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Fr. Thomas Berry's memorial service in New York City

Rich Heffern | Oct. 7, 2009 NCR Today

Vic Hummert, environmental activist and author from Lafayette, La. reports on the memorial service held at the Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine in New York City.

"Fr. Thomas Berry (1914-2009), the wisest person I ever met, was honored and remembered in the last of four major funeral/memorial services on Saturday, Sept. 26, 2009, in one of the largest churches in North America.

Rev. James Kowalski, Dean of New York's Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine, estimated attendance at 1,200, including his North Carolina relatives, former students, friends and associates from far and wide, assembling for the final major memorial service honoring Berry.

With the departure of Thomas Berry on June 1, 2009, we were deprived of one of the most stratospheric minds since Jesuit Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) tried to convince humankind that we are Earth coming to consciousness. A long-time president of the Teilhard Society, Berry had in his academic career the distinct advantage of seeing photographs of Earth from space and evaluating the universe's evolution from perspectives not available to Teilhard.

When author Mary Judith Ress questioned Berry about death in 1994 asking forthrightly: "Where will Thomas Berry be 50 years from now?," he responded: "Why, I'll be where I have always been ... Each of us is as old as the universe and experiences our greater self in the larger story of the universe. So we are as old as the universe and as big as the universe. That is our great self." From that point Thomas proceeded: "Everything we do or will do has consequences that will go on forever."

In *The New Cosmology and Death*, Berry mused: "We are born of others; we survive through others; we die into others."

In May of 1989 I phoned Berry, then living at the Bronx, NY, Riverdale Center amid thousands of books, to ask for time just to visit with the author of writings I so admired. "What are you doing for lunch?" was his response. Thomas drove us to a Yonkes diner for a three-hour meal That surprising encounter matched later meetings at Thomas Berry's seminars held throughout numerous centers of learning where he was invited over the years.

As we meander towards a precipice in Earth's four-billion year history, Thomas warned how humans are terminating the Cenozoic (Greek for "most recent") Age, while at the same time granting a ray of optimism in his yearning for a new spiritual ecological age described by him as the "Ecozoic."

Introducing *Tersely Yours II*, my second book of haiku poetry, Thomas supported my use of the three-line haiku as a useful teaching tool in our distracted digital culture.

Thomas has taught so
Many how to fall in love
With our universe "

-- Vic Hummert

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