

A tribute to Fr. Thomas Berry

Rich Heffern | Jun. 3, 2009 NCR Today

This tribute was written by James Conlon, director of Sophia Center in Oakland, Calif. Last summer the Center dedicated its annual summer session to the work of Fr. Berry.

ttt**Where is Thomas?**

tttThomas,

tttWhere are you now?

tttA child raising himself

tttWalking through the meadow

tttThomas,

tttWhere are you now?

tttReading at 2:30am

tttwith a towel at the door

tttOr seated in the diner with a companion

tttand a good glass of wine

tttThomas,

tttWhere are you now?

tttbrooding over Earth

tttthe Jeremiah of our time

tttasking the question

ttt?what should I say??

tttThomas,

tttWhere are you now?

tttin the Philippines or Chinat

tttRiverdale or the Caroline hills

tttwhere your dreams and thoughts were born

tttThomas,

tttWhere are you now?

tttin your fierce and wild life

tttyou are here among us

tttyour spirit clear and strong

tttcalling us to our Great Work

tttfrom the Cathedral of the Soul

Thomas Berry is generally understood to be the most significant scholar and spokesperson for the movement that sees the future of humanity and the entire planetary community as unfolding from a new, shared cosmic story. We are deeply indebted for his lifetime of dedication that makes possible a more mutually enhancing

relationship between humanity and the other-than-human world.

Thomas' life has been devoted to being a passionate herald for Earth, reminding us of the beauty of the cosmos, the enchantment of the Universe, and the challenges, dangers and possibilities that await the children and all those yet to be born of every species. Thomas is a voice for the voiceless, a spokesperson for the deep wisdom that resides in women, indigenous people, our Christian roots, other religious traditions and the new science. He emboldens us to nourish our souls and amplify our spirits within the mystery and beauty of each meadow, sunset and star.

Calling forth a renewed awareness of our destiny and the legacy that is our rightful inheritance, Thomas warns us of the danger of "soul death" during this era of human pathos and ecological bereavement. If we devastate the planet, we endanger and extinguish our souls. When we diminish our sensitivity, imagination and inner depth, we lessen our capacity to fully experience Earth. Thomas challenges each of us to take back our souls and, in doing so, the soul of our planet.

Out of the chaos of this present moment comes an enormous opportunity for creativity that could foster harmony and integration for the entire Earth community. We are being offered a "moment of grace," a time of both creativity and promise. Thomas reminds us that we have been chosen to live at this particular moment, each endowed with a unique and significant role to play in what he calls the Great Work. We are given the opportunity to contribute to the difficult transition from the post-industrial era to the ecological age that awaits us. The new era offers nourishment and sustainability, engaging our human capacity for play, delight and good work. Thomas promises that if we undertake this Great Work, we will know where we are, where we have been, and where we are going. "We begin to understand that the way to the world of the sacred is through the place of our dwelling. We are finally awakening to the beauty of the land."

During a recent visit with Thomas, once again he emphasizes his hope that humans focus our full attention on Earth and her people. It is critical that we, particularly in the Western world, take our proper place in the sacred Universe, realizing that the "American dream" will no longer work. At this defining moment we must heed the call to be liberated from convenient cultural structures that stand in the way of change. Thomas encourages us to evoke, name and celebrate a new way of being present, urged on by belief in a God we do not know. And as our systems of knowledge change, Thomas states, so must our spirituality. Through the expression of poetry, music, movement and art, we connect to other modes of understanding; we gain access to the wonder and beauty of Earth and all her peoples. Thomas joyously exclaimed: "May we all give thanks for our gorgeous planet and along the way to our Earth companions."

Gratitude and Goodness

Frail and tender one
man of Wonder and Dream
as you ponder the meaning
of your journey and
the way you wish to be remembered
I join a chorus of gratitude and thanks
with your passion for Earth

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