

## TURTLES ALL THE WAY DOWN

By Beatrice Briggs

Mundelein College, Chicago, Illinois, January 1982. *Thirty-five adult students enrolled in a master's degree program in "Creation-Centered Spirituality," directed by Catholic priest, Matthew Fox.*

*Guest speaker: Thomas Berry, then 67 years old. During the three cold, winter days that he met with us, Thomas was intermittently interrupted by his own terrible coughing fits, moments in which I feared he would not make it to the end of the hour. Fortunately, he lived another 17 years, forever changing my life, as he did for so many others.*

What most struck me about Thomas's discourse was its depth. His words, while always perfectly clear and understandable, penetrated to the essence of every topic he broached. Profound without pomposity, inspiring without ostentation, always generous, never condescending.

With his encouragement, I went on to study History of Religions at the University of Chicago and became active in the bioregional movement, where I learned to be a group facilitator and to support activists in participatory processes that strengthen our collective contribution to the Great Work. Since 1998 I have been based in Mexico, where I have had the opportunity to serve groups in almost every country in Latin America.

Currently I am focusing my facilitation skills in the area of public participation, helping the voice of local residents in vulnerable ecosystems to be heard in the decision-making processes that affect the imperiled future of their home place.

Now, ten years after Thomas's death, the cosmological tale of the world resting on the back of a turtle comes to mind. When asked what the turtle is standing on, the sage answers, "On another turtle." And what is that turtle standing on? "Another turtle." And then? "Ah, my friend, it is turtles all the way down."

Thank you, Thomas, for asking the big questions, always going deeper, beyond facile answers and superficial judgements, showing us the way to celebrate life on Turtle Island.