A GUIDE TO THE NEW THOMAS BERRY WEBSITE: IT WILL NOT DISAPPOINT
By Allysyn Kiplinger

The new Thomas Berry website, http://thomasberry.org/, will not disappoint, be you a veteran scholar or a new disciple. It is a good tool for understanding Thomas Berry, his contribution, and his influence.

The site has a number of parts and functions: book store, summary of his contribution to our current moment, original source audio-video library, and highlight of others carrying on his Great Work. It is beautiful and easy to read. I encourage you to experience it yourself.

Seemingly designed for a touch-screen hand-held device—with big splashy cosmic introductory photo images on the home page—it also works well on my Windows 8 system with a 32-inch monitor. I especially like the “Next” button in the lower right-hand corner of many pages that keeps me moving in the right direction.

The many Thomas Berry-related hyperlinks scattered here and there will take you to interesting places around the web. These are fun to discover. What it does not have is a good ol’ fashioned table of contents or index, as a book does, to help understand its content and organization. You have to open each page to see the full contents of that page. That seems to be the nature of websites these days and is not necessarily the fault of this particular website. I somehow wish that were not true...but alas.

Besides the homepage, it is organized by four tabs: Biography, Publications & Media, Quotes, and The Foundation. The home page is activated automatically upon arrival or by clicking the “Thomas Berry and the Great Work” button in the top left corner of the site. It features a rotating collection of seven of Thomas’s pithy and well-known statements complete with book and page number for reference. These statements are set against gorgeous NASA photos of Earth and the universe. I feel the home page acts as an overture to Thomas’s work.

The design choice to set Thomas’s words over photos of the universe on the home page is perfect: it reiterates and reinforces Thomas’s philosophy that the universe must be our starting point. It is our context. It is a simple and profound performative support of his philosophy, ultimately congruent with all his work. It is a brilliant, insightful design choice.

The home page has links to a complete list of his books for sale (Books), an audio library (Audio), a video library (Video), and a collection of his essays (Essays).

The Biography tab leads to a 12-part overview of his life and thought, a brief biography, an impressively long list of his awards, the text of his Memorial Service Program, a list and biography of Berry Award recipients, and a long list of most of his published works.
The Publications and Media tab leads you to 77 sources (as of this writing) for his books, essays, secondary sources, videos, audio recordings, poetry, translations, and lectures. This was the most exciting part of the website for me, since it has original source material—various YouTube videos of Thomas, for example—now collected in one place. This is wonderful. Not necessarily obvious, you’ll find the videos about a third of the way down this page/tab with a repeating photo icon of Thomas. The videos are followed by audio archives represented by a different repeating photo icon of Thomas. I would have liked some sort of index for this page, in particular. A lot of the videos were made by the most wonderful Lou Niznik who followed Thomas for years with his home video recorder capturing Thomas on film and tape. It was Lou’s Great Work to do this, for which we benefit today. Lou’s widow, Jane Blewett, generously donated Lou’s videos of Thomas to the Foundation.

The Quotes tab contains quotations from four books: The Dream of the Earth, The Great Work, The Universe Story and Evening Thoughts. This collection is a useful resource for creating a ritual, liturgy, sermon, or lecture. It is a great place to “take off” from, as you activate your own Great Work. Artists and teachers could also use the list in an infinite number of ways. It’s a great review as well as a starter kit, or a re-kick-start for yourself if you’ve been away from these books for a while. For example, a friend and I have recently picked up The Universe Story to great re-discovery. (Wow, what a great book! I’d forgotten!)

The final tab is called The Foundation. It offers background for the Thomas Berry Foundation that runs this site, along with its many initiatives, associations, and affiliations. I always find this kind of information interesting, to know how things are linked together and who is involved. Here you will find the all-important “Donate via Paypal” link, a link to photos on Flickr, as well as a link to subscribe to the affiliated newsletter from the Forum on Religion and Ecology—an easy to read, straight-forward, and very important monthly newsletter. You must sign up for it.

Peppered throughout the website are lovely photographs of Thomas over the years, some familiar, many new to me. Can you find the one of Thomas with an elephant?

I hope you visit the website and find your own way through it. It is a tremendous resource. Great thanks to the Thomas Berry Foundation for this gift to the world!