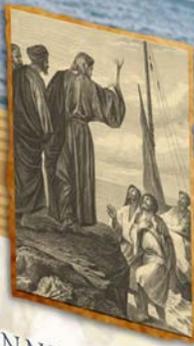


A
MINIATURE
HISTORY
of
EARTH

IN THE **HISTORY** WE ARE YET TO WRITE
WE SHALL **MAKE IT** OR **BREAK IT!**



DANNY E. MORRIS
DR. MCGREGOR SMITH JR.

A Miniature History
of
Earth

Danny E. Morris
Dr. McGregor Smith Jr.

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It is our gift to all future generations with our gratitude to the ever-present

Presence of the primordial God Force of Love

Here, consider several facts, theories, and possibilities gleaned from the history of Earth—and the Church. These considerations will expand your awareness and appreciation for both the planet and the Church. You will know more when you finish reading than you did when you started.

But keep in mind, all written history—of the earth and of the Church—is “*done data.*”

Our goal is for you to realize that *our generation* is writing its own history—*right now!*

It is in the history *we are writing* that we shall *make it or break it!*

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Our Appreciation

to the following persons:

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Mac and Danny

Preface in Stereo

Whatever It Takes!

Danny E. Morris

WITH ONE STROKE OF THE Holy Spirit's grace at Pentecost, everything changed for the man named Simon Peter. In twenty-two verses—Acts 2:14–36—Peter was transformed

- from a sinner who used horrendous language... to a “reverend” who spoke in homiletics
- from a boastful and loud-mouthed fisherman... to a plain-spoken preacher
- from the man who had denied Christ and wanted only to hide... to a bold witness who willingly stood before a multitude—three thousand of whom “accepted his words” and were baptized (Acts 2:41).

Somewhere along there, the Church was born! But when? Was it...

- when the fire fell from heaven? (Acts 2:3)
- when believers received a new language? (Acts 2:4)
- when Peter preached his first sermon, and the first three thousand people responded? (Acts 2:14–41)
- when those first believers began to meet in small “house churches” and create the first Christian faith communities—bodies that would, in the words of James W. Fowler, “transcend the destructive... idolatries of national, ethnic, racial and religious identifications and... bind us as a human community in... trust and loyalty to each other and to the Ground of our Being”? (*Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* [New York: HarperCollins, 1981], 293. Fowler’s *Stages of Faith* was introduced to Mac by friend Evelyn Laycock during the summer of 2007, at a time when his spiritual journey was at a dead end; Fowler’s book opened an inviting new path for Mac to explore.)

When?

Regardless of when the Church began, she is not what she used to be.

Through the years, I have been privileged to see the Church as relatively few people get to. I was a “circuit rider” for three rural churches while a university student. In seminary I was a student assistant in three successive churches. After seminary I was an associate pastor for two years. I pastored three churches in Florida for a period of twenty-two years, and I served on the denomination staff for almost three decades, nearly two of which were spent as the director of the Prayer and Bible Conference. (That is a long time for a Methodist preacher. That’s what happens when you are not appointable!) In my various ministerial capacities during these years, I was traveling across the church more or less weekly. In addition, for twenty years, concurrently,

I was director of the Two-year Academy for Spiritual Formation and the Five-Day Academy, with an approximate attendance of ten thousand. (I did the math from autobiographical memory, with a margin for error.) What I found, through my travels and several positions, was that, just as expressed in the book of Revelation, there really are three ways a church can be: *hot*, *cold*, and *lukewarm* (Rev. 3:16). In all of these various ministry settings I met people of all three “temperatures.” I met “singing souls” who were always *zinging*—and singing a new song each time we met. But many others lamented that they were stuck in dead churches with no song to sing. Speaking of their dysfunctional (even pitiful) congregations and leadership, they’d say, “If it were not for [this event each year], I couldn’t survive, spiritually.” In other words, their churches were stone-cold. I also heard from congregants who were suffering in their dreaded, “lukewarm” churches. Without intervention, it won’t be long until these cooling churches will also be cold.

The fact is, the world over, lukewarmness has begun to set in. Not in every church body, of course, and not in every community or every denomination. There are still some “on fire” churches with blazing parishioners and red-hot leadership, determined to set the world aflame for Christ. But what cannot be denied, in spite of the burning fires among us, is that from pole to pole, the Church is in dire need of revival, renewal, *rebirth!*

Who among us will do whatever it takes for the Church to be reborn?

Other Questions

Dr. McGregor Smith

My colleague has posted deep and rich questions about when the Church “began.” Yet many people, across the globe, are wondering, when did the *earth* begin? There are abundant scientific and theological suppositions for every viewpoint regarding the age of the earth. Some say one thing; some say another. Some Bible interpreters see a creation just six thousand years old. Others say there’s a clear gap, right in the text of Scripture, that proves that the earth is billions of years old.

We may never have agreement about our planet’s actual age, but we *do* have our planet—and it is in disrepair. Hence, a challenging question arises, the answer of which will affect our earth—old or new—*right now*: What can—what *must*—we *now* do to be thoughtful, wise, and faithful stewards of planet Earth?

Introductions in Stereo

My COLLEAGUE, DR. MCGREGOR SMITH, is the retired founding director of the Environmental Ethics Institute at Miami Dade College in Miami. In this two-author publication, my chapters give rise to his chapters. Conversely, his chapters serve as expansions of mine.

Mac Smith and I go back many years. Long ago, he led the most memorable seminar I have ever attended. Today, he is the most focused and spiritual advocate on behalf of our stewardship of the earth that I know. Way beyond “tree-hugging,” Dr. Smith is deep into cosmology and how theology and biblical truth embrace and elucidate the scientific method.

In a phrase, Mac is *different!* His feet are planted securely not only in the scientific method, but in faith, the biblical record, personal spiritual grounding, and a passion to know the truth. What’s more, he is perfectly *transparent* when unfolding his personal journey, as you will see.

Dr. Smith’s study of culture, society, public policy, and how all three have “shaped the earth” in ways both good and bad, have given him an epiphany, which he will define later. In the meantime, early in his initial chapter (2) he will first recall how he became a student of the adolescent behavior of “Simon son of John” (John 1:42) before Pentecost. His new insight about Simon provided “Aha!” reference points about many of the adolescent ways that we moderns (and the generations before us) have abused the earth. In his succeeding chapters he taps into the amazing story of the spiritual transformation of Simon into “Saint Peter.” Peter’s astonishing paradigm shift gives hope to us all.

In his concluding chapter, Dr. Smith combines theological constructs and biblical insights with the scientific method to present his professional “pet peeves” about cosmic adolescence—and how we can overcome this immaturity. He uses Simon Peter’s story as a “parabolic hook” into the consciousness and interest of the reader. The unique result is his Altar Call, (should you be willing to accept it!)

In short, in 1940, Dr. E. Stanley Jones, missionary to India, brought the ashram movement—a spiritual retreat and renewal effort—to the United States, founding the International Christian Ashram movement. Mac Smith attended the Christian ashram.

As you will discover, he and I are *simpatico!*

* * *

My name is Danny E. Morris. After forty-seven years as an ordained clergyman, I *retired* one day and *refired* the next.

For twenty-two years I was in pastoral ministry. For an additional twenty-five years, I was on the staff of Upper Room Ministries (a ministry of the General Board of Discipleship of the United

Methodist Church). For sixteen of those years I served as director of developing ministries. During that time my staff, and others, provided more than forty learning resources and retreat models (forty-one, to be exact) for the United Methodist Church and other denominations. I personally developed the following:

- the Academy for Spiritual Formation (now international)
- the “Five-Day Academy”
- the Living Prayer Center (nationwide)

I also brought the Catholic Cursillo into the United Methodist Church through the Department of Developing Ministries. Later, Cursillo became “the Walk to Emmaus.” By 2008, the one millionth person had completed the “walk.”

Two additional “breakthroughs” occurred under my supervision:

- the beginning of Saint Brigit of Kildare, a Methodist-Benedictine monastic order—the first one in history.
- the Upper Room’s emphasis on *spiritual discernment*, with eight hundred persons/churches choosing to be a part of a “prayerful discernment network.”

I am the author of fourteen books—if you let me do the counting— including three children’s books written after retirement. Today, I live happily with my wife, Rosalie, in a “senior excitement center” close to our three children and nine grandchildren.

—Danny E. Morris

The Meaning of the Title

A MINIATURE HISTORY OF EARTH

BECAUSE THE WORDS *MINIATURE* AND *HISTORY* are contrary ideas, using them as we have in the title of this book has resulted in an oxymoron. Some would say the same about the two of us. One of us (Mac) is a career environmentalist—an Earth ethicist, if you will. The other (Danny) is a minister of the gospel. Yet our shared faith stance has kept us from being saddled with a “combination of contrary words,” as the dictionary defines *oxymoron*. We are in fact “joined at the hip”—*simpatico*, as stated earlier.

In this book, we are not attempting to focus on a sweeping, historical plethora of human affairs or “wars and rumors of wars” that the first three Gospel writers predicted (Matt. 24:6; Mark. 13:7; Luke 21:9). We have intentionally linked “miniature” and “history,” but we have no intention of usurping the task and passion of historians for making a study or a record of past events. Though we will mention various historic events, we will concentrate our focus on the *beginning* of history (the earliest absolute past) and the *present day*, hence, *Miniature History*.

One cannot pick up a stick without both ends being lifted. Yet we are most keenly interested in *this* end of the “stick” because *our end* of history is the only portion yet to be written. And *all of us have the privilege of writing it*.

Ultimately, this is about how we will answer this question: What history do we want to—or will we be able to—write about *our* earth—and about *our* faith?

So are you ready to begin?

Good on ya!

—Mac and Danny

Preamble

My Introduction to a Spiritual Journey

Dr. McGregor Smith

DANNY MORRIS GAVE THE ALTAR call at the end of the three-day Christian ashram on July 26, 2009. The ashram, held at the United Methodist Conference Center, Lake Junaluska, North Carolina, was led by him and Dr. Evelyn Laycock, a renowned Bible scholar and teacher. The two spoke alternately on the same subject, four times during the retreat.

For three days each focused on the story of Simon, son of John. He was a disciple of Jesus and a giant of a man, as strong as an ox. He was also a fisherman by trade—one who was constantly putting his foot in his mouth.

Simon, or Peter, as he came to be called, was a fully grown man, but he didn't act like it. In truth, he was stuck in adolescence. For some reason he hadn't fully matured. For all three years of Jesus' ministry, our Lord had to put up with Peter's impulsive, compulsive, and explosively immature behavior. At times the loudmouthed, boastful fisherman must have embarrassed Jesus. But Jesus saw his great potential.

In one particular story, Peter was in a boastful mood, bragging about how loyal he was to the Son of God. Jesus took the wind out of his sails. "Peter," He told him, "when the chips are down, you will deny that you ever knew Me!" What's worse, Jesus told his braggish follower, Peter would voice such a denial *three times!*

And that's exactly what happened. When Jesus was put to death by the Roman executioners, Peter turned into a frightened, whimpering adolescent and denied exactly three times that he was one of Jesus' disciples.

That was a hard lesson that Peter couldn't forget. He was crushed, but worse, he was disgusted with himself—so disgusted that he told a couple of the other disciples he was just going back to being a fisherman. They decided to come along, because they, too, were crushed.

That would have been the end of the story of Peter if it hadn't been for Pentecost.

We know that after Jesus' resurrection, He spoke with Peter again, making it clear that He wasn't through with his immature friend. Then, right before He ascended into heaven, Jesus promised to send Peter and the other disciples a spiritual companion who would make His appearance on the day of the Jewish annual festival of Pentecost. Pentecost was held on the fiftieth day after

Passover. It was also called the “Feast of Weeks.” Who could have imagined the *real* feast that was ahead after Pentecost?!

But back to my own story—and let me back up a bit.

In the 1980s I was struggling to understand the difference between being “religious” and being spiritual. Lloyd Knox, then district superintendent of all Methodists in the Southeast Florida hurricane zone, knew of my struggle. I had been a Methodist all my life, but for the first time I was asking some important questions. He suggested that I attend the Academy for Spiritual Formation, sponsored by Upper Room Ministries and developed by Danny Morris. When I got there, I was surprised to find that many of the young pastors enrolled in the Academy were asking questions very similar to mine! But the Academy—and in particular, Danny and my spiritual director, Rueben Job—started me on a spiritual journey. It would only get better.

A few months after the eighth and last session of the Academy, I attended a Men’s Retreat in Florida. Peter Marshall II, whose father was chaplain of the U.S. Senate for years, was in charge. Marshall spelled out for me the next steps I should take if I was serious about the spiritual journey that Rueben and Danny had started me on. It was also at this retreat that Marshall made a sobering statement, which I’ll never forget. He said that our civilization was on a path to a dead end and that it would destroy itself if it remained on that path. In other words, we were on a slippery slope to meltdown. Those of us attending the retreat that day could tell that Marshall meant every word. He got our attention.

And I knew he was right. In fact, at the college where I was teaching, that “slippery slope” was the number one concern in our Earth Literacy program. (It was about that time that the United Methodist Bishops released their strong “Defense of Creation” document, which is currently being updated and rereleased. There was such a close parallel between the Earth Literacy program and the spiritual values of the Academy that my dean gave me an official leave for each of the weeks I spent at the Academy—I didn’t even have to use vacation time. He clearly recognized the strong solidarity that exists between the scientific and spiritual disciplines.)

The good news, Marshall told us, is that Christians in America have a unique and golden opportunity, though it comes with a heavy responsibility. Marshall said, “A *tiny minority* of us could become a catalyst for others.” We could become channels for God in saving humanity. But that tiny minority would have to be willing to say no to the skewed values of society. We would have to humble ourselves, pray, and seek God’s will (see 2 Chronicles 7:14). And we would have to put aside desire for worldly success, and turn to a new way of life.

But it was Marshall’s altar call that really surprised and got through to me. (For those of you unfamiliar with the term, an “altar call” may be likened to a “Come to Jesus” invitation. It prompts a determinant act of faith. Responding to an altar call indicates that one is “playing for keeps,” as we used to say.) Marshall said that if we want to live up to our Christian responsibility and be catalysts for change, then Christians will have to stop *playing church*!

See, we were actually part of the problem that was keeping civilization on a destructive path: everything to excess, following the crowd, insatiable appetites, secular values, etc. But now, we

were being given an opportunity to become part of the solution. All it would take would be a handful of us to become a catalyst for all the rest.

Talk about a “determinant act of faith”—I felt it coming on!

Marshall’s voice as he gave his altar call resonated. Here are his words, as I remember them:

“Who among us... will step forward... and do... whatever it takes to *stop playing church?*”

There was no question in my mind that Marshall was speaking directly to me!

As soon as I got back to work, I wrote a letter to my wife, Jackie’s, parents. The letter was mailed in a Miami-Dade Community College envelope dated September 24, 1985, and written on the Institute for Environmental Ethics stationery. (The Institute was just getting started, and I was its director.) In my letter I wrote about Marshall, saying that he “thinks America in our age is like Israel in the Old Testament. We have been especially prepared to be God’s people—to be a light to the world. I agree that America’s freedom, democracy, and spiritual heritage give us a special opportunity to respond to God’s call.”

I remember telling my in-laws that I thought my life might have gone in many different directions if it weren’t for Jackie. I wrote, “She, more than anyone I know, is God’s person. There hasn’t ever been any question about Jackie’s direction.” But me, on the other hand? “I think I fit perfectly the image of what Peter Marshall called *playing church*,” I wrote. “I am just now getting an inkling of what it would mean to give up *playing*, to let go, and to truly follow Christ.

“As I approach my sixtieth birthday,” I concluded, “I have a clear goal: to be a part of the *tiny minority* in America that responds to God’s call.”

I spent a lot of time thinking about Marshall’s words: *Christians will have to stop playing church*. And those words came rushing back to me when Danny and I met for breakfast Monday morning before he and his wife, Rosalie, left to return to Nashville. He already had a plan: could we collaborate and present the biblical story of Simon Peter, beginning with Peter’s adolescence, through his transformation? Could we view Peter’s story as a metaphor that speaks to us about society, culture, and the care and feeding of the universe? I loved it. Danny believed the story of Peter was powerful.

He was right: Simon Peter’s story *is* powerful; *and it is our story*:

- He gives a human face to challenges that confront each of us.
- He reveals human traits that are involved in our overall human condition.
- He models human steps that are essential for us to take.

Over the next couple of days Danny e-mailed a step-by-step outline, with more details on the side. He would make his presentations on Peter. As an environmentalist I would follow with insights from my side of these issues. We would end up with an altar call.

I loved it even more! I couldn't wait to get started!

A tiny minority of us could be a catalyst for others!

Epiphanies

for Simon, Son of John—and Myself!

Dr. McGregor Smith

SO, BACK TO THE ASHRAM in 2009.

Danny spoke four times about the story of Simon Peter. In the biblical story, Jesus' disciple, "Simon, son of John," was a big man, with a big mouth—and a BIG problem! But everything changed when Simon Peter's irresponsible, adolescent traits were transformed by the Holy Spirit into spiritual gifts. Peter the adolescent was reborn in a sudden "Eureka!" wake-up experience. At Pentecost he became "Peter the rock," and the Christian Church was founded upon his rocklike faith.

During the teaching sessions, Danny alluded to ways that *institutions* can also get stuck in adolescent traits. In such cases, these institutions, like individuals—like Peter—have to be *reborn*.

He ended our retreat with a booming altar call. His voice, like Marshall's so long ago, resonated with emotion as he asked, "Who among us will step forward and do *whatever it takes* for the Church to be reborn?"

There was a long pause...

Here is how I heard the question, blending what I'd heard once years back with the question Danny was asking:

Who is willing to do whatever it takes for us to stop playing church, and stop playing school, and stop playing politics, and economics, and science, and all the institutions we've divided civilization up into that need to be reborn, so that we can *be* reborn, rather than staying on a dead-end path so that civilization destroys itself?

If I had not responded to a similar altar call in 1985, at that men's retreat in Florida, I wouldn't have been ready to respond to Danny's altar call in 2009. That men's retreat was the first step on my spiritual journey.

I didn't know there even was such a thing as a spiritual journey until I met Danny in 1983, when I enrolled in the initial Academy for Spiritual Formation, which I mentioned earlier. As you've already read, I also didn't know there was a difference between being "religious" and being spiritual. But Rueben Job, my gifted spiritual director, helped me sort things out. (Rueben was at the time the editor and publisher of Upper Room Ministries, which publishes *The Upper Room* devotional guide, six other magazines, and about twenty books a year.) What I wanted most to

learn was exactly what it would take to be “religious” in the way Jesus talked about it. I was wondering if it were even possible.

So for two years I commuted from Miami to Nashville every three months to attend five-day sessions of “immersion” in spirituality. For each immersion, Danny, who was the Academy’s executive director, imported two topnotch scholars and/or practitioners of Christian spirituality to be our leaders. I appreciated that we were learning that mind, body, and spirit weren’t detached. Spirituality includes each, in a unique balance.

It was a few months after we celebrated our final “five-day immersion” that I attended that men’s retreat, where I heard Marshall’s booming voice telling us we were doomed as a society if we didn’t change.

In my church we prayed every week and sought God’s will. Every Sunday we asked for forgiveness. We confessed that we hadn’t obeyed Jesus’ commands. But after hearing Marshall speak, I remember thinking, *What else are we missing?*

That’s the question that caused me to step forward during Marshall’s altar call.

* * *

Fast-forward twenty-four years. Though I had, in 1985, come forward in response to a life-changing altar call, here I was again—only this time, the speaker—Danny, was asking who wanted the Church to be reborn!

During breaks at the ashram, I reminisced with Danny about the amazing adventure the Academy had been for me. We also discussed monastic orders and their benefit to the body of Christ. Then Danny told me that the creation of a Methodist Monastic Order was no longer a dream. “We’ve started one!” he said.

He surprised me! I thought he was kidding. But no. The 1984 General Conference (the basic governing body of the denomination) had passed a resolution to consider forming a Methodist monastic order. The Resolution was sent to the General Board of Discipleship (also known as GBOD), and on to the Upper Room, and then to Danny himself, in the Department of Developing Ministries. His group worked on the proposition for ten years.

“We now have Saint Brigit of Kildare,” Danny told me, “a brand-new Methodist-Benedictine monastic order. It is the first one in the history of the world. Sister Mary Stamps, a lifelong United Methodist with a degree in theological studies, focused in monastic theology, is the first to profess vows. Currently there are thirty-two Oblates related to Saint Brigit”

I was delighted! I remember, when I retired in 1992, how I rigged up a kind of monastic routine of my own. I was lucky that my wife put up with my monastic leanings. She claimed I never retired; I just kept doing new things. I called it my Retirement Plan. Early every morning, before she was awake, I would disappear into my tiny cubicle for my morning prayer. That was as close to a home-made “monastic cell” as I could arrange. I was grateful for the quasi-monastic practices I experienced in the Academy. I still practice the open-ended breath prayer and daily

spiritual disciplines I took home with me. Being *open-ended* was a key for me—so many of my static practices have become open-ended.

* * *

The Academy was, and is, a wonderful experiment. So were experiments with new curriculum I worked on at Miami Dade Community College. I told Danny that I thought he and I were very fortunate. We had lived through the era when *windows of honesty* were open, in the 1970s and '80s. We were caught up in Crash Courses to make sense out of a civilization that everyone could see *wasn't* making sense. For example, it didn't make sense for a people to be on what was obviously a road to oblivion. *What was our intelligent species thinking?* I had to solve the puzzle.

The story about Simon Peter gave me two puzzle pieces that I needed. Each fit in with pieces I had been given at an earlier point in time. Puzzle pieces, to me, are *seeds of wisdom*. I started collecting them when I was in the Academy. I think I got the idea from Rueben when I was doing an assignment on Thomas Merton. (Merton became my “rock.” At every “Eureka!” turning point on my faith-journey I check it out with Merton.)

Since retiring in 1992 as director of the Earth Ethics Institute at Miami-Dade, I have collected more seeds of wisdom for the “7 Generations Remembering and Reconnecting Project” Seed Bank, which has resulted in more than a hundred pages of notes, quotes, and data that I have kept through the years. (More on that later.) For more than a decade our group, called 7GRRP, has worked to put the puzzle pieces together concerning the big Ecozoic Universe story—as Father Thomas Berry, a Catholic monk, called it. He also coined the term *Technozoic story*. To help you distinguish between them, here are some hints: For *Ecozoic*, think of *ecology* (the science relating to organisms and their interrelationships), and relate it to the power to *be real!* This is bigger than civilization's *little*, Technozoic story, which addicts people to worldly success. For *Technozoic*, think of *technology* and its power to rule—and ruin!

The Technozoic story grew out of the scientific revolution a few centuries ago. It depended on the myth that science and technology could make possible a future of *unlimited expansion*—unlimited production, unlimited consumption, unlimited growth. In that myth, we were told that because of our intelligence, the human species was different from all other species. We did not have to fit into nature's “law of limits” (or from a religious perspective, God's “plumb line,” which we'll discuss momentarily). Both institutions of education and of acculturation indoctrinate young people to live out of a story that has *nothing to do* with where the Universe is going. As long as each new generation is taught to believe in the Technozoic *myth*, there will be no hope for Earth's children seven generations from now. Our chiefs will continue to flunk the 7 Generations Test (more on this later). The last wave of civilization in the Milky Way galaxy on planet Earth will be doomed.

The Ecozoic Universe story grew out of breakthroughs that occurred when the window of honesty, mentioned earlier, was open. Humans deepened their understanding of all dimensions of reality—physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, historical, cultural, cosmological, etc. They recognized the indivisible oneness in which every dimension was a part of the whole. Nature's “law of limits” and God's “plumb line” applied to every species—no exceptions. In this story the outer, physical dimension of reality and the inner, spiritual dimension of reality had been

unfolding together for more than 13 billion years. The inner spiritual dimension we associated with *Creation*. The outer physical dimension we associated with *evolution*. These two primordial realities were like two strands of DNA. Both the outer, material, physical reality and the inner, nonmaterial, spiritual reality played a role in weaving together the whole of reality we call the Universe. Every atom and molecule of matter and every cell of life participated in the ongoing process of creation. There is no conflict between the outer-material-physical dimension of reality and the inner-nonmaterial-spiritual dimension of reality. The adolescent debate about which is real is a Technozoic phobia that results in a significant waste of time, money, and human creativity.

In the Technozoic story the recent economic collapse can be explained rationally. The problem can be fixed. It might take years. It'll cost trillions of dollars. But don't doubt that human ingenuity can do it. Fire up the presses! We can always print more money! However we choose to act, eventually, we think, we will return civilization to "business as usual." Everyone can breathe a sigh of relief. A future of unlimited expansion will be guaranteed a little longer. With science and technology, our intelligent species will prove that it can solve every problem our finite planet can throw at us.

Humans can go on pretending. Only Earth can't pretend. To go on pretending will be suicide. Every human knows this at some level of consciousness.

The Technozoic story confuses people about what is transient and what is durable in the present values of society. That's why we need the *bigger* story so we can open a new window of honesty and get new, vital Crash Courses under way!

I capitalize "Crash Courses" for the same reason I capitalize Earth and Universe. There is something sacred about living in an age in which history, along with everything good and evil in humans, is maturing. The "curriculum" of these Crash Courses has not been imposed upon us. It is welling up within us. It is "breaking through," as Merton put it. Every human being is on a spiritual journey beginning at birth. Each Crash Course reveals that the maturation of our species is eminent. What becomes of the good and the evil in each of us individually, and in all of us collectively, will depend upon our openness to the future.

From a spiritual perspective, we are reconnecting to God's "plumb line." From ancient times, stone masons used the plumb line to align walls by the force of Earth's gravity. In the Bible, the plumb line is used as a metaphor for how humans can align their agenda with God's agenda. This Crash Course teaches us that God's plumb line is more than a metaphor. It is a tangible reality. The concept of the plumb line is also applicable in the physical sciences and the life sciences. There is a deep connectivity that links all humanity, all life, and all matter. In the Crash Course curriculum, a new principle of wholeness cuts across the boundaries of every academic discipline.

Windows of Honesty

An epidemic of fear was the only thing that opened the window of honesty in the twentieth century. The Cold War was raging between the two superpowers, Russia and America, and each

had enough weapons of mass destruction to end the human experiment by exercising the “freedom to choose.” For decades, the fate of civilization depended on a *MAD* policy—of **M**utually **A**ssured **D**estruction. As long as we were sufficiently scared, the window of honesty stayed open. In those MAD-policy days every field of science, religion, politics, economics, and education was in tumult because of mortal fear. Ironically, that was a good time to be alive. Creativity was called for and expected. For twenty years I could experiment with one new curriculum after another. “Crash Courses” made amazing breakthroughs in every academic discipline, because all of us were looking for answers to our fears. I viewed the Academy for Spiritual Formation as one of these vital Crash Courses.

After the ashram ended on that Sunday afternoon in 2009, Danny and I discussed personally what it would take for the Church to be reborn. I told him that his story about Simon Peter being stuck in adolescence resonated with Peter Marshall’s altar call to Christians to stop *playing church*, and using God *for our own purposes*. In my opinion, I said, the most adolescent game we play is the meaningless debate over evolution and Creation, and that this is one of a half dozen sideshows that have encouraged us to choose sides and use God for our own purposes. He asked me to explain. Here’s what I gave him:

“God created the Universe in a little more than 13 billion years (by the last estimate). If you start your cosmology, your religion, or your science with the creation of planet Earth (alone), you shortchange God. *Your God* is preoccupied with creating one little planet in one little galaxy out of a billion!

“When scientists and religious leaders debate one another about which is real—evolution by chance or Creation by design—it is an incredible waste of energy and creativity. From the beginning of Creation, a material, physical dimension of reality and a nonmaterial, spiritual dimension of reality have unfolded together. The Universe couldn’t exist without both dimensions. Science, when doing its job, will provide humans with an *exterior* compass by which they guide their lives. Religion, when doing its job, will provide an *interior* compass by which they guide their lives.”

That fascinated Danny. He said he never thought the evolution-versus-Creation debate had to end up with one or the other. (That would be an unimaginable divine restrictive!) I said that if research by both religious scholars and scientific scholars had made anything clear when the window of honesty was open in the twentieth century, it was that the *Universe depends on both*—science *and* religion!

Now, this was our chance to put the puzzle pieces together. The goal is helping people see the urgency of getting civilization off its adolescent dead-end path. It is not just the Church that has to be reborn! Every institution of civilization has to be reborn. It is not just Christians who have to stop playing games. All religions, all scientists, all politicians, economists, educators, jurists, all of us living out of the pint-sized Technozoic (again, think “technology”) story have to stop playing games! Then we can get on with the awesome role humans are being invited to play in a 13-plus-billion-year cosmic drama. We can face up to the *extraordinary decisions* we must make as individuals. Institutions can’t make them for us.

Thomas Merton said it far better than I can. The following quotes from *Opening the Bible* (1970, The Liturgical Press) are puzzle pieces (seeds of wisdom) collected from assigned readings on

Merton at my Academy Sessions. They also became part of my “7-Generations Remembering and Reconnecting” Seed Bank. *Please bear in mind that some of the following are paraphrased.* Merton observed that, in the past, the “God” of “religious man” had always been:

the God of his tribe, his nation, his king... God of a tribal or national religion... a God for us and against everyone else...

Religion in this sense is gradually revealed in the Bible to be under judgment. It is questioned not so much by man as by God... (87–88)

As the Bible progresses, we get an ever growing sense of the urgency and meaning of time... of a moment of breakthrough toward which history itself, with all the good and evil that are in man, has gradually been maturing. (92)

Merton described our civilization’s detachment from reality as the time of *Kairos*. Of the guilty generations Merton wrote:

In this “last age” all the struggles and problems of humans come to a head, and we face extraordinary decisions upon which rest not only the fate of individuals but the judgment of nations and of the human race itself.

In this time of great crisis, everything in humanity, including all we hold most sacred, must come under scrutiny and judgment. All our institutions, our aspirations, our hopes and desires are weighted and estimated in terms of love.

[In this time of Kairos,] when the living relationship with God hardens into a rigid and “established system” that claims to give humans full control of all the answers and encourages us to “use” even God for our own purposes, then nature and culture, law and religion and even prophecy become ambiguous, deceptive, fatal not only to humans but to our ability to apprehend the truth of God... In such a situation the most sacred and fundamental conceptions become meaningless...

At such times, the capacity for openness, the ability to listen to the Word of God and hear it, becomes a precious gift: for the Word will make itself heard in the most unexpected places. And it may tend to be understood by the people you would be least inclined to qualify as “religious.”

The “Kairos,” the special, critical time, is then not only a time of breakthrough, convergence, the destruction of the old, the invasion by the new and unforeseen—it is above all a time of decisive response. (92–93)

Renée Weber, in *Dialogues with Scientists and Sages: The Search for Unity* (New York: Penguin, 1990), quoted Einstein as saying:

I maintain that the cosmic religious feeling is the strongest and noblest motive for scientific research... The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mystical. It is the power of all true art and science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant

beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms—this knowledge, this feeling, is at the center (of) true religiousness.

Science and religion, together. Let's see what we can make of it.

Chapter One

The Making of a Saint

(How One Man Actually Became Another)

Danny E. Morris

WE ARE READY TO LOOK into the Gospel story of Simon, son of John. This man, by the end of his story, actually became another man—Simon Peter, one of the greatest spiritual leaders in the history of the Church. And what changed Simon, a simple fisherman known by his *father's name*, to Simon Peter—“the Rock”? A series of unbelievable, unforgettable, undeniable miracles.

* * *

Writing to you is an honor, because I'm writing to the saints of God! “Saints?” you may be asking. Yes, by my definition of a saint, all of us will qualify: a saint is *a sinner who never quits trying!* And in a way, that is a summary of Simon Peter's life: Peter, too, was a sinner—who never quit trying!

He was a fisherman, as by now you're aware, and we can imagine that he used a fisherman's language. A 1959 movie made about him, called *The Big Fisherman*, portrays him as a man whose ego and weaknesses were as big as he was.

Yet you will find that he deserves to be called *Saint Peter*, to have not only children named for him, but churches too. The world's largest cathedral is not named The Little Brown Church in the Wildwood, is it? No! It is called *Saint Peter's Basilica!*

In a manner of speaking, Peter was chairman of the board and CEO, of the Twelve, Jesus' inner circle of disciples. The Catholic Church recognizes Peter as the church's first pope, for goodness' sake, although Peter never referred to himself as such, or even as the “Bishop of Rome,” as tradition would have it. Dr. Richard Lloyd Anderson, emeritus professor at Brigham Young University, in his article “Simon Peter,” which you can read on the (Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship Web site (<http://maxwellinstitute.byu.edu/publications/transcripts/?id=79>), referred to the disciple as “Christ's chief apostle.”

All of these facts make it ironic that Peter is even considered a *saint* when we compare them to his negative traits:

- He was *impulsive*. Proof? He impulsively jumped into the water, thinking he could walk on it like Jesus did. But “The Rock” was immediately headed for the bottom.

- He was *compulsive*. There were times when that kept him from being a faithful disciple.
- He was *explosive*. Peter was not always in control of himself. Case in point: the night he just *exploded* and lopped off a man's ear with a sword, "in front of God and everybody."

Any *one* of these traits would make one hard to live around. Simon, that is, Peter, had all three: impulsiveness, compulsiveness, explosiveness. These were his *fleshly* traits.

In the flesh, these disturbing traits made him brash, inept, and inelegant, even while being equally intelligent and charitable. And initially, it was only in "the flesh" that Peter lived and walked. That's why I think of him as "Mr. Sinner." This is the man who flat-out denied Jesus, *just before the crucifixion*.

But though Peter was in the flesh initially, it would not be long before he was *in the Holy Spirit*—totally! He would stop playing games and stop playing "church," as you will see.

Peter's transformation process was very much like a three-act drama. We'll discuss all of this in more detail in subsequent chapters, but for now, let's examine the acts of his drama and the Bible passages associated with them. (Get ready to do a little "homework.")

Act 1: Read Mark 14:27–31. Here we see Jesus telling his disciples that they will all fall away, every last one. What's more, He predicted that Peter would deny Him. Now notice how Peter responded. He didn't stop with a simple, "Oh no, I won't." He said (my translation), "No, even if *everyone else* fails You, *I* won't." Then, as if that weren't enough, he went on to say, "Even if I have to *die* with You, I'll never leave Your side." (Braggadocio...)

But Jesus knew better. "Before the rooster crows twice, Peter, you—*yourself*—will disown Me *three times!*"

Now read verses 32 through 50. Jesus felt alone in Gethsemane. He needed support. He needed prayer. But as Jesus prayed alone in the garden, wrestling with all that He was about to suffer, Peter *slept*, along with James and John, a stone's throw away. "Peter," Jesus said to him when he returned for a moment's comfort and companionship, "couldn't you stay awake and pray with me for even an *hour?*" Regrettably, it wasn't too long until the Bible tells us that everyone—including Peter—deserted Him "and fled" (v. 50).

Act 1 was an *act of betrayal!*

Act 2: Read Mark 14:66–72. To a young servant girl, Peter did exactly what Jesus said he would: thrice he denied that he had *any* relationship with Jesus. Three times before the rooster's second crow! Now, roosters usually crow early in the day. But this was at night. It happened just as Jesus predicted: He was disclaimed by his dear friend.

Act 2 was an *act of denial!*

Act 3: Read John 21:15–17. Jesus had risen from the dead, and now He and His remaining disciples (Judas was dead by this time) were eating fish by a fire on the seashore. In this three-verse passage, Jesus reinstated Peter—the fallen—and in a most unusual manner. Jesus repeatedly asked Peter a single question: “*Do you love Me?*”

The first time Jesus asked, I would think Peter’s answer would have been a no-brainer: “You know I do!” Remember, Peter answered quickly—yet rather than responding the way he did because it really was a “no-brainer” for him, his quick response was more likely out of compulsion. (Being compulsive is *having the urge to act quickly.*) As the question came again, and then again, it began to frustrate the irrational disciple.

For us to understand Simon’s inner frustration here, perhaps we ought to imagine a long silence after each of Jesus’ redundant questions. Of course, Peter answered Him every time, but just play along:

“Do you love Me?” (Now, count to 10, real slow.)

“Do you love Me?” (Count to 10.)

“Do you love Me?” (1, 2, 3,...)

By this time, Simon must have been churning inside!

Even though Peter answered the Lord, long pauses might still have played a part in this scene, because these were the hardest questions he had ever had to answer—hard because of the inner cleansing, and the repair of his brokenness, that were required. “Jesus!” he finally answered the third time, exasperated. “You *know* I love you!”

“Then take care of My sheep,” Jesus answered him. And from that moment on, Peter determined to never fail Jesus again.

Act 3 was an *act of transformation!*

Now, you may be thinking, *Why did Jesus ask the same question* three times? Simon Peter had voiced *three denials* of Jesus. Jesus now wanted to cut through to Peter’s inner core and undo them all. In our language, Jesus wanted to give him an “extreme spiritual makeover.”

Put yourself in Peter’s place. If you had voiced these three denials, how many calls to repentance would it take for you? Do the math.

Through the wonderful grace, compassion, and power of Jesus, Peter moved into deep healing as those awful denials were recalled, one at a time. Through this process Jesus gave Peter an opportunity to make three *new* affirmations that wiped clean his tarnished slate. Three questions later—three hard questions later—Simon Peter was fully reinstated and restored—with no residual guilt!

Three acts were tied together like a formula:

Betrayal + Denial + Transformation = PETER THE ROCK!

I call that a “Bingo! Bingo! BINGO!”

These hard questions spiritually energized the Big Fisherman, and immediately—immediately!—he went into a new line of work. Through his powerful, personal transformation, the Big Fisherman became “Simon Peter, the Preacher.”

Let’s look at Peter’s first sermon. First read Acts 2:1–13. This sets the stage for his first experience with the occupation of preaching. He and a bunch of other folks were gathered and worshipping together as they awaited the Comforter that Jesus, just before He ascended to heaven, had promised would come to them and be their eternal partner and helper. You know the story. The Spirit of God came and sat upon each person present, like a tongue of fire, and they were filled with the Spirit—changed from the inside out—endued with power from on high, equipped by the Divine, to do great and marvelous things. They all began to speak in other tongues, and certain onlookers misunderstood and made fun.

But Peter had experienced the *power of Pentecost*! That day, the “day of Pentecost,” the Holy Spirit undid Peter’s past and healed his brokenness! He had nothing to be ashamed of anymore. Instead, he had the fire! Pentecost immediately prompted Peter’s first sermon. (At this point in time I think of him as a “boy preacher.”)

Now look at verse 14. It says he “stood up” before his mockers, “raised his voice and addressed the crowd.” Then Peter gave them a pattern for his preaching, and themes for his new message.

The pattern was so powerful, we need to understand it!

1. A major event was interpreted.
2. The gospel was proclaimed.
3. A call to repentance and baptism was given.

Let’s look at each of these, individually.

A Major Event Was Interpreted. “These people are not drunk,” Peter began, when bystanders began to ridicule. Now read verses 15–21. Peter patiently explained that what these scoffers were witnessing was actually prophesied *hundreds of years before* in the Old Testament.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ Was Presented. In verses 17–37, Peter boldly preached to all who would hear Him about Jesus, the fulfillment of the Old Testament. He spoke of Jesus’ life, death, resurrection, and exaltation! In one brief sermon, he convinced a multitude that Jesus was “both Lord and Christ” (v. 36).

A Call to Repentance and Baptism Was Given. Peter unflinchingly called for repentance and told his listeners to be baptized. Read verses 38–39, and feel his passion.

In Acts 3, we see the same pattern repeated. The occasion? The healing of a beggar at the Temple gate. Read the first eleven verses of the chapter and you will see that the spectators were

amazed when they witnessed a man crippled from birth, rise to his feet in full strength. Thus began Peter's sermon:

First, he interpreted the event. Read verses 12 and 13, in which he gave the glory for the lame man's healing to Jesus Christ.

Next, Peter proclaimed the gospel, just as he had in his first sermon. Beginning in verse 12 and on through 16, he both indicted his hearers and gave them hope. "You killed the Christ!" he accused, then went on to say, "But God raised Him from the dead! And this man was healed in His name."

Finally, he called them to repentance. Verse 19 reads, "Repent then and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out."

In Acts 4, we see Peter's same pattern a third time. From the beginning of the chapter through verse 12, we see Peter's interpretation of events, proclamation of the gospel, and call to repentance. "There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved," he said of Christ.

This was the new Peter, not of the flesh, but of the Spirit.

* * *

Who wants to remain like Peter *in the flesh*? You remember his negative qualities: impulsiveness, compulsiveness, explosiveness... Truth be told, in our flesh, *all of us* possess at least one of these. Get serious now. Aren't you at least *occasionally* impulsive? What about compulsive? And think about the last time you were explosive. (Maybe you'd rather not...)

As in Peter's life, we all have *fleshly stones* in us that the Builder rejected. I do, and you do. The important question is, do you want those fleshly stones to become your *cornerstones*? Or would you rather the Holy Spirit transform those fleshly traits into spiritual gifts? (There you go!)

From here on out, I'd like for you to consider that being *impulsive*, *compulsive*, and *explosive* may actually become *spiritual callings* for you!

Would you like to "get it all together within yourself," as Peter did?

Are you interested in an "Extreme Spiritual Makeover"?

Do you want to become the same type of bold witness that Peter became?

Then make Peter's Pattern your own personal plan. It is profound. Here's how you do it:

On every *occasion* of your life...

stick with the gospel...

because repentance is our calling!

No more kidding ourselves about our fleshly traits! We're full of them! God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit love us so much. All Three frequently get together to talk about us. They are calling... waiting... longing for our transformation! Draw near for a "spiritual makeover" in Jesus name!

We're not finished with Peter yet. There's more to come about his journey from

- impulsive,
- compulsive, and
- explosive...

to *SAIN*T!

Chapter Two

A Test for All Times

Dr. McGregor Smith

YOU WILL REMEMBER, FROM my opening words, that almost two decades ago I began collecting “seeds of wisdom” for the 7 Generations Remembering and Reconnecting Project. This project is aimed at helping humanity learn to create and maintain a constructive future, not only for itself but for generations to come. The project was initiated by Helen Wallace, a sociologist at Miami-Dade. It came from lots of research she had done on Native American spirituality. Her personal heroines were the grandmothers of the Iroquois Federation of Six Nations.

In the Iroquois traditions the wisdom of the tribes was held in the memory of the grandmothers. The Iroquois Federation institutionalized this wisdom into its democratic system of government six centuries ago. An Iroquois “Council of Grandmothers” served as the Supreme Court and the Environmental Protection Agency for the Federation.

Every big tribal decision the federation chiefs would desire to make was first weighed by the grandmothers, using a test that they would themselves administer. This test would bring to light any harmful consequences that the decision could potentially have for their grandchildren seven generations in the future. The council was empowered to veto any decision made by the chiefs if the company of grandmothers believed it would be detrimental to children “seven generations in the future.” Helen Wallace herself was a grandmother, and she was worried about the consequences of decisions being made by *our* “chiefs” to only one or two future generations. So she recruited a small band of grandmothers to work together on a research project.

A group of middle school students and I had the opportunity to watch Helen’s modern-day Iroquois Council of Grandmothers apply the “Seven Generations Test” to decisions made by our twentieth-century chiefs.

The grandmothers sat in a circle. Then, the decisions made by our modern chiefs were read aloud. Finally, one of the grandmothers asked, *“What will be the consequence of these decisions on our children, seven generations in the future?”*

No discussion was needed. The question was drawn into the deep consciousness of the elderly women, where resided the wisdom of the tribe. The circle was sacred. It bound together the deepest concerns of the oldest generation with the well-being of the youngest generation. The circle was a symbol of their unity of purpose.

As we watched, one grandmother smiled, another grimaced. Body language provided clues to what the women might be feeling. Intuitively, they empathized with one another as they considered the consequences of decisions on their children seven generations into the future.

Each grandmother was aware when an agreement was reached. Slowly they got to their feet and announced in unison their decision.

The chiefs of modern civilization were flunking the 7 Generations Test.

The grandmothers had conducted their research over a two-year period. What they had discovered made it clear that the human economy was bankrupting Earth's economy. But as a grandparent, Helen had experienced firsthand the creative power of youth and how it could complement the wisdom of elders. She believed that they could work *together* to make the world a better place, including finding a cure for the virus of violence that has infected our planet. She envisioned partnerships between visionary youth (honors students) and wise elders. They could accomplish miracles.

But there was a big problem. The *little story* young people were taught to live out of was too small. Each generation was taught to believe in a technological myth. The myth was that they could count on a utopian future of *unlimited expansion* that could be naturally produced by technology. Yet because Earth is a finite planet, both the little story and the myth were irrational. We were teaching students to believe in a fantasy world, disconnected from the real world in which they would live.

Helen's idea was to give young people a *bigger story* to believe in and live out of, so together, she and her group of likeminded grandmothers came up with a "100-Million-Year Business Report for Planet Earth." At first, the women were depressed by the report, because their grandchildren's future seemed hopeless. "That's when we experienced a miracle!" Helen said.

The grandmothers presented their Business Report at Miami-Dade's Environmental Demonstration Center, where many honors students were present. The students were *not* depressed. One fourteen-year-old boy was even ecstatic and explained why. "The one-hundred-million-year period has been a time of preparation," he said. "We are now living in the time for which everything has been prepared. This report has simply indicated that the human species might be in a time of mutation." (The grandmothers had been talking about the meaning of *mutation*.)

To the grandmothers the implication was negative. We were mutating into a cancer that would destroy Earth's "business of life." But to the boy, the implication was positive. *We now know the myth doesn't make sense. So, now we can create a bigger story.* Our species, he decided, could mutate into a "better-fitting species." We had a choice!

Suddenly, Helen sensed that if *enough* people would come to believe, in this time of mutation, that they really do have a choice about their future, then Earth's "business of life" might just be all right. In each generation more humans would:

- understand their species' story and why the path civilizations have followed so long had to end
- recognize their own deep humanity and reunite their disconnected surface-level selves to their deep-species selves, *remembering* who they are and why they are here

- reconnect the surface-level reality they take part in every day of their lives to their deep-species truth: Earth-reality, Universe-reality, and Creation-reality.

The grandmothers' Business Report included comments by four world-class scientists: R. Buckminster Fuller, Ian McHarg, Jacob Bronowski, and Carl Sagan. To make the presentation dramatic, Helen asked four of the grandmothers to role-play the part of each scientist. The four women could have won an Oscar for their performances. Here is a summary of what each "scientist" had to say.

"Fuller" said humans are in the last lap in a long relay race. The last lap is like a final exam that will determine if humans qualify to go on. "He" warned that if we flunk our exam, it will only be because we "hook young people on a game of life that has nothing to do with where the Universe is going."

"McHarg" said the human species has become a cancer. We are *consuming our host*, devouring the planet. The good news, the actor-turned-scientist said, is that the cancer will die off before it kills its host—and Earth will recover.

"Bronowski," though, said that the human species is *not* a cancer. We are simply in a stage of mutation. It is too early to tell whether humankind would become a cancer or transform itself into a better-fitting species.

The youngest and most ebullient grandmother played the role of Carl Sagan. She startled the group of middle school boys and their teacher. First, she threw a handful of sunflower seeds over their heads. Then she explained.

"Sagan" believed it was a mathematical certainty that intelligent life would be seeded on planets throughout the Universe. "He" said that wherever intelligent life is *seeded* in the Universe, it will go through three stages. First, intelligent life will discover technology. Second, intelligent life will discover a technology powerful enough to destroy itself. In the third stage, intelligent life will...

In midsentence she paused and then addressed a question to the students: "In the third stage, what do you think intelligent life will do?"

"Destroy itself?" one boy whispered.

"Yes," the grandmother whispered back. "Sagan thought that intelligent life will destroy itself... unless that intelligent life discovers a *higher purpose* for its existence."

In Thomas Berry's version of civilization's Technozoic story, we delude ourselves by thinking nothing can go wrong that humans can't fix. You name it (or break it) and science and technology can *fix* it! That's because the Technozoic story has tarnished our current value system

by confusing people about what is fleeting and what will last, what is genuine and what is just a copy.

In the twentieth century, when young people asked adults why we didn't "get real," we had no answer. We thought we were already "real." But in this new, twenty-first century we have an answer. At some level of consciousness, *we know we are not* "real." What we think is so important, is not. What we have set up as enduring is actually very temporary. Society at large is built on a foundation of shifting sand. And our house of cards is about to fall. It won't be long before young people are asking, "What are you going to do, now that you know this?" There can only be two responses. The question is, which will we make?

The Refugee Response

Consider our current economic collapse. If we live out of the Technozoic Story, the thing that will be most real to us is the threat, the danger. We will respond like refugees—because we have nothing left to risk. We will choose to hunker down and play it safe. We will try to hold on until we can go back to the old way of doing "business as usual," mindlessly applying our array of technologies to "fix" us.

The Pilgrim Response

If we live out the Ecozoic Universe story, on the other hand, the thing that will be most real to us is a sign of hope, a golden opportunity. We will respond like Pilgrims and join with other Pilgrims to go in search of a *sustainable and authentically human way to do business* that will be "real." That's why we need the *bigger story*, so we can open new windows of honesty and get vital Ecozoic Crash Courses under way! The Ecozoic Universe story makes clear that when our "intelligent species" came to live in this "garden," it came with a *higher purpose*. The Ecozoic Universe story doesn't end with us. It doesn't end with planet Earth or the Milky Way galaxy. The story goes on, and on! And *we* can choose, as individuals and as a species, to go on with the Universe...

Or we can choose to stay behind by clinging to the Technozoic myth that we don't have to "fit in" to Earth's reality, as other species do. We can consume what we want to consume and destroy what we want to destroy—all in the name of progress.

But in the Ecozoic Universe story, the future promises to be more awesome than the past, and we are invited to participate in that future. The Ecozoic Universe story is about an unfinished Universe, an unfinished planet. It is about an unfinished intelligent species on planet Earth that has discovered a technology powerful enough to destroy itself—but doesn't have to. It is a mystery story full of suspense.

Will we humans discover a "higher purpose" for our existence in time? Will we choose to fit in, or will we choose to do our own thing?

AN ANCIENT PAWNEE PRAYER

*Is it real? Is it real? Is it real?
Ye God, who lives everywhere,
Is it real, this life I am living?*

(an appropriate prayer for modern humans in the twenty-first century)

* * *

During the 1960s, '70s, and '80s, you didn't have to be an Einstein to know that humankind was on the verge of catastrophe. We were scared. When we went to bed, we didn't know if our world would exist the next morning. The push of a button by America's top brass or Russia's top brass could finish off civilization in overnight nuclear Holocaust. Their stance gave the world an ultimatum backed by their MAD policy, which we discussed earlier (a MAD policy guarantees *mutually assured destruction*). Weapons were on trigger alert, ready to do the job of annihilation. A mistaken radar, signaling that a rocket was on its way, could launch the dreaded Armageddon. We had many close calls, including the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Our intelligent species was out of its mind. Civilization was detached from reality. Our definitions were all about insanity. When individuals are diagnosed insane, we know what to do: *lock them up for their own good and for the good of society*. Give them therapy. Give them drugs.

But what can we do when an entire civilization has gone MAD; when our species is detached from reality?

As long as we were sufficiently scared, the window of honesty stayed open. Resultantly, various "Crash Courses" made amazing breakthroughs in every academic discipline. (I viewed the Academy for Spiritual Formation as a vital Crash Course for me.)

But where do we go from here? What can we do to ensure our future well-being as individuals and as a planet?

We must dispense with the fallacies of the past. They haven't worked. The Technozoic story is for people who see themselves as mere "objects." Each is just one among many, born only to eke out a temporary, hedonistic existence doing exactly what one pleases—compulsively raping the environment, impulsively stepping on others on the ladder of success, explosively warring with whoever has the better "toys"—without a thought of consequence. It's time to turn the page—in fact, *burn* the previous pages—and begin to live out a new story—an ecozoic one—that writes in its human players, not as *objects*, but as *subjects* under a higher authority, created by God to be stewards of our universe—and ourselves. Then we can pass the 7 Generations Test with flying colors!

Chapter Three

Peter, the Impulsive

(Impulsive: “I want it right now!”)

Danny E. Morris

THERE IS NOTHING IMPULSIVE ABOUT being retired—’cause you have to wait so long for it! If I had known retirement would be this much fun, I would have never worked a day in my life; I would have impulsively jumped right into retirement, way back in the day!

Not everyone feels this way, of course. I asked a friend what he was doing since he retired. He said, “Going to funerals!”

But I see retirement in a different way. I want to use it to do something *extreme*. That’s why I don’t twitter. I don’t tattle. And I don’t twattle. (Don’t bother looking that up. *Twattle* is a word I made up—impulsively.) But I am looking for one of my pictures that is good enough for Facebook.

Seriously, I’ve been using my post-retirement time to “get it together”—whatever that means! Of course, now that I’ve got it together, there’s so much of it, I can’t pick it up! Nobody wants to buy it. So, I’m eager to see what’s coming next!

But I digress. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss Peter the Impulsive. So let’s begin by defining an impulsive person, in layman’s terms.

An impulsive person: one who is eager to accommodate a sudden urge

As we begin this chapter, let’s take a look at Matthew 14:22–33 from the New International Version. Jesus had just miraculously fed a multitude of people who had come to be healed by the Man of Miracles. He had healed their sick. He had filled their bellies. And now it was time to move on:

Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of him to the other side, while he dismissed the crowd. After he had dismissed them, he went up on a mountainside by himself to pray. When evening came, he was there alone, but the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.

During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw Him walking on water, they were terrified. “It’s a ghost,” they said, and cried out in fear.

But Jesus immediately said to them: “Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.”

“Lord, if it’s you,” Peter replied, “tell me to come to you on the water.”

“Come,” he said.

Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, “Lord, save me!”

Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. “You of little faith,” he said, “why did you doubt?” And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down. Then those who were in the boat worshiped him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God.”

When Peter impulsively jumped into the water, he took two huge personal problems with him.

1. He couldn’t walk on water, like Jesus did.
2. He couldn’t swim in water, like fish do.

But into the water—and down—he went, soon to be bouncing off the bottom. Thus Jesus was compelled to rescue from drowning the Big Fisherman, of all people. (A fisherman who can’t swim! How dumb is that?!)

But Peter was impulsive, remember, and impulsive means *“I want it right now!”*

* * *

You would have enjoyed meeting an old codger about my age. At seventy-five, he bought his first red convertible roadster. He loved it; he’d put the top back, the wind would blow his hair late every afternoon, and each day he would go a little faster.

One day, he saw blue lights behind him. When he pulled over, and an officer approached his window, the trooper said, “Sir, you were driving too fast.”

“How fast was I going?”

“You were going eighty,” the officer replied. “But you know what? I’m in a good mood. My shift is over in about thirty minutes. If you can give me a good reason for driving that fast, I won’t give you a ticket. If you can’t, I’ll have to ticket you.”

The old man thought a minute and then said, “Well, it’s like this: my wife divorced me about two years ago and married a state trooper. When I saw your blue lights, I thought you were him, bringing her back!”

Talk about an impulsive answer!

I'm known for my impulsiveness. For example, when I buy shoes, I always tell the clerk, "Don't wrap them. I'll wear them home!" Because I'm impulsive, I want to wear my new shoes *right now*"—or "*ratt now*" as I've heard it said where I live.

Wearing new shoes home from the store is a simple thing, but when impulsiveness is a way of life, that's a serious thing! Impulsiveness becomes a fleshly proclivity when it develops into one's natural inclination. So forget about pedestrian things like new shoes. (That's a pun—pedestrian? shoes?) The big question is, are *you* wired to immediately act on your decisions? Is your motto "Let's *do* something, even if we have to clean it up"?

That was definitely Simon Peter's motto. He was "Mr. Impulsive!" He responded with quick and shameful answers even to questions asked by a young slave girl. His impulsive responses were not only denials—they were lies! And worse, every time Peter denied Jesus—every time he lied about even knowing Him—he crumbled inside a little... and a little more... and a little more, much like the pattern of society today!

Peter was a complex person. He was big-hearted and enthusiastic, yet hot-headed and impetuous. In brief, the fleshly fisherman was an abject failure—*abject* means, base, contemptible, miserable, wretched. Early on, Peter was all of that.

But at Pentecost the Holy Spirit transformed an impulsive, hardened, shipwreck of a disciple to an eventual saint. That was transformation—big time! If it hadn't been for Pentecost, Peter would have been a "throwaway" disciple. (Is there a lesson here for any of us?) In the flesh, he was a disturbed and disturbing character. But in the Spirit, he became one of the most remarkably transformed "saints" of all times!

A distinguishing mark of this miracle is that in transforming Peter, the Holy Spirit didn't obliterate his "fleshly traits." He simply morphed them into spiritual gifts!

Peter was a special case:

- He was "president, pro tem" of the disciples (could "tem" be short for temerarious—prone to acting rashly—here?).
- He was always present in Jesus' inner group: at the healing of Jairus's daughter, at the Transfiguration, at Jesus' agony in the Garden.
- He was the first disciple to witness the resurrection.
- He forthrightly urged selection of a replacement for Judas.
- He was prominent in "Ye Olde First Church, Jerusalem" at the organization—and many turning points—of the Church
- He preached to the multitude at Pentecost—where thousands were converted.

And all of this in spite of his negative traits, in particular, impulsivity.

I suspect that at least one of my readers is, like Peter, a Mr. or Ms. Impulsive. *I* certainly am!

Good news: there is something for us in Peter's story!

Jesus' three questions in John 21:15–17 put me to thinking about good Saint Ignatius of Loyola, the sixteenth-century hermit and priest. Saint Ignatius was not a United Methodist, like me. But about five centuries ago, he *was* the father of classical “prayerful discernment.” Ignatius believed that there is nothing more important to us than to know and do God’s will.

When I first started as a “child evangelist,” I had what turned out to be a strange image about the divine will. I pictured my life as a mature wheat field. God had taken the divine will—I imagined it was like a concrete block—and dropped it somewhere in “my world.” My task in life was to run through the wheat until I found it. If I stumbled over it, I could get hurt, because I imagined God’s will to be as hard as concrete! If I missed it, I would miss *everything*! Meanwhile, God was up in heaven, looking over a balustrade (there are no banisters in heaven, only balustrades), yelling to me, “Run, run, run till you find My will!”

That was a terrible image—and totally unhelpful!

In time, I began to see that God and I are actually co creators of His will for me. As His will is revealed, I may accept it or reject it. Each of my responses conditions God’s further responses. If I am *accepting*, God has certain options in my life. If I am *un-accepting*, God has different options. God and I are, therefore, partners with respect to His particular will concerning me!

One guy told me he was afraid of God’s will. “Why?” I asked him.

“I’m afraid God will want me to sell my boat. But if I don’t fool around with God’s will, I won’t get stuck with it.”

What a point of view. His image was worse than mine!

But Ignatius was convinced that nothing is as critical as knowing God’s will—and doing it. Furthermore, he believed, God is far more eager for us to know the divine will than we are eager to know it.

Our Duty to Discern

To know and do God’s will on a matter that concerns us, there is no substitute for making our best decision about it. That is the place to begin discernment.

That means that we do our due diligence; we talk with people about it; we research it; we pray about it so we can arrive at our best decision.

Deciding the best thing to do is essential for gaining clarity about God’s will. But because of our impetuosity, we assume that completing our due diligence is the final step. We make a decision, and we become fired up and ready to go, go, go! But making our best decision is *not* the final step. It is the *initial* step!

For example, let’s imagine that we want to know God’s will about our family moving across the state so one spouse can complete college and begin an exciting new career. Now imagine that

our family has just decided to move. Having made our decision, our impulsiveness makes us eager to act. So, we line up all of the family on the edge of a virtual swimming pool—the pool being our *future*—and say, “Everyone, hold hands. We’ve decided what we are going to do. When I count to three, we will jump into our future!”

But wait: we have no certain knowledge about what is before us. The water in our pool of opportunity may be only a foot deep—and we are about to dive in head-first! There may be stumps beneath the surface of the water—or boulders, or sharks, or snakes. I’m saying, one can’t know what the future holds! But we are impulsive and ready to jump. “On three: one, two...”

The God Question

Many people make the mistake of thinking that the decision to act is the key! But it’s not. Before we count to three, we must first stop to ask the “God question”—that’s the real thing. And what is that “God question”? Here it is, plain and simple:

“God, is what we have decided to do Your will for us—*yes or no?*”

Questions about God’s will are always yes-or-no questions, never short answer, true/false, fill in the blanks, complete the sentence, or “pin the tail on the donkey.” God is Spirit, and we are spirit. God’s Spirit communicates with our spirits—affirmatively or negatively. God doesn’t deal with fact and figures:

- How much will it cost to move?
- How much money in scholarships is possible?
- What is the cost of living over there?
- How is the housing market?
- How much will it cost to get our house ready to sell?
- How much can we get for our house?

God has no interest in these concerns. If you ask the right question to begin with, all of these other things will “come out in the wash,” and you will recognize God’s will. God simply wants to respond to one simple question, and I repeat: “God, is what we have decided to do your will for us—yes or no?” You will find that God is eager to answer!

Yearning to Know God’s Will

It was a delight to talk with our son David when he was about twenty-four and facing a major job decision. The day before, he had suggested we get together to talk about his exciting—but scary—dream of moving into more sophisticated and challenging financial management—in New York City, of all places, coinciding with his marriage.

When we met, I said, “There are those happy occasions when either of two attractive alternatives could be lived out within the spirit and love of God. At such times, it is as though God says, *Take your pick of either choice, and go live your life. I will be with you.* But there are also times when

you experience anxiety and confusion. Perhaps you feel that way now.” I told my son that it is important to know if there is a spiritual factor involved in this decision. “Since knowing and doing God’s will is important to you, it is necessary to ask whether God’s will is involved. Does God have anything to do with this?”

I wanted to make it clear that, in discerning God’s will, you can’t recognize three choices, or even two. You have to find the *one choice* that you feel is best. The other choices must be eliminated—at least temporarily. With one alternative chosen, the question then becomes, “God, is *this* your will—yes or no?”

“David,” I said, “here is the crucial point in the discernment process: you will know whether the answer is yes or no according to the feeling you get. You do not *discern* facts. You *evaluate* them. Your *feelings* are what’s important here.”

Saint Ignatius said that, in time, the Holy Spirit will give the decision maker one of only two responses—the feeling of *consolation* or the feeling of *desolation*. Both feelings may occur together at first, but in time one will predominate.

Consolation is like peace, freedom. It is the joy that comes when you think about the decision. Consolation is a wonderful, free feeling. When the choice you made comes to mind, lightness and brightness and *rightness* surround it.

Desolation has the opposite effect. It brings a troubled, ill-at-ease feeling. Desolation is heaviness; the absence of peace and joy; darkness. Instead of freedom, you feel stifled. It does not feel right.

So which will it be? In time, one or the other, consolation or desolation, will prevail. (Adapted from Danny E. Morris, *Yearning to Know God’s Will* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991], 42–45)

The Clearness Committee

For centuries, Friends—that is, Quakers—have used the “clearness committee” as a means of discernment. It is a simple process—as Friends would have it. Ask four or five people who are mature, who know you, and who love you, to be your clearness committee. They are not to make decisions for you, or even to advise you. That’s why it is important to have mature friends on your clearness committee. They can resist the temptation to tell you what *they* would do, or what *you* should do.

Next you arrange for a group member to serve as timekeeper and to ensure that the group stays within the clearness committee guidelines.

Once you have chosen your clearness committee, write a description of your issue. Make it an unhurried writing. Be “praying it through” while you write. Review and rewrite until you have your issue as simple and complete as possible, on no more than one handwritten page. Give it to the committee at the first meeting. After they have read it, ask—as though you were qualifying a jury—whether anyone has experienced anything that would make objectivity difficult or

impossible. This is important because it is not their will, but God's will, you are trying to discern. Anyone who is biased must be excused (with thanks).

Those who remain take your question as a deliberate prayer concern until the next meeting, a week later. It is gratifying to know that they are praying with you. There is great power in intercessory prayer, and your clearness committee's prayers may be intercession at its best.

After the week of prayer, you meet at an appointed time for about an hour and a half. Remember, the committee cannot give advice or advocate a particular solution. They may only ask questions for you to consider. Unhurriedly, lovingly, they ask deep, probing, and hard questions without evaluating, criticizing, or conferring about your answers. Through prayer and their love for you, guided by the Holy Spirit, they help you consider your issue from every angle. Your answers to their inquiries are not for them; they are for you. The meeting may be marked by periods of silence and deep reflection while you offer your answers and additional questions are framed. The committee's questions may grow out of intercession during the week, or be prompted by the question of another committee member—or by an answer you gave.

When the hour and a half is up, the timekeeper asks if *clearness has come*. If not, the group is asked to go their way for another week of prayer.

Clearness is expected to come! It might come in one meeting or require several, but once clearness has come, you thank the group, and the clearness committee is dissolved.

All of us have friends who would be happy to serve as our clearness committee. We don't have to be alone in seeking God's will! (Adapted from Morris, *Yearning*, 45–46)

Frequent invitations for people in your congregation to call a clearness committee would be a gift to the entire church. Clearness committee meetings would not be put on the "Activities" list in the church bulletin or newsletter. But should you decide to try it, as little groups begin meeting here and there, in the church and in homes, there will be ample evidence of God's grace that all of your members will enjoy looking for—and will see.

* * *

We've talked a lot about questions in this chapter. But back to the one Jesus asked Peter: "Do you love Me?" That question must have felt like a "stinger" to Peter. The second time Jesus asked, it must have felt like a "burner." But the third time, it was a heartbreaker! How deeply Peter must have felt the weight of Christ's incessant inquisition! He didn't know that the Holy Spirit was about to come upon his broken spirit and mend it.

"Do you love Me?" This is, actually, our question, no less than it was Peter's. Here, today, on our modern streets, Jesus' question for us is, "Do you love me?" He wants to know:

- "Do you love Me enough to let My Spirit live in you?" It's possible. Do you feel the shock of that possibility?

- “Do you love Me enough to want to know the will of God for your life, as I came to know it for Myself?” Do you feel the punch in this question?
- “Do you love Me enough to let Me transform your impulsiveness into spiritual strength?” Can you feel the empowerment that Jesus offers you?

Look again at these three questions. Are they “stinging” questions for you? Or do your answers to them offer you comfort for your journey? However they make you feel, Jesus wants you to know this, straight from His heart: *I love you just the way you are— right now!*

So you are impulsive, like Peter? Jesus says. I can turn your “impulse” into passion!

So you are impatient? I can transform your impatience into highly productive spiritual energy!

So, you are an eager beaver? I can take your eagerness and make it into unbridled determination!

So you are impetuosity? I will equip you to become My “first responder”!

So relax. You’re good to go! There’s nothing complicated about Jesus’ questions for you.

All He wants is for you to be a faithful disciple!

“Feed My sheep,” He told Peter. Translation, for both the disciple and you? *Be faithful in whatever I ask you to do!*

“Feed My lambs.” Translation: *Care for My people—big and small!*

“Feed My sheep.” That is, *Do whatever you do in My name! I’ll be with you!*

In a nutshell, “I am the Good Shepherd: do as I have done!”

Chapter Four

Earth Story

Dr. McGregor Smith

I’VE SAID IT BEFORE, BUT I’ll say it again: the story that our educational and cultural systems is teaching each new generation to live out of is far too small. Our young people are being taught to believe in a myth of unlimited expansion, infinite growth, unrestrained production, and consumption without limits. Yet this myth goes against all we know about our species—and every other. Still, says the myth, only the human species doesn’t have to fit into nature’s “law of limits” into which all other species must fit. We’ve got *technology*, and we can do what we please with it.

The myth feels like a straitjacket! And so imprisoned in our “straitjacket,” we assume Earth and our species are the center of the Universe.

Einstein had a knack for describing our human, knuckleheaded gift for deceiving ourselves. Here is how he described our “straitjacket”:

A human being is part of the whole, called by us the “Universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest—a kind of *optical delusion of his consciousness*.

This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. [emphasis added]

It is clear that *we* and *Earth* are not at the center of the Universe. Our galaxy, along with a billion others, exists in a material, physical dimension of reality held together by four primordial forces: gravity, the electromagnetic force, and the weak and strong nuclear forces.

We also live in a nonmaterial, spiritual dimension of reality held together by a God Force that predated the four primordial forces.

So what *is* the God Force, and where does it fit in?

Each of us must answer for ourselves where the spiritual dimension comes in—whether we identify it as God or some other supernatural force. We will obviously answer the question based on our own experience of that force in our lives. No institution can confine in any dogma the reality of God. But every one of us will come to some conclusion or the other about the origin of our species.

In the section titled “Epiphanies” that preceded chapter 1, you were introduced to Franciscan monk Thomas Berry. He offers a glimpse of different stages in the awesome drama unfolding in our species story. In his words, “The primordial universe [just] managed to slide through [the] eye of the needle near the beginning of time and thus entered a new state of being” (Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era—A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* [New York: HarperCollins, 1994], 21.) He continues:

The universe thrives on the edge of a knife. If it increased its strength of expansion it would blow up; if it decreased its strength of expansion it would collapse. By holding itself on the edge it enables a great beauty to unfold...

Every being that thrives does so in a balance of creative tension... [Ibid., 54]

The story of the universe is [one] of majesty and beauty as well as of violence and disruption, a drama filled with both elegance and ruin. [Ibid., 47]

More than three billion years ago... life was seeded on planet Earth: [This particular phrase came from the Seed Bank.]

The universe becomes present to itself in [a] new way... life strives to capture and save its significant breakthrough experiences... that singular moment [of creativity] has the possibility of being remembered and shared. [Ibid., 91–92]

Cells not only have the power of memory, they have the ability to share their memories among themselves... The sum total of all... significant historical events cannot be contained by any particular bacterium. The DNA of each is not long enough to contain all memories that might some day be valuable. Instead, the memories are dealt freely among the living bacteria so that the irreplaceable learning is held by the community as a whole. It is thus the entire community that probes, creates, discovers, learns, develops, and remembers. [Ibid., 90, 92]

If the dynamics of the universe from the beginning shaped the course of the heavens, lighted the sun, and formed the earth, if this same dynamism brought forth the continents and seas and atmosphere, if it awakened life in the primordial cell and then brought into being the unnumbered variety of living beings, and finally brought us into being and guided us safely through the turbulent centuries, there is reason to believe that this same guiding process is precisely what has awakened in us our present understanding of ourselves and our relation to this stupendous process.

Sensitized to such guidance from the very structure and functioning of the universe, we can have confidence in the future that awaits the human venture. (Berry, *The Dream of the Earth*, 2nd ed. [Sierra Clubs Books, 2006], n.p.)

History is governed by those overarching movements that give shape and meaning to life by relating the human venture to the larger destinies of the universe... Perhaps the most valuable heritage we can provide for future

generations is some sense of the Great Work that is before them... to carry out the transition from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when humans would be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner. (Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* [New York: Bell Tower, 1999; repr., Three Rivers Press, 2000], 1, 7, 3)

In *The Universe Story*, where Berry discussed in detail how the Universe just “managed” to slide through the eye of the needle, he wasn’t implying that random chance played a role in the creation of the Universe. The four primordial forces that established the limits within which every atom of matter and every cell of life must fit did not magically appear out of nowhere. Another force predated gravity, the electromagnetic, and weak and strong nuclear forces.

From my Christian faith perspective as a member of the United Methodist Church, I believe the “other force” that predated the four primordial forces that keep the Universe balanced on the “edge of a knife” is a force I experience as a Presence of God’s Love. The Presence of the Force of God’s Love is the “thread of oneness” that weaves together the outer dimension of physical reality and the inner dimension of spiritual reality. It is this *Presence* that gives the Universe direction and meaning as it unfolds. The same Presence gives every human direction and meaning as our lives unfold.

The Presence of the Love Force can’t be confined in dogma or defined by rational logic. But according to my faith tradition, the Presence exists in every human at birth. In every culture on Earth, humans experience the Presence as a primordial need to love and be loved. The same Presence has been described in many different religions and from many scientific perspectives. I described for my children and grandchildren my perspective in what I call “Love’s Story of Creation.” But since I’m not speaking to children here, let me give you my viewpoint on the human race.

Scientifically, we are an experiment. Why? Because of our unique gift of being able to choose our own place in this world. If we choose to “fit in,” we can bring a new dimension of freedom into Universe reality. Our experiment is centered in the last of four great breakthroughs to radical new freedoms in the history of the Universe.

The first breakthrough came when atoms of hydrogen and helium learned the balancing act that enabled the cosmic dance to begin. Atoms were then free to exist and clump together.

The second breakthrough came when tiny, invisible prokaryotes learned the balancing act that added more complexity to the cosmic dance. Now they were not only free to exist; they were free to replicate themselves and to modify their environment.

The third breakthrough came when multi-cell eukaryotes learned the balancing act that enabled them to not only exist, replicate themselves, mutate, and modify their environment, but also to join together to form new symbiotic relationships.

The fourth breakthrough came when a new symbiotic species of eukaryote learned the balancing act that brought forth from the womb of creation a creature that could write its own *instruction book* on how to live and fit in. Instead of having their responses to their environment genetically programmed, humans could invent their own responses.

Theologically, we are a gamble. In the natural world, good and evil exist only as potentials. Evil can come into existence only when it is chosen. No species, other than humans, are given that choice. We, as a species, are now confronted with the burden of choosing, and if our “freedom to choose” is real, we have to be a gamble. The risk is great because there is no guarantee that humans will choose to “fit in.” Close to four billion years of preparation on planet Earth are at stake. If we choose to “do our own thing,” the Universe will go on without us.

But this doesn’t mean our experiment will be a complete failure. Much will have been learned, and this irreplaceable learning will be held by the community as a whole, sensitized into the very structure and functioning of the Universe. Future experiments on other planets in other galaxies will benefit from the Great Work that was completed by the human community as it probed, created, discovered, learned, developed, and remembered.

But what about now? Will we continue to live as we please, chipping away at the bedrock of our current society with our narcissism and overindulgence, or will we discover a higher purpose for our existence—that is, communion with the Presence? Put a different way, will we choose to *fit in* with the order prescribed by the One who made our universe, or will we choose to *do our own thing*? *Will the divine gamble pay off?*

There Is Nothing More Important Than Knowing and Doing God’s Will!

Apart from Ignatian discernment, Danny indicated in the previous chapter that another way to discern whether we are doing our own thing or truly doing God’s will is by emulating the Quaker Clearness Committee. The Committee members do not presume to know “God’s will,” but they ask hard questions that God might ask. I think my own Methodist denomination and the Church at large would do well to develop similar practices for discernment as we make decisions in the twenty-first century. Upon some of these decisions will rest, not only the fate of individuals, but of nations, the environment, wildlife, and the human race itself.

When we arrived for the first session of the Academy for Spiritual Formation, which I wrote about in the Preamble, we were welcomed by our spiritual director, Rueben Job. As orientation commenced, we sat in a half circle. The orientation began with a silent time for settling in and just being present to one another. Before any of us spoke, Rueben made eye contact with each of us. His first words were “*None of you are here by accident!*”

I wasn’t sure what he meant, or if he really meant it. Sure, I resonated with the idea that I was present for a purpose. But I also thought that some “accidents” might have played a role in my being present. Or *were* they accidents? I didn’t know.

I tried to picture God keeping in touch with a Universe of a billion galaxies while taking time to point a finger and say to me, “Mac, go to the Academy!” There had to be more to it than that. There was!

I already mentioned that I believe in another Force that predated the four scientific forces. Before the Universe even existed, there was the presence of a Force Christians perceive as God. It was

Teilhard de Chardin, a monastic scholar similar to Thomas Merton, who equated the God-presence as the *Force of Love*. (I encourage you to take a look at some excellent selected writings of de Chardin in *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*, part of the Modern Spiritual Masters Series, with an introduction by Ursula King.) The God I experienced at the Academy was that mysterious *God-Force of Love*, which I wrote about earlier in this chapter. But when I say “love,” I do not mean love as an abstraction separate from the Universe. The Force of Love was and is a Presence and a dimension of reality that was infused into every other dimension of the Universe from its beginning.

The dimension of *Love* was there in the first hydrogen and helium atoms ever to take part in the cosmic dance. Love was there in the material, physical dimension of reality, and in the nonmaterial spiritual dimension, as they unfolded together. It was there, in the dimension we call the “arrow of time,” that we would follow the lead of the Arrow of Love.

Suddenly, I understood how it could really be true—we *weren't* present by accident! God had “pointed the way,” not with a finger, but with God’s own love. So Rueben’s first words, “You are not here by accident,” made sense.

De Chardin once prophesied that one day, after humans master the winds, waves, tides, and gravity, we will harness for God the energies of love (Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Toward the Future*, Mariner Books, 2007, 87). When we do that, he said, we will discover fire for the second time in the history of the world! At the Academy, the presence of the Force of God’s Love became a living dimension in *my* own life—and it was as if we were discovering (*I* had discovered) fire for the second time! God’s *Presence* had suddenly expanded to encompass the Universe! The God I had earlier thought of as “pointing a finger” was infinitely too small. Neither Creator, nor Universe was fitting into my straitjacketed religious imagination.

The vastness and grandeur of Creation didn’t belittle us; neither did it lessen God’s love. But we belittle God when we confine God’s *Presence* to our earthly sphere. We further demean God when we insist that the Force of Love can only be experienced one way (which happens to be *our* way). Perceiving God for us—and against others—is to demean everything that God’s Force of Love stands for. It’s especially demeaning when we examine the seeds of wisdom collected during Jesus’ three-year Crash Course. In His Sermon on the Mount, he spelled out the *way of life* He was commending to us: the way of *love; compassion, and nonviolence*—love of God, of neighbor, and even of enemies.

When terrorists attacked America on September 11, 2001, we became scared. It was an ideal time to reopen the windows of honesty on all fronts. No way: we were so absorbed in national security that it took priority over honesty. It was *everything*, and it had to come first. But we were learning a marvelous lesson: in any crisis, no matter its severity, if we have *eyes that see* and *ears that hear*, we can look through windows of honesty and gain valuable instruction at a deep-species level of knowing.

By 2008, when the global economy collapsed, America’s premature, immature, explosive, and misguided response to the 9/11 terrorist attack was reaping rewards for the terrorists. In 2001, almost the entire world was feeling love and compassion for America. But by 2008, more than half the world had sided with the terrorists in hating America. So many adolescent decisions had been made at political, economic, scientific, and technological levels that the environmental,

planetary crisis had escalated. (A hallmark of adolescence is the tendency to be irresponsible for one's choices and actions.) Civilization was closer to meltdown and self-destruction than it had been when the Cold War "MAD" policy was out of control.

But what to do about it?

Environmentalist Paul Hawken got off to an honest start when he spoke to the 2009 graduating class at the University of Portland. In his commencement address, he said:

Class of 2009: you are going to have to figure out what it means to be a human being on earth at a time when every living system is declining, and the rate of decline is accelerating. Kind of a mind-boggling situation... but not one peer-reviewed paper published in the last thirty years can refute that statement...

You can print money to bail out a bank, but you can't print life to bail out a planet. At present we are stealing the future, selling it in the present, and calling it gross domestic product. We can just as easily have an economy that is based on healing the future instead of stealing it. We can either create assets for the future or take the assets of the future. One is called restoration and the other exploitation. And whenever we exploit the earth we exploit people and cause untold suffering.

Hawken warmed to a more optimistic future:

If you look at the science about what is happening on earth and aren't pessimistic, you don't understand the data. But if you meet the people who are working to restore this earth and the lives of the poor, and you aren't optimistic, you haven't got a pulse. What I see everywhere in this world are ordinary people willing to confront despair, power, and incalculable odds in order to restore some semblance of grace, justice, and beauty to this world...

No one knows how many groups and organizations are working on the most salient issues of our day: climate change, poverty, deforestation, peace, water, hunger, conservation, human rights, and more. This is the largest movement the world has ever seen... It is called the world of non-profits, civil society, schools, social entrepreneurship, non-governmental organizations, and companies who place justice at the top of their strategic goals. The scope and scale of this effort is unparalleled in history.

The living world is not "out there" somewhere, but in your heart... Working for the earth is not a way to get rich; it is a way to be rich.

The first living cell came into being nearly 40 million centuries ago, and its direct descendants are in all of our bloodstreams... We are vastly interconnected. Our fates are inseparable. We are here because the dream of every cell is to become two cells... In each of you are one quadrillion cells, 90 percent of which are not human cells. Your body is a community, and without those other microorganisms you would perish in hours. Each human cell has 400 billion molecules conducting millions of processes between trillions of atoms. The total cellular activity in one

human body is staggering: one septillion actions at any one moment, a one with twenty-four zeros after it...

This extraordinary time when we are globally aware of each other and the multiple dangers that threaten civilization has never happened, not in a thousand years, not in ten thousand years. Each of us is as complex and beautiful as all the stars in the universe. We have done great things and we have gone way off course in terms of honoring creation. You are graduating to the most amazing, stupefying challenge ever bequeathed to any generation... Take it and run as if your life depends on it. (The Commencement Address by Paul Hawken to the Class of 2009, University of Portland, May 3, 2009, available at http://www.paulhawken.com/multimedia/UofP_Commencement_05.03.09.pdf. Used by permission.)

Now the question is, who will step forward and do whatever has to be done to respond to the most amazing, stupefying challenge ever bequeathed to any generation?

For Crash Course veterans from the twentieth century, the “extraordinary time” Hawken described will ring a familiar bell, just as Danny’s altar call, described in the beginning of this book, rang a familiar bell for me. So, will even a *tiny minority* of the human species step forward and do whatever it takes to write a history that will not be heartbreaking for succeeding generations? What is holding us back?

It is not as if we don’t know. We really are an intelligent species. We’ve put the puzzle pieces together. We are the first civilization ever to have a big enough story, a big enough cosmology, to understand where the human species fits in to Earth’s story, the Universe story, the Creation story... and evolution! We also understand that intelligence is not what distinguishes us from other species. Every species has intelligence. It’s just that every *other* species comes into existence with a set of genetically programmed guidelines for living and fitting into the Universe. They instinctively know their identity, the *niche* they fit into, and the *role* they play in the Universe story. It is only within their hardwired parameters that a microbe, a mouse, a whale, and all other creatures are free to experiment and participate in the cavalcade of creation. They’re just born that way, hardwired.

But humans have to figure it out for themselves. The hardwiring that programmed earlier species to instinctively “fit in” was left out of the first *Homo sapiens* who took up residence in Earth’s garden of Eden—and every one who followed. We are the *only* ones who have to find out *on our own* our unique identities, niche, and roles. Every man and woman comes into existence with three “gifted gaps” in genetic memory: (1) we are born without genetically programmed instructions for life; (2) we are free, in varying extents, to write our own; (3) we are at liberty, at least to some degree, to *choose* our identities; *create* our own niche; and *self-elect* the roles we will individually play on Earth. It is this awesome freedom, not intelligence, which differentiates our species from all others. Other organisms have intelligence, but only with limited freedom to use it. They are innately predisposed to fit in to the Universe story in a mutually beneficial manner.

But we aren’t. We can fit in if we want to—or we can march to our own drum, irrespective of the benefit of anyone but ourselves. That’s what Peter did for a time. He looked out for number

one—and look where it landed him. In a sea of regret. Though Peter’s faux pas weren’t environmental or fiscal, we know that he blundered for the very same reason that we often do. He acted on impulse—all the time—driven by what *he wanted* at any given moment. I can’t think of a better description of society today. We as a race will do anything to get what we want—the environment be hanged. And we’ll kill or die for the assurance of our continued existence (ironic, isn’t it?). That’s all Peter was doing when he denied Christ, right? Trying to ensure his continued existence? But today’s generation goes over-the-top, craving a “continued existence” that is nothing short of a wish for wonderland. That’s why we must stop playing games and start treating our world as Jesus would.

I direct your attention to Danny’s closing words in chapter 3: “I am the Good Shepherd: do as I have done!” Christ made His world better, not worse.

What will you do?

Chapter Five

Peter the Compulsive

(Compulsive: having an irresistible urge to act quickly)

Danny E. Morris

TO BE *IMPULSIVE* IS TO “want it right now.” To be *compulsive* is to have an irresistible urge to act quickly. The terms are very similar, and people often use them interchangeably, but there is a difference.

When you wonder about “the irresistible urge to act quickly,” think of this guy:

Ben came home early one day to his upstairs apartment and found a smoldering cigar in an ashtray. He knew someone was there. He looked in every room, in closets, under the bed, in the bathroom—everywhere! He ended up in the kitchen. Suddenly he noticed a man running down the outside stairs. “Ah! There he is,” he said to himself.

When the man reached the ground, Ben realized that he would have to pass right under his upstairs window. With superhuman strength he grabbed the refrigerator, lifted it over his head, and heaved it through the glass. It fell on the man and killed him.

The dead man found himself standing before the pearly gates, but there was a long line to get in. He stood for hours, moving inch by inch closer to the gate. But when he finally reached the gatekeeper, he said, “Mr. Gatekeeper, I don’t know why I’m here. My wife sent me to the store for some diapers. Would you believe that a refrigerator fell on me?”

Fortunately, the deceased’s record was clean and clear. The gatekeeper welcomed the good man to heaven.

The guy in line behind him overheard and said, “Oh no! I’m *so* sorry. See, I came home and—and—I saw this cigar butt, burning in my ashtray, so I knew someone was in my apartment. I looked everywhere, but I didn’t see anyone. But then I saw *that* man running”—he pointed at the fellow who’d just gained admission into the celestial city—“so I grabbed the refrigerator, and... Aw, geez, I’m sorry. It was all a big mistake. When I looked down and saw that guy dead, I had a heart attack myself, because... Good heavens! I killed a man! I don’t deserve to be here!”

But the kindly gatekeeper said, “Come in. This is just the place for repentant people.”

Now the next guy in line was facing the gatekeeper. “Mr. Gatekeeper,” he began, “um... it’s like this: you see, I was sitting in this refrigerator...”

He obviously followed a strong urge to act quickly.

Simon, son of John, was that way. But at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit changed everything about him.

Try to imagine what it was like for the folks behind closed doors in the Upper Room—not to mention the spectators—to fully comprehend the first Pentecost:

Fire fell from heaven, but no one was injured by it.
Everyone was talking at the same time—*in languages they'd never spoken before...*
Yet those who were watching could understand everyone.
Phenomenal! What an experience!

Perhaps no one was more affected by the coming of the Holy Spirit than Simon, son of John. Before Pentecost:

- he was *impulsive*—often, acting on volatile inner urges
- he was *compulsive*—with an irresistible desire to “do something,” and do it right now
- he was *explosive*—frequently not in control of himself.

Early on, that combination of fleshly tendencies caused young Simon to be Jesus’ most unstable disciple.

Then Pentecost occurred. Pentecost was a divine “Shazam!”

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit both filled and empowered Simon—and many others. He would become a pillar of the Church—and a better-than-average preacher!

But *why* did the Lord choose Simon to be the bedrock of the fledgling Church? Why not one of the other disciples?

One day, before Jesus’ crucifixion, He had given the disciples a pop quiz on what people were saying about Him. “Who do people say I am?” He asked. “Some say you’re Elijah,” ventured one. Another disciple proudly responded, “John the Baptist. That’s what I’ve heard.” “No, man,” said another disciple. “They think he’s Jeremiah, back from the dead.” The other disciples snickered. Then Jesus asked a more penetrating question: “But who do *you* think I am?” And Simon, the hot-tempered misfit, was the only one to answer, and he got it right: “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God!” (Matt. 16:16).

Because Simon got it right, Jesus said, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah [John]... You [will be called] Peter, and on this rock I will build my church (vv. 17–18). And as if that weren’t enough, Jesus added, “I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven” (v. 19). In *The Message*, Eugene Peterson translates Jesus’ words this way: “God bless you, Simon... You didn’t get that answer out of books or from a teacher.” (You’re right, Dr. Peterson! The Holy Spirit was *already* working in Simon Peter’s life—even before Pentecost!)

Imagine: Jesus was so impressed with the erratic disciple named Simon son of John (or “Jonas,” in Greek) that He changed his name to “Petros,” or *Peter*—Greek for “Rock.”

Then came Pentecost, and from that point on, “Peter the Rock” was “flying high” in the Church.

Peter’s answer to Jesus’ question, “Who do *you* say I am?” was compulsive, but thoughtful. But the next time Jesus questioned Peter, as we’ve already discussed, the disciple answered as quick as lightning. “Do you love Me?” Jesus asked, and Peter made an instant decision; he jumped right in, giving his answer without a thought.

We often do the same. When confronted with some big matter in life, we, too, jump right into it—without ever stopping to ask the “God question.” That’s a problem we must fix! And thinking about Peter’s quick response to Jesus’ “Do you love Me?” has often caused me to wonder if so many of us were equally compulsive when we made our commitments to Christ! Remember, to be compulsive is to have “an urge to act quickly.” Think about your own conversion. Did you make your commitment to Christ quickly, based in emotion or so you could “get ’er done” and move on to something else?

We all remember our initial commitment to Christ as our Lord and Savior. I bet the details of yours are still fresh in your mind. But reflect on that experience. Do you remember what followed your decision? After your choice to follow Christ, what did you do? You would have done only one of two things: *wax* or *wane*. To wax means to grow greater, gradually. To wane means to progressively decrease, say, in enthusiasm, devotion, faithfulness. After you decided to follow Jesus, did you wax, or did you wane?

* * *

I first became aware of the issue of waxing and waning in the mid-1970s. Maxie Dunnam, then world editor of Upper Room Ministries, and I were riding to work together, as we often did. Maxie was telling me about his meeting with the Ecumenical Institute of Spirituality, led by Dr. Douglas Steere. He said he’d learned that the Roman Catholics in that group didn’t talk much about evangelism. Their strong focus is on “spiritual formation.” That was not a term either of us used. He explained its meaning as being formed by the Holy Spirit.

We began to see that what we were doing at the General Board of Discipleship where we worked could only be perceived as evangelism—not spiritual formation. The decision to follow Christ was primary with us. But John Wesley, one of the founding fathers of the English Methodist movement, also had a strong emphasis on “growing in grace” and “going on unto perfection,” which he preached about in his sermon titled “On Perfection.” To us, these two themes sounded very much the same as having an intentional goal and practice of being “spiritually formed.”

Maxie and I then began to reflect on the Sunday school. This is our primary “learning center,” where Methodists are taught *about* spirituality. Small groups were catching on in a marvelous way. Our Section of Evangelism and our Christian educators at the Board were very effective. But unfortunately, we concluded, too many churches were stopping their “follow-up” with the goal of “membership assimilation.” Who among us at the GBOD was focusing on helping persons, not only to know *about* spirituality, but also to be “spiritually formed”?

We began to see that “spiritual formation” is more than learning *about* the faith. It is about

- *maturing* in the faith; that is, being able to stand against temptation to sin.

- *deliberate spiritual growth* that goes way beyond the initial decision for Christ, as in, *doing what Jesus did*. Jesus “went around doing good” (Acts 10:38). Spiritual growth requires a desire on the believer’s part to do the same.
- *growing in love and commitment* to Christ that far exceeds the levels of one’s initial commitment.

Up to that point, our emphasis at the Upper Room had been prayer and the devotional life. It became clear that morning, in the car with Maxie, that we had been stopping short of spiritual formation, even though the concept of spiritual formation was Wesleyan, through and through!

We agreed that from then on we would expand our focus to include spiritual formation. This would be a significant change. Because we felt so clear about it, we sealed our agreement with a handshake. I remember that we both chuckled when one of us said, “Let’s remember where we are as we make this decision: driving under the Donelson overpass on I-40 East.” (I called Maxie just the other day to confirm that my recollections were correct about this day. He said they were.)

That was a watershed moment for both of us—and for the Upper Room. This agreement was about more than adopting a new term. It was our acceptance of a new calling!

Maxie began to shape the ministries and resources of the Upper Room as “spiritual formation” resources. We worked together on his *Alive in Christ* book, in which he stated his definition of spiritual formation. He defined it as:

that dynamic process of receiving through faith and appropriating through commitment, discipline, and action the living Christ into our own life to the end that our life will conform to and manifest the reality of Christ’s presence in the world

In the late ’70s spiritual formation was only a “Catholic thing.” It was a totally new concept for United Methodists and for multiple denominations in our constituency. But now we saw it as a vital part of our faith.

In reflection, it seemed providential that when I joined the staff in 1975, I initiated the Department of Developing Ministries. That morning we agreed that all “developing ministries,” should be “spiritual formation” resources to help people *mature* in their faith. Maxie developed the Prayer in My Life series. He also wrote his *Workbook of Living Prayer*. And together we developed the “Adventure of Living Prayer” retreat model. Essentially, all new Upper Room ministries began to be focused on spiritual formation.

Over a ten-year period the Healing Ministry was developed and introduced to the church by Dr. James Wagner. Healing Ministry liturgies and guidelines are now in the *Book of Discipline*.

Robert Wood introduced and directed the Upper Room Cursillo, and also developed the Walk to Emmaus Walk, for adults; and the Chrysalis program, for youth.

I developed the Living Prayer Center, a ministry of praying for people, and of teaching them about the healing power of prayer, and how to pray. I also started the Academy for Spiritual

Formation and the Five-Day Academy, along with the Prayerful Discernment Network, consisting of more than eight hundred churches. I wrote *Discovering Our Family Covenant*, a curriculum for families with children still living in the home. All of these programs were spiritual formation settings and resources.

My colleague, Charles Olsen, and I presented a new face for the ancient practice of prayerful discernment. Chuck wrote two books on discernment, we wrote one together, and I have written four. We also began assisting United Methodist Annual Conferences in using prayerful discernment in conference sessions. In our book, *Discerning God's Will Together*, we coined the word “discernmentarian” as a counterpart to “parliamentarian.” We trained about three hundred discernmentarians in how to give guidance to churches in the use of prayerful discernment along with *Robert's Rules of Order* (an adversarial system).

We had association with two persons on the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches. (One was a Quaker, and the other was in the Reformed Church of America.) We coached them, and they then introduced and advocated for a consensus model of decision making. That is now the system of governance of the Central Committee of the World Council.

Bishop Rueben Job told me that prayerful discernment has also become the way of decision making in the United Methodist Council of Bishops. The discernment model is now commended in the *Discipline*.

In time, the editorial staff of the book department began specializing on production of “spiritual formation” resources. Additionally, several new spiritual formation magazines were initiated, including *Weavings* (for adults), *devozine* (for youth), and *Pockets* (for children). *Alive Now!* was also refocused as a spiritual formation magazine to guide young adults and others in maturing in Christ. The *Upper Room* magazine became more and more a *formational* resource in the selection of meditations for publication, and in the popular “Prayer Workshop,” which has become a recurring feature.

After the first sixteen years of the Department of Developing Ministries, there were more than forty Upper Room “spiritual formation” resources—actually, there were forty-one. Apart from magazines and books, some were programs, some were learning resources, and some were retreats.

“Spiritual formation” began to be talked about and valued by many Protestant churches. And the *heartbeat* of producing formational resources goes on and on and on in Upper Room Ministries.

As we close this chapter, let me leave you with two questions. These are more than key questions. They are “turnkey” questions. One question “locks up.” The other “unlocks.”

- Did you make your commitment to Christ, and then immediately get busy with something else? This question locks up your future.
- Are you being spiritually formed, on and on and on? This question unlocks the future.

William James said, “The great use of our life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.” Was that his antidote for the persistent problem of “waning”? Could he have also had in mind

being spiritually formed so that our “*lives conform to and manifest the reality of Christ’s presence in the world*”?

So, here you are! Your church doesn’t need a shot of penicillin *from* you! It needs a shot of Pentecost *for* you! It’s not enough for you to be a leader “in the flesh” the way *Simon* started out! You are called to be a leader “in the Spirit” the way *Peter* ended up!

Why would you, to quote an old hymn of the Church, “have a little talk with Jesus” to “make it right”—and then stop there? Why, when a fresh infusion from the Holy Spirit can conform your life to reflect the presence of Christ to the world?

Altar Call

Here is your “altar call,” should you be willing to accept it:

Arrange your schedule to observe a half hour of silence, ASAP! ASAP means “And Say A Prayer,” as you review the previous content on “Spiritual Formation” in this chapter.

Can you read that and walk away, as if “persons being spiritually formed” has no implications for you—or your congregation?

Or...

does it prompt in you “an irresistible urge” for your church to do “whatever it takes” to specialize in resourcing *mature spiritual growth*?

Chapter Six

Love Story

Whatever Happened to LOVE?

Dr. McGregor Smith

WE HAVE TALKED MUCH THUS far about the “seeds of wisdom” that I and colleagues have collected over the years. Each *seed*, I said, has been like a puzzle piece for my colleagues and me. At both the Academy and at my college, we have tried to fit the puzzle pieces together as we got them, in order to answer the many questions that have been raised, such as: Why is civilization on a dead-end path heading for destruction? Why are humans using their intelligence to speed up the process? Why is the virus of violence spreading like wildfire? Why are hate groups committing atrocities? Why are nations committing genocide?

Whatever happened to *Love*?

At my college we changed the name of the Environmental Ethics Institute to the Earth Ethics Institute, because we came to recognize that the crisis that is keeping civilization on its pathway to obliteration is much more than an environmental one—it is an issue of ethics—the ethics of the *entire human race*! True, it affects the “environment,” but it is so much more than that. It is a crisis of survival for, not only the plant and animal kingdoms, but for the human species and all of our civilization.

The crisis will never be solved at a political or economic level, or even at a scientific or technological level. It can be solved only at a species level—by a species with their eyes wide-open.

Bethsaidan Blindness

In Mark 8, the gospel writer tells a story of a blind man...

[Jesus and His disciples] came to Bethsaida, and some people brought a blind man and begged Jesus to touch him. He took the blind man by the hand and led him outside the village. When he had spit on the man’s eyes and put his hands on him, Jesus asked, “Do you see anything?” He looked up and said, “I see people; they look like trees walking around.” Once more Jesus put his hands on the man’s eyes. Then his eyes were opened, his sight was restored, and he saw everything clearly.

I had always thought the story stopped there. But Evelyn Laycock, a great Crash Course Bible teacher, opened my eyes to more. Mark’s story about the blind man contains a paradox—as did many of Jesus’ parables. For those listening to Mark’s story two thousand years ago, the paradox would have given the story a much deeper meaning.

After curing the man's blindness, Jesus gave him specific instructions. The man could return to his home, but he couldn't go back to Bethsaida. But wait! The man's home was in Bethsaida. What did Jesus have in mind? The function of paradox was to jar our thinking.

Evelyn explained the paradox this way:

“Jesus was not referring to the surface-level, buildings-and-streets Bethsaida reality. He was referring to the surface-level Bethsaidan consciousness—their shallow, two-dimensional way of thinking. They were stuck at a *mental* and *physical* surface level of understanding reality. They were totally out of touch with the deep *spiritual* and *relational* level of reality that gives life meaning. “Most Middle Easterners listening to the story about the blind man in Bethsaida two thousand years ago would hear it at all four dimensions of reality. The meaning would be clear. If the man returned to the Bethsaidan, shallow way of seeing reality, his blindness would return.”

The deepening of my understanding of this one parable was a breakthrough for me.

Evelyn made it clear that most of us well-meaning Christians are listening to Jesus' teaching at a two-dimensional level of reality. I contend that *all* of humankind shares the problem of the poor, desperate man in Jesus' story. We are stricken with a “Bethsaidan blindness,” and it is a pandemic affliction today.

When we see reality only at a surface *mental and physical* level, we will depend on an *external compass* and remain blind to the deep *spiritual and relational* level of reality that gives life meaning. Seeing at that deep level requires an *inner compass*, and once we have it, we will see in *all four dimensions*. This is precisely what releases the *invisible molecular moral forces* that help us grow from being “religious” to being *spiritual*. And seeing in four dimensions gives us tools to reality-test obsolete cosmologies and to update assumptions that are untrue. It will also show us why the “institutions” on which we depend are out of sync with species, Earth, Universe, and God reality.

A primary function of religious, scientific, and educational institutions *should* be to enable its students to *see* when their outer, material dimension of reality is—or is not—in sync with their inner, nonmaterial dimension of reality. Unfortunately, our leaders have been as blind as the individuals they have sought to lead, a classic case of “the blind leading the blind.” And what did Jesus say would be the fate of both? “Both will fall into a pit” (Matt. 15:14). Talk about a dead end.

So why all the blindness? Because at a species level, we have become victims, like the apostle Peter, of the *adolescent species dilemma*. Put another way, we're stuck in a juvenile stage of consciousness. Our interior and exterior worlds don't match. Most of society can only see the surface-level, corporeal reality. They are *blind* to our deep-species, *spiritual* reality. This is so clearly evidenced by the number of people who believe that physical death is “it.” It's the end of ends. There's no afterlife, no God, nothing supernatural—only what can be seen and touched. Just like the Bethsaidan blind fellow's, mankind's vision is distorted. First, the blind man saw nothing. Then he got a little “light” and saw men, but they looked like trees. Some of the world's “wise” are just like him. They've grabbed onto a little “light”—science, technology, etc.—but

without the Light Eternal, they are only getting part of the picture. They may see themselves, but not clearly, and not in connection to one another—or to God. It’s all about *me, me, me*. Why else would writers have coined the term *Generation Me* to describe the age in which we’re living? We buy more, spend more, use more, take more, waste more. It’s all about “getting all we can, and canning all we get”—who cares about the future, or each other, for that matter? Live for the moment! We’re disconnected from Universe reality at both a *spiritual* and *relational* level. In our blindness we can’t see that, in reality, we *are* connected—each of us—to the whole human community, and to all of life on Earth. In layman’s terms, *everything we do* affects *everything there is*. We consume more and more natural resources; it affects the entire planet. We rape the forests and fill the atmosphere with pollution; it affects the oxygenation of everything that breathes this critical gas. We live our lives without compunction; we are held accountable when we stand before our Creator, and there will be no second chances, with new—and newer—“sciences” with which to experiment.

Because there is plenty of evidence that twenty-first-century civilization has fallen into the “pit” into which the blind have led the blind, it’s time to mature into a responsible stage of consciousness. Put a different way, we need to be “spiritually formed.” Everything we do—from helping a bedfast neighbor to refusing to throw our candy wrappers out the car windows—is a *spiritual* decision, and we must be *spiritually formed* in order to be mature enough to make such a decision from a spiritual perspective. The institutions of civilization that have lasted are dependent on keeping humans stuck in an adolescent stage of consciousness. That’s why we can’t look to them for help. Instead, we must look to God, asking the God question about our decisions. If we don’t, we are only living for a passing moment.

In the previous chapter, Danny quoted William James, who said, “The great use of our life is to spend it for something that will outlast it.” Our earth will outlast us. Our children will outlast us. And God will outlast us. We cannot afford, then, to live our lives stuck in eternal adolescence. It’s time to grow up and spend our days on that which will be here when we, in our physical bodies, will not. That’s the adult thing to do. We must *very deliberately* become a generation of humans with both adult consciousness and conscience, living today, but for the good of tomorrow.

(By the way, William James had also given up on institutions to “save us.” “I am done with great things and big things and great institutions and big success,” he said, “and I am for those tiny, invisible molecular moral forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies of the world like so many rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, yet which if you give them time, will rend the hardest monuments of human pride.”)

In closing this chapter, I would like to offer some excerpts from a keynote address given by Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis, titled “Fate of the Earth.” (Available at <http://www.GenesisFarm.org> .)

“In this time of “supreme crisis,” we deeply need a transforming vision that opens the future to new hope.

“We must pay attention to, but not be paralyzed by the signs of our time: greed, destructiveness, and moral and ethical failure. They are not the source of our real crisis.

“Our real crisis is a crisis in cosmology, in our story of a “ready-made” universe with no spiritual dimension, and with humans as separate from that universe.

“As tiny, fragile persons, the life of each of us can be significant; and it is no accident that we are born now; that we find our lives unfolding now.

“Both modern science and ancient spiritual traditions teach us that the cosmology of our modern “civilization” is completely inadequate; our institutions are based on assumptions that are untrue.

“The human is the being in which the earth has awakened into consciousness; become spiritually aware and self-reflective. You are the unfolding universe thinking about itself. You are irreplaceable and unrepeatable.

“This is the anguish of our time: we now know that our basic assumptions are not working, and we do not have a roadmap or an ethic to pass on.”

But we know the answer to this “anguish,” don’t we? We know that for all of this to change, we have to transform from “Generation Me” to “Generation WE,” a species filled with concern—and love—not for ourselves alone, but for flora, fauna, and *all* of humanity, both now and in the future, whether one generation, seven generations, or seven *million* generations. It’s not the nature of an adolescent to have such love. Neither is it the nature of the “spiritual juveniles” of our time. But for the Church, those of us who have answered the call of God to be salt and light in our world, what did the apostle Paul write? He said, “We have the mind of Christ” (1 Corinthians 2:16, emphasis added).

Let’s walk in it.

Chapter Seven

Peter the Explosive

(Explosive: tending to explode)

Danny E. Morris

AS WE OPEN THIS CHAPTER, I'd like to begin with a story about a preacher.

The preacher had decided that he needed to visit two of his parishioners. Both lived in his neighborhood, so he decided he would ride his bicycle. As he was riding toward the first home, he came upon Billy Bott, a little boy in the church. Billy was sitting at the curb, beside an old lawn mower. "Billy, what are you doing?" the pastor asked.

"I'm trying to sell this old lawn mower so I can buy a bicycle."

They continued to talk for a while, but remembering his agenda, soon the preacher said his good-byes and rode away. He hadn't gotten far, though, when a thought occurred to him. He turned his bike around and rode back to the curb, where Billy was still sitting. "Billy," he said, "how about me trading my bicycle for your lawn mower?"

"I'd have to ride it to see if I like it." Billy got on the bicycle. He rode around in a few circles, then took a spin around the block.

When Billy returned, he said, "You've got a deal."

Now the preacher decided to test his new equipment. He pulled on the lawn mower cord... but it didn't crank. He pulled a second and third time, and then a fourth. Nothing.

Billy said, "You have to cuss it to get it to crank."

"Billy," the pastor replied, "I'm a preacher. I don't cuss. I can't remember the last time I cussed.

I've probably forgotten *how* to cuss."

Billy said, "If you'll pull that cord eight or ten more times, it'll all come back to you!"

* * *

I hope your recollection of how to cuss never comes back to you. But I also hope that our discussion in chapter 5, about being spiritually formed, does come back to you—again and again! As we delve into this chapter, let me ask you a question: Are you being sufficiently, spiritually formed to meet not only your needs but the needs of those around you?

Up to a certain point in our story of Peter, he had definitely *not* been spiritually formed—at least not enough to keep him from being EXPLOSIVE!

Let's review some of Peter's "explosions."

After Peter witnessed Jesus' transfiguration on the Mount of Transfiguration, and saw Him talking with Moses and Elijah, Peter impetuously blurted out, "Hey, let's build three monuments! One for You... and one for him, and—and one for him!" (see Matthew 17). News flash: Peter was a *fisherman*; he wasn't a *contractor*!

Fast-forward a few chapters. It's the night of the betrayal, and Jesus has just told his disciples, "This very night you will *all* fall away [from Me]" (Matthew 26:31).

"No!" Peter all but yells. Can't you just imagine the fiery fisherman jumping to his feet and thumping his chest dramatically? "Even if the *whole wide world* walks out on You, *I* won't." (That's my interpretation, anyway...) Then, two verses later (back to the NIV now, but with emphasis), "Even if I have to *die* with you, *I* will never disown you" (v. 35). The "Big Fisherman" reminds me of Mount Vesuvius; except, Peter sounded like "*Mouth*" Vesuvius at the Last Supper. (Peter was a Galilean. They had a reputation for lots of *energy*.) Check out these eruptions:

"Simon, Simon," Jesus said to Peter at the Last Supper, "Satan has asked to sift you as wheat" (Luke 22: 31).

"Lord," spewed "Mouth" Vesuvius, "I am ready to go with you to prison *and to death*" (Luke 22: 33, emphasis added). Jesus sweetly responded by prophesying Peter's repeated denials and the rooster's crows. But He also reassured Peter that He would be praying for him throughout the testing. And He did pray—that Peter's faith would not fail so that he could strengthen his brothers when his testing ended. (How would you feel about having your life-story prophesied, all at once, like this— and at the Last Supper, of all places?)

But Peter "went bang" again while Jesus was washing the disciples' feet! The apostle John tells us that everything was going great until Jesus knelt to wash *Peter's* feet (story paraphrased):

(Loudly) "*No!*" Peter cried. "You will *never* wash *my* feet."

(Softly) "Unless you let Me wash you, you have no part with Me."

(Loudly) "Then—then—don't stop at my *feet*, Lord!" Peter burst out. "Wash my hands—and my head too!"

The disciples never knew when this "man-grenade" was going to go off.

But that wasn't Peter's last "detonation." In the Garden, after already bailing on Jesus and falling asleep when He needed Peter most, the volatile disciple went up in smoke when soldiers came to arrest Jesus. With a "bang," he drew his sword and, as mentioned in a previous chapter, cut off a man's ear (John 18:10)! It seemed not to matter to Peter that Jesus was standing right there!

Mm-hmm. Peter was out of control.

Then Jesus was led away. We know that Peter's heart was broken from what Luke wrote about him. "Peter followed at a distance" (22:54b). He was the only one who did. That tells us everything about who Simon Peter was *not* anymore. He was no longer the "ringmaster"; he had ceased to be the star of the show. But he would still be an "actor" bound by his explosive nature.

The testing by Satan brought fourth Peter's most devastating detonation of all: during the trial and crucifixion of Jesus, Peter popped off and denied any association with Him whatsoever. That is, Peter flat lied!

Peter now stood in the eye of a New Testament "perfect storm." His trusted friend Judas's betrayal of Christ; his *best* friend, Jesus', arrest; and his own failure in denying his Savior—all piled up to make an unimaginable emotional hurricane. And "he went outside and wept bitterly" (v. 62). He was broken.

Then came the Day of Pentecost, the day of Peter's transformation. But now, not only did the Holy Spirit have to deal with Peter's abrasive "raw materials"—his compulsiveness, his impulsiveness, and his explosiveness—He also had to contend with a broken man. But God knows how to make something beautiful out of our brokenness, doesn't He?

By now, we know all about what Peter became. God changed him from the inside out. Of course, the essentials of Peter's personality remained the same. He continued to be explosive. We know this because Peter reacted thunderously *again* when Ananias and Sapphira had the nerve to lie to him. He pounced on their deceit like a violent storm—and he was so angry that Ananias dropped dead on the spot.

You might say, "Well, it doesn't sound like Peter changed very much." But that's not the case. See, at Pentecost, though the Spirit did not *remove* Peter's negative traits, He *redeemed* them, transforming them in such a way that they became spiritual gifts. Can you imagine someone milquetoast and mild having the kind of ministry that Peter ultimately did? No way! God needed Peter the Explosive for a job like that.

As we look at "Peter the Explosive" there is something here for us! Are you ready to receive new spiritual gifts? You could be *flooded* with them if you would simply ask the Holy Spirit to transform and redeem your raw materials! Why not give it, not just a go, but a good go! You can start by asking the Holy Spirit to embed three simple rules into your soul. They will change your weaknesses into spiritual gifts that can be used by you, and by the Holy Spirit *in* you! Let me explain.

Bishop Rueben Job has blessed the church by presenting, again, John Wesley's "three simple rules" for Christian living. I watched Rueben write a book about them, titled *Three Simple Rules* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2007), and begin receiving many accolades for it. The *Three Simple Rules* provides a profound pattern to help us become spiritually formed.

Rule number one is: Do no harm.

What if we were to commit to doing no harm to those with whom we disagree? According to the bishop,

- we could no longer gossip about someone;
- we could not put others down;
- we could no longer manipulate facts to our advantage (that’s a big one for me!); and
- we could no longer discredit those who don’t agree with us.

I highly recommend that you get this book and read Rueben’s “Do No Harm” chapter to see how and why this rule is so poorly practiced—why it is so radical and so rigorous! (My wife, Rosalie, told him, “I love your book, but I want you to take out pages 19–32 because they are too hard for me to follow!”) I guarantee that if you take the time to read this chapter, you will discover what it would mean to actually live by this first “simple rule.”

Wesley’s rule number two is: Do good. This one is tough—maybe harder than rule one. Rueben Job says it means to seek good for everyone! In his own words, “Every act and every word must pass through the love and will of God and there be measured to discover if its purpose does indeed bring good and goodness to all it touches.” (38)

This second rule is radical, because, says Rueben, if I follow it, “I am committing myself to seeking *good* for everyone in my world and everyone in God’s world” (ibid.).

Look at the risks if you offer a gift of goodness:

1. It could be rejected.
2. It could be seen as weakness.
3. It could be accepted—but then misused. (39–40)

What a challenge for change, this call to “do good.” You may wonder, *What if I do commit to doing good, and I begin to think of others first? Is it really healthy to forget about myself like that?* or *What if I really did let what’s good for the community be my guide? Would this bring me closer to Jesus?* Bishop Job says, “I have a feeling that it would!”

Finally, rule number three: Stay in love with God. Here is a message directly from Bishop Job’s book to all of us who want to do exactly that:

We can accuse Jesus of many things, but we cannot accuse him of neglecting his relationship with God. He must have learned early how important it was to stay close to God if he was to fulfill his mission in the world. He must have learned early that there was power available to live the good life and that power involved staying connected, staying in touch, and staying in love with his trusted Abba... He found not only his strength and guidance but his greatest joy in communion, companionship with his loving Abba. Perhaps it was these experiences that prompted his teaching about prayer and faithfulness and probably gave birth to his question to Peter. (56)

The question Jesus asked of Peter[,],... “Do you love me?” reveals a great deal about the essentials of our relationship with God. Three times Jesus asked, “Do you love me?”...

Staying in love with God was the primary issue of a faithful life then, and it is today. For from such a life of love for God will flow the goodness and love of God to the world. It can be no other way. One who is deeply in love will be constantly formed and transformed by that relationship. And such a transformed life will be a natural channel of God's goodness, power, and presence in the world. (57–58)

We know that in answer to Jesus' thrice-asked question, Peter declared his love three times. In so doing, writes the bishop, "Peter was drawn toward a new beginning, a new future. The failures of the past are to be forgotten and the new possibilities are to be embraced. And those new possibilities are reflected in the mission given to Peter.

"Each of us has our own litany of failures to recite," he continues, but like Peter, we can start over again." Pentecost was Peter's chance at a new beginning. Rather than look back at his past moral breakdowns, he picked up the pieces and did what Christ wanted most. You remember Jesus' response to Peter, don't you, when Peter answered, "*Yes! I love You*"? He said, "Feed My lambs."

Today, Jesus asks us the same question He asked Peter, and when we respond affirmatively, His response to us will be the same as it was to his unbalanced disciple: "Feed My lambs," or put a different way, "Tend My sheep." You can easily do this—no matter *how* you've failed in your past—when you have stayed "in love with God."

Wesley's three simple rules can be easily understood and practiced by *anyone*, every day of one's life. If you will practice this way of living, it will help to keep you from doing evil and will enable you to do good, just as Peter did time and time again from Pentecost on. This kind of loving, giving lifestyle promises a way to claim and enjoy your full inheritance as children of God. Sounds almost too good to be true, doesn't it? But the facts are that those who have followed these three simple rules have been able to do that very thing—and they've discovered their world changed.

Allow me, again, to recommend that you get a copy of Bishop Job's book. Read all the way through to the end of the chapter titled "Stay in Love with God," and then share your copy with someone else. Or better yet, get a copy for him or her too. You won't regret it.

* * *

Bishop Job also said in his book that the way to stay in love with God is through our spiritual disciplines. Wesley called these disciplines "ordinances," and they include worship; Holy Communion; prayer, both individually and as a family; searching the Scriptures through Bible study; and fasting.

How would you rate yourself with respect to your practice of spiritual disciplines? Perhaps I can offer some help.

The disciplines that have changed my life are found in the John Wesley Great Experiment, "Wanted: Ten Brave Christians." This experiment, which you can also see in my *A Life That Really Matters* (Franklin, TN: Providence House, 1999), consists of five disciplines that I and

several church members committed to practicing for a month—to *see what would happen*. Here they are, from page 90 of my book:

**Wanted:
Ten Brave Christians Who for One Month Will**

1. Meet once each week to pray together.
2. Give two hours' time each week to our church. (Self-surrender)
3. Give God one-tenth of earnings during this month. (Self-denial)
4. Spend 5:30 to 6:00 each morning in prayer and meditation. (Self-control)
5. Witness for God their experiences to others.

Of these five disciplines, which would be easiest for you? Which would be hardest? Why? Let me offer you some help that guided me in my implementation of this experiment.

Sam Teague, a Sunday school teacher of young adults in our church, challenged us to “put God first” in these five ways for one month. He also made a list of thirty-one Scripture passages to read and pray about during the month, one passage each day. You can find these passages listed in *A Life That Really Matters* and use them as you practice spiritual discipline number 3. You will divide your time for this discipline into ten-minute increments. This is what it should look like (adapted from Appendix D of *A Life That Really Matters*):

5:30–5:40 Read the Scripture for the day; then pray and meditate on it. Next, write out in fifty words or fewer how it applies to your life.

5:40–5:50 Choose one totally unselfish and unexpected act of kindness or generosity that you will do today, and do it. Then, in a notebook, write down both the deed and the name of the person for whom you did it. Keep a written record of (1) the reaction of the person toward whom the kindness is extended and (2) the effect of your act on yourself personally.

5:50–6:00 Write out carefully how you would like to build and develop your life. Go into as much detail as you desire. Take your time, and be thoughtful and prayerful. One well prayed-out and thought-out sentence per day would be excellent progress.

As you pray, make sure that you ask God *each time* for a *sense of divine direction for your life*. Also ask God to *help you understand how important it is for you to totally surrender to the divine will*. Once you know God's will, you will need *great strength of mind for the development of self-discipline*.

Can you imagine what your church would look like if, as a whole, they practiced these three movements of prayer? What value can you see for each member of your church to ask God *daily* for these spiritual blessings? How would it affect the leadership? The congregation?

I'm guessing that, after Pentecost, Peter's prayers were very similar. The man who wrote 1 and 2 Peter was not the same man we saw pouring his emotional “lava” out at just about every turn throughout the Gospels. He became spiritually formed, because he practiced his own spiritual disciplines.

In thinking about the five disciplines above, are there any that you need to tighten your cinch on? How's your prayer life? Your scripture study? What do you do for the church? For the widow across the street? Do you share Christ with others? Do you give your "tithes"?

Benedictine nun Joan Chittister once said, "The secret of life... is that it must be developed from the inside out" (*Illuminated Life: Monastic Wisdom for Seekers of Light* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2000], 14). That's absolutely true. Peter the Explosive would testify of that. So, *what can you do* about the big question that we each must face?

Three things: Think about it, figure it out... and then, *go for it!*

Let me close this chapter by sharing with you a prayer, put on the lips of Jesus, by Brother Charles of Jesus:

PRAYER OF ABANDONMENT

Father, I abandon myself into your hands.

Do with me what you will.

Whatever you may do, I thank you.

I am ready for all. I accept all.

Let only your will be done in me,

And in all your creatures.

I ask no more than this, O Lord.

Into your hands I commend my soul.

I offer it to you with all the love of my heart,

For I love you Lord, and so need to give myself,

To surrender myself into your hands,

Without reserve, and with boundless confidence,

For you are my Father. Amen.

—Brother Charles of Jesus

Powerful, isn't it? It reflects some of the last words of Christ before the Cross. But now, read it as if *Jesus were speaking these words to you*. After all, Christ abandoned all divine rights—indeed, everything—to bring light and life to *you*.

PRAYER OF ABANDONMENT

[*Jesus calls your name*]

I abandon Myself into your hands.

Do with Me what you will,

Whatever you may do, I thank you.

I am ready for all. I accept all.

Let only God's will be done *through* Me,
 for you—and all creatures.
I ask no more than this, *my child*.

Into your hands [*Jesus continues, speaking to you*]
I commend My *Spirit*.

 I offer it to you with all the love of My heart,
For I love you, *My child*, and so need to give Myself,
 To surrender Myself into your hands,
Without reserve, and with boundless confidence,
 For you are *Mine*. Amen.

Amen... Amen... Amen!

Chapter Eight

The Last Wave

Dr. McGregor Smith

*Will civilization get off of its path to a dead-end, in time?
Will adolescent humans mature to responsible, adult maturity, in time?*

The Epic Story of All Stories (Worth repeating, again and again and again!)

TIME FOR A QUICK REVIEW.

Before there was a Universe, there was the *Presence* of the God Force of *Love*. The *Presence* was there when the end of the war of subatomic particles signaled the “first Great Freedom Experiment.” That experiment began with the first atom of hydrogen. Hydrogen was *free* to exist, to endure, *to be*.

That hydrogen atom pioneered a path that would lead to more freedoms, and brought into being the first “instruction book” on how to exist and fit in. This instruction book was embedded in hydrogen’s mysterious memory, which gave it permanence. The “book” contained the first elegant rules for assembling a viable universe.

Billions of years later, on a planet on the outer edge of the Milky Way galaxy, Albert Einstein deciphered the rules in hydrogen atoms’ instruction book. He then made available to humans the powerful formula that had been carried in hydrogen’s memory since the beginning of time. Humankind used the formula to split the atom—and their newfound knowledge made possible the atomic bomb. In that cosmological and historical event, the human species achieved the power to destroy the earth some 13 billion years after hydrogen gave the Universe its first freedom and stability! And what did they do with this power and unique freedom? They used it to build weapons of mass destruction, to destabilize planet Earth, and to bring death and destruction to our own race.

But long before the atomic bomb, we’d already had a lot of practice at the art of demolition. Take a quick peek at world history. As each of the great ancient empires was born, a previous one was first decimated. We read of the Babylonian Empire, the Persian Empire, the Greek Empire, and the Roman Empire. (This last power was so corrupt and so divided that it was already destroyed from within, before ever a sword was raised.) Consider even the last five hundred years. One war after another has left countries great and small in shambles, its people left to pick up the pieces. The Eighty Years’ War in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries claimed hundreds of thousands of lives, as did the eighteenth-century Seven Years’ War. In the nineteenth century there was the Taiping Rebellion, responsible for the deaths of millions. And the confrontations connected to Menelik II of Ethiopia, and the Napoleonic wars. Again, millions

of people dead, not just from the warfare itself, but also from subsequent famine and disease. The collateral damage has been unspeakable.

The twentieth century brought out the worst in people. World Wars I and II, the war between China and Japan that began in the 1930s, the Korean War, Vietnam, and more. There's been conflict in Russia, conflict in the Congo, conflict in Bangladesh, Mexico, South America... and the list goes on. And these are but a few among many. But in every case, tottering civilizations have gotten back on their feet and begun a new era. New civilizations have risen from the ashes of the previous ones. We've come to count on that. We've had to. Why? Because in wave after wave of civilizations, not one was *sustainable*! Hmm...

If our civilization is the next to fall, it will be because we have taught our young people to live out of a *Technozoic story*, a story that glorifies technology—indeed, worships it—but a story without a *reason for being*. In a phrase, a story that is *devoid of love*. How tragic. The deepest need of every human being on Earth is to love and be loved. It's what we were designed for: to love one another and to love the One who created us, of whom it is written, "God is love" (1 John 4:8). This Love is the most powerful Force in the Universe. But unless we learn, planet-wide, to live out love—not violence, not terror, not environmental plunder, but love—we will reach the dead end that has been a topic in my chapters. Our adolescent behavior—"That's mine!" "No, it's mine!" "I had it first!" "But I want it, and I'll *take* it!"—will spell the end of the world as we know it.

And that brings me to an epiphanic question. What if we *grew up*? And what if, in our efforts to do so, we applied Wesley's three simple rules, which Danny expounded in the last chapter, to our earth, to our environment, to *science*? Let's see what that would look like:

1. *Do no harm*. If our generation would commit even to this one rule, there would no longer be wars over oil—or over religion. There would be no need to dig mass graves—such as the two hundred-plus graves found in Iraq after the overthrow of Saddam Hussein—and fill them with the bodies of innocent people because of our explosive, compulsive, and impulsive natures. We'd stop the slash-and-burn approach to building the economic situation that we want *now*.
2. *Do good*. For the tree-huggers out there, this one's a no-brainer. Instead of raping the ecosystem, what if we nurtured it? Plant trees instead of mowing them down. Go really green—not the Technozoic version of green! Clean up the littered landscape instead of dumping more on it. Join hands with other individuals and organizations who are committed to sustaining the Universe—for seven generations and beyond. This is good ethics. It's responsible. It's *mature*. And it's a reflection of a people who are being *spiritually formed*.
3. *Stay in love with God*. This one is the most important of all. If we are truly in love with God, we won't willingly be bad stewards of the earth God has entrusted to us. We'll shun wastefulness and value personal responsibility, not just in and toward the church, but in and toward *every* living thing. And when we leave this planet, each in our own way, there will be something left for those who follow us? Why? Because we loved God *and* those made in His image. We can't even say that we love God if we don't love others. John made that clear: "Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love" (1

John 4:8). So we stay in love with God—perhaps practicing the five disciplines in Wesley’s Great Experiment—and it will be evidenced in our love for what God has created for us.

These are just some thoughts, but I hope you will entertain them. If we don’t do something quickly, what our honor student predicted will come to pass. Civilization will destroy itself. Not a pretty picture. So think on these things...

* * *

It has been fun—two old codgers sipping cold, leftover coffee, cooking up a grandiose plan to get civilization off its fast track to self-destruction—and get ourselves, and the rest of our species’ “selves” unstuck from our *adolescent species dilemma*—as if anybody cares!

Why not? All it would take in the beginning is a *tiny minority*! Actually, it might take *many* tiny minorities to get sufficient momentum going, but you’ve heard the adage, I’m sure, from the old Aesop fable: Little by little does the trick. Together, no matter how small our individual bands, we can reach a “critical mass”! So swing wide those windows of honesty, and let’s do it!

Chapter Nine

A Message from Earth

Dr. McGregor Smith

No early population of human beings could have survived had it not been for the dominant role that love and cooperation played in holding them together.

Ashley Montagu

Love is the most universal, formidable, and mysterious of cosmic energies

Teilhard de Chardin

THE OWLS WERE COMMUNICATING DAY and night.

They glided in low over the crystal clear spring and settled on the limbs of the great oaks overlooking the blue water. They'd as likely come at twelve noon as at midnight. They carried on their conversation as if we weren't there. I am sure they meant for us to hear.

I had the privilege of their company for several weeks. We shared a remnant of God's original design for Earth in a tiny nature preserve in a north Florida wilderness.

The hooting of the owls got most of my attention. The croaking of frogs at dusk was muted compared to years past, but seemed no less urgent. I believe the owls and frogs were asking each other the same questions: "Why don't they get it? Will they wake up, and grow up, in time?" These were reasonable questions for endangered species to ask.

I'm sure you know that the "they" the owls and frogs were discussing is *us*. And in answer to their questions, at one level, we do "get it"—that is, we at least know what we *don't* get. We even know *why* we don't get it. After all, we are a species too. But our deep-species level of *knowing* gets blotted out in our big, complex human brains. Still, we know everything we need to know for us to *wake up and grow up* in time.

The message from my wilderness friends doesn't give us new information. The last thing we need is more of that. Earth, owl, frog, the Universe, and God all know that we have enough information. More research, more experts, and more authorities will only worsen, not solve, the multiple crises we could never have created without *more* research, *more* experts, and *more* authorities. If we choose to act on information we already have, we could solve all the crises we've created for ourselves and the world. We do have a choice. Owl and frog are glad to know that! They are already experiencing the terrible consequences of our bad choices.

On the other hand, our species has made amazing progress from the beginning. We were in the infancy of our species a mere sixty thousand years ago.

Our maturation was impressive throughout our tribal childhood to our adolescent stage of consciousness. The irreplaceable learning held in the human community as a whole is awesome. We know, for instance, when we first entered our adolescent stage of consciousness. It was when we left behind our peaceful Neolithic village culture, with its relatively level playing field, and embraced the exciting, chaotic culture of the first warring civilizations more than five thousand years ago. We traded our level playing field for civilization's pyramid culture of power and privilege. And from antiquity, our irresponsible adolescent behavior has been the norm in civilization after civilization.

Each new civilization created its own mythic little story. The various myths became the individual *cosmologies* out of which these civilizations lived. One function of each story was to explain the "Creation." How did the world begin? How did everything come to be the way it is? Another function was to justify the injustices that were inevitable because of civilization's pyramid of power and privilege. Climbing to the top of the pyramid was like the adolescent game of "king of the mountain." The few winners who got to the top were in command, and stayed there. They kept the losers—the vast majority of humans—confined in the bottom of the pyramid.

Nevertheless, every civilization accomplished great things—architecture, literature, religion, art, science, philosophy, etc. Unfortunately, each also developed some terrible things: weapons, slavery, genocide—and more powerful technologies than the previous civilization's, leaving their individual scar on human consciousness. As a result, no past civilization was sustainable. Every mythic story was "make-believe." No pyramid of power and privilege was authentically human. The story out of which every civilization has lived justified the status quo, so every civilization was doomed to fall. Where are the "ancient" Greeks today? The ancient Egyptians? The ancient Romans? Though Rome, Greece, and Egypt still stand, the individual ways of life of their "ancient" civilizations are extinct, as are those of the Vikings, the Mayans, the Barbarians, and on and on. Consider the number of extinct languages: Adai, Beothuk, Cayuse, Dalmatian—at least three for every letter of the alphabet, depending on whose account you read. And ancient gods? Who worships Loki these days? Or Odin? Or Aphrodite? All of these were parts of an earlier, unsustainable "act" on the world's epic stage.

A new act began when our modern, Western civilization created its own mythic little story. Regrettably, our story has nothing to do with the real world, because it, too, is about accommodating the status quo.

The Turning Point

We know we are at a turning point in the human story. Life on Earth has an opportunity to bring into being a new dimension of reality. Our “higher purpose” could be to make that happen. That is the message that the owls, frogs, *all* species on Earth, and God want us to get. From a cosmic perspective, we could complete the fourth Great Breakthrough—started at the dawn of humankind—to a radical new *dimension of freedom* in Universe reality. *We have the freedom to write our own “instruction book,”* instead of being genetically programmed to respond in certain ways. (See chapter 4.)

Preparations for that breakthrough began here at home, in the Milky Way galaxy, on planet Earth almost four billion years ago. It took that long to prepare a garden planet lush enough and with a vast enough reserve of resources to risk the gamble of cutting the hardwiring of our species. Humankind did nothing to deserve this incredible gift of our freedom to choose, but we are now in a position to honor that gift by using it for the welfare of all the species on Earth’s garden planet, and in the service of the Universe—and of God.

Adolescents Galore! (but not “Glory”)

Adolescence is the time to be irresponsible, to test the limits. We understand that in our species’ adolescent stage of consciousness, it was natural that humans would choose not to fit in with real-world reality. The myth that modern Western civilization teaches us is that nothing can go wrong—even if we are the perpetrators—that humans can’t fix. So why worry?

The collapse of the make-believe global economy officially announced in 2008 is a good example. We’ve talked about the economy before. Now it’s in a state of breakdown again. And fixing it—from the adolescent point of view, anyway—simply means propping up the pyramid of power and privilege—again. (This won’t be the first time—or the last.) The vast majority of humans at the bottom of the pyramid will suffer for a while. It’ll take some time for science and technology to bail civilization out of our economic meltdown. Using our current methods, it is like trying to bail out the Atlantic Ocean into the Pacific Ocean. Continuing to bail doesn’t make sense.

Young people are being told not to worry because we humans are intelligent enough to resolve our past mistakes. This time around, we will make our technology “green.” Then, when we get green technology flourishing, we can all return to our accustomed (and preferred) lifestyles.

We should know better. First, the cost of propping up the pyramid of power and privilege one more time will cause a debt of trillions of dollars. But more important, our “accustomed lifestyles” aren’t sustainable by any technology—green or otherwise. Neither *lifestyle* nor *technology* is authentically human. We might be able to go on pretending they are for another generation or two. But Earth won’t be pretending. The Universe won’t be pretending. And God won’t be pretending. If *we* continue to pretend, our civilization will fall.

Our civilization has had close calls before. We’ve already talked about the “Cold War.” That wasn’t the first close shave; neither was it the last. But we will have even more—if we don’t

grow up. By now we should be able to see the signs. It is past time to mature as individuals and as a civilization—before it's too late.

Biologist and futurist Elisabet Sahtouris wrote:

Like any adolescent who is suddenly aware of having created a very real life crisis, our species faces a choice—the choice between pursuing our dangerous course to disaster or stopping and trying to find mature solutions to our crises. This choice point is the brink of maturity—the point at which we must decide whether to continue our suicidal course or turn from it to responsible maturity...

[It's time] to see ourselves within the whole evolving world, even within the whole evolving cosmos. When we look at things broadly this way, we see that the problems we have created may not be as great as problems other species have created, for which life found solutions. What could be more interesting, more exciting, than to be alive in the very age when we as a species have the opportunity to mature, to solve the adolescent problems we have caused ourselves and others? (*Earthdance: Living Systems in Evolution* [Lincoln, NE: iUniversity Press, 2000, chap. 17])

As you just read, other species have created crises just as great as the crisis we have created for ourselves—yet *life* has found solutions. Prokaryotes, for instance, were on the verge of extinction two billion years ago. Their crisis was almost identical to ours: these miniscule one-cell pioneers of life on Earth were too successful for their own good.

Their accomplishment was the transformation of Earth from a barren volcanic rock into a garden planet. To prepare the garden for complex species, prokaryotes had to pump oxygen into Earth's polluted atmosphere. And after a billion and a half years of their hard work, the atmospheric content of oxygen was just right to accommodate species as complex as us.

But this was when the very lifestyle that enabled the prokaryotes to accomplish so much turned lethal. Nothing in their genetic instruction book told them when and how to stop pumping oxygen into Earth's atmosphere. The entire library for life on Earth was stored in fragile threads of their DNA, possessed by trillions, and trillions, and trillions of these primitive bacteria. Now the excess oxygen was setting these delicate threads on fire, causing the Great Oxygen Crisis (variously called the Great Oxygenation Event, the Great Oxidation, and the oxygen catastrophe). The crisis came within a hair's breadth of ending the experiment with life on Earth. The irreplaceable learning held by the prokaryote community began to smolder in genetic flames. The entire library of life was going up in smoke. Yet in amazing ways, life found solutions for the Great Oxygen Crisis.

Two billion years later, in the twentieth century, the great *Consciousness Crisis* came dangerously close to ending the experiment with *consciousness* and *conscience* on Earth. The irreplaceable learning held in the human community could have gone up in smoke. Yet in amazing ways, the avalanche of life sought solutions to the Consciousness Crisis by opening what I have referred to throughout this book as a *window of honesty*. In marvelous Crash Courses, researchers got their first impression of the immensity of the sea of irreplaceable learning stored up in human consciousness century after century. In the arcane study of

morphogenic fields, and the implicate order of nature, we glimpsed the immeasurable wholeness in which the depth of consciousness itself is unfathomable. We made amazing breakthroughs at a deep level of *knowing*. We recognized that the crisis we faced couldn't be solved at a political or economic level, by institutions or experts and authorities of any stripe.

It could be solved only by individual human beings who were willing to bring *consciousness* and *conscience* together in community. We would have to remember, and reconnect to, *survival traits* that were never nourished by past civilizations. In their day, the traits had to be eradicated to justify the status quo.

Physicist David Bohm, writing about his research on “hidden variables and the causal interpretation of quantum mechanics,”* concluded that the Universe in which we live is:

participatory – we participate consciously in the “explicate order” of manifest reality, that is, the three-dimensional world of matter, space, and time. We perceive the Universe at this superficial level with our *senses*. We see, hear, touch, taste, smell, and thus participate in our Universe.

multidimensional – it is infinitely deep and is characterized by an all-inclusive, intangible “ocean” of subtle energy, the “implicate order” that embraces all tangible reality. This order is also manifested in the spiritual, mystical, religious experience of oneness in which human beings become aware of and identify with the vast inseparable continuum of the Whole.

counterintuitive – in our Universe, paradox is not the exception; it's the rule. The only reason the “hidden order” is hidden is because we cannot make it fit into our mental models of a linear reality, that is, a *visible* dimension in our surface-level everyday reality. The manifest physical world in which we use our five senses is like water ebbing and flowing into a great ocean of seemingly empty space—the implicate order—which in reality is far from empty.

*For more on Bohm's brilliant research, see his book *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (London/New York: Routledge, 2002).

In Western civilization, when it comes to experiencing the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, specialization, achievement of expertise, and professional status, are more often a liability than an asset. How many people do you know who are either underemployed or overstrained? That's why it is most comforting to realize that you don't have to know a thing about quantum mechanics to experience the oneness in which humans perceive and identify with the vast invisible continuum of the whole. In amazing ways, life is recruiting each of us—including you—to participate in a Universe that is multidimensional, counterintuitive, and in which paradox is the rule.

You Were Born with *Survival Traits*

You were born with “survival traits” that were designed to help you sustain your Universe. These innate survival traits are not dependent on mental models of linear reality. Because of your survival traits, the hidden order is *not* hidden from you. It should be a joyous experience to remember, and reconnect to, the youthful survival traits that enabled our earliest ancestors to create what might have been the most peaceful culture in the history of our species. In *Growing Young*, anthropologist Ashley Montagu described those traits.

[Humans]... are designed to grow and develop in ways that emphasize rather than minimize childlike traits... We were never intended to grow “up” into the kind of adults most of us have become.

[This doesn't] mean that we are programmed to remain arrested at childhood stages of development, but that we are, by every confirmable measure, designed to continue throughout our lives in the growth and development of those traits so conspicuously exhibited by the child[:]... curiosity[:];... imaginativeness; playfulness; open-mindedness; willingness to experiment; flexibility; humor; energy; receptiveness to new ideas, honesty; eagerness to learn; and perhaps the most pervasive and the most valuable of all, the need to love. All normal children, unless they have been corrupted by their elders, show these qualities... every day of their childhood years... They watch, and they listen. They want to know everything about everything. They can keep themselves busy for hours with the simplest toys... [They] laugh from sheer exuberance and happiness. Unless they suspect they may be punished for it, they tell the truth... They soak up knowledge and information like sponges...

Most adults stop any conscious effort to learn early in their adulthood... and begin to grow a shell around [their] pitiful store of knowledge and wisdom... [They] resist all attempts to pierce that shell with anything new... This hardening of the mind—psychosclerosis—is a long distance from a child's acceptance and flexibility and open-mindedness. ([Westport, CT: Bergen & Garvey, 1989], 2, 94, 2–4)

Montague went on to say that, though people have always been capable of violence and wrath, these behaviors are usually reactions to “specific environmental conditions—not the spontaneous expression of internally generated effects” (69). Love and cooperation, he wrote, were dominant in every early population and were the very actions that held them together for their respective durations. None could have survived as long as they did had it not been for the roles that mutual collaboration and affection played in their societies.

Conclusion? It's time to grow up—but not to grow old. Though we must forever forsake our adolescent approach to Earth management, and to spirituality, we need to retain the childlike (not to be confused with *childish*) qualities that will help us pass on to future generations a sustainable and authentically human civilization. Phrased another way, these qualities are: youthful enthusiasm, cheerfulness, imagination, flexibility, tolerance, lightheartedness, a zeal for

learning, honesty, and most important of all, a lifelong need to love and to be loved. That's what it means to live out of an Ecozoic Universe story.

The message here is not intended to be a final interpretation. The final draft won't be complete until you, and countless other individuals, step forward to share your perspectives on the Real World story. The data we need is available, but there is one stumbling block. There is no 12-step program for our addiction to the Technozoic story.

I understand addiction, by the way. Until 2006, I was addicted to collecting *seeds of wisdom*. I had to read every new book, which highlighted my addiction—but didn't force me to take responsibility for my freedom. I didn't apply what I was reading and learning. I wasn't walking my talk.

A 12-step program was exactly what I needed, and a 12-step-like group. I had to hit bottom before I could admit I was an addict. I had to confess I was powerless to break my addiction without help from a higher source. I am still obsessed with these seeds of wisdom. I have a very long way to go.

There is no way to break an addiction solo. We need each other. We need a community we can trust and where we are trusted. We can't have community like that when we're hung up on trifles. It's the nitpicking details that keep us addicted. For example, *dates*...

A friend of mine believes Earth was created six thousand years ago. I have other friends who believe in different timelines for when God created planet Earth. My personal timeline has changed several times during my lifetime, but ultimately I came to believe the evidence indicates that Earth was created about 4 billion years ago and that the Universe came into existence about 13.7 billion years ago. (The evidence likely will keep changing.) While our beliefs on this topic are different, my friend and I share a faith that it was the God Force of Love at work in the Universe that got us here. There was a spiritual dimension and a physical dimension of reality at work in the world from the beginning—whenever that was. Sharing that faith should make it possible for us to dialogue about those things that matter most—not the “nitpicking details”—things like, how do we put our shoulder to the wheel to carry on God's work that got us here? What role do we have to play in the awesome and beautiful creation that we can experience every day of our lives—if we choose to?

We know our lifetime on Earth is limited. How would Jesus want us to spend our time? Debating over timelines? Choosing sides? Arguing with each other? Or putting ourselves in God's shoes and trying to determine what was on the divine Mind when the Word of God was being revealed?

Debate was never part of God's plan. But dialogue is. And if the God-seed of Love is planted in each one of us, then we have a lot to talk about. We can get together and figure out the best way to water the seeds God has planted, and get them to grow, instead of clinging to our mindless addictions (like debating over things that don't matter).

It took many wake-up calls urging me to grow up and take responsibility for the consequences of my choices—and addictions—before I hit bottom. But I have begun to see a path that makes sense to me, starting with my most obvious source of addiction—my pocketbook.

Each dollar I spend has consequences. But will the consequences of my choices be loving or uncaring? For instance, I buy a sporty new shirt. My wife likes the bright colors. Makes me look younger! I like it too! The first time I wear it, I get compliments. All in all, I'm a satisfied customer.

But should I be? If I had been more discriminating, would I have had second thoughts? Would I have bought the shirt without caring about the consequences of my choice?

My sporty new shirt is just the tip of the iceberg. Suppose I go over my credit card purchases for a week... or a month... or a year. I ask myself, *When I bought all this stuff, was I nourishing the seed of love that God planted in me? Was this the way Jesus would want me to spend my money?*

If I were more discriminating, would I want to know the consequences of each purchase I made? This may sound picky, but my spending habits are one way I make contact with God's beautiful creation, for better or for worse. Were the people who made my new shirt treated fairly? The shirt was made out of fabric woven with threads and colored with beautiful dyes all coming from *somewhere*. Every step along the way brought consequences to the well-being of, not only human beings, but the world in general, perhaps both the plant and the animal kingdoms!

I didn't figure this out by myself. It was spelled out for me by an organization called Students against Sweat Shops, whose members had come up with criteria for taking responsibility for choices. These student members sent delegations to visit sweat shops around the world, seeking data to make sure their criteria were accurate and being met. For example, they refused to buy T-shirts and other stuff on their campus that they believed had detrimental consequences for Earth. From my Christian faith perspective, what these students were communicating was: *I am responsible for how my lifestyle affects other human beings for good or for evil, and how it affects the sustainability of life of God's creation on planet Earth for good or for evil.*

Young people like these give me confidence that we can create a plan in which I and others take responsibility for the consequences of a small percentage of our budget every year to begin with. A small minority of humans taking responsibility for an increasing percentage of the consequences of our choices every year can start the ball rolling. This can be the first step toward achieving a sustainable lifestyle. We will discover that the real world—the Ecozoic Universe—is infinitely more interesting, enduring, and fun to live in than the mythical little “material” world—the Technozoic world—that we are taught to live out of.

Chapter Ten

On the End of Your High Diving Board

Danny E. Morris

Will you *step forward*?

You are being recruited by every endangered species to take part in the transition from the current period of devastation of the earth, to a period when humans will be present to the planet in mutually beneficial ways.

You are being recruited by owl and frog, and every species alive on the earth.

You are being recruited by generations yet unborn to provide them with some sense of the great work already begun when windows of honesty were open.

You are being recruited by Earth and the Universe to sensitize yourself to the guidance available to you from the way the Universe is structured, and the way it functions.

And you are being recruited by God to participate, consciously, in the same creative dynamism of Love that brought forth the continents, the seas, and the atmosphere—and awakened life in the primordial cell, and is now awakening consciousness in you! (McGregor Smith)

What you are being recruited to do:

*Put yourself on record, opening a new window of honesty,
and agree to fill the special role that only you can fill.*

How?

**Form, or Join,
A Virtual Ecozoic Dialogue Group!**

Guidelines for a Virtual Group

1. **Be—and tell—who you really are.** You won't have to pretend you are the "somebody" that the Technozoic little mythic story teaches you to pretend you are. Begin by looking at who you really are. It can be unsettling if you realize that your real self is different from the self you show. Only you know the difference. You will always be your final judge. You will know when what you perceive is real, and when it is not real. It is most important for you to discover and to share your "real self." Without this on the record, the learning for everyone in the group will be incomplete.
2. **Try not to jump to conclusions**—about yourself, our species, Earth, the Universe, or God! And don't jump to conclusions about other members in your Dialogue Group. Here are some tips:

- Prior to each meeting, jot down your perspectives on upcoming topics.
- Speak thoughtfully when you are asked to give your perspective.
- Remember that your perspective may be very different from other group members.
- Get accustomed to silence when you are meeting.
- Recognizing and respecting differences is a sign of honesty. Differences are not a problem to solve; they enrich the dialogue. “Cosmic causes” are more important than *differences* anyone brings to the table. Valuing differences is a first step toward authentic community.

3. Don't debate. Don't try to *win* an argument in your Dialogue Group. Don't try to prove that your insight is more important than another's. We can't solve our problems by eliminating (or ignoring) our differences—but, perhaps, by treasuring them, alike for all! Members in each Group will be sharing unique perspectives on the human venture—as they are experiencing them. *Listen carefully* to others as they share. You will be accessing the *irreplaceable learning* held in this little human community as a whole. This will help prepare your group to experience a deep level of knowing that we all need in order to keep our civilization from falling—and *failing!*

4. Be discriminating about goals. The Technozoic mythic, little story teaches us that:

- Winning a debate is *winning a game*.
- “Winning” is the name of the game.
- The more eloquently we can argue the more games we can win.
- Winning is the way to the top of the ladder of success.
- Success is the stairway to a penthouse in the pyramid of power.
- Winning is a finite game that ends in winning. (McGregor Smith)

*Do you feel you are a good candidate for an Ecozoic Dialogue Group?
Do you have friends who are?*

The goal of the group is to not judge, but to help each other develop as many perspectives about reality as we can. It is also meant to provide a way *to make sense out of a world that isn't making sense*. (That won't come as a quick fix!) This Group's reason for being is to put on record the whole spectrum of different ways of perceiving reality within your Group's consciousness. We will begin to access the entire sum of knowledge held by our *virtual* community.

Do you feel like you are

Standing on the end of

YOUR

High Diving Board?

If you choose to walk away, Mac and I will not ask for more of your time.

We have some options for you to consider if you are ready to take a deeper plunge into

THE EARTH?

It is not too late for you to

Bless the Earth . . . **A Very Personal**

OPTION FOR YOU
when you have finished reading the book.

You may choose to lead the way in
registering persons for your
Virtual Ecozoic Dialogue Group.

The Registration Template

Your name _____ Phone Number _____

Email address _____

City and state or city and country _____

Number of participants in your Group _____

Email the completed template to
danny@spiritslaughing.com

- *It is not too late for you to contact additional friends to join you!*
- *It is not too late for you to contact your church about this CAUSE!*

What if
twenty groups of four to seven persons in your church
entered into one of the most important concerns facing humanity?

COMPARE THAT TO: **What if the same twenty groups ignore this Concern?**

On a count of three: One... Two... Three!

Congratulations for making the Decision to
bless the earth, and
all Peoples in it!

Seed Bank Database
7 Generations Remembering and Reconnecting Project
(7grrp)

SURFING THE SEED BANK COLLECTION
IS MUCH LIKE SURFING THE INTERNET

The 350 Seed Bank pages were written or collected over the previous three decades. (The content in the documents is accessible via key words.)

- You may scan documents from beginning to end, as you do the Sunday paper.
- You may drill-down in a chosen document for deeper consideration.
- You may cut and paste selected paragraphs and print them for Ecozoic Dialogue.

Here are two methods for using the Seed Bank document:

1. Read the printed document. (Each time in the future this document is amended, page numbers will be updated.)
2. Surf the document on a computer or CD. *Any word or phrase can be used as a digital "link." Links allow you to "surf" rapidly through the document, stopping at every location where that link appears. Here's how: Select "Edit" on the Toolbar. Click "Find." Type into the "Find window" the word or words you want to surf for. Each time you click "Find Next" you will be taken to the next reference. To remain temporarily at one location, left click twice anywhere on the open page. You can then move forward or backward through the pages, and copy and paste any material you select. Some computers use other terminology for "Find next" but all offer this option.*

Examples

(The following words and phrases were selected to illustrate how to surf the Seed Bank.)

Spiritual formation: Type these words into the *Find* window. At the first stop you will *hear* Thomas Merton explain the Eureka experience of awakening spiritual consciousness. This is not what you learn in books. Merton uses excerpts from William Faulkner's short story "The Bear" to explain *awakening consciousness* to candidates as they become Trappist Monks at the Abbey of Gethsemane.

The second stop will take you to the Academy for Spiritual Formation where Merton was *waiting for me* again. This time he was explaining that:

What is going on is "a time of breakthrough, convergence, the destruction of the old, and invasion by the new and unforeseen—and above all a time of decisive response." We in the 21st Century are making extraordinary decisions on which the judgment of nations and the human race itself will depend. Our institutions, or aspirations, and our hope for the future are being weighted and estimated in terms of love.

If you take time at each stop to scan up and down a page or two you will be introduced to different applications of "seeds of wisdom" as puzzle pieces and clues to a bigger *Big Picture*, or reality, than the way we tend to live our lives.

Spiritual: If you take away Formation and just type in *Spiritual* you will make 145 stops. If you pause to look at each stop you will, in a relatively short time, come up with a *Big Picture* of what the 7 Generations Remembering and Reconnecting Project is about.

Infinite Games: Your first stop will be page 27. If you back up and read page 26 and 27, you will be introduced to a secular model, a religious model, and a pedagogical model for playing the “Waking Up in Bethesaidan” real-world game.

Adolescent: Typing in *adolescent* will give you 107 stops.

Responsibility: will take you to 65 stops. At Stop 1 on page 7, we will read that “The hallmark of adolescence is an inability to take responsibility for the consequences of our choices.”

Bethesaidan Blindness: will take you to 16 stops.

At every stop you have the option to copy and paste Seeds you want to take to your Group for dialogue and/or to your Hot House.

A Trilogy

1. Reading the book is an important step.
2. Tapping into the Seed Bank will take you deeper.
3. Forming or joining a *Virtual* Ecozoic Dialogue Group will guide you in becoming a *change agent*. (Appoint someone to register your Group using the template on page 3 below.)

After your Group is registered, a login password will be emailed for your Group’s use, only.

When you and your friends choose to form or join “*An Ecozoic Dialogue Group*” each person will receive through the Group’s Registrar:

1. A code to access the 350 pages of the Seed Bank Database.
2. Your Group’s opportunity for a live phone conversation with the person your Group chooses:
 - Mac: mac.jac@juno.com (On the Science)
 - Danny: danny@spiritslaughing.com (On the Sacred)
 - Dandy: dandy@good.org (On the *Virtual* Source)

If and when you wish to schedule a conference call with Mac, Danny, or Dandy select someone in your Group to send an email to schedule the conference call. Include the telephone number for the call-back.

As you complete reading
A Miniature History of Earth
 you have the opportunity to make “*a road, less travelled*”
Into a Thoroughfare!

Pick a Scenario:**Scenario 1 – Ecozoic Dialogue Groups for Special Churches**

After showing your pastor the book, talk about your congregation forming (online) Ecozoic Dialogue Groups.

Tell the congregation about the spiritual call.

Imagine this “spiritual call” addressed to all humanity,
To your congregation,
And to You!

The Call

**“Who will step forward
to do whatever has to be done
to keep our civilization from falling into oblivion?”**

Help them understand that . . .

We may actually be the last wave of civilization, because we are the first civilization to possess technologies powerful enough to destroy itself and take our species, and many other species, with it. So why not take some actionable choices that will ensure that this never happens?

Scenario 2 - *Begin inviting your friends to join you.*

Send this E-mail to friends you know *who want to make a difference!*

Greetings, [name of your friend]:

I am writing to invite you to read *A Miniature History of Earth*.

You can purchase and download the book at:

www.spiritslaughing.com.

Call me after you have read the book and I'll get back in touch with you.

Good on ya!

(your name and your phone number)

When your friend calls:

- Have three or four issues selected from *A Miniature History*... so you can review the “high stakes” denoted by your selections.
- Give the names of others who are reading the book.
- Ask your friend to take the Earth seriously, and join the Ecozoic Dialogue Group.

Three or four joining you will be a great start!

Scenario 3 - In another organization

Talk with “whom-ever” about reading *A Miniature History of Earth*.

Scenario 4 - Where you work

Talk to *people in your workspace* about taking seriously, the “Spiritual Call” above.

Your church, your friends, your organization, your fellow-workers can make a *difference!*

Actionable Choices

These choices are for everyone who reads *A Miniature History of Earth* and . . .
cannot just walk away!

Getting Prepared for your First Ecozoic Meeting

1. Scan the book again and mark your favorite copy.
 - Review your highlighted copy to see if any of the content you selected constitutes *a call* for you.
 - Express your personal *call* on paper and consider sharing it with your Group.
2. Access the Seed Bank Database and enter key-words or phrases prompted by your “selections” from the book. (This will be a continuing process for your Group.)

At Your First Group Meeting

1. You will need a gentle moderator to start and end each Session, and to remind your Group to stay focused on Dialogue.
2. At the Group meeting call for dialogue about each member’s favored copy from the book, and about any Seed Bank citations he/she consider to be important.
3. Consider following the procedure stated in # 2, above—chapter-by-chapter. (After the first couple of chapters, determine if you wish to review one chapter per session, or combine two chapters in a meeting.)
4. Note: If you consider pages 1-14 as front-matter for the book, and you think of “Epiphanies” as a chapter, generally speaking, the remaining chapters will alternate between the Scientific and the Sacred—lending themselves to chapter-by-chapter study, and comparison and contrast of the Sacred and the Scientific.

End the first meeting by introducing the following Dialogue Questions:

- **What is your yearning for our sacred Earth a hundred years from now?**
- **Do you see a connection between Theology and Cosmology?** (Explain!)

Request each Member to prepare their personal answers for the next meeting.

Personal Statements by

Two Old Codgers

Mac’s response to: “What is your yearning for our sacred Earth a hundred years from now?”

*My yearning is that 100 years from now there will be an inhabitable world for our children. It will be a better world than the one we are living in at the end of this first decade in the 21st Century. **Religious institutions** will supply an “inner compass” to keep our lives in sync with the spiritual dimensions of the real-world story every species has to fit into. **Scientific intuitions** will supply an “outer compass” to keep our lives in sync with the physical dimensions of the real-world story. **Educational institutions** will provide a synthesis of these that will enable us to keep our outer physical dimensions of reality and inner spiritual dimensions of reality in sync with each other.*

Also, my yearning is that Teilhard de Chardin’s prophesy will come true that: “Some day, after we have mastered the winds, the waves, the tides, and gravity, we will harness for God the energies of love; and then for the second time in the history of the world, man will have discovered fire.”

Finally, my yearning is that the ancient prophesy in Deuteronomy 30, will come true: “Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?’ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, ‘Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?’ No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.” (vs. 11-14 NRSV)

Danny’s response to “What is your yearning for our sacred Earth a hundred years from now?”

Here at our Senior Excitement Center we have a recycle receptacle for paper. That’s a good thing—but recycling is not all that is needed over the next hundred years.

*Beginning NOW, Earth needs an ever-increasing, savvy group that sees the Earth as **Sacred** and will bless the Planet by refusing to abuse it.*

Obviously, I cannot “see” a hundred years from now, but I can “feel” my own yearning that some day it may be said that the Earth began to be cherished and healed, “beginning about a hundred years-or-so, ago”!

If we are keen about doing what needs to be done here-and-now, all will be well in the “sweet-bye-and-bye! Our “future” is NOW!

Anyone else interested?

Mac’s response to, “Do you see a connection between Theology and Cosmology?”

The connection between Theology and Cosmology is the connection between the inner and outer components of spiritual and physical dimensions of Earth Reality and Universe Reality. We are not authentically human if we are not connected. Our civilization will not be sustainable if we are not connected. There will be no future for our children as long as we are not connected.

Danny’s response to, “Do you see a connection between Theology and Cosmology?”

Does a grape grow from a vine? Does a dog bark? It is absurd to talk about the value of vines separate from the grapes they produce. Dogs cannot be separated from what they do! So it is with Theology and Cosmology. They are profound disciplines of both mind and spirit that—together—help us grapple (struggle) to comprehend God’s Mighty Acts.

There have been two great ‘splits’ in our times:

*The first split was steeped in reality.
The second split was contrary to reality.*

***The Atom was split.
Theology and Cosmology were split.
(But, they belong together!)***

The Theology of Creation is grounded in Holy Scripture. The Genesis versions of Creation do not attempt to explain Creation—they define Creation as Acts of God.

The Scientific Community attempts to identify and explain the whole of Cosmology that God created—as we currently know it.

Both sources of knowledge are needed—just as white-on-rice belong together!

Our position in these pages is two-fold:

- God has blessed us with Cosmology—that can be explained.***
- God has also blessed us with Theology that can be experienced.***

Anyone interested in helping to correct the second split?

Mac’s edited citation from the Seed Bank.

The business of religious institutions should be to provide humans with an “inner compass.” An inner compass that can activate human conscience and enable humans to live in sync with species reality, Earth reality, Universe reality, and God reality. If humans listen for clues, the inner compass should provide them with spiritual criteria they will need to make Conscious Corrections in the dysfunctional direction their lives are going.

The business of scientific institutions should be to provide humans with an “outer compass.” An outer compass that can give humans clues that provide them with empirical criteria they will need in order for each new generation to choose more wisely than the last generation. (See answers to Pivotal Question #3, 7grrp pg 163)

Continuing Agenda

- A. Proceed, chapter-by-chapter as you list and unpack selected Seed Bank citations.**
B. Choose from additional written assignments concerning your relationship with Planet Earth, featured as the Group chooses:

Creation vs Evolution
 “Earthy” situations calling for your church’s action
 Your developing goals for Planet Earth
 Your family goals for here-and-now
 Your plans for initiating additional Ecozoic Dialogue Groups

- C. As Your Ecozoic Dialogue Group comes to an end, pick your final writing assignment, up ‘til now:**

- 1. What do you wish to say to your congregation about these issues?**
- 2. What future, personal plans do you have that relate to Planet Earth?**
- 3. Formulate a “plan of action” for presenting various articles written by Group Members:**
 - Publish the articles in successive newsletters.
 - Feature Group Member as Lay Speakers in Worship Services.
 - Use as prompts for forming new Ecozoic Dialogue Groups.

What Can Planet Earth Possibly Need From Us?

What is needed . . .

Is not Earth-shakers: The Earth was not created to *shake!*

Not Earth-movers: The Earth already moves properly!

Not Earth-cultivators: The Earth can currently produce more than can be consumed.

Not Earth-benefactors: The only way to be its *benefactor* is to allow Earth to *replenish itself!*

What is needed is a united will,

TO WILL

That Planet Earth is afforded all

*“Rights and Privileges
 Appertaining unto itself”
 that the Creator intended.*

Ironically,

**That can only come as a
 Gift of the People!**

Anyone game to give it a go?