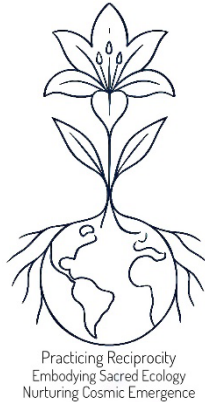


P.R.E.S.E.N.C.E.



An Ecologically Sensitive Spirituality

A Lecture by Thomas Berry

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The Thomas Berry Project
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Lecture Engagement Guide

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Overview

Thomas Berry's lecture situates spirituality in the context of fulfillment—not simply personal or religious fulfillment, but fulfillment in relation to the universe and the Earth. He argues that humans awaken to a universe that gives meaning, beauty, and intimacy, and that our true vocation is to live as a mutually enhancing presence within this larger community of life. He says that restoring the dignity of the plants, the rivers, the mountains, the oceans, the animals and the birds is the spirituality that is before us. And in that is our fulfillment.

Transcript

Introduction

This is wonderful. It is such a delight to be back in New Orleans; kind of a springtime delight to be able to come and be with you for a few days. If you cannot hear me, raise your arms, I sometimes drop my voice. This evening there is a subject that I was asked to speak about concerning spirituality. For me spirituality is fundamentally the question of fulfillment. How does a person obtain true fulfillment in these years of the late 20th century and the emerging 21st century. It is certainly a challenging time, a turbulent time, and for the next generation and the generation after that, probably as awesome and difficult a future or as challenging a future as any generation ever dealt with.

I was thinking of this as regards the collection of essays that I am writing. I gave the title of the book, that I hope to publish within a year, *The Great Work*. How can a person find fulfillment in these times? We are dedicated to personal survival, we get educated in order to find a place in the contemporary economic order; the general practice of religion is not that satisfying on the whole. And the question arises: How does a person obtain fulfillment?

Wonder, Beauty, and Imagination

Just to give you a brief idea of how I approach this subject, I received a manuscript of a book, soon to be published, with verses for children and I was asked to comment on it, and I wrote these lines:

A child awakens to a universe. The mind of the child to a world of meaning. The emotions of the child to a world of intimacy. The imagination of the child to a world of beauty. It takes a universe to make a child both in outer form and inner spirit. It takes a universe to educate a child. It takes a universe to fulfill a child. And the work of one generation in relation to the succeeding generation is to bring these two together into their mutual fulfillment. The child in the universe and the universe in the child.

Now, we could take this and use it as regards the human. As humans we awaken to a universe. We don't awaken simply to this or that, to trees and then to rivers or to clouds. A child experiences a beautiful and wonderful and fulfilling and exciting universe. And the difficulty that we are experiencing, the confusion and the impasse that we are witnessing in all the professions, is, I think, because we have somehow lost the universe. When I spoke here some time ago about the universe and the university, I said that the difficulty with the university is that it doesn't have a universe. Because, without a universe nothing is going to have any meaning. The universe in the phenomenal world is the only self-referent mode of being. The universe is the only self-referent mode of being in the phenomenal world and that is where everything starts. If we don't have a universe we are completely lost. Everything goes back to the universe and everything in the universe is universe referent. As humans, we are a component of the universe, and our fulfillment is in the universe. And the great work to which we are called, everyone is called, and all the professions are called, is to fulfill a role in the universe. And it's why our cosmology, our universe-ology, is the primary context of meaning as regards everything that we do.

And within the universe, the planet Earth is the more immediate context in which we find meaning. The planet Earth is the fulfillment of meaning as regards everything, every member of the planet Earth. The difficulty of these times, a person would say: How did we ever lose our awareness of this? And here is where the traditions, and I think particularly the Christian tradition, has lost itself, has lost a substance of what it should be about because it became alienated from its role in the universe. Ultimately Christianity exists as fulfillment of the universe, the universe has the prior status. The universe doesn't exist to fulfill humans. Ultimately, humans exist for the fulfillment of the universe and for the fulfillment of the planet Earth. That is the world of meaning and if we lose sight of that, if we try to make the planet Earth serve the human instead of the human serving the planet Earth, then it is not going to work.

Now how did this arise where we have tried to make the Earth totally subservient to the human? We have tried to make the Earth subject to all kinds of abuse under the excuse that humans need to do this. We need to poison the soil with fertilizer and chemicals of all sorts and pesticides and herbicides because somehow we think that that is going to be a better way of developing our food supply. But it won't work unless we begin with the idea that the Earth carries a mystery over the years. And it took billions of years for the Earth to work out that precise community, that precise relationship with so many components, so many species, with the insects and the bacteria, with the birds and the trees, the forests and the animals, and the oceans and the rivers and the mountains. These work together in a way that humans will never understand.

And as regards planet Earth, every being on the planet Earth has inherent rights. The trouble with the Constitution, one of the difficulties of the present is that America has a Constitution that is based on an inadequate jurisprudence. We have a jurisprudence, and we have a Constitution that guarantees rights; there are four components basically of America: personal freedom, private property, participatory government we call democratic government, and then there is something else that I can't quite remember now. I'm a little into the later years and my memory doesn't work as well as it used to. But what does not exist in the Constitution is rights to any non-human component of the planet Earth, and that is a deadly failure and that is basically why this continent is going down in ruins. Because, very simple reason, because we do not grant rights. Now when a person talks about rights to the non-human components of the planet Earth, they are not saying that they should have human rights, because human rights wouldn't mean anything to trees, wouldn't mean anything to rivers. Rivers have river rights; trees have tree rights. There is a qualitative difference, but unless every mode of being constituting the North American continent is granted its right to existence, its right to habitat, and its right to fulfill its role in the great community of existence then the community is going to go down in ruins.

So this sense of humans being part of the Earth project. The human project in every way is integral with the Earth project, and that is where our fulfillment is, in the beauty of the Earth, in the mountains and in the rivers, and in the wonder of things; but we have to take care of that wonder of things. It is a world of meaning. It is a world of beauty. It fulfills imagination. It fulfills the mind. It fulfills the emotions. It is what gives us poetry and music and dance and our literature. It all emerges from the outer world and the inner world. Our inner world wouldn't exist without the outer world. If we damage the outer world, we damage our inner world. If we don't see the stars in the sky, and because of light pollution and particle pollution our children don't see the stars in the sky. It's not simply a question of pollution or a danger to our health or a danger to our aesthetics. It is a loss of soul. We lose our souls if we lose the natural world.

When we cut the great forests, it is not just, and here is something that a person never, never hears, it's a question of jobs, as though cutting the trees was making jobs when its eliminating jobs, because after the trees are cut, where are the loggers going to go? They go cut another tree, but the whole thing is going away rather rapidly. We have cut 95% of the primordial forest of this country, only 1% is being protected and the others are being devastated.

We are one of the last continents, North America, South America, and Australia, were the last of the continents to undergo what we call modern development. Well, that is not exactly the way to put it, but were occupied by European peoples, and the European peoples when we came here, came without an idea of joining the great community of the North American continent. They didn't think that they could learn anything from this continent, that they needed to become a member of this society of the North American continent, not to make them subservient to an occupying force and some other continent. We thought when we came here, we thought that we had the best religion in the world. We had the bible, and certainly there is a valid way in which you can claim that. We thought we were the best educated, that we had the best political order, that we had the best economic order. That we had everything to give, provided this continent submitted to our exploitation. Then we would make it a glorious continent.

What happened was that by refusing to become a member of the North American continent and insisting that it follow the patterns that we brought and submit to the type of economy we insisted on, then we come to the impasse that we are coming to in this present time in which we are not fulfilled

because we are devastating that which could fulfill us. Because the divine comes to us in and through the natural world. We have no access to the divine immediately. Or we do in a way, but that's the idea of having eyes to see and ears to hear and the powers of touch and to experience a fragrance. The basic idea of having these channels of communication is to enter into the mystery of the divine as it comes to us through the song of the birds, it comes to us through the wonder of the mountains and rivers and all the living things. We are not angels. We don't go to God immediately the way the angels go to God. We don't understand things immediately the way the angels do. We go through our experience, our sense of experience, and that depends on having a certain sensitivity and an honoring of the natural world as the locus for the meeting of the divine and the human.

The Great Work of Our Time

Now I just wanted to make those comments to establish this setting for understanding of where we are at this present time and what our great work is. The great work is a vocation, we can say, for everybody. The great work of the future, the spirituality of the future is not something that is a calling for this person or that person, or people in economics or people that are in law or medicine or something like that. It is a universal call for everybody, it is the vocation of everyone. Everyone has a vocation to restore, to move the human community from a position of devastation of the natural world to a context in which we will establish a mutually enhancing presence to the natural world. That is the basic work. That is fulfillment, in that calling to establish a mode of being in which the human will be a mutually enhancing presence to the natural world. Because if we don't do that, that's the first thing. If we don't do that, everything goes.

Now there was a time when perhaps the great work was theological. And certainly there was a time when the great calling was to martyrdom in the early church. There has been a time in recent history when the great calling was the discovery of the divine in the poor and the suffering and go into the human pathos. And both of those still exist, and certainly the alleviation of the human pathos and the discovery of Christ in the poor and the suffering is an abiding context in which we live our lives. But beyond that we cannot save the poor, we cannot help the poor, we cannot help the ill, if we do not first take care of the context of the planet and of this continent.

We are losing on this continent 4-6 billion tons of topsoil every single year, if this continues then there will come a time when we can't feed anybody. The pesticides and the herbicides that we are using are devastating the soil that remains so that it loses its fertility. So the basic need is to work with the soil, not against it. We have the idea that if we crush all the insects, if we use herbicides and crush all the weeds, that we will get more food. We won't. The use of pesticides and herbicides and so forth is already self-defeating because the insects can mutate faster than we can invent new chemicals to suppress them. And many of the insects can learn to be nourished by our pesticides. We are losing now as regards the amount of crops that we are losing to the insects now, we are losing now precisely the same amount that we lost before we started using pesticides. It is a losing game. We can't beat the natural world because we depend on the natural world.

How this came about: three moments in Western history

Now there is just one more thing I wanted to say before we go into some of the more precise methods of healing. How did this come about? Let me tell you how this situation came about where we developed a spirituality of alienation from the natural world rather than integration with the natural world. Where we developed a spirituality of redemption rather than a spirituality of creation. Where we

developed a spirituality of justice for the human but no justice for the non-human. Where we would try to alleviate one without alleviating the other. It just won't work. Well, how did it come about?

It came about this way. And this is why a person needs to get some perspective on where we are in relationship to how we got here, because if we don't know how we got here, we won't know how to go forward in some creative way. There are three things, three moments in western history that are supremely critical.

The first has to do with the spirituality of the early Christian period in relationship with Greek humanism. It was a great triumph intellectually for Christianity to be able to avail itself of the philosophical insights and great achievements of the civilizations of the time. But what it did, it fostered what a person might call anthropocentrism, a centering on the human, because the Greeks were focused so profoundly on the human. In a way, they discovered the human in western civilization. It was a wonderful thing they did but that became subject to, later on, our over-occupation with the human to the neglect of the non-human.

The second point in Western civilization that we need to be aware of is the Black Death. Nobody seems to talk about the Black Death anymore. The Black Death occurred in 1347-1349, and that was the period when a third of Europe died. Half the people died in less than six months in Florence. More than half in Venice. It went from 45,000 to 15,000 in three months. It was the traumatic experience of western civilization. The really difficult thing about the Black Death was that they had no understanding of germs, they had no explanation of how did this happen, why it had happened, and the only thing they could think of was it must be a moral explanation. The world must have become wicked, and God was punishing the world. And for the first time, in art you get these paintings of Christ with his arms raised condemning the wicked into the inferno. You get these last judgement scenes. You never got that type of severity before. The basic idea that came through was that life had become wicked and the best thing to do was to be redeemed out of the Earth rather than to become intimate with the divine as manifested in the Earth.

So a new spirituality developed, the spirituality after the Black Death, I belong to a religious order that used to preach missions, and the mission's sequence of death, judgement, heaven and hell. That type of preaching came in. You begin to have this preaching of withdrawal from contact with the phenomenal order. You get Thomas A' Kempis spirituality which says that the more I go abroad into life, into the world of humans, the less human I am when I return. So there was this question. The dance of death came in. You have the art of dying. You have the morality plays that nothing is worthwhile except what you take with you when you die, which is your virtues. It emptied meaning right out of the natural world. And to my mind, we never, ever overcame it. This was the background of the spirituality of the 15th century. And the 15th century is what led up to the religious troubles of the 16th century. You get Protestant puritanism, you get Catholic Jansenism, which were very severe in their morality and so forth.

So that sets the stage for when the scientists and technologists came in. And they said, like Francis Bacon said, the way to deal with this is not by escaping out of the world but by learning to control the world. That was not an adequate answer, it was also a deadly thing, but we got these two divisions in our modern society, the scientific technological world trying to control the natural world and the religious orientation trying to be apart from it. Whereas the real solution was to become intimate with the natural world, both because that is where the divine manifests itself primarily and where the human

naturally belongs, because we are who we are and where we are in order to fulfill the dynamics of the cosmological order.

There is a third moment that happened. And this happened in this country back in the 1880s. And that's when the scientific technologies came in and this country took the leadership in moving from an organic ever-renewing economy to an extractive non-renewing economy. An extractive non-renewing economy is a terminal economy. The only sustainable economy is an ever renewing, organic economy that is based on the ever-renewing processes of the natural world that will give us enough each year of its abundance that it can still carry on life and renew itself.

But that's when, if you take the 1880's, that's when all the great corporations, well not all, but the key corporations that have existed for the past over 100 years were founded in the 1880s. The great corporations came into existence. The oil corporations, the U.S. steel corporations, the pharmaceuticals, the chemical corporations. All of these came into existence in the 1880s or the early 1890s. Then the automobile companies came into existence in the early 1900s. So you get the 20th century, which is exuberant, the wonder world that we were building. We were building Disney world and this wonder world we are going to come to by industrial, exploitive processes based primarily on petroleum. Our food is transformed petroleum from fertilizer, our clothes are made from spun petroleum, our transportation is petroleum based, our energy system, a great deal of the electricity in this country comes from petroleum, and all our plastics come from petroleum. But petroleum is going to be gone. Eighty percent will be gone in 40-50 years. So when I say that there is a challenge ahead of us it is going to be more immediately brought about by the exhaustion of petroleum. It is a limited supply at the rate we are using it. Now this is background.

What must we do?

But what must we do? We must move into an organic, ever renewing economy. In our energy, we must move into largely, as much as possible, into a solar-based economy. In the future in many parts of the world will never form an electric grid because they will go into a photovoltaic system where each household will get its electricity from a roof that will be able to transform sunlight into electricity.

We need to go back to the land as regards the organic production of food. Everyone, or just about everyone, should begin gardening. During the war years, in the 1940s, a large amount of food (in England it was over 60%) was grown by kitchen gardens. The lawns that we use need to be turned into garden space.

We need to establish a craft economy, and we need to begin walking and begin using bicycles. We need to redesign our cities so that we don't need an automobile. The automobile is over with, substantially. The automobile is not viable. We will need to go into this type of a world. This is what I have in mind in regards the vocation of the future.

The vocation of the university in the future is to place itself into a cosmological context where cosmology or universe-ology or the study of the universe and how the universe communicates itself with the human. And how the universe is mediated to us primarily through the solar system and through the planet Earth. Everything the universe teaches needs to be recognized as a way of communicating a sense of how humans fulfill their role in the universe, how humans function effectively in a mutually enhancing way with the rest of the planet Earth, and how we on the North American continent function

in relationship to the larger community. Sociology can no longer be a human society. We belong to the society of the North American continent.

Economics, the human economy is a subsystem of the Earth economy. The primary economy is the economy of planet Earth. Same with medicine. When I talk to administrators of universities, I tell them that ecology is not a course. It's not a program. It's the foundation of all courses, all programs, all professions, because ecology is a functional cosmology, and cosmology or universe-ology is placing ourselves within the only self-referent mode of being in the phenomenal order. The universe is self-referent in the phenomenal order. The phenomenal order is not itself without a trans-phenomenal referent. God, or in different societies the transphenomenal referent of the phenomenal world is given different names and so forth, but you will notice in the bible, the first thing the bible does in the opening chapters of Genesis is to give us a cosmology. The opening chapters in almost every religious setting, in their sacred world, begin with the universe because you have to first establish yourself within the universe.

The difficulty we are now experiencing is that we now have a new way of looking at the universe. We have an emergent universe that has gone through a sequence of irreversible episodes in its development, but we have to know where we are in that process of development. That now needs to be the basic background of our thought world, our professional world, and all the different aspects of life, because that is where our spirituality comes from.

Models of Spirituality

This is why when a person talks about a spirituality, we have the models of the past. We have the model of the saints, we have the model of the martyrs. And when you talk about religious personalities there's a whole span of religious personalities in the world generally. In the Buddhist world you have the monk, and then you have the guru in the Hindu world, the yogi personality. In China you have the sage personality. And in the Christian world the monk, the priest, the nun, you have the martyr. In the bible you have the prophet. And all these different religious types. Now we have in our times we have Mother Teresa that people think should be canonized, and probably she should be because she did a great spiritual work for the poor and the suffering. Her spirituality was a socially integral spirituality, but that type of spirituality, I would say, is not the most important thing at the present time. The most important thing at the present time is to enable the living world to survive, because you cannot have a social program without an Earth program. You cannot have a human economy without an Earth economy. You cannot have well humans on a sick planet. You cannot have justice to humans if you don't have justice for the larger community that you are a part of.

This reorienting ourselves away from a kind of a self-orientation that assumes that everything has to serve the human immediately, no matter how much abuse we inflict on the non-human world (here is the problem of Earth). This is what I would suggest is the spirituality of the future.

Let me give you some typologies of the past which did understand this to some extent. Not in the way that we now understand it. There are five models for Christian ecology.

The first would be, I would say, the Celtic with its animas model, that is, the spirit world. The Celtic world understood the power in all reality, and that is quite valid because everything is constituted with a power, a kind of a mystical power. The mountains, the rivers, and the animals, they are something more than just pieces of material. And our relationship to them cannot even be what is said that Christian

ecology is based on: custodial, we are stewards. Stewardship. I would say that is not adequate. Our first relationship is not stewardship. Our first relationship is a mystical rapport. It is a companionship. It is an intimacy. It is like with children and their parents; the first relationship is a love relationship. The first relationship is not exactly a caringness, though you can manifest it that way. There is a bonding that exists that is the basis of stewardship, but is deeper than stewardship, and more pervasive than stewardship. So that sense of stewardship is valid.

Now that's the second model of Christian ecology was of the Benedictine monks who had a kind of a stewardship model, which is perfectly valid, stewardship, but it needs to be understood in this more profound manner. Stewardship needs to be understood in terms of the divine manifestation so that the presence of natural reality carries this mystical rapport.

The third, you have the animas model of the Celtic world, the stewardship model of the Benedictine monk, the third would be Hildegard of Bingen, which was the fertility model. She perceived the divine in the greening of the Earth. Her metaphors have an almost erotic type of relationship of God and the Earth. There was this intimacy between God and the Earth that enabled the Earth to bring forth its wonders. And she was very cosmologically oriented. Hildegard of Bingen.

The fourth model is Francis of Assisi, the fraternal model. It is a kind of family model, a fraternal model. We all know the story of the wolves and the birds and all the animals and St Francis.

There is a fifth model, which is Teilhard de Chardin which is the evolutionary model of an emergent, evolutionary process that humans have a certain integral relationship with.

Now I am proposing a further model, what I call the Ecozoic model. Ecozoic meaning a period when humans will be present to the Earth in a mutually enhancing way. It is somewhat different from, it is assuming the emergent evolutionary process that Teilhard spoke of so profoundly, but it takes it a step further, because we are dealing with a period when evolutionary development based on Darwinian natural selection is over with. We have terminated the evolutionary process in its Cenozoic phase. We are now passing into a period when humans must necessarily, if they are going to survive and if the planet Earth is going to keep any of its integrity, what must exist in the future is a spirituality that is integral human presence.

Now there are examples of this: Wes Jackson in the sphere of organic farming. Richard Register is redesigning cities. Herman Daily and Robert Costanza in economics. Miriam Therese MacGillis as regards organic farming and as regards what's called community supported agriculture. There are a multitude of people. Wendell Berry in Kentucky, who does such wonderful things. Then there are the nature writers.

All of the ecologists and nature writers that I know of have a profound spiritual orientation to what they are doing. The most spiritual people that I know are the people that are involved in the healing of the Earth. It takes a lot, because the deluge of things that is happening now is proceeding so rapidly, and the mechanization of life and the commodification. See, that is the difficulty of our time. That we have to somehow change this commodifying the natural world. That is the curse. If there is one epitaph that a human being uses in relationship to another human being that conveys the deepest contempt, you might say, or the deepest injury, it is to say, "You used me." That is one of the worst things. So the Earth with the human could say, "You used me." The Earth is not there primarily to be used. It is primarily here for an integral relationship with humans. But not in a sense to be used as a commodity, it is there for much more sublime reasons than to be a commodity. And as soon as it is reduced to a commodity it can

no longer be inspiration for the human in terms of beauty, wonder, and the manifestation of the divine. All that goes when you commodify the planet Earth, and that is what is happening. We commodify the Earth. And religious people, we don't generally understand this. We know that something is wrong, but we don't understand it.

Finding Our Fulfillment

To restore the dignity of the plants, the dignity of the rivers, the dignity of the mountains, the dignity of the oceans, and the animals and birds and insects and so on, that is the spirituality that is before us.

I got a book the other day called *Intimate Nature*. It is about insects. I suppose it doesn't appeal very much to you to be told you have to develop a devotion to cockroaches or mosquitoes, but these too are a part of the community, and if you go to war with them like now, going to war with what we call bugs, you are in trouble. We are in trouble because we don't know how to relate to insects. But without the insects we are ruined. Without the insects the pollination of the plants wouldn't take place. Already the bees are declining in the Southern part of the country. The ants are in trouble, the Earthworms are in trouble, and we don't even have people that see that these are integral modes of life, and you have to know how to interact with them. If you get rid of the insects, you get rid of the birds. If you get rid of the birds, you get rid of the propagation of the plant world. Everything is connected closely with everything else.

The one person who understood this rather well, particularly in the sphere of education, that is why I like to give this book to college presidents or to college deans. A book that is titled *Education of the Human Potential* where she [Maria Montessori] starts off with what she calls the cosmic plan. This is how to teach six-year-olds. That they need to be introduced to the universe and to know how to relate the center of their own being to the center of the universe. If we don't do that, we will never function properly. She points out how this ennobles a child. How the universe is the answer to all questions. The imagination is excited and all the whole human development is based on this relationship with the universe.

So coming back then to the point I was asked to talk about, spirituality and ecology. I don't know if I said anything worthwhile, but you can see how I would deal with it if I did deal with it. When you hear ecology always think "functional cosmology" or "functional universe-ology" or a universe in its functional integrity. If we don't have a universe that functions, nothing in the universe is going to function. It is one thing. It is one society. It is one spirituality. We become spiritual by joining the spirituality of the Earth. It is a single economy, a single health. There are not two healths, human health and the planet Earth health, there is only one health system. And we all share in that one health system.

The final thing is this: this vocation of the future is for everybody. It is not a question of choice. I was thinking of this mission that we didn't ask to be born at this time and to have this issue thrown at us so to speak. We were chosen to be here at this time and to do this work. We weren't asked whether we wanted to or not. It is not whether you want to be spiritual in this context or not. You have no choice. You are here and here is the issue. The nobility of our lives, the nobility of younger people, is how we deal with the issue. There are certain determinations that we get from our genetic structure and there are determinations that come from the historical moment in which we live, certain determinations. And the society in which we live, and the nobility of our lives is how we deal with that. We have no choice of doing or not doing.

Once I was talking and the next morning a mother came to me and she said, “You know, my nine-year-old boy was here last night and he came to see me this morning and he said, ‘Mom I am chosen for something. There is something for me to do in life.’” You could tell that he had been rescued from uncertainty or that he was insignificant or something like that or he didn’t know what to do. He felt that he was chosen, that he was given something to do. We all have something to do and no matter what aspect of life we are in, there is something to do within that context. And that, I would suggest, is our spirituality and our fulfillment.

Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. Berry says spirituality is “fundamentally the question of fulfillment.” What does true fulfillment look like for you in our time, and how does his framing challenge or deepen your own understanding of spirituality?
2. Berry tells us that the primary manifestation of the Divine is not found in books, but in the natural world. How have you experienced that as true?
3. Berry warns that damaging the outer world damages our inner world: “We lose our souls if we lose the natural world.” Can you recall an experience in nature that nourished your soul? What might be lost if future generations are cut off from such experiences?
4. Berry critiques U.S. jurisprudence for failing to recognize the rights of non-human beings. What would it mean—legally, culturally, and spiritually—to affirm the rights of rivers, trees, and animals?
5. Berry describes the Great Work as moving humanity from devastation of the Earth toward a “mutually enhancing presence.” In what ways might your own life and work participate in this Great Work?
6. Berry argues that treating the Earth as a commodity destroys its power to inspire wonder and beauty. How do you notice commodification in your daily life, and how might we resist it personally and communally?
7. Berry insists that we did not choose to be born in this era, but we are chosen to respond to the ecological crisis. How do you respond to the idea that your life has a vocation tied to this historical moment?
8. How does Thomas Berry’s distinction between a spirituality of redemption and a spirituality of creation challenge traditional religious understandings of salvation and the divine?

Journaling Prompts

1. Spend some time writing out your initial reactions to this talk. What moved you? Where did you find resistance? Which one or two quotes specifically struck you? Why?
2. Berry says, “*The great work to which we are called, to which everyone is called, and all the professions is called, is to fulfill a role in the universe.*” A call to become a mutually enhancing presence on Earth. Journal your thoughts on what your role in the universe might be. Does it specifically relate to your profession? Is it something within your family, your community, the political context of your culture? Are you already fulfilling that role and does that role fulfill you? If not, what steps can you take to begin to take your place in the unfolding story of the universe?

3. Berry tells the story of a child realizing, “I am chosen for something.” Take time to imagine that you, too, were chosen to be alive in this exact historical moment. What gifts or strengths do you carry that might serve the healing of the Earth community?

Meditation / Prayer Practice

Spend some time in quiet prayer and contemplation around one of the following:

- *To restore the dignity of the plants, the rivers, the mountains, the oceans, and the animals and birds and insects. That is the spirituality that is before us.*
- *We are a component of the universe and our fulfillment is in the universe.*

Take a moment to write down any thoughts, questions, or new understandings that came to you.