A Letter to Our Spiritual Leaders

Dear Spiritual Leaders:

My colleagues and I at the MILLENNIUM INSTITUTE are delighted to join with the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions in preparing for the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions.

Our part has been to prepare this report on the critical issues of the 21st century. As you will see, many of the trends before us are troubling. We look forward to working with you and others to assure that our future is very different from the one toward which we seem now to be rushing.

In preparing this report, we have, in a sense, revisited *The Global 2000 Report to the President*, the report I directed for the United States Government. *Global 2000* is the first and only report by any national government on the economic, demographic, resource, and environmental future of all countries of the world. Published in 1980, it has sold 1.5 million copies in eight languages.

Global 2000 is now 13 years old, and although most of its trends are still disconcertingly accurate, it needs updating. This report assembles new data on most of the basic trends reported in the original *Global 2000*. This is why I gave it the title *Global 2000 Revisited*. It is not, however, a full update of *Global 2000*. Only the U.S. Government can do that job, and we hope that President Clinton will.

A major part of the MILLENNIUM INSTITUTE'S work is encouraging and assisting countries in the preparation of long-term strategic studies of their options for sustainable development and security. We call such studies "21st Century Studies." In one way or another over the last decade, we have helped research teams in a fifth of the countries of the world as they prepared a long-term outlook for their country.

We feel that it is important to include spiritual leaders in the process of preparing national 21st Century Studies, but only rarely does this happen. There are several reasons. Often national leaders doubt that spiritual leaders have a sufficient understanding of the contemporary analytical methods used by economists, ecologists, demographers, and geographers to participate effectively in a national strategic study. Sometimes two or more of the country's spiritual traditions are in violent

conflict, and the political leaders doubt that spiritual leaders could converse constructively among themselves and with others about future possibilities. In other cases, there are extreme tensions between the nation's political and spiritual leadership.

The board and staff of the MILLENNIUM INSTITUTE believe that spiritual leaders have a vital contribution to make to a country's reflections on sustainable possibilities for the future. During the Parliament of the World's Religions, we hope to meet many of you and to discuss the possibility that you might like to participate together with political leaders in the exploration of alternative futures for your countries.

We at the MILLENNIUM INSTITUTE also believe that the entry into the 21st century and the new millennium needs to be understood as an anniversary of Earth, an anniversary in which all nations, cultures and faith traditions participate. The 1999-2001 period must be a time when five billion of us humans give up old, 20th century ways of thinking and living; change to a new time and a new purpose; and then start toward the humane and sustainable future that we can all share.

The MILLENNIUM INSTITUTE is nurturing a worldwide network of individuals and organizations that are planning to use the 1999-2000 period to encourage a major shift in human attitudes and institutional goals, a shift toward a sustainable future. We hope the spiritual leaders at the Parliament will join the planet-wide effort.

Beyond these institutional reasons for our participation in the Parliament, my colleagues and I feel an urgent need for a more substantive dialogue between "secular" issue experts and spiritual leaders of all faith traditions. There are many pressing issues that need thoughtful, holistic attention, integrating both the spiritual perspective and the secular or scientific perspective. Such integrated work is difficult because of limited trust and respect on both sides.

In the course of my work for the Institute, I have had many conversations with political leaders and with ecologists, economists, geographers, modelers, political scientists, and other leaders about the role of the spiritual traditions in the future of Earth. I have been disturbed by the attitudes that some professionals have expressed toward the spiritual traditions.

For example, an internationally famous, highly influential author on sustainable development told me bluntly, "Religion must die. It is the fundamental cause of virtually all social, economic, and ecological problems and much of the violence in the world."

In another example, an ecologist, who has devoted his life to the practical work of preserving specific endangered species, was

equally vehement in his feelings that religion generally, and mine (Christianity) in particular, was a menace to the future of Earth. After I explained the importance of my faith to me in the work I do, he was silent for a moment, and then said with total sincerity, "You have done some very important work, but just think of how much more you could have done if your parents had not exposed you to the pernicious influence of Christianity!"

The attacks on religion generally and mine in particular are not limited to quiet conversations among friends. The editors of *Time* introduced their 1989 "Planet of the Year" issue with these thoughts:

> [In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the] earth was the creation of a monotheistic God, who, after shaping it ordered its inhabitants, in the words of Genesis: "Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." The idea of dominion could be interpreted as an invitation to use nature as a convenience. Thus the spread of Christianity, which is generally considered to have paved the way for the development of technology, may at the same time have carried the seeds of the wanton exploitation of nature that often accompanied technical progress."

This is a serious public charge against my faith. It troubles me that the charge was made. It troubles me that it might be true. It troubles me that my faith has made no thoughtful or significant response to the issue raised by *Time*.

Christianity is not alone in coming under criticism. In one forum or another, virtually every faith tradition is being criticized today for not having a thoughtful, informed, penetrating analysis of the issues facing Earth and Earth's human community in the 21st century.

We, the people of Earth, need the help and involvement of our spiritual leaders. It is from our respective faiths that we derive our sense of origins, of self, of purpose, of possibility. You are our source of inspiration for what we humans and Earth can become. Your dreams are our visions—and our destiny. We depend on you.

So we come to you both with our perplexed sense that something is terribly wrong on Earth and with our question: What shall we do?

Gerald O. Barney, Executive Director
MILLENNIUM INSTITUTE
Arlington, Virginia, United States
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Overview

If present beliefs and policies continue, the world in the 21st century will be more crowded, more polluted, less stable economically and ecologically, and more vulnerable to violent disruption than the world we live in now. Serious stresses involving inter-religious relations, the economy, population, resources, environment, and security loom ahead. Overall, Earth's people will be poorer in many ways than they are today.

For more than a billion of Earth's desperately poor humans, the outlook for food and other necessities of life will be no better. For many it will be worse. Life for billions will be more precarious in the 21st century than it is now—unless the faith traditions of the world lead the nations and peoples of Earth to act decisively to alter current beliefs and policies.

This, in essence, is the picture which emerges in *Global 2000 Revisited: What Shall We Do?* This picture is based on projections of probable changes in the world economy, population, resources, and environment. Although these projections are drawn from the most reliable sources available, they do not predict what will occur. Rather, they depict conditions that are likely to develop if there are no changes in beliefs, public policy, and practices. A keener awareness of the prospects for the 21st century, however, may induce significant changes in beliefs, policies, and practices.

Principal Findings

Rapid growth in the world's population cannot continue through the 21st century and will come to an end either by human decision and action or by an uncontrollable increase in deaths.

Over the past 70 years—roughly one lifetime in many countries—the human population grew from 1.8 billion to 5.3 billion. For every person alive 70 years ago, there are now three. Such rapid growth cannot continue for even another generation. Fertility must decline, or mortality will increase.

But for now the growth continues. Currently the world's population is growing faster than ever before. Each year, 90 million people are added to our numbers, the demographic equivalent of another Mexico. Just a lifetime ago, we were adding only 15 million people per year.

If drastic declines in human fertility (or very large increases in mortality) occur over the next five years, it would be possible to stabilize the human population at about twelve billion within a century. Virtually all of the additional growth—more than 6 billion—would occur in the poorest, least industrialized countries of the world, often called the "South." The population in the South would grow to over 10 billion. The population in the industrialized countries of the "North" would remain at about its current size, a little over 1 billion.

For such a rapid drop in human fertility to occur, it will be necessary to change the religious, social, economic, and legal factors that shape couples' decisions on the number of children they have. Safe and effective contraceptive services must be available, but most importantly, religious teachings and social, economic, and legal circumstances must shift to encourage small families. Child labor, for example, must cease to provide an economic benefit to parents.

It will be difficult to provide 11 to 12 billion people with even such basic necessities as food. Of the 14 billion hectares of land on Earth, only 3.3 billion hectares are potentially arable. At current yields, 0.26 hectares per person are needed to feed the human population; thus at current yields, 3.1 billion hectares would be needed to feed 11 to 12 billion. Only 1.5 billion hectares are currently in production. Since in most cases the best lands are already in use for agriculture, and the remaining lands are already used for grazing or some other use, a doubling of the land in agricultural production would be expensive and disruptive.

Doubling the world's agricultural lands would also cause enormous environmental damage. The potentially arable land that is not now in use—especially land in the tropics—is habitat for a large number of species. Doubling the amount of land in agricultural production would lead to massive extinctions. Even with modest growth in the amount of land in production, a third of all the species that were alive a lifetime ago will become extinct—gone forever—within another decade or two. By 2015, *hundreds* of species are projected to disappear *daily*.

If we are to meet the food needs of up to 12 billion people by the end of the 21st century, it is essential that agricultural yields continue to be increased—and in ways that are sustainable. Although conventional technologies can probably double yields, there are increasing questions about the sustainability of conventional agricultural technologies. Furthermore, the promised benefits of yield increases through genetic engineering may be delayed and more modest than expected.

The so-called Green Revolution began about 1950. For the first time, yield-increasing technologies (plant breeding genetics,

fertilizers, pesticides, and pumped irrigation) were applied extensively and systematically during the last half of this century, increasing yields dramatically and preventing serious food shortages.

But the Green Revolution also changed agriculture radically, making it dependent both on environmentally destructive practices (especially the use of pesticides, fertilizers, and irrigation) and on fossil fuels. Energy used for corn production in the United States, for example, has increased by a factor of four since 1945. The future of human food supplies is now closely linked to the future of energy supplies.

Global energy supplies and prices are likely to become more unstable and erratic in the decades ahead. Even at present rates of consumption, most of the world's petroleum would be burned within the lifetime of a child born today. If consumption were to increase enough to fuel economic growth in the South, the petroleum supplies of the world would disappear even more quickly. The most pressing constraint on the use of petroleum, however, may not be supply of the resource, but disposal space for its principal combustion product—carbon dioxide.

The concentration of carbon dioxide in Earth's atmosphere is increasing around the world, largely because of the combustion of fossil fuels in the industrialized North. Within the lifetime of today's children, global concentrations of carbon dioxide are likely to reach twice pre-industrial concentrations. Such high concentrations are expected to cause planet-wide changes in temperature and weather patterns. Such changes would seriously disrupt agriculture throughout the world as early as the first half of the 21st century, and during the second half would lead to a sea level rise of 20 to 30 centimeters—enough to force the resettlement of hundreds of millions of people and the abandonment of some island nations.

The Choice Ahead

The critical issues described above are just a few of the challenges that lie ahead. Others that have not even been touched on include the implications of AIDS and tuberculosis; nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons; the global debt; migration; corruption; drug trade; and technological change, to name a few.

Given the magnitude of the issues we face, we must expect that within the lifetime of a child born today, the world will change radically in one of two directions. If we continue with present beliefs, institutions, and policies, the world will become highly polarized, with a billion people in the wealthy industrialized countries of the North attempting to enjoy life and leisure a few decades longer while 10 billion people in the South

spiral downward into increasingly desperate poverty exacerbated by global environmental deterioration. Ultimately the North spirals downward too, and the whole planet drifts off into a new dark age or worse.

But there is another option open to us, one in which everyone comes to recognize that a healthy Earth is an essential prerequisite for a healthy human population. Under this option, the world could become less polluted, less crowded, more stable ecologically, economically and politically if we humans would be willing to work together to (a) create the religious, social, and economic conditions necessary to stop the growth of human population, (b) reduce the use of resources (sources) and disposal capacity (sinks) by the wealthiest, (c) assure civil order, education, and health services for people everywhere, (d) preserve soils and species everywhere, (e) double agricultural yields while reducing both agricultural dependence on energy and agricultural damage to the environment, (f) convert from carbon dioxide-emitting energy sources to renewable, non-polluting energy sources that are affordable even to the poor, (g) cut sharply the emissions of other greenhouse gases, (h) stop immediately the emissions of the chemicals destroying the ozone layer, and (i) bring equity between nations and peoples of the North and South.

We do not have generations or even decades to choose between these two directions because of the momentum inherent in population growth, capital investments, technological choices, and environmental changes. In fact, the choice of direction for Earth is being made today.

The choice is difficult because: (a) there is some scientific and economic uncertainty about the severity of the difficulties ahead, (b) it is difficult to believe that such major, unprecedented change can be occurring, (c) it is generally thought to be easier to adapt to whatever comes than to make change in advance of necessity, (d) there is widespread lack of awareness of what is happening, and (e) the steps which must be taken are extremely difficult, and (f) we lack a set of common moral values on which to base collective action. Most difficult, however, is to accept that our concept of progress has failed.

Our concept of progress—our model of development—measures every nation by the norm of a so-called "developed" country. Under this concept of progress, each "rational" nation is to progress to the economic and military might of the "developed" countries of the industrialized North. Similarly, the goal of each "rational" person is to progress to the point of being able to live like the wealthiest. This concept of progress has failed. Twelve billion people cannot live like the wealthiest do now. All nations of the world cannot become as wasteful and environmentally destructive as the industrialized North is now. For them to do so

would increase the total economic activity of the world by a factor of five to ten, and Earth could not withstand such an assault.

What is our alternative? What other concept of progress—what other model of development—can we pursue? Currently there is no agreed upon answer to these questions. But if we people of Earth are to avoid a massive disaster within the lifetime of our children, our most critical and urgent task is to bring forth a transformed vision of progress, one of sustainable and replicable development.

We are discovering (or rediscovering) that our human economy is part of, and depends on, the "economy" of the whole ecosphere. So any model for a sustainable world must address both our habits of consumption and reproduction and our willingness to live peacefully with one another, with other creatures, and with Earth itself. Our definitions of progress and success must take into account the future well-being of the entire ecosphere, not just the human part of it. Such a changed understanding of progress and success will require a new understanding of humankind as a species, a new approach to the ethics of interspecies relations, and a new vision for the future of Earth.

Questions for Our Spiritual Leaders

The task before us is fundamentally spiritual in nature: to discover who we humans are, how we are to relate to each other and to the whole community of life, and what we are to do, individually and collectively, here on Earth. So we turn with our questions to you, our spiritual leaders.

What are the traditional teachings—and the range of other opinions—within your faith on how to meet the legitimate needs of the growing human community without destroying the ability of Earth to support the community of all life?

- What does your faith tradition teach about how the needs of the poor are to be met as human numbers continue to grow? What does your faith teach about the causes of poverty? What trends and prospects do you see for the poor?
- How are the needs and wants of humans to be weighed relative to the survival of other forms of life? What trends and prospects do you see for other forms of life?

What are the traditional teachings—and the range of other opinions—within your faith on the meaning of "progress" and how it is to be achieved?

- What does your faith tradition teach about the human destiny? Is the human destiny separable from that of Earth?
- What is your destiny, the destiny of the followers of your faith tradition? What does your tradition teach concerning the destiny of followers of other traditions?
- How are we to measure "progress?" Can there be progress for the human community without progress for the whole community of life?
- How is personal "success" related to "progress" for the whole?

What are the traditional teachings—and the range of other opinions—within your faith tradition concerning a proper relationship with those who differ in race or gender (conditions one cannot change), or culture, politics, or faith?

- Much hatred and violence is carried out in the name of religion. What teachings of your faith tradition have been used—correctly or not—in an attempt to justify such practices?
- Discrimination and even violence by men toward women is often justified in the name of religion. Which, if any, of the teachings of your faith have been used—correctly or incorrectly—in this way?
- How does your faith tradition characterize the teachings and followers of other faiths? Do some adherents of your tradition hold that the teachings and followers of other faiths are evil, dangerous, misguided? Is there any possibility that your faith tradition can derive wisdom, truth, or insight from the teachings of another faith?

What are the traditional teachings—and the range of other opinions—within your faith on the possibility of criticism, correction, reinterpretation, and even rejection of ancient traditional assumptions and "truth" in light of new understandings or revelations?

- Does your faith tradition envision new revelation, new understanding, new interpretation, new wisdom, and new truth concerning human activity affecting the future of Earth?

Changing Course

In a sense, Earth is no longer orbiting peacefully about the Sun. Earth is careening toward the spiritual equivalent of a massive stone wall.

The brutality of humans to each other—the "ethnic cleansing," the ignoring of hunger and poverty, the acts of terrorism—and the environmental destruction and loss of natural beauty are already draining us of the spiritual and emotional energy we need to change course, and the situation is growing worse daily. We are becoming numb, unable to feel and react as we must if we are to put Earth back into a peaceful orbit.

Changing course will require an immense amount of energy. Not the energy that comes from coal, gas, oil, or even nuclear fuel, but rather spiritual and emotional energy, enough to change the thinking and lives of five billion people.

Can so much energy be generated? Can so many people become empowered to think and live differently? Maybe.

An Invitation to Help

It is the conviction of the Trustees and staff of the MILLENNIUM INSTITUTE that a unique opportunity to set Earth on a new course is offered by the 1999-2001 period, and we are working steadily to make the most of this opportunity. We invite spiritual leaders, and others too, to join us in this effort.

The opportunity relates to the fact that deep in the human psyche is a compulsion to celebrate anniversaries, birthdays, and other recurring dates. The entry into the 21st century and the third millenium will be a psychological experience vastly more profound than any anniversary we humans have yet experienced. Already hotel ballrooms are being booked along the Greenwich meridian by people who want to be the first to enter the 21st century. Concord supersonic jets are being chartered to fly people across time zones so that they can attend parties and celebrate the entry into the new millennium *twice*. These are just the beginning signs of the emotional energies that will be released during the 1999-2001 period.

This occasion, the entry into the new millennium, has special significance for Christians as the approximate bimillennium (2000th anniversary) of Christianity, and there is danger that it

could come to be seen as an exclusively Christian event. The Gregorian calendar, however, never was an exclusively Christian calendar. Beginning the year at 1 January was a pagan Roman custom resisted by the Church, and most scholars now agree that the Nativity of Christ did not occur in 0 (or 1) A.D. but rather before Herod's death in 4 "B.C." Furthermore the Gregorian calendar has become the calendar of commerce and science throughout the world. The entry into the new millennium must be understood to be an anniversary of Earth to be enjoyed and celebrated by peoples of all faiths.

Earth's entry into the next millennium is a planetary "transitional" event, and as a "mega anniversary" it has potential for reinforcing the identity of human beings, first and foremost, as citizens of Earth, as "Earthlings." This potential must be developed and utilized.

In most cultures, the transition from an old state to a new one (birthdays, graduations, marriages, funerals) is marked by celebrations having three elements. The first element is a period of preparation and grieving. During this period, we prepare to give up our past condition or to "die" to our old state. For our entry into the new millennium, we must prepare to give up our old, 20th century ways of thinking and living.

The second element is a moment of transition, the actual giving up of the old state and the entry into the new. It requires a symbolic act of change, such as the embrace or kiss at a wedding, the movement of the tassels at a graduation, the closing of the casket or the lighting of the pyre at a funeral. For our entry into the 21st century, we need a new symbol, perhaps crossing a stream or river to a new place and a new way of being.

The third element is the celebration of the new and its possibilities. Music, dance, singing, and other forms of celebration are appropriate and needed. Gifts are an essential part of the celebration. Gifts are our way of expressing our good wishes and support for the new, and also a means of helping to assure that something good and enduring comes of the new. For our entry into the new millennium, we must celebrate the opportunities and possibilities of the new era not only with music and joy, but also with generous gifts for the poor, for our enemies, and for Earth on this most extraordinary occasion.

Earth's entry into the next millennium cannot be just another major event. It cannot even be just the event of a lifetime. Or of a hundred years. Or even of a thousand years. That would not be enough. This must be *the* event of the whole Earth-time, the whole history of Earth. This must be the moment when humans interchange bad and good, unreal and real and set themselves and Earth on a new course.

Over the next five years all five billion of us humans must prepare to die to 20th century ways of thinking and being. We must also prepare to see the possibilities and opportunities in our new condition in our new millennium.

To make these preparations, all five billion of us must devote the next five years to learning from each other about Earth and how to live sustainably and peacefully on Earth. Every person must learn to think in a way that leaves room in one's mind for the thoughts of others. Every person must come to understand much better how Earth's natural systems function and how human institutions, governments, political systems, social systems, international organizations, corporations, and spiritual institutions operate and influence the future of Earth. Every person must learn again the immense power and value of life. (Does all the money or wisdom in the whole world have the *power* to restore a single life?) Every person must learn to think like Earth, to act like Earth, to be Earth.

As a part of this learning process, we must all think through how our part of Earth can contribute to the new. Each person, each family, each corporate institution, each community, each country, each faith needs a plan to contribute to the new. What laws must be changed, what traditions, what beliefs, what institutions?

We also need ideas of appropriate gifts for Earth on this anniversary. What gift can a person give? What can a family, a corporate institution, a community, a country, a faith give to Earth on this momentous anniversary?

For this event to do what it must, the spiritual leaders of Earth must help lead the way and help plan the events. We humans, all five billion of us, depend on our spiritual leaders to make this all happen. Only the spiritual leaders of Earth—the recognized and the not-yet recognized—command the emotional energies needed to move heads of state, leaders of corporations and other institutions, and ordinary citizens to the acts of generosity and changed thinking and living that must occur.

We need you to lead us in teaching each other about Earth and how to live sustainably on Earth. We need you to help us all design a once-in-an-Earth-time celebration of Earth's entry into a new era. We need you to bring every person, every community and every country to the celebration with their gifts. And most importantly, we need you to bring to the celebration a gift from your own faith tradition, a gift that will help change the course of Earth. What gift could your faith give Earth?

To do what must be done, Earth's spiritual leaders of all faiths and all traditions must work together in ways previously unimagined and unimaginable. We must count on you to

develop a community of Earth's faith traditions that is an example of the kind of open communication, mutual respect, acceptance, cooperation and good will that should characterize the emerging global community of nations and peoples. Each tradition has at its core a vision of Divine harmony that it urges its followers to embody in the social sphere. These visions have evolved in distinct historic and geographic contexts. The religions have not successfully been able to transcend their own historical origins so as to express their visions of unity in a fashion appropriate to the needs of the pluralistic global society that is taking form at the beginning of the new millennium.* The greatest single scandal in which Earth's faith traditions are now involved is their failure to practice their highest ethical ideals in their relations with one another.

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*In his recent message acknowledging the Church's error in the conviction of Galileo, Pope John-Paul II introduced some thoughts that might provide a basis not only for increased understanding and respect between science and religion, but also between religions. To paraphrase and abbreviate the Pope's argument:

> The church must teach the truth, but what are we to do when a new scientific datum seems to contradict the truths of the faith? These are two things we must do. First, it is a duty for theologians to keep themselves regularly informed of scientific advances in order to examine whether there are reasons for introducing changes in their teachings.
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> Second, it is necessary to recognize the distinction between Sacred Scripture and its interpretation. If it happens that authority of sacred Scripture is set in opposition to clear and certain reasoning, this must mean that the person who interprets scripture does not understand it correctly. Truth cannot contradict truth, and we may be sure that some mistake has been made.
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> From the Galileo affair we can learn a lesson that remains valid in relation to similar situations. In Galileo's time it was inconceivable to depict the world as lacking an absolute physical reference point, which could only be situated in the Earth or in the sun. Today, however, after Einstein and within the perspective of contemporary cosmology, neither of these two points of reference has the importance they once had. The lesson, therefore, is that often beyond two partial and contrasting perceptions there exists a wider perception that includes them and goes beyond both of them.

This lesson of Pope John Paul II might point the way for a new approach to the distrust, hatred, and violence that currently plagues interreligious relations. Might there be beyond the "partial and contrasting perceptions" of the many faith traditions "a wider perception that includes them and goes beyond...them?"

As soon as we humans learn to think like Earth, we together will see a new future for Earth. Then we can die in peace, all five billion of us, to our old ways of thinking. We can cross the waters together. And we can celebrate Earth's safe arrival in a new era in a way that will be remembered forever.

Optimism, Hope, and Confidence

Many people—especially young people—look at our situation and prospects and ask, can we be optimistic? We have acted too slowly to help tens of millions of people, and if hundreds of millions, even billions are to be spared the same fate, massive changes are needed over just the next few years. Can we be hopeful?

There is a difference between being optimistic and being hopeful. An optimistic person has a habitual disposition to expect the best possible outcome as the most likely. A hopeful person has a reasoned commitment to and faith in a good outcome, even though it may be unlikely in the light of past experience.

There is reason for us all to be hopeful but not optimistic. We can be hopeful because Earth is such a fertile, supporting place. We can be hopeful because Earth is showing remarkable resilience in the face of tremendous abuse. We can be hopeful because we now have a much greater understanding of Earth and its limits. We can be hopeful because we humans are recognizing that, as a species, we cannot indefinitely increase our numbers and our demands on Earth. We can be hopeful because we humans are beginning to recover from our erroneous notion that we are separate, above, and independent of all other life.

But perhaps something more than hope is justified. At least one person, Father Thomas Berry, thinks so:

> [We] need to realize that the ultimate custody of the earth belongs to the earth. The issues we are considering are fundamentally earth issues that need to be dealt with in some direct manner by the earth itself. As humans we need to recognize the limitations in our capacity to deal with these comprehensive issues of the earth's functioning. So long as we are under the illusion that we know best what is good for the earth and for ourselves, then we will continue our present course, with its devastating consequences on the entire earth community.
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> Our best procedure might be to consider that we need not a human answer to an earth problem, but an earth answer to an earth problem. The earth will solve its problems, and possibly our own, if we will let the earth function in its own ways. We need only listen to what the earth is telling us.

> Here we might observe that the basic mood of the future might well be one of confidence in the continuing revelation that takes place in and through the earth. 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. . . .

Let us all *listen to and allow ourselves to be guided* by the creative energy that shaped and lighted the universe from the beginning. Let us all *awaken* to a new understanding of ourselves and the continuing revelation that takes place in and through Earth. Let us *take back our lives* from cynicism, optimism, addictions, and despair. Let us *act* with conviction and confidence.