



# Reflections with Thomas Berry

In Honor of the  
50th Anniversary  
of Earth Day

From the  
Thomas Berry—Kathleen  
O’Gorman Collection  
Loyola University New Orleans



# Reflections on Creation with Thomas Berry

## In Honor of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Earth Day

The Loyola Institute for Ministry (LIM) has developed this creation-centered reflection opportunity in honor of the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day during this time of coronavirus quarantine. It can be used either by individuals or as part of a class, parish, or small group online gathering. You may wish to adjust it to meet your local conditions. It is based on materials associated with Thomas Berry, a Catholic priest of the Passionist order, cultural historian, and “eco-theologian.” LIM Professor Emerita Kathleen O’Gorman collected these materials during Thomas Berry’s many visits to Loyola. LIM graduates, faculty, and staff—including Carol Lenox, Marion Danforth, Thomas Ryan, and Jennifer Shimek—have developed this and other materials.

### For More Information

- Regarding the Loyola Institute for Ministry’s focus area in Religion and Ecology [GO»](#)
- Regarding the Thomas Berry Project at Loyola [GO»](#)



Steps	Prayers and Readings
Pause for a minute of silence to remember that, now as always, we are in the presence of a God who loves us at every moment and without condition.	
Read this passage and reflect on it in silence.	Everything in the vast universe is necessary for each individual thing of the universe. So for us to be who we are, everything else has to be what it is, and also what is important in this type of an understanding of the universe is that everything comes into being in relation to everything

	else. I am not me unless you are you and the differences are most important. We are bonded together. We live or die together. (Thomas Berry, from a 1994 interview with Barbara Fleischer, Professor Emerita at the Loyola Institute for Ministry)
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Read this opening prayer slowly and pause for a moment of silence afterwards.	As we enter into this time of reflection, we thank you, God, for this universe in which we live our lives.  Awaken us to our place in the world.  Help us to see the gifts we have to share.  Lead us to communion with each other and all beings.  And teach us to be open to the gifts that others have to share with us.  Amen.
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<b><i>Lectio</i> Reflection on Some Words of Thomas Berry</b>  If you are reflecting on the following texts on your own, you should read each text three times and stop between each to reflect on the prompts and at the end spend some time journaling or reflecting on the final prompts.  If you are reflecting on the following texts as	
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<p>part of a group, you can designate readers for each text, which should each be read three times. After each of the three times, allow time for brief individual or group reflection. At the end, allow extended time for individual or group reflection. The text will be read out loud three times.</p>	
<p>Reflect on these instructions</p>	<p>Thomas Berry spoke of the three basic tendencies of the universe, tendencies that exist in every individual being: differentiation (no two of anything is the same), communion (the bondedness of all things), and spontaneity (the inner voice, the subject-ness, of everything). We are going to read and reflect together, in a sort of <i>lectio divina</i> process, on three pieces from Thomas' talks and interviews that speak to these and help us to contemplate our own identity within the larger community of existence.</p>
<p><b>Text 1</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. After the first time the text is read, just reflect on it and what strikes you.</li> <li>2. After the second time the text is read, listen for a word or a phrase that touches you. Reflect in silence on it or say your word or phrase out loud, as everyone else in your</li> </ol>	<p>The primary direction of the universe is towards differentiating. ... Every being is a unique being. There are no two realities the same. There are no two leaves on a tree the same. There are no two drops of rain, no two snowflakes, no two atoms, no two of anything that are the same. Sameness is a deficiency. It is the uniqueness that establishes the high value of things so that each being contributes something to the universe that no other being ever could contribute or ever will contribute. Difference is primary, and in the human order, difference is such that each individual seems almost to be a different species. ... And the sacred part of every being – of every atom, of every</p>

<p>group listens. After everyone has spoken, indicate in a sentence or two why the word or phrase you spoke has relevance or application to your life right now.</p> <p>3. After the text is read a third time, allow for 1 minute of silence to consider whatever new insight you may have received.</p>	<p>molecule, of every bird, of every tree, of every leaf even is that each brings something to the universe that is unique, that is not repeatable. If we do not realize the possibilities within ourselves as individuals, something is lacking in the universe that can never be replaced. There is a failure, so to speak, that is beyond remedy, because no one else will ever be able to do what each individual is called to do. Each individual is expressing the Divine perfection in a unique way, and to carry that uniqueness to its full expression is the obligation of each individual being.</p> <p>(From: "The Emergent Universe" lecture and the "Morality" interview with Kathleen O’Gorman)</p>
<p><b>Text 2</b></p> <p>1. After the first time the text is read, just reflect on it and what strikes you.</p> <p>2. After the second time the text is read, listen for a word or a phrase that touches you. Reflect in silence on it or say your word or phrase out loud, as everyone else in your group listens. After everyone has spoken, indicate in a sentence or two why the word or phrase you spoke has relevance or application to your life right now.</p> <p>3. After the text is read a third time, allow for 1</p>	<p>St Thomas tells us in the <i>Summa Theologica</i> that because the Divine could not express itself in any single being, the Divine created the great multiplicity of beings so that the perfection lacking to one would be supplied by the others, and thus, "The whole universe together participates in and manifests the Divine more than any single being whatsoever." ... Just like with any work of art or any achievement, the primary work is the design of the whole and each part is not seen simply in itself, it is seen in the context of the whole, and the whole has its purpose as the unifying aspect and it elevates all the parts into a new level of being, a new level of majesty. The human neither exists nor functions independent of its relation with the natural world to which it belongs. The human belongs completely within the created order as a part of a more integral whole. ... The human is a special mode of being in the universe. In the human the universe reflects on itself and its numinous origin in a special mode of reflective self-awareness. That is what humans are. We belong to the universe as a functioning role in the universe, and without us neither the universe has its ultimate meaning nor do we have meaning.</p>

<p>minute of silence to consider whatever new insight you may have received.</p>	<p>(From: "The University in the 21st Century" lecture and "The Difference between the 20th and 21st Century" lecture)</p>
<p><b>Text 3</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. After the first time the text is read, just reflect on it and what strikes you.</li> <li>2. After the second time the text is read, listen for a word or a phrase that touches you. Reflect in silence on it or say your word or phrase out loud, as everyone else in your group listens. After everyone has spoken, indicate in a sentence or two why the word or phrase you spoke has relevance or application to your life right now.</li> <li>3. After the text is read a third time, allow for 1 minute of silence to consider whatever new insight you may have received.</li> </ol>	<p>Now we have many selves. In fact the great secret of existence, to my mind, is the secret or the mystique of discovering the unity between our smaller self and our Great Self. The Great Self is the universe itself. So that in discovering the universe we discover ourselves. ... the whole universe has been required to produce ourselves individually. We're significant in that sense, and I think we don't understand our individual self until we are able to place ourselves within this larger context. ... Why are scientists so drawn to experience the universe? Well, it is the call of the Great Self to the small self, and we cannot be at peace until we venture into this. And the fact that this is endless is so important because if you ever came to the end, then the interest is gone, the discovery will be gone. And the wonderful thing about the Divine is that it is endless discovery on discovery on discovery. And that is to a large extent, the key to a successful and fulfilling life is keeping always the wonder of the child. As life unfolds, mystery unfolds unto mystery unto mystery unto mystery. And to be able to follow this and to experience this never ending sequence of wonders is the key to life itself. And it is a requisite for our fulfillment.</p> <p>(From: "Interview with Kathleen O'Gorman—Greenville Chapel" and "Morality" interview with Kathleen O'Gorman)</p>
<p>Reflection Questions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What does it mean to connect our own identity to all of creation? What are the implications of the claim that we cannot have a full understanding of our individual identity without recognizing our</li> </ol>

	<p>connection to all of creation, graced into existence by a God of infinite love?</p> <p>2. Loyola Institute for Ministry Professor Kathleen O’Gorman once asked Thomas Berry: “How do you live differentiation?” He responded: “It’s the fidelity that a person has to their own special gifts. We live differentiation in every act that we do.” How might you live differentiation as you go forth from this time of reflection? What might you do differently on your own and with others?</p>
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<p>Read slowly or reflect in silence on this prayer from Pope Francis</p>	<p>A Prayer for Our Earth</p> <p>All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures.  You embrace with your tenderness all that exists.  Pour out upon us the power of your love,  that we may protect life and beauty.  Fill us with peace, that we may live  as brothers and sisters, harming no one.  O God of the poor,  help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth,  so precious in your eyes.  Bring healing to our lives,  that we may protect the world and not prey on it,  that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.  Touch the hearts  of those who look only for gain  at the expense of the poor and the earth.  Teach us to discover the worth of each thing,  to be filled with awe and contemplation,  to recognize that we are profoundly united  with every creature  as we journey towards your infinite light.  We thank you for being with us each day.</p>
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Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle  
for justice, love and peace.

—Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'* #246.

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