Masters of the Cosmos and the Soul: Thomas Berry and Thomas Merton in Dialogue

By **Kathleen Deignan, CND**

Introduction

Thomas Merton and Thomas Berry are, arguably, two of the most exceptional Catholic thinkers of the twentieth century, whose import will increase in centuries to come. Since his death in 1968, scholars have had the opportunity to research and explicate the enormous library of wisdom left us by Thomas Merton.[1] Now, with the death of Thomas Berry on June 1, 2009, scholars likewise begin to elucidate and elaborate the compendious vision bequeathed us by another visionary who, like Merton, suffered a penetrating comprehension of the mysteries in which we find ourselves encompassed.[2]

It was my privilege to be a student of Father Thomas Berry at Fordham University in the 1970s, where I enjoyed his mentorship and inspiration along with the challenging discomfort of his prophetic vision that cannot be engaged without the death of the old self and the birth, or at least gestation, of the new cosmic person – a theme that resonates in analogous terms throughout the writings of Thomas Merton.[3] When it came time to invite someone to write the Foreword to my edited volume of Thomas Merton's writings on nature, *When the Trees Say Nothing*,[4] I instinctively turned to Father Thomas, always having wished he – like so many other great thinkers of his generation – had been a dialogue partner of Merton so that we might have been enlightened by the depth and urgency of their correspondence on the crises and potentials of our times.

Father Thomas received my manuscript with a curious delight and some relief because he confessed a certain disappointment that the greatest contemporary spiritual writer of the Christian world seemed to have no time for the natural world. In fact, when asked to deliver a tribute to Merton after his death, Berry offered a reverential bow to the master on several counts, and then offered a sobering critique of a spirituality that seemed to know nothing of the sacrality of the cosmos.[5] In Berry's mind, Merton had made five significant contributions to the depth of Christian spirituality in our time: establishing his own life story as an archetypal narrative of conversion in *The Seven Storey Mountain*; restoring the mystical dimension of the monastic life in books like *The Waters of Siloe*; providing a critique of the social order as in *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*; renewing the poetic-aesthetic dimension of the Christian spiritual tradition in his poetry, drawings and photography; and establishing an intimate rapport between Christian and Asian spiritualities, especially with Zen Buddhism (see *WTSN* 15-16). However, Berry offered a pointed challenge to Merton's apparent slight of the natural world as the ground of religious experience.

In all fairness to both men, few in the 1970s would have had an accurate perspective on Merton's profound nature mysticism. Before the publication of his journals, so rich with his

celebration of creation, no one could have known the extent to which Merton was alive to the revelatory Earth – and so anxious about its devastation. Only with the presentation of his more complete corpus could we discover "[s]cattered throughout his journals, letters, and poetry [the] 'seeds' of a vibrant creation spirituality in which Merton celebrates the natural world in all its variety, complexity and beauty as the body of God."[6] Yet, as Berry would later confess, "To miss this aspect of his work was to fail in recognizing an all-pervasive aspect of his writings" (*WTSN* 16), which, once brought to Berry's attention, changed his assessment of his illustrious contemporary. He came to recognize this concern for creation "not simply in some of his specific writings but [as] an all-pervasive concern throughout his work. This aspect of Merton takes on added significance since, in the future, the understanding of nature, its infinitely diverse modes of expression, and the need to develop a mutually enhancing mode of human presence to the natural world will be a central concern in every phase of human activity" (*WTSN* 16).

> The deep psychic change needed to withdraw us from the fascination of the industrial world, and the deceptive gifts that it gives us, is too difficult for simply the avoidance of its difficulties or the attractions of its benefits. Eventually only our sense of the sacred will save us. Merton's gift . . . is this sense of the sacred throughout the entire range of the natural world. (*WTSN* 19)

Merton and Berry in Dialogue

It is a daunting task to try to bring these two prophetic voices together to awaken us to the challenge of what Thomas Berry calls "The Great Work"[7] of our time: nothing less than a reinvention of the Human as a benign, integral presence to the living Earth. Indeed, in more familiar Mertonian terms, perhaps, we are being invited to be born again, but on the species level, as a new creature, willing and able to tend a new creation: what shall remain of the life communities of this wondrous and wounded Earth now at the terminal phase of the Cenozic Age.[8] We might say that we are being called to rise to the utmost intention of our christic nature, summoned to become Earth's healer, indeed its redeemer, if we and our planetary relatives are to survive the desolation humankind has brought to this paradise – if we are to repent of the calamity we have brought to bear on our singular life-abundant planet. As if summoning us to repentance, Berry offers a litany of ecological transgressions begging for reparation:

> In our times . . . human cunning has mastered the deep mysteries of the earth at a level far beyond the capacities of earlier peoples. We can break the mountains apart; we can drain the rivers and

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> flood the valleys. We can turn the most luxuriant forests into throwaway paper products. We can tear apart the great grass cover of the western plains . . . pour toxic chemicals into the soil and pesticides onto fields until the soil is dead and blows away in the wind. We can pollute the air with acids, the rivers with sewage, the seas with oil – all this in a kind of intoxication with our power for devastation at an order of magnitude beyond all reckoning.[9]

In a prophetic voice reminiscent of Merton's, Berry not only lays bare humankind's ecological sins, but finds even now a way to intone a word of hope. Even now, Father Thomas reminds us,

> as the crashing of the tropical rains forest resounds about us, as the sun is dimmed in the day and the stars at night by the hovering pollution in the atmosphere, as the great hydrological cycles are disturbed in their vast role of watering the continents and bringing forth the greenery of the land, as a multitude of living species become extinct throughout the earth – even amid all these events, there is a resilience, a hope, and even an expectation for a surviving abundance of life upon earth, if only the human community will respond to the urgency with . . . insight and the vigor. (Berry, *Dream* xiv)

For both masters, the challenge of this Great Work of human transformation is nothing less than the actualization of what Christians proclaim in the mystery of Incarnation: the birth of the fully mature Human Person, living in communion with the Holy Unnamable Source, honoring its growing cosmic Body, actualizing its True Self – its Great Self – and recovering our capacity for communion with all the precious relatives in all the myriad dimensions of our planetary home, which itself lives in the ever-unfolding matrix of the Cosmos. And though a full encounter between these two great spiritual masters is beyond the scope of this reflection, I would like to propose some of the congruities that bring them into virtual dialogue on many issues, but particularly on the sacrality of Earth and the challenge its peril poses to our generation and generations to come.

The parallels between the lives of Thomas Berry and Thomas Merton are quite uncanny. They were born several months apart, Berry in May 1914 and Merton in January 1915, one in the foothills of the Uwharries in the Piedmont region of North Carolina, the other in foothills of the French Pyrenees on the border with Spain. Both were spiritually precocious; each had a paradise mind,[10] vibrant and vivid. Thomas Berry's awakened in a meadow experienced as edenic;[11] Thomas Merton's under the shadow of a monastic mountain, high Canigou in southern France. Though their early lives were different in many ways, each opened them to the crises of the dawning twentieth century, and each harbored deep forebodings about their historical moment. Here is how Merton tells it:

> On the last day of January 1915, under the sign of the Water Bearer, in a year of a great war, and down in the shadow of some French mountains on the borders

> of Spain, I came into the world. Free by nature, in the image of God, I was nevertheless the prisoner of my own violence and my own selfishness, the image of the world into which I was born. That world was the picture of Hell, full of men like myself, loving God and yet hating Him; born to love Him, living instead in fear and hopeless self-contradictory hungers.[12]

An orphan soul raised in the breech between the two Great Wars in Europe, Merton fell victim to those hungers and calamitous self-contradictions. His soul-sickness induced his famous conversion experience that guided him from England to New York to a monastery refuge in Kentucky. Not too far away in North Carolina another young man was feeling the foreboding of the twentieth-century juggernaut that was gearing up to careen though the innocent nations of natural species, human and otherkind. It unsettled him deeply, though inchoately. So young Thomas Berry also sought sanctuary in a monastery, a safe-haven where he could ponder the imponderables rising up inside him like a summons. Both were sensitive souls with keen minds – they needed a place to think and to write; both had strong wills and imaginations in which the dramas of an age would host as dread and eventually hatch as wisdom for the likes of us. They needed to brood; they needed to dream.

In these monastic settings both became mystics, and completely so, the Cistercian monk and the Passionist priest. Both were informed by the Christian life and liturgy; both were steeped in the Christian scriptures and the Christian mysteries. Both were in their own ways ascetics; both were ravenous intellectuals. Both sought the gems that lay beneath the encrustations of dogma; both plumbed the depths of the Christian well until they tasted the living waters of wisdom which intensified their thirst to see what could be seen and to know what could be known. Berry and Merton read everything they could, and both became cultural historians in their own right. Both mastered the libraries of the Christian tradition, drawn to the rich writings of the early Eastern and Western masters, and especially of the great medieval thinkers in whose various tomes were the elements of the great synthesis of western Christian wisdom. Both Thomases were in some sense Thomists, compendious thinkers on the cutting edge of understanding in their time, as Aquinas was in his. Both were paradigm breakers and birthers, each eventually generating his own summa: Berry, a *Summa Cosmologica* – a comprehensive story of the universe and the role of the human within it; and Merton, a *Summa Psychologica*, a penetrating story of the human soul. Each had a magnetic orientation to the East and each made their way there – Berry at the beginning of his spiritual quest, Merton at the end of his.[13] And each passionately and intensively explored the trails of insight opened up by the luminous humanism of the great Asian masters: Confucius, Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu. Indeed, both wrote books about Buddhism and were deeply influenced by the religions and philosophies of China and India.[14] Likewise, both learned deeply from the wisdom of indigenous peoples, particularly of the Americas.[15]

Thomas Berry became a brilliant cultural and religious historian, following in the footsteps of thinkers who thought deeply about historical development. Augustine and Joachim of Fiore,

Dante and Giambattista Vico, Charles Darwin and Teilhard de Chardin, among others, tripped in him the ability to see with clarity and originality the unfolding periods of history in their evolutionary arcs of purpose. Like them he was able to see into history, to see through history, sorting out the beginnings and endings of great movements and projects, able to see at once etiology and teleology in the various unfoldments of the human and particularly the Earth story. Thomas Merton became a cultural and religious interpreter, a re-sourcer, a diviner, a critic, a confessor to and for a generation of lost souls like himself who sought an orienteer through the crises of the twentieth century – the post-war cold war, the nuclear threat, the race troubles, the eclipse of human freedom in the tyranny of mass culture and the captive mind. In time they each came to understand that the purpose of the monasticism they had embraced as a refuge from this troubling world was not for their own survival away from the world, but for the world's survival, as they gradually made their way back into its maelstroms, funded with a mother-lode of sacred wisdom for the work of prophecy. Gratefully, each became a writer, both became teachers with a cohort of students, many of whom became disciples. And ultimately, the revelation they both sought to explicate was what each had come to read as the original, primordial scripture: The Book of Nature.

Reading the Book of Creation: A Brief Tutorial with Merton and Berry

During his General Audience on January 30, 2002, while offering a meditation on Psalm 18, Pope John Paul II reminded Christians that creation is the original revelation, speaking clearly to us about the Creator and leading us ever more deeply into the mystery of God's love. He said,

> for those who have attentive ears and open eyes, creation is like a first revelation that has its own eloquent language: it is almost another sacred book whose letters are represented by the multitude of created things present in the universe. St. John Chrysostom says: "The silence of the heavens is a voice that resounds louder than a trumpet blast: this voice cries out to our eyes and not to our ears, the greatness of Him who made them." And St Athanasius says: "The firmament with its magnificence, its beauty, its order, is an admirable preacher of its Maker, whose eloquence fills the universe."[16]

With these remarks, John Paul echoed a long tradition that affirmed two scriptures in the Christian canon: the Bible and the Book of Creation. From the beginning we have been invited to read one in light of the other. Creation spirituality, therefore, is nothing new in Christianity. In fact, it is its very heart and soul since Christianity celebrates the mystery of the incarnation of divinity into cosmic matter, affirming creation as an unspeakable alphabet by which God spells out the inexhaustible creativity and splendor, the terrible beauty and magic of the divine milieu. The Scripture of Creation and of the Bible are coextensive. Given the right interpretive tools, one can read the divine design from nature back to the Bible and vice versa.

In a theo-poetics that has fashioned the Christian imagination from the start, John's Gospel

announces a universe resplendent with divinity embodying everywhere from beginning to end, and especially in the mystery or sacrament of Jesus, setting Christian faith on its mystical course of seeing divinity manifesting throughout the universe. St. Paul likewise iterates this understanding as the Romans are reminded that "ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and perceived in what he has made" (Romans 1:20). His letter to the Colossians reaches a truly cosmic vision of Christ who is seen not only as the center and meaning of history, but also the epicenter of creation and all existing reality (Col. 1:15-20). In the second century, Irenaeus, one of the early Christian teachers, noted that "the Universal Church, through the whole world, has received this understanding from the Apostles themselves: that creation reveals the One who formed it, and the very work made suggests the One Who made it, and the world manifests the One Who ordered it."[17] About the "Book of Creation," Athanasius writes to a fellow Egyptian bishop: "the creatures are like letters proclaiming in loud voices to their Divine Master and Creator the harmony and order of things; and the firmament, through its magnificence, beauty and order, is a prestigious preacher of its Author, whose eloquence fills the universe."[18] But it was Augustine of Hippo whose theological works set the course of the tradition even to this day, who likewise instructed the Christian community to read the scripture of creation. Some people, he noted, in order to discover God, read books: "But there is a *great book*: the very appearance of created things. Look above you! Look below you! Note it. Read it. God, whom you want to discover, never wrote that book with ink. Instead He set before your eyes the things that He had made. Can you ask for a louder voice than that? Why, heaven and earth shout to you: 'God made me!'"[19]

This creation tradition had many other articulations throughout the centuries of Christian history, particularly in the monastic schools founded by Benedict of Nursia and refounded by Bernard of Clairvaux and the Cistercians, as well as the Victorines; in Celtic Christianity, and then the exquisite voices of Hildegard of Bingen, Meister Eckhart and the Beguines, Dame Julian of Norwich, Thérèse of Lisieux, Gerard Manley Hopkins, and in our own time, Teilhard de Chardin. But it had its real flowering and flourishing in the Middle Ages with the emergence of two mendicant movements: the Franciscans who brought incarnational spirituality to its most poetic and prophetic articulation; and the Dominicans, who labored to recover the depth and beauty of divinity's embodiment in creation, body, matter in the face of the denigrating Albigensian heresy. Arguably the most eloquent voices of these two very influential traditions are the neo-platonist, kataphatic Franciscan master, Bonaventure, who gave us an *Itinerary* of *The Soul's Journey to God* following the footprints of the Creator through creation. The other is the more apophatic, Aristotelian Dominican master Thomas Aquinas, who labored to set Christian faith in accord with the new science of his day and who gave Christianity its *Summa of Theology,* likewise perceiving the divinity manifesting in the multiplicity of beings arising from the One source of Being Itself.

But then there intervened several severe dislocations from the later Middle Ages up till modernity – the catastrophes of plague, the crisis of the Reformation, the derailment of a

coherent Christian cosmology by the countervailing forces of enlightenment, secularization, industrialization and the killing fields of the twentieth century – all of which set Christian hope heavenward, in an abandonment of Earth. Yet the underground streams of creation spirituality still run deep and strong and in our time these fountains of wisdom have sprung up again, baptizing two contemporary masters and mentors who bring new light to the Christian practice of "*Lectio Naturae*" – reading the Book of Nature – and its greater urgency for our moment: Thomas Berry and Thomas Merton.

Thomas Berry might be understood as the neo-Thomist and apophatist of the pair, preferring not to engage in traditional God-talk, but rather to evoke and evolve a new *cosmo-* or *geo-*poetics of the divine mystery by reading the Book of Creation in dialogue with the sciences of cosmology and ecology as they elaborate a new story of an emergent universe of wonder and mystery. In his reading of the cosmic text, Berry, the geologian, offers us an affirmation, a new story, a warning, a dream, a great work. Thomas Merton might be understood as a kataphatist – a creation mystic, and the ecological prophet of the pair, whose labor to read the Book of Creation returned him to paradise here and now in the contemplative recovery of his endenic consciousness and practice. In his reading of the Book of Nature, Merton, the ecologian, leaves us an incantation, an old story, a critique of Christian practice, a prophecy, a vision, a great work.[20]

Berry's affirmation states that the phenomenal world arises from a transphenomenal source, yet these are two aspects of one single energy. The divine, he says, is creating a world that is creating itself. The universe is the initial word of divinity still spelling itself out in endless creativity. The primordial scripture of the universe then is the only text without a context. All other scriptures are commentaries and interpretations, illuminations, explications. Merton, the poet, might say it this way:

> There is in all visible things an invisible fecundity, a dimmed light, a meek namelessness, a hidden wholeness. This mysterious Unity and Integrity is Wisdom, the Mother of all . . . . There is in all things an inexhaustible sweetness and purity, a silence that is a fount of action and joy. It rises up in wordless gentleness and flows out to me from the unseen roots of all created being . . . . This is at once my own being, my own nature, and the Gift of my Creator's Thought and Art within me, speaking as Hagia Sophia . . . . sent to me from the depths of the divine fecundity.[21]

Berry offers us a new telling of the cosmic creation story, drawing from science yet begging a sacred narration.[22] He says that the universe in its full extent of space and sequence of transformations is best understood as a story. He says that our greatest need for the survival of earth and humankind in our time is for an integral reading and a sacred telling of this great story as an empowering religious narrative to guide and energize the human venture. Merton's penetrating *lectio* of the old biblical creation story, however, is illuminating for the new scientific one because it casts light on humankind's sacred role in this evolutionary drama. Merton says

the early chapters of Genesis are precisely a poetic revelation of God's view of the universe and God's intentions for the human. The point is that God made the world a garden in which God takes delight. God made the human and gave to the human the task of sharing in the divine care for created things. God made the human in God's own image and likeness as an artist, a worker – "as the gardener of paradise."[23] Entrusted with the earthly paradise of Eden, Adam and Eve, our mythological progenitors, also were invited to be collaborators with God in "governing paradise."[24] Their partnership was so intimate that the Creator entrusted to these earthlings the naming and knowing of living things, an acquaintance at once simple, primitive, religious and non-violent, sustaining a clear vision of the singular vestige of God in the great multiplicity of creatures.[25] Paradise, in Merton's eyes, is an ontological reality which has an epistemological challenge; it is our vocation, our existential labor, to wake up to paradise all around us, and to do this by the therapy of contemplation.

Berry renders a severe critique of Christian teaching and of the Christian lectio of the Bible in particular, because he maintains it has distracted us for centuries from the primordial scripture of creation.[26] Poorly read, explained, and understood, the Bible has given us license for our rapacious ways toward the creatures and elements we have dominated, subjugating them as objects for use and not as subjects for communion. A too narrow reading of the Christian mysteries has focused on Jesus as text, without cosmic context (something unimaginable for St. Paul and the early Christian masters), attributing all value to the human and leaving other kind to be abused at our whim. With this reading of the scripture, the universe loses its sacrality. Merton would agree but focuses his critique on the failure of Christian formation to accentuate transformative spiritual practice over formulaic religious performance. He maintains that by stressing believing over perceiving, Christians fail to awaken the mind and heart of Christ, leaving us in the lonely isolation of the false self, whose dominant characteristic is an anthropocentric or human-centered consciousness that excludes the kind of wisdom discovered by communion with nature, a wisdom based on love of the cosmos, which he calls our "cosmic parent (both Mother and Father)" (*LE* 108).

For Merton, restoration of original sanity and wholeness is realized through the practice of natural contemplation. In this therapeutic work, one recovers original wholeness and integrity by a process of remembering paradise through reverent attentiveness and presence to nature. Like a voice in the wilderness of our self-wrought isolation and desolation, Merton cries out for the recovery of our paradise mind as our home ground through the work of contemplative conversion: "Take thought, . . . take thought of the game you have forgotten. You are the child of a great and peaceful race, . . . of an unutterable fable. You were discovered on a mild mountain. You have come up out of the godlike ocean. You are holy, disarmed, signed with a chaste emblem. You are also marked with forgetfulness. Deep inside your breast you wear the number of loss. Take thought . . . . Do this. Do this. Recover your original name."[27]

As their dialogue deepens, both creation masters remind us that because we do not know our true identity or name in this cosmic story, our self-centered arrogance and tremendous technical power have created a human world that is extinguishing the natural world. In a

rapidly deteriorating eco-system we have brought 67 million years of geological and biological evolution and flourishing to an end. Defaulting on our vocation to be the gardeners and governors of paradise, we choose rather to build a human-centered wonder-world, but have created unwittingly a planetary wasteland. Now the survival of Mother Earth depends on her most immature offspring and time is running out for us to re-imagine another way of being human on this Earth.

In the face of this impasse, Thomas Berry holds out a dream of reinventing the human and inaugurating the ecozoic age, a period he calls the next season of evolution for planet Earth that will be marked by a mutually enhancing rapport between human and other kind, guided by a new mode of presence to the subjects to be communed with on this Earth (Berry, *Dream passim*). He conjures a dream of awakening to our planetary destiny as conscious celebrants of the cosmos, which the poet Merton envisions this way:

> For the world and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness. The silence of the spheres is the music of a wedding feast. The more we persist in misunderstanding the phenomena of life, the more we analyze them out into strange finalities and complex purposes of our own, the more we involve ourselves in sadness, absurdity and despair. But it does not matter much, because no despair of ours can alter the reality of things, or stain the joy of the cosmic dance which is always there. Indeed, we are in the midst of it, and it is in the midst of us, for it beats in our very blood, whether we want it to or not. Yet the fact remains that we are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast away our awful solemnity to the winds and join in the general dance. (*NSC* 297)

Berry reminds us that in these initial years of the twenty-first century, we find ourselves in a critical moment when our religious traditions must waken again to the natural world as the primary manifestation of the divine. The very nature and purpose of the human is to experience the intimate presence of the divine that comes to us through natural phenomena. In Merton's teaching, we must recover our paradise mind and sensibility so that we might recover, restore, return to paradise. Berry argues that the deep psychic changes that are needed to withdraw us from fascination with the industrial world and its deceptive gifts will take a tremendous store of psychic energy. Indeed, he says we need a new meta-religious movement to awaken our energies to do the great work of this moment. Ultimately, only our sense of the sacred will save us.

Both Berry and Merton teach us that the original scripture is creation itself in its infinite unfolding of divine creativity, and reading this book, in the light of our religious scriptures and the revelatory codices of science, will restore our spent energies of imagination and hope. They knew so well that every creature is a word of God spelling out the glory and genius of God. In Merton's words, "Every plant that stands in the light of the sun is a saint and an outlaw. Every tree that brings forth blossoms without the command of man is powerful in the sight of God. Every star that man has not counted is a world of sanity and perfection. Every blade

of grass is an angel singing in a shower of glory" (*RU* 106). These Christian masters invite us to read the scripture of creation with bifocal spectacles. Just as the far-sighted reading of the ever expanding galaxies hyphenated by light-years will fill us with awe and wonder, so the near-sighted reading of our own planet's degradation will fill us with shame and regret. In the Catholic tradition we read the world through such multi-focal spectacles – a spectrum of mysteries: joyful, sorrowful, glorious, and illuminative. Each is transformative of what is beheld; all are transformative of the beholder. In relearning the practice of reading it, we must be prepared to behold creation. But *caveat lector*: let the reader beware as we take up the Book of Nature in all its wonder and woundedness: it is truly a Book of Revelation, at times visionary and more often now, apocalyptic. Yet we share with Merton and Berry the hope that in re-learning the practice of "*lectio naturae*" our Christian senses may be healed to see as if for the first time the mystery we hold in trust for all: divinity enfleshed. And yes, crucified. And yes – please God – rising.

1. Thomas Merton has inspired a trove of scholarship over the past four decades from various disciplines that explores and explicates his compendious legacy. See the Merton Bibliography at http://www.mertoncenter.org.
2. For a summary of Father Thomas Berry's legacy and publications, see http://www.thomasberry.org; see also John Grim and Mary Evelyn Tucker, *Thomas Berry: Reflections on His Life and Thought, Teilhard Studies* 61 (Fall 2010).
3. See especially Thomas Merton, *The New Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Cudahy, 1961).
4. Thomas Merton, *When the Trees Say Nothing: Writings on Nature*, ed. Kathleen Deignan, CND (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2003); subsequent references will be cited as *"WTSN"* parenthetically in the text.
5. Private correspondence.
6. "Introduction: 'The Forest Is My Bride'" (*WTSN* 40).
7. Thomas Berry, *The Great Work: Our Way into the Future* (New York: Bell Tower, 1999); subsequent references will be cited as "Berry, *Great*" parenthetically in the text.
8. The Cenozic Age is the last era of geological time which marks the flourishing of life as we have known it until now. Scientists are beginning to refer to this phase of Earth history as the Anthropocene, noting the ubiquitous impact of humankind on planetary systems (see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthropocene).
9. Thomas Berry, *The Dream of the Earth* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988) 7; subsequent references will be cited as "Berry, *Dream*" parenthetically in the text.
10. See Kathleen Deignan, "'Love for the Paradise Mystery' – Thomas Merton: Contemplative Ecologist," *CrossCurrents* 58.4 (December 2008) 545-69.
11. See "The Meadow across the Creek" (Berry, Great 12-20).
12. Thomas Merton, *The Seven Storey Mountain* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948) 11.
13. In 1948, having completed his doctoral studies in Western cultural history, Thomas Berry went to China to study Chinese language, culture and religions. In 1968 Thomas Merton traveled throughout Asia to engage in dialogue and study with spiritual masters and practitioners, particularly of Buddhism; he died in Bangkok, Thailand during a pan-monastic dialogue, after months sojourning in the East: see Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal*, ed. Naomi Burton Stone, Brother Patrick Hart and James Laughlin (New York: New Directions, 1973).
14. See Merton's *The Way of Chuang Tzu* (New York: New Directions, 1965); *Mystics and Zen Masters* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1967); *Zen and the Birds of Appetite* (New York: New Directions, 1968). See Berry's *Buddhism* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1967; New York: Columbia University Press, 1996) and *Religions of India* (New York: Bruce, 1971; New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).
15. See Thomas Merton, *Ishi Means Man: Essays on Native Americans* (Greensboro, NC: Unicorn Press, 1976) and Thomas Berry, "The Historical Role of the American Indian" (Dream 180-93).
16. Pope John Paul's full address is available at: www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/audiences/2002/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_20020130_en.html.
17. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, II.9.1.

18. Athanasius, *Letters to Serapion* (Patrologia Graeca, vol. 27, col. 124).
19. Augustine of Hippo, *Sermon* 126.6, in *The Essential Augustine*, ed. Vernon J. Bourke (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1978) 123.
20. For a sense of Merton's practice of reading the Book of Creation, see *Thomas Merton: A Book of Hours*, ed. Kathleen Deignan, CND (Notre Dame, IN: Sorin Books, 2007).
21. Thomas Merton, *The Collected Poems of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1977) 363.
22. Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era – A Celebration of the Unfolding of the Cosmos* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994).
23. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation* (New York: New Directions, 1961) 291; subsequent references will be cited as "*NSC*" parenthetically in the text.
24. Thomas Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, ed. Patrick Hart, OCSO (New York: New Directions, 1981) 368; subsequent references will be cited as "*LE*" parenthetically in the text.
25. See Thomas Merton, *A Search for Solitude: Pursuing the Monk's True Life. Journals, vol. 3: 1952-1960*, ed. Lawrence S. Cunningham (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1996) 189-90.
26. Thomas Berry, *The Christian Future and the Fate of the Earth*, ed. Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2009).
27. Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable* (New York: New Directions, 1966) 125; subsequent references will be cited as "*RU*" parenthetically in the text.