

CONTACT: Donald Lehr – The Nolan/Lehr Group
(212) 967-8200 / dblehr@cs.com

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IN A FITTING TRIBUTE, THOMAS BERRY TO BE HONORED IN WORD AND DEED

As one of the pioneering thinkers of the 20th century, Thomas Berry, who died in June at the age 94, revealed a stream of insights on humans, Earth, and the universe that have led to countless ongoing initiatives to preserve and sustain the planet. That type of engaged scholarship leading to action will be evidenced at the Thomas Berry Award & Memorial Service with Paul Winter on Saturday, September 26 at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, a celebration of Berry's life and the honoring of the latest recipient of the award given in his name.

Teacher, writer, and sage, Berry's life is often associated with the term "Great Work," not only because it served as the title of his seminal 1999 book on environmental awakening, but also because his vast range of scholarship and the enlightenment it inspired can aptly be described as such. From his academic beginnings as a historian of world cultures and religions, Berry developed into what he described as a "geologist," a scholar of Earth and its evolutionary processes.

Typical of the consciousness he raised is the work of Martin S. Kaplan, the 2009 winner of the Thomas Berry Award, who for more than 20 years has promoted progressive environmental grant making at numerous organizations and academic institutions, and was instrumental in establishing the Thomas Berry Foundation in 1998.

"Thomas Berry contributed to the realization in our times that environmental issues are more than science or policy, they are also issues of the spirit," said Mary Evelyn Tucker, who with her husband, John Grim, heads the Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale and directs the Thomas Berry Foundation, co-sponsors of the event. "How well we respond to the planetary challenges that face us now will be determined by our ability to form an Earth community with a common future for all species."

The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale builds on Berry's work in the history of world religions by focusing on the roles that religions play in constructing ethical worldviews for interaction with other people, species, and the environment. Created in 1998 following the three-year World Religions and Ecology conference series at Harvard, the United Nations, and the American Museum of Natural History, the Forum is credited with creating a new field of academic study in religion and ecology as well as spearheading a growing moral force for environmental action.

"The planet Earth is something more than a natural resource to be used by humans," Berry wrote. "A viable future for the human community rests largely upon a new relationship between human communities and the planet we dwell on."

That future would be difficult to achieve, Berry realized, and would require what he called "the great work" – in politics and law, economics and business, education, and religion. "From here on," he explained in a 2006 interview, "the primary judgment of all human institutions, professions, programs

and activities will be determined by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore or foster a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship.”

Born in Greensboro, N.C. in 1914, Berry entered the Roman Catholic Passionist Order as a young man, received his Ph.D. in European intellectual history from the Catholic University of America, and then spent many years studying the cultures and religions of Asia, authoring two books, *Buddhism and Religions of India*. After teaching Asian religions at Seton Hall and St. John’s University, Berry chaired Fordham University’s history of religions program and directed many doctoral and master’s theses, including those of John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker.

Berry also served as president of the American Teilhard Association, dedicated to the 20th century French philosopher and Jesuit priest Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who inspired Berry’s “universe story” concept which came to fruition in his 1992 book, *The Universe Story*, written with mathematical cosmologist Brian Swimme.

Berry explored the intersection of ecological, spiritual and cultural issues in other books including *The Dream of the Earth* (1988; 1995 Lannan Award), *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future* (1999), *Evening Thoughts: Reflection on the Earth as Sacred Community* (2006), and two essay collections, *The Sacred Universe* and *The Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth*, published this month.

The 2009 Thomas Berry Award recipient, Martin S. Kaplan, has been a guiding force in the development of the field of religion and ecology. He played a leading role in arranging the grants for the World Religions and Ecology conference series and subsequent conferences, leading 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, Kaplan helped achieve grants for environmental programs at Harvard, Columbia, MIT and Yale as well as the Consortium for Conservation Medicine, the Wildlife Trust Alliance, and Grist, the on-line environmental news service. He recently retired as a partner at Wilmer Cutler Pickering Hale and Dorr LLP, where he represented public and private corporations and developed philanthropic strategies for families and foundations.

The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale, in collaboration with Brian Swimme and director David Kennard, is nearing completion of a documentary film, *Journey of the Universe*, inspired by Berry’s book. Scheduled for release in 2010, it will provide an integrating framework for understanding the story of the universe and the Earth from the perspectives of science and religion. The Forum’s website at www.yale.edu/religionandecology, the world’s most comprehensive source of overviews, bibliographies, commentary, and resources on religion and ecology, also includes up-to-date global news and events listings, and statements on climate change from the world’s religions.

The Thomas Berry Foundation, established in 1998 by Berry, his sister Margaret Berry, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, carries out Berry’s work in enhancing the flourishing of the Earth community through the publication of his essays, the Thomas Berry archive at Harvard University, and The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale. For more information on the Thomas Berry Award and Memorial Service, go to www.thomasberry.org.

The Thomas Berry Foundation and The Forum on Religion and Ecology at Yale are engaged in four major initiatives:

- Enhancing Thomas Berry's Legacy. Over the last decade Berry's archives have been transferred to Harvard with the assistance of his sister Margaret Berry. Concurrently, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim have edited and promoted the distribution of four of his books, *The Great Work*, *Evening Thoughts*, *The Sacred Universe*, and *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth*. They also lead the American Teilhard Association, organizers of the Teilhard celebration at the United Nations and the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in 2005 on the 50th anniversary of his death.
- Creating a New Field of Study with Implications for Policy: Publications and Conferences. The Forum has helped create a new field of study in religion and ecology with global implications for environmental policy. With its scholarly network it published the ten-volume World Religions and Ecology Series (Harvard University Press), and it supported the first journal in the field, *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology*. The Forum participates in policy-oriented, interdisciplinary conferences with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the Dialogue of Civilizations, the Earth Dialogues led by Mikhail Gorbachev, the Earth Charter, and the Parliament of World Religions.
- Promoting a Moral Force for Environmental Action: Network and Internet Outreach. The Forum has expanded the global network of scholars, activists, educators, and religious leaders concerned with environment and justice issues. To assist this network it is editing the 20-volume "Ecology and Justice" series (Orbis Books), which includes Berry's final book. Its website at www.yale.edu/religionandecology 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 film, *Renewal*, featuring eight case studies of religious environmentalism in the United States, and held a major conference at Yale in 2008 bringing together scholars and activists to celebrate the film's release. Upcoming activities include the October "Restoring Balance: The Great Mississippi River" conference sponsored by the Ecumenical Patriarch, Bartholomew, the Parliament of the World's Religions in December in Canberra, Australia, and organization of a conference on "Environmental Justice and Climate Change" at Yale in April 2010.
- Fostering Knowledge of "The Universe Story". In collaboration with mathematical cosmologist Brian Swimme, the Thomas Berry Foundation is creating an educational film, book, and website to build on Berry's vision. The project is designed to foster a broader understanding of the Universe Story and its implications for a viable future for the Earth community. As project background, the Forum has created a network of advisors and organized a series of conferences with scientists and humanists at Whidbey Institute in Washington State.