

Thomas Berry

Good to be here. Begin by continuing reference to the native people of this continent. In some ways they have the finest religious traditions that humans have ever known. The finest spiritual sensitivities. It is difficult to surpass these people of the N. American continent. It is such a grace to have them here, to centre our thinking, or to be guided by the people who have appeared on this platform. Perhaps one of the most helpful things for myself has been the studies, the contacts I have had with the native people, the indigenous people, the first people. Seattle, from this area, is kind of a presiding spirit over the North American continent. He will always be that. He wasn't that so much some years ago. I remember when I first discovered that speech of his given in 1854, a stupendous speech, and the person who recorded it said that it was in his language was much more powerful than the translation that he was able to give to it. It brings back to mind also the other guardian spirits of this continent Tacompsa (?), who was the first to perceive the overwhelming assault that was being waged against this continent. His was the first effort to gather the different tribes together to protect the continent. He travelled throughout the east to gather the groups together, the dispersed groups. Then in the West, it was Red Cloud, the great Sioux leader. Earlier there was Henson Rake of the Seneca peoples who guided them through their transition period. There was Chief Joseph who led such a group of Indians. He had the women and children when he led them in battle. We must remember that the Europeans did not have to deal with families. But Chief Joseph did so much. Then Black Cattle, the Cheyenne. The great peace chief. He went to Washington. So many of them went to Washington. In their regalia. Red Cloud gave a famous speech there and Chief Joseph also. In the SW we have people like Jeroimo. One important is Black Elk. So fortunate. Good to have his story and the deep spiritual vision of the Sioux. He communicated this first to John Neihart in the 1930s and later to Richard Hairdos. Then in more recent times, someone that I had great reverence for and was fortunate to know a bit, Philip Deer was a Muscogee (?) Indian, a Cree Indian that was the last of their great medicine men and he was in this country for a time almost the dean of the spiritual leaders.

I just recall these to mind that we might be guided by them, and one of the great spiritual moments in the last two centuries was in the mid-eighties when Black Elk had his great vision when he only 9 years old and he had one of the greatest spiritual visions that has ever taken place on this continent. You will find in the book Black Elk where he had a vision of the future and the difficulties that his people were going to face in the future and something of what this continent was going to face. And had a great interpretation for this.

So I would like to begin by reinforcing the words that we have been honoured with by this great tradition. And they are still the people who are spiritually in contact with this continent. And learn from them. And we who have assaulted this continent so much now at this moment of atoning consciousness we wonder, have we really done, brought about such disaster. Are we really so devastating, are we really so cruel. Are we really such shameless people to have dishonoured the earth. Because beyond all the question of the damage done is a question of honour. Our first obligation is honour, we have dishonoured

the continent. And in dishonouring the continent we have dishonoured ourselves. And at the present time we are in kind of frenzy with hysteria. Why is this hysteria we see in television, throwing in so many ads. You might get 40 ads in an hour, interrupting our thinking. How do we endure that? Why do we permit that? Why do we allow our mains to be jammed by enormous volume? Consume, consume, consume, consume. How do we permit this to happen? It is not easy to say.

Going back to the plundering of this continent, the people that did it and the pathos of much that happened to this continent is that it was done by people of some good intentions, not perhaps totally greed. This was a way to a better life many thought. That this was the way to progress. That this was the way that humans somehow found their fulfilment. A way of finding a more satisfying life, a way of life that in itself would be more fulfilling. Destiny. It was our destiny. And as I have thought of it so much over the years, I would rather deal with bad people than good people. Because good people without an integral idea of what is good, the better they are the worse the consequences. Because here is a certain ruthlessness about being good. Good people can be ruthlessness God wills it. It is divinely decreed in some way. I am a minister of goodness. I am making a better world for the children. I am making a better world for the next generation. And that is the deep pathos of the situation. And it becomes institutionalized. And everybody is caught up in. And we are ourselves are caught up in the many ambivalences of life. You buy a newspaper and you are destroying the forests. And there is one thing I would like to say before I go into what I think should be our basic approach.

I would like to say something about the grace of the moment. We did not choose to be here. To live in this time. We did not choose to be born in the time that we were born and in the circumstances in which we were born. We did not choose the incidents in our lives and the incidents that have brought us here. We were chosen. Very important I think to believe that you are chosen. Somehow in the destiny of things, somehow in the disposition of created affairs, of the earth, of human history, somehow we are chosen. And everyone is chosen for a very special task. We are chosen to live in this crucial moment, in this moment when we need a guidance, when we need a vision. that we must apply, that somehow must be evoked in ourselves through the powers of the universe. In us the destinies of the universe are articulated. The stars speak in us, the shaping forces of the earth, the whole life development – it's all contained in every part of our being, everything that has happened in the whole history of the universe is present in the physical reality of our being. In our minds, everything that has happened that has shaped the human mind. And our thoughts were born when the universe was born, that we are as old as the universe, and as big as the universe since every being is present to every other being, as every atom is influencing every other atom and everything is integral throughout the whole transformation in time, and throughout the vast extent of things in space. When you ask scientists, "why is the universe as big as it is, as old as it?" It is a very simple answer: Because it takes the universe this old and this large to produce the conditions of life and consciousness. And so coming to ourselves we need to know that we are supported by the universe itself, supported by the whole sweep of history. It is calling upon us to bring about a new transformation. The transformation that we are to make is a fantastic transformation that I would like to describe to you.

It is the 3rd of the great biological ages of the earth the visible life forms. 600 mil years ago to 220 mil years ago was the palaeozoic when the larger forms developed on the land and in many cases the sea. Then the mesozoic, the great dinosaur age, 220 to 65 mil years ago. Beginning with 65 mil years ago the cenozoic came. We are cenozoic people, our forms of life. And it took 65 million years for the birds and the trees flowers and for the living beings, the butterflies. they go back, many of them further than 65 mil. But the forms of life with which we are familiar with have been greatly modified in the past 65 mil. Years. And what we are doing is closing down this life sequence. Wave on wave of life took place for 65 mil years. What we are doing when we extinguish the life forms, the plants, the trees, we are negating 65 mil years of effort, and more than that because it goes back to the beginning. But it is not that we changing human history, we are changing earth history.

We are not just changing human life we are bringing about a disastrous change in the total life development of the planet earth, and perhaps the intentions of the universe itself.

So that is something of the order of magnitude of the times in which we live.

What do we do? We have to think in terms of a renewal of life. at that scale. We are presently extinguishing 10,000 species every single year. We only know 1 mil, 600 thousand species, or we feel sure there are 5 mil, or 10 or 20 or even 50 mil species if we count all of the microbial forms would not be an exaggeration. Of the larger more developed species, I don't know just how many there would be. Of the species that we are acquainted with we are doing enormous damage, and perhaps 20% of all living species will be extinguished by the end of this century. It is a devastating thing. We are beginning to realize also, that this is irreversible. Extinguished species, neither heaven or earth can bring back. It is the most absolute deed that human can do, I think. Certainly one of the most absolute things is to extinguish species. You can't bring back a extinct species. The Carolina parakeet will never be back. The Passenger Pigeon no one will ever see again. We are blacking out not for our children but for the children of 10,000 generations, will never see will never recover the species that we extinguish. Now during that period it is very probably that any new species could come into being.

So we are making a diminished world, something that we cannot do that much about, it is inevitable now. We cannot restore the extinct the butterfly species, replace the extinct species of any kind. It is rough. Particular on future generations.

We have to be somehow terrorized by what we have done but not without hope. We live, I think, between terror and hope. We have to be terrorized or else we won't have the psychic energy to do something. We are as it were in a crash situation. And we don't recognize it. It is something like addiction. The denial phase. An alcoholic will say, O No, I am doing all right. It is not until after they crash that they are able to do the restructuring of life that is demanded. If they continue on they will die. We are addicts to this consumer pattern of life, to this industrial plundering of the planet. But when we try to tell people they say, "O, it's not that bad. We can take care of it. Our scientists are geniuses, and we can do genetic engineering. or as a last result we can go off to Mars.

My proposal is this. The conditions under which we can move from a terminal cenozoic to

an emerging ecozoic.. I think that the basic word now is the biological word, ecozoic. It is kind of an invention of mine that I think will catch on, But if we can go into the ecozoic age then we will be in business. Now how do we get there?

There is one simple first commitment, I will give you 6, 7 maybe more principles.

The First is a very simple thing, it is very clear from, what we heard this morning. THE UNIVERSE IS A COMMUNION OF SUBJECTS, IT IS NOT A COLLECTION OF OBJECTS. THE UNIVERSE IS COMMUNITY TO BE COMMUNED WITH, NOT OBJECTS TO BE USED PRIMARILY. IT IS PRIMARILY A COMMUNION EXPERIENCE.

If we ever forget that then we will destroy it. And that is exactly what has happened. And it is the dark side of our whole western tradition, our religious tradition, our humanist tradition, all our traditions tend towards the view of the non-human world as objects to be exploited on the part of the human. And that is disaster. Other peoples have not been perfect in their relationship, but for the most part the first people of the world have understood this with great brilliance. When we come to the question of why we do this, I would describe my generation as autistic. You know what autism is. An autistic person an autistic child is locked into itself and it could not talk frequently, it could not bounce a ball. It's locked in psychologically. It is not that it can't do anything. You can't get in and the child can't get out. It's one of the most difficult things of all to deal with. It's in older people too, but to describe my own generation I would describe it as we have been autistic.

The western society to a large extent, we have been hard of hearing. We don't hear the voices. If you don't hear the voices, you are never going to do what needs to be done. The person has to talk to the trees. I was talking to 400 Indians the Ojibwa, I was invited a couple of weeks ago upon on Georgian Bay. There were Ojibwas, Cree, Seneca, Mohawk. And we came together to discuss their future, and I has been asked to speak. The way you speak to Indians, the way it came to me, I wasn't sure what to say. But I, last night there was the moon, on the Bay, the Georgian Bay, the largest fresh water bay in the world. And the moon was shining, I was looking at the light rippling on the waters, so I said to the Indians, "I didn't know what to say, so I asked the moon. 'What should I say?' and the moon said, 'Tell them the story.' And the wind was blowing, and I asked the wind, 'What should I say?' And the wind said, 'Tell them the story.' And I asked the red clover out on the lawn, little sister, And the clover said, 'Tell them the story, the tree story, the river story, my story, the mountain story, your story, the Indian story, the great story.' THE GREAT STORY IS THE HEALING, THE GREAT STORY IS THE GUIDE OF WHERE WE ARE AND HOW WE ARE TO GO. You have to go to this and I said then as I say here. What I say here is of no importance. But what the mountain says is important. What the trees are saying out there are important. What the river says is important, what the fish says is important. Because these are the medium through which the ultimate truth comes to us. In our intellectual life we get confused. We have deep in us, we have similar guidance, but our thinking gets obscured and we want to know the way. We have to ask the trees and the birds and the stars and the butterflies and the worms of the earth. If we don't do that if we can't do that if we are blocked from doing that because of our education which tells us to us go read a book , or go to the library and you

will find out something. Well its not that way.

SO THE FIRST THING IS THIS QUESTION OF COMMUNION. EXISTENCE IS A MYSTICISM, IS A MYSTICAL THING, THE EARTH, EVERYTHING IS PRIMARILY A MAGICAL, MYTHICAL REALITY. To us things seem so opaque, but it's that magic in things. The world functions by magic, by mystery, by this mystical report of things, subject to subject, intimacy, a presence. That is the beginning and ending of all things. What do think eventually: report, intimacy, presence. That is the way that we are fulfilled, the mind is fulfilled, our aesthetics are fulfilled. That is why the earth is so important. If we lived on the moon we would have only a lunar landscape. We have a great sense of the divine because we live on such a gorgeous planet. If we lived on the moon our imagination would be as dull as the moon. Our sensitivities would be negative. Our intelligence would be retarded, because there wouldn't be that much to think about. So we have this gorgeous hearth, and what we do out there is what we do in here. Its damaging the inner life. adhere. It's in the very fact the think takes place. So that is the first condition of MOVING INTO AN ECOZOIC PERIOD.

THE SECOND THING TO REMEMBER IS THAT THE PLANET EARTH IS A ONE TIME ENDOWNMENT. YOU DON'T GET A SECOND CHANCE. IT'S A ONE TIME ENDOWNMENT.

It is in a sense a one way process. It is an unfolding, and certain things have to be done at certain times. And that is both a threatening thing and an encouraging thing, because when life was born and when the situation had developed in the seas a moment came when life appeared. And when life appeared, and when life appeared that consumed the conditions of life and things went on.

Never again would there a moment like that. Life cannot come from pre-life at this time. That capacity is exhausted. That has been activated. So at different periods: certain things have to be activated and if they are not activated, it is over with.

It can never happen again. And I think we are at moment like that now. There was a period when the great classical religions could come into being. I think if things like this had happened earlier in human history I think that a great religion would have come about. In the classical mode. I think that period is over. WE can no longer do that. What next must be done is of that order of magnitude. We are creating a new mode of religious consciousness. AND THAT IS THE MOMENT IN WHICH WE EXIST NOW. THIS IS ABOVE ALL A RELIGIOUS, SPIRITUAL MOMENT. WE HAVE NEVER RECOGNIZED IT. BUT IT IS A SUPREMELY RELIGIOUS MOMENT AND HAS TO DO WITH ANY EXPERIENCE OF THE DIVINE, EXPERIENCE OF MEANING. IF WE DON'T HAVE THIS CONTEXT THE SENSE OF THE DIVINE WOULD BE TERRIBLY DISTORTED.

THE THIRD THING: I suggest that we must think about is that the earth is primary Human derivative. Difficult. The earth is primary, HEALTH WISE. The first obligation of medicine is not to take care of humans, but to see that we have an integral healthy earth. BECAUSE YOU CANNOT HAVE WELL PEOPLE ON A SICK EARTH no matter how much technology you have. It just doesn't work that way. THE FIRST OBLIGATION OF ECONOMICS is that THE GROSS EARTH PRODUCT MUST BE INTEGRAL. To have a

rising gross national product with a declining gross earth product makes no sense whatsoever. There is the question of ethics. We ask: do trees have rights? The trees have the first rights and we are derivatives. If the fish and the trees don't have rights, then we, we are derivative from this context. If the rights there are not honoured, then we are not honoured. I think that we become religious by participating in the religion of the universe. The universe is a religious modality. It has a spirit mode, and we participate in that. We come from the earth and we have only what the earth has given us. Eventually it comes from the deepest mystery of the universe which we call divine. This comes to us through the earth and our spirit dimension is dependent on the earth. We join the earth economy, we join the earth health, we join the earth religion. And down the line we are educated by the earth, governed by the earth law. What we need is not a united nations but a united species. And in government I sometimes denounce democracy. The conspiracy of humans against the natural world. WE give humans rights to life liberty and the pursuit of happiness at the expense of the natural world. I was astounded in Costa Rica when I was with the Minister of Natural Resources in the rain forests and I could see where they were cutting on the watershed. Is that permitted here and he said: "Private property, private property". Cutting on the watershed where the water of the community comes from. And so there are those aspects of what we are about.

ONE OTHER THING THAT IS ENORMOUSLY IMPORTANT AS REGARDS THE ECOZOIC IS THAT IT IS GOING TO FUNCTION VERY DIFFERENT FROM THE CENOZOIC. In the cenozoic all of the beauty that existed was entirely without human participation. We were not asked how many thousands of flowers we wanted, we were given this infinite number of flowers in this gorgeous world we live in with no effort of our own. Given all these things, but with a gracious endowment and so forth, we were simply asked to be present to it in some gracious honouring way. BUT IN THE ECOZOIC NOTHING IS GOING TO TAKE PLACE OF ANY SIGNIFICANCE WITHOUT IT IN SOMEWAY BEING RELATED TO THE HUMAN. Whereas we cannot make a blade of grass, there is liable not to be a blade of grass unless WE ACCEPT IT, PROTECT IT, AND FOSTER IT.

So from here on we have to have as our major human concern if we are going to survive in any integral way to accept, protect and foster the larger context of our existence which is the planet earth.

ONE OTHER THING HAS TO DO WITH LANGUAGE:

Because we tend to use the bible so much in terms of redemption concerns rather than in creation concerns, I suggest that we place the bible on the shelf for 20 years until we learn to read the scriptures of the natural world. Earlier Christians were very much aware of the two books. There wasn't a bible by itself there was also the natural world was also a revelatory context of human existence and the biblical world and the natural world interpreted each other. But from the 16th century we have got so taken up with redemption that we have forgotten creation. I have also decided recently in trying to discuss these subjects that we will have to put Webster on the shelf too. Because we need a new language. WE are really going into something terribly different. This is awesome business.

I would like to end very simply BY GOING BACK TO ONE OF THE BASIC METAPHORS OF THE BIBLICAL WORLD WHICH IS THE EXODUS SYMBOL, THE EXODUS FROM AWESOME TO THE PROMISED LAND, THE EXODUS OF THE RELIGION OUT INTO THE CLASSICAL WORLD, OUT TO THE MEDIEVAL AND TO THE LARGER UNIVERSAL WORLD OF THINGS, SOMETHING OF THE EXODUS SEQUENCE OF THIS COUNTRY. IT THOUGHT OF ITSELF AS AN EXODUS FROM A PLACE OF ENSLAVEMENT TO A PLACE OF LIBERATION OF EUROAMERICA. Sometimes I use that to describe our present situation. Only this time its not the exodus of a certain group of people, its not exactly Israel, not simply an exodus of Christian people, it is not exactly a human exodus ---IT IS THE EXODUS OF THE PLANET EARTH, IN ITS BIOSYSTEMS, IN ITS GEOSYSTEMS, IN ITS NOOSYSTEMS, THAT IS IN ALL OF ITS DIFFERENT PHASES FROM A TERMINAL CENOZOIC TO THE EMERGING ECOZOIC.

AND THE WAY I PHRASE IT IS THIS: THAT THE HUMAN COMMUNITY AND THE NATURAL WORLD WILL GO INTO THE FUTURE AS A SINGLE SACRED COMMUNITY OR WE WILL BOTH PERISH IN THE DESERT.

Now it is a bit of hyperbole - of how much the earth would perish in all of its life systems, impossible that is perish in all of life systems. But it would perish in an extraordinary large dimension of its existence. Nor do I really expect the humans to perish absolutely, but to perish in grandeur. I think that it is possible for us to destroy an enormous part of the earth in its grandeur. So too with the human, we can establish a degraded world and in some sense an extinction might be preferable. So this question is so important. And we appreciate the fact that the human community and the natural world go into the future as a single sacred community.