

Thomas Berry Award and Lecture

Cathedral of St John the Divine

Saturday September 26, 2009

Mary Evelyn Tucker

We welcome you today to celebrate Thomas Berry and his legacy. That legacy is greater than any one person because of the largeness of Thomas himself. It cannot be fully captured in a phrase or in a speech, but rather in the multiplicity of gifts that Thomas had and invoked from others- namely his unique intelligence, his deep affection, and his passionate commitment to the whole Earth community.

It is this generous and expansive spirit that we are recognizing today. And this is indeed cause for celebration. We are especially pleased that Rick Clugston who began convening this award and all the other recipients of this honor are present with us on this occasion – Brian Swimme, Steven Rockefeller, Miriam MacGillis,

Fritz and Vivienne Hull. Tu Weiming is in China, otherwise he would be here.

Ever since Thomas' death there has been something of a supernova explosion of energy – a feeling of so many people embracing this man who was in many ways larger than life and yet deeply embedded in the rhythms of life.

Thomas lived the majority of his days here in the New York area and was closely affiliated with this Cathedral for many years. We would come with him for the Solstice and Equinox ceremonies with Paul Winter and we would drive him down when we was asked to preach.

Thus we gather today to bear witness to a city and a Cathedral that he loved and that in turn loved him. In the 20th century there was perhaps nowhere on the planet except New York and the Cathedral that could have held such a great mind and spirit.

Thomas' expansive nature and his voracious pursuit of wisdom needed the grounding of this special place – a vibrating center of energy, ideas, and inspiration.

So we give thanks to the Cathedral which provided a home when he needed one, which took his ideas seriously when others did not and which became green with his thoughtful guidance. We are indebted to Dean Morton for beginning that process with Thomas and to Dean Kowalski for continuing it.

Today we turn to honor someone who has also been instrumental in carrying on Thomas' legacy – Martin Kaplan.

Marty has not only been a brilliant leader in the field of environmental grant making, he has assisted the environmental program at Columbia, Harvard, MIT, and Yale. For all of us who are dedicated to Thomas legacy he has made this possible in the Harvard conference series on religion and ecology, in the books that were published from that series, in the conferences in New York at the United Nations and the American Museum of Natural

History, and in the emergence of the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale.

But before presenting this Award we would like to invite Ann Berry Somers to make some welcoming comments on behalf of the Berry family. Ann teaches biology at the University of North Carolina, Greensboro where Thomas returned to live 14 years ago.

Ann is a specialist in turtles and she was able to have many memorable conversations with Thomas during Sunday morning breakfasts at the Oak restaurant, which was Thomas' substitute for the Riverdale Diner. Please join me in welcoming Ann Berry Somers.

Steve Dunn has been a friend and colleague to Thomas Berry for some 40 years, knowing him from their shared life together in the Passionists Order. Steve's appreciation for Thomas was such that he founded an environmental center at St Michael's College at the

University of Toronto. He was able to direct a number of students in their graduate studies on Thomas Berry's work including Heather Eaton and Ann Marie Dalton who are with us today. In addition along with Ann Lonergan he organized summer conferences at Port Burwell that featured Thomas and his ideas.

Rick Clugston has been one of Thomas' most loyal supporters. For nearly 20 years as was executive director of the Center for Respect of Life and Environment, he would welcome Thomas to Washington for our annual board meeting. And what memorable meetings they were! We would debate the meaning of sustainability as Thomas contested the term. We would imagine the greening of higher education as Rick led that effort for many years. And most of we would drink wine late into the night, as Thomas would wax eloquent about his latest ideas. These were some of our most memorable moments with Thomas and we thank Rick for making them possible. We thank him too for his remarkable support for the Earth Charter all through the drafting

process and beyond. To say he is indispensable to its success is an understatement.

Steven Rockefeller needs no introduction in many ways. He received his PhD at Columbia focusing on John Dewey. He then went on to a distinguished career at Middlebury College. There he taught religion and also served as Dean of the College.

One could say that with the 1992 conference he organized on Spirit and Nature that the field of religion and ecology was launched. Its success was such that it became both a book and a film. It was a few years later that we started the Harvard conference series to explore this topic and Steven was at the first conference on Buddhism and Ecology.

We were then collaborators, along with Rick Clugston, on the drafting of the Earth Charter. Steven chaired this process and without his steady, remarkable leadership the Charter would have never emerged from committee. Indeed, his patience and kindness

to people at all hour of the day and night who felt they had something to offer has earned Steven the title of Bodhisattva, the equivalent of a saint in the Buddhist tradition. Please welcome this all compassionate Bodhisattva.

Marty Kaplan

There are few people who have been more dedicated to promoting environmental change and the work of Thomas Berry than Martin Kaplan. Indeed, it was through his skilled direction that the Thomas Berry Foundation was formed and that Thomas' archive was created at Harvard, which Margaret Berry has so carefully organized. For all of this we are immensely grateful.

On a personal note I can say that the support and encouragement Marty Kaplan has provided for John and my work in religion and ecology has been incomparable – second to none. When we were overwhelmed during the Harvard conference series he would call out of the blue and ask how we were doing. After the call our

energies were restored. He took us in to his family and home for Seder dinners at Passover. He provided rest and restoration at Tanglewood in the summer.

But more than anything he has been not only a friend and mentor, colleague and collaborator, he has been what my mother called, “Our fairy godfather”. As such he has made our dreams come true of bringing Thomas’ ideas into an ever expanding circle of eager listeners – bringing Thomas’ inspiration into the rippling circles of our nation and our world so hungry for this wisdom.

Marty for being the fairy godfather for so many people and projects of significance, we thank you and honor you today.