

The New Ecozoic Reader

CRITICAL REFLECTIONS, STORIES, DREAM EXPERIENCES & PRACTICES FOR AN ECOLOGICAL AGE

Number 3, September-December 2021

SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE LIVING LEGACY OF THOMAS BERRY



The historic mission of our time is to reinvent the human at the species level, through critical reflection, within the community of life systems, in a time-developmental context, through story . . . shared dream experience [and practice].

—Thomas Berry, *The Great Work*

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Contents

**Front Cover: Participants in “Living Legacy of Thomas Berry” Conference
Held in the Piedmont of North Carolina (2019)**

**INTRODUCTION TO SPECIAL ISSUE ON THE LIVING [1](#)
LEGACY OF THOMAS BERRY**

Herman Greene

UNCLE BROTHER AND THE CELTS..... [2](#)

Peter Berry

**LIVING THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE, GRATITUDE, BEAUTY,
COMPASSION, AND JUSTICE [4](#)**

Jules Cashford

ELDER BERRY AND US (ABRIDGED) [6](#)

Betty Lou Chaika

THOMAS BERRY AND THE SELF-ORGANIZING UNIVERSE [8](#)

Mary Coelho

**INSCENDENCE AND RE-AWAKENING TO THE ECOLOGICAL
SELF WITH THOMAS BERRY (ABRIDGED)..... [11](#)**

Kaytlyn Creutzberg

LOVING WATER (ABRIDGED) [14](#)

Thomas Berry’s Inspiration for an Integral Water Ethic

Elizabeth McAnally

CONCATENATIONS OF ALLUREMENT..... [18](#)

Maria Myers

BOUNDLESS COMPASSION FOR CREATION[21](#)
Joyce Rupp

WOMEN RELIGIOUS: THE VOICE OF EARTH[25](#)
Gail Worcelo, SGM

Back Cover: Twelve Understandings for the Ecozoic Era

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*The mission of the Center for Ecozoic Studies is to advance ecology and culture as the
organizing principles of societies, through research, publications, education, events, arts, and
action. CES emphasizes critical reflection, story, and shared dream experience as ways of
enabling the creative advance needed to bring into being a new mode of human
civilizational presence, and also of discerning the practical steps leading to the Ecozoic. CES
understands the universe as meaningful, continuously evolving, and relational. In such a
universe, the Ecozoic is not something to be arrived at, but something ever to be created.
Its hallmarks are inclusiveness, interdependence, and appreciation; communion,
differentiation, and subjectivity; and sensitivity, adaptability, and responsibility. It involves
more just and cooperative relationships among humans, as well as transformed
relationships of humans with the larger community of life.*

Introduction to Special Issue on the Living Legacy of Thomas Berry

Herman Greene

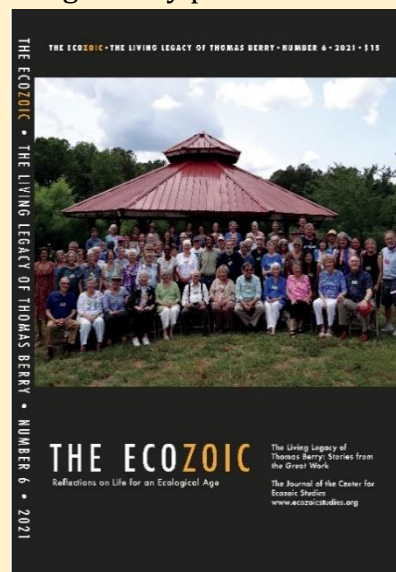
On and around the date of the 10th anniversary of Thomas Berry's death (June 1, 2009) over one hundred people gathered at Timberlake Earth Sanctuary, near Whitsett, North Carolina, and later at the Eco-Institute at Pickards Mountain, near Chapel Hill, North Carolina. This event was celebrated in many other places around the world as well. I personally have always given more significance to the date of his death than his birth date (November 9, 1914). This is because the date of his death marks the completion of Thomas's life and the deposit of his work with us who are living. Catholic saints are celebrated on the day of their death, which is considered their birthday in Heaven. Thomas with his insistence that he was a "geologian" and his focus on "inscendence," I think, would not have liked this interpretation of his completed life. He said to more than one person who asked where would he be after his death, that he would be in the same place he had always been—in the universe.

And so it is. What was striking about Thomas's life was the effect he had on those who knew him. More than anyone I have known he could turn a person's life around and set them in a new direction. This happened to me. True, leaders of other causes have pulled more people into their causes than Thomas did. What is different about Thomas is that his cause involved everything, the Great Work—the movement from the ending of a geobiological age and the beginning of a new one. There is no single entry point to this cause and no single direction. Thomas ignited a unique fire in each individual. They grasped their particular vocations in new ways.

Thomas left a substantial body of written work. Many videos and audiotapes captured his talks. These are his legacy, but more important is his living legacy, his legacy that lives in those whose lives he touched. They have experienced Thomas's call to bring into being an Ecozoic era—a time of mutually enhancing relations among humans and the larger community of life, life systems, and materials—as invitation, invocation, and evocation.

Thomas did not command, he invited. He opened our eyes to the beautiful world in which we live. He invoked the powers of the universe to support us, and this gave us courage. He evoked our imagination of what could be, and this strengthened our resolve.

After the celebration of Thomas's life in 2019, the Center for Ecozoic Studies invited all who wished to tell their stories of how they are living the legacy of Thomas Berry. Thirty-three people responded and their stories are set forth in *The Ecozoic Journal* No. 6 (2021), on "The Living Legacy of Thomas Berry: Stories from the Great Work." We have collected in this issue of *The New Ecozoic Reader* some of those stories, three of which are abridged. If you would like to purchase a copy of this edition of *The Ecozoic Journal*, contact us at ecozoic.studies@gmail.com.



Uncle Brother and the Celts

Peter Berry

I have recently been reading the biography of Thomas by Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim and Andrew Angyal. I was intrigued to see that his essay "The New Story" was published in 1978. A year prior to that as a college freshman in New Orleans, I received a large envelope in the mail from my "Uncle Brother" as we all called him. In it was a mimeograph copy of "The New Story" along with a note saying, "Here's some of my propaganda." I found the essay very inspiring indeed. I am writing this account over 40 years later. I want to highlight how my uncle's life's work has inspired my own.

Based on a combination of Thomas's vision for the reinvention of the human presence on the Earth for a mutually enhancing relationship with other life forms and life systems and my Uncle Jim Berry's circulars from the Center for Reflection on the Second Law (of Thermodynamics), I for the past decade have led a study group called "Seedbearers: Living between the No Longer and the Not Yet."

Here is how I have described this group to potentially interested newcomers:

Signs of the decline of our western industrial civilization are apparent everywhere. What is the optimum mode of human presence on the planet that we can envision to replace the outmoded one as it falls away? Guided by cosmologist Thomas Berry's statement that "The Universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects," we'll spend the monthly sessions looking at diverse sources of inspiration and guidance. These will include ancient Egyptian examples and insights of humans living in a civilization based on communion with the divine. I've been deeply inspired by two trips to Egypt I've taken in recent years. We'll also consider modern practical experiences and spiritual approaches to connecting with the consciousness of the natural world in order to reinvent the human presence on the planet for the future . . . a future in which we have a mutually enhancing presence with the other life forms and life systems of Earth. . . .

I would like to share a spontaneous connection of others with my uncle's inspiration that took place in Ireland a number of years ago. In 2005 I was "harper in residence" for a tour of ancient and sacred sites for a small group of Episcopalian women connected with a retreat center near Greensboro, North Carolina. (I play the Irish harp.)

We went to the Holy Well of Brigit at Kildare where Thomas Berry planted an oak tree ten years prior in a ceremony. The nuns went absolutely berserk with excitement when they found out I was his nephew. I suspected something like that might happen, so I was trying to be low key and was not going to mention it, but when a friend was taking my photo next to the oak tree, she mentioned to the head nun I was his nephew and all hell broke loose! What happened after the nuns calmed down was really special. They took us to the "real" healing well of Brigit, which is more private and secluded, and then took us into their home where the flame of Brigit burns and gave us votive candles ignited from that special flame and we all received very special individual blessings pertinent to our work in the world. It was an amazing afternoon and was very meaningful for everyone in our small group of pilgrims. As I was handed my ignited candle by Sister Mary (the head of

the order called Solas Brigh—Light of Brigit) she looked into my eyes and said, “Peter, don’t let your uncle die without YOU being ready to carry on his work in your own way.”

After telling a friend of mine about my experience at Brigit’s Well, she gave me the image of a priest and priestesses going to the sacred temple—he to visit the ancestral oak (a male aspect) and they to visit the sacred well (a female aspect). (Druid would be another word, and it derives from *dara* for oak! *Cill Dara* in Gaelic is “church of the oak” and is anglicized as Kildare). The notion of “ancestral oak” was literally true in this case since the tree at the well was planted by my uncle who is my ancestor in the sense of being a mentor as well as my ancestor by being my father’s brother.

In our pilgrimage to this sacred site, we, the Druids and Druidesses, were granted admittance into the inner temple of the flame as well as the secluded true healing well of water through the intercession of the ancestral oak. In ancient Druidic understanding, the oak is a special teacher of humanity. In our experience, the oak did indeed open the door for us to gain admittance into the inner sanctum where we each received special blessings for our life’s work, blessings given by a woman whose life is dedicated to the spiritual vision of Thomas Berry.

My commitment to the “reinvention of the human species on the planet so that we have a mutually enhancing relationship” with the other life forms and life systems of Earth is undiminished and is ongoing. My gratitude to the Center for Ecozoic Studies for continuing to bring Thomas’s work to the attention of the world.



Living the Language of Love, Gratitude, Beauty, Compassion, and Justice

Jules Cashford

It is almost impossible to think about the legacy of Thomas and how to live it, or even any part of it, without seeing him standing before us with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes and a new thought for us to play with. So, pouring myself, as it were, a glass of “tequila sunrise with salt around the rim,” and imagining him holding one himself and laughing, I am reminded that whatever he was talking about, he always spoke in the language of love.

Whether he was throwing up his arms into the sky to reach the whole universe in one embrace, or tenderly reciting his poem to the children—“To All the Children”—or recalling his shimmeringly iridescent meadow which became his lifelong touchstone of what was good—“Good was what was good for the meadow”—he left us more in love with life than before, and especially, of course, more in love with our Earth, whom we share with all other forms of life.

This feeling permeates all his writing. So those who were not fortunate enough to have known him, or to have heard his rapturous talks, may also experience the joy and excitement and gratitude which shine out of the pages of his books in which he was always himself talking to you, personally, whoever the “you” may be, calling us to see the beauty in all life and to relate to everyone on Earth with compassion—all sheltered by the Great Jurisprudence—no one too small to be an essential part of the whole.



His legacy is obviously as indefinable as is the person himself, whose life's work lives on in ways we can hardly see, let alone understand. And so there will be many legacies that he has left—as many as there are people to read his works—and all this will go on living a life of its own now he is gone, just as his own passion is continuing to inspire so many individuals and communities all over the world.

The legacy that I am aware of trying to live is the freedom to speak from the heart. I would want to suggest that Thomas changed the rational language of the Enlightenment into a new language of love.

And that he did this in such a way that his own language cannot be dismissed in Enlightenment terms as irrational, emotional, not “germane” to the argument, etc. By instinctively, and generously, assuming that our feelings are as loving as his own, he calls forth from us the best of us, and this invites us to move beyond any lingering habits of thought we might have inherited and not yet transformed.

His own irresistibly unifying language allows us to see the radical defects in the current practice of thinking in oppositional terms from an exclusively rational point of view.

Hypotheses come not from reason but from imagination, as Thomas and Einstein knew. And yet the orthodox dualistic hypotheses of our world, which divide humans from the rest of nature, and further, curiously assume that humans are in some way intrinsically superior to nature, are seldom scrutinized and called into question, neither by reason nor imagination: “Loss of imagination and loss of nature, they’re the same thing!” he once, unforgettably, boomed down the phone to me.

Thomas’s own hypotheses were as wide and generous as the universe. It was the “Great Jurisprudence”—whatever that may mean for each of us, which transformed all his language into love. Even when venturing into the legal world and defining Earth Jurisprudence—naming and numbering its “Ten Principles” with a precision that would pass muster in a court of law—he begins with the inherent lawfulness of the cosmos which sustains all beings within itself:

Rights originate where existence originates. That which determines existence determines rights.

Every component of the Earth community has three rights: the right to be, the right to habitat, and the right to fulfill its role in the ever-renewing processes of the Earth community.

Human rights do not cancel out the rights of other modes of being to exist in their natural state.

The planet Earth is a single community bound together with interdependent relationships. No living being nourishes itself.

Always he imagines the quality of life for every being of life. Everyone has a role. No one is depersonalized. This care of all life is ultimately love. And this is the language he would have us think in, and through, and towards each other, whoever that “other” may be.

If all, or even any, of us could embody this relationship to each other and to those who belong, like us, to the mystery of the universe, then would we not be following his supreme example and living his legacy of loving all our neighbors as ourselves?

Let’s drink to that!



Elder Berry and Us (Abridged)

Betty Lou Chaika

I vividly remember my first encounter with Thomas Berry. In the spring of 1990 I was struggling to hold together my three passions—for being in nature, for spiritual fellowship, and for creative work. In reading *The Dream of the Earth* I had been deeply moved by Thomas's ability to lyrically weave together the material and spiritual dimensions of life with a celebration of human creativity. Moving from the urban San Francisco Bay Area to rural North Carolina, I had been experiencing many encounters with animals in both the outer wild and the inner wild of dreams, and fervently holding the question of what it means when myths and fairy tales and Indigenous people all over the world say that animals speak to us. *What does it mean that wild animals speak to us?*

At the time, our son was in middle school. He told us he was writing a book called "The Quest." One night he asked me to send him on a quest. I wrote out this quest for him to take to an Earth Day II school campout:

In polluting the land, air, and waters and in clearing land for development of housing, shopping centers, and roads we are destroying the habitats of many species. Without their homes they can't live. We have lost our ancient deep connection with animals. We regard them only as pets or as food, or as entertaining attractions. That's why we allow this.

Yet the stories of peoples from all over the world and from all different times tell of communication with wild animals, of animals and people speaking to each other, helping each other in times of need, even of animals being able to transform into people and people into animals. What have we forgotten?

A quest is to find something, an object or an answer to a question. Your mission, Tristan, should you choose to accept it, is to find out about the native animals who live in your habitat, these Piedmont woods, fields, and streams. And to answer the question: What is communication with animals, and how does it happen?

At the same time there was to be an ecumenical conference on Land Stewardship at Brown's Summit, near Greensboro, North Carolina, where Thomas Berry would speak. I was excited at the opportunity to experience the coming together of spiritual communities *in relation to nature*. Communities of nature and of spirit were both important to me, but they were rarely joined together. I had arrived at the conference and was enjoying a walk in the lush forest amidst wonderful mosses, lichen covered rocks, and wildflowers when suddenly I came upon a very large, lumpy, black rat snake lying right across the path, stopping me in my tracks. A rat snake when confronted kinks itself and becomes motionless. We looked at each other for a long time. I took this as a synchronous appearance. Snakes sense the world around them through picking up vibrations with their entire bodies and tasting the smells in the air by flicking their tongues. This alerted me to tune into my senses and trust my feelings in what was about to unfold.

The presentations were all about stewardship and the ethics and responsibilities of land use. I kept thinking about what I had overheard a young man say in the morning, that we needed to gain a spiritual relationship with the land, hear the land speaking to us. Yes, I

didn't want to hear about stewardship. I wanted to learn about *voice*. I wanted to ask the American Indian man sitting nearby what he knew about hearing nature's voices and to say that this stewardship talk bothered me because it seemed patriarchal. Just then Thomas Berry stood up and said, "It's not enough to talk about stewardship. We must listen to the voices of the trees, the voices of the animals, the voices of the land." It was as if he had heard my thoughts and spoken to me! Ah, here were words that I wanted to listen to!

I went up to him afterwards (wearing my mountain lion earrings for courage) and told him that I had had experiences of plants and trees as a child that I recognized as communication, but not experiences of communication with animals. At first he started to talk about having a dog, but I stared him in the eye, and, looking deeply back into my eyes, he said, "You get the communication, you just don't recognize it. It's not in the form you expected." As he spoke, I remembered that I had been having these synchronous experiences and dreams of animals. Maybe these *were* forms of communication—I just wasn't recognizing them as such. Thus began a life-long exploration of synchronicity and kinship with wild animals and with this man whom I felt to be a mentor in such matters. (At the recent 2019 conference on the living legacy of Thomas Berry held in the Piedmont region of North Carolina (TB19), many people shared similar experiences of being spoken to very personally by Thomas on a level that deeply supported their unique interests.)

Thereafter I heard Thomas Berry speak many times – at Duke, at Carolina, at our local Jung Society, at Earth Spirit Rising, and at many other conferences and gatherings over the years. He continues to speak to me. In preparing to attend the TB19 Conference I read an old paper of his, *Elders: Their Creative Role in the Human Community*, in which he called upon us to take up the role of elders and tell our personal stories of "bio-cultural regionalism" with "a high level of emotional-aesthetic-spiritual communion with the natural world." These two phrases leaped out at me, his voice loudly supporting what I feel called to convey in my own work of eldering.

As an elder my overarching desire is to hold together the community of people with the community of plants, animals, and spirits native to our place on Earth in a joyous circle of love and belonging, as we were always meant to be joined. As an artist, writer, and photographer, I teach eco-psycho-spirituality through weaving illustrated stories on the Earth Sanctuaries website and through forming an Earth Sanctuaries community. (www.earthsanctuaries.net)



Betty Lou Chaika—Calling the Ancestors

Thomas Berry and the Self-Organizing Universe

Mary Coelho

In the mid-1980s a friend invited me to go to a lecture on a Saturday afternoon at a place called the Riverdale Center for Religious Research, which had been founded by Thomas Berry. I had not heard of it. We found our way north of Manhattan up to the Center high up on the bank of the Hudson River. We went several times to the monthly Saturday afternoon events that were held there. I only superficially understood what Thomas Berry was saying in those lectures, but I learned the name Brian Swimme, so I went to see his video series "Canticle to the Cosmos" when it was being shown at a church on Central Park West in New York City in the early 1990s. The decision to go to that video series must have meant that at some level Thomas's talks had struck a chord. And I had learned that Brian Swimme, a physicist, had studied with Thomas Berry.

I was excited and profoundly moved by several remarkable discoveries and insights I learned about during those evenings at the video series as they gave me a glimpse of a worldview fundamentally different from what I had been taught as a student of biology and evolution in college. Can we actually trace a 13.8-billion-year history of the universe? Where have I been, I wondered, as I had no idea of that discovery. He said the atom is 99.99% empty, a mysterious realm of pure generativity. What is that about? As someone in our new story group said recently, we are no longer in Kansas. It was during those evenings, watching the video series that I began to leave many of my objectified assumptions about "Kansas."

As I was beginning to embrace a transformed understanding of our world, there were questions that I stumbled over. One was that I could not imagine how our complex bodies and those of all the other living beings of Earth could actually have arisen out of the elements created in stars before Earth was even formed. When I studied evolution, our studies of human origins were limited to the changes in living beings on the surface of the Earth from whom a line of descent could be traced. I learned, for example, to trace the origin of the human backbone to very early chordates, fishlike water organisms. This familiar focus of the study of evolution which assumes the presence of simpler creatures while fascinating did not address the question of how the complex forms of the early beings of the Earth arose. Did the elements forming the bodies of the early creatures come together as they randomly bumped into each other? Did complex molecules and conglomerates of them arise simply from the attraction of charged molecules? Did an external creative force assemble the elements over the millennia? I turned to Thomas Berry with my questions. Discerning among these and other possibilities are important as the answer determines the nature of human belonging within the evolutionary story.

I asked Thomas Berry how on Earth could the elements made in stars possibly find their way to become part of my body and countless other beings? Can we actually trace our origins to a continuous, unbroken succession of events going back to the formation of atoms in the stars and some elements formed even earlier? Thomas understood my question clearly and recommended that I read Erich Jantsch's *Self-Organizing Universe*.

By reading that book with great care and arguing with the librarian about keeping it too long, I began to grasp ideas about the origin of complexity by means of the active, creative ordering powers intrinsic to the cosmos and Earth. Everything is a form, including atoms

and cells and human beings. So is a star and the flame of a candle. Self-organizing involves an ordering from within, an inner ordering and creative patterning such that the universe continually seeks new forms, new domains of emergence. New forms of being are carried forward and are sometimes nested in more complex forms in which self-organizing continues. Parts organize themselves into new patterns that could not be predicted from the parts alone. Arthur Peacocke proposed that chaotic processes and self-organizing, acting together, may produce new patterns and forms. The emergence of complexity through self-organizing enables us to understand how the world of daily life can be both old and also new.



Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme write that intelligent ordering permeates each being at all levels of complexity. In this understanding nothing exists outside unseen shaping activity.¹ F. David Peat, physicist and speculative thinker, suggested the name “objective intelligence” or “creative ordering” for the generative power that brings about the dynamic ordering of matter and mind.² He proposed that this generative, ordering power in the universe cannot lie within the mental and material worlds alone. The base of the universe seethes with creativity.³ As I learned about the inner ordering process that brought the elements made in stars into today’s world, Thomas Berry’s work became more important.

It was a further understanding that made self-organizing even more personal and most important regarding human participation in this process. The Jungian analyst Michael

¹ Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 1992), 75.

² David Peat, *Synchronicity: The Bridge Between Matter and Mind* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), 88.

³ Brian Swimme, *Hidden Heart of the Cosmos* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1996), 93.

Comforti has proposed that Jung's archetypes are the psychological parallel to the scientific theory of self-organizing dynamics in nature. So the archetype of the Self, the soul-like inner ordering of the person, is one form of the inner creative ordering process of the Earth and cosmos.⁴ Through understanding the nature of self-organizing we can see how archetypal patterns enable a person's participation in the unfolding story in the depth of consciousness. It was most hopeful and encouraging to me to learn that self-organizing, expressed in consciousness as the Self (or soul), is a given potential by virtue of being human. It is important that these patterns were understood by C. G. Jung to be psychoid, which means they order the whole spectrum of our being from the psychological to the material, physical world, helping to integrate his thought with the understanding of self-organizing as a holistic process. It is heartening and life-giving to learn that everyone, wounded or whole, has an intrinsic belonging grounded in this inner creative patterning within us. With this understanding, I could begin to leave the claim of the objectified, impersonal evolutionary story I had learned in college. I was no longer in Kansas.

Self-Organizing and Subjectivity

Self-organizing is at the heart of Thomas Berry's understanding of subjectivity. Subjectivity is one of his three governing tendencies of evolution, the other two being differentiation and communion. The subject, the person and other beings, is a self-manifesting, dynamic center of experience. Swimme and Berry write in *The Universe Story* that the universe pushes us toward greater variety and intensity in its psychic modes of expression!⁵ We are ordered by the self-organizing dynamics intrinsic to our being, not solely by ego efforts alone or by our defenses against early wounding and cultural violence of so many kinds. We must consciously cooperate with the expression of self-organizing as a subject.

New ordering appears especially in times of chaos, both personal and collective. In these times of ecological crisis confidence in the possibility of new order is a source of hope. New order can arise in unexpected places as each region of the universe is permeated with self-organizing dynamics in latent form.⁶ We are invited to be alert to the emergence of new order in our individual lives and in our communities. We have reason to hope that the new story with its promise of change will encourage people to be alert to new patterns emerging in these chaotic times. Thomas reminds us that only a coordinated sequence of transitions makes possible the emergence of entirely new realities.⁷

If Thomas Berry had not recommended Erich Jantsch's book to me, I wonder how I might ever have come to understand the central role of self-organizing in the person, in cultures, and in the evolutionary story. Actually, it is a bit frightening to think of the great personal loss I would have suffered had this critical understanding not been offered to me. I am deeply indebted to Thomas's wisdom.

⁴ Michael Comforti, *Fields, Form and Fate* (Woodstock, CT: Spring Publications, Inc., 1999), xiii.

⁵ Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story*, 72.

⁶ Ibid., 85

⁷ Ibid., 70

Inscendence and Re-Awakening to the Ecological Self with Thomas Berry¹ (Abridged)

Kaytlyn Creutzberg

How difficult it was to bring myself to task and write just a glimpse of my connection to the work of Thomas Berry! It kept expanding and expanding! This “bit of verse” he wrote says it best for me.

An Appalachian Wedding

*Look up at the sky –
The heavens so blue, the sun so radiant,
The clouds so playful, the soaring raptors,
The meadows in bloom, the woodland creatures,
The rivers singing their way to the sea,
Wolf song on the land, whale song in the sea,
Celebration everywhere, wild, riotous,
Immense as a monsoon lifting an ocean of joy
And spilling it down over the Appalachian Landscape,
Drenching us all with a deluge of delight
As we open our arms and rush toward each other,
You and I and all of us,
Moved by that vast compassionate Presence
That brings all things together in intimate Celebration,
Celebration that is the universe itself.²*

When was the last time most of us saw, heard, smelled, felt sensations on our skin, imagined, were in awe of beauty, or could sense the power of nature? In his “Bill of Rights for the Planet Earth,” Thomas states: “The universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.”³ From the greatest expanse to the most minute, all are capable of having rights. This is the *New Story* that tells how humanity is part of nature based on what science has unveiled. This, the new cosmological story, is especially important because there are many who are no longer rooted in a religion. What Thomas Berry offers is solace. His message can be heard by all, including those who do not heed Christian texts, and personally I have found great comfort in his words.

Thomas Berry gave me a huge gift—validation of my inner journey—and the word “inscendence.” I had such a problem with the word transcendence for so many years. And when I encountered inscendence, I grabbed hold of it and have never let go! As creatures of this Earth, we cannot transcend life and the day-to-day. “The Earth is our origin, our

¹ Editor’s note: A prior version of this article was published in January 2020 on the website https://www.researchgate.net/publication/338986886_Inscendence_and_Re-awakening_to_the_Ecological_Self_with_Thomas_Berry.

² Thomas Berry, “An Appalachian Wedding,” in *Selected Writings on the Earth Community*, selected by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, Modern Spiritual Masters Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 197, Appendix B.

³ Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books, 2006), 149, Appendix B.

nourishment, our educator, our healer, our fulfillment. At its core, even our spirituality is Earth derived.”⁴ . . .

In the words of Thomas Berry, “We are quintessentially integral with the universe. In ourselves the universe is revealed to itself as we are revealed in the universe.”⁵ And when we learn to inscend, we can have a felt experience of “our small part in the larger cosmic orchestra,” and do what we were meant to do.⁶

In seeking to find what the web was saying about inscendence, I found only a few writings, mostly by Bill Plotkin. Then on June 1, 2017, author Robert Macfarlane posted on Twitter:

Word of the day: “inscendence”—the impulse not to rise above the world (transcendence) but to climb into it, seek its core. (Thomas Berry)

The Practice of Inscendence

What does Berry really mean by ‘inscendence’? In *The Dream of the Earth* he implores us with his suggestion:

We must invent, or reinvent, a sustainable human culture by a descent into our pre-rational, our instinctive, resources. Our cultural resources have lost their integrity. They cannot be trusted. What is needed is not transcendence but “inscendence,” not the brain but the gene.⁷

What is needed is that we descend into our most primal selves, which I understand as getting out of our heads and back into our bodies and coming to know and accept how our lower brain tends to respond instead of our observer brain. With this awareness, we can become creatures of creativity rather than creatures of reactivity. . . .

Sensibility and the Contemplative Gaze

Science has given us a new ability for gazing at the world. Put together with the gaze of intuitive knowing or trusting your inner resources, a new way of seeing is emerging. As Thomas Berry would say, “The outer world activates the inner world and causes, [or] brings forth that contemplative gaze and then the awesome capacity to imagine and to respond with feeling and [from] the depth of what our human souls carry.”⁸ Using the tools of science, we can now see Earth from space, and we can also comprehend relationship at the quantum level. Add to this our capacity for contemplation, and we now understand that human beings are the universe looking back on itself.

⁴ Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 69.

⁵ Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 32.

⁶ Ibid., 20.

⁷ Berry, *Dream of the Earth*, 207-08. See generally, Bill Plotkin, “Inscendence— the Key to the Great Work of our Time: A Soul- centric View of Thomas Berry’s Work,” in Ervin Laszlo and Allan Combs, eds., *Thomas Berry Dreamer of the Earth: The Spiritual Ecology of the Father of Environmentalism*, (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2011), 42-71.

⁸ MacGillis, St. Alfege Church.

Our ancestors could not know this in the same way, but they still believed and knew how to access Earth's intelligence. "We are the eyes, the minds, and the hearts that the cosmos is evolving so that it can come to know itself ever more perfectly through us."⁹ Or in the words of Sister MacGillis, "We need to realize that we are the universe in the form of the human."¹⁰ . . .

Berry's concept of inscendence has led me to the task of building what I am calling a new sensibility, a term I borrow from Susan Sontag, who critiqued her culture in the 1960s. The new sensibility becomes felt experience when taking in real art, poetry, and music that challenge and stretch the senses, and which hurt, she argued; while "literary intellectuals" frowned upon it all, clinging to the comfort of their literature as the "central cultural act."¹¹ Since artists are usually ahead of their time in their very nature, they have the capacity to witness and express the new, "educating conscience and sensibility,"¹² which is always uncomfortable to those who cling to old ways.

New possibility is opening before me as I, like others doing their great work (intentionally lower case) of the Self, unveil "the guiding vision for a lifetime, the mythopoetic template for personally belonging to the world,"¹³ in the way that evolution is nudging me to step forward into the world. My soul implores me to express my authentic self, because the universe brought us into being for a specific function. I am coming to understand this in the unique capacities given to me for "thought and speech, aesthetic appreciation, emotional sensitivity and moral judgment."¹⁴ Through inscendence, I encounter my soul's image, discern my path, embody my "coding" and take full responsibility as my "true adult" self.¹⁵ I am part of evolution and choose to contribute to the sustainability of our culture, our species and our planet. I fully express my authentic self and join with other "evolutionary midwives" to do the Great Work. . . .

Thomas Berry's Dream

. . . .

Thomas Berry's dream is paving the way to an ecological Earth-restoring global community, and there is plenty of evidence that we are transitioning now into what he named the Ecozoic era. As we enter a new decade, we can already feel the acceleration as more of us do our homework to heal by practicing inscendence, transforming our grief, and setting intentions to act.

⁹ Thomas Berry quoted in Richard Schiffman, "Bigger than Science, Bigger than Religion, Yes! (Spring 2015), <https://www.yesmagazine.org/issue/together-earth/2015/02/18/bigger-than-science-bigger-than-religion/>.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Susan Sontag, "One Culture and the New Sensibility" in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Picador, 1966), 298.

¹² Ibid., 295.

¹³ Plotkin, "Inscendence," 70.

¹⁴ Berry, *The Great Work*, 57.

¹⁵ Plotkin, "Inscendence," 71.

Loving Water

Thomas Berry's Inspiration for an Integral Water Ethic¹ (Abridged)

Elizabeth McAnally

Thomas Berry has influenced so many of us in myriad ways. In my own life, Berry's work has inspired my thinking about an "integral water ethic," by which I mean the practice of cultivating love and compassion for water and learning to see water as a loving and compassionate member of the Earth community who nourishes all beings. I give an extensive account of this idea in my new book, *Loving Water across Religions: Contributions to an Integral Water Ethic*.² The brief reflections that follow provide an overview of an integral water ethic and explore how this idea is rooted in Berry's work.

I never had the opportunity to meet Thomas Berry in person, but I have felt his presence reverberate throughout the life of my teachers, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, who were long-time students of Berry and recently published a comprehensive biography about his life and work.³ I received my first memorable introduction of Berry in 2006 in a World Religions and Ecology class with Tucker and Grim when they came to the California Institute of Integral Studies as visiting scholars. I remember a particularly striking moment occurred in class as we watched the film, *Thomas Berry: The Great Story*. In it, Berry says the following:

Last night the moon was shining on this wonderful bay. And I asked the moon "What should I say?" And the moon said, "Tell them the story." And I asked the wind, "What should I say?" He said, "Tell them the story." And I asked the clover out on the lawn, "What should I say?" And the clover said, "Tell them the story—my story, the mountain's story, the river's story, your story, the Indians' story, the Great Story."⁴

These words struck me at my core. I heard them as a call, as an opportunity to learn how to tell the story of water. At that point in my life, studying environmental ethics and the philosophy of water at the University of North Texas, I had been learning about water for a few years, and I was in the middle of writing my master's thesis about the pollution and damming of the Ganges River.⁵ Through the work of Thomas Berry, I was coming to understand the value of listening to the voices of water and the many different stories of water—the stories of creeks, rivers, oceans, raindrops.

As I pursued my doctoral studies, I continued to find many sources of inspiration from Berry that influenced my thinking about an integral water ethic. One key concept is that of

¹ This essay is an edited version of my presentation at "Cosmovision: Thomas Berry and the Great Work," the fourth annual Religion and Ecology Summit at the California Institute of Integral Studies on March 15, 2019.

² Elizabeth McAnally, *Loving Water across Religions: Contributions to an Integral Water Ethic* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2019).

³ Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, and Andrew Angyal, *Thomas Berry: A Biography* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2019).

⁴ Nancy Stetson and Penny Morell, *Thomas Berry: The Great Story*, DVD (Oley, PA: Bullfrog Films, 2002).

⁵ Elizabeth Ann McAnally, "Toward a Philosophy of Water: Politics of the Pollution and Damming along the Ganges River" (M.A. thesis, University of North Texas, 2007), <https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc3643/>.

the Great Work, the crucial task of our time “to carry out the transition from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when humans would be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner.”⁶ In terms of an integral water ethic, the Great Work is to cultivate a mutually enhancing relationship between humans and water and our whole Earth Community. An integral water ethic holds that water is not a mere resource, commodity, and sewer, but is instead a sacred source of life. Water is not a passive object to be controlled and manipulated, but is an active, vital member of the Earth community that deserves our respect and care. Water can help us in this Great Work to open our hearts and minds and learn to be in communion with all beings. Water is a liquid, elemental thread that weaves together our Earth community. Water gives us life and nourishes all beings. Loving water can help us love all things in the world.

An integral water ethic is grounded in integral ecology, the transdisciplinary field of study that brings together multiple perspectives—natural sciences, social sciences, and the humanities—in order to address environmental issues in comprehensive ways. Berry was one of the first people to use the phrase “integral ecology,” viewing humans as integral to the Earth community.⁷ He writes, “We need an ecological spirituality with an integral ecologist as spiritual guide.”⁸

In *The Universe Story*, Brian Thomas Swimme and Thomas Berry discuss the cosmogenetic principle, which holds that all things in the universe are evolving to greater degrees of complexity, consciousness, and interrelatedness. As Swimme and Berry explain,

The cosmogenetic principle states that the evolution of the universe will be characterized by differentiation, autopoiesis, and communion throughout time and space and at every level of reality. . . . Some synonyms for differentiation are diversity, complexity, variation, disparity, multiform nature, heterogeneity, articulation. Different words that point to the second feature are autopoiesis, subjectivity, self-manifestation, sentience, self-organization, dynamic centers of experience, presence, identity, inner principle of being, voice, interiority. And for the third feature, communion, interrelatedness, interdependence, kinship, mutuality, internal relatedness, reciprocity, complementarity, interconnectivity, and affiliation all point to the same dynamic of cosmic evolution.⁹

Water, like all things in the universe, is an integral being that functions in terms of the cosmogenetic principle. Water has a unique chemical and physical structure that differentiates it from other beings within the universe. Water has self-organizing dynamics evident in particular patterns like whirlpools, eddies, snowflakes, and waves. And water is

⁶ Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York, NY: Random House, 1999), 3.

⁷ Sean Esbjörn-Hargens notes how Drew Dellinger recounts that in 1995 Thomas Berry began “referring to his cosmological vision as an ‘integral cosmology or integral ecology.’” Esbjörn-Hargens points out that “phrases like ‘integral vision,’ ‘integral ecological community,’ ‘integral functioning,’ and viewing humans as ‘integral members’ of the Earth are found throughout his work.” Sean Esbjörn-Hargens, “Ecological Interiority: Thomas Berry’s Integral Ecology Legacy,” in *Thomas Berry, Dreamer of the Earth: The Spiritual Ecology of the Father of Environmentalism*, eds. Ervin Laszlo and Allan Combs (Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2011), 93-94.

⁸ Thomas Berry, *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-First Century*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 135.

⁹ Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era—A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1992), 71-72.

in interdependent relationships with all other beings throughout the Earth community. Water is life.

Berry expresses the cosmogenetic principle through his famous aphorism: “the universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.”¹⁰ How can we learn to commune with water? How can we cultivate a beneficial relationship with water? To address these questions, I draw inspiration from religious traditions. In *Loving Water across Religions*, I consider three of the world’s religions—Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism—as well as contemplative practices. With Christianity, I examine the ritual of baptism and a sacramental consciousness of water. By cultivating a sacramental consciousness, we can learn to have a reverential relationship with baptismal waters and the waters that flow throughout the world. With Hinduism, I explore the Yamuna River of India, a river that is considered to be a sacred goddess of love but is at the same time severely polluted. Loving service (*seva*) is currently being used to promote the ecological restoration of the river, and I hold that an attitude of loving service can be of great benefit for all waters. With Buddhism, I take a look at the compassionate wisdom of the bodhisattva, one who vows to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. If we can see water as a bodhisattva, we can learn how to develop a respectful relationship with this compassionate being who serves us all. I also consider contemplative practices to cultivate intimacy and empathy with water. For example, I discuss being mindful when drinking water, flowing like water through practices of taiji, and taking gratitude walks to see water as a living being with whom we can maintain an intimate relationship.

Religious traditions and contemplative practices can help us listen to the voices of water. By tuning in to our own personal and collective experiences, we can see that we are water reflecting on itself, just as we are the universe thinking itself. As Berry writes, “The human is that being in whom the universe reflects on and celebrates itself and its numinous origin in its own, unique mode of conscious self-awareness. . . . It is not that we think on the universe; the universe, rather, thinks itself, in us and through us.”¹¹

Our Great Work is to love water and all beings. Water can teach us comprehensive compassion, opening our hearts to all members of the Earth community. As Brian Thomas Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker describe in *Journey of the Universe*, oceans can teach us about empathy and intimacy. The oceans will be our guide as we journey into the future. The ocean is a power that can dissolve things into itself. Even the hardest rocks, given enough time, will become one with the ocean’s waves.

With our symbolic consciousness, we are very much like the ocean with its power to pour through boundaries. What we long for is profound intimacy of relationship. . . . With the emergence of humans, we have arrived at an evolutionary breakthrough for being able to develop compassion, not just for our offspring, but for all beings of every order of existence. With this alone, Earth gave rise to the possibility of an empathetic being who could flow into and become one with the intimate feelings of any being.

Our human destiny is to become the heart of the universe that embraces the whole of the Earth community. We are just a speck in the universe, but we are beings with the

¹⁰ Thomas Berry, *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker (San Francisco, CA: Sierra Club Books & University of California Press, 2006), 17.

¹¹ Thomas Berry with Thomas Clark, *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation Between Humans and the Earth*, eds. Stephen Dunn, C.P. and Anne Lonergan (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1991), 21.

capacity to feel comprehensive compassion in the midst of an ocean of intimacy. That is the direction of our becoming more fully human.¹²

Through the guidance of water, we can practice cultivating comprehensive compassion. Loving water can help us love all beings. The Neo-Confucian scholar Tu Weiming explains that humans can embody the cosmos in our heart and mind, in our conscience and consciousness. He writes, “the uniqueness of being human is the intrinsic capacity of the mind to ‘embody’ (t’i) the cosmos in its conscience and consciousness. Through this embodying, the mind realizes its own sensitivity, manifests true humanity and assists in the cosmic transformation of Heaven and Earth.”¹³

We can discover how to do this with water as our guide. Embodying water in our conscience and consciousness with the help of religious traditions and contemplative practices can assist us in becoming more fully human. By learning to love water, we can learn to love all members of our Earth community. Listening to water as a source of inspiration can facilitate the Great Work of creating a flourishing future for all beings.



¹² Brian Thomas Swimme and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Journey of the Universe* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2011), 115.

¹³ Tu Weiming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation*, SUNY Series in Philosophy (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1985), 132.

Concatenations of Allurement

Maria Myers

*The future enters into us,
in order to transform itself in us,
long before it happens.*

—Rainer Maria Rilke



The circumstances and consequences of my interactions with Thomas Berry are so improbable that I hesitate to confine them to words.

Recounting them to friends and colleagues—and now to readers unknown—is daunting. My attempt to do so here is not only in honor of the endearingly generous person we have been privileged to know and learn from, but also in service to that which he eloquently calls into shared awareness.

In retrospect, categories of thought about what seem to me like a series of *strange attractions* range from impossible to inevitable.¹ They suggest the term “concatenation” -- defined as “bringing two or more separately located things together” and referring to “singular events unlikely to recur” -- to best describe a sequence of events that seem remarkably *unlikely to have occurred at all!*

I was first drawn into Thomas Berry’s orbit by an inadvertent act of eavesdropping when I happened to pass a small circle of strangers chatting during a coffee break and

¹ In the mathematical field of dynamical systems, an attractor is a set of numerical values toward which a system tends to evolve for a wide variety of starting conditions of the system. System values that get close enough to the attractor values remain close even if slightly disturbed. In finite-dimensional systems the evolving variable may be represented as an n-dimensional vector. In physical systems, the n dimensions may be two or three positional coordinates for each of one or more physical entities. . . An attractor can be a point, a finite set of points, a curve, a manifold, or even a complicated set with a fractal structure known as a *strange attractor*.

Wikipedia contributors, "Attractor," *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Attractor&oldid=929190961> (accessed January 15, 2020).

overheard his name and a date when he would be speaking at a place not far from my home. The name was unknown to me then, and it seemed that the message went in one ear and out the other, but it kept recurring in my memory until I finally called the site mentioned to request more information. I was told it was a private event, not open to outsiders, which should have been enough to put an end to my exploration. But the niggling message continued to persist, without a why.

When I phoned again, asking if a single exception to the strict policy of exclusion might be considered, I was again firmly rebuffed. I decided to forget it. But whatever was inviting my attention would not have it; the beckoning grew stronger, more insistent. When I became consciously aware that I was being *lured* toward something that would not take no for answer, I decided to ask a friend who had connections within the host group to intervene on my behalf and, thanks to him, I received an informal okay to “slip in under the tent flap,” if not to enter officially through the front door of where (it still seems) I was called to be.

It was 1981, half a lifetime ago, and long before easy access to internet research. So when I first heard Father Thomas speak, I knew nothing of his background and did not even have a copy of the program disclosing his intended topic. I entered the space entirely without expectations. It had not occurred to me to bring a notebook to record what he might say, but I vividly remember digging frantically in my purse for pen and paper soon after his opening remarks. Somewhere among my long-saved books and papers, I still have the envelope I found there, now covered with verbatim scribbling, as well as the two pale, blue-covered, self-printed essays he gave me following a warm (entirely unexpected!) impromptu conversation after his formal presentation. In summary, my worldview was irreversibly altered that day; enduring gratitude ensues.

A few months later, while attending Villanova University’s annual Theology Institute for the first time, I happened to purchase a newly published copy of the proceedings of the previous year when, unknown to me, Thomas had been one of six distinguished speakers. I clearly remember holding that bright orange volume in my hand the following autumn while carefully packing “essentials only” to take to Chicago for a year at the Institute of Culture and Creation Spirituality (ICCS) as Matthew Fox’s graduate assistant and deciding *not* to bring it. I also remember my astonishment when after reaching my destination I opened my suitcase and found it there! *Non sequitur*, or so it seemed then.

The next improbable connection occurred in small talk between strangers. Brian Swimme had just been recruited by Matthew Fox to join the ICCS faculty in place of someone whose untimely death had created a sudden opening. Brian had been on his way, with his pregnant wife, Denise, and their four-year-old son, to MIT to collaborate with others in his chosen profession, mathematics, but opted instead to take the vacant position in Chicago. I have no idea why, a few minutes into my first conversation with him (another person I’d never seen before and, at the time, knew nothing about), it would occur to me to say, “Have you ever heard of Thomas Berry?” But I surely recall his immediate reply: “*Thomas Berry? Thomas Berry!!*” Far from the quiet voice I had barely overheard speaking his unfamiliar name months before, here was ready recognition, emphatic enthusiasm. And, as we now know, a spark of generative potentiality leading to exceedingly unlikely results.

The stow-away volume containing Berry’s presentation at Villanova was soon in Brian’s hands, then in Matt’s. Not long after that, negotiations were underway to bring Thomas to

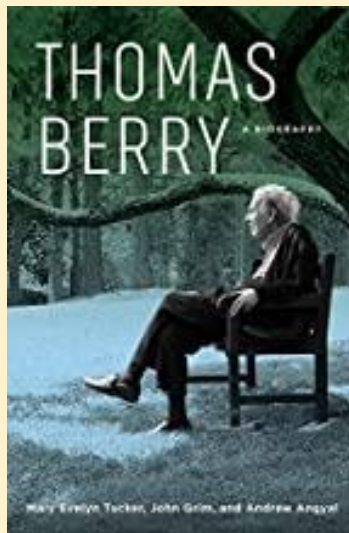
Chicago. His momentous visit with us, the ICCS class of 1982, was pivotal in the ensuing Berry-Swimme collaboration that has enriched so many lives, my own among them.

Following graduation, I was offered an unanticipated place on Villanova's faculty and taught in the Religious Studies department for nearly a decade. Even more surprising, I was asked on a couple of occasions to serve as a moderator at Theology Institutes, my original point of entry into a new, profoundly altered experience of vocation. I was invited, also, to be one of the first women on the board of Kirkridge, the place where I first heard Thomas Berry's name spoken. During those years I occasionally drove the 90 miles from my home to the gatherings Thomas hosted at his residence in Riverdale, New York. And on one unforgettable occasion, he graciously accepted my invitation to come speak informally with my undergraduate students at Villanova, an invaluable gift that I hope they appreciated and continue to recall.

In light of the starting point, all of the above is acknowledged here as far stranger than fiction. If I had not lived it, I certainly could not believe it, much less recall and recount it. The most remarkable aspect, it seems to me, is not any achievement or accomplishment of my own or others. It is the enduring sense of having been *visited by* and *invited into* "the future," a realm possibly best described by Rilke above and maybe by Rupert Sheldrake and others elsewhere. There is something indescribably joyous and invigorating about that!

Further, when asked in a recent interview "what new thoughts" had occurred to her in researching and writing *Thomas Berry: A Biography*, Mary Evelyn Tucker replied, "I was continually amazed at his persistence and continual growth. He had a penetrating intelligence and a *unique ability to synthesize material*. . . . *He was prescient in anticipating our challenges and helping us to develop the stamina to understand them and endure.*"²

These well-remembered qualities remain as alluring as they have ever been, now recognized as both legacy and invitation.



² H. Emerson Blake, "Why Thomas Berry Matters Today: Mary Evelyn Tucker Reflects on Her Latest Book, *Thomas Berry: A Biography*," *Orion Magazine* blog post (August 22, 2019) <https://orionmagazine.org/2019/08/why-thomas-berry-matters-mary-evelyn-tucker-reflects-on-new-book-thomas-berry-a-biography/> (accessed December 29, 2021) (italics added).

Boundless Compassion for Creation

Joyce Rupp

... the universe is a communion of subjects
rather than a collection of objects...

—Thomas Berry

Precious memories of childhood activities on our Iowa farm fill my inner storehouse: running through dawn's dew-laden grasses, my hands in the black soil making mud pies in the grove, long hours of planting, weeding, and gathering produce in our vast garden, the chores of feeding oats to the chickens and tossing bundles of hay from the barn loft to the hungry cattle waiting below, summer evenings when I joined my seven siblings for hours of countless games before dark—a joyful time after the day's work was done—nighthawks swooping above our heads and owls hooting their first hellos. I did not need religious language to assure me that I lived among a sacred community. I trusted my kinship with nature and did not need words to express that sacred rapport.

I took this natural relationship with creation for granted. So I felt quite a jolt when I attended a rural, Roman Catholic school and heard the warning, "It's pagan to see God in trees and flowers. God is in *us*, not in nature." To my teachers, being "pagan" implied a dire condition. With that threat, the communion established in my childhood was torn away from me.

Twenty years after that I slowly turned toward re-union with the natural world, reentering a bond with what resides below, within, and above our beloved planet. I let myself fall in love again with creation. The writings of Joanna Macy, Elizabeth Dodson Gray, Teilhard de Chardin, and Brian Swimme, along with poets like Wendell Berry and Mary Oliver, led me in this direction, but it was not until *The Dream of the Earth* brought me to Thomas Berry that I returned fully home to where I belong. Healing of the distortions of my childhood teachings arrived with his foundational emphasis on the I-Thou relationship with everyone and everything we encounter.¹

Thomas Berry restored my belief in having a horizontal, rather than a vertical, relationship with creation. His writings assured me that we are part of a whole, different from the other—not better than—not wielding power over another, but dependent on one another and benefitting from this mutuality. As my consciousness of the *I-Thou relationship* strengthened, I recognized the blatant separation that certain religious sources such as *Psalms* 8 imply: "You have given them (humankind) dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet."²

From the very first meeting with Thomas Berry's writing, I felt the compassion and inherent goodness with which he approached everything in the universe. (So radically different from *Psalms* 8.) He writes, "We are not here to control. We are here to become integral with the larger Earth community."³ He also speaks of our having lost "our sense of courtesy toward the Earth and its inhabitants."⁴

¹ Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999), 17.

² *Ps. 8:6* (New Revised Standard Version).

³ *The Great Work*, 48.

⁴ Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), 2.

After reading *Recovering a Sense of the Sacred: Conversations with Thomas Berry*, this respect became even more apparent. Author Carolyn Toben describes the reverence he extended to nature when she first met with him: “Thomas opened his eyes slowly and beheld the tiny plant in his hands, then whispered, ‘You are so beautiful,’ and a circuit of love seemed to pass between them that was palpable to witness.”⁵

Besides this exquisite esteem for nature, Thomas Berry led me further into an awareness of the suffering inherent in creation. When I studied *The Great Work*, his keen perceptions increased my compassion for how our planet has been harmed and is in need of healing:

The deepest cause of the present devastation is found in a mode of consciousness that has established a radical discontinuity between the human and other modes of being and the bestowal of all rights on the humans. The other-than-human modes of being are seen as having no rights. They have reality and value only through their use by the human.

In reality there is a single integral community of the Earth that includes all its component members whether human or other than human. In this community every being has its own role to fulfill, its own dignity, its inner spontaneity. Every being has its own voice. Every being declares itself to the entire universe. Every being enters into communion with other beings. This capacity for relatedness, for presence to other beings, for spontaneity in action, is a capacity possessed by every mode of being throughout the entire universe.⁶

I longed to share this view with others and finally gained courage to submit a manuscript to Orbis Books. *The Cosmic Dance* was published in 2002. Its essays and poems reflect Thomas Berry’s wisdom regarding our interdependence with the universe, the I-Thou relationship he urges us to have, and his understanding of the transformative process—the “primordial flaring forth,”—that gives way to newness. This book remains the most cherished of my publications because each page invites the reader to recognize our kinship with everything. I could never have written what I did without the significant influence of Thomas Berry.

Twelve years ago, I discovered a more direct way to enable others to know and value his teachings. Early in 2007, Margaret Stratman, another member of my religious community, joined me in creating and establishing a four-day program titled *Boundless Compassion*, which focuses on learning how to live compassionately. When Margaret and I created the content and process, we both recognized the suffering of our planet and decided one component would definitely be that of compassion for creation.⁷

The program topics include compassion as a way of life, compassion for self, compassion and suffering, compassion and marginalization, compassion for creation, and

⁵ Carolyn W. Toben, *Recovering a Sense of the Sacred: Conversations with Thomas Berry*, (Whitsett, North Carolina: Timberlake Earth Sanctuary Press, 2012), 28.

⁶ *The Great Work*, 4.

⁷ We initially presented the material in the structure of a four-day conference but soon realized that the content was such that sufficient silence and processing were needed for in-depth integration. We then changed from a conference style to a retreat format which has been highly successful.

becoming a compassionate presence. When we encourage participants to reflect on compassion for our planet, we first consider the woundedness of Earth. Following this, we ask them to go outdoors and quietly be with the wonder of creation, much like Thomas Berry described for himself: “I was immersed in the mystery of things, in the mysterious powers expressed in natural phenomena. The various living beings I experienced as integral with my own existence.”⁸

We invite the participants to become one with whatever they choose, such as a leaf, bird, stone, or soil. They are to reflect on what it could be like for that part of creation to exist, to enter into the life of that particular subject as fully as possible, to imagine how it is to go through the seasons, and to experience the treatment they receive from humans. This I-Thou reflection with nature often develops into a profound experience for the participants and moves them beyond the old paradigm of dominance-separation. When they rejoin the large group, we listen to them speak about what occurred in their time of bonding. Following that sharing, we discuss ways in which we can contribute to the healing of our suffering planet.

By June 2018, nearly 2,500 women and men had participated in the *Boundless Compassion* program. At that time we co-directors decided to offer workshops for any of those participants who wished to facilitate the program in their regions. We developed a detailed *Training Workbook* and we now have over 100 persons from the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom who have become certified facilitators.

In conjunction with the training workshops, I gathered the essential content of the program into two books.⁹ *Boundless Compassion* contains the core content and *Prayers of Boundless Compassion* has reflections and prayers associated with the six major topics. Each book is divided into six “Weeks,” with the fifth week focusing on “Compassion for Creation.” The title of this fifth week reflects Thomas Berry’s work. “A Thousand Unbreakable Links,” suggests the interdependent kinship we have with all of life. In this chapter, I encourage readers to understand the foundational cause for humankind’s rash treatment of Earth:

In *The Great Work* Thomas Berry laments the distance that has come between nature and humanity. Societal and cultural changes have led humans into a mode of thinking of creation as “a collection of objects rather than a communion of subjects” Because of the increasing distance separating us, we stand apart and lose an awareness of what is happening to creation. Consequently, the damage done to nature fails to affect our minds and hearts.”¹⁰

In *Prayers of Boundless Compassion*, the most obvious connection with his thought rests particularly in two reflections. “I Bow to You” expresses reverence for fifteen various aspects of nature. For example: “I bow to you, black soil, red earth, rocky ground, limestone and granite, ash and cinders, mud and clay, sandy beaches, loamy woodlands, graveled

⁸ Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim, and Andrew Angyal, *Thomas Berry: A Biography* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), xiii (a quote from Berry’s unpublished memoir, *Goldenrod*).

⁹ Joyce Rupp, *Boundless Compassion: Creating a Way of Life* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2018) This book is structured as a study book with topics matching the six components of what we teach. Joyce Rupp, *Prayers of Boundless Compassion* (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2018).

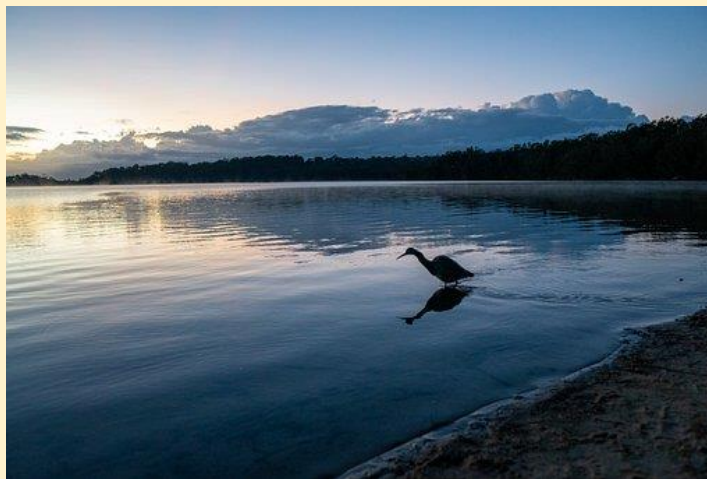
¹⁰ *Boundless Compassion*, 146.

paths, and silted streams.”¹¹ Another piece in *Prayers of Boundless Compassion* exposes the pain that humans have caused in treating non-humans as objects. Here are a few lines from “What Have We Done to Them?”

Shoot them. Swat them.
Stomp on them. Kill them.
Steal their food. Beat them.
Rip the hide from their bodies.
Get them out of the way.
Cage them. Slaughter them.
Poison them. Drown them.
Hook them. Snare them.
Cut off their paws. Skin their fur.
Squash them. Behead them.¹²

I often receive messages from those who have led study groups with the *Boundless Compassion* book. They tell me, as do the participants in the four-day program, that their lives have been changed because of what they learned and experienced. Their personal transformation includes an understanding of compassion for creation. I hope that each person goes forth from our *Boundless Compassion* program with more inspiration and a greater determination to live as a compassionate presence, one that includes a profound gratitude and respect for all that exists.

Thus it is that I continue to be deeply grateful for the influence of Thomas Berry on both my personal and professional life. Each day as I walk around the three miles of Blue Heron Lake, I pause to thank the trees for their abiding presence, the soil and stones on the path for grounding my feet, the air for precious oxygen filling my lungs and nourishing my bloodstream, and the many creatures both seen and unseen, heard and unheard, who accompany me on my trek. I doubt I could ever have reached this kind of awareness and gratitude without the immense and wise work of the person I have come to know and reverence as Thomas Berry.



¹¹ *Prayers of Boundless Compassion*, 59.

¹² *Ibid.*, 67.

WOMEN RELIGIOUS: THE VOICE OF EARTH

Gail Worcelo, SGM

"The human and the natural world will go into the future together or both will perish on the way!" This is the first sentence spoken by Thomas Berry during our novitiate training with the Passionist community.

In 1982, I entered the Passionist Nuns of St. Gabriel's Monastery in Pennsylvania, a congregation of Catholic sisters, priests, and brothers founded in the 18th century by Italian mystic and preacher Paul Danao, who was later canonized as St. Paul of the Cross. Thomas Berry had entered the same congregation of Passionists forty-nine years earlier. So it was no surprise that Thomas, as a seasoned member of the order, was asked in 1984 to be a visiting scholar during our joint novitiate training of men and women novices. Thomas oriented us and our religious vocation within the comprehensive context of our unfolding universe and so gave us a deep time perspective and challenged us to re-imagine ourselves within the entire sacred community of life.

There were about ten of us who were novices at the time. In the mystery of things, I, knowing there was nothing else I could do as his words rang so deeply within me, was the only one in the group who asked Thomas if I could continue studying with him.

Following this novitiate experience, my studies began with Thomas through monthly visits to the Riverdale Center for Religious Research in New York City where we explored thinkers and writers like Nigel Calder author of *Timescale*, William Catton who wrote *Overshoot*, and groups like the Club of Rome and their published work, *Limits to Growth*. Thomas would also come and visit my monastery. Each time he brought books and we had conversation well into the night. On many occasions I remember saying, "Thomas it is late, time for sleep," and his response would always be, "Why sleep, there is so much to talk about!"

Beginning then in my novitiate in 1984 and continuing until his death in 2009, Thomas taught, guided, and mentored me, and set my life in a clear and focused direction of service to the Earth community as a sister within the Catholic religious life tradition.

In 1991, Thomas presided over my Final Vow Ceremony with over two hundred people gathered.



He gave me the ring of Final Profession and celebrated my vocational commitment within our emerging universe. He began his homily by saying, "I have been to many religious professions in my life, but never before, never before has anyone been so conscious of their deep commitment to the universe and Earth community."

Shortly after making Final Vows, Thomas said, "To begin all you need is a room, a phone, and a letterhead." So with that guidance I founded "Homecomings: Center for Ecology and Contemplation," a new ministry of my monastery. Homecomings became the

vehicle for concretizing the thought of Thomas through an on the ground understanding of Earth as a “communion of subjects.”

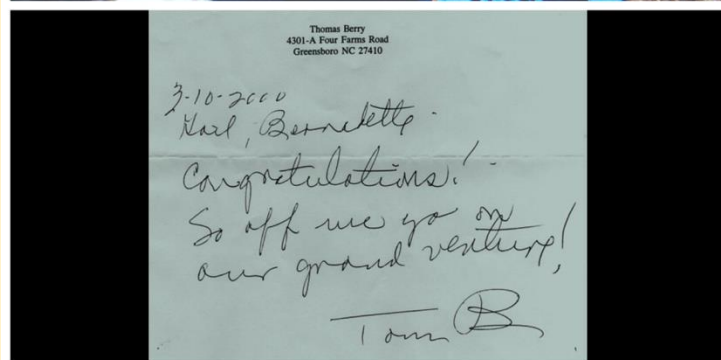
This unfolded through the creation of organic gardens, children’s programs on the land, community supported agriculture (CSA), sustainable building design, and educational programs on the themes of cosmology, spirituality, and the Universe Story. We studied *The World Charter for Nature*, *The Silent Spring*, *A Sand Country Almanac*, *The Immense Journey*, and many other documents and books.

In addition, I began traveling around the world (India, Africa, Australia, South America, Asia, and Europe) teaching and leading programs on the work and challenges of Thomas Berry for many different groups, including seminaries, houses of formation, and chapters of men’s and women’s religious communities. In 1994, along with sisters Mary Southard, Toni Nash, and Mary Lou Dolan, I gathered Catholic sisters from around the country together to form what has become the vibrant network of “Sisters of Earth.” The first gathering took place at my Passionist monastery in Clarks Summit, Pennsylvania.

In 1994, my life direction was significantly impacted by Thomas’s paper, “Women Religious: Their Future Role.” In this paper, Thomas pointed out that throughout history women’s religious communities in the Catholic tradition were founded to meet the needs of the human community (through schools, hospitals, social services, and more) but no community had been founded to tend to the needs of Earth.

This pivotal paper along with conversations with Thomas inspired me to ask my Passionist community to mission me, joined by sister Rita Ordakowski and lay associate Bernadette Bostwick, to begin a new community of sisters the founding of which would be for *the healing and protection of Earth and its life systems*. In 1999 the sisters of St. Gabriel’s Monastery gave their blessing by missioning Rita, Bernadette, and me to found a new religious community. We called ourselves *Sisters of the Earth Community* with a mission of *Going into the Future with the Natural World as a Single Sacred Community*. We were welcomed into the Diocese of Vermont by Bishop Kenneth Angel, and on June 1, 1999, we arrived in Vermont.

During the years 1999-2009, Bernadette and I made many trips to Greensboro, North Carolina, to visit Thomas. On these visits our understandings deepened, and we laid the cosmologically oriented foundations for our new community. On the home front in Vermont, we began to make connections with farmers, artists, professors, and activists as well as offering programs on the universe story while establishing financial stability.



In 2001, we raised enough funds to purchase 190 acres of wild forest land in the Green Mountains with the vision of building an ecologically sustainable green monastery and retreat. We explored the land for two years and then, because of a right of way issue, had to sell the property, which we did for added value. This enabled us to purchase 160 acres of land with an ecologically designed building in 2004 in the town of Greensboro, Vermont. Thomas called this beautiful synchronicity “a touch of heaven.” Our place, Green Mountain Monastery and the Thomas Berry Sanctuary, became known as Greensboro North while Thomas’s place of residence became known as Greensboro South.



A 30-member advisory board was formed, and one hundred companion members accompanied our new community, which was designed at all levels to reflect a consciousness of communion with the natural world. I continued traveling around the world leading programs and retreats, while Bernadette worked on art projects, including designing the beautiful Mary of the Cosmos Icon and Earth Prayer Beads both of which are found in centers all over the planet. This icon was Bernadette’s attempt to express in image and color Thomas’s words spoken to us on one of our visits, “The universe is more in Mary than Mary is in the universe.”



The legacy of Thomas Berry continues through us with many programs, retreats, guests, and visitors from around the world who spend time at Green Mountain Monastery/Thomas Berry Sanctuary. In addition, many gatherings have taken place around the arts—concerts, writing, poetry readings, dance, rituals—expressing ourselves as a single, sacred community.

On June 1, 2009, ten years to the day of our founding, Thomas Berry passed on and at his request was buried in a meadow on our land, where many visitors come to pay their respects. Honored by his request, we continue to be custodians of this sacred trust.

In the years following, new sisters joined our community (Amie Hendani, Kris Prasetyo, and Elizabeth Carranza) from Indonesia and the Philippines with several women currently in discernment. These women continue to bring our mission and legacy of Thomas Berry to many gatherings and places in Asia, especially to younger generations.

On June 1, 2019, we celebrated our 20th anniversary of our order and 10th anniversary of the passing of Thomas Berry. Highlights of the celebration included the unveiling of four cosmic stained-glass windows by the glass artist Amber Hiscott from Wales, windows that were five years in the making, displaying in a tent art works by women artists curated by Bernadette, and conferring of the Thomas Berry Award for Selfless Service to three friends who had given so generously of themselves over the many years of our unfolding. The Great Work continues as we prepare to finalize placing 145 acres of our land in a conservation easement with the Nature Conservancy and Vermont Housing and Conservation Board in 2020.

In his book *Evening Thoughts*, Thomas reflected on the need for a new pattern of rapport with the planet. Only a profound change in human consciousness, he said, can remedy the deep cultural pathology manifest in our destructive behaviors. His words continue to ring true in this moment of profound planetary collapse. Joining his wisdom are new voices coming through in papers and books such as *Deep Adaptation*, *The Sixth Extinction*, *The Uninhabitable Earth*, and *The End of Ice*.

We are linking with and supporting young people in movements such as Extinction Rebellion, Fridays for Future, and the Global Eco-Village Network. We are also working on United Nations NGO status so that we can connect with others and extend influence at a global scale. Our dream is to spread our mission and legacy of Thomas Berry all around the

world by establishing extensions of Green Mountain Monastery in countries beyond the United States, as we branch out as Sisters of the Earth Community.

Our first international Thomas Berry Sanctuary is currently unfolding in the country of Indonesia where we are meeting with supporters to find land and establish this new sanctuary. Our special concerns reach to palm oil plantations that are depleting biodiversity and destroying the tropical forests of Indonesia as well as the threat they pose to the extinction of the critically endangered orangutans.

Amie has brought the thinking of Thomas Berry to Indonesia by translating into Bahasa *Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth (Kosmologi Kristen)* and writing a book on *Laudato Si'* in conjunction with Thomas Berry's work entitled: *Memahami Laudato Si' Bersama Thomas Berry*. Kris leads programs, rituals, and retreats in Indonesia for young people and religious communities to introduce the work of Thomas to these groups. Through her hands-on work with the land, Kris also brings others into connection with Earth. Her particular passion is the love of and protection of animals.

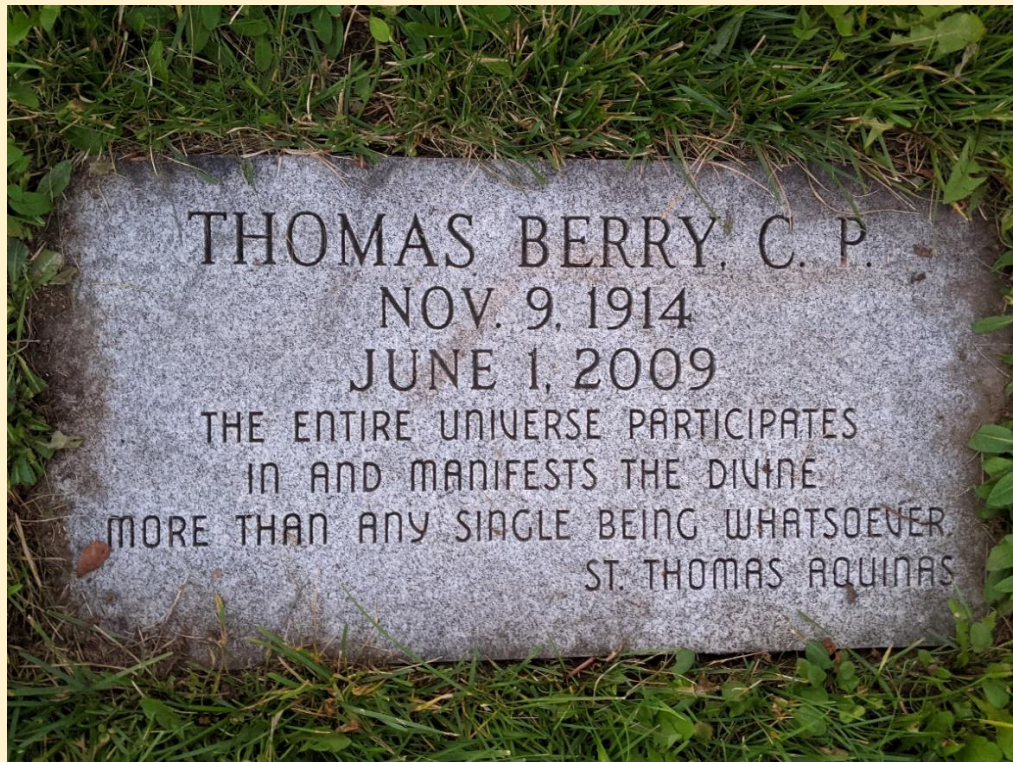
Through our new website we are offering online Planetary Grief sessions to help all of us around the world deal with the enormous amount of grief, anger, and planetary trauma we carry. We are also offering deep rest retreats for climate activists and those engaged in the Great Work as well as a worldwide training program to integrate the wisdom of Thomas Berry into our current moment of planetary ecocide.

Bernadette continues creating contemporary art pieces flowing out of the interface between environmental collapse and political turmoil. A recent piece entitled "So Many Words, So Little Time" was displayed at the University of Vermont conference "A Feverish World." Part of her series entitled "All that Glitters" is displayed at the new Work Artz Gallery in Los Angeles, California.

Here in Vermont I am involved in the Perennial Turn Environmental Studies course at Middlebury College as a community partner, mentor, and presenter as well as part of the New Perennials Champlain Valley Hub. I am also co-leading a group of forty women from around the world who are engaged in a now three-year collective deepening of the interior together as a way to help guide us through our current planetary ecocide. We are exploring Thomas Berry's admonition that when our cultural coding no longer has the capacity to guide us forward because it has lost its wisdom and integrity and can no longer be trusted, a return must be made to our deeper knowing. Urging us to go inward and seeking guidance from the deep interior, he called this "inscendence."

Finally, we are extending our membership to include various levels of community involvement as we take the legacy of Thomas Berry into the future and honor the fundamental cosmological principles at the heart of our mission: greater differentiation, deeper interiority, and more profound communion.





Twelve Understandings for the Ecozoic Era

The Nature of the Universe

1. **The Unity of the Universe.** The universe as a whole is an interacting community of beings inseparably related in space and time. From its beginning, the universe has had a psychic-spiritual as well as a physical dimension. The universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects.
2. **Modes of Expression.** The universe expresses itself at all levels through communion (intimacy, interrelatedness), differentiation (diversity), and subjectivity (interiority, self-organization).
3. **Cosmogensis.** The universe is a creative, emergent, evolutionary reality that has developed and is still developing through a sequence of irreversible transformations.

Earth and Its Current Dilemma

4. **Earth.** Earth is a one-time endowment in the unfolding story of the universe.
5. **The Current Dilemma.** The effects of human activity on Earth have become so pervasive and invasive that the survival and health of the Earth community now rest on decisions being made and actions being taken by humans.
6. **Transition to the Ecozoic Era.** There is a need to move from the current technozoic period where Earth is seen as resource for the benefit of humans, to an Ecozoic era where the well-being of the entire Earth community is the primary concern.

Three Key Building Blocks

7. **The New Story.** The New Story, the narrative of the evolutionary development of the universe, offers a new understanding of the cosmos and of the role of humans in the universe process.

8. **Bioregionalism.** Bioregionalism, care for Earth in its naturally occurring, relatively self-supporting geo-biological divisions, reorients human activity in developing sustainable modes of living, building inclusive human community, caring for other species, and preserving the health of Earth on which all life depends.

9. **Ecological Spirituality.** Ecological Spirituality, presence to the primal mystery and value of Earth as a single sacred community, provides a basis for revitalizing religious experience, healing human psyches, and maintaining both diversity and unity in the emerging Earth community.

Special Contributors to the Ecozoic Era

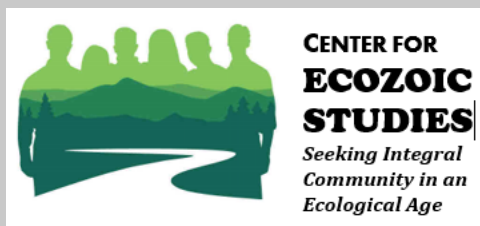
10. **Women, Indigenous People, Science, and Humanistic and Religious Traditions.** The wisdoms of women, Indigenous people, science, and classical humanistic and religious traditions will have important roles to play in redefining concepts of value, meaning, and fulfillment, and in setting norms of conduct for the Ecozoic era.

11. **The Earth Charter.*** The Earth Charter provides a comprehensive set of values and principles for the realization of the Ecozoic era.

The Great Work

12. **The Great Work.** The epic task, or "Great Work," of our time is to bring into being the Ecozoic era. It is a task in which everyone is involved and from which no one is exempt. On it the fate of Earth depends, and in it lies the hope of the future.

*The Earth Charter may be viewed at www.EarthCharter.org



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