

**Reflections
By Mary Evelyn Tucker**

**Thomas Berry Memorial Service
Cathedral of St John the Divine
September 26, 2009**

We welcome you today to this special Cathedral, a place of such beauty and grandeur that it beckons us to a larger life journey. It calls us, as did Thomas here on many occasions, to the journey of our greater self toward new human-Earth relations.

This is the journey that Thomas invited us into and it is why we celebrate with one another as fellow travelers. We can recognize in the many faces gathered here today a sense of the shared journey. We have chosen a common path because Thomas showed us the Way. In his writings and in his talks he has lit up the path – illuminating it for us and for those who will come after.

Because of Thomas Berry we are fellow pilgrims who are bound together in a moment of grace – a historic time that is requiring of us a monumental response. This is a time of great ecological devastation with crushing social consequences and unknown affects on the future of life itself. We need little reminder of what pressing challenges such as climate change and species extinction bring us together.

But in the midst of these grave and growing challenges we draw strength and indeed courage from the journey of Thomas himself.

Coming out of the south Thomas experienced the great rhythms of nature's beauty before development swept away the meadow across

the creek. Finding his way forward to study western history at Catholic University in Washington. Moving beyond the west in his journey to China where he encountered the great religious traditions of Asia. Finding his way to Europe as an army chaplain after the war. And then back to the United States to discover his path into teaching. Finally, in his 60s, after so much reflection and anguish, he arrived at his understanding of the New Story. There is hope for all of us in that such creativity takes time! And we can observe, although he did not speak of them, that each one of these migrations in his journey presented significant challenges.

-His professors at Catholic University did not understand the breadth of his interests and insisted that he completely rewrite his thesis.

-His time in China was cut short by Mao's take over in 1949 and he had to flee the country.

-His desire to teach was not initially affirmed by his religious order.

-His history of religions program was not fully embraced or continued by the Theology Department at Fordham.

-The Riverdale Center of Religious Research was discontinued after a quarter of a century and the 400-year great Red Oak was cut down.

And yet amidst these obstacles and setbacks his movement to largeness of soul was palpable. Thomas never succumbed to bitterness

or cynicism, even a few years ago when he taught himself to read again after suffering a stroke. Rather, he embraced his life journey with humor, in the company of friends, enriched by wine and music on the sun porch at Riverdale. And for some 25 years he sustained us all, along the banks of the Hudson River, across from the 200 million year old cliffs of the Palisades, under the great red oak where we would gather with him to watch the blazing sunset.

Through our graduate studies and early teaching there was Thomas ready to go to the Broadway dinner, opening up the Center for our monthly Teilhard lectures, moving through his immense library with his generous give away spirit: “Take this book, you will need it” was his mantra. And how poignant it was when generosity overflowed in his 80th year. Together we dismantled his splendid library of some 10,000 books sending them, like a shamanic dismemberment, to scholars all over North America.

How can one capture the immense journey of such a person who was always giving away - his time, his Riverdale papers, his ideas, his affection. He was present to each of us – making us all feel like his companions on the way.

This, then, is a person of the great Tao – the Way beyond name or form, as the Taoists would say. He is a sage in the Confucian sense – forming one body with Heaven, Earth and the 10,000 things. He is the Cosmic Person, the Mahapurusha of the Vedic Hymns of early Hinduism. He is the Renaissance man of the West who embraced, like

the drawing on the Award program suggests, the whole Earth community.

But more than anything he is a person whose journey was defined by a migrating intelligence. By this I mean, with all of his erudition he remained close to the intuitive ways of knowing that permeate our living world. And this more than anything is what inspired us. His primal intuition that this is indeed a *Sacred Universe*, that *The Dream of the Earth* has yet to be realized and that we could join with him in *The Great Work* for our time.

For Thomas' wisdom is like the vast imprinting in the world of migrations – like that of the red knot sand piper who journeys from the southern tip of South America, Tierra del Fuego, to the northern regions of Canada, James Bay. This migration of some 6000 miles is punctuated by a stop over for feeding on the horseshoe crab eggs in the Chesapeake Bay – energy for the great journey.

But the real miracle occurs when, after giving birth to their young in the great forest of northern Canada, those fledglings find their way back by themselves preceding their parents on the long flight home. Stopping in the Chesapeake Bay, feeding on the horseshoe crab eggs they return at last to Tierra del Fuego.

Such profound intuitive sensibilities – guided by wind and wave, sun, moon and stars – reside deep within the living worlds. And it is these sensibilities that Thomas remained close to his whole life, thus giving us the possibility that in the midst of great challenges we also would find our way home once again.

His promise is that the Earth community will embrace us too as fellow travelers.

This is our hope,

This is his legacy.

This is now our shared journey, bound as we are by the migrating ways of knowing whereby we have found one another.