

How Thomas Has Touched My Life

Allysyn Kiplinger

A native of the San Francisco bay area, Allysyn Kiplinger's passion is the re-visioning of Earth-human relations. Holding a vision of creating "The Ecozoic Center of the San Francisco Bay Area" she wants to highlight and promote local examples of the emerging global ecological civilization, a.k.a. "The Ecozoic Era", as articulated by Thomas Berry. Self-employed since graduating university, she has worked as a printer, an ecological renovator of buildings, and now has a natural soap business (www.ArthaSoaps.Com), an example of a local, "green" business, part of the budding ecological society. She studied at U.C. Berkeley (1985, B.A.), Schumacher College (1992-3), and California Institute of Integral Studies (2004, M.A., with Dr. Brian Swimme).



Thomas Berry touches my life in three ways—in what he says with his clear mind, how he says it with his warm heart, and how he has inspired and activated me to transform my own life and work.

A Clear Mind: What Thomas Says

Thomas's intellectual understanding of the human adventure and his ability to synthesize and extend my understanding of humanity has been invaluable. Thomas feels native and "famili-ar" to me, like a member of my family, when he speaks of the evolutionary achievement of our amazing and highly unique human body, the variety of human cultural achievement through time, as well as the need to work together as one human family for our common future.

See, I was raised by a single mom who was always interested in the human story. As a child I was taken to museums, operas, plays, churches, synagogues, shrines, tea gardens, pow-wows, unique markets, national monuments and parks all over America—anything that expressed the endless variety of humanity. I guess I extended my mom's legacy when I chose to major in anthropology at UC Berkeley. My course of study included social, cultural, linguistic, anatomical, as well as the artifactual understanding of humanity. So when I encountered Thomas, he seemed to speak my language.

He is unafraid to clearly state the awful news of the era without hyperbole or drama. He has synthesized and framed common knowledge to reveal a new perspective of the future that is reassuring and accessible to all.

Given the power of his intellect, I find it curious that I entered his work through the doorway of spirituality. Initially my attraction to Matthew Fox and creation spirituality led me to Brian Swimme, who introduced me to Thomas's great work.

A Warm Heart: How Thomas Says It

My direct experience of meeting Thomas has been as influential as reading his published works: for me, *how* something is said, in *person*, is as important as *what* is written or published. The half-dozen times we've met, I've been impressed by, what I can only call, "the fullness of his humanity." I remember one late-night chat a few of us had with him, at a *silent* retreat, in the front parlor of the Santa Sabina Center in San Rafael, California, in October 1998. He spoke with a pixie-like-glint in his eyes and a smile on his face—as if he had a secret surprise that he could barely contain. He was chatty, curious of our stories, and always patient with our questions. He

was full of humor, grace, charm, depth, and warmth even as he challenged our occluded Old Story assumptions. He expressed himself with an all-too-rare integration between “heart” and “mind” that has allowed me to trust him and follow the fullness of his vision for the Earth community.

In India there is an ancient spiritual practice called “darshan.” It is a form of face-to-face, in-person blessing and transmission between a teacher and student. I suppose that is one way to describe what I have experienced with Thomas: I feel blessed by his writings as well as his personhood.

Inspiration and Activation

Thomas’s words and presence have given me direction. He has activated, what I think, in my heart of hearts is, my life’s work.

In 1994 I was “fresh off the boat” from my year-and-a-half-abroad at Schumacher College in England. I had just enrolled in Brian Swimme’s first class at the California Institute of Integral Studies (CIIS). On October 20th, Brian announced that we might have a surprise guest lecturer. Sure enough, Thomas sauntered in partway through Brian’s first lecture of the evening. When it was his turn, Thomas talked about how the human species was “disrupting the Earth processes”. He talked about the history of the chemical industry and the role of the U.S. Constitution in Earth jurisprudence; he used phrases like “deep cultural pathology” and “soul loss” in relation to the impoverishment of the natural world; he reminded us that humans are a subset of the Earth Community and that the planet will never function in the future as it has in the past. While none of the information was particularly new to me, it was shocking and disturbing to get it all in one quick dose. His story was so dire. At the break I nervously wandered up to him and meekly asked, “Given all this bad news how are we supposed to live? How shall we proceed?” Calmly and quietly, and rather nonchalantly, he answered, “We have to live and act *knowing* that *how we are living and acting is not* the way we should be living.”

Ah! Of course, *how* things are is *not* the way they *should* be. With his answer he magically transmitted to me a larger vision of the world, perhaps a new cosmology, that gave permission and offered forgiveness for the present historical moment without particular blame or anger. We need to keep our eyes on the prize, and stay focused to how we *should* be living, on how the world *should* be, on new cultural patterns. I thought the world was in a mess because we didn’t have enough facts and information. But that evening I really “got” that it wasn’t about information so much as the cultural framework, or story, that framed our way of organizing the world. That evening Thomas gave me a lifeboat called “Forgiveness for the Old

Story” that has allowed me to voyage from the terminal Cenozoic Era to the emerging Ecozoic Era.

Thomas helped inspire me to get an M.A. with Brian Swimme at CIIS. His vision has led me to conferences, workshops, and gatherings in Oldenburg, Blairstown, Louisville, Denver, New York, San Rafael, Santa Cruz, Sebastopol, Palo Alto, and Oakland. Almost all my friend’s are Thomas Berry admirers so we have a wonderful rich language with which to communicate about the Human as well as the More-than-Human world. I am haunted, in a good way, by Thomas’s neologism the “Ecozoic Era” and have reached out to others, like Herman Greene, who actively and professionally uses the term. I have a vision for an organization called “The Ecozoic Center of the San Francisco Bay Area,” and a book called “A Guide to the Ecozoic Era in the San Francisco Bay Area.” I have Thomas’s permission to publish a little book of some of his quotes, and plans to publish a few different Ecozoic study guides. There is also talk of an Ecozoic Press...

My pioneering spirit reaches for the stars with all the possibilities. Thank you Thomas for your words, your rich presence, and for your inspiration. I’m so glad to know you. Many Blessings for Our Mutually Rich Future.



Thomas Berry and Allysyn Kiplinger. Photo by Caroline Webb.