

"In Praise of North America"

by Thomas Berry

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www.thegreatstory.org/NA-Berry.html

Note: This extract of Thomas Berry's liturgical manifesto (somewhat adapted by Connie Barlow) is marked for multiple orators to read. You may wish to make copies of the "chorus" and distribute these for all participants to recite in unison. For long workshops on The Great Story, we highly recommend this group recitation before or after the ["Coming Home to North America"](#) group experience. Thomas is said to have delivered this talk in the early 1990s, somewhere in the Great Plains, at a North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology.

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[1. OPENING] In these opening years of the 21st century, as we gather here in the [*add name of bioregion*] of the North American Continent, we reflect, in a moment of stillness, on the lands and waters and living beings with whom we share our vast continental home. [Pause for meditation, then "Let us all say together,"]

CHORUS:

We awaken to the beauty of this land.
We listen to the teachings of this land.
We accept the discipline of this land.
We are absorbed in the delight of this land.

[2. GLORIOUS LAND] When humans first entered the [*add name of bioregion*], it was a glorious land of [*add description of those times*]
[*end with*]: a land of abundance, shaped through the millennia by [*name climatic features*].

CHORUS

[3. LANDSCAPES] In our hearts today, we look out from this [*add name of bioregion*] to the coastal plains along Atlantic shores, to the Appalachian hill country and Cumberland Plateau, to the Great Lakes surrounded by moraines and mottled till and myriad kettle ponds. We look to the vastness of boreal forests and mossy tundra, and then turn our gaze to the bayous and estuaries of the Gulf lowlands and onward to the River of Grass called the Everglades. We look to the prairies and plains, the rich soils of the continental heartland, on to the towering mountains of the west — the Rockies, the Cascades, the Sierras. We look out from this bioregion to the deserts of cactus and sage, to the canyons and buttes of the Colorado Plateau, to the redwood and cedar forests that grace Pacific shores, to the storm-beaten cliffs of the North Atlantic. We look out from this bioregion to mysteries of the deep earth: to the cave country where once lapped an inland sea, to the lava layers of Columbian Flood Basalt scoured open by glacial floods, and on to the geysers of Yellowstone and to our towering volcanoes, some still simmering.

CHORUS

[4. INTIMACY] We join here today, some of us arriving from other regions of the continent, or even other continents of Earth. We come together now to reflect on how, centuries ago, all newcomers might have entered the community of life here. How our ancestors might have established an intimacy with the continent in all its manifestations.

CHORUS

[5. BUTTERFLY DANCING] Our ancestors might have seen this land as divinely blessed, as a continent to be revered and dwelt in as a light and gracious presence. Would they, and we, have felt the divine in every breeze that blows across the landscape, seen in every flowering plant, wondered at in every butterfly dancing across a meadow, in every dragonfly darting across a marsh, in every firefly flashing at the close of day!

CHORUS

[6. PILGRIMS] But if in the past we have not been sensitive to the deeper meaning of this continent, we gather here today as pilgrims, not simply to this bioregion, but to the entire continent. Pilgrims, penitent, we bring with us the promise of dedicating ourselves to relieving the oppression we have imposed in the past and beginning a new era in our presence here today. We begin to understand that the way to the world of the sacred is through the place of our dwelling.

CHORUS

[7. MANY PATHS] We have come to this continent via many paths, each of us with our own unique experience, our own distinctive lineage of ancestral homelands. We reflect on the 200 million years since this northern hemisphere broke off from the amalgam of continents to the south. We reflect on the 65 million years since the dinosaurs were vanquished, and when the Bearpaw Seaway of the heartland gave way to a landscape recognizable to us today.

CHORUS

[8. STORY] While we learn the sacred qualities of this continent in its spatial extent, we also experience those historical moments of grace whereby all the various features of this continent took on their present modes of expression. The story of this continent thus becomes our own story, for while we arrived in the later stages of its history, we are now integral with what takes place. Ever after, the story of this continent and our own story will be a single story.

CHORUS

[9. CHILDREN] We are concerned for the children, the children of every living being on this continent: the children of the trees and grasses, the children of the wolf, the bear, and the cougar; the children of the bluebird and the thrush and the great raptors that soar through the heavens; the children of the salmon that begin and end their lives in the upper reaches of the great western rivers; the children, too, of human parents — for all the children are born into a single sacred community.

CHORUS

[10. RESILIENCE] Today we pledge to relieve an ancient wrong. We wish especially to restore to this continent its ancient joy. For while much of what we have done is beyond healing, there is a resilience throughout these lands and waters — a resilience that only

awaits an opportunity to flourish once again with something of its ancient splendor. So far as we are able, we wish to evoke these powers to their full expression, so that the primordial liturgy of divine praise that once arose from this continent might again burst forth in a new brilliance of expression.

CHORUS

[11. BLESSING] Today we join as pilgrims to this continent, to beg a blessing from its mountains and rivers, its plains and piedmont, and from all its inhabitants. We beg a blessing that will heal us of our responsibility for what we have done, a blessing that will give us the guidance that we will need. For we can never bring a healing to this continent until we are first blessed and first healed *by* this continent.

CHORUS

[12. FUTURE] To make ourselves worthy of this blessing is the task to which we dedicate ourselves in these opening years of the 21st century, such that all the children of Earth might walk serenely into the future as a single sacred community.

CHORUS

Copies of Chorus to distribute

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