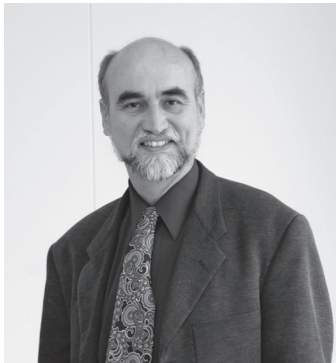


In All ways, Thomas Berry Served and Mentored His Students

Christopher Chapple

Christopher Key Chapple is the Navin and Pratima Doshi Professor of Indic and Comparative Theology at Loyola Marymount University. Dr. Chapple received his undergraduate degree in Comparative Literature and Religious Studies from the State University of New York at Stony Brook and his doctorate in the History of Religions through the Theology Department at Fordham University. He served as Assistant Director of the Institute for Advanced Studies of World Religions and taught Sanskrit, Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism for five years at the State University of New York at Stony Brook before joining the faculty at LMU.

Dr. Chapple's research interests have focused on the renouncer religious traditions of India: Yoga, Jainism, and Buddhism. He has published several books, including *Karma and Creativity*, 1986; a co-translation of the *Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, 1991, and *Nonviolence to Animals, Earth, and Self in Asian Traditions*, 1993; *Hinduism and Ecology*, 2000; a co-edited volume, *Jainism and Ecology: Nonviolence in the Web of Life*, 2002; and *Reconciling Yogas*, 2003.



While hunting for graduate schools in 1975, the History of Religions program within Fordham's Theology Department was suggested as a good option. Many of my professors at Stony Brook had known Thomas for many years and recommended meeting him. I paid a stealth visit to his undergraduate class in Confucianism, identified myself as a potential graduate student after the lecture, and Thomas invited me for coffee. He immediately put me at ease, regaling me with tales of his interests, and asking about my own background in Sanskrit and Tibetan Studies. Though Fordham's resources were a bit more spare for supporting graduate students than the offers that I received from two Ivy League schools, Fordham maintained one distinct advantage: at that time all its graduates were fully employed in academia.

From the onset, Thomas Berry took us on a grand tour of world history and the history of ideas. We learned how to read a text literally, allegorically, ethically, and personally. We traveled with Mircea Eliade, Teilhard de Chardin, Carl Jung, Thomas Aquinas, and Sankara, all in one lecture. Though his classes were filled to the rafters (with both people and ideas), each of us felt a deep connection with the material. We often enjoyed meeting with Thomas for coffee at the now-demolished Howard Johnson's diner adjacent to campus.

When it came to approval of my dissertation topic and its eventual defense, Thomas negotiated an auspicious alignment of professors from philosophy and theology. This opened my project to scrutiny by India specialists (John Chethimattam, the primary advisor, and Anne Feldhaus) as well as Christian philosophers and theologians (Norris Clarke, S.J. and Ewert Cousins). This training in "big picture" thinking has served me well over the years, particularly within the work of the Forum on Religion and Ecology.

Reviewing class notes and materials from those years at Fordham (1976-1980), I remain deeply impressed by and grateful for the care and attention that Thomas Berry gave to his teaching. Each class, whether a lecture or a seminar, included a copious bibliography and a list of suggested paper topics. For each course, Thomas wrote and produced thoughtful, insightful essays, printed at the Riverdale Center for Religious Research in brown ink on a mimeograph machine. These were later gathered as the *Riverdale Papers*, and many of these essays became chapters in the several books that he has published since retirement.

Through my career as a university professor and scholar, I have drawn deep inspiration from the example set by Thomas Berry. He coached each of us on our job interviews, recommended us for research conferences, and has remained supportive throughout our academic careers. He also set an excellent example of the importance of community involvement. During

my first year as a graduate student, I remember attending a Teilhard Association lecture off campus somewhere in Manhattan. People from all walks of life were there to hear Thomas, and to talk about the key ideas that eventually became the foundation for *The Dream of the Earth*. Without hesitation, Thomas accepted invitations to lecture at a community bookstore managed by my wife and me on Long Island and graciously spent time with each of our parents.

In all ways, Thomas Berry served and mentored his students. Both academia and the world at large have benefited from his vision of the cosmos and his commitment to its ongoing sustenance. Thinking back to afternoon discussions at the Riverdale Center, one cannot deny the feeling of being involved with something very important, and of being in the presence of intellectual and spiritual greatness. Thank you Thomas!