

## LOOKING BACK – LOOKING AHEAD!

A talk by Fritz Hull prepared for the Thomas Berry Award Dinner

October 15, 2007

Thank you for being here tonight. It is really quite moving to look out over this room at so many faces representing the various eras of Chinook-Whidbey Institute. To look at you is to see the history of this place and the years of common endeavor now packed with all sorts of amazing memories.

Vivienne and I are deeply grateful to be receiving this award as an acknowledgment of our work here over the past forty years. It's been an amazing ride! The accomplishments of these years are, as we all understand, the work of many hundreds of people and an even wider circle of support. It is clear that we did it together. Congratulations to us all!

We extend our special thanks to Mary Evelyn Tucker, Brian Swimme and to the Center for Respect of Life and Environment and its director our friend Rick Clugston for this award. And we offer our deepest thanks to Thomas Berry himself for being a cherished mentor and friend over many years, including right here on this land. And our thanks tonight go as well to the Whidbey Institute with its remarkable staff and board. This is truly an inspired place and it's deeply needed in today's world. Nothing could please us more than to be part of this great company of people, walking this powerful land, and to be alongside friends who are committed to finding the best ways to live with more than ourselves in mind. Thank you all!

It's been a long road since those first rainy days in January 1966 when we came here, bought this old farm, walked the land wondering why — why had we done this? We weren't sure what we were going to do here, but we did know that we were not to put the chain up across the driveway and call the place ours. We knew from the beginning that it was a place for more than ourselves. It was a place for many, and there was a work to pursue here that had to do with what we called at the time, “the integration of religion and life.” It was, we learned, to be a place of study, personal renewal, a search for positive alternatives to much of what we opposed in the sixties, a new form of community, a new relationship with nature, peace not war, freedom from the constraints of heavy religion — but the word that most expressed that early sense of mission was “integration.” We were to work for a great coming together of things our society and we ourselves had held apart. And the integrating *force* was somehow the power of creative vision, commitment to a common cause that was beyond ourselves, loving community, and the guiding presence of God's Spirit.

With all those heady thoughts in our minds, what we really did in those early days was to pick up lots of broken glass, balance the generator on the wheelbarrow as it went down to the well and back, cut a lot of grass, rebuild the cabin so we could live in it, avoid going into the farmhouse because we were not sure the abandoned old structure was even safe

to enter, and just wander around getting used to the place and saying — “I bet it will be beautiful when spring comes.”

That was over 40 years ago. By and large those early dreams have come true, and many subsequent dreams and visions of many people working together have manifest here in this place and have been celebrated. Basically the whole thing has actually *worked!* There were certainly times, however, when we didn’t know how to take it from one phase to the next — but here we are tonight alive and well! Let us truly celebrate the fact that we have held it all together, accomplished great things, and that new people have come to take the place and the organization, also through hard work, to new occasions of courage and success.

As for Vivienne and me we have now been given, in these years of our lives, the privilege of remaining part of this endeavor. So, for us, *creative vision* as we knew it in early Chinook is alive and active within us, and we have now committed ourselves to a new work called the *Spirit of Legacy Project*. This encompasses all of our current work, and is a project of the Whidbey Institute.

This new project seems to be arising out of our growing concern and focus on the future, not just our personal future, but *the* future. As I look each morning out at Puget Sound I really wonder what it will be like when the waters of the world, including, of course, those right in front of our house, begin to significantly rise. I have begun to imagine how one day our house will probably be turned to kindling by the waves and float out to sea. The potential consequences of the warming of the planet are now on all our minds. This is a profoundly disturbing aspect of our common future.

The word “legacy” in common use often means that which we may think about in later life. It is frequently an act of leaving something behind to others. But we have chosen this word because it can suggest something much more — something critically needed — and something we each can do. “Legacy” means for us: thinking and making choices with the future in mind. The *Spirit* of legacy is learning to remember the future, and to integrate the future of human life and the planet into our inmost beings — and live from now on in that awareness. As we know how to honor and assimilate the past, and as we learn to dwell blessedly in the present, we can also learn to lean forward in our hearts and minds — and out of an integral spirit accept and honor the future. We can learn to care for it, and to hold it also as *sacred*. It feels to me that this integral embracing of the future is a great next step for all of us, for the human species.

The calling to us all is to sense deeply in our bones that our work, our Great Work, is to see — really see as in a vision — the future of human life, of planetary life, as a continuation of a *sacred* story. Of this Great Work Brazilian theologian Ruben Alves writes: “We must live by the love of what we will never see. That is the secret discipline.” Over the last couple of years, as we have been writing about this new work of ours, we realized that our word for that secret discipline was to be called — *legacy practice*. This means paying attention as never before to how our thinking and all our choices reflect a sensitivity to the life that wants to emerge on the planet, and that it will

want to flourish, and be healthy, and fulfill its own potential here on Earth. Legacy practice is our day to day respectful imagination, hard work and advocacy regarding the lives of our children, and their children, and their children, and as Thomas Berry reminds us — this includes the children of the elephants, the children of eagles, the children of whales, the children of the trees.

As we have heard in a presentation here again today, in this beautiful home of ours called “Chinook,” our lives are a product of the universe and its long unfolding story. The universe is how we got here tonight. We are now integral to this story, and are increasingly responsible here on this planet for how this story reads from here on. *The Spirit of Legacy Project* is about this story, seeing what we all can contribute to this story, and writing as best we possibly can a great next chapter.

Knowing that tonight we would be honoring Thomas Berry who has become so deeply important to our personal thinking and to the work Chinook and Whidbey Institute over the years, I pulled down from the shelf my own book Earth & Spirit, the Spiritual Dimension of the Environmental Crisis. I remembered there were two articles in there by Thomas. As I opened and began to read I could feel Thomas immediately. I could feel both his prophetic assessment of what we are doing to the world, and doing to ourselves, and I could feel his soaring ultimate trust in the Earth and the universe itself. As he spoke of the divine in nature I could feel his priestly spirit and his compassion that all this beauty, all this diversity, should be given a full opportunity to flourish long into the future and to inform and to ennoble all our efforts.

In this book is a chapter by Thomas called Into the Future. I want to read you some lines so that tonight *you* can feel something of this man, his mind and heart, and his ability to provide perspective on who we are, what we’re doing, and how to proceed with the Great Work.

“To guide our judgment and to sustain the psychic energies for the task ahead we need a certain fascination with the future that is available to us only if we respond creatively to the urgencies of the present.”

“I am concerned that we enter the future in a way that will lead to that wonderful fulfillment for which the entire planet as well as ourselves seems to be destined.”

“As we recover our awareness of the universe as a communion of subjects and not a collection of objects a new interior experience awakens within the human. The barriers disappear. An enlargement of the soul takes place. The excitement evoked by all natural phenomena is renewed.”

“There does exist at present a quantum of energy available for a creative movement from the terminal Cenozoic era to the emergent Ecozoic. This is not a situation that can be remedied by trivial or painless means. A largeness of vision and a supreme dedication are needed.”

“It is the wonder and majesty of the universe that evokes the sense of the divine and the sensitivity to the sacred.”

“Every being contributes to the magnificence of the whole.”

“What can be hoped for is a sense of the human joining in the larger liturgy of the universe itself.”

“The story of the universe now becomes the basic context for everything else.”

“Through our understanding of this story our own role in the story is revealed. In this revelation lies our way into the future.”

In building the *Spirit of Legacy Project* I want to tell you that it is blessed throughout with the spirit and thinking of Thomas Berry. In this project we will seek to learn and articulate in many different forms how we are part of the great story of the unfolding of the universe and Earth, and that we will find our way into the future as a species as we identify with this story. So what is this new project?

Very briefly, *Spirit of Legacy Project* has four parts. **First**, we want to create with others what we are calling an awakening message. We believe that such a message leads with the positive declaration that this is time when a new vision and a new energy are entering the world. *The Resurgence of Hope* work is an aspect of this message. This message also says that this is a time of a dramatic cultural course correction in human-Earth relations and we have to get the new course right. The message says that we will be guided in this transformational moment and that all that all the guidance and energy we need is available to us. The final part of the awakening message is that the only way forward into the future is together — as the whole Earth Community. That is our message, and it is vintage Thomas Berry.

So, our first work in *Spirit of Legacy* is to fashion such a message and get it out there. **Second**, we are in the process of developing what we consider a Sacred Place of Learning. It's the 30 acres on the East side of Chinook. It will include the new Story House for learning and telling the new story, trails and nature awareness programs people finding their own great work, developing a cosmic liturgy, and all this to be totally integrated with all the Chinook land and new vision arising out of the Whidbey Institute.

**Third**, we will work for a deepening spirit. Slow it down! Read together, think together, spend time together, meditate together. And on our own — reflect, write, pray and see what happens to us! And look long and deep into nature itself. Whatever we do — deepen it! There will be numerous courses, and special events on the land at Story House to serve this deepening of our spirits.

**Fourth**, we want to have a hand in creating a fellowship of the journey — some new form of community. The quest for community has a long history at Chinook and Whidbey Institute. We have learned a great deal over the years. This should serve us well in this new time as this quest continues — to really love each other, hang in there with each other, follow our dreams, let new forms arise from many people’s efforts. I’m thinking that maybe this fellowship of the journey is a commitment to a journey of a hundred years! We link with those yet to come. This would be a form of legacy practice.

I am personally grateful for this new time in my life to think, explore, create new educational forms, build, write, to be in the forest and out on the water, to continue to dream dreams with Vivienne, to be a part of the Whidbey Institute, to continue to feel your interest and love, and not be in the way — to be a skilled and worthy founder.

We’ve not done it perfectly over all these years. But with many of us working together we have done some amazing things. We have, in fact, made an important contribution in this great transformational moment, and we have taken responsibility for what we love.

Finally, a little story about Thomas Berry.

As he concludes his book The Great Work he refers to the tremendous powers of the universe that brought all life into being and says: “We need only summon these forces to our support in order to succeed. Although the human challenge to these purposes must never be underestimated, it is difficult to believe that the larger purposes of the universe or of the planet Earth, will ultimately be thwarted.” In a personal conversation with him two years ago I asked him to speak further about this passage, particularly about what he means by “summoning the forces.” He simply responded by saying “How does a mother summon the child, how does the child summon the mother? You open your arms.”

Standing here tonight, filled with such gratitude, I am deeply convinced that opening our arms is our most compelling calling as we face our uncertain common future. We must open our arms, hearts, our minds so that everybody and everything....IS IN! This is the integral embrace. This is essential to generating a compassionate force of creativity that engages our world and all its difficulties. This is legacy practice. This is to do the ongoing work of Chinook-Whidbey Institute. This is how to celebrate the past. This is how we create a future of beauty and justice. This is how we belong to a great movement now underway in our culture that thrives on hope. This is to do just what is in front of us, like picking up small bits of broken glass, sometimes slowly but faithfully, and watch the dream become real and powerful. It will happen when our hearts are open and arms are outstretched. Above all, let us take care of each other — continuing in this great company of people to travel side-by-side, to know Spirit’s empowerment, to celebrate our common work, and to love what we’re doing on behalf of the world.

Thank you again for coming tonight.