

## Wild Law: A New Jurisprudence

Cormac Cullinan

Cormac Cullinan is a practising environmental lawyer and adviser on institutional, policy and regulatory reform. Valued for his expertise in drafting legislation and international treaties as well as in designing and strengthening governance systems, he is also author of the book *Wild Law: A Manifesto for Earth Justice*, 2003, which advocates the development of Earth jurisprudence based on the principles proposed by Thomas Berry. Cormac is based in South Africa but regularly lectures and teaches on Earth jurisprudence and wild law in the USA, UK and other countries.



I first realised Thomas Berry was going to be significant in my life when I missed my station. I was on the train on my way home from my office in the centre of Cape Town, South Africa and had been so engrossed in reading *The Universe Story* by Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme, that when I looked up the train was a long way past my stop. This was sufficiently unusual for me to realise that the book had a special significance for me.

It was 2000 and I had only recently learned of Thomas Berry's existence. I had met Liz Hosken of the Gaia Foundation of London at a workshop in Cape Town and while discussing some difficulties I was having drafting wildlife legislation in Namibia, she asked if I had heard of Thomas Berry, and his call for the development of a "new jurisprudence." I hadn't, but was very interested and became progressively more so when I met Paul Crier of the Wilderness Leadership School. Paul described the experience of meeting Thomas as being "like meeting Yoda" (the Jedi master in *Star Wars* whose power comes from his mastery of "the Force"). I eagerly read the copy of *The Universe Story* which Paul gave me, followed by others of Thomas's books. However, nothing really prepared me for meeting Thomas. I was invited to participate in a meeting with Thomas arranged by the Gaia Foundation at the Airlie Centre in Virginia, USA in April 2001. I first met Thomas in the breakfast room of a motel where we assembled before proceeding to the Airlie Centre. I was immediately struck by the calm authority and clarity of this elder who spoke with such quiet certainty about the imminent end of the "petroleum interval" even as huge trucks roared by on the highway outside.

At the subsequent meetings at Airlie Centre, Thomas made a great impression on me, not only as a profound thinker, but also as a warm human being. This was no cold, detached intellectual but a man who took joy in living, whose eyes twinkled with humour and who had a spontaneous appreciation of the beauty of the early Springtime that surrounded us. Even now his characteristic exclamation "My, Oh my!" in appreciation of a joke sounds as clearly in my memory as the urgency in his voice as he conveyed to the next generation the gravity of the situation ("ultimacy" was the word he used). There was no doubt in my mind that he was intent on handing on the baton to others to continue after him. I left Airlie with a deeper understanding of the importance of acting decisively during this transient "moment of grace" in which we find ourselves—a brief moment that will have a profound effect on the future of the Earth Community.

Meeting Thomas, reading his works and becoming inspired by his vision of the "Great Work" impelled me in 2002 to write *Wild Law: A Manifesto for Earth Justice* as a contribution to the process of developing an "Earth jurisprudence" informed by the basic principles established by

Thomas. At that time, I had only read a few of Thomas's works, had had little time in conversation with him, and was unaware of the existence of the "Berry community" of scholars and friends who have pored over his writings for decades. In retrospect my ignorance and youthful impatience was fortuitous as I might not otherwise have had the courage to attempt to interpret and elaborate upon the work of so eminent a scholar.

Thomas, as always, was extraordinarily generous and supportive. I had asked him, at short notice, if he would do me the honour of writing a brief foreword to *Wild Law*, which was being rushed out in time for the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. I expected a single page giving a general endorsement to the importance of beginning the process of developing a new jurisprudence. Instead, Thomas asked for a copy of the (almost complete) manuscript, read it and wrote a 16-page foreword of great depth. Happily the concepts discussed in *Wild Law*, underpinned by the strength and depth of Thomas's work, have now taken root in many African countries and in the United Kingdom, and continue to spread. I am particularly grateful for the unstinting support and encouragement which Thomas and his sister, Margaret, have continued to give me in taking this work further.

Thomas has taught me so much about our true place within the Earth Community, and about the fundamental importance of dreaming and bringing into being a new mode of what it is to be human, that I now find it impossible to articulate fully the extent of my intellectual indebtedness to him. However, probably the greatest gift he has given me has been to help me find my own way home to the Earth community in which I so innocently participated in my youth—a way to reconnect with my own "field of white lilies," touchstones that bring me back into connection with this spectacularly beautiful community we call "Earth." He has renewed my faith and trust in that wild, ever-renewing energy that flows spontaneously through every aspect of Earth. Thank you!

Thomas, wise as ever, seems content in the evening of his life. However, I know that even as the light of his intellect, vigour and warmth declines in the West, its rays have already done their work in warming hearts and illuminated minds across the planet. All over Earth, the seeds which he planted are growing. The green shoots of the Ecozoic age are breaking through the paving, spontaneously curling their tendrils upwards and bursting their buds as the wild and mysterious forces of creation flow through us.

For me Thomas is, and will always remain, one of the most inspiring manifestations of Earth, a true compatriot and elder statesman who speaks for all the members of the Earth community. Whenever we meet to take

the Great Work forward his words and presence are always among us. My real tribute to Thomas, however, is not these words, but my ongoing commitment to taking his work forward and to seek the courage to step up to the challenge of the Great Work which he has so eloquently defined for us.



Cullinan with Thomas in coffee shop, Greensboro, NC April 2007. Photo by Caroline Webb.