

"Leading religious and environmental thinkers now believe that the ecological crisis is pre-eminently a spiritual crisis of the greatest magnitude. Its resolution depends on a basic transformation of human hearts and minds - a profound spiritual renewal that deepens our kinship with life and creates a new vision of human presence within the Earth community."

These words from Thomas Berry's address to the conference of Earth and Spirit in Seattle made clear that we need a "new story", a revised cosmological underpinning, because "the Earth is mandating that the human community assume a responsibility never assigned to any previous generation. We are being asked to learn an entirely new mode of conduct and discipline."

The transformation that we are to make is a fantastic one. We are presently in the third of the great biological ages of the earth of visible life forms. From 600 million years ago to 220 was the paleozoic, where the larger forms first developed on the land as well as, in many cases, the sea. Then came the mesozoic, from 220 million years ago - the great dinosaur age - to 65 million years ago.

Beginning 65 million years ago came the cenozoic. We are cenozoic forms of life. Wave on wave of life expansion took place for 65 million years. What we are doing when we extinguish species of trees, animals and rainforests is negating 65 million years of effort. Actually, it's more than that because this does go back to the beginning of things.

It's not that we are just changing human history, but are changing Earth history. We are not just changing human life. We're bringing about a disastrous change in the life development of the planet Earth and perhaps the intentions of the universe itself.

Perhaps 20 percent of all living species will be extinguished by the end of this century. It's a devastating thing and the important thing to realize also is that this is irreversible. Neither heaven or earth can bring back extinguished species. It's forever. It's the most absolute deed that humans can do.

So we are making a diminished, degraded world. That is inevitable now. It's something we can't do much about in itself.

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 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 unfortunately.

My proposal is this: conditions from which we can move from a terminal cenozoic to an emerging "eozoic". If we can go into the eozoic age then we'll be in business. Now how do we get there? There's one simple first commitment I'll give you.

It goes this way: the universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects. It is a community of beings to be communed with, not objects. It is a community of beings



to be communed with, not objects to be used, primarily, or plundered or whatever. It's primarily a communion experience. If we forget that, then we'll destroy it and that's exactly what has happened.

It is the dark side of our whole Western tradition, religious, humanist traditions: all our traditions tend to view the non-human world as an object to be exploited on the part of the human. That's disaster. Other peoples have not been perfect in their relationship, but for the most part the First Peoples of the world have understood this with great brilliance.

The second thing is to remember that the planet Earth is a one-time endowment. We don't get a second chance. It is in a sense a one-way process, an unfolding, and certain things have to be done at certain times. That, again, is both a threatening thing and an encouraging thing. What we are creating now is a new mode of religious consciousness.

We have never recognized it but this is supremely a religious moment because it has to do with the very basis of any experience of the divine and of meaning. If we don't have this context, that all life is sacred, the sense of the divine would be certainly distorted.

The third thing I would suggest we must think about is that the Earth is primary and humans are derivative. The Earth is primary health-wise. I would say the first obligation of medicine is not to take care of humans but to see we have an integral, healthy Earth.

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. So a person could do this across the board.

There's one other thing that's enormously important as regards to the ecozoic. The ecozoic is going to function very, very differently from the cenozoic. In the cenozoic all the beauty that was developed was entirely without human participation. We weren't asked how many thousands of flowers we wanted. We were given this infinite number of flowers and insects and the gorgeous world we