

The Story *of* Everything

A Parable of Creation and Evolution

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TO BEGIN

THIS is a parable. A parable is a story you lay down next to a mystery, as a way of honoring it. When the mystery is about *everything*—about quarks and bugs and spirits and stars, not to mention science, religion, and philosophy—well, that’s a lot for a parable to handle.

So this one is longer than most. But it’s not that complicated. There’s a Speaker. There’s a Story. Each has a life. Each makes a journey. The Story’s journey seems almost human, which should not be surprising because stories *are* a lot like people. They are born, they grow, and they die, just like people do. They enter your life, they stay for a while, they leave. Where they go is anybody’s guess, but sometimes they return, vastly changed.

“We are in trouble just now because we are in between stories,” said the priest and self-described “Earth Scholar” Thomas Berry in 1978:

The Old Story—the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it—sustained us for a long time. It shaped our emotional attitudes, provided us with life purpose, energized action, consecrated suffering, integrated knowledge, and

guided education. We awoke in the morning and knew where we were. We could answer the questions of our children.

But no longer, said Berry, and he saw a New Story in the distance, coming our way. Nearly thirty years later, we are still in between. Maybe that's because it's hard to let the Old Story go. When you love something, when you hold it sacred, how can you show it the door and give its place to a stranger? There is guilt in the transition, and fear. You feel unclean. You feel uncertain. You betray the Old even as you greet the New.

And so, as Berry foresaw, we are still in trouble. In our schools and courts we go to war these days under the flags of "creation," "evolution," and "intelligent design." Some of us fight for the Old, others just as desperately, as "fundamentally," for the New. It looks like a war between religion and science, but it is not; it is a war between those who embrace their stories with a grip so tight they squeeze the very life from them. Look at the result of such embraces: a bloody trail throughout history of people dying—and killing—for intractable versions of a story.

What? you say. Killing for a story? Why would anyone do that? You forget: these are stories of *everything*.

Maybe if we entered the world of these stories, maybe if we went where they went and saw what they saw and listened in on their thoughts, maybe we would understand them better. Maybe we'd let them go on a long, long walk by the sea, all by themselves. I think they would like that. I think they would come back refreshed—silent and innocent, sensitive to mystery once again, absorbent, ready to find the next Speaker.