# INTERVIEW WITH MARY EVELYN TUCKER[[1]](#footnote-1)

On her new book co-authored along with John Grim and Andrew Angyal [*Thomas Berry: A Biography*](https://cup.columbia.edu/book/thomas-berry/9780231176989).

Mary Evelyn is a co-founder and co-director of the [Forum on Religion and Ecology](http://fore.yale.edu/) at Yale University. Michael Lerner is President of [Commonweal Magazine](https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/).

These notes give Lerner’s questions and the time stamps for Tucker’s answers. The interview begins at 25:02 after Tucker’s introductory talk.

**Lerner.** My goal in the interview today is to get to something in myself that I’m working on. That is this: whether Thomas Berry’s New Story and Journey of the Universe that you and your husband (John Grim), Brian Swimme[[2]](#footnote-2) and so many others devoted so much of your lives to is a key to finding our way out of the darkness in which we find ourselves. I don’t know the answer. I know it’s a beautiful story. I know that it is scientifically true and that science has enabled us to see our story of emergence from the universe for the first time. The question is whether that universe story actually ignites in us a fire sufficient to bring humanity together.

**Response**. 28:15

**Lerner.** Berry found in Brian Swimme the one who would write down his work. What has been your role? Just as Thomas Berry needed to go beyond Teilhard de Chardin[[3]](#footnote-3), I wonder if you have found yourself needing to go beyond Thomas Berry?

**Response**: 34:37

**Lerner**. I guess part of my question was just as Brian Swimme felt that he needed to distinguish himself from Thomas Berry are there ways that you have found yourself going beyond his thinking?

**Response**: 39:03

**Lerner**. One of the chapters that touched me deeply was the one on Berry and Teilhard de Chardin. Could you describe who was Teilhard de Chardin and how did he influence Thomas Berry? What are the three things that Berry took from him and why did Berry need to go beyond those?

**Response**. 42:03

**Lerner**. If we have interiority and consciousness, then these must be implicit in the whole chain of being. Why is that obviously so?

**Response**. 50:08

**Lerner**. I love to think that the whole universe is alive, that it is a manifestation of love and justice, and that love is the greatest power of life and connects us to spirit, that we live in a living universe, and that the universe appears to be designed to support life. (The whole idea of the multiverse is a way for cosmologists to get around the fact that the universe seems to be designed to support life.) But it is one thing for me like all that, but another thing for me to accept the interiority of a rock or an inanimate object.

**Response**. 52:39

**Lerner**. Berry starts [his research] by being interested in the history of religions and then he starts being interested in the earth and then the universe. Yet he continues to live a religious life. What dimension of Christianity remained living for him as he took this journey?

**Response**. 57:29

**Lerner**. Of the different religious types he was closest to the Shamanistic. How did he experience himself as shamanic?

**Response**. 59:20

**Lerner**. I once expressed the mistaken observation that Thomas Berry expressed the perennial philosophy[[4]](#footnote-4) He did not, nor do the Asian religions and expressly Confucianism. What is it about the Confucian vision of the human place in the universe that appealed so deeply to Thomas?

**Response.** I:01:42

**Lerner**. One of Berry’s subtleties of thought was his perception that as we became a pluralistic, global civilization that the different religions of the world would necessarily enter into a dialog with each other in a new way for the first time. And In this dialog there was a process of shedding outdated or formalistic structures such that it pushed the religious tradition to connect more deeply to the internal fire or spirit at their cores. Toynbee thought that the greatest event of the 20th Century was not the atomic bomb, but the coming of the dharma to the West. American Buddhism is a very different thing from the Buddhism in Asia. This has given Buddhism a freshness and vitality in its roots. Does this connection drive us drive us toward the universe story? The universe story will take different forms in different milieus. Did Berry make this connection?

**Response.** 1:10:06

**Lerner**. One more question. There is the historical Jesus and then Christ or Cosmic Christ or whatever. How did Thomas relate to that continuum?

**Response.** 1:14:40

**Q&A**. 1:17:59

1. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lgq_-3rwOZ4&feature=youtu.be> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. **Brian Swimme** is Director, [Center for the Story of the Universe](https://www.humansandnature.org/brian-swimme); Professor, California Institute of Integral Studies. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. **Pierre Teilhard de Chardin** **SJ.** (1881-1955) [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pierre_Teilhard_de_Chardin) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. **Perennial philosophy**, also referred to as **perennialism** and  **perennial** wisdom, is a perspective in spirituality that views all of the world's religious traditions as sharing a single, metaphysical truth or origin from which all esoteric and exoteric knowledge and doctrine has grown. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)