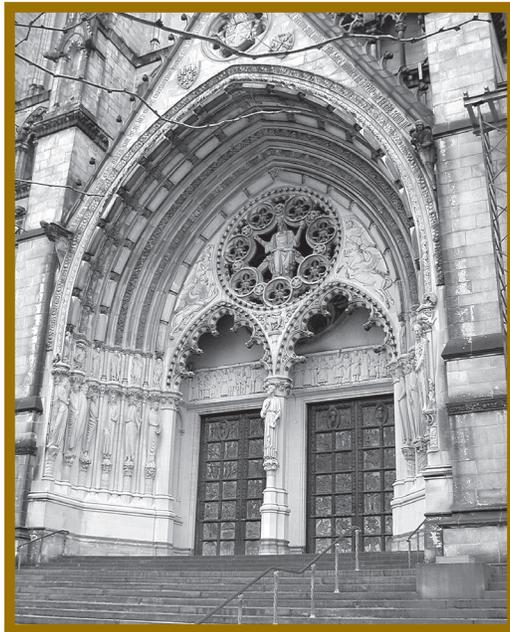


2009  
Thomas Berry  
AWARD & LECTURE

*Sponsored by  
The Thomas Berry Foundation  
and  
The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale*



Saturday, September 26, 2009  
The Cathedral of St. John the Divine  
New York City



2009

# Thomas Berry

AWARD & LECTURE

## PROGRAM

### Welcome

Mary Evelyn Tucker, Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale  
Ann Berry Somers, University of North Carolina, Greensboro  
Stephen Dunn, CP, University of Toronto, Emeritus  
Rick Clugston, Earth Charter International Council

### Reflections on Thomas Berry

Steven C. Rockefeller, Co- Chair, Earth Charter International Council

### Presentation of the Thomas Berry Award to Martin S. Kaplan

### Thomas Berry Lecture

Martin S. Kaplan

### Closing Comments

John A. Grim, Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale



## 2009 Thomas Berry Award Recipient Martin S. Kaplan

MARTIN S. KAPLAN has been a guiding force in developing the field of Religion and Ecology through his energy, intellect and passionate commitment to a better world for all people and all species. He played a leading role in arranging the grants for the ten conferences on World Religions and Ecology held at Harvard's Center for the Study of World Religions (1996–98), and the culminating conferences at the United Nations and the American Museum of Natural History. He helped enable the two conferences at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences which led to the Fall 2001 issue of *Daedalus* entitled "Religion and Ecology: Can the Climate Change?"

As Trustee and Managing Director of the V. Kann Rasmussen Foundation and Trustee of the Germeshausen Foundation, he was instrumental in promoting their progressive grantmaking relating to the environment and other causes. Mr. Kaplan was also a key participant in organizing the Consortium for Conservation Medicine, the Wildlife Trust Alliance, the South Carolina Sustainable Universities Initiative, the Associated Colleges of the South Environmental Initiative, and Grist Magazine, the largest on-line environmental news service. He has provided leadership in supporting environmental programs at Harvard, Columbia, MIT and Yale.

As Chairman of the Interreligious Affairs Commission of the American Jewish Committee, Mr. Kaplan was active in that institution's continuing dialogue with Roman Catholic Church leaders. In addition, he has served as a member of the Dean's Council of Harvard Divinity School and on the Board of the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard.

As Chair of the Massachusetts Board of Education (1992–96), appointed by Governor William F. Weld, he was a leader in the Education Reform Movement, and served as a member of the Education Commission of the States and a director of the National Association of State Boards of Education.

Mr. Kaplan is a graduate of Columbia College and Harvard Law School. Following a clerkship with Chief Judge Bailey Aldrich of the United States Court of Appeals, Mr. Kaplan has spent his entire legal career at Hale and Dorr and its successor, Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP, recently retiring as a partner. His practice included the representation of public and private corporations, and the development of philanthropic strategies for families and foundations. He has been a frequent speaker on interreligious affairs, environmental issues, education reform, family businesses, and foundations.

Mr. Kaplan was for ten years a member of the Board of the Boston Foundation, one of the largest community foundations, and chaired its Program Committee. He has also served on the boards of many charitable organizations in the fields of education and youth, and arts and culture, including the Board of Overseers of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. He has held a number of leadership positions at Columbia University, including president of the Columbia College Alumni Association, and was honored by Columbia with the University Alumni Medal (1993) and the John Jay Award (2000).

Mr. Kaplan is married to Wendy Tarlow Kaplan, an independent art curator. Together they share five children and ten grandchildren.

## Thomas Berry's Intellectual Journey



FROM HIS ACADEMIC BEGINNING as a cultural historian, Thomas Berry evolved over his lifetime to become a historian of Earth. He saw himself not as a theologian, but as a geologist. The movement from human history to cosmological history was a necessary progression for Berry. In his own lifetime he witnessed the emergence of a planetary civilization as cultures have come in contact around the globe, often for the first time. At the same time, the very resources for sustaining such a planetary civilization are being undermined by massive environmental destruction.

Thomas Berry began his academic career as a historian of Western intellectual history. His thesis at Catholic University on Giambattista Vico's philosophy of history was published in 1951. Vico was trying to establish a science of the study of nations comparable to what others had done for the study of nature.

Influenced by Vico, Berry developed a comprehensive, historical perspective in periodization, an understanding of the depths of contemporary barbarism, and the need for a new mythic wisdom to extract ourselves from our cultural pathology and deep alienation. Berry described contemporary alienation as especially pervasive due to the power of the technological trance, the myth of progress, and consequently, our dissociation from nature. With the *New Story* and *The Dream of the Earth*, Berry hoped to overcome this alienation and evoke the energies needed to create a viable and sustainable future. He called this effort to create a new basis for human-Earth relations the "Great Work."

When Berry set out for China in 1948, he met William Theodore de Bary on the boat leaving from San Francisco. De Bary was on his way to China as the first Fulbright scholar of Chinese studies. Berry intended to study language and Chinese philosophy in Beijing. Their time in China, while fruitful, was cut short by Mao's Communist victory in 1949. After they returned to the States they worked together to found the Asian Thought and Religion Seminar at Columbia. Berry's

friendship with Ted and Fanny de Bary lasted 60 years. Discussions with Ted spurred Berry's interest in Asian religions, especially Confucianism. Likewise, Fanny supported Berry's ecological thought through her work with the American Teilhard Association of which Berry was president from 1975–1987.

Berry taught Asian religions at Seton Hall (1956–1960) and St. John's University (1960–1966) and eventually moved to Fordham University (1966–1979). Berry founded a Ph.D. program in the History of Religions at Fordham and wrote numerous articles on Asian religions in addition to two books, one on *Buddhism* (1966) and the other on *Religions of India* (1971). Both are now distributed by Columbia University Press.

What distinguished Berry's approach to religion was his effort not only to discuss the historical unfolding of the traditions being studied, but also to articulate their spiritual dynamics and contemporary significance. Equally important in Berry's approach was his effort to highlight the distinctive contributions of both the Western traditions and the Asian religions. In addition, he showed a long-standing appreciation for the spirituality of indigenous traditions in both Asia and the Americas.

Berry was able to appreciate the deep spiritual impulses and devastating human sorrows which have given rise to the world's religions. From this perspective he discerned which spiritual resources are needed to create a comprehensive multicultural perspective within the Earth community. For Berry, tolerance of the plurality of religious ideas was comparable to protecting biodiversity of species in the natural world; human diversity and biological diversity are two aspects of a vital ecological whole.

Confucianism had special significance for Berry because of its cosmological concerns, its interest in self-cultivation and education, and its commitment to improve the social and political order. With regard to Confucian cosmology, Berry identified the important understanding of the human as a microcosm of the



cosmos. Essential to this cosmology is a “continuity of being” and thus a “communion” between various levels of reality: cosmic, social, and personal. This is similar to the ideas of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Alfred North Whitehead, and other contemporary process thinkers, who emphasized relationality, as do the Confucians.

In addition to a remarkable ability to appreciate the diversity and uniqueness of the great world religions, Berry had a lively interest in and empathy for indigenous religions. His own research, writing, and teaching in the field of Native American religions was extensive. Berry’s appreciation for indigenous traditions and for the richness of their mythic, symbolic, and ritual life was enhanced by his encounters with the ideas of Carl Jung and Mircea Eliade. Jung’s understanding of the collective unconscious, his reflections on the power of archetypal symbols, and his sensitivity to religious processes made him an important influence on Berry’s thinking. Moreover, Mircea Eliade’s studies in the history of religions were enormously useful in Berry’s understanding of both Asian and indigenous traditions. This is due in large part to Eliade’s ability to interpret broad patterns of meaning embedded in comparable symbols and rituals across cultures.

Within this larger framework of interpretive categories, Berry was able to articulate the special feeling in native traditions for the sacredness of the land, the seasons, and the animal, bird, and fish life. Native peoples respect Creation because they respect the Creator. They have a deep reverence for the gift of all life and for humans’ dependency on nature to sustain life. They have perfected some of the ancient techniques of shamanism, namely using ritual fasting and prayer to call on the powers in nature for personal healing and communal strength. They have cultivated an ability to use resources without abusing them and to recognize the importance of living lightly on Earth. This is not to suggest that native peoples were the ideal ecologists. As in the Chinese case, abuses certainly have occurred.

However, for Berry these two traditions (Confucianism and Native American religions) remained central to the creation of a new ecological spirituality for our times.

In formulating his idea of the New Story, Berry is much indebted to the thought of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. In particular, Berry derived from Teilhard (and from other writers, such as Loren Eiseley) an enormous appreciation for developmental time. As Berry wrote frequently, since Charles Darwin’s *Origin of Species* we have become aware of the universe not simply as a static cosmos but as an unfolding cosmogenesis. The theory of evolution provides a distinctive realization of change and development in the universe that resituates us in a huge sweep of geological time. With regard to developmental time, Teilhard suggested that the whole perspective of evolution changes our understanding of ourselves in the universe. For Berry, the New Story is the primary context for participating in the immensity of cosmogenesis. It is similar to what Loren Eiseley refers to as *The Immense Journey* or *The Firmament of Time*.

From Teilhard, Berry also derived an understanding of the psychic-physical character of the unfolding universe. This implies that if there is consciousness in the human and if humans have evolved from Earth, then from the beginning some form of consciousness or interiority is present in the process of evolution. Matter, for both Teilhard and Berry, is not simply dead or inert, but a numinous reality consisting of both a physical and spiritual dimension. Consciousness, then, is an intrinsic part of reality and is the thread that links all life forms. There are various forms of consciousness and, in the human, self-consciousness or reflective thought arises. This implies for Berry that we are one species among others and as self-reflective beings we need to understand our particular responsibility for the continuation of the evolutionary process. We have reached a juncture where we are realizing that we will determine which life forms survive and which will become extinct. We have become co-creators as we



have become conscious of our role in this extraordinary, irreversible developmental sequence of the emergence of life forms.

Berry's approach has been much more inclusive in terms of cultural history and religion, while Teilhard's has been remarkably comprehensive scientifically. These two approaches came together in Berry's book, written with the mathematical cosmologist Brian Swimme, called *The Universe Story*. Here for the first time is the narration of the story of the evolution of the solar system and Earth along with the story of the evolution of homo sapiens and human societies and culture. While not claiming to be definitive or exhaustive, *The Universe Story* sets forth a model for the telling of a common creation story. It marks a new era of self-reflection for humans, one that Berry described as the "ecological age" or the beginning of the "ecozoic age."

Berry's ideas on the *New Story* began in the early 1970s as he pondered the magnitude of the social, political, and economic problems we were facing in the human community. He first published the *New Story* in 1978 as the initial booklet of the *Teilhard Studies* series.

Berry opens his essay by observing, "We are in between stories." He notes how the old story was functional because "It shaped our emotional attitudes, provided us with life purpose, and energized action. It consecrated suffering, integrated knowledge, and guided education." This context of meaning provided by the old stories is no longer operative for many people. Berry proposes a new story of how things came to be, where we are now, and how our human future can be given some meaningful direction. In losing our direction we have not lost our values and orientation for human action. This is what the *New Story* can provide.

Berry states that to communicate values within this new frame of reference of the Earth story, we need to identify the basic principles of the universe process itself. These are the primordial intentions of the universe towards differentiation, subjectivity, and communion.

Differentiation refers to the extraordinary variety and distinctiveness of everything in the universe. No two things are completely alike. Subjectivity or consciousness is the interior numinous component present in all reality. Communion is the ability to relate to other people and things due to the presence of subjectivity and difference. Together these create the grounds for the inner attraction of things for one another. These are principles that can become the basis of a more comprehensive ecological and social ethics that sees the human community as dependent upon and interactive with the Earth community. For Berry, such a perspective will result in the flourishing of both humans and Earth. As Berry stated, humans and Earth will go into the future as one single multiform event or we will not go into the future at all.

This *New Story* was born out of Berry's own intellectual formation as a cultural historian of the West, turning toward Asian religions, examining indigenous traditions, and finally culminating in the study of the scientific story of the universe itself. It is a story of personal evolution against the backdrop of cosmic evolution, and of one person's intellectual journey in relation to Earth history. It is a story awaiting new tellings, new chapters, and ever deeper confidence in the beauty and mystery of its unfolding. This story provides a comprehensive context for orienting human life toward the Great Work of our time. As Thomas suggested, history calls us to create new life-sustaining human-Earth relations. The life, beauty, and diversity of the planet need to be preserved and enhanced for future generations. This is the Great Work to which we are each called by Thomas Berry.

*By Mary Evelyn Tucker, Yale University*

# The Thomas Berry Foundation and The Forum On Religion And Ecology at Yale



The mission of the **Thomas Berry Foundation** is to carry out the Great Work of Thomas in enhancing the flourishing of the Earth community. Organized in 1998 by Thomas Berry, Mary Evelyn Tucker, John Grim and Thomas' sister, Margaret Berry, the Foundation has promoted Thomas' ideas through publishing his essays, creating an archive at Harvard, assisting the American Teilhard Association, and making a film on the Universe Story.

**The Forum On Religion And Ecology at Yale** is the primary program of the Foundation, and is directed by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim. The Forum was also created in 1998, following the completion of 10 conferences on World Religions and Ecology at Harvard (1996–98), and the culminating conferences at the United Nations and the American Museum of Natural History. It builds on the innovative work of Thomas in the history of world religions. The Forum highlights the important roles that religions play in constructing ethical worldviews for interacting with other people, species, and the environment. It has helped to create a new field of study as well as a growing moral force for environmental action.

The Foundation and the Forum seek to achieve their goals through four major initiatives:

## **1. Enhancing Thomas Berry's Legacy**

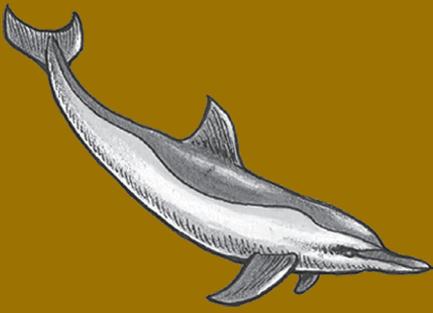
Over the last decade Thomas' archives have been transferred to Harvard with the dedicated assistance of his sister Margaret. During this same period Mary Evelyn and John have edited four of Thomas' books and promoted their distribution. (*The Great Work, Evening Thoughts, The Sacred Universe, The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth*). They also lead the American Teilhard Association and organized the celebration of Teilhard in 2005 at the United Nations and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine that commemorated the 50th anniversary of Teilhard's death.

## **2. Creating a New Field of Study with Implications for Policy: Publications and Conferences**

The Forum has helped to create a new field of study and teaching in religion and ecology that has implications for environmental policy. With its scholarly network it published the 10 volume *World Religions and Ecology Series* from Harvard. It has supported the first journal in the field: *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*. The Forum is participating in interdisciplinary conferences, both national and international, that are policy oriented. These include conferences with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), Religion, Science, and Environment Symposia led by Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, the Earth Dialogues led by Gorbachev, the Earth Charter, and the Parliament of World Religions.

## **3. Promoting a Moral Force for Environmental Action: Network and Internet Outreach**

The Forum is involved in expanding the network of international scholars, activists, educators, and religious leaders concerned with environment and justice issues. To this end, the Forum is assisting with editing the *Ecology and Justice Series* from Orbis Books, which has 20 volumes, including Thomas' last book. The Forum's comprehensive website at Yale provides introductory essays, annotated bibliographies, selections from sacred texts, environmental statements from religious communities, and examples of religious environmentalism. The Forum was a principal advisor for the *Renewal* film featuring eight case studies of religious environmentalism in the United States. It held a major conference at Yale bringing together scholars and activists to celebrate the film's completion in 2008. As part of its outreach the Forum sends out a monthly email newsletter and news articles from the United Nations Environment Programme that reaches over 10,000 people worldwide.



#### **4. Fostering Knowledge of the Universe Story**

The Foundation is collaborating with mathematical cosmologist Brian Swimme in creating an educational film, book, and website that builds on Thomas' vision. This project is designed to foster broader understanding of the universe story and its implications for a viable future for the Earth community. As background for this project, we have created a network of advisors and organized a series of conferences with scientists and humanists at Whidbey Institute in Washington State.

Tax-deductible contributions to support the work of the Foundation and the Forum are most welcome and much appreciated.

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Website addresses:  
[www.thomasberry.org](http://www.thomasberry.org)  
[www.yale.edu/religionandecology](http://www.yale.edu/religionandecology)  
[www.religionandecology.org](http://www.religionandecology.org)

#### **The Cathedral of St. John the Divine**

The Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine, the mother church of the Episcopal Diocese of New York and the Seat of its Bishop, is chartered as a house of prayer for all people and a unifying center of intellectual light and leadership. It serves the many diverse people of our Diocese, City, Nation and World through an array of liturgical, cultural and civic events; pastoral, educational and community outreach activities; and maintains the preservation of the great architectural and historic site that is its legacy.

The Cathedral welcomes people of all traditions to come together to explore our connections with each other and our care for Earth as a vital part of our cultural, spiritual, and social lives.

Thomas Berry was a honorary canon at the Cathedral and helped to direct its mission toward concern for the environment and the role of the human as part of the Earth community.