

REMEMBERING WM. THEODORE DE BARY

By Herman Greene



Wm. Theodore de Bary, a renowned scholar of Asian thought, died on July 14 at his home in Tappan, New York, at age 97. He taught at Columbia University and finished his last class in May of this year. He was a close friend of Thomas Berry, and Mary Evelyn Tucker did her doctoral studies under de Bary's instruction and guidance.

Thomas met de Bary when he embarked from San Francisco en route to China in July 1948. They traveled on the same boat and became lifelong companions. From 1959-65, Thomas participated in an elite faculty seminar at Columbia University. Six scholars met twice a month to discuss Asian thought. Dr. de Bary's wife Fanny was also an important part of Thomas's life as were the de Bary children. Fanny assisted Thomas in the development of his ecological papers prior to the time that *The Dream of the Earth* was published in 1988. Thomas was a frequent guest in the de Bary home.

Mary Evelyn Tucker's father was a professor at Columbia and he taught de Bary when he was a student there. She has known de Bary her whole life and had her last visit with him in June.

De Bary's obituary in *The New York Times* stated:

Professor de Bary was an internationally esteemed Sinologist with a shelf of at least 30 books to his credit, either written or edited by him, and a bevy of academic awards and honors, including the National Humanities Medal, presented by President Barack Obama.

More locally, on the university campus in Morningside Heights in Manhattan, he was the consummate Columbia man — “one of the towering figures of modern Columbia history,” as Columbia College Today declared in 2013, a courtly figure “with the bow-tied elegance and comportment of a seasoned ambassador.”

As an editor, Professor de Bary presented thinkers from various Asian cultures in their own words in dozens of books that became standards in the field, elevating Asian studies far beyond Columbia to a prominence once reserved for European scholarship. In 1987, *The New York Times* reported that his “Sources of Chinese Tradition” had been the fourth-best-selling nonfiction book in universities over the last 25 years.

De Bary's obituary is available [here](#). Tributes to Thomas Berry by Fanny de Bary and Catherine de Bary Sleight appeared in the “A Tribute to Thomas Berry,” special issue, *The Ecozoic 2* (2009).

The passing of Wm. Theodore de Bary is of great moment to the Berry community. His influence will live on and he will always be remembered.