

**MARY EVELYN TUCKER, JOHN GRIM, AND ANDREW ANGYAL, *THOMAS BERRY: A BIOGRAPHY* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019)**

**Review by Herman Greene**

Who was this man, this Thomas Berry? We know he made his mark. We can show where he made a substantial difference in, among other fields, ecological spirituality, environmental ethics, religion and ecology, Earth law, and cosmology. Yet, those of us who are devoted to his work feel he has a historical significance far beyond what has yet been recognized. We feel his influence will grow over time.

The authors of *Thomas Berry: A Biography*, Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, and Andrew Angyal, wisely chose not to define or make claims regarding Berry's historical role or potential future role and significance. They did exactly what the very modest title of the book says, they wrote a biography of Thomas Berry. I would say they wrote an astounding biography, one that will propel his work forward. The biography is a landmark in the life of the Thomas Berry community and a new beginning for work of that community. This is because it helps us to know and understand him better. The biography may also serve as an entry point for people who don't know of Thomas. The book reads well and its content is mesmerizing.

People who knew Thomas Berry established a direct link with him. He was a kind of polymath and he would talk with people about the topics in which they were most interested. I carry an image of Thomas being at the center of a wagon wheel with spokes going out from him to individual people and particular groups of people. My personal interests were philosophy, theology, church and world history, social policy, and building a movement, the last being a topic in which Thomas showed little interest. When I met with Thomas, we discussed these topics at length over many years. Carolyn Toben was more interested in spirituality and the inner life. When I read her book on her conversations with Thomas Berry, *Recovering a Sense of the Sacred*, I was surprised at what they discussed . . . he never talked with me in the way he talked with Carolyn. In the last year of Thomas's life (2008-09), we of the Center for Ecozoic Studies issued a call for tributes to Thomas Berry and received and published 151 of them. Reading and editing them, I couldn't help but be aware of the many spokes that went out from Thomas and how many people felt a very special relationship with him. It was not a contest, but it was evident that many felt their connection with Thomas was among the closest and truest ones.

It was a great gift for Thomas to be able to speak with people where they were and about what interested them. This changed the lives of people and enabled them to go deeper into their personal callings. A slight problem with this, however, is that people may have thought their spokes of the wheel were the total wheel. I was one of those people. I spent hundreds of hours in personal conversation with him, still I came away from reading this book saying "I barely knew him." Maybe this will not be the case for some, but many of the people who read this biography will come away saying "Thomas was bigger than we knew."

The 20<sup>th</sup> century will go down as a pivotal century, one equal in importance to any other in human history. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century modern physics and biology were born as well as digital technology. Humans reached deep into the structure of atoms and the genetic structure of life. They explored outer space. Earth systems science was born. Chemistry and materials science grew rapidly. Transportation mechanisms and systems spread across Earth. Global communication became instant. The knowledge of humankind in its breadth and depth became available at the click of a computer mouse. Great migrations occurred of unprecedented scale, some from rural to urban areas (especially in China), some for work reasons, and some due to forced migrations caused by war, famine, repression, extreme poverty, or other reasons. Travel for tourism, conferences, business, and other reasons brought the peoples of the world into contact each other. The potential for ultimate destruction through wars as well as the potentials for genocide, terrorism, and hate became manifest. Economies were globalized. Models of democracy spread along with those of autocracy and totalitarianism. Earth's life and life systems were drastically altered. Since 1970 wild vertebrate populations have declined by 60% and the amount of fish in the oceans by half. Human population increased from 1.6 billion to more than 6 billion in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is still growing. Human impact surpassed the carrying capacity of Earth. The ideas, technologies, lessons, and impacts of the 20<sup>th</sup> century will endure long into the future.

There is no way back from the 20<sup>th</sup> century and for many there is apprehension that there is no way forward. As a species, we *Homo sapiens*, having been in being for about 250,000 years, are a young species. The average lifespan for a mammal species is one million years and for some mammal species as long as ten million years. Strangely, all the advances of the 20<sup>th</sup> century rather than bringing confidence about the human future, left it in doubt. I would venture that few of us can imagine a human future lasting 10 million more years on Earth. Certainly the techno-skeptics cannot, nor as I see it can the techno-optimists who blithely envision a future of intelligent robots who have replaced humans and perhaps downloaded their souls or of humans migrating from our depleted planet to outer space.

One could, however, anticipate the continuation of our species on Earth for millions of years. If so, these future Earthlings might look back on the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a crucible in which civilization ended and an ecological post-civilization began. It's too soon to tell, however, because we are still living in that time where the old is ending and prospects for the future are uncertain. We are living in the aftermath of the 20<sup>th</sup> century . . . aware of its devastation, reliant upon and often enjoying its benefits, but doubting its promise.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century is a background theme of *Thomas Berry: A Biography*. Many people lived through the same times he did, but not as he did. While an awkward analogy, I would say Thomas was a sponge who absorbed many dimensions of that century. Having done so, he discerned their meaning and synthesized a multi-dimensional vision of an Ecozoic era, that of a viable human future in mutually enhancing relations with Earth community. His vision is one that requires a fundamental reorientation of the human project, a change in direction so difficult that Berry called it the Great Work. The biography brilliantly presents the process of Thomas's life, sources of his vision, and the ways he inspired others. It complexifies his life and

thought in a beneficial way. One cannot understand Thomas and his vision in a strictly rational way—they resist reduction and simple expression. To understand requires a lot of education, but to fully understand his life, thought, and vision means to enter into his space and, having entered, to be guided intuitively. His writings and this biography offer instructions on and invitations to enter this space. The first eight chapters of the biography give a roughly chronological history of Thomas life and the last four chapters concern his thought.

Thomas was born in 1914 in Greensboro, North Carolina. His father, William, and mother, Bess, had moved there from Kentucky for William to take a job as a dispatcher for the Southern Railroad. Greensboro at the time was a small town of 15,000 people. Thomas's family was Catholic and grew in size to 13 children, 15 including the parents. William saw the opportunity to begin a coal delivery business as homes and factories were converting to coal furnaces. Thomas told me that at first the family just picked up coal that fell off coal cars and sold the coal for extra money, but this gave way to delivery service which continues until this day under the name Berico, originally Berry Coal Company. While located in the agrarian US South and the Piedmont area of North Carolina, Greensboro became a city of industry dominated by manufacturing of textiles and tobacco products. Thomas, a brooding type who was drawn to solitude in nature, experienced firsthand the process of industrialization and the transformation of society resulting therefrom. He experienced it working in his father's company and in the changes that were taking place in Greensboro. He experienced the marginalization of Catholics, of African Americans, and of industrial laborers. He entered adulthood in the time of the Great Depression and World War II.

While still young, he moved with his family to a home on the edge of town. There he had a defining experience at "the meadow across the creek" from his home. It was springtime. He gazed at "lilies rising above the thick grass." He heard the singing of crickets in the woods and watched the clouds overhead. He described his experience in a chapter in *The Great Work* called "The Meadow across the Creek." The experience became normative for him. Whatever preserved this meadow in its natural cycles of transformation was good and what did not was not.

While he recalled vividly this moment, he did not then become a naturalist or, until much later in life, an environmentalist. In his unpublished memoir called *Goldenrod*, which was a frequently cited source in the biography, he wrote "The volume of such experiences [in nature] may not be the determining thing. It may rather be the quality of the experience" (quoted on p. 39). In his young life he had experiences that connected him deeply with Earth.

As a young man, his path was oriented to religious studies and a contemplative life. At age fourteen he was sent to study at Mount St. Mary's Preparatory School, a school for Catholic boys, in Emmitsburg, Maryland. He would not return to Greensboro to live for the next sixty-six years. For me it is hard to imagine that he played on the varsity football and basketball teams, but he did. He went to dances, especially with girls from nearby St. Joseph's College High School, and he hiked in the nearby Blue Ridge Mountains. He graduated first in his class.

After finishing his freshman year of college, also in Emmitsburg, he decided to enter the Passionist religious order. Members of that order had preached at the church he attended as a child in Greensboro. He wrote he had “chosen the Passionists because of the special devotion to the Passion of Christ, because of its mission work, and because of the strictness of the Order” (Thomas Berry letter, quoted on p. 25). His monastic life was quite demanding. For the next fourteen years he would seldom see his family. During this time he would complete his college degree in Passionist seminaries and seven years of study for the priesthood, including three years of philosophy followed by four of theology. In his early monastic training he was limited to sending one letter a month to his parents, and other modes of communication were restricted. He slept on a pallet filled with straw and made his own leather belt and sandals. He chanted the Divine Office five times a day and engaged in spiritual exercises. He was a prodigious scholar and would regularly read between three and six in the morning after early morning prayers (Matins and Lauds) and before daybreak prayers (Prime and Terce). He studied scripture, canon law, rhetoric, music, Christian mystics, church history, and Greek philosophy, and he took on the study of Upanishadic literature and classical Chinese writings. Aristotle and Aquinas had a major impact on his thinking, as did St. Augustine. He saw Augustine’s *City of God* as playing a crucial role at the time of the fall of the Roman Empire and saw the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a similar period of upheaval with the need for a visionary story.

His practice of praying and working and studying and contemplating in regular intervals throughout the day and the night gave him a mystical sense of the sustaining rhythms of nature and of the cosmos as well. He reflected on how the Benedictine religious order carried the classical intellectual and cultural traditions in the dark ages between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries.

In 1942, at age 28, Thomas was ordained to the priesthood and a year later he began doctoral studies in history at Catholic University in Washington, DC. From that time Thomas began a broadening out from the intense years of philosophical, religious and monastic studies with the Passionists, but always his life and work were grounded in his classical education. At Catholic University he studied Western political and military history. Reading Christopher Dawson, Arnold Toynbee, and Eric Voeglin, he studied the history of civilizations and their rise and fall. He embarked on cultural studies which became a lifelong pursuit. He wrote a dissertation on *History in a World Religious Context*, in which he examined the philosophy of history in Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. His initial dissertation was rejected as being overly broad and as lacking sufficient footnotes and quotations, a criticism that would be made of his writing throughout his career. He was interdisciplinary and made observations on large patterns of development, whereas academic studies were increasingly becoming disciplinary and narrow. He submitted a second dissertation on *The Historical Theory of Giambattista Vico*. Vico is credited with beginning the field of philosophy of history and sought to articulate a single science of the humanities that explained the historical cycles of the rise and fall of societies. Vico criticized enlightenment rationalism and praised classical knowledge. His observations of history included reflection on “planetary order and even the entire order of the universe” (*Goldenrod 73*, quoted on p. 47). Thomas in his later work followed Vico in offering a sweeping cultural and cosmological interpretation of history and in his criticism of Enlightenment rationalism, but Thomas departed from Vico’s particular historical analysis.

Just as Thomas was completing his doctoral studies, he obtained a long sought-after assignment to do mission work in China. The biography gives an amusing story concerning the day of Thomas's dissertation defense, July 3, 1948. This was the same day he was to leave on a train to San Francisco where he would catch a boat to China. He finished his defense with barely enough time to make his train. He caught a taxi to the train station and upon arrival he rushed out and left the only copy of his dissertation in the taxi! Fortunately the document was eventually returned to him. This story reminds us of how different life was in Thomas's early years.

He left for China around July 10 together with seven other Passionist priests. Such a trip at that time meant something very different than it would mean today. This was really going "away," and people did not know when they return. An exchange of letters with home would take weeks. Further, people knew they would enter China at a tumultuous time in the aftermath of the Japanese defeat in 1945 and in the midst of a bloody civil war between Nationalist China and Mao Zedong's Red Army.

Our lives are shaped by serendipitous events. One of the more significant occurrences during the time of Thomas's travel to China was meeting Wm. Theodore de Bary of Columbia University, the first Fulbright Scholar to China who was later to become a renowned Asian scholar, on the boat to China. De Bary and Thomas became friends for life and colleagues in a decades-long study of Asian thought and religion. The length of Thomas's stay in China was short. He arrived in Beijing to study Chinese language and culture at a Franciscan school, but in November of 1948 he had to leave the city because of the advancing Red Army, and he left China in December of 1948. Still he was indelibly marked by his experiences there. The Beijing Thomas encountered was flooded with refugees of war, including homeless children. Chinese money was almost worthless, inadequate housing and destitution were widespread. Thomas made entries in his diary of the people he encountered and their desperate conditions. He developed an admiration for the endurance and survival skills of the Chinese people. Rather than being repelled by the difficulties he observed, he was drawn even more deeply into a quest to understand the Chinese language, history, and people. He even dreamed of one day starting a university and a press in China.

In reading the biography I was struck by how much Thomas's life was devoted to Asian studies. In the post-war period there was a growing demand for Asian scholars and this opened the door for Thomas to teach from 1957-61 at Seton Hall's Institute of Far Eastern Studies. Later, from 1961-65, he taught at the Institute for Asian Studies at St. John's University. In addition to his studies of Chinese culture and religion, Thomas undertook studies of the religions of India. He studied both Chinese language and Sanskrit so that he could read or better understand original texts. He wrote a book on *Buddhism* (1966) and later one on *Religions of India* (1971).

His academic path was never smooth. After returning from China rather than continuing his studies, he became a US Army Chaplain and was assigned to Germany. The biography said he spoke German well. This means that in addition to English his languages included Latin,

Chinese, Sanskrit, and German. He arrived in Germany in 1951 at a time when Germany and all of Europe was still suffering and recovering from World War II. Thomas worked not only with US military personnel and their families, but also with local German villagers. The biography makes clear that Thomas was deeply familiar with and touched by human suffering, first by the oppressed in the US South, and then by those who suffered during the Great Depression, by the anguish of Americans and others during World War II, and by direct experience with the people of China in 1948 and in Germany in the early 1950s. His religious order, the Passionists, focused on divine participation in human suffering and Thomas later extended this to the suffering of Earth.

Thomas had an uncanny but non-sentimental empathy for people. The biography reports on a story told by Ted de Bary: "One evening while Thomas was delivering a paper on the esoteric school of Shingon Buddhism in Japan, de Bary saw tears running down Professor Hakeda's face. The next day de Bary . . . asked him why he was so moved at the seminar. Hakeda replied that in listening to Thomas's paper, 'I felt as if I was hearing my old master in Japan speak'" (pp. 72-73). The biography gives another report of how Thomas spoke to a group of Indigenous people and they had a similar experience. Thomas never pandered to people to win their approval, rather he spoke to people as if he knew them and they sensed they were in the presence of one who understood their culture and inner being and that they could open up to him. He strengthened people in their sufferings and in the depths of their deepest concerns, and gave them a sense of nobility and capability. He also had a way of calling people to be more than they had been and to do more than they had done. The lives of thousands of people were transformed by him and their life purposes were recast. I know, for I am one of them.

What seems to me to have been one of Thomas's biggest breaks came at the time of one of his deepest crises. While teaching at St. John's University, tension arose between the president of the university and the faculty which led to a faculty strike. As a result, thirty-one of the faculty members were terminated, including Thomas even though he was not a part of the protesting faculty group. His dismissal led to a request being made to the Passionist Order that Thomas be prevented from further university teaching and the order complied with the request. This was a crushing blow to Thomas and he vigorously defended his role at St. John's and the value of his teaching. In time the Superior General of the order in Rome reversed the ban on further teaching. Shortly thereafter, in 1966, at age 52, Thomas was hired by Fordham to teach in its theology department. This was the beginning of the flowering of his career into the globally significant person he became.

At Fordham he continued his Asian studies and established the history of religions program. Thomas became known for his teaching and drew students to him, many of whom were to be important in his future work. He moved from the Passionist monastery in Jamaica, Queens, New York City, to the Passionist retreat center in Riverdale, The Bronx, New York City, which was near to the Fordham campus. At this retreat center he established the Riverdale Center for Religious Research, which became his base of operations until he returned to North Carolina at age 80 in 1995. During his time at the Riverdale Center, Thomas received guests from around the United States and the world. He held monthly gatherings at he which invited lecturers

spoke. He wrote essays that were copied using a mimeograph machine and distributed. A collection of the essays were bound into the 11 volumes of the *Riverdale Papers*. This was his most creative period. Many of the papers were revised and published in *The Dream of the Earth* (1988), *The Great Work* (1999), *Evening Thoughts* (2003), *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth* (2009), and *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (2009). The Riverdale Center was also where Thomas's relationships with Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, and Brian Thomas Swimme and many others developed. In 1984 Swimme published a very popular book on the universe story in the form of a dialogue between Thomas as the master teacher and Swimme as the student. Later the two became joint authors of *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Beginning of the Ecozoic Era—A Celebration of the Unfolding Cosmos* (1994). Tucker and Grim, as well as writing many books of their own, edited all of Thomas's books beginning with *The Dream of the Earth*, and they now serve as Managing Directors of the Thomas Berry Foundation.

Thomas's public life grew greatly after the 1988 publication of *The Dream of the Earth*, which sold well over 100,000 copies and is still in print. He spoke at many, many conferences and retreats around the world and engaged in conversation with people from many places and walks of life who visited him in Riverdale and, after 1994, in Greensboro, North Carolina. Many projects and organizations developed around Thomas's work and a significant portion of them remain in being. The documentation and detail of the activities of Thomas throughout his life in this biography are amazing and informative.

The last four chapters of the biography concern Thomas's thought. Chapter 9 is on "Narratives of Time." As discussed in the foregoing, Thomas sought an understanding of the broad sweep of human history and of diverse human cultures. In his studies of the histories of religion he became aware of the importance of cosmology to human cultures and religions. In his study of history at Catholic University, Thomas was influenced by Christopher Dawson's argument that religion was at the foundation of every culture and Thomas felt that the base of every religion was a "cosmological system that orient[s] humans to their place in the universe and . . . Earth" (p. 99). This is true not only in the cultures grounded in classical religions, but also in secular Western modernity with its acosmic understanding of a meaningless universe composed of inert matter in motion available for exploitation by humans. This secular understanding functions as a religion with its own acosmic cosmology. In his years in Riverdale Thomas became familiar with the secular scientific story of the universe . . . as did others because it was not until the 1970s that the big bang theory of the universe became the scientific consensus and the evolutionary history of Earth became widely known. Thomas connected his understanding of religion, culture, and historical cosmologies with the new secular scientific story and gave birth to his "new cosmology" or "universe story" or "new story."

Chapter 10 is on "Teilhard and the Zest for Life." Teilhard de Chardin was a Jesuit priest with training in paleontology and biology. His paleontological work took him to China where he was involved in the discovery of the Peking Man. His broad knowledge of geology, paleontology, and evolutionary history led to path-breaking books on the relation of the divine and evolution. His book *The Phenomenon of Man* (in a more recent translation, *The Human Phenomenon*)

described the common heritage of all species, including *Homo sapiens*. Teilhard understood the divine as being at work in the evolutionary universe, even in matter. His works, which (other than his scientific works) were not published until his death in 1955 and not in English until 1959, greatly influenced Thomas's thinking. He noted, "The three main teachings of Teilhard that influenced me most profoundly were: that the universe from the beginning had a psychic-spiritual as well as a physical-material dimension; that the human story and the universe story are a single story; that western religious thinking needed to move from an almost exclusive concern for redemption to a greater emphasis on creation" (Berry, *An Appalachian View*, 5, quoted on pp. 126-27). Teilhard gave Thomas an understanding of the evolutionary universe as an integral process, which meant that characteristically human aspects such as culture, consciousness, and religion were integral with that process. Teilhard also gave Thomas a way of understanding the future as promise and the special role humans have to fulfill in the universe. Brian Thomas Swimme and other scientists gave Thomas understandings of the Earth process. I was surprised to learn from the biography that there was no sudden point at which Thomas turned from humanistic concerns, such as history and the study of religions and cultures, to ecological concerns. What occurred was more of a growing integration and, in a sense, a necessary conclusion that humans are grounded in the Earth and universe and that Earth's life and life systems are in peril. He had studied human cultures and had seen how they were related to ecosystems and bioregions and cosmologies. He wrote that soon "after the Riverdale Center was founded, the focus of attention shifted to the ecology issue" (*Goldenrod*, 96, quoted on p. 114).

Chapter 11 is on "Confucian Integration of Cosmos, Earth, and Humans." Perhaps no word better captures Berry's thought than "integral." The dictionary definition of the word as an adjective is "essential to completeness" or "possessing everything essential." As a noun it means "a complete whole." Thomas wrote about how the universe was ever integral with itself throughout its vast extent in space and time. He spoke of integral ecology and integral spirituality. One could say that there was a wholeness in the universe from the beginning. It proceeded through a process of diversification, but always in its diversity there was the wholeness, which Thomas described as communion (togetherness) and subjectivity (psycho-spiritual awareness of part, whole, and relationships). The universe was not self-explanatory, it had numinous (mysterious, unknowable) origins—one could not account for why there was something rather than nothing or why the universe has had its particular order and dynamics through its sequence of irreversible transformations. Our access to the divine was through the universe itself, the universe was a manifestation of the divine and the locus of divine activity. Humans had a special role as knowing subjects.

Chinese culture developed around a combination of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism. None of these religions were theistic in the sense of appealing to a personal transcendent deity. The Chinese word "*tian*" which is translated as "Heaven" means something closer to the cosmic order, rather than a transcendent realm as in Christianity. *Di* is Earth. A human is *rén* (人) and another character (仁) with the same pronunciation means humanness/human-heartedness/virtue/compassion. When a human *rén* (人) lacks *rén* (仁), he or she is not really human. Humans were the middle between Heaven (or the cosmos) and Earth and were the

understanding heart of the universe. The cosmos is the larger dimension of humans and humans discover themselves in the cosmos. The biography describes Confucianism as an anthropocosmic tradition, and refers to Tu Weiming's characterization of it as "'spiritual humanism' expressing a continuity [among] all orders of reality—Cosmos, Earth and Human" (p. 226). The love that is found in healthy family relations is reflected in the cosmos under a universal law of compassion. In the cultivation of the self and deeper knowledge of the self, one comes to know the cosmos. Thomas wrote, "The main principle of Confucian thought is that the human is integral with the Earth and the entire universe" (Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts*, 85, quoted on p. 226). Confucianism sought harmonious relations with family, society, government, and nature. Thomas's study of Confucianism affected his vision of ecozoic societies and of Earth jurisprudence.

Chapter 12, the final chapter, is on "Indigenous Traditions of the Giving Earth." Another great influence on Thomas's work was the wisdom of Indigenous people, especially American Indians and the T'boli peoples in the Philippines. These Indigenous people had a mystical communion with all the beings in their bioregions. They had connection with the archetypal world and the collective unconscious and were able to express this through ritual, art, and dream experience. This is in contrast with Euroamericans who are so focused on rational thinking and ego consciousness that they have largely lost or suppressed this mode of consciousness. Thomas met American Indian leaders such as Oren Lyons and John Mohawk; he worked with the T'boli peoples; he read books on Native American lifeways; and he taught courses on religious studies and the American Indian. Indigenous people grounded their lives "in different relationships of kinship and reciprocity with the community of life in a bioregion" (p. 240). They had a sense of the continuity of life forms and that they shared a genetic inheritance with plants and other animals. The Indigenous people experienced a living Earth. The universe was not driven by alienating and impersonal forces, but was grand, was demanding in its discipline, and called forth heroic responses. Thomas's primary observation that "the universe is composed of a communion of subjects not a collection of objects" was in part derived from the wisdom of Indigenous people. They had a cosmic vision, or *cosmovisión*, and based on their wisdom, among other influences, Thomas wrote:

In reality, there is a single integral community of the Earth that includes all its component members whether human or other than human. In this community every being has its own role to fulfill, its own dignity, its inner spontaneity. Every being has its own voice. Every being declares itself to the entire universe. Every being enters into communion with other beings. (Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*, 4)

Such was the wisdom of Indigenous people.

As stated at the beginning of this review, the biography does not make extravagant claims for Thomas's place in history. It simply tells the story of Thomas Berry. It lets us know what his life was, how it was shaped, and the teachings he conveyed.

As also stated earlier, Thomas was a kind of polymath—he was a polymath of cultures and of interiorities. The Buddhist cried when he heard Thomas because he heard him as the voice of his own teacher. Later when he spoke at the “Four Winds Assembly” called by elders of certain Native American tribes, “Chief Tom Porter, founding elder of the Mohawk Kannatsiohareke community in upstate New York, said . . . he had never heard a non-Indian speak so much like his grandfather and the older people of his memory. He turned and addressed Thomas as ‘Grandfather’” (p. 244). Wherever Thomas spoke, people heard their own deepest voice.

Berry was also a polymath of cosmology and ecology. He understood the meaning of his times . . . our times . . . in a profound way—we are destroying the life systems of our planet, industrial civilization must yield to an ecological-cultural age. While many have written of the Anthropocene epoch and disturbance of the planet, Thomas was and is the only one to my knowledge who has cast our situation as that of living in a time of transition between geological eras. He said we are in the terminal Cenozoic era and he offered the promise of an Ecozoic era in the life of the planet Earth, but to achieve this would involve reinventing the human and changing our mode of civilizational presence. He had a significant impact, one that is continuing, on education, religion, ecology, and law. He transformed and is transforming countless lives.

Thomas rarely characterized who he was or what his role in history was. He did speak of himself as being of the shamanic type, which the biography interpreted as meaning “one who entered deeply into the powers of the universe and Earth and brought back an integrative vision for the community” (p. 39). He also spoke of himself as a “geologist,” one who immersed himself in the evolutionary development of the universe and its meaning. Though he did not like the term and it is not used in the biography (probably because of its varied religious connotations and meanings and often communication with a divine being), I think of him as a prophet: “One who names a situation truthfully in its largest context without being pulled unto dualistic factions” (Richard Rohr). “A person gifted with profound moral insight and exceptional powers of expression” (*American Heritage Dictionary*). One who renders judgment and commands reform. One who foresees the future and its perils and offers a vision of renewal.

Though of religious background, Thomas made no claims of divine inspiration, only of knowledge gained as a student of Earth, its history, its science, and cultures. He gave to us the Great Work of bringing into being the Ecozoic era and the vision of what that can be. He gave us ecological spirituality as a source of strength and guidance. He gave us a new cosmology, a knowledge of our genetic coding and kinship with all beings, and an understanding of human culture and cultures and how we can draw on the wisdom of various cultures and create new cultures needed for the Ecozoic era.

Audaciously he foresaw a human future of millions of years on Earth. *He gave us an understanding of the Great Work we must do.* We might say that he taught us we are a young species. If we do this work, we are at the beginning, not the end.