude of the task facing us as a species.

Finding the Sacred in all things! Earth asks this of us. It is our calling!

Called to be Pioneers of Hope

—Patricia Bombard, BVM

Huston Smith, in his book, *Why Religion Matters*, suggests that religion matters a great deal because it addresses our experience of “the More” from which we all come. Says Smith, “Built into the human makeup is a longing for the ‘more’ that the world of everyday experience cannot requite....The reality that excites and fulfills the soul’s longing is God by whatsoever name” (p. 3).

Smith’s description of “the More” is alluded to in the words of Psalm 139. Clearly, the psalmist is attempting to express an experience of this reality of “the More” in such lines as:

“O Lord, you have searched me and known me...you discern my thoughts.”

“Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.”

“Where can I go from your spirit? Or where can I flee from your presence?”

This relates also to a passage in the Book of Samuel: “During the time young Samuel was minister to the Lord under Eli, a revelation of the Lord was uncommon and vision infrequent.” (Samuel 3:1). We might say those same words about our time. As we face so much social violence and predictions—inconceivable only a short time ago—by some scientists of an end to life on Earth as we have known it, we might be wondering to whom the God of “the More” is speaking these days and with what message. Like Samuel, we might ask: to what word, what call, should we be awake and alert?

A New Brand of Pioneer

In the United States we are fond of and fascinated with our pioneer heritage. Leonard Doohan, an emeritus professor at Gonzaga University, suggests in his latest book, *Courageous Hope*, that leaders today must be pioneers still. However, the call today is not to geographic frontiers. Instead, the call today is to frontiers at the margins of meaning and justice. As a result, we need a different brand of pioneer.



Photo by William Fleming

To people ravaged by neglect, abuse, and environmental devastation; to people denied their basic right to water, food, shelter and clothing; to people labeled as unqualified to love and be loved; to people searching for meaning in a rapidly changing world; to these people we are called, says Leonard Doohan, to be Pioneers of Hope.

In Mark's Gospel, we find the story of Jesus' call to the apostles, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." When I recently saw that line and focused on the image of fishing, I thought to myself: "What is the lure?" If you have ever fished, you know you have to have something on the hook that will be attractive to the hungry fish in order to catch anything. I realized in that moment of reflection that Doohan is right—the lure Jesus offered, and the lure we must offer today, is "Hope." Jesus offered Hope to people crushed by the Roman Empire, and by the brutalities imposed even by their own people. We must offer Hope today to people and a planet crushed by those spreading injustice, violence, and environmental destruction.

At this point, you may be asking: If our call today is to be Pioneers of Hope, what does the hope we wish to offer look like? I am coming to believe it involves being Bridge-Builders. Huston Smith says something about this need for Bridge-Builders. He suggests that today we are in the midst of a profound social debate he identifies as secular vs. religious, science vs. spirituality. He writes:

"The crisis that the world finds itself in...is located in something deeper than particular ways of organizing political systems and economies...East and West are going through a single common crisis whose cause is the spiritual condition of the modern world" (p.1).

An Ancient Prophecy

To further illustrate Smith's point, I am going to share an ancient vision that comes from Latin America. You may have heard of it. It is the prophecy of the Eagle and the Condor. I will summarize the prophecy by adapting a description of it from the website of the PachaMama Alliance (<http://www.pachamama.org/blog/the-eagle-and-the-condor-prophecy>) :

"The prophecy speaks of human societies splitting into two paths—that of the Eagle, and that of the Condor. The path of the Condor is the path of heart, of intuition, and of the feminine. The path of the Eagle is the path of the mind, of the industrial, and of the masculine.

The prophecy says that the 1490s would begin a 500-year period during which the Eagle people would become so powerful that they would virtually drive the Condor people out of existence.

However, the prophecy offers a hope. It says that during the next 500-year period, beginning in 1990, the potential would arise for the Eagle and the Condor to come together, to fly in the same sky, and to create a new level of consciousness for humanity. The prophecy only speaks of the potential, so it's up to us to activate this potential and ensure that a new consciousness is allowed to arise."

The prophecy of the Eagle and the Condor begins by pointing to differences between what we might call indigenous and Western cultures. The prophecy speaks of the Eagle and the Condor flying high together and connects that image to the potential for a new level of human consciousness, as if we, too, could fly at the great heights of the Eagle and the Condor. What meaning is there in this for us? To me, this image of flying to new heights suggests that to become Bridge-Builders, we must begin within ourselves, in the development of a conscious awareness that can rise above the fragmentation of difference and see "the More," the fundamental unity of all things. The prophecy suggests we all have the potential for this. This is why Huston Smith says the crisis of our time is a spiritual one. In our

heady rush toward material progress, we have forgotten about the spiritual need to grow inwardly to reach our full potential as human beings wise to the reality of “the More.”

The prophecy of the Eagle and the Condor calls each of us to new frontiers as Bridge-Building Pioneers of Hope. It calls us all to be people who work whenever and wherever (and no matter how old or young) to overcome the divide

- between the cultures of the Eagle and the Condor,
- between secular and religious,
- between science and spirituality,
- between ego and “The More.”

Photo by William Fleming



What Bridge-Building Looks Like

What, practically speaking, might that bridge-building look like? In answer, I would say it looks like all persons everywhere who work to grow inwardly to develop the qualities necessary to be in the world as Bridge-Building Pioneers of Hope in desperate times. Certainly, it looks like many of our pioneering ancestors who left the country of their birth and embraced people beyond their homeland; who actively stretched their own identity and vision to include more of the whole.

These times call for us all to look for the Bridge-Building acts through which we can be Pioneers of Hope.

The fecund energy we call God is at the heart of the evolutionary process, working from within, endowing creatures themselves to be empowered to choose life in whatever way is appropriate for their mode of being.

Judy Cannato



Photo by Gina Sullivan Erker

Circle the City with Love

—Rita Petruziello, CSJ

If anyone had ever told me that 3000 people would join me standing for Love on a bridge in silence during the RNC July 17, 2016, and then two months later, I would be participating in a month-long retreat, entitled *A Journey into Deeper Love* at Berakah Spirituality Center in New Hampshire, I would have said that is absurd. How could this be? And yet I believe that nothing is a coincidence! I **do** know that in my heart, I have been called to a deeper love, a love that comes from deep within where the essence of all Love resides. And in this place, I know I am not alone!

Circle the City with Love was a non-religious, nonpartisan, non-issue and no labels event and yet, it was filled with spirit that knows no bounds! As we stood on the bridge that day in Cleveland, Ohio, many of us felt that spirit as the strong breeze that literally floated across the bridge came upon us on a relatively calm weather day. Folks who were present with us shared how they got goosebumps and shivers as the winds blew. Perhaps this was a sign that came from the same promptings deep within me while sitting with a group of our sisters on the feast of St Joseph, March 19, commiserating about the fear, negativity and unrest that prevailed in anticipation of the upcoming Convention being held in Cleveland. The words *Circle the City with Love* (Kathy Sherman's song) spilled out of my mouth that night followed by *why don't WE do that!?!*

In my work at River's Edge Spirituality Center, I learned through both science and spirituality that energy fields holding memory and the power of intention when done individually and collectively, brings about change beyond our comprehension. Further reflection on the profound quote from the late Jimi Hendricks that resonated so strongly with me, *When the Power of Love becomes Stronger than the Love of Power we will have Peace*, brought me to thinkingWhat better way was there than to put positive thoughts into the energy fields of our city, our country and beyond, by pledging to stand in silence for Love collectively and publicly!

A committee of ten strong, spirit-filled, committed volunteers from different backgrounds and positions stepped to the plate and spent four months of weekly meetings planning, strategizing and raising money to help make a dream a reality. The Congregation of St Joseph took the biggest risk of all by agreeing to become the fiscal sponsor for this project. This is both humbling and thrilling for me and I am forever grateful! The rest is history!

On July 17, as we stood together on the bridge we repeated together the words:

I agree to be substance free, nonviolent and law abiding while standing in line, holding hands for one/half hour in silence, putting the power of Love that will bring peace and justice into our city, our country and the Universe.

In the days that followed, we learned from our experience and the media that we DID indeed make a difference! People from various parts of the country stood in solidarity with us from their respective locations. Children sat on their parents' shoulders. Police Officers and participants hugged one another. Some of us cried. Newscasters across the country reported that neither serious disturbances nor negative activity occurred and no other group came anywhere near the numbers we gathered that day. Several reporters attributed much of this to what took place on the bridge. Truly it was a peaceful and love-filled day!

A participant expresses it best in poetry:

*It was splendid, fantastic.
The Hope Memorial Bridge has never served a better purpose
East and West
Black, White and Brown.
Young and old, hand in hand, heart with heart
The silence was healing and blissful.
I could almost hear the river at two hundred feet below
Eye contact, confidence, silent contracts of affirmation and gratitude,
Ours was the most powerful speech of the week.*

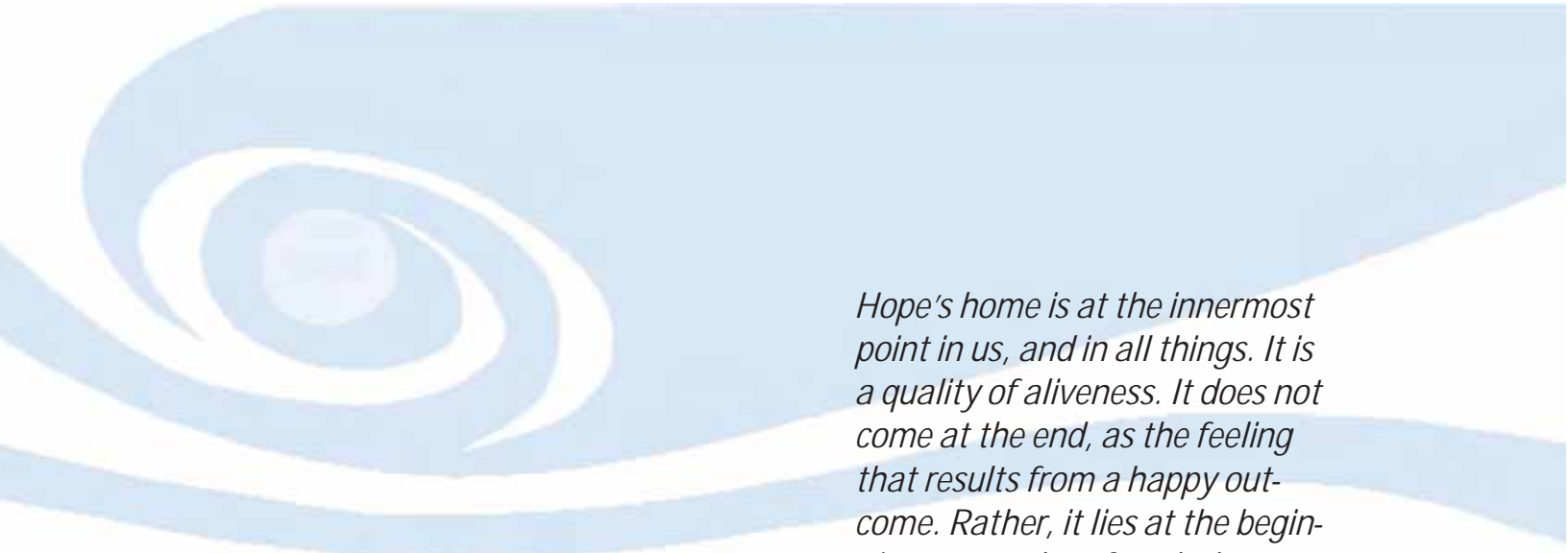
Now after my four weeks away at Berakah discerning/reflecting and deepening my journey into the meaning and power of love within the very contentious environment of hate and fear in which we find ourselves, the same promptings are calling me once again to put the power of love into the energy fields by standing in silence with somebodies, somewhere, somehow, sometime!?! My dream would be to go to Washington DC in numbers from around the country and stand for love in silence just prior to the Presidential Inauguration. Again this would be nonpartisan, non-issue, no label event, because no matter which candidate got elected there will be a tremendous reaction of hate, fear and potential for violence rampant in our country.

Two learnings that stand out for me from our work with this project are: Never underestimate the power of the Spirit/Love and secondly; it takes a village, a community, a city and a nation to Stand for Love!! Please consider being a part of us. Together we are great!!

On reading this account, if you have any thoughts to share about what was and/or could be, please send your thoughts, ideas, willingness to be involved to me at rpetruziello@csjoseph.org. I would love to hear from you! Our committee has been meeting again and will soon have a plan as to what we will be doing around the date of the Inauguration.



Photo by Gina Sullivan Erker



Hope's home is at the innermost point in us, and in all things. It is a quality of aliveness. It does not come at the end, as the feeling that results from a happy outcome. Rather, it lies at the beginning, as a pulse of truth that sends us forth. Hope fills us with the strength to stay present, to abide in the flow of Mercy no matter what outer storms assail us. It is entered always and only through surrender; that is, through the willingness to let go of everything we are presently clinging to.

Cynthia Bourgeault

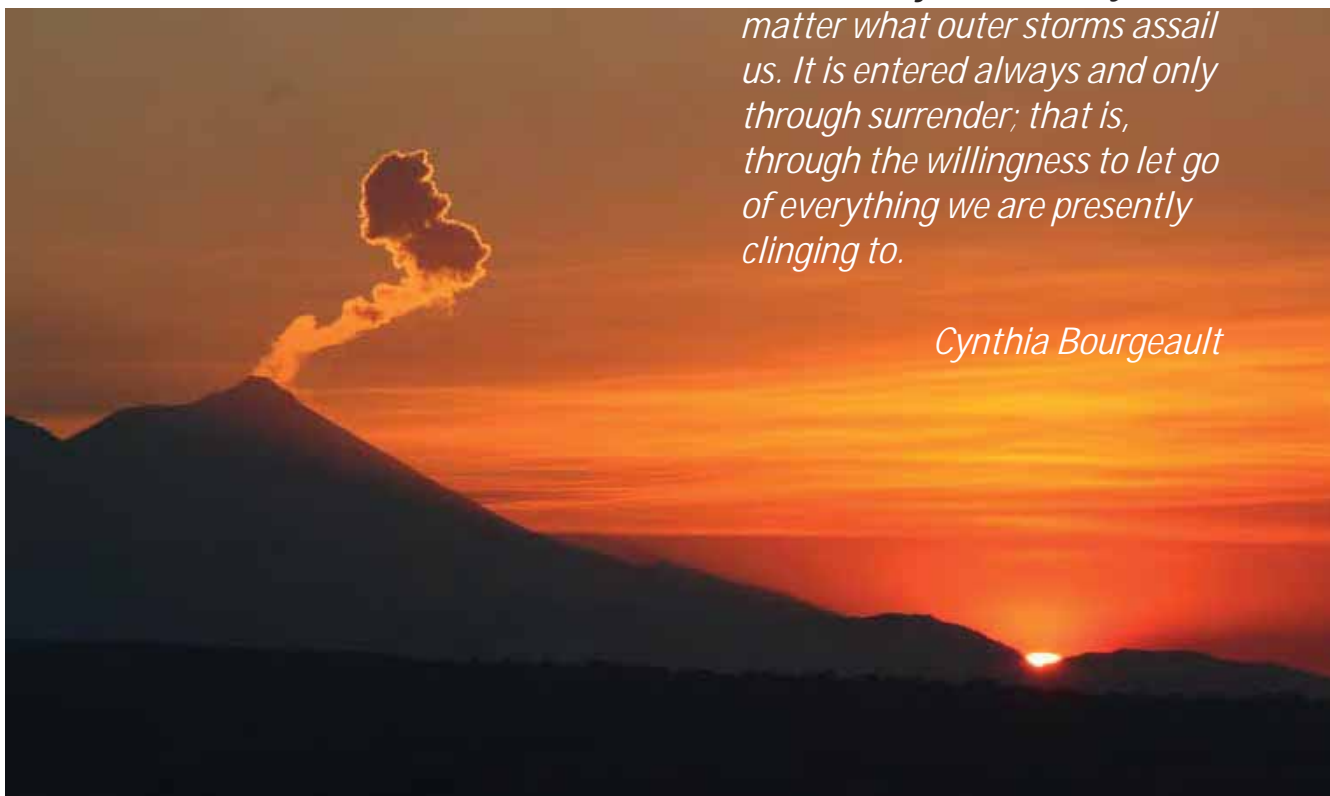


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Photo meditation by Pat Irr, OSF

We are invited to "feel that we are supported by the same process that brought the Earth into being, that power that spun the galaxies into space, that lit the sun and brought the moon into orbit." Thomas Berry