

Genesis Farm E-news

December 2009

Dear Friends of the Farm,

We are nearly ten years into this new millennium. This season offers time to reflect on the vast changes that have transformed our lives and our world since 2000. And the story of this decade provides a context for discerning our way into the next one.

Thomas Berry described these early millennium years as ushering in a "*century of anxiety.*"

Most of us could not have imagined the trauma of September 11, 2001, or in its wake the rapid deployment into wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Neither could we have anticipated the images of people being tortured by our government and in our name. We could not have been prepared for the continuing lawlessness of governments against their own people throughout Asia and Africa, or the peaceful protests of millions of people in the "free" world met by disturbingly uniform arsenals of security police trained to quell public dissent with the most frightful of sci-fi weaponry. We could not have foreseen the rising specters of peak oil, the unprecedented violation of land and life in the desperate technologies of mountaintop-coal removal or tar sands extraction and gas shale mining. And on top of all this, the relentless campaign against family farmers and the imposition of unreasonable burdens on them and their farm animals through the determination of agribusiness to control the world's food supply, yes, even with the poisoned promises of feeding the hungry of the world through genetic engineering of seeds, crops, animals and forests.

This commentary on a single decade could be overwhelming. Yet, in spite of all this danger and suffering there has also been a remarkable maturing of the human spirit expressing itself everywhere in a courageous care for life in all its forms.

Surely this has also been a decade of deepening human consciousness. A grassroots tide of civil society has birthed itself into more than two million organizations speaking out in defense of the rights of all people and all

creatures, and taking action to foster the growth of restorative work among communities and ecosystems. In *Blessed Unrest*, Paul Hawken describes this birthing as Earth's immune system become conscious. This movement is unprecedented in its scale and in the speed of its growth. Throughout the world, people are rising up to defend their lands and regions, their water, air and animals, their crops and seeds, their music, their religious beliefs, their children and the free flow of information. Bioregionalism is on the rise...and so is human willingness to break from the stupor of consumerism and materialism to foster the unity of life on this small, threatened planet.

While we approach the end of this first decade of the 21st century, Genesis Farm is also approaching the end of our third decade here. A span of 30 years provides a perspective from which to identify the continuity of these more recent events with earlier ones we have experienced since coming here in 1980. Clearly it has been a privilege to live and work in a place focused on these trends, both to grapple with their meaning and to probe for ways to respond creatively to them. The privilege of reaching out in collaboration with others, to network and support each other, to share and develop resources and insights has been a gift beyond comparison for which we give immense thanks.

In all of this the underlying bedrock has been the new understanding of the Universe and Earth as illumined through the writings and work of Thomas Berry. To have witnessed the emergence of this land we call Genesis Farm, with our spaces and resources, and to have participated in the service of sharing these insights and questions with others over three decades, is humbling.

As many of you know, Thomas Berry slipped away from us this past June 1st at the age of 94, barely a week after putting the finishing touches on his last two books: ***The Christian Future and the Fate of Earth*** and ***The Sacred Universe: Earth, Spirituality, and Religion in the Twenty-first Century***. Both volumes invite religious traditions to redefine and revise their immense wisdom to integrate the incomparable revelations of the Divine shining forth through our discoveries into the known Universe and the emergence of Earth. No other perspective, he suggests, can awaken the capacity we need to stop our assault on the natural world and recapture the sense of unity needed to break through the alienation of humanity from nature and from each other.

Thomas Berry's contribution to the future of life is immeasurable. He gave uncommon attention to the fundamental causes of our alienation from nature. Rooted as he was in history of religions and world cultures, he spoke tirelessly to the importance of religious traditions to examine the cosmology, the origin stories out of which the religious world of meaning was woven. His scholarship demanded of him a wisdom that could speak truth to power and confront the extolling of the human agenda at the cost of the natural world. He was a generous, kind, courteous and sensitive human being who gave unstintingly of whatever he had. Three times he broke up his priceless libraries, and each time Genesis Farm received countless volumes of his books, some with his marginal notes and underlines intact.

There are no words to express the loss we feel on so many levels, for his interest, guidance and support were unending. With gratitude and renewed vigor we move into what is emerging now in the life and work of Genesis Farm.

In ***The Great Work***, Thomas described our present dependency on the diminishing reserves of fossil fuels as the *Petroleum Interval*, the period which made possible the explosive technologies of the 20th century and their devastating effect on the planet. In another piece he described the *Extractive Economy* in which massive amounts of fossil fuels are being substituted for human labor and animal power, for purposes of the human enterprise without regard for the common good. He warned of the corresponding deficit that would result in every natural system. He challenged the universities of industrialized nations to reform their subservience to the Corporation and to the utilitarian function of educating the young to be ever more efficient exploiters of the planet. He warned of the rise of the corporate state and professed his belief that religious institutions of the world were obliged to resist such a fate, suggesting that they could renew themselves through the study and contemplation of the emerging universe in its origin, nature and functioning, for, as he said, the universe is the primary revelation of the divine, and what we have discovered in our times expands the depths of this sacred revelation. He spoke of Earth as a unity of highly differentiated regions rather than as a uniformity, and he emphasized the necessity of a bioregional context for reinventing and re-localizing our way into the future.

Now as we move toward our 30th year, we trace within our own story the long preparation for the next phase of our small part in the Great Work. We are preparing to help foster the emerging *Transition Movement*, which is seeking to promote profound, life-giving changes for individuals and societies as we face into the addictions to which we have succumbed in this *petroleum interval*. The vision of this movement is that together we can reclaim our resilience at the community level, rebuild our interdependency with each other and all life forms, and renew our reliance on the culture and history that hold us in that sense of place which gives us life. We *can* regain a deep sense of the sacred energy revealed through the cosmic story, through the primordial relationship of Earth and Sun freely giving all that is needed for the existence within this fundamental unity. Translating this sense of the sacredness of energy to serve the emerging *Transition Movement*, as well as the already committed two million grassroots organizations arising in our times, is a privilege to which we commit ourselves.

We hope you, our dear and faithful circle of friends, will join us in living into this service in 2010.

Miriam MacGillis, OP