

## THERE IS WORK FOR EVERYONE

By Allan Combs

Thomas Berry was born in Greensboro, North Carolina, where as a child he came to love the trees and green forests of that state. After a long career as a Catholic priest of the Passionist order, cultural historian, and eventually an ecotheologian and “Earth scholar,” he returned to North Carolina to retire in 1995, where he continued to reflect and write for another ten years. At that time I lived in Asheville, North Carolina, located in the western mountains of the state. Thomas had many admirers in Asheville and made occasional trips to speak to us there. He once came to preside at the unveiling of a walking labyrinth designed by students and faculty at Warren Wilson College, a small school nestled nearby in the forest. He also spoke more than once at the beautiful wooden chapel there. It was a perfect place to meet the person who had devoted so much of his life to valuing and preserving the natural world around us.

During his final years Thomas’s voice became unsteady, and it was necessary to listen carefully to understand his words. Nevertheless, as I recall through the clouds of time and memory, there was always a poetic song-like quality beneath the surface of his speech, like the sound of birds singing softly in the forest.

I recall few details of his talks, but one thing he said stays with me even today. This was his reply to a student’s question, “What can we do in a world with so many troubles?” His answer was simple and profound: “There is work for everyone.”

No matter what you do in your life; if you are a parent, a writer or musician, an artist, a carpenter, a mason, a teacher, or a bus driver. There is always good work to be done.

I have never forgotten this answer and believe it to be one of the wisest statements I have ever heard.