

The Movement

By John P. Cock

The Great Work before us . . . is not a role that we have chosen. It is a role given to us, beyond any consultation with ourselves We were chosen by some power beyond ourselves for this historical task The nobility of our lives . . . depends upon the manner in which we come to understand and fulfill our assigned role.

—Thomas Berry (*The Great Work*, p. 7)*

The good life is not “grasping after greater wealth to sustain a ‘better life’ that we perceive as ‘progress.’” This mode of consumerism is our “pathology” and “addiction” according to Thomas (p. 116). Likewise, the good life is not measured by GHP: “A rising *gross human product* with a declining gross Earth product is surely a contradiction” (p. 74). And the good life is not glorification of the human: “Both our religious and our humanist traditions are primarily committed to an anthropocentric exaltation of the human” (p. 104), at the expense of greater values. “Our human ethics are derivative from the ecological imperative. The basic ethical norm is the well-being of the comprehensive community and the attainment of human well-being within that community” (p. 105).

What are some new strategies for the good life? “Community-supported agriculture, solar-hydrogen energy systems, redesign of our cities, elimination of the automobile in its present form, restoration of local village economies, education for a post-petroleum way of life, and a jurisprudence that recognizes the rights of natural modes of being” (p. 110). Our present pace of the old *good life* is simply not sustainable according to Thomas. “What is needed is a sustainable way of life”

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* *Editor’s note:* All page numbers cited refer to the hardcover first edition of Thomas Berry’s *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999).

(p. 114) and a “sustainable future” (p. 133). “Any recovery of the natural world in its full splendor will require not only a new economic system but a conversion experience deep in the psychic structure of the human” (p. 60). A conversion from the old *good life*—that doesn't work—to the *new good life* of *intercommunion* with the universe is the objective of the *Great Work*.

These manifesto-style words by Thomas indicate *Our Way Into the Future* (his subtitle for *The Great Work*). He reminds us it took about 15 billion years for the Earth to emerge to this point, and only ten thousand years for us humans to gain significant control over the Earth (p. 50). How long will it take for us to come into a compassionate and responsible management of that which is entrusted to our care, to become *good* stewards of the universe?

The thesis of the *good life* we are putting forth is that of the *profound human journey*. Within primal communion we are awakened to, formed for, engaged in, and sustained for the *Great Work*, which is the good life of universe stewardship. This *Great Work* is our calling that can set us free.

Moses was awakened, formed, and sustained for the *Great Work* of setting *God's* chosen people free. Today we are being awakened, formed, and sustained for the *Great Work* of setting *God's* universe free, which was the assignment from the beginning, but we humans got carried away with serving human desires rather than the needs of the universe. Now we have been called again to the real task of caring for the universe. If we answer this call, liberation of all *God's* humans will also be done, and immeasurably better than before.

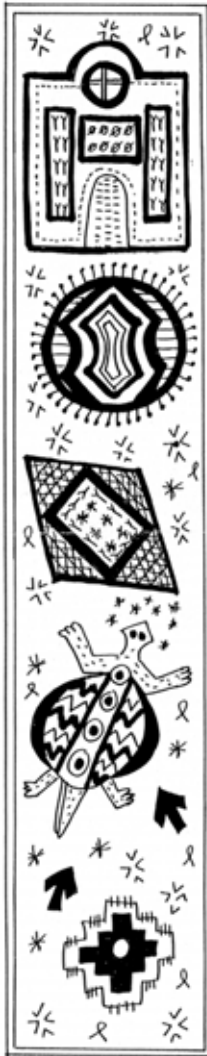
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The main way we humans are liberated is caring for the universe-wide neighbor that Thomas has convincingly described. How will that liberation come to be? By our creating and joining *the* movement. I again quote Thomas' opening to *The Great Work*: “History is governed by those overarching movements that give shape and meaning to life by relating the human venture to the larger destinies of the universe. Creating such a *movement* might be called the Great Work of a people.” (p. 1)

Therefore, our mandate is to help create the movement of those who care for the universe. We know there are hundreds of movements abroad that are comprehensive. One could even call the United Nations a movement and applaud its recent fifteen-year plan for the Earth and all its constituents, including water, various species, and the atmosphere, as well as us six billion humans. But this is not the movement Thomas is talking about.

The movement we are talking about is the *intercommunion* of creation, as we know it, bound together in some more or less self-conscious network of care. The primary hope for this moment in evolution is our deeper consciousness of the Spirit present in creation. Throughout our meditations we have emphasized motivation for the *Great Work*, and we have said that the heart of that motivation is Spirit. If the movement of those who care for the universe is not grounded in the Spirit, it will fail. If it is grounded in Spirit, there will be no force great enough to stop it.

- Who can stop a movement on which every being's life depends?
- Who can stop a movement that is history long, universe wide, and Spirit deep?
- Who can stop a movement with a membership of all species, all peoples, all cultures, all religions, and all sectors?
- Who can stop a movement that's out to protect every being's home, every being's rights, and every being's best interests?
- Who can stop a movement that is the big tent for all caring movements?
- Be careful in trying to stop this movement. Be enhanced by advancing it.
- It's a movement whose time has come.
- It's a movement worth body and soul.
- This is a movement of *intercommunion*.



- To be in this movement, this *Great Work*, is to be living the *good life*.
- The Spirit, the call, the story, the mandate—all these—and *we* are creating this movement.
- May we be so motivated, and re-motivated, and re-motivated.

This article is excerpted from the Epilogue of John P. Cock's book, *Motivation for the Great Work: Forty Meaty Meditations for the Secular-Religious*, with a foreword by Thomas Berry.