



*On the Occasion  
of the Inauguration of*

***Robert A. McDermott***

*as President of the*

***California Institute  
of Integral Studies***

*Asian Art Museum*

*San Francisco*

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**DEDICATION**

*With gratitude to  
the Institute's founder  
HARDAS CHAUDHURI  
and benefactor  
LAURANCE S. ROCKEFELLER*

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In his *Critique of Pure Reason* (of all places), Immanuel Kant reminds us that if a bird were to reflect on its flight, it might imagine that flying would be easier without resistance. Though we are more reflective than birds, and should know better, we often fall for the same illusion: that we could soar—whether intellectually, artistically, or spiritually—if there were no resistance.

This Institute not only acknowledges resistance to the spiritual, but seeks to understand this resistance, and by using it, seeks to transform it and ourselves. In myriad ways—whether in courses and workshops, doctoral dissertations and counselling sessions, chanting mantras and drama therapy, translating Lao Tzu and interpreting Jung, experiencing the goddess and balancing genders, as well as in admission and registration, salary structures and public relations—this Institute seeks to move with and through resistance to the reuniting of body, mind and spirit.

—Robert McDermott

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*Inaugural Address*

## ***Hope for a Renewing Community***

by Robert A. McDermott

I wish to thank the members of this board, and of the board as previously constituted, for affording me the privilege of serving as the fifth president of this unique and promising Institute.

What I have been able to do thus far on behalf of this Institution would have been impossible without my wife, Ellen, and whatever contribution I might make in the future will be possible in significant measure because of her help. If it isn't already, it will soon be obvious to everyone in this community that we are a team, and that we will continue working intimately and collaboratively throughout our years here as we have throughout our twenty-six years of marriage.

It was Ellen's idea to journey by train across the continent to the start of this new phase of our life. It was just a little more than a week ago that we had our noses pressed against the glass peering out at endless prairies, winding rivers, and of course, the mountains. We had begun our journey. In the evenings Ellen read *The Road from Coorain*, in which Jill Ker Conway recounts her journey from childhood in Australia to the presidency of Smith College. I read Josiah Royce's book,

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*California*, a history of this state from 1846 to 1855. As our AmTrak carried us comfortably through the jagged and forbidding Sierra Nevadas, I thought of Josiah Royce's mother, Sarah, who was rescued by the cavalry, in the snow, in those same mountains in October 1849. As she could take with her on horseback only what she could carry in her hands, she took the Bible, Milton, and a writing tablet.

Sarah Royce bequeathed this same indomitable spirit, and love of the community of ideals, to her son, Josiah, America's foremost philosopher of the ideal of community. A native son of these parts, Josiah Royce was born in 1855 in Grass Valley, in a town, as he said, "one year older than myself." He attended elementary and high schools here in San Francisco. On graduation with a degree in classics from the University of California at Berkeley, he delivered a commencement address "On a Passage in Sophocles." It was a group of San Francisco businessmen who paid for the youthful Royce to study philosophy in Germany; later, from 1878 to 1882, between his graduate study at Johns Hopkins and his years as William James' junior colleague and friend at Harvard, he returned to Berkeley to teach English literature.

Royce showed that a true community—whether a family, a friendship, a group of individuals united by an ideal, members of a team or gender, a school of artists or spiritual seekers—has three parts, each worthy of our review on this occasion:

The community as it exists through the MEMORY of the ideals and sacrifices of those who founded and sustained the community to the present:

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The community as it exists in the PRESENT, in loyalty to its ideals at each moment;

The community as it exists in the HOPE FOR THE FUTURE, in the ideals to which we aspire, and commit to serve.

### ***Community of Living Memory***

As we learned in the Sixties, we were not as able to form and sustain genuine enduring communities as were, for example, the Native Americans, because in any given present we prove unwilling to sacrifice for the future. We vainly hope to create instantly forms of life which it had taken the Native American many generations, and in some cases centuries, to form out of the wisdom and generosity of ancestors.

This community does not begin today; it is able to renew itself today thanks to the contributions of those who precede us—those whose vision and sacrifice make this renewal possible.

We thank foremost the founders of this Institute, Haridas and Bina Chaudhuri. Those of us who take seriously the concept and living reality of karma cannot help but be conscious that this Institute incarnated primarily through the agency of Haridas Chaudhuri, a spiritual philosopher, teacher, lecturer and writer of rare quality. I knew him as a friend, a mentor and an example. All of us who knew him have ever since been grateful for his learning, his vision and his practicality. Haridas' writings show that he was equally at home in Indian and Western thought, classical as well as contemporary, and that he was both scholarly and inspiring. We also express our deep gratitude to Mrs. Bina Chaudhuri for enabling the In-

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stitute to realize a measure of fidelity to Dr. Chaudhuri's vision and influence.

Michael Murphy has vividly recounted and wisely thanked the contributions of those who preceded and then supported Bina and Haridas Chaudhuri: Louis Gainsborough, Alan Watts, and Frederick Spiegelberg, among others. We are mindful as well of the efforts of previous presidents in addition to Dr. Chaudhuri and Dr. Spiegelberg—Theodore Vestal and John Broomfield—as well as two recent acting presidents, Eleanor Anderson and Obadiah Harris. We acknowledge the dedicated leadership of Ralph Metzner who served as dean, as well as faculty member, for more than fifteen years—through most of the Institute's history.

Perhaps because I have spent 25 years in full-time teaching (and only two years in full-time administration), I have never been confused about the fact that the essential function of a school, from nursery to graduate, rests with the faculty. This community has been built by the competence and dedication of faculty members working with their students and—note well—with each other, on behalf of spiritual and intellectual disciplines which scarcely come to light in other graduate schools but have been honored and shared here for the past 22 years.

In addition to the 500 students presently enrolled, this Institute boasts many hundreds of alumni and alumnae who extend the ideals and the reality of this community of seekers and thinkers throughout the state and the nation.

By virtue of the joining and extension of living links, this community of memory now includes a host of friends and

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relatives who have stood behind me and have enabled me to approach this office and this podium. My father, surely with us as the spirit that he is, helped me to anchor my feet firmly on the ground of service and good sense; my mother, from whom I learned to cherish the unique inner life of each person, is here to bless this new life which Ellen and I are now beginning. I acknowledge with love and pride our children, Darren and Deirdre, to whom we bequeath the future with hope and confidence that they and their generations will do a better job than we have done of caring for our planet and the poor.

I nod with gratitude to friends and relatives from New York, and especially to a brother who is here partly representing the faculty of a rival institution just south of here—Stanford University!

Also with us in this hall is Thomas Berry, to whose informal seminar on Dante I rode my bicycle when I was in high school. My wife Ellen wrote an article on a lecture on China which Thomas delivered in 1960 at Queens College where Ellen and I were students. Thomas gave me a copy of the *Bhagavadgita* as I left for Boston University to begin graduate studies in philosophy of religion; he officiated at our wedding in 1964; our son is named Darren Thomas. Our present is also linked to Thomas Berry through Brian Swimme, my friend and colleague, who for ten years has been Thomas' collaborator and dear friend, and is now this Institute's director of the Center for the Story of the Universe.

A person doesn't accumulate the audacity to undertake so daunting a task as the presidency of a spiritually-minded

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graduate school without the training provided by other institutions: most of what I know about administration, teaching, and the clash of ideals inevitable in an academic institution, I learned during seven years on the faculty of Manhattanville College, to which I was appointed in 1964 by then Dean Elizabeth McCormack. The fruits of that friendship have been in dramatic evidence in my a special way: when I completed my doctorate in 1969 it was Elizabeth McCormack, then president of Manhattanville, who pursued for me, perhaps because I was the newly appointed dean of the sophomore class, this conspicuous academic regalia.

At Baruch College—a senior college of 17,000 students within the City University of New York—I experienced the enabling, empowering function of education for working class students, and from my own biography was able to identify with their struggles and aspirations. I also experienced the possibilities for community even against institutional forms antithetical to individuality and interiority.

Simultaneously with my work at Baruch, I was busy attempting to grow in the Spiritual Science of Rudolf Steiner, called Anthroposophy—meaning human wisdom or the wisdom of the human, including the human in relation to the cosmos, to nature, to the earth, to human history and to spiritual realities. More than any other single source except my family, this teaching and influence of Rudolf Steiner has proven to be a decisively positive force in my life. I believe that my efforts in Anthroposophy will enable me to listen and think behind the appearances, to resonate with the variety of personalities and destinies linked to this Institute; I believe it will enable me to

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work in a disciplined way for the integration of thinking, feeling and willing in my own life and in the ways in which I will join my life to the life of this Institute.

Communities sometimes form in surprising ways. For the past five years I have felt myself to be part of a community of spiritual-minded inquirers who formed *The Esalen Project for Revisioning Philosophy* (supported, needless to say, by Laurance Rocketteller's Fund for the Enhancement of Human Spirit). This project served as a haven and energizer for philosophical thinkers in search of colleagues. Recall Josiah Royce, while he was teaching literature at Berkeley, writing to William James at Harvard, complaining that as he was all alone with no one with whom to discuss philosophy he couldn't know what was true. Those of us who for too long have had too few colleagues with whom to discuss what Jacob Needleman refers to as "The Heart of Philosophy" found a home in these *Revisioning Philosophy* conferences. Friendships were forged there which will continue to make an essential contribution to this Institute.

It was through these conferences, five of which I was privileged to attend, that I renewed my friendship with Elizabeth McCormack, and either forged or deepened Bay Area friendships with, among others, Michael Murphy, Huston Smith, Frances Vaughan, Roger Walsh, Jerry Needleman, Rick Tarnas, Don Johnson, Ty Cashman, and bless them, the Laniers: Sidney Lanier (priest and stage manager for myriad souls on their journeys) and Jean Lanier (therapist, friend, and newly appointed member of the board of this Institute).

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## *Loyalty of and to the Present Community*

As we travel from the past, from the community of our memory, on our way to an anticipation and glimpse of the future of this community, we of course pass through this memorable present, this moment of intense focus on the transition from preparation to inauguration. In the course of this brief span of time in this splendid hall we witness the convergence of careful thought, sensitive aesthetic feeling and the expression of will through dogged hard work. We thank my colleagues who brought this ceremony into reality: Phyllis Jackson, Stefanie Freydont and Anne Teich. We thank and applaud the musical artistry of the Alexander String Quartet, and note with relish that this same quartet was for two semesters in residence while I was a member of the faculty at Baruch College; Sandy Wilson and I and a colleague in the music department at Baruch planned the quartet's participation at a meeting in a favorite coffee shop around the corner from Baruch College, on 23 St. and 3rd Ave.

We should also stop to focus on the passage, "The Hour of God," written by Sri Aurobindo in 1921; it was Sri Aurobindo, whom I cannot but regard as the loftiest spiritual teacher of modern India, who sent Haridas Chaudhuri to San Francisco to take up the work of which we are all the beneficiaries. And how fitting that this passage should be read by Dionne Marx Sommers, his student and editor of his posthumous writings.

We thank our invocators—Rina Sircar, Joanna Macy and Frances Vaughan—for their blessings and encouragement. We thank my good friends, Michael Murphy and Jerry Needleman, for their reflections. I first heard about Michael Murphy from Haridas Chaudhuri when I met him here in San

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Francisco in 1970 while I was returning to New York from the Sri Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville. Michael and I took up a real friendship three years ago thanks to the *Esalen Project for Revisiting Philosophy*. I have been a friend of Jerry Needleman since the late '60's, and I have fancied myself trying to accomplish in New York something of what he has accomplished here in the Bay Area.

A person who doesn't know us better might think this entire assembly consists in a collection of friends airing their mutual admiration in public. But it is worth acknowledging that these friendships—the few that I am celebrating here and many others within and around the Institute — are themselves the result of a shared commitment to the spiritual source of the earth, of human evolution and of our daily lives, both individual and institutional. Royce would agree that in celebrating our friendships and our community we are in fact celebrating shared ideals. That is why I am emphasizing that we are a community. We are the ideals to which we are committed and which enable us to go beyond the puny selves we would otherwise be.

The remainder of the program is also an expression of this living community. At the conclusion of my talk, we will have the opportunity to participate in musical artistry. Allow me to thank on your behalf, as on my own, the choral directing of Gayle Davis, my friend and colleague from Rudolf Steiner College, a Waldorf teacher training graduate school in Sacramento on whose board I proudly serve.

Soon after, we will have the pleasure of a reception in the Gruhn Court, for which we thank Ms. Lee Gruhn. We also

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thank the Flowing Stream Ensemble for traditional Chinese music which we will hear during our reception.

### ***Hope for the Future Community***

Beyond this ceremony and this turning point in the history of our Institute, there is the push and pull of daily work, and the application of ideals to daily problems and opportunities. As we turn our thoughts to the loyalty which serves our present, and the hope with which we approach the future, we focus on the students of the Institute whose registration represents a life-defining act of hope in us and in our ability to provide the direction they seek.

Of the many ideals this Institute, and particularly this faculty, will make available to our students, none will be in such plentiful supply as our shared ideal of integralism. We are prepared to help our students integrate Asian and western intellectual and spiritual traditions; ancient and contemporary; *yin* and *yang*; masculine and feminine; spiritually transformative and practical; interior and socially active; textual and oral; analytic and artistic.

We will also have prepared for their arrival a disciplined commitment to what Steven Rockefeller refers to as spiritual democracy. In his lecture on "John Dewey, Spiritual Democracy and the Human Future," which was first delivered at the *Esalen Conference on Revisiting Philosophy* and recently published in *Cross Currents*, Steven presents this challenging text from John Dewey's early writings:

The next religious prophet who will have a permanent and real influence on human life will be the person who succeeds in pointing out the

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religious meaning of democracy, the ultimate religious value to be found in the normal flow of life itself. It is the question of doing what Jesus did for his time.

At this Institute, I believe, we will make progress not only in pointing out the religious significance of democracy, but in attempting to embody this ideal in our personal and institutional lives.

Let me offer an example of an ideal which should help to create the kind of community worthy of the socially and intellectually diverse, spiritually alert students who will continue to come to this Institute.

In the past week, we have been experiencing a phenomenon which might seem unintelligible, and perhaps embarrassing, to anyone unfamiliar with this community, but in fact I believe it is not a surprising or negative event: there has been a wide and intense difference of opinion about a physically unattractive statue of Mary the Virgin Mother in the courtyard parking lot at the entrance to the Institute. I was an unsilent member of a committee which unanimously decided to remove the statue and replace it with a statue of St. Francis. Once announced, this decision proved to be extremely controversial in segments of the community.

My immediate response to the opposition led me to want to forge ahead—let "them" learn that decisions can't always be to their liking, that this committee is in charge in this area, and that we intend to get on with it. I figured a little *yang* was in order. But subsequently I recalled a conversation from two weeks earlier: on the night that our government declared war on Iraq, I had the privilege of sitting at a conference table with



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eleven colleagues and friends, in the middle of a week-long seminar on the *Renewal of Thinking*, intensely discussing the instinct to violence and power which lives in all of us, particularly in us males.

In the course of this memorable discussion, wise reflections were offered by Roger Walsh, Frances Vaughan, Patrick Hill, and others, as a result of which we all experienced the living fact that anyone wishing to avoid violence and conflict ought not draw a line in the sand and set a clock. Under this good influence, I was able to respond to the dissenting members of this community in a way tragically lacking in our war on Iraq, and in a way which meets the ideal of a spiritual democracy.

My response to the dissenting members of the community was aided by the fact that they were already part of this community. Local disagreements such as this are but training for the daunting and urgent task of recognizing all peoples, as well as all of the kingdoms of nature, as members of a complex yet single community. This is the ideal to which I hope this Institute will aspire. We won't be able to treat Iraqis as community members if we can't respect the opinions and passions of our own colleagues and students.

In my previous academic institution, like virtually all other academic institutions, faculty and staff seemed primarily concerned with their pensions and power base; here passions run high concerning iconography. That's fine with me: it is by our symbols and ideals, and our fidelity to them, that we wish to be known—and measured.

While disagreements and disappointments are inevitable in an institution devoted to the study and transformation of

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values, to the extent that we achieve our ideal, none will feel disenfranchised or diminished; we will strive to be as inclusive as possible and no more exclusive than necessary.

### **Conclusion**

I consider myself, from this time forward, to be responsible—not alone, certainly, but in a special way—for the destiny of this apparently unique graduate school. My actions must be, and will be, motivated and measured by the degree to which they are informed by and loyal to the deepest aspirations of this entire community. When my service to this Institute comes to an end, I hope to be able to say in retrospect, as Royce said at a testimonial dinner in his honor in New York City in 1915: My deepest commitment has been the ideal of the community.

Let me ask you to accept my heartfelt gratitude for the privilege of serving this Institute and its ideals in concert with all here assembled and many others, and to accept my promise that I will serve in a way which is loyal to the memory of our shared past and loyal to the highest ideals of the future for which we hope and to which we aspire.

Thank you.