

Change is necessary

The following text is the first in a three-part series from a talk given to participants at the 1990 annual meeting of the B.C. Museum Association, given in the Comox Longhouse, Comox, B.C. by Father Charles Brandt of Campbell River.

"We are part of the earth, and it is part of us." This is the heart of Chief Seattle's prayer, a prayer respected and repeated by many who are deeply concerned with the environment and the earth.

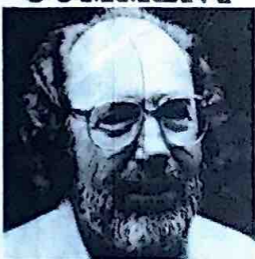
Chief Seattle expresses a wisdom and a philosophy lost almost entirely to the west since the renaissance. This unity of all beings, living and non-living, with both physical and psychical dimensions — we know as the perennial philosophy, a philosophy which prevailed until the renaissance, and was embraced by all the great religions of the earth: Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Islam, and especially the North American Indians.

Beginning in the 17th century this Perennial philosophy, this ancient wisdom, was rejected and a new understanding of the universe which we have been following since the last three centuries began to emerge. It began with Rene Decartes continued with Francis Bacon, Galileo and Newton. They came to look at the universe as a mechanical system without spirit or consciousness. This led to the industrial revolution. Man began to think of the earth and matter as something to be manipulated and controlled. This eventually led to the development of the atomic bomb and the tragic state of the environment today. Today we stand on the brink of ecological destruction. Some feel that the environmental bomb has already been dropped. Others think that we have 10 years to turn it all around.

Unless we regain the perennial philosophy, the sense and wonder of the unity of all things with both their physical and psychical dimensions — we very probably won't come to grips with the terrible destruction that is taking place.

Western science, which was formerly closed to eastern wisdom and mysticism, is opening itself in the most extraordinary way. We are, Capra asserts in his *The Tao of Physics*, on the verge of a paradigm shift. A new vision of reality is penetrating the scientific world. It has recently been discovered that the material universe is essentially a field of energies in which the parts can only be understood in relation to the whole. As Capra describes it, it is a complicated web of interdependent relationships. The universe is a great dance of energies of which we are a part.

COMMENT



By Father Charles Brandt

If the Louvre or the National Gallery has burned 10 years ago we of course would have been appalled. There goes our heritage, our civilization. After all, museums are concerned with preserving our civilization. And at the same time if the forests of Brazil had been burning, we perhaps would have said, "O hum". But today as these forests disappear through burning we are becoming more aware that they too, along with our rivers, our mountains, our atmosphere, our forests — that all of these are part of our heritage and civilization. We can no longer separate the burning of a museum from the burning of the rain forests. They both are part of our heritage.

In teaching the course of Curatorial Care of Paper at the University of Victoria I often for instruction purposes turn a page of a brittle pamphlet and the corner of the page breaks off. The reason for this is that the paper is no longer permanent or durable. It has been attacked by water, acid, heat and light (acid-catalysed hydrolysis) and can no longer be used or circulated.

These same forces that are attacking our books and archival materials and works on paper are attacking our buildings, our rivers, our mountains and atmosphere. In the past museums, galleries, libraries and archives have been satisfied with removing these art treasures and heritage pieces from the bad environment of nature and creating a pristine environment of RH, temperature, and lighting within our buildings to preserve these documents. But today we realize that we have to move outside of our structures and into external environment and improve that as well.

Museums and Galleries are in a good position to improve the overall environment. We have specialists who understand these destructive forces: scientists, conservators, curators and directors who are dealing with these forces daily. We are in a position to motivate others to make changes. And to change ourselves.

But how do we motivate others? What can we do?

Part II, Tuesday March 26.

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White Island