This picture of Thomas Berry taken late in his life is a reminder of the spirit of this great man and of the legacy he left with us. June 1, 2015 will be the sixth anniversary of his death.

Thomas was a Catholic. The day that is celebrated for a Catholic saint is the day of the saint’s death. I imagine this is because this is the day that the saint’s work on Earth has been completed and is reunited with God. It is a sobering thought but is in keeping with the teachings of the church that our lives are a living sacrifice. There is no flight from mortality or denial of death in this understanding. We live with the ends of our lives in mind and ever with us. Death is the victory of a life well lived. If ever there was a person whose life was faithful to his or her purpose to the end, that person would be Thomas.

So I am brought to reflect most deeply on Thomas on the day of his death. I am drawn to consider the continuing importance of his work. Last year we held a Colloquium on “Thomas Berry: Development, Difference, Importance, Applications.” Comment was invited on the continuing importance of his work and, for purposes of dialogue, there was no assumption of continuing importance. The Colloquium was a success and, we will publish the papers from it this year. One professor who had not read Thomas extensively was impressed by what a foundational thinker he was.

Today the ecological situation is worse than in Thomas’s lifetime and the need for a change of direction is urgent. There are many approaches suggested for this. The deep ecology approach emphasizes biocentrism, localism, degrowth, and inclusion of multiple human wisdoms and traditions. This is the approach Thomas would have favored. He gave a deep and enduring cultural critique and a vision of ecozoic societies that does not fit the common understanding of sustainable development that finds continued global economic growth and sustainability compatible. Whether he was right in doing so, is not the point here. The point is that he was different and he was important. Further, his work has inspired many applications along the path he emphasized.

I have had differences with the Berry community. Difference has merit. Thomas sometimes said, “Sameness is not anything, difference is everything.” This is consistent with his overall observation that the universe is constituted by communion, subjectivity and diversity. Yet, difference can also hinder work. There is a tension between communion and differentiation.

I feel the need to move on to a new relationship with the Berry community. The coming years will try all of us and the Earth community as a whole. The wisdom Thomas gave us has not been exhausted. It needs further study, consideration and application on wider scales.
We need diversity within the Berry community because there is diverse work to do. We also need unity in order to carry the body of Berry’s work forward and see that it spreads. We need to do our particular parts in the Great Work, but also not forget the body of work that Thomas gave us. It remains fresh, has enduring value, is still transformative, and has an important place in contemporary dialogues and considerations.

My reconciliation is to work with those who have been entrusted with Thomas’s work and to honor the diversity of approaches to it.