

Evolving Humanity & Earth: “The Great Work” of Thomas Berry



Sandy Hinden



Introduction

Humanity stands at a turning point in its long story with the Earth. Our science has expanded the boundaries of knowledge, yet our wisdom has not kept pace. The result is an accelerating crisis of climate, ecology, inequality, and meaning — a planetary disorder born of forgetting who we are in the vast community of life.

Few voices have spoken to this crisis with greater depth and foresight than **Thomas Berry (1914–2009)** — cultural historian, priest, and ecological philosopher. In *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future*, Berry calls our generation to a task no previous generation has faced: to move from a period of human domination over nature to one of **mutually enhancing relationship between humanity and the Earth**. He saw this not as a reform or a program but as a **civilizational transformation** — a reawakening of consciousness, ethics, and culture that restores the sacred dimension of life and situates the human within the story of the evolving universe.

This vision was not only theoretical for those who knew him. **Sanford Hinden met with Thomas Berry three times** — twice at his **Riverdale Center for Religious Research**, overlooking the Hudson River, and once in a private meeting at the **United Nations in New York City** in connection with his **Universal Children's Gardens** project. In those encounters, Berry affirmed the beauty and purpose of Hinden's work for the children of the world and the future of the Earth itself.

Drawing from those formative exchanges, Hinden has carried forward Berry's call through initiatives such as *Sacred Earth Economics*, *Commonwealth for Earth & Humanity*, and the *Annual Sacred Earth Conference*. Each of these projects continues the Great Work — envisioning an economy, governance, and culture rooted in consciousness, compassion, collaboration, co-intelligence, and co-creativity.

The pages that follow explore both **Berry's original process** — awakening perception, re-storying our myths, reorienting ethics, and reinventing the human — and its **modern extension** through Wisocracy's framework for wise, sustainable systems. Together they express a single continuity: the evolution of the human spirit toward harmony with the living Earth.

The purpose of this document is not only to understand *The Great Work* — but to participate in it — to recognize that the future of Earth depends on how fully humanity learns to live as part of its sacred community of life.

Thomas Berry & “The Great Work”

Thomas Berry (1914–2009) was a cultural historian, Catholic priest, and eco-theologian who became one of the most influential voices in the field of Earth spirituality and ecological philosophy.

He described himself as a “geologist,” emphasizing that humanity must understand itself as part of the larger story of the Earth and the universe.

Through works like *The Dream of the Earth* and *The Great Work*, Berry called for a new, life-centered worldview that unites science, religion, and ethics in service to the flourishing of the planet.

Berry’s Context: “The Great Work”

Thomas Berry’s “The Great Work: Our Way into the Future” describes not a linear process but a multilayered transformation.

He calls it humanity’s **Great Work**—the historical task of transitioning from an era of **exploitation and domination of nature** to an era of **mutually enhancing relationship between humans and the Earth**.

This transformation requires deep change in consciousness, culture, and institutions.

It is civilizational rather than technical, requiring a new story—an ‘Earth story’—that situates human life within the unfolding of the universe rather than above it.

Key Elements of Berry's Process

Berry envisioned several interdependent elements that together form the process of the Great Work. These overlap rather than follow strict order, integrating inner change, cultural renewal, and institutional transformation.

Element	Description	Why It Matters
Awakening / Perception Shift	Humans must regain awareness of Earth as sacred, alive, and a 'communion of subjects' rather than a collection of objects.	Without a shift in consciousness, policy or technology changes will repeat exploitative patterns.
Re-storying / Myth & Narrative	We must adopt a new cultural myth that locates humanity within the universe's story of evolution and cosmogenesis.	Stories give meaning and orientation, shaping what people believe is possible.
Ethical Reorientation	New ethical relationships must be formed—rights of rivers, mountains, species; duties of care and reciprocity.	Ethics must move beyond anthropocentrism toward an Earth-centered moral framework.
Institutional & Systemic Change	Transformation must permeate law, politics, economy, education, and religion.	Inner change alone is insufficient; systems and structures must reflect new values.
Element	Description	Why It Matters

Reinventing the Human	Berry calls for evolving a new identity that views humans as participants within, not masters over, Earth's systems.	This is a radical shift in self-understanding.
Imagination + Creativity + Hope	The process requires cultivating artistic, spiritual, and imaginative capacities that sustain vision and possibility.	Creative imagination fuels resilience and moral energy.
Practical Engagement / Action	All of the above must be embodied in real projects—ecological restoration, design, and community innovation.	Vision must manifest in concrete action.
Iterative Feedback, Learning, Adaptation	Because the Great Work is unprecedented, the process must be experimental and adaptive.	We must stay humble, learning from failures and ecological feedback.

How the Process Might Unfold (A Possible Sequence)

Though Berry did not present a strict sequence, one can outline a possible unfolding:

- 1. Crisis Awareness & Disruption** – Recognition that the dominant trajectory is unsustainable.
- 2. Conscious Awakening** – Growing dissonance with industrial modes of living.
- 3. Narrative Shift / New Story** – Emergence of an 'Earth story' locating humanity within cosmogenesis.
- 4. Ethical & Philosophical Reorientation** – Development of new values and obligations beyond human-centeredness.
- 5. Institutional Realignment** – Changes in law, economy, education, and governance.
- 6. Embodied Practice / Local Experiments** – Communities model new, regenerative ways of living.
- 7. Scaling & Diffusion** – Successful practices spread culturally and institutionally.
- 8. Continuous Reflexivity & Renewal** – Ongoing adaptation as human-Earth relationships evolve.

Challenges and Tensions in the Process

Berry recognized the Great Work as both urgent and difficult:

- **There is no external 'enemy'**—we are part of the problem and must transform from within.
 - **The ecological crisis is severe and time-limited.**
 - **Powerful systems resist change** due to vested interests.
 - **Cultural fragmentation** makes holistic thinking difficult.
 - **Sustaining hope and imagination** is essential to avoid despair.
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Sandy Hinden's work for The Great Work of Thomas Berry

2012 - SACRED EARTH ECONOMICS



Sacred Earth Economics was proposed by Sanford Hinden (founder of Wisocracy) who worked closely with Robert Muller of the United Nations, and eco-theologian Thomas Berry, the

repository of the work of Teilhard de Chardin.

Hinden proposed an annual global conference to be broadcast on the Internet, expressing the need for a new economic system to match human's higher values, higher-self, higher purpose, and best intentions.

He idealized a sustainable, higher economic system to support humanity and Earth. It took economics beyond competition to sustainability for humanity and nature, and sought to balance development and wealth creation, with sustainable living and environmental conservation.

Rather than an economic system guided by caveat emptor (let the buyer beware), it was guided by uberrima fides (in the utmost good faith).

The goal was to help sustain all of humanity and the Earth by creating sustainable communities worldwide with shared assets and enlightened infrastructure that enlightens humanity and cares for the Earth, our sacred home in the universe.

2015 - COMMONWEALTH FOR EARTH & HUMANITY



CEH was proposed by Sanford Hinden (founder of Wisocracy). The vision of the Commonwealth for Earth & Humanity is to achieve Global Disarmament gradually through a 10% national reduction of military spending,

with funds being redistributed into Earth Care, Human Development, Social Evolution, and Infrastructure for Sustainability.

The funds would produce enlightened people, thriving families, creative communities, worker-owned cooperatives, regional cooperation, international peace, and a sustainable, healthy planet.



The Annual Sacred Earth Conference

By Sanford Hinden

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The Earth is asking humanity to evolve more rapidly to become conscious, compassionate, collaborative, co-intelligent, and co-creative if we, as a species, are to survive on Earth.

If humans are not able to do evolve rapidly, they will become the first species to self-destruct, along with destroying many other species, and a magnificent biosphere that took billions of years to create.

The Earth is now asking us to evolve rapidly to become a wise species, so our nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons do not become the end of us.

The Earth is now asking us to grow in heart and compassion to match our advancement in science and technology.

We now call this emotional and social intelligence. For thousands of years, religions called this kindness, love, charity, forgiveness, mercy, peace, harmlessness, selfless-service, unity, oneness.

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This call of the Earth has been growing louder for the past 60 years... I heard it clearly through two teachers of mine, Thomas Berry and Robert Muller.

In the late 1970s, I first learned of Thomas Berry when I attended a talk by [Robert Muller](#) at the [Teilhard Society for the Future of Man](#) Tom hosted at the [Riverdale Center for Religious Research](#).

Robert became a mentor and dear friend for 30 years of his 60-year career with the United Nations, including his work with five Secretaries-General, the creation of 22 specialized UN agencies, and the co-founding of the *United Nations University for Peace*.

In the early 1980s, working at Planetary Citizens across from the UN in New York City, I then met with Tom Berry several times over a three-year period for *Universal Children's Gardens*, which I had founded, and he said was the most beautiful program on the planet. He became an honorary board member of UCG.

Our motto was “*Growing food, flowers, trees, peace hope and love.*” UCG lasted from 1979 to 1985, affiliating 135 children’s gardens in 17 nations with the United Nations.

Today in 2016, as a global and local organizer, drawing on the wisdom of Thomas Berry and Robert Muller, I hear their call and see the need to create an annual *Sacred Earth Conference* with the participants of the *Center for Humans and Nature* that would be an alternative to the annual G20 summit.

“In my view, after fifty years of service in the United Nations system, I perceive the utmost urgency and absolute necessity for proper Earth government. There is no shadow of a doubt that the present political and economic systems are no longer appropriate and will lead to the end of life and evolution on this planet. We must therefore absolutely and urgently look for new ways.”

**Robert Muller, former UN Assistant Secretary General
Co-Founder of the UN University for Peace**

“The Earth, with its layers of land and water and air, provides the space within which all living things are nurtured and the context within which humans attain their identity. If, in the excitement of a secular technology, reverence for the Earth has diminished in the past, especially in the Western world, humans now experience a sudden shock at the devastation they have wrought on their own habitation.

The ancient human-Earth relationship must be recovered in a new context, in its mystical as well as in its physical functioning. There is a need for awareness that the mountains and rivers and all living things, the sky and its sun and moon and clouds all constitute a healing, sustaining sacred presence for humans, which they need as much for their psychic integrity as for their physical nourishment. This presence, whether experienced as Allah, as Atman, as Sunyata, or as the Buddha-nature or as Bodhisattva; whether as Tao or as the One or as the Divine Feminine, is the atmosphere in which humans breathe deepest, and without which, they eventually suffocate.”

Thomas Berry

Based on first telling “*The Story of the Universe*,” we need to build a process for the recovery of a sense of sacredness for our beautiful and beloved planet Earth.

We need an *Annual Sacred Earth Conference*, supported by an organizational structure that can support the work using a process I call *C5 ~ Consciousness, Compassion, Collaboration, Co-Intelligence, and Co-Creativity*.

We also need to create ongoing *participatory committees (working group structure)* for contributors to support the co-evolution of consciousness and collaboration of humanity and the Earth.

Successful movements are based on the five phases of development. The *Annual Sacred Earth Conference* and ongoing *Committees* are a natural structural extension, growing out of the “*The Story of the Universe*.”

1	Story	WHY WHAT	A clear, simple and compelling narrative of WHY we want to accomplish WHAT.
2	Structure	WHAT WHO	Organizational chart with committees based on the functions needed.
3	Strategy	HOW	Developed and updated by the participants.
4	Systems	HOW	To improve the procedures and processes of the work.
5	Skills	HOW	To improve the capacity of the workers to be effective to reach goals and objectives.

Ongoing Committees & Annual Conference Tracks					
Sacred Earth Economics	Evolutionary Psychology	Character Building for Enlightened Leadership	Sustainable Families	Creative Communities	Earth Care

I look forward to working with people interested in the development of an *Annual Sacred Earth Conference* and ongoing *Committees*.

The Earth asks us to go beyond what is, to be brave and bold, to tell the story, build the new structures for organizing, strategize wisely, create new systems, and train ourselves in new ways of teaching consciousness, compassion, collaboration, co-intelligence, and co-creativity so we may survive and thrive on our beautiful and sacred home in the universe.

12 Ways to Advocate for a Mutually Enhancing Relationship Between Humanity & Earth



Educate for Ecological Literacy

Integrate planetary well-being into all human services and civic education
— teaching that social justice and ecological justice are inseparable.

Frame Earth as Client and Partner

Apply the social-work principle of client dignity to the biosphere:
the Earth has intrinsic worth and rights that must be protected and restored.

Promote Environmental Justice

Address environmental racism and inequity — ensure that vulnerable communities
are not bearing the costs of pollution, extraction, or climate collapse.

Empower Community Voice

Facilitate listening circles and participatory planning where residents
co-design sustainable housing, food, and transport systems.

Bridge Social and Ecological Policy

Advocate for laws that link human welfare to ecological integrity
— e.g., green jobs, just-transition funds, and regenerative agriculture.

Use Strengths-Based Storytelling

Share success stories of restoration and resilience to inspire agency rather than despair.

Model Sustainable Practice

Lead by example: minimize waste, choose ethical procurement, and
embed ecological mindfulness in professional and organizational routines.

Coalition-Build Across Sectors

Unite social workers, educators, health advocates, environmental scientists, and faith
leaders around shared values of care and interdependence.

Practice Systems Thinking

Map how economic, political, and ecological systems interact
— identify leverage points where small changes create cascading benefits.

Center Intergenerational Justice

Advocate for policies that safeguard the well-being of future generations
— from climate action plans to education for ecological citizenship.

Integrate Healing and Advocacy

Recognize ecological grief and trauma; use restorative dialogues and
rituals that help people process loss while mobilizing for change.

Re-Sacralize Relationship with Earth

Encourage cultural and spiritual reconnection with nature
— see Earth not as a resource warehouse. Honor Earth as a living community.

www.Wisocracy.org

Sanford Hinden is a global systems educator dedicated to promoting peace, justice, and the stewardship of the Earth. As the founder of Wisocracy, he designs frameworks for wisdom-driven governance, whole-systems approaches, and leadership healing, helping humanity and nature in an age of planetary crisis. Sandy's work spans five decades and continents — facilitating transformational programs, and founding and organizing NGOs, community organizations, and UN initiatives. He is the author of multiple works on personal growth, leadership transformation, civic education, peacebuilding, systemic reform, and regenerative governance.

Sanford Hinden
www.wisocracy.org
sanfordhinden@verizon.net
 1-516-815-4967



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