

Introduction to This Issue

Herman Greene

The “Colloquium on Thomas Berry’s Work: Development, Difference, Importance, Applications,” was held on May 28-30, 2014, at the Fedex Global Education Center of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Thirty-one people made presentations at the Colloquium. An equal number of people were attendees only at the Colloquium.

The event was co-sponsored by the

- Center for Ecozoic Societies,
- Carolina Seminars Program of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill,
- Douglass Hunt Lecture Series,
- Fenwick Foundation, and
- Relationality Seminar of the Carolina Seminars Program

Funding for the Colloquium was provided by the Douglass Hunt Lecture Series of the Carolina Seminars Program, the Fenwick Foundation of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and the Relationality Seminar of the Carolina Seminars Program.

The Douglass Hunt Lecturers were

- *Christopher Key Chapple, PhD*, Professor of Indic and Comparative Theology, Loyola Marymount University
- *Anne Marie Dalton, PhD*, Professor of Religious Studies, Saint Mary’s University, Halifax, Nova Scotia
- *Heather Eaton, PhD*, Professor of Conflict Studies, Saint Paul University, Ottawa, Ontario
- *Dennis O’Hara, PhD*, Professor of Theology, Saint Michael’s College, University of Toronto
- *Sheri Ritchlin, PhD*, Writer, Lecturer, and Dream Worker, Sonoma County, California, and Ovando, Montana

The members of the Colloquium Organizing Committee were

- *Becky Coble*, Coordinator of the Program on Integrative Medicine, UNC-CH (retired)
- *Arturo Escobar*, Kenan Distinguished Teaching Professor of Anthropology, UNC-CH
- *Herman Greene*, President, Center for Ecozoic Societies, Chapel Hill, North Carolina
- *Alice Loyd*, Vice President, Center for Ecozoic Societies, Chapel Hill, North Carolina
- *Michal Osterweil*, Senior Lecturer, Internship Coordinator, Curriculum in Global Studies, UNC-CH
- *James Peacock*, Kenan Professor of Anthropology, UNC-CH, and past President of the American Anthropological Association
- *William Peck*, Bowman and Gordon Gray Professor of Religious Studies Emeritus, UNC-CH

The Colloquium was held in 2014, the 100th anniversary of Thomas Berry's birth and the 5th anniversary of his death. Berry was one of the most important ecological thinkers and visionaries of his time. Berry's work has influenced thousands of activists in the United States and around the world. His thought is regularly cited in environmental ethics, environmental literature, and theology. Berry developed the concept of the anthropocene *avant la letter*. As he put it in 1988, "The anthropogenic shock that is overwhelming the earth is of an order of magnitude beyond anything previously known in human historical or cultural development.... We are acting on a geological and biological order of magnitude. We are changing the chemistry of the planet."

His work linked together ecology, spirituality, and religion, among other fields. He envisioned a transition to an entirely different era and civilization, far beyond any form of contemporary culture, as the only 'way into the future.' He proposed the 'Great Work' that was needed in order to usher in an 'Ecozoic era.' He gave birth to three visible movements, the Universe Story movement, the Rights of Nature or Earth Jurisprudence movement, and the transition to Ecozoic Societies or Ecological Civilization movement. Less visible

but equally important were his contributions to bioregional movements, movements for a sentient or living Earth, and movements for the rights and wisdoms of indigenous people. He also engaged in the reform of religious orders. Further, he has been credited with beginning the spiritual ecology movement.

Though his influence and applications of his work have been many, his work has received limited critical review or attention. The Colloquium was based on the strong belief that it is imperative *to engage critically and creatively* with the key aspects of Berry's thought, as contained in his published and other written work, and to produce *thorough assessments of it* through scholarly and intellectual reflection and debate on the main dimensions of his work. The Colloquium thus was intended to move from straight commentary and appreciation of Berry's work to the *critical reception and re-articulation* of his legacy as it bears on the real transitions needed. We saw this process as being a crucial ingredient in the very transition that Berry envisioned from our current disastrous path to viable new life visions that make possible different organizations of society in the long run.

To this end, we invited individuals to offer presentations at this Colloquium that would:

- Situate Berry's work within broader intellectual and social currents and contexts
- Review his ideas critically
- Assess his contributions to particular domains and establish conversations between Berry's work and other fields or thinkers
- Analyze the contemporary relevance and potential applications of his work
- Develop further his key concepts concerning the main elements of the transition(s).

We gave Colloquium presenters these five key questions for consideration:

1. Does Thomas Berry's written work have independent and enduring significance such that it should be, as a prima-

ry source, widely taught, studied, further-developed, and applied?

2. Does Thomas Berry provide a set of foundational principles for the transition from economic-industrial civilization to ecological-cultural civilization?
3. Is the primary legacy of Thomas Berry his intellectual ideas?
4. Did Thomas Berry frame the Great Work of our time?
5. Why has Thomas Berry's rhetoric been so effective? And, at the same time, what has limited his influence?

Presenters were not asked to prepare papers prior to the Colloquium. They were, however, invited to submit papers based on their presentations for publication in this issue. The papers that were submitted are contained in this issue. This issue contains one essay not related to a presentation made at the Colloquium. It is David Schenck, "Cosmology and Wisdom: The Great Teaching Work of Thomas Berry." David was unable to attend the Colloquium, but he did send a paper.

We now proudly offer these papers to you. We believe they are significant contributions to Thomas Berry's legacy and they illuminate key aspects and applications of his work.