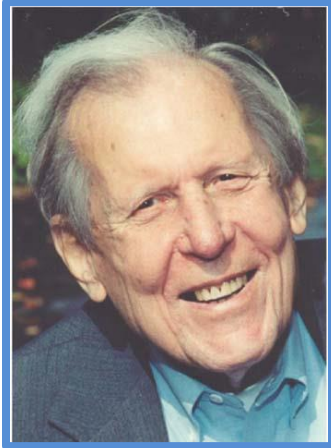


Thomas Berry

(1914-2009)



Thomas Berry is one of Greensboro's most beloved native-born citizens. An internationally recognized historian of cultures, Thomas Berry focused his writings and lectures on the relation of humans with the cosmos and Earth. His thought influenced the intellectual and spiritual history of the twentieth- and early twenty-first centuries. Affirmations of his work include eight honorary doctorates.

Thomas Berry was born in Greensboro, North Carolina where he spent his early childhood and where he returned when he was 80. It was there that he died peacefully on June 1, 2009. Named William Nathan after his father, he was the third child of thirteen children. He entered the Passionist Order in high school and upon ordination he took the name Thomas after Thomas Aquinas whose *Summa Theologica* he admired.

He received his Ph.D. from the Catholic University of America in European intellectual history with a thesis on Giambattista Vico. Widely read in Western history and theology, he also spent many years studying and teaching the cultures and religions of Asia. He lived in China in 1948 where he met the Asian scholar and Confucian specialist, Ted de Bary. Their collaboration led to the founding of the Asian Thought and Religion Seminar at Columbia. Thomas authored two books on Asian religions, *Buddhism* and *Religions of India*, both of which are distributed by Columbia University Press.

For more than twenty years, Thomas directed the Riverdale Center of Religious Research along the Hudson River. During this period, he taught at Fordham University where he chaired the History of Religions Program. He directed some twenty doctoral theses, including those of John Grim and Brian Brown, as well as many Master's theses, including those of Mary Evelyn Tucker and Kathleen Deignan. From 1975-1987 he was President of the American Teilhard Association. It was from Teilhard de Chardin that he was inspired to develop his idea of a universe story. With Brian Swimme he wrote *The Universe Story* (Harper San Francisco, 1992), which arose from a decade of collaborative research.

His major contributions to the discussions on the environment are in his books *The Dream of the Earth* (Sierra Club Books, 1988), *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future* (Random House/Bell Towers, 1999), and *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community* (Sierra Club/University of California Press, 2006). Many of his earlier papers were edited into two books focusing on world religions and on Christianity. These were published in September 2009 entitled *The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-first Century* by Columbia University Press and *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth* by Orbis Books.

Thomas Berry inspired the creation of many organizations worldwide including Genesis Farm, The Center for Education, Imagination and the Natural World, the Forum on Religion and Ecology, Green Mountain Monastery and Thomas Berry Sanctuary, Timberlake Earth Sanctuary, the Center for Ecozoic Studies and Emerging Ecology. The Thomas Berry Collection is located in Harvard University's Environmental Science and Public Policy Archives.

Thomas Berry was presented with the Order of the Long Leaf Pine Award from the Governor of North Carolina in 2007. The Greensboro Public Library periodically grants a Thomas Berry Award to individuals and organizations that honor the legacy of one of Greensboro's greatest authors.