



## **THE SHAMANIC MISSION OF THOMAS BERRY**

### **A PERSONAL MEMOIR**

**By  
Mike Bell  
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### **INTRODUCTION**

**I want to thank you for inviting me to talk to you today about The Shamanic Mission of Thomas Berry. Preparing this talk has brought back a sense of great loss but also many wonderful memories. He was a man of tremendous influence in so many areas of human life. Recently I typed the words “Thomas Berry” into Google. I got 44 million, 400 thousand responses. By contrast, I typed in Mike Bell and the name of my company. I got 15 responses.**

**This story begins on a beautiful May morning, 1925, in the community of Greensboro, North Carolina. An eleven year old boy went for a walk. His family was just moving into a new house on the outer edges of the city and he was curious about the lay of the land. He walked a short distance down a hill to a creek, crossed the creek, and found himself in a meadow. Then something happened. We are not sure what, and he himself indicated that he was not exactly sure either. But he was suddenly overwhelmed by the beauty of the white lilies rising above the thick grasses, the singing of the crickets, the woodlands in the distance, the clouds drifting across the sky.**

At that moment he had a profound psychological and spiritual experience—what I will call in this talk *a shamanic vision* out of which evolved his *shamanic mission in life*. He discovered a wonder-world that he carried deep in his psyche and that influenced the evolution of all his thinking. To quote him *directly* “...*whenever I think about my basic life attitude and the whole trend of my mind and the causes to which I have given my efforts, I seem to come back to this moment (in the meadow) and the impact it has had on my feelings for what is real and worthwhile in life.*” And then he articulated the fundamental principle that guided his whole life. “*Whatever preserves and enhances this meadow in the natural cycle of its transformation is good; whatever opposes this meadow or negates it is not good. My life orientation is that simple. It is also that pervasive. It applies in economics and political orientation as well as in education and religion.*” (“The Meadow Across the Creek,” in *The Great Work*, .13)

That young boy, Thomas Berry, died on June 1, 2009. He was 94. He became one of the great original thinkers of the past century and one of its foremost spiritual leaders.

Throughout the course of his life many scholars have studied his writing and thinking. Their intellectual competence and scholarship is far beyond mine. So this is not a scholarly interpretation of Thomas Berry’s work or his thinking.

This is a personal memoir: my recollection of Thomas and my interpretation of his thinking based upon our many conversations. This interpretation is strongly influenced by my work with indigenous communities over the last 30 years.

In the latter part of his life, Thomas became a close friend, a mentor and in many ways a father figure for me. I would travel down from Canadian Arctic twice a year, and more recently from Vancouver Island. I would meet with one or two friends in New Jersey and together we would drive down to spend a few days with Thomas in North Carolina.

I’ll begin by talking about “Me and Thomas Berry.” Who he was, who I am, and the nature of our relationship. Next I’ll talk about his shamanic mission: the concept I believe that best describes his vision and work. I’ll conclude by describing what I think is his legacy: his sense of Earth as the primary source

of all spirituality, and his challenge to all of us to help restore Earth--to undertake what he called *The Great Work*.

## ME AND THOMAS BERRY

### *The Passionists*

I first met Thomas almost 50 years ago. We lived together in a monastery on Long Island, New York. I was a young student just starting my journey to the Roman Catholic priesthood. Thomas was, at that time, teaching oriental religions in St. John's University.

The religious order we both belonged to was called the Passionists—a monastic order founded in Italy in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century and transported to the United States in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. It was a preaching order that lived a strict monastic life—chanting psalms five times a day in the chapel, including getting up at 2:00 a.m to chant and pray for an hour, but it was also a preaching order. Periodically its members went out to give parish missions (a series of spiritual exercises) and retreats. The focus of its ministry in those days was quite narrow—the Passion of Christ and his death on the cross—thus the name “Passionists.”

Even by monastic standards, Thomas was a man of mystery. We young students knew very little about him other than that he was a cultural historian teaching Asian religions in universities around New York City. We knew he had been a foreign missionary in China, had done some work in other countries, had taught himself to read Mandarin and Sanskrit and lived a life dedicated to study and contemplation. When we returned to our cells at 3:00 a.m. we were supposed to go to sleep. We found out years later that Thomas, instead of going back to sleep, spent the rest of the night studying until it was time for morning prayers. To make sure he wasn't disturbed by some over-zealous superior doing a bed check, he taped the cracks around his door so the light wouldn't show out in the corridor. And this went on for many years.

It was quite obvious to all of us that Thomas didn't fit into the Passionist mould. He was not a traditional preacher, and his theological and spiritual interests extended way beyond the narrow focus of the death of Christ on the cross. They extended far beyond Roman Catholicism, Christianity and even the world's great religions. This made him, to put it mildly, somewhat suspect. Because he was marching to the tune of his own drum, we were advised by our superiors not to use him as a spiritual director. Those of us who thought of

ourselves as radicals—if you can imagine a radical monk in the 60s—would go to confession to him, something they could not prohibit.

On weekdays Thomas would spend much of his time at the university teaching oriental studies, but, at one low point in his life, his superior, thinking he was becoming proud, refused to let him teach. Spiritual pride was the eighth deadly sin. To keep him humble, the superior made him serve as porter, the person answering the door of the monastery who would summon whatever priest the visitor wanted to see. When Thomas complained about this to one of his friends from China, the friend pointed out that Confucius himself served as a porter. Thomas eventually appealed to higher authority in Rome and he was permitted to resume teaching.

During this time as the monastery's porter, Thomas would sit in a small room off the main foyer, reading his books and doing his writing. We were always curious about what he was reading. I remember one day another young monk and I hung around the front door. When Thomas went to answer the door, we sauntered into his room to see what he was reading. It was a book full of squiggles. Is that Aramaic, or Coptic, or what? We didn't have a clue what language the squiggles represented. I had the bright idea of putting my finger in the page and turning to read the cover of the book—and, of course, the book's title was also written in squiggles.

Many years later we asked Thomas why he became a monk, particularly a Passionist monk. Why didn't he become a Jesuit or a member of some other famous teaching order? He gave his stock answer. "When I was a young man" he said, "I was a brooder. And in those days, the only place they would let you brood was in jail or in the monastery—so I chose the monastery." The Passionists, with very few exceptions, did not understand Thomas, but he was always deeply indebted to his religious community for the support they gave him throughout the course of his life.

After a couple of years I was moved to another monastery and I eventually left the Passionists and the institutional priesthood. I married, we started a family and eventually, after a few years working as a community organizer in Milwaukee's drug culture, we moved back to Canada and eventually found our way to Baffin Island, the fifth largest island in the world, a thousand miles from top to bottom. It is situated in the High Arctic north of Quebec and runs parallel to Greenland. I was the Superintendent of Social Services for the

**Baffin Region and worked in the few small Inuit communities throughout the region.**

***Life in the Arctic***

**When I first got to the Baffin I was quite confident in my abilities. I had a number of degrees, a lot of street work experience, had even worked for five years as an administrator of a health care facility in northern British Columbia. At times, in my arrogance, I figured I was just who the Inuit were waiting for.**

**I was most anxious to try out my management theories: these intellectual contexts which help us structure our organizations and service delivery systems. But I quickly discovered that these contexts weren't working in the cross cultural environment I found myself in. Another thing. I'd be way up at the top of Baffin Island in community meetings. It would be in the dead of winter, -40 below, in 24 hours of darkness, and I'd be holding forth on child welfare services or correctional services or mental health services—very serious stuff. But I'd find myself competing with elders. As I listened to their speeches through a translator, they would be saying over and over different versions of the same mantra “Learn from the land. Learn from the land.” I thought their words were interesting from a cultural point of view, but not relevant. So with my organizational contexts falling apart, and the elders, in my opinion, not addressing the real issues, I was going through a vocational crisis. Was I really cut out for this type of work?**

**Then one day, in the search for an organizational context that would work in this environment, I picked up one of Thomas' books and read these words: “*The universe is the only text without a context.*” The words began to sink in. Could this be the context I had been looking for? Could it be that all human endeavours should be organized the way the earth and life organizes itself? And a short time later I read the clincher: “*We are not a collection of objects. We are a community of subjects.*” What Thomas was saying, in effect, was that the Earth was a living organism, and there was some form of consciousness in the Earth, in its species and in human communities and organizations. And where did this consciousness come from? If we have consciousness and we have come from Earth, our consciousness, in some way, had to come from the Earth. It was not only the people in the organizations that were living. It was, in some sense, the communities and organizations themselves. And as this reality began to dawn on me I suddenly thought back to the words of those**

elders. They were saying to us: “We have come from the earth, we will return to the earth. Learn from the earth.” And the connection was made.

I reconnected with Thomas in 1990 at an earth and spirit conference in Seattle. By this time he had become quite famous as a thinker and a leader of the environmental movement around the world. When he walked onto the stage to give the keynote speech, a thousand people stood up and started cheering. The lunatic fringe had become the wall-to-wall carpeting. That Sunday my wife and I went to mass in a local parish to hear Thomas. He talked about the aboriginal community and about native medicine men, shamans and mystics. I was sure that very few people had ever heard a sermon like that. And, of course, the link between his thinking and my work in the Arctic was obvious. A couple of years later I began travelling down to North Carolina with former Passionist colleagues to visit him.

*Visiting Thomas in Greensboro, North Carolina.*

Those visits were wonderful experiences. We’d spend a couple of days with him and he always seemed to start our conversations asking for a report on my work in the North. I’d tell him what was happening and raise issues, he’d share some thoughts. He’d then say to us, “Well, what would you like to talk about.” And we’d say, “Whatever you want to talk about Tom.” And he’d start talking. We’d take him out to lunch and supper in local restaurants where he was well known by everyone. We would often be greeted by people at the door who’d say “Hello Dr. Berry, welcome.” We once asked him where did the ‘Dr.’ come from. And he would say, somewhat sheepishly, “Oh that’s my sister’s doing.”

His sister is Margaret Berry, now a woman in her early late 90s. She had been university teacher with a PhD, spent 30 years living in a convent, and finally decided to leave and become his personal secretary. She called him “Brother”, as did all the members of his family. This is a common custom in the American south—a title of honour to the family’s leader. So when I talked to Margaret on the phone or wrote to her I would call him “Brother.” It made me feel like a member of the family.

Brother often described his sister Margaret as “the indestructible Margaret” and he’d always add, “I don’t know what I’d do without her.” Margaret always arranged our visits, helping us pick dates, suggesting reasonably priced motels around Greensboro and giving us exact instructions on how to drive to Thomas’ place. Each visit she would invite us to lunch. She lived in a

home for assisted living where Thomas also lived for a few years towards the end of his life.

In much of the last decade of Thomas' life, Margaret took on the job of cataloguing all his books, writings and files to send to Harvard University Library which had requested them. She also served as his initial editor, which was not always an easy task. Brother thought so hard about what he wanted to say before he wrote things down that he was always wary of anyone editing his writing. And this even applied to his sister. On one occasion we asked him about Margaret and he said, "Well we've been having a squabble about her editing." He went onto explain. "In something I wrote recently I referred to a young faun. Margaret said to him, "Brother you can't say that. It is redundant. All fawns are young." And he looked at us and, pleading his case and said, "But I said to her that some fawns are younger than other fawns."

Our conversations with Thomas ranged across the broad scope of his knowledge: From cosmology and the origins of earth, to Mencius, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century interpreter of Confucius, to Thomas Aquinas whom he greatly admired, to the Council of Trent, to Teilhard de Chardin, to Earth Jurisprudence, to the environmental crisis which he saw as fundamentally a spiritual crisis. He was distressed that Rome and the Roman Catholic hierarchy seemed completely unaware of the severity of the environmental crisis and did not seem to understand the revelatory nature of the universe. He was delighted at the number of religious communities around the world, especially communities of women, that had been influenced by his work and were setting up eco-spirituality centres.

And there were many moments of fun and amusement, especially when we were all talking about our monastery days or he was telling us about his childhood and his family. He was one of 13 children. He described his mother's child rearing approach as "benign neglect." And there was often a lot of laughter.

On one occasion, after he had moved into the home for assisted living, I gave him a bottle of single-malt scotch that I bought at the duty free shop on my way down from Canada. He thanked me and asked me to put it up in the cupboard above the sink in his room. The next visit down I did the same thing, knowing he enjoyed a drink of scotch. I put that bottle up in the cupboard. On the third visit I had another bottle of scotch and, as I was putting it up in the cupboard, I noticed the other two bottles, still unopened. I

said to him, “Hey, what’s going on here? You’re supposed to be drinking this stuff. He looked at me sheepishly and said, “Well, actually we are not allowed to drink in this place. The only time I get to have a drink is when I got out with you guys for meals.” I shook my head in disappointment and said to him, “Geez, I thought you were going out to lunch with us because you appreciated our great intellectual abilities and our stimulating conversations. Now it turns out that you were only going out with us to do some drinking.” In the next few visits when he’d look at his watch and say, “Well I guess we should go out to lunch,” I’d look at him and say, “Getting thirsty are we?” He’d laugh.

So that is Me and Thomas Berry. I’d now like to turn to discuss the thought and vocation of Thomas Berry—his Shamanic Mission.

### THE SHAMANIC MISSION

#### *About Shamanism*

In C.S. Lewis’ Narnia Chronicles there is the story of the Witch and the Wardrobe. Four young children wander out the back of an old wardrobe—and discover a wonderland. Something like that happened to Thomas Berry when he happened on that field as a child; a door opened but he discovered a real world, not a fictional one.

Those of us who knew Thomas well recognized within him an ability—a sixth sense—to see the world and think of the world in a different way than the rest of us see it or think about it. It all began in that day in the meadow. Along with that vision came a sense of mission—an obligation to tell the story—the story about the earth and about our relationship as a species with the earth. In looking for models to help him explain his vision and mission, Thomas talked about indigenous peoples. Traditionally they have understood the Earth and their relationship to it in a different way than we have come to see it. He was particularly fascinated by the role of the shaman.

Shamanism is the world’s oldest religion, pre-dating our established religions by many centuries. Shamans have a special power to commune with the spirit world of nature. Thomas saw the need for us get outside our cultural filters and see the world the way it really is. The shaman was the historical figure who could do this. If we look at some of the characteristics of shamans and then look at Thomas’ life, the connection will become obvious.



### *The Shamanic Vision and Call*

**Not everyone can become a shaman. It requires some kind of calling. Among indigenous peoples there are certain characteristics that appear early in life and, when these are recognized by the community, the shaman undergoes a certain training and development. One of the first manifestations is some kind of profound psychological experience or vision. And that vision becomes a guide for the Shaman's life—a vision he must communicate to his people.**

**When he was nine years old, Black Elk, the great Sioux shaman, had a series of dreams that might remind some of the visions of the prophet Ezechiel. These dreams were interpreted by the elders of his community, leading to the vision of the sacred hoop where all the nations of the world would come together and live in harmony.**

**Plenty Coups, the last traditional chief of the Crow Nation, had his vision when he was also nine years old. He saw the Buffalo disappearing into a hole in the ground and out of the hole came “spotted buffalo”—the white man's cattle. He saw the great wind blow across the world and knock down all the trees except the tree of the lowly chickadee, which survived because of its ability to adapt to changing conditions. Plenty coups realized that the white people would eventually over-run the Crow Nation and survival of his people meant being able to adapt to change.**

**Thomas Berry was a late starter. His vision came when he was 11, when he crossed that creek and went into the meadow. He saw in a profound way our relationship as humans with the Earth and how that relationship was continually being destroyed by modern society. And he realized then that his mission in life was, as he often put it, to tell the Great Story—about the earth, about how it came into existence, how it developed and how, in almost the last hours, the human appeared. He saw that we are destroying our planet's life support system. This destruction is so profound that Thomas saw us coming to the end of the Cenozoic era, which has existed since the time of the dinosaurs, 65 million years ago. He saw our only hope was to help usher in the new age, what he called “The Ecozoic Era,” a time of new mutually enhancing relationship between humans and Earth.**

**Thomas was fully aware of his mission. One day I asked him what he was doing through all of those years of study and his life as a university professor--before he became a “geologist” and focused on cosmology and the Great Story of our relationship with Earth. He said, “Preparing.”**

### *The Shamanic Journey: Serving the Community*

One of the defining characteristics of shamans is their ability to go on mystical shamanic journeys, to the upper reaches of the galaxy or down into the bowels of the earth and the depths of the seas. These journeys have a purpose. They are meant to find things that the community needs—particularly animals that people needed for food, clothing, shelter and tools for hunting and fishing. The Shaman would set off on a journey to find and negotiate with the animals and lead them closer to the people.

The Inuit only came off the land in the early 1960's. One day I asked an Inuit Elder, a woman who spent most of her life living a nomadic existence on the land, how the community would know when it was time to abandon their snow houses and move closer to where the hunting was better. She said to me: "The shaman would tell us."

Thomas journeyed to various parts of the world---to China, to the Philippines, to Europe, but his real shamanic journeys were into what he described as "the far reaches of the cosmic mystery." (*The Dream of the Earth*, 212.) Through his study, research and reflection he journeyed into the mysterious psyche of the Earth. He learned from Teilhard de Chardin what he had sensed as a child: that the earth, from the very beginning, is not just a physical reality. It is also a psychic/spiritual reality: a living, self organizing body that has certain capacities that reflect some kind of consciousness.

In the introduction to his first book, *The Dream of the Earth*, Brian Swimme, his close friend and colleague, talks about Thomas' journey and his mission.

"He comes back to the culture in the ancient tradition of the shamanic personality—after long contemplation on the ultimate issues, he returns with a vision for the people. He comes back and speaks of the simplest things—the sky, the rivers, the soil, the human smile, the living community. He speaks of the earth, he speaks of a vision he finds everywhere, even in the distant past, even in the unborn future." (Introduction p.1X)

### *The Shaman as Healer*

A second characteristic role of the shaman was that of a healer. Sometimes this involved physical healing but, as Mircea Eliade the great authority on shamanism pointed out, the healing is more often psychological or spiritual.

**Sickness was perceived as a loss of soul or spirit. It was the shaman's job to search for the lost soul, find it, and return it to its owner.**

**Thomas often described our rapacious culture as being sick. He likened the sickness to a sort of communal autism. One day he asked a high school student what autism was. The young boy responded that it is when a person becomes so locked up in themselves that nothing else can get in. It is an isolation process. And that is how Thomas felt about this illness affecting much of mankind.**

**It has afflicted our four major institutions: the economic institutions that see earth as nothing more than a collection of resources, put there for our use; the educational institutions which fail to teach the true nature of the earth and too often become part of the military-industrial complex; the political institutions that support the status quo; and of course the religious institutions that fail to recognize that the earth is the primary source of revelation. In all dimensions of life we have lost our soul—our awareness that we are part of a living earth. We have shut ourselves off from what is the ultimate source of our survival. And that is why we are in need of healing.**

**I can't deal with all four of these institutions but I would like to say a few words about several of Thomas' comments on religion—some of which have been perceived as outrageous.**

**Given the far reaching implications of his thought, Thomas was very careful never to refer to himself as a theologian, though many others have referred to him as an eco-theologian. Thomas preferred to think of himself as a "geologist"—a student of the Earth.**

**Thomas often made the point that he did not like to use the word "God". For him the term was "loaded" and often suggested exclusivity: a Catholic God, a Lutheran God, a Jewish God a Muslim God. He preferred to use a more neutral and embracing term—the Divine, the divine presence, the creative Divinity.**

**Some years ago on Earth day I remember hearing him interviewed on the CBC science program, Quirks and Quarks. The interviewer asked him what the churches could do about helping develop an awareness of the environmental movement. He said "It would help if they put the Bible on the shelf for about twenty years."**

**Many of the churches and Christian tradition itself have been infected by a concept that the Earth—the world—is evil. Thomas traced this attitude back to the Black Death pandemic in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> Century where, from 30% to 60 % of the Europe’s population perished. Because they knew nothing about viruses, people assumed that God was punishing the world for its sinfulness. This led, in both Catholic and Protestant denominations, to a belief that the world was evil and had to be redeemed. Once the earth becomes evil, it becomes the enemy, and it is alright to abuse it.**

**The most important aspect of the earth for Thomas from a spiritual perspective was that it was revelatory. It taught about the divine presence. So for Thomas there were two great books, Book 1 and Book 2—and the Bible was Book Two. The only way we know of a divine presence is through what our eyes tell us about the gorgeous nature of the world around us. If we lived on the moon, he often said, we would have no understanding of beauty, majesty, intimacy, joy, relationship.**

**Finally, the shaman had a role as a mediator.**

### ***Shaman as Mediator***

**The role of the shaman among indigenous peoples was to mediate a common ground between the community and the animals they needed for survival. There is a perception among many groups—including some of those I’ve worked with in the North--that it is the animals that give themselves to the hunters. There are many rituals based upon the concept of respect for animals and the land they inhabit. If we abuse their land the animals will not give themselves to us the next time we come through here.**

**For me this concept of the shaman as mediator is best illustrated by a picture of an 18<sup>th</sup> Century Shaman from Siberia that I have in my office. There are a number of ornaments on his costume that signify his power. But the one that interests me is a copper mirror over his right shoulder. It symbolizes his ability to see a world beyond the present world, and his ability to capture lost souls.**

**But it also enables his followers to see themselves and what they are doing. It is this contrast between the present and the future, between the the internal world and the external world, between the inner individual soul and the outer**

great soul of the world, the *anima mundi*, this is where there is need for mediation.

There are many of us in work like mine who continually walk between cultures—trying to mediate between one culture and another. Thomas walked between species—the human species and the earth and its species. As he walked between these different worlds, his shamanic mission in life was to establish what he called “a mutually enhancing relationship between the human and the earth.” He recognized that he was trying to negotiate the closing of a yawning chasm. But for Thomas that chasm need not exist. It was an aberration. In the last analysis we are one human-earth community. He had many interesting ways of stressing this. Here is one of my favourites, the dedication to perhaps his most well-known book, *The Great Work*.

To the children  
To all the children  
To the children who swim beneath  
The waves of the sea, to those who live in  
The soils of the Earth, to the children of the flowers  
In the meadows and the trees in the forest, to  
All those children who roam over the land  
And the winged ones who fly with the winds.  
To the human children too, that all the children may go into the future  
in the full diversity of their regional communities.

In conclusion, a word about the legacy of Thomas Berry.

### THE LEGACY OF THOMAS BERRY

What is the legacy of Thomas Berry? What is it that this man has left us with?

I think he has given us two things. First, a more profound, more universal awareness of the spiritual dimension of life—all life. Secondly, a challenge which he described as “The Great Work.”

One day on one of my earlier visits to North Carolina I said to him, “Tom, there are many people in the Arctic who are interested in an earth-based spirituality. Have you ever written anything on an earth-based spirituality?”

He paused for a moment and said to me, “No, I haven’t. But I have written something on the spirituality of Earth that you might find interesting.” It was his way of telling me that I should not use Earth simply as a spiritual resource—the way we use it as a collection of resources for so many other things. It is more than that. It is much more than that.

For Thomas, human spirituality was simply an extension of the Earth Spirituality. The foundation of spirituality is not Roman Catholic, nor Christian, nor a Buddhist, nor Muslim, nor something that is accessible only to those who happen to believe in a personal god. Though the ways we express and live our spirituality will take some different forms according to cultures and spiritual traditions, for Thomas the foundation of all spirituality was Earth. Our individual spirituality is simply the internal manifestation of the external spiritual reality we all share and hold in common. He once said that human consciousness was the universe reflecting upon itself. He felt much the same way about human spirituality—it was the human communing with the divine presence in earth and the Universe.

Brendan Keevey, A close friend of mine and Thomas, and a former Passionist, once put it this way when we were discussing the various religions and their search for a common ground, “The first thing the churches seeking common ground must come to realize is that they are standing on it.”

The second gift from Thomas was a challenge—a share in his mission. It was to carry out what he called The Great Work.

Thomas believed we had come to the end of an era, the Cenozoic Era, that has existed for 65 million years, since the time of the dinosaurs. We are destroying the Earth’s life support systems that have taken millions of years to develop. But in spite of all the destruction he could see around him, he also saw manifestations of concerned people around the world working to ensure the survival of our species and the earth. He saw the beginning of a new Era he called the Ecozoic Era. It is a new age characterized by a mutually enhancing relationship between the human and Earth. At the present time, however, we are “in between stories.” The old story of how the world came to be and how we fit into it is no longer effective. But we have not yet created the New Story.

To explain our current situation he often used the image of the Exodus—the great transition from one stage to another. We are wandering around in the desert, not sure of where we are going or how we are going to get there, but

realizing that we cannot go back to where we came from. We cannot continue to plunder the Earth's gifts upon which our very survival depends. And so for Thomas, our task, our mission in life, is to help us find our way, to help usher in this Ecozoic Era. This mission, that has fallen to each one of us, is what he called The Great Work.

## CONCLUSION

It is a custom among Roman Catholics at the time of a wake to pass out small remembrance cards. There is a picture of the deceased individual on one side, and on the other side the relevant dates, a few details about the individual's life and perhaps a quote from the scriptures. I have one of those for Thomas, dressed in his Passionist garb. But that is not how I will remember him. I'll remember him as the shaman.

I'll remember him and his shamanic mission when I go out for my walks and look up and see the eagles high in the sky above me. I'm fortunate to live in a very beautiful part of Canada, the Comox Valley on Vancouver Island, where, depending upon the season, watching soaring eagles is a common occurrence.

Among many indigenous people, the eagle is the symbol of the shaman. Shaman men and women carry eagle feathers as symbol of their special powers. For the Galyaks of Siberia, the word for eagle is also the word for the shaman.

They say that the eyesight of an eagle is 8 times more powerful than the eyesight of humans. When I look up and see the soaring eagles high above me, I realize they can see me and all that surrounds me. And that was Thomas's great gift—to be able to see our relationship as humans with the world that surrounds us.

The eagle is also a reminder of Thomas' total commitment to the creative Divine Presence in the world. I've often reflected on the words in Exodus 19 when Yahweh calls to Moses on the mountain and says, "Tell the Israelites, You have seen for yourselves what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you away as an eagle carries her young on her wings and brought you here to me."

**I last saw Thomas on a visit a few months ago. He was sitting in a chair with a shawl around his shoulders. He was in pain from his various ailments but he was still very much alert. As we were leaving to go I reached over, embraced him and kissed him on the cheek. I straightened up, and looking into his eyes I said, "I'll see you next time." He looked up at me, nodded his head gently and, at that moment, we both knew that this was to be our last meeting.**