

# Taking Thomas Berry's Thought Seriously: Opening Lecture of the Colloquium

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If anything happens out of our time together, it will not be because of my effort, but because of what you bring to this Colloquium. We all bring our respect, love, and admiration for Thomas Berry. This is good, yet at the outset let's agree this event is different from other events about Thomas. To my knowledge this is the first academic colloquium on his work. I don't mean academic in the sense that we will be using the language of a certain discipline, such as that of philosophy, theology, or ecology. Rather this Colloquium is academic in the sense that we have taken time to prepare by reading and writing about Thomas's work, and now we have come together to engage Thomas's thought and try to understand it better.

I heard someone say that our time together in this small, intimate community would be fun. While this may be the case, some caution is in order. What we are trying to do here is along the lines of a dispassionate look at Thomas's work. Thomas Berry was a wonderful person with a warm personality. We are not, however, here to tell stories about Thomas—you may tell stories about Thomas, but that's not what we are here for. What we are focusing on is the significance of the body of work he left. Thus we have titled this event, "Thomas Berry's Work: Development, Difference, Importance, Applications."

While I can't speak for Thomas, I don't know of any better way to honor this man who gave himself so thoroughly to his work, than to consider it carefully and carry it forward. There is a long poem by Nikos Kazantzakis called *Saviors of God*<sup>1</sup> where he says we are one body with all human beings, those before and after us. He talks about how the dead are crying out, "Finish my work! Finish my work!" So Thomas gave us a Great Work and now we are the ones who carry that on. Thomas wrote in his essay "The Spirituality of

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1. Nikos Kazantzakis, *The Saviors of God: Spiritual Exercises* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1960).

Earth” that it is part of the dialectics of history that great understandings need to be associated with a person.<sup>2</sup> For example, we speak of Kant’s ideas or Socrates’ ideas. None of us know Kant or Socrates, but we talk about Kant’s ideas and Socrates’ ideas. Thus, here we will talk about Thomas Berry’s ideas, not for the sake of understanding alone, but to come to terms with them and carry them forward in the Great Work.

### **Thomas Berry’s Thought**

I’m going to make some provocative comments about Thomas’s work to begin our Colloquium. More than one person has made statements along the lines that academic study of Thomas’s work misses the point. To approach Thomas this way, they say, makes it too objective, too much like school. I would note, though, that some of you were students of Thomas when he taught at Fordham University, or you wrote your dissertations on Thomas’s work. I have read your stories of your relationships with Thomas when I read your tributes to him that we published.<sup>3</sup> Going to school with Thomas was a moving event.

This man had a personal library of 10,000 books and he read all of St. Thomas Aquinas’s major work, more than 20 volumes, in Latin. He read the major works of St. Augustine’s in Latin. He learned Sanskrit to study Indian religions. He traveled to China to learn Chinese and study Chinese culture and religions. He studied the ways of indigenous people. He was the best historian I have ever known. When he was in his prime and you were having a conversation with him, you could ask him about nearly any event in the past anywhere in the world and he would be able to give you the background of that event. He was just phenomenal as a historian. He taught as a cultural historian and it is important to remember that this was his academic field.

The work for which he is best known was published after he

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2. Thomas Berry, “The Spirituality of Earth,” *The Ecozoic: Reflections on Life in an Ecological Age* 1 (2008).
  3. See tributes to Thomas Berry in “A Tribute to Thomas Berry” special issue, *The Ecozoic: Reflections on Life in an Ecological Age* 2 (2009).

retired from teaching. In this time he made presentations at many events and had extended personal conversations with many people. If he was pithy in his talks and gave easy to remember-and-say ideas, such as “Earth is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects,” they were ideas that came out of a lifetime of study and reflection. What always captures this for me is that in his early life as a monk he practiced the canonical hours. After the Midnight Office he would sometimes stay up and read books until it was time for Matins because he was so passionate about learning. Given all this, it’s certainly no dishonor to study Thomas Berry.

Here’s a way of looking at Thomas. In 2000, I wrote a paper called “Thomas Berry’s Great Work.”<sup>4</sup> I began by talking about the awe I felt when I first held *The Great Work*<sup>5</sup> in my hands. And then I wrote:

I considered the man behind the book. What was his great work? How could one describe this man and his thought, now most recently made available in this slim book, to those who do not know him? He is so widely known and influential in a small circle, and so little known in the world at large. Yet, he has everything to say to the world at large. The crisis resulting from the ecological devastation of the planet by human activity is real, though not yet expressed in a commanding and immediate way that is evident to all. We need Thomas to help us understand what is going on; to give us eyes to see, ears to hear, passion to feel, courage to act; to give us ways to explain what has happened; and to give us knowledge of what we authentically may rely on, hope for and move toward if we are to create a viable future in this dawning new millennium.

That Thomas has done this—given us a new understanding of (i) where we are, (ii) who we are as humans, (iii) how we got here, and (iv) where we are to go—is his great work.<sup>6</sup>

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4. Herman Greene, “Thomas Berry’s Great Work,” *The Ecozoic Reader* (Fall 2000): 1-16.

5. Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999).

6. Greene, “Thomas Berry’s Great Work,” 1.

This was his great work, but he gave all of us a “Great Work” to do, and I think that should be at the foreground of our consideration. I’ll continue reading from the paper I wrote<sup>7</sup>:

In the very first chapter Thomas lays before us “The Great Work.” In each historical epoch, he writes, people are given a “Great Work” to do—in one age, the settling of new lands, in another the building of great cathedrals, the creation of artistic, philosophical, religious or scientific works, or the shaping of political structures and ideas. The Great Works of prior periods are seen in such things as the movement of the first people out of Africa in the Paleolithic period; the creation of language, rituals and social structures in hunter-gatherer communities; the establishment of agriculture communities in the Neolithic period; the development of the great classical civilizations; and, in the modern period, advances in technology, urban civilization, new ideals of government and human rights, the modern business enterprise, and globalism.

Our Great Work is not something we choose, Thomas says. It is something we find ourselves thrown into by virtue only of being born in a certain time and place. The task may seem overwhelming, one coming in response to some huge historical difficulty, but, he observes, just as we are given our historical task by some power beyond ourselves, we must also believe we are given the abilities to fulfill this task.

The Great Work into which we and our children are born, Thomas says, comes in response to the devastation of the planet caused by human activity. We are facing a breakdown in the life systems that can only be understood by comparison with events that marked the great transitions in the geo-biological eras of Earth’s history, such as the extinction of the dinosaurs and countless other species when the Mesozoic era ended and our present Cenozoic era began (p. 3). Our task is to move from our modern industrial civilization with its devastating impact to that of benign presence. It is an arduous and overwhelming task, one exceeding in its complexity

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7. Page references are to Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*.

that ever offered to humans, for it is not simply one of adjustment to disturbance of human life patterns, as, for example, that occasioned by the Great Depression or the recent World Wars, but one of dealing with the disruption and termination of the geo-biological system that has governed the functioning of the planet in the 67 million year reign of the Cenozoic era in the history of the planet Earth. The Great Work before us is to move from the terminating Cenozoic era into an emerging “Ecozoic era” when humans will be present to Earth in a mutually enhancing way and become functional participants in the comprehensive Earth community. To do this involves “reinventing the human,” because we have a task and role emerging from our modern capacities and dimensions that has never been conceived in the human venture. From the earliest times in human history we have been acculturated into a microphase awareness of our place in the Earth system, yet we find ourselves now at a place where humans as a whole have a macrophase impact. *Microphase* refers to our individual survival, achievements, freedoms, and aspirations; *macrophase* refers to our place as a collective human community within the Earth system.

To accomplish this transition requires a fundamental reassessment of our role as humans, and it must be done as might be said in computer talk, in “real-time.” We have no reprieve from being participants in the destructive impacts of our present modes of civilizational presence, yet from our places as active participants in the current system, we are called to bring about a transition to a mutually enhancing mode of presence.

The complexity of this task, as compared with other Great Works, can be understood when we realize there can be no frontal attack on our adversary in this crusade. There is no “we” and “they,” there is no “here” and “there,” there is no frontier to cross, and no externalities that can be ignored in the name of one great cause. No, everything is in the midst; we are both on the side of this cause and against it. The transformation that is called for is both inner and outer, regional and global, national and international, economic and social,

individual and collective, family and sect, and—for the first time in human history with self-conscious awareness—human and other-than human nature.

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This then is where we are: We are in modern industrial civilization in the terminal phase of the Cenozoic era. We are people born into the Great Work of creating and transitioning into an emerging Ecozoic era.

This is quite moving, isn't it?

Now Thomas talked a lot about cosmology. I would like to give an understanding of what Thomas was doing when he dwelt on this subject by reading from another paper I wrote called "Whitehead and Civilization."<sup>8</sup> It is about Alfred North Whitehead's work but it sheds light on what Thomas was about.<sup>9</sup>

Let us begin with the importance of cosmology and Whitehead's work as cosmology. In the contemporary mind, I would venture, cosmology means something old on which ancient civilizations were grounded....And if, in the contemporary mind, cosmology doesn't mean something old, I would venture it means physical cosmology—the work of scientists in investigating the structure and dynamics of the universe and the description of the universe as given by such scientists. Neither something that is antiquated, nor something limited to the investigations of modern science would lead Whitehead to write, "In each age of the world distinguished by high activity there will be found at its culmination, and among the agencies leading to that culmination, some profound cosmological outlook, implicitly accepted, impressing its own type upon the

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8. Herman Greene, "Whitehead and Civilization," paper presented at the 7th International Whitehead Conference, Bangalore, India, January 7, 2009.

9. Page references in the quoted text are from "Whitehead and Civilization" are to Alfred North Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas* (1933, 1st paperback ed., New York: The Free Press, 1967), except where indicated they are to Alfred North Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (1925, 1st paperback ed., New York: The Free Press, 1967).

current springs of action.” He must have had something different in mind with the term “cosmology,” something of essential importance.

We might ask “Of essential importance to what?” The answer to that lies in Whitehead’s statement of what his subject was in *Adventures of Ideas*. He wrote, “The intellectual agencies involved in the modification of epochs are the proper subject of this book.” (p. 12) It is in this context that Whitehead understood cosmology, which he implicitly defined as “the most general ideas at the base of the whole development of science[—the] concepts of Speculation and Scholarship, and the various notions of the Order of Nature, and of Nature itself.” (p. 103)

This is really what Thomas was about with cosmology. Now continuing with the paper on Whitehead:

Given the way Whitehead employed the term cosmology in *Adventures of Ideas*, we can understand “science” as used in the foregoing definition very broadly as meaning knowledge of the world and ourselves generally.

The cosmology of a particular epoch, though profound in its influence, is only partly expressed, and the details of such expression issue into derivative specialized questions of violent controversy. The intellectual strife of an age is mainly concerned with these latter questions of secondary generality which conceal a general agreement upon first principles almost too obvious to need expression, and almost too general to be capable of expression. In each period there is a general form of the forms of thought; and, like the air we breathe, such a form is so translucent, and so pervading, and so seemingly necessary, that only by extreme effort can we become aware of it. (p. 12)

Whitehead’s whole philosophical task, [and one could say Thomas’s as well,] was to make people aware of the inadequacy of the cosmology of the epoch or age that we call modernity,

the period beginning in the West in the 16th century and extending to the present, and of a more adequate cosmology emerging out of both contemporary science and culture (including philosophy and religion) to inspire and guide the post-modern world.

Thus Whitehead writes in *Science and the Modern World*:

Philosophy, in one of its functions, is the critic of cosmologies. It is its function to harmonize, re-fashion, and justify divergent intuitions as to the nature of things. It has to insist on the scrutiny of the ultimate ideas, and on the retention of the whole of the evidence in shaping our cosmological scheme. Its business is to render explicit, and—so far as may be—efficient, a process which otherwise is unconsciously performed without rational tests. (*Science and the Modern World*, vii)

In the chapters of *Adventures of Ideas* on how great ideas have been carried in Western Civilization, Whitehead includes a critique of modern thought. For two thousand years “Plato’s philosophic theories and Christian intuitions” informed the soul of Western man. In the modern period, physical science and individualism became preeminent. Metaphysics was abandoned and philosophy developed around the narrow range of concerns of positivism, utilitarianism, and empiricism. Of modern scholarship and modern science he writes:

They canalize thought and observation within predetermined limits, based upon inadequate metaphysical assumptions dogmatically assumed. The modern assumptions differ from older assumptions, not wholly for the better. They exclude from rationalistic thought more of the final values of existence. The intimate timidity of professionalized scholarship circumscribes reason by reducing its topics to triviality, for example, to bare *sensa* and to tautologies. It then frees itself from criticism by dogmatically handing



over the remainder of experience to an animal faith or a religious mysticism, incapable of rationalization. (p. 118)

Whitehead wholly approves of science while upholding the value of philosophy: "Science and Philosophy are merely different aspects of one great enterprise of the human mind." (p. 140) "Science and Philosophy mutually criticize each other, and provide imaginative material for each other."(p. 146) For 1800 years after Aristotle, science was dominated by philosophical conception of the universe with insufficient attention to observation. Modern science focuses on observation, but with insufficient attention to philosophy. Science observes "particular occurrences...issuing in wide classifications of things according to their modes of functioning, in other words according to the laws of nature which they illustrate. [In contrast,] the emphasis of philosophy is upon generalizations which almost fail to classify by reason of their universal application." (p.143) Modern science fails to recognize the "grave weakness in the observational order. Observational discrimination is not dictated by the impartial facts. It selects and discards, and what it retains is rearranged in a subjective order of prominence."(p. 155)

Without philosophical reflection, science is unaware of its own presuppositions. "No science can be more secure than the unconscious metaphysics which tacitly it presupposes." (p. 154) Philosophy "seeks those generalities which characterize the complete reality of fact, and apart from which any fact must sink into an abstraction. But science makes the abstraction, and is content to understand the complete fact in respect to only some of its essential aspects." (p. 146) Philosophy broadens the inquiry:

[Philosophic systems] are the way in which the human spirit cultivates its deeper intuitions. Such systems give life and motion to detached thoughts. Apart from these efforts at coordination, detached thoughts would flash out in idle mo-

ments, illuminate a passing phase of reflection, and would then perish and be forgotten. The scope of an intuition can only be defined by its coordination with other notions of equal generality. (p. 144)

The difficulty with much of modern philosophy is that it has accepted the same abstractions of what constitutes a “fact” as modern science and seeks to describe reality through such means as empiricism, utilitarianism, substantial objects, measurable qualities, and logic. Whitehead calls for a nondogmatic return of philosophy to the task at its Hellenistic roots, that of describing a complete fact. This would entail at least covering these elements of Plato’s philosophy: “The Ideas, The Physical Elements, The Psyche, The Eros, The Harmony, The Mathematical Relations, The Receptacle.” (p. 147)

Now I will give one last set of reflections from two papers I wrote titled “We Cannot Act Effectively in the World without an Adequate Understanding of the Nature of the World,” (Understanding the Nature of the World)<sup>10</sup> and “Process Ecozoics: Philosophy and Theology in the Ecozoic Age,” (Process Ecozoics).<sup>11</sup> These papers again cover ideas from another thinker—E. Maynard Adams, former head of the Philosophy Department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill—that I believe illuminate what Thomas was about.<sup>12</sup>

How we understand the nature of the world is our philoso-

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10. Herman Greene, “We Cannot Act Effectively in the World without an Adequate Understanding of the Nature of the World.” *CES Monthly Musings* (April 2013): 7-10.
  11. Herman Greene, “Process Ecozoics: Philosophy and Theology in the Ecozoic Age, Keynote Lecture, 8th International Whitehead Conference on “Eco-Sophia,” Sophia University, Tokyo, Japan, September 26, 2011.
  12. References in the quoted text are from “We Cannot Act Effectively in the World without an Adequate Understanding of the Nature of the World” are to E. Maynard Adams, “The Mission of Philosophy Today,” *Metaphilosophy* 31, no. 4 (July 2000): 349-64, except where indicated they are to E. Maynard Adams, “Rethinking the Idea of God,” *The Southern Journal of Philosophy XXXIX* (2001): 313-329; available at, accessed October 31, 2011, <http://emadams.unc.edu/Rethinking-the-Idea-of-God>.

phy whether we use the term philosophy or not. We cannot act effectively in the world without an adequate understanding of the nature of the world. Our present situation calls for wisdom, insight, intimacy, solidarity and creativity as we give form to a new age. None of these are, however, possible if we do not understand the nature of the world.

The modern period, while opening up new vistas of understanding and much progress in human affairs, has introduced many distortions in our understanding of the world. Descartes is considered the originator of modern philosophy in the West. His “Cartesian dualism” divided mind from matter. Other ontological dualisms of the modern period include fact and value, primary qualities and secondary qualities, science and the humanities, the religious and the secular, humans and nature, objective and subjective, and civilized and uncivilized. These dualisms have become natural for the modern mind, but they are not natural to nature, not even our human nature.

Much can be written about how contemporary philosophy has accommodated itself to the un-natural distortions of the modern worldview. The philosopher E. Maynard Adams in “The Mission of Philosophy Today,” describes how, in the modern period, scientific naturalism, based on sensory empiricism, materialism, and efficient causation, seeped into and came to dominate the cultural mind. He wrote that this is attributable to the great success of science:

Empirical science provided the factual knowledge that was fruitful in making things and in the manipulation and control of the material environment. In time, the great success of empirical science in providing the knowledge base for mastery of nature, the making of useful things, and the production of wealth led to the discrediting of all other kinds of knowledge claims. (pp. 354-55)

Further, the presuppositions of science undermined the humanistic dimensions of society and led to skepticism, subjectivism, relativism, and even nihilism in the cultural sphere.

Science . . . eliminated, normative, value, and meaning concepts, the fundamental categories of the humanities and humanistic thought in general, from its descriptive/explanatory conceptual system because they cannot be funded with meaning by sensory experience, and so statements containing them [could] not be confirmed or falsified by scientific methods of inquiry. Thus, according to the presuppositions of modern science, there are no normative laws, values, inherent structures of meaning, ends, or teleological causality in nature—only existential and factual structures and elemental and antecedent causes that engage them. One cannot accept modern science's descriptive/explanatory account of something as the truth about it without accepting its presuppositions about the basic structure of the world. Yet the presuppositions of science are inconsistent with the presuppositions of most religious beliefs and humanistic thought in general. (pp. 353-54)

Adams wrote of a “cultural mind” based on a widely shared set of assumptions and beliefs. He believed it is the province of philosophy to discover and critique the presuppositions of experience, thought, and action in the cultural mind. Further, philosophy needs to “[excavate] the inherent commitments about the categorial structures of various subject matters and the world as a whole that are hidden in these presuppositions, and to develop an account of how the culture is grounded in and maps[,or is not grounded in and does not map,] the basic structure of the world.” (p. 357)

Now I'll read from *Process Ecozoics*:

[Adams] understood the mission of philosophy as cultural critique and reconstruction, a mission few academic philosophers, at least in the Anglo-American tradition, would accept. With this understanding, and his conviction that the cultural mind contained fundamental errors about the categorial fea-

tures of the world and the humanistic enterprise, he wrote:

The mission of philosophy in our time is daunting, even overwhelming, for our basic cultural problems are philosophical. While there are other resources in the culture that must be utilized, it is only through clear philosophical analysis and education that we can come to grips with our deepest problems in a way that will overcome our cultural derangement and prepare the way for cultural renewal. We must redefine the human enterprise by shifting our priorities from materialistic to humanistic values, reassess the semantic and knowledge-yielding powers of the human mind, reexamine all sectors of the culture to determine how each is grounded in experience and related to the items, features, and structures of the world, and construct a coherent worldview that makes sense of all the realities we know, especially human existence and the whole human phenomenon. (p. 356)

The *human phenomenon*...it's almost like I read all of this to get to the human phenomenon. This was at the core of Thomas's work.<sup>13</sup>

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13. Thomas taught and regularly referred his students to Pierre Teilhard Chardin's book, *The Phenomenon of Man*, trans. Bernard Wall (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), which in a later translation was called *The Human Phenomenon*, trans. Sarah Appleton-Weber (Brighton, United Kingdom: Sussex Academic Press). Brian Swimme wrote the foreword to this later translations. *Ibid*, xiii-xvi. There Swimme quotes Thomas as saying:

Teilhard was the first to see the universe in a new way, so I suppose it's inevitable that he would be criticized. If you're bothered by what a few scientists have to say [about Teilhard] you should read some of the theologians! Fundamentally the difficulty is one of scale. Any attempt to understand Teilhard that does not begin with the entire complex of civilizations as well as the vast panorama of the evolutionary universe is doomed to failure for it is simply too small to grasp what he was about. *Ibid.*, xiii-xiv.

Swimme wrote about his conversations with Thomas about Teilhard's book:

Now back to Process Ecozoics:

Adams understood that philosophy alone could not bring about a cultural reformation, but it was his position that there cannot be a cultural reformation without a philosophical reformation. With respect to philosophical reformation, he wrote, "It is not enough for a few philosophers to solve these problems intellectually; the solutions need to be worked out in the culture, in the experience and lives of the people, and in the social structure and the institutions of the society." (p. 362) This meant, for him, that philosophers needed to be engaged in the culture working to bring about change....

Adams offers three historical examples of how changes in philosophy functioned to bring about cultural transformation: (1) The Greek Enlightenment from the 6th to the 4th century before the common era; (2) the development of Christian feudalism in the wake of the collapse of the Roman Empire and its supporting culture; and (3) the dissolution of Christian feudalism and the emergence of modern Western civilization from the 14th to the 18th century. In each of these periods, philosophers exposed cultural errors in the dying civilization and helped construct and defend a new vision of humankind in the world and a culture that would support and generate social institutions that would support the new way of life. (p. 360)

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I would read on my own and once a week discuss the ideas with Thomas Berry; I would be regularly amazed by how much of the world's intellectual history it seemed necessary to refer to. He drew constantly not just from physics and biology, but also from philosophy, poetry, linguistics, music and above all world history and cosmology.... The unexamined assumptions that had been organizing my experiences in the world were now writhing. *Ibid.*, xiv.

Swimme also makes clear that in Teilhard and Thomas the universe must be understood in terms of the human phenomenon. He quotes Thomas as saying: "Teilhard was one of the first scientists to realize that the human and the universe are inseparable. The only universe we know about is a universe that brought forth the human." *Ibid.*, xv.

In the foregoing I have offered philosophical background for understanding part of what Thomas's work was about. Philosophical papers like the ones I have just quoted from, however, cannot take these messages to the larger culture. A language is needed that takes those ideas and engages the culture. Offering such a language was Thomas's great gift. But, I would submit, his work is grounded in deep philosophical understandings.

I feel insufficient attention has been given to Thomas's historical analysis, his cultural critique, and his proposals for reform of societies. Many people are aware of Thomas's association with the universe story and that's all they know about him. Even on the subject of the universe story, I feel there hasn't been enough attention given to Thomas's various statements by him concerning how the universe story can function as the "New Story" for our time. Kudos though to the long work of Brian Swimme, Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, Jennifer Morgan and many others on this.

On another subject, I know people admire Thomas, but to me making Thomas an icon is an obstacle to the spread of his thought. What do I mean by icon? The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines icon as a "representation or picture of a sacred or sacrifice sanctified Christian personage. One who is the object of great attention and devotion, an idol."<sup>14</sup> Thomas's passion was his work and in a larger sense the Great Work. Let this be our passion too.

I also recommend that we resist the efforts to spiritualize his teaching. What I have in mind by spiritualizing his teaching is using it devotionally. Thomas's work is inspirational and I've used it devotionally—I don't mean that we should never use his work devotionally. It's a matter of emphasis. More attention needs to be given to analyzing Thomas's work and what its meaning and implications are.

I feel Thomas's work is often quoted without careful examination of its significance. For example, I believe that his central message that "the universe is not a collection of objects but rather is a communion of subjects" is generally understood as an attitude we should take in regard to nature, rather than a statement about the

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14. *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, 3d ed. (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992).

structure and nature of existence.<sup>15</sup> Thomas's call for intimacy with the Earth community is important, but let us not forget how his teaching counters the mechanistic understanding of the universe on which so much of modern thought and action is based.

David Orr has an insightful passage about the difficulty and length of the task that lies ahead. He thinks the hardest thing, for those who are really concerned about these problems, is to adopt a long view. He says it will be 500 years before the planet and the climate and the systems of the planet return, if they do return, to what they were in the preindustrial period.<sup>16</sup> Taking the long view doesn't mean we shouldn't fight fracking or we shouldn't fight the XL pipeline, but there has to be recognition that we need the philosophical critique and development of new civilizational understandings in order to effect a change of the scale and magnitude of that which

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15. I do not know how Berry came up with his statement that the universe is a communion of subjects. I do know, because he told me so, that he read Alfred North Whitehead's work. Whitehead's "ontological principle" was this: "Apart from the experience of subjects there is nothing, nothing, nothing, bare nothingness." Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, corrected ed., ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne (New York: The Free Press, 1978), 167. Whitehead could have stated this principle another way as "all of reality consists of the experience of subjects."
16. David Orr, *Down to the Wire: Confronting Climate Collapse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), xiii (emphasis added):

The news about climate, oceans, species, and all of the collateral human consequences will get a great deal worse for a long time before it gets better. The reasons for authentic hope are on a farther horizon, centuries ahead when we have managed to stabilize the carbon cycle and reduce carbon levels close to their preindustrial levels, stopped the hemorrhaging of life on Earth, restored the chemical balance of the oceans, and created governments and economies calibrated to the realities of the biosphere and to the diminished ecologies of the postcarbon world. *The change in our perspective from the nearer to the longer term is, I think, the most difficult challenge we will face.* We have become a culture predicated on fast results, quick payoffs, and instant gratification. But now we will have to summon the fortitude necessary to undertake a longer and more arduous journey. Rather like the builders of the great cathedrals of Europe, We will need stamina and faith to work knowing that we will not live to see the results.



occurred, for example, in the transition from the medieval to the modern period. It wasn't the horse collar that caused this, though this was important, rather it was ideas. Why did Hitler, after he invaded Poland and quickly gained control, proceed to kill university professors, priests and other thinkers? It was because he wanted to control ideas.

For a long time I have felt that Thomas Berry was a seminal thinker, one of the most important in the 20th century. He is not without academic standing—certainly he is often cited in works on ecological ethics and he gave rise to contemporary spiritual ecology. I do not, however, think he is sufficiently recognized for his contributions to philosophical cosmology, though he should be. What he did was give a very powerful rhetoric for communicating to the larger culture critical concepts about the nature and structure of existence.

Go back to that statement of Whitehead I read earlier, "In any era of high achievement, at the base of it there is a profound cosmological outlook." This underscores the importance of a cosmological outlook. A cosmological outlook is more than physical cosmology. It is also philosophical cosmology. The novelty of Thomas's work did not relate to physical cosmology, it related to philosophical cosmology—the meaning and understanding we give to the world in which we live.

In closing, let me sum up what I have been concerned with in this lecture. I see deep structure and consistency in Thomas's thought. I see philosophical commitments in his thought. These are very important. What is involved, though, is not just head logic or structure, because Thomas was concerned with more than opening up our minds, he was concerned with opening up our heart connections to the world and our ways of being in the world.

