

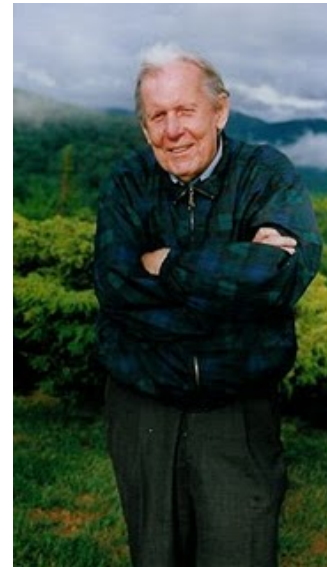
## Thomas Berry

Thomas Berry (1914 - 2009), Passionist priest and internationally recognized historian of cultures, focused his writings and lectures on the relation of humans with the cosmos and Earth. His works have notably influenced the intellectual/spiritual history of the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Born in Greensboro, North Carolina and originally named for his father, William Nathan Berry, founder of *Berico Fuels Company* (1924), this second of eight sons in a family of thirteen children, following 1933 entry into the *Passionist* Religious Order, adopted the name Thomas after philosopher-theologian Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). A Catholic University of America doctorate concluded with publication of his research on the historical theory of philosopher-historian Giambattista Vico 1668-1744 (Catholic University of America Press, 1951).

Believing the wisdom of Asia indispensable for adequate learning, Thomas went to China in 1948 to study and teach at Beijing's Fu Jen University but returned to America in 1949 when Mao Tse-tung took over China. Subsequent studies in Chinese language and culture at Seton Hall University and Sanskrit and South Asian culture at Columbia University were interrupted by service as United States Army chaplain in Germany 1951-54. Afterwards Thomas undertook a teaching career, first with the Asian Institute of Seton Hall University 1956-61; then with the Asian Institute of St. John's University 1961-65; finally, at Fordham University 1966-79, where he instituted the doctoral program in the history of religions.

In 1970 Thomas inaugurated the Riverdale Center for Religious Research (1970-95) in Riverdale, NY. From this base and with his presidency of the American Teilhard Society (1975-1987), Thomas's international influence as thinker, writer, and lecturer expanded rapidly. Annual conferences explored themes such as 'Energy: Its Cosmic-Human Dimensions'; 'The Future: Technological Society Man's Covenant?'; 'New York as Sacred City'; and 'The Ecological Age'. From across the globe scholars and others came to the Center for rethinking their disciplines in the light of newly understood relations of humans to Earth. In 1998 as part of Harvard's international Forum on Religion and Ecology (FORE), the Thomas Berry Foundation was established by Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, currently of Yale University.



Besides the eleven-volume *Riverdale Papers* and treatises on Buddhism (1966) and *The Religions of India* (1971), the most influential of Berry's books are *The Dream of the Earth* (1988, National Lannan Non-Fiction Award 1992); *The Universe Story*:

*From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era* (1992), with mathematical-cosmologist Brian Swimme; *The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future* (1999); and *Evening Thoughts: Reflecting on Earth as Sacred Community*, Sierra Club Books, University of California Press, 2006. Thomas Berry papers are housed in the Harvard University Environmental Science and Public Policy Archives.

Besides eight honorary doctorates, Thomas's awards include the United States Catholic Mission Association Award (1989); the 1992 James Herriot Award of the Humane Society of the United States; Honorary Canonship of the Episcopal Cathedral of St. John the Divine (1992); the 1993 Bishop Carroll T. Dozier Medal for Peace and Justice; the Catholic University of America 1993 Alumni Research and Scholarship Award; the 1992 Prescott College Environmental Award; annual Thomas Berry Lecture Awards established by the College of Mt. St. Vincent on the Hudson and, in Washington, DC, by the Center for Respect of Life and Environment and the Humane Society of the United States; a Thomas Berry Hall and Thomas Berry Seminars at Whidbey Institute, Whidbey Island, WA.; and the Thomas Berry Student Writing Award at Warren Wilson College, Asheville, NC (2005).

During World War II Thomas's mother, Greensboro's Elizabeth Vize Berry (1890-1980), was named by the national Golden Rule Foundation the 'American Mother of 1942'. All eight sons of this family of 13 children served in the military 1940 – 1958. Having returned to his native Greensboro in 1995, Thomas continued to write at the Hermitage cabin on a family member's land, eventually moving to Well-Spring Retirement Community. Here he continued to work on developing essays for publication until his death on June 1, 2009. August 2009 will see publication of two more books: *The Sacred Universe* (Columbia University Press) and a further volume - *The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth* (Orbis Books).

(Written by Dr. Margaret Berry, sister and Aide for Thomas Berry)

"Thomas Berry Short Biography", *Thomas Berry and the Earth Community*, Retrieved on August 27, 2011 from: <http://www.earth-community.org/bio.htm>

## Reflection Questions

1. (For those of you who have studied other religious worldviews) what kind of influence do you think Buddhism and Hinduism had on Thomas Berry's views about life and the universe? How are Buddhist and Hindu teachings about our relationship with nature similar to Catholic teachings?
2. After reading the biography and watching the brief video slideshow of Thomas Berry's quotes (below), what are your thoughts about achieving an "Ecozoic Era"? Is it possible? Do you think humanity is endangered and if so, able to change its way of living? Explain.

**Video link:** <http://www.earth-community.org/images/SS-with-Text-Broadband.mov>