Seeking integral community
in an ecological age . . .


* * *
The “Ecozoic Era” is a time of mutually enhancing relationships among humans and the larger community of life.

* * *
The “Great Work” is living the promise of the ecozoic.

* * * * *


THOMAS BERRY MEMORIAL SERVICE AND AWARD CEREMONY, NEW YORK CITY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2009

Dear Colleagues,

Thomas Berry who passed away on June 1st is being remembered in many places across North America and around the world. So many messages are coming in with words of deep appreciation for this remarkable teacher, writer, and sage

Thus we are pleased to invite you to join us for the Thomas Berry Award and Memorial Service on Saturday, September 26th 2009 at the Cathedral of St John the Divine in New York City. For many years the Cathedral has held a special place in the religious and cultural life of New York. Thomas Berry was a canon there and he was a major inspiration for the Cathedral’s long standing concern for the environment. We are delighted that Dean James Kowalski is welcoming this event with great enthusiasm.

The Thomas Berry Award was initiated in 1999 at the same time as the Thomas Berry Foundation was established. This year the award will be given to Martin Kaplan who helped to set up the Thomas Berry Foundation and has been an extraordinary supporter of Thomas’s vision. He is a leader in the field of
environmental grant making and has assisted environmental programs at Harvard, Columbia, MIT, and Yale. He has been instrumental in the work of the Forum on Religion and Ecology.

All events will take place in the Cathedral which is located at Amsterdam and 112th Street near Columbia University. The schedule is as follows:

- 2:00 Thomas Berry Award ceremony honoring Martin Kaplan
- 3:30 Break
- 4:00 Thomas Berry Memorial Service with Paul Winter
- 6:00 Reception in the Cathedral

We look forward to your joining us for this special time to honor Thomas's legacy and to recommit ourselves to the great work ahead.

Warmest wishes,

Mary Evelyn Tucker
maryevelyn.tucker@yale.edu

John Grim
john.grim@yale.edu

This event is sponsored by the Thomas Berry Foundation which was established in 1999 to foster his work. Donations to continue his legacy may be sent to:

The Thomas Berry Foundation
c/o Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim
29 Spoke Drive
Woodbridge CT 06525

EUCHARIST CELEBRATION AND BURIAL OF THOMAS BERRY, C.P., AT GREEN MOUNTAIN MONASTERY- GREENSBORO, VERMONT, JUNE 8, 2009

The weather at Green Mountain Monastery on June 8th, the day of the funeral mass and burial of our dear friend and teacher Thomas Berry was impeccable. With bright blues skies and a few puffy white clouds, the mist from the early Vermont morning had burned off completely by the time people had assembled in front of and to the side of the monastery entrance, greeting each other in wait for the toll of the bell to signal the commencement of the service.

Upon hearing the monastery bell, all fell silent and began to follow one by one as Sr. Gail Worcelo led us in a silent walking meditation down a balsam-lined path circumambulating the steel statue of St Francis and the Birds donated by Frederick Franck in 2006 to Green Mountain Monastery in
honor of Thomas Berry. After circling the lower meadow and mid-sized evergreens, people gathered in front of the statue. The dedication by Franck was read aloud:

I dedicate this steel icon to the deathless spirit incarnate in one of the most precious of my contemporaries.

Like that of St Francis of Assisi, Thomas Berry’s life testifies to the indestructible human spirit, the surviving triumph of human wisdom over all the follies and cruelties of our generation.

Then we left single file once more and filed into the monastery for the Eucharist Celebration and Burial Mass, whose celebrants were listed as: “The Entire Earth Community.”

In the center of the room, surrounded by the people that loved him, lay Thomas’s casket with a single lit candle placed upon it.

Musician Paul Winter pierced the silence with his soprano sax in a prelude that was part lament, leading participants into a state of presence and contemplation.
Then Sr. Gail (co-founder with Fr. Thomas Berry and Bernadette Bostwick of Green Mountain Monastery) came to the podium and welcomed us. She reminded us how,

At the age of eleven, Thomas had a life altering experience when he came upon a Meadow filled with white lilies in his home town of Greensboro, North Carolina. This experience was not so much an epiphany but a “geo-phany,” the sudden revelation of the numinous presence of the Divine penetrating the Earth.

Thomas dedicated his entire life to this geo-tific vision. Whatever preserved the meadow was good, whatever opposed the meadow was not. The Meadow was an archetype for the entire Earth Community.”

How fitting it is that he would be laid to rest, in our Meadow, which today takes Thomas back to itself in a full embrace.

When Gail’s welcome was at an end, the response of “O Thou who Clothes the Lilies” was sung by Sr. Kathleen Deignan. During this song, Sisters Bernadette and Gail laid upon the coffin three objects sweet with symbolic and ordinary significance: a vase of white lilies, Thomas’s well-worn navy blue jacket and his black loafers. I had a sense of both history and the future, where his items of dress, so familiar to those who knew Thomas, would become treasures in the years and centuries to follow.

We were then graced with the recorded voice of Thomas reflecting in anticipation of when we would all be gathered together for this moment:

It is a touching moment, a poignant moment a person might say. Together with you all here, in a sense for the last time that we would meet in such a large assembly with those of us who have been associated with each other over all these many years.

I came across something not long ago, it was a story of an Indian whose name was Rubin Snake, a rather large person, who did so much for his tribe. I’m not sure exactly what tribe.
He was talking with someone and they were venturing on something of monumental importance. The other person was reflecting on it and said, ‘dear, this is something awesome to try to do,. There’s you and me, and we are nothing. And we must be very foolish to even think of such a thing.

The old Indian, in a gruff voice said, “Yeah, but we’ll find good companions along the way.”

And so in my own life venture, I’ve found good companions along the way. And from moment to moment the number has gathered until it seems almost limitless the number of good companions.”

Moments of silence followed in which we marveled at the truth and goodness of Thomas’s comforting words to us.

The mass proceeded with a call to prayer by Fr Steve Dunn, C.P., and three verses of a Song of Blessing by Coleen Fulmer that began:

The whole of the Earth will be blessed by you; in God you have made your home. The stars will dance as they call out your name; your heart always laughing with joy, your heart always laughing with joy.

The Gloria was from the Mass in the Ecozoic by Jan Novotka and the first reading was done by Kaiulani Lee from the Gospel of Thomas:

Jesus said to his disciples, “Compare me to something and tell me what I am like.”
Simon Peter said to him, “You are like a righteous angel.”
Matthew said to him, “You are like a wise philosopher.”
Thomas said to him, “Teacher, my mouth is utterly unable to say what you are like.”
Jesus said, “I am not your teacher. Because you have drunk, you have become intoxicated from the bubbling spring that I have tended.”

Following was the Psalm, “The Ways of the Universe” also by Jan Novotka, and the Psalm reader was Brian Brown.

Then came the Alleluia “Journey’s Ended, Journey’s Begun” from the recording Spirit Alive (Weston Priory).

Journey’s Ended, Journey’s Begun to go where we have never been, to be beyond our past, moments of lifting up transcending death, rising in transparent light to the fullness of God’s presence.

The Gospel Reading was Matthew 6: 26-28, which was read by Fr. Steve Dunn, C.P., who followed this reading with a homily focusing on the cosmological perspective needed to answer Thomas’s often posed question: “What time is it?”

What time is it? In this case, for the lilies of the field and birds of the air, as well as the Green Mountains, especially the Green Mountain Monastery, and each of us honoring Thomas’s 94 years.”

Ann Berry Somers, the niece of Thomas Berry then gave the Eulogy. Coming from a close family member who met with Thomas weekly once he came home to North Carolina after his years of teaching and directing in New York City, her eulogy was heartwarming and informative to the many present who had not participated in this aspect of Thomas's life.

Though her whole talk will be on the Thomas Berry website shortly, one story stands out in this writer’s mind: Ann told us that she was on numerous occasions able to press Thomas on some of the utterances he would make that begged elaboration. One instance was about the small self (each individual component of the Universe) and the Great Self—the Universe in its wholeness. Thomas mentioned the meaning of it all.
“Well, what does it mean?” she asked her “Uncle Brother” point blank.

In time Thomas replied that the meaning is in “the attraction between the small self and the Great Self” a theme that underlies his often quoted statement that the Universe is not a collection of objects but a communion of subjects and one of the great mysteries of existence.

She also told some humorous tales from Thomas’s life: Once as the family was gathered around—nieces and nephews and their children—as he celebrated mass, he became “so animated by his own words” that he almost went up in flames as he gesticulated and his sleeve ignited from the flame of a nearby candle!

When Ann stepped down, we then rose to recite the Litany of the Saints, written by John Becker in 1987, words adapted by Srs. Gail and Bernadette. This special Litany was recited at the Dedication and Blessing of the Monastery not long ago and it goes so deeply to the core of the human struggle that many people around the room were moved to tears.

This recitation lists the growing number of saints including now Thomas Berry himself and his contemporary, Ewert Cousins who passed away two days before Thomas. Many of us who had been mentored by Dr. Cousins shed an extra tear of joy and sorrow to see his name so tenderly added to this list that began with the Holy Family, all the archangels, continuing through the martyrs, reformers and leaders of the Church throughout the centuries, to holy men and women outside Church canon: Black Elk, Rachel Carson, Albert Einstein, to victims of violence, genocide and environmental (natural and manmade) disasters, and ended with this prayer:

God give new life
To this planet
To the Earth Community
To all children of the future
Send your spirit
In its fullness
That we may awaken
As one planetary body

Following the Litany of Saints, Sister Gail then invited everyone to anoint Thomas’s casket with pine infused oil that lay in a small bowl to one side of the casket. Each person dipped a finger into the scented oil and drew close to the casket, marking their own glyphs of love and farewell onto the simple wooden box: hearts, spirals, crosses within circles. It was a deeply fulfilling and meaningful gesture.

The mass continued with more pieces from Mass in the Ecozoic and communion was accompanied with more music from Paul Winter who was stationed in the rafters above the congregation with all the other musicians and singers. A beautiful a capella piece of a poem by Mary Oliver was sung by Elizabeth Thompson and Amity Baker - “I don’t know what a prayer is- but I do know how to lay down in the grass and pay attention.”
At the closing, Sr. Gail asked for women in the room who had had a heart connection with Thomas to come up, surround the casket and dance in a circle to the closing song, *(Songs of the Angels* by Bob Dufford). We danced, hands clasped together, walking to the right and then to the left, swaying for a moment and then back in the other direction . . . another simple gesture of embrace and tenderness.

Then Sr. Gail asked for some able-bodied men to come up and carry the casket to Thomas’s final resting spot in the upper meadow. Outside the monastery, at the foot of the ascent, Sister Bernadette sounded the Ram's horn to initiate the final climb. Sr. Miriam MacGillis and Mary Evelyn Tucker also helped carry the casket. Before the final ascent, we passed through a ritual threshold where two women blessed us all with the smoke of burning cedar as a final purification before the act of burial.

At the summit, Paul Winter played his soprano sax as people prepared to lower Thomas into the Earth. The monastery bell tolled, one that is only rung when someone has died, and Thomas was lowered into the fresh Earth by those gathered.

To the side of the gravesite was a large bowl of red earth from Thomas’s birthplace—the red earth of Greensboro, North Carolina which Srs. Bernadette and Gail had collected on one of their visits to Thomas.

Once the casket had been lowered, Sister Gail invited everyone to toss a bit of this earth from “Greensboro South” to mingle with that of “Greensboro North.” Red roses were present so that we could also bid farewell with delicate rose petals. Shovels were ready for those who wanted to help fill up the grave. This went on for a long while, as people shed tears and said their final good-byes.
A final song was sung,

    Our brother is here; we give him your hand.
    Bathe him in your love
    Clothe him in your care
    Send him along
    With the wind and a song
    And the rains of the earth in his hair.

—from Bathe Him in Your Love, by Joe & Maleita Wise

Slowly people gave their leave and made their way down to the tent for the sharing of food.

The day honored the spirit of Thomas in every way and allowed those who loved him to participate intimately in committing him to the final embrace of his beloved meadow.

Angela Manno
amanno@angelamanno.com

Gail Worcelo, sgm
srgail@together.net

Photographs in this article are by Angela Manno and Martin Ostrow Martin
finecut@comcast.net

REPORT ON THOMAS BERRY’S MASS OF THE RESURRECTION, IMMACULATE CONCEPTION MONASTERY, JAMAICA, NEW YORK, JUNE 6, 2009

I was happy to join with other friends and former students at the Passionist Monastery in Jamaica Estates, New York, for Thomas Berry’s Mass of Resurrection on Saturday, June 6, 2009. I took along Thomas’s book The Dream of the Earth to read while I waited, but also just holding the book made me feel close to him. He had gifted me with this book at the time of its publication with the inscription “To Patricia with every best wish. May all your dreams be integral with the dream of the Earth. Thomas Berry—October 22, 1988.” He had first shared his Riverdale Papers with me one at a time and this publication was a collection of his many essays. They were my first primer which continued to expand my consciousness one step at a time. It is comforting to read his greeting and to re-read this worn out and somewhat tattered book with all its underlined and highlighted sections. What began as awakening knowledge has become the bedrock of my consciousness and the source of my inspiration. How I treasure the memory of those precious visits.

Back to the service— As we waited in the small chapel, Sisters of St. Joseph from The Mary Louis Academy community across the street began to arrive. As a former Sister of St. Joseph, I was happy to greet them. There were also a couple of Passionist Nuns and later half a dozen Dominican Sisters of Caldwell arrived including Sister Miriam MacGillis, OP, Founder and Director of Genesis Farm, Blairstown, New Jersey. It was touching to greet Miriam because it was from her that I first heard of Thomas Berry at an National Catholic Education Convention in Boston in the mid ’80s. Our warm embrace made words unnecessary.
I was most happy to meet Thomas's most faithful and loyal companion and friend—Brother Conrad Federspiel—who assisted him in every way while he was at the Riverdale Center located on the grounds of the Passionist Monastery in Riverdale, New York. We recalled my many visits and I was delighted to hear him say, "You were on the list of his ten top women." How humbling for a middle school teacher to hear such a compliment.

Back to the service—The Passionist community gathered on the elevated choir benches around the chapel walls. The remainder of the Chapel was filled. The Very Reverend Joseph R. Jones, C.P. (Provincial), was the main celebrant of the liturgy. The homilist was Rev. Stephen Dunn, C.P., who worked with Tom at the Holy Cross Centre for Ecology and Spirituality in Canada for more than twenty years and knew him for many years before that.

Father Dunn referred to Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker’s comment that Thomas’ s life was like a brilliant rose stained glass window where each piece shone forth brilliantly. He recited the words of the Shaker song, "Tis a Gift to Be Simple . . . Tis a Gift to be Free" He said that Tom's life was like a great symphony and this was the last note . . . but that his life will continue to play out in all those who knew him and those who will know him through what he called the GREAT WORK OF OUR TIME.

His homily (given in full text below) ended with a story of how Thomas’s Grandniece discovered her Uncle Thomas and herself in a writing by Brian Swimme about Tom. This writing is indeed a fitting description of him: “A supernova pouring forth his goodness, flinging his gifts into the world. His life was a song of the universe . . . a dance of the galaxies . . . a canticle of joy.” He believed in intimacy with all things and flooded all creation with his goodness. We will continue to bask in the light of the rose window that was Tom's life.

At the end of the Mass, Tom’s niece, Ann Berry Somers, came to the podium. She recalled that as a child she heard about an uncle who was a priest, a college professor, an author, and scholar of history. This special uncle would visit very seldom and one day she asked her mother, "Is 'Uncle Brother' really a member of our family?" It wasn't until Thomas returned to Greensboro, North Carolina in 1995 that Ann had a chance to get to know her uncle. It was in 2003 when Tom had his stroke that Ann began visiting him each Sunday. They spoke about everything under the sun and she learned so much from him. She went on to say that Thomas had struggled these past three years, but that at the end he was surrounded by compassionate caretakers, his beloved and loyal sister Margaret, and herself. He died peacefully on Monday, June 1 at 6:30 AM. As a final gesture, Father Jones presented Ann with Tom's profession cross to hold and to cherish in his memory. It was a touching moment.

The Mass was followed by a lunch in the refectory where a young Thomas began his religious life. Toward the end of the luncheon, people were invited to share some memories. Friends and former graduate assistants shared their appreciation for Tom's presence in their lives. Miriam MacGillis stood and proposed a toast to Tom for all the good he had accomplished throughout his life. Gerry Leonard mentioned what a tremendous inspiration Thomas had been to the Montessori movement. Tom Stock from Dominican Village in Amityville, New York, spoke of Tom's inspiration to his work in the organic garden. Brother Conrad had shared, just before Mass, in the Chapel, his gratitude for the time he shared with, lived with and assisted Thomas. Dan Sheridan, Tom's assistant at Riverdale, spoke of his privilege in having Tom as mentor for his graduate dissertation on Hinduism. Sister Mary Angela from Australia spoke of Thomas picking her up in his battered Toyota from a street in New York City. Even though he had no idea who she was, he picked her up without asking any questions when she asked for his guidance. Tom has a way of being fully present to anyone he spoke with no matter what their station in life. I remember that extraordinary quality from my own visits with him.

I have more notes scribbled on the back of some scrap paper which I can't quite make out. However, I think this much will give you a sense of what it was like to be in attendance at Thomas's funeral at the Passionist Monastery in Jamaica, New York.
We ask along with Thomas, "What time is it?" What time is it for those who knew and loved Thomas? What time is it for the Congregation of Passionist Priests and Brothers? What time is it for the Roman Catholic Church? What time is it for our precious planet as we move into the future? What time is it?

Pat Monahan
patm1227@verizon.net

HOMILY, MASS OF THE RESURRECTION FOR THOMAS BERRY, IMMACULATE CONCEPTION MONASTERY, JAMAICA, NEW YORK, JUNE 6, 2009

First of all, on my own behalf, and that of the Passionist Community, and especially, Fr. Joseph Jones, our Provincial, I wish to offer sincere condolences to Thomas’s niece, Anne, who is present here with us, his surviving brothers, and the extensive Berry family, and particularly to his sister Margaret, who has shown him such support and care over these last years.

It is a very great honor and humbling to be asked by Fr. Provincial to be the homilist for today. I venture to say that no one could comprehend all the facets of his life, which Dr. Mary Evelyn Tucker, his former student, then colleague, then, of late, his editor described as a kind of “rose window,” each fragment of colored glass stunning on its own merits.

It is a matter of record that Thomas Berry became a Passionist shortly before I was born, that he was ordained a priest in 1942, that he earned a doctorate in history and developed as a world renowned scholar of religions and cultures, while also serving in the Passionist China mission, in the military chaplaincy in Germany, teaching, publishing and indefatigably offering his “preachment,” as he called it, advocating a mutually enhancing relationship between Earth and its humans.

All that being said, the privilege I have had of collaborating with Thomas each summer for more than twenty years and personal encounters that long pre-date those years will have to suffice to guide me in my remarks today.

Shortly after Thomas’s sister Margaret informed me of his death, I, hoping to have a quiet background for my thoughts, happened to turn on the radio to a classical music station. To my very pleasant surprise, I had cut in on a part of Eric Copeland’s Appalachian Spring that seemed extremely appropriate: it is his approach to The Shaker Song called “Simple Gifts”. The very familiar words are:

‘Tis the gift to be simple, ‘tis the gift to be free,
‘Tis the gift to come down where we ought to be,
And when we find ourselves in the place just right,
’Twill be in the valley of love and delight.

When true simplicity is gain’d,
To bow and to bend we shan’t be ashamed,
To turn, turn will be our delight,
Till by turning, turning we come out right. [1848]

Thomas used to insist that, like a symphony, a life’s significance and meaning is not truly known until the last note is played. If you’ve ever seen Thomas participate in a dance, you would realize how unlikely is the suggestion I am about to make. But the dance of the exuberance of “simple gifts” seems to me like that note. It’s not as though he could not party. In every one of his twenty and more trips to Port Burwell in Canada, each day, after exhausting hours of lectures and probing question and answer sessions, when the participants would relax with some wine and cheese and story telling of a much lighter variety, Thomas would be the last to retire . . . only to start again next morning with his accustomed vigor. And he had a playful side that doubled as a pedagogical tool. He would set his audience on edge with a one-liner, certainly not without humor, that could only be understood if you took the time to puzzle about why he said it. At one point, Anne Lonergan and I compiled a little book of these sayings. Any thought of
It is in this Monastery that he took up the responsibility to greet “I agree with Kant: all knowledge is self
knowledge, but the self is the larger universe.” And—“People say you can’t treat people as things; I say you can’t treat things as things.” And for us religious types in the congregation: “You never quite know who is the saint and who is the demonic person. They keep changing places.”

The point is always distance. He said of himself: “I have always lived marginally. My mother told me once that I was so difficult as a child that by the age of four my mother and father had a conference one day about me, and my father said ‘We have been nice and sweet and kind to this boy. We have spanked him, we have punished him. Just nothing’s going to work. I guess he will have to raise himself intellectually.’” That we are here today is a testament to how successful that child rearing program was! Yet there is also a certain poignancy. For the thousands who understand what he meant by a multiple levels that he felt deeply. He noted: “Our modern world is not working. Christianity, in this sense, is not working. Particularly, there is the inability of the Christian world to respond in any effective way to the destruction of the planet.”

But some moments of transcending that distance are noteworthy. His famous Center for Religious Research on the grounds of the Passionist Spiritual Center in Riverdale is a prime example. Also: that Fr. Colmkiille Regan, when he was Provincial, asked him to chair a think tank he personally convened; that in the ‘sixties, and up until the turn of the century, his Canadian Brethren gladly offered him the opportunity to expand the circle of his appreciative audience beyond Riverdale; that individual Passionists were supportive of him . . . most notably Brother Conrad Federspiel, for which we are extremely grateful. All of these are witness to bridging the poignant distance. Thomas makes reference to this in his volume Evening Thoughts when he dedicates it:

To my monastery community, which has guided, Educated, and supported me through these many years.

And it must be said—the thousands of people all around the world who found it possible to respond to Thomas as a prophet of our time were very sustaining for him. But Thomas would insist, more importantly, they were sustaining what he termed the Great Work—and the Passionist community is grateful to all of them, and among them, several of you who are present here today.

Fr. Terry Kristofak, our formal Provincial superior, noted in his homily at Wednesday’s beautiful service in Greensboro that Thomas has “transformed our Passionist community, not only here, but around the world.” I would hope this homily can continue that transformation by bringing Thomas’s perspective to my brief commentaries on our three readings.

In the beginning, the story of Genesis says. In my own life as a Passionist, I especially remember two things that date all the way back to 1951. (I won’t tell you how old I was.) Fr. Coleman Haggerty was teaching us about evolution. This was so far back I don’t know whether he was for it or against it, but for some reason he made a point of the Greek translation of that phrase: “in the beginning” . . . en arche (ἐν ἀρχῇ). He noted that these were the same words with which St. John’s Gospel begins . . . because linking
the two texts suggests a cosmic dimension of Christ. The words, then, gained what Thomas would call a “numinous” quality for me. The other thing I remember was that 1951 was also the year that Thomas’s teaching career at the Prep Seminary ended—in no small part because in that McCarthy era, he felt he could not teach college level European history without having the students read Karl Marx! This began my interest in his confident intellectual leadership. Today, it allows me to interpret, in terms of the new cosmology, our reading from Genesis when it says humans “have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air and the cattle and over all the wild animals and all the creatures that crawl on the ground”. It would be better to think about Thomas’s quip: “Maybe opera is the degradation of the bullfrogs.”

Genesis speaks of God. Thomas spoke with a sense of mysticism about the Divine. His thoughts are particularly apt on this, the day before the Feast of the Trinity. “There exists in the Christian world” he said, “this sense that the inner life of the divine is community. To say that community is at the heart of the ultimate simplicity (we attribute to the Divine) is a challenging statement.” Barbara Reid, OP, a scripture scholar teaching at Catholic Theological Union, says: “Augustine liked to speak of the three persons as ‘Lover, Beloved, and Love.’ Hildegard of Bingen favored ‘Fire, Burning, and Flashing Forth.’ One might name them ‘Eternal Giver, Receiver and Outburst of Joy’. There is no limit to the ways we can speak of the profound mystery of the Three in One.” She further notes: “the saving activity of God is concrete and visible both in great moments and in the routines of everyday life.” (America Magazine. May 25, 2009)

Thomas would so agree with her that there is no limit to the ways we can speak of the profound mystery of the Three in One. He considered the model of differentiation, inner articulation, and communion—insights emerging from our scientific understanding of the universe—as another way. He thus offered a vast theological program to further articulate the numinous meaning of ἐν ἀπρόθετῳ.

Our second reading is insisting we realize that Divine love is gifted to us; the gift is primary . . . our love of the Divine is secondary. The genius of the author of this epistle is that he gives us a practical guideline: “No one has ever seen God, yet if we love one another God dwells in us and God’s love is brought to perfection in us.” In the several beautiful and moving eulogies of Wednesday’s service in Greensboro, various members of Thomas’s family introduced us to the many ways this man of towering intellect also proved to be a man of outstanding heart. By St. John’s standard: “The person without love has known nothing of God, for God is love.” Thomas certainly proved himself to be in possession of profound knowledge of the Divine. That is what he meant in yet another quip: Resist Ecstasy!

But Thomas gave us a challenge in what he called the Third Mediation of the Divine. Succeeding the Christian mediation found in sisterly and brotherly love, but not dispensing with it, the Third Mediation of the Divine is discovered in the numinous universe. He said: “The basic mood of the future might well be one of confidence in the continuing revelation that takes place in and through Earth. . . . Sensitized to such guidance from the very structure and functioning of the universe, we can have confidence in the future that awaits the human venture. (Dream of the Earth, 137)

Finally the Gospel for this Mass of the Resurrection deals with the counter intuitive Evangelical norm of “turning the other cheek” and learning to love those who would present themselves to us as enemies. Each person here, I am sure, could cite numerous examples of this altruistic behavior in Thomas’s life story that would surely make us expect that St. Luke’s sense of the exuberance of the Resurrected life applies to him: “Give and it shall be given to you . . . good measure pressed down, shaken together, running over.” However, I feel that St. Luke is also giving us the opportunity to contemplate a further aspect of the numinous cosmos. St. Luke’s sense of exuberance suggests what Thomas called the asymmetry—the wild disproportion—between the gift and response.” He cites the sacrifice parents make for their children. If the child responds with gratitude, the asymmetry is accomplished. Yet that too can demand sacrifice. Thomas said, further: “The thing that exists in our times and the root of the tragedy might be considered to be our unwillingness to make the return for what has been given us. . . . We did not choose to be here, the story (of the universe) selected us to be here. Once we are here, we must be willing to fulfill the destiny assigned to us; that is our grandeur, that is our blessedness, that is our joy, that is our peace. . . . We are not making the journey simply by ourselves. We are making it with the entire universe community, the human community, the life community, the earth community. . . . All the great transition moments are sacrificial moments. Our present transition will not be accomplished without
enormous sacrifice." He later names that sacrifice as “the entire industrial system” and describes that system as “taking beneficial resources and giving back poisonous products, rather than the return of gratitude.” (*Befriending the Earth*, 132-133)

But the last note is not tragedy, but dance. Along with Thomas, we are aware that the story of the universe has “brought us into being and guided us safely through the turbulent centuries, (so) 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.”

Thomas’s Grandniece, in Wednesday’s ceremony, read from Brian Swimme’s book that imagined a conversation between a wise person, unsurprisingly having the name Thomas, and a young person who was not named. It was in the book’s “conversations,” she said, that she discovered her Uncle Thomas and herself. This was the heart of her discovery:

Thomas: What began as the outward expansion of the universe in the fireball ripens into your desire to flood all things with goodness. Whenever you are filled with a desire to fling your gifts into the world, you have become this cosmic dynamic of celebration. . . .

Youth: But how do I know. . . . How do I know what I have to celebrate is worthwhile?

Thomas: Every song has tremendous value! Learn to sing, learn to see your life and work as a song by the universe. Dance! See your most ordinary activities as the dance of the galaxies and all living beings. If we attempt to constrain the self-emergent expressions of joy, we bottle up the exuberance of the universe. Imagine trying to hold back a supernova! It’s the same with human celebration, generosity, and creativity: try to bottle them up and you only get neurosis and destruction.

Think of the unborn of today and tomorrow, all the future generations and all the possible species. They, too, are waiting for the exuberant generosity of being. They are dependent upon it, just as you were dependent upon the generosity of the supernova five billion years ago. Fall in love, sink into intimacy with all things, explore the relationships throughout the Earth’s realm, pursue your dreams and flood all creatures with goodness” (*The Universe is a Green Dragon*, 148 (emphasis added))

The last note is the exuberant dance of Simple Gifts.

And so, we take this opportunity to declare how deeply indebted we are to Thomas Berry’s presence with us during our part of this numinous journey. His legacy goes ahead of all of us, for the “rose window” of his life can never be repeated. In particular his legacy to the Passionists beckons us across that poignant distance he himself transcended when reminding us a few years ago “We have been friends together for a long time.” So we might well ask with Thomas:

What time is it? . . . What time is it for the Passionists, what time is it for the legal profession, for the religions, for the universities, for the governments of the world . . . for each us here?

Our Eucharist brings the mystery of Christ’s Death and Resurrection into our very midst . . . may the thanksgiving it generates also bring us a deeper awareness of the numinous universe that was Thomas Berry’s Passion.

Stephen Dunn, C.P.
stephen.dunn@utoronto.ca
THOMAS BERRY’S FUNERAL, GREENSBORO, NORTH CAROLINA, JUNE 3, 2009

It was the didgeridoo—the most ancient of all instruments other than clapping sticks and drums—that called us to remember. We remembered how ancient this event was that we were a part of, the funeral of our dear friend and mentor, Thomas Berry, who brought us into deep time.

Before the service there was the viewing. Thomas’s now faded body lay as he left it, not made to look lifelike, in the Narthex where we gathered. Those old friends from far and near and the many Berrys, mostly from North Carolina gathered. It seemed clear that Thomas was not there . . . he was everywhere. Still I knelt and thanked this flesh for being such a faithful vessel of love, and dedicated myself anew to carry on.

The bulletin for the funeral accompanies this writing and I will let it serve as a description of this service, for I want most of the memory of this event to rest in the voice of Malcolm Kenton, who is one of the “children” who brought to us during the service such hope that what Thomas was about has just begun.

We remember the music of Peter Berry on the Irish harp and Anne G. Berry on the cello that still resonates within.

We remember dear Margaret Berry, Thomas sister and companion, without whom Thomas’s work would not have been so widely carried to the world. We marveled as she led the Berrys in remembering Thomas and honoring him with such dignity and, perhaps I should say, such precision and elegance.

Afterwards we joined in celebration only tinged with sadness at a reception in the place where he lived his final days Well-Spring, Greensboro, North Carolina. I thought of the old gospel tune “Why should I feel so glad, when I should feel so sad . . . .” It’s the mystery of death and resurrection and resurrection was very much felt.

This man, Saint Thomas, lived his life fully to the end, never losing his consciousness, never losing the ability to communicate deeply, never losing his wish to know “What are you up to?” before he offered anything of his own.

“What are you up to?

Herman Greene
hgreene@mindspring.com

An Eulogy for Thomas Berry: Cosmology and a Unifying Philosophical Context for Transition into the Ecozoic Era

First, let me say that I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity to have considered Thomas a mentor and a friend. I believe the best way to eulogize Thomas is to do what he and I always did during our many visits and meals together: discuss big ideas.

I met him so early that I was too young to know what an important figure he was, but from the beginning of our relationship, he saw a lot in me. Before I could articulate my thoughts on such matters as the human-Earth relationship, he had picked me to be an integral actor in the profound transformation he knew humanity must undergo in order to restore our planet to health and reestablish our proper place in the universe. He tried to guide me in a certain direction by recommending books to read and planting suggestions in my consciousness, but he knew in the end that I had to forge my own path. He saw my role, first and foremost, as being a writer. The last time I spoke to him, the week before last, despite his diminished mental
capacity, he expressed a desire for me to someday write at least one book. That day seems pretty far off, but I have a feeling that it may come. The way that I will most assuredly continue to honor Thomas’s memory is by leading a mindful life, both in the sense of a life of the mind, and in the sense of one that is mindful of the context and impacts of my actions.

When I think about Thomas, I remember one key word that was central to his thinking: “Cosmology.” It’s a word you don’t hear much in contemporary academics or literature, much less everyday conversation. It literally means, “The study or knowledge of the universe, or cosmos.” Like much of Thomas’s thought, the word is overarching and evokes the big picture. The fact that contemporary culture lacks a cosmology, or a way of relating to the universe and considering humans’ place in it, is disconcerting, and is one of the fundamental challenges Thomas grappled with as he envisioned the road ahead of us. He did so in a way that was challenging and critical, yet elegant and enlightening. His writing, often verging on the poetic, is enough to invoke a desire to recapture what has been lost in the process by which the inborn cosmology that evolved in the human species has been weathered away by belief systems that have the human project at the center point of reference and acknowledge its impact on the rest of the Earth as secondary.

Perhaps the idea of cosmology is most usefully applied to our society through the idea of context. Having a working relationship with the natural world involves putting the institutions and belief systems that guide our endeavors into a broader context. Thomas taught me that a proper cosmology obviates the age-old struggle between science and religion by giving context to both, allowing us to see the role each one plays in deepening our understanding of the world around us, which hopefully leads to a stronger desire to live in greater harmony with it. He also taught me that a cosmology can serve as a guide to the four core institutions in our society -- organized religion, the business sector, the government, and the education system. As Thomas memorably observed, “The churches are too pious. The corporations are too greedy. The government is too subservient to the corporations. And the universities should know better.” Instead, guided by a firmer sense of context, the faith that guides religious institutions and the knowledge that guides academia can perhaps work together to restore corporations and government to their proper roles in fulfilling society’s material needs while curbing its excesses.

Reclaiming such a unifying philosophical context to guide human endeavors will be our core task as we transition into the Ecozoic Era. In this next stage in world history, about whose eventual coming Thomas remained convinced, we will reestablish the universe as our primary frame of reference. Given that the universe is too big for most of us to comprehend in a way that is relevant to our daily lives, the best we can do is to place our activities in the context of the natural systems in our own small corner of the cosmos.

Thomas placed a lot of faith in my generation as the one that must, and will, lead the world into the Ecozoic Era by working within the aforementioned four core institutions to reframe their missions and purposes in light of a broader understanding of the human relationship with the universe. It’s a tall order, to be sure, and it will require a lot of teamwork, each of us contributing in our own small way, maximizing the use of our talents and the engagement of our interests. While I could not always follow Thomas as he charted a wide-ranging mental path, I could generally see the direction in which his compass was pointing. Now, I and my peers are left to continue to blaze the trail he began and, using his lifetime of scholarship as a map and foundation, write the next chapter in the Universe Story.

Malcolm Kenton
malcolm@malcolmkenton.info

THOMAS BERRY SPEAKS—VIDEO

An excerpt from the video Thomas Berry speaks, filmed by Martin Ostrow, has been posted at the bottom of this web page: http://renewalproject.net/

Martin Ostrow
finecut@comcast.net
The mission of CES is to offer a vision of an ecozoic society and contribute to its realization through research, education and the arts.

To become a member of CES, send a letter to CES at 2516 Winningham Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27516, USA, with your contact information and dues. Dues for each calendar year are US$30 (individual or family); outside USA, Canada and Mexico, add US$10. Sustaining Member US$130. Contributions are welcome.