

As our final observation, we note that the greatest danger to the human community may be the loss of its will to carry on the cosmic and numinous intentions within itself. The danger is the loss of internal vitality and a cooling down of life energies. Precisely at this time, these energies are needed in a new vigor of expression. A new vigor of expression can be brought about only by a new infusion of the life and ideals that animated this institution at its earliest foundation, and that derive ultimately from the realization of the numinous goals toward which human effort has aimed from the beginning. If, in the necessarily heroic course of the institution, these ideals are set aside as incompatible with the hard facts of life—with what are called political realities or economic urgencies—this would be like destroying the sails or the power system of a great ship and expecting to paddle it to its designated port. Little wonder that the human effort would soon be exhausted. The real skill is to raise the sails and catch the power of the wind as it passes by.

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Evening Thoughts

*On the occasion of the presentation of the Thomas Berry
Award to Tu Weiming, director of the Harvard-Yenching
Institute, at the Millenium World Peace Summit of
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During these past few days much has been accomplished to advance the cause of peace by our discussions and simply by our being with each other. We learn to trust and admire each other and to share with each other the traditions we represent.

This evening I suggest that we continue this presence to each other by looking beyond ourselves to the larger universe we live in. If it were convenient, I would suggest that we go outside this building, that we go beyond all the light and noise of the city and look up at the sky overarching the Earth. At this time in the evening, we would see the stars begin to appear as the sun disappears over the horizon. The light of day gives way to the darkness of night. A stillness, a healing quiet, comes over the landscape.

It is a moment when some other world makes itself known, some numinous presence beyond human understanding. We experience the wonder of things as the vast realms of space overwhelm the limitations of our human minds. At this moment, as the sky turns golden and the clouds reflect the blazing colors of evening, we participate in the intimacy of all things with each other.

Parents hold their children more closely and tell stories to the children as they go off into dreamland, wonderful stories of times gone by, stories of the animals, of the good fairies, adventure stories of heroic wanderings through the wilderness, stories of dragons threatening to devour the people, and of courageous persons who

saved our world in perilous times. These final thoughts of the day are continued in the minds of children as even in their sleep they begin to dream of their own future, dreams of the noble deeds that would give meaning to their lives. Whether awake or asleep, the world of wonder fills their minds, the world of beauty fills their imaginations, the world of intimacy fills their emotions.

When we look back over our own lives, we realize that whatever of significance we have achieved has been the fulfillment of earlier thoughts and dreams that sustained us when we encountered difficulties through the years.

Beyond the dreams of our personal future, there are the shared dreams that give shape and form to each of our cultural traditions. Because this other world cannot be explained by any technical or scientific language, we present this other world by analogy and myth and story. Even beyond childhood this is the world of the human mind.

So tonight as we look up at the evening sky, with the stars emerging against the fading background of the sunset, we think of the mythic foundations of our future. We need to engage in a shared dream experience.

The experiences that we have spoken of as we look up at the starry sky at night, and as, in the morning, we see the landscape revealed as the sun dawns over the Earth—these experiences reveal a physical world but also a more profound world that cannot be bought with money, cannot be manufactured with technology, cannot be listed on the stock market, cannot be made in the chemical laboratory, cannot be reproduced with all our genetic engineering, cannot be sent by e-mail. These experiences require only that we follow the deepest feelings of the human soul.

What we look for is no longer the Pax Romana, the peace of imperial Rome, nor is it simply the Pax Humana, the peace among humans, but the Pax Gaia, the peace of Earth and every being on the Earth. This is the original and final peace, the peace granted by whatever power it is that brings our world into being. Within the

universe, the planet Earth with all its wonder is the place for the meeting of the divine and the human.

As humans we are born of the Earth, nourished by the Earth, healed by the Earth. The natural world tells us: I will feed you, I will clothe you, I will shelter you, I will heal you. Only do not so devour me or use me that you destroy my capacity to mediate the divine and the human. For I offer you a communion with the divine, I offer you gifts that you can exchange with each other, I offer you flowers whereby you may express your reverence for the divine and your love for each other.

In the vastness of the sea, in the snow-covered mountains, in the rivers flowing through the valleys, in the serenity of the landscape, and in the foreboding of the great storms that sweep over the land, in all these experiences I offer you inspiration for your music, for your art, your dance.

All these benefits the Earth gives to us individually, in our communities and throughout the entire Earth. Yet we cannot be fully nourished in the depths of our being if we try to isolate ourselves individually or if we seek to deprive others of their share by increasing our own; for the food that we eat nourishes us in both our souls and our bodies. To eat alone is to be starved in some part of our being.

We need to reflect that our individual *delight* in the song of the birds or the sound of the crickets and cicadas in the evening is enhanced, not diminished, when we listen together in the evening with our families and our friends. We experience an easing of the tensions that develop between us, for the songs that we hear draw us into the intimacy of the same psychic space. So too music, our folk music as well as the symphonies of Mozart or Beethoven, draws an unlimited number of persons into the same soul space.

Perhaps our greatest resource for peace is in an awareness that we enrich ourselves when we share our possessions with other. We discover peace when we learn to esteem those goods whereby we benefit ourselves in proportion as we give them to others. The very structure

and functioning of the universe and of the planet Earth reveal an indescribable diversity bound in an all-embracing unity. The heavens themselves are curved over the Earth in an encompassing embrace.

Here I would recall the experience of Henry David Thoreau, an American naturalist of the mid-nineteenth century who lived a very simple life with few personal possessions. At one time he was attracted to the idea of purchasing an especially beautiful bit of land with a pasture and a wooded area. He even made a deposit. But then he realized that it was not necessary to purchase the land because, he reasoned, he already possessed the land in its wonder and its beauty as he passed by each day. This intimacy with the land could not be taken away from him no matter who owned the land in its physical reality. So indeed that same bit of land could be owned in its wonder and beauty by an unlimited number of persons, even though in its physical reality it might be owned by a single person.

Such was the argument of Mencius, the Chinese Confucian writer who taught the emperor that he should open up the royal park for others, since it would be an even greater joy to have others present with him, just as at a musical concert we enjoy the music without diminishing, but increasing, our own joy as we share it with others. So too for those in the Bodhisattva tradition of India, where those such as Shanti Deva, in the fifth century of our era, took a vow to refuse beatitude itself until all living creatures were saved. For only when they participated in his joy could he be fully caught up in the delight of paradise.

It has taken these many centuries for us to meet with each other in the comprehensive manner that is now possible. While for the many long centuries we had fragments of information concerning each other, we can now come together, speak with each other, dine with each other. Above all we can tell our stories to each other.

Tonight we might recall the ancient law of hospitality, whereby the wanderer was welcomed. So it was with Ulysses on his long voyage home after the Trojan war. When exhausted and driven ashore

on occasion, and surrounded by a people he had never met before, he was consistently rested, invited to dine with the people of the place, and then in the quiet moment afterward invited to tell his story. So it has been, I trust, with each of us in these past few days. To some extent we have been able to tell our stories to each other. Now a new phase in all our stories has begun as we begin to shape the Great Story of all peoples as we move into the future.

As a final reflection, I would suggest that we see these early years of the twenty-first century as the period when we discover the great community of the Earth, a comprehensive community of all the living and nonliving components of the planet. We are just discovering that the human project is itself a component of the Earth project, that our intimacy with the Earth is our way to intimacy with each other. Such are the foundations of our journey into the future.

Now night has advanced. The stars are more brilliant than ever. The time has come for us to enjoy our final moments with each other as we continue our journey on into the twenty-first century.