

The Awakener

Patricia Monahan

Thomas Berry exploded my consciousness and awakened in me the realization that “the human is that being in whom the universe comes to itself in a special mode of conscious reflection.” His principles of DIFFERENTIATION, SUBJECTIVITY, and COMMUNION became a lens through which I began to transform my sense of reality and reshape my vocation in life. I began to appreciate that everything is intimately present to and related to everything else. What *I* do affects everyone and everything else. WOW!!! I began to appreciate more clearly the impact I was having on the Earth community. To the extent that I diminish or destroy the grandeur of the world around me, I diminish and destroy myself and everything else. Sitting reflectively beside the Bronx River one day, I became one with the river, the geese...ducks...sparrows, the woodland wild flowers, the cloudless blue sky, the refreshing breeze, and even the people who stopped to admire my perch beside the river. I had become a Sister of Earth.

As an educator in the 80’s and 90’s I used Thomas’s three principals as my classroom behavior code. We used them as a lens through which to judge the injustice of slavery in history, the use of animals in scientific experimentation, and the taunting of a new girl in our class from Kenya, Africa. It provided the impetus for my students to rally the County Legislature to vote for a recycling center instead of an incinerator. Those same principles motivated my KIDS FOR THE EARTH group to clean up the Hutchinson River *so the ducks could have their babies safely*. Students asked, “Why do grownups throw all this garbage in the river?” I explained, “because they don’t know any better...but you do.” I am still in touch with many of those students whose lives were changed by that brief exposure to a new way of seeing themselves in our world.

Today I am retired and active in our neighborhood association where I serve as chair of our Quality of Life Committee. Without giving speeches, I witness to the three principles in everything I do—from assisting an elderly person with her packages, to planting and maintaining gardens around town, to presenting proposals to the City Council to expand our city recycling program. All this has led me to proclaim a new expression of religious commitment in our world. I can’t awaken the entire world to this new consciousness but because what I do affects everyone and everything else, I can change the world from right here in Mount Vernon, New York.

Thanks, Thomas!

Patricia Monahan is a teacher, gardener, community activist, and Sister of Earth: She first became aware of Thomas Berry at a convention in the mid 80’s when Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis OP drew a horizontal line on the blackboard depicting historic time and then a longer line describing universe time. That experience began a journey that inspired and reshaped her sense of the sacred and the meaning of religious life in today’s world.



Cleaning up the Beaches



The Children's Garden at Genesis Farm