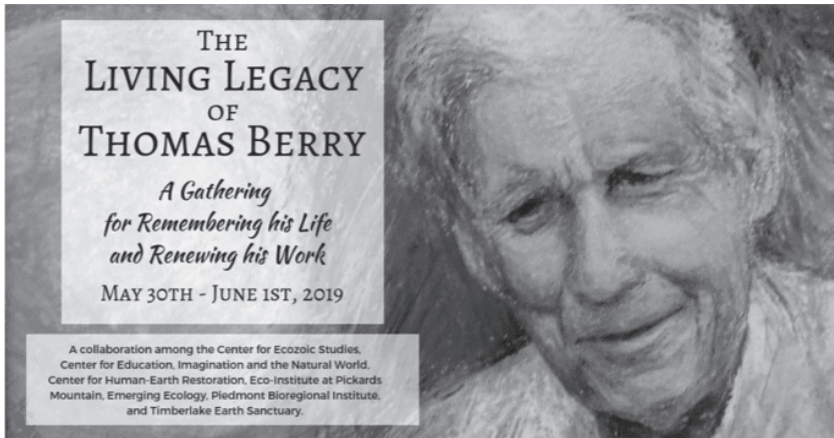


## THE LIVING LEGACY OF THOMAS BERRY

By Mary Southard, C.S.J.



Portrait of Thomas Berry by Mary Southard, C.S.J., reprinted with permission.

On June 1, 2019, people gathered to celebrate the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the passing of Thomas Berry, one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century’s most profound and prophetic thinkers. I first met Thomas in 1981 through his paper, “The Spirituality of the Earth” which came my way while studying Art and Spirituality at the Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, California. Every single word resonated with my own experience of the natural world being my sacred place to encounter the Holy—for which I had never found words to describe.

A few years later, I was in the midst of creating my yearly calendar to be called “Song of the Earth” and wanted to quote that paper. I researched and called a phone number for Thomas Berry’s Riverdale Center. To my surprise and delight, Thomas, himself, answered my call. His jovial *Hello!* eased my nerves and allowed me to find the courage to request the copyright permission.

“Well, sure! I’m just finishing a book right now, myself, called *The Dream of the Earth!*”

The conversation proceeded as if we were colleagues. Welcoming, affirming, and gracious; that was Thomas! Soon after, in July 1988, I met Thomas in person at a yearly colloquium in Port Burwell, Ontario, sponsored by the Canadian branch of the Passionist Religious Order to which Thomas belonged.

I soon found myself drawn into a widespread network of fellow travelers who were also exploring the work of Thomas Berry, Brian Swimme, and others. We took a deep dive into the radically amazing scientific Origin Story of a Sacred Universe, which is far-more ancient and vast than we could ever comprehend, and yet as tiny and intimate as the atoms of our bodies.

We discovered that the dynamic of diversity, an interior dimension, and radical interdependence creates a Communion of Life to which and in which everything on Earth belongs.

I celebrated this anniversary of Thomas's death with 100 other "companions on the way" as Thomas used to call us, in locations near Greensboro, North Carolina, where Thomas was born and lived for the first 14 and last 14 years of his life. (See the cover picture of this issue.) I was overjoyed to be reunited with the people who have worked with and been influenced by the work of Thomas over these many years.

Beginning in 1981, John Surette, S.J., and I began the quarterly *SpiritEarth* publication, and founded and led SpiritEarth, an eco-spirituality Center, forerunner of "The Well" now located in Lagrange, Illinois. The Well Library now houses the SpiritEarth library, the largest library in the Midwest focused on the Sacred Earth and ecology. I have been and continue to be a working artist with much of my art inspired by the worldview taught by Thomas. (See [www.marysouthard.org](http://www.marysouthard.org).)



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