

Reimagining Modern Industrial Global Culture

Summary

Thomas Berry builds the case that "the demonic pathology of the Western soul" is the prime driving force behind the current devastating impact of the human species on the planet. He argues that Western religion, economics, education and politics have all failed to address this issue primarily because they all see a discontinuity between the human and the non-human. The non-human has no legal rights, sacred or economic value, and can teach us nothing in this Western worldview. He argues that until Western culture becomes more integral with the Earth Community and Universe Story, there is little which can be done to arrest the devastation of our planetary home.

Questions/Points for Discussion

1. Western culture tends to place value on and grant all rights to the human as opposed to the non-human. Discuss how this affects human religion, economics, politics, law and education. Is it not easier to exploit that which has no rights and value? We are learning that persons of all genders, ethnicities, cultures, and religions have value and worth - what will it take for us to see that everything in the natural world is of similar value and worth?
2. Thomas says we humans need a healing in the total structure of our being, that we, in the Western world, have a deficiency - a deep cultural pathology - which allows us to devastate the awesome and beautiful natural world. Do you agree with Thomas? How do you feel being told that you are pathological in some way? Which people, organizations and institutions do you know that are working to address/remedy this species-wide pathology?
3. Thomas says that you can't have a rising human economy in the midst of a declining Earth economy - that you can't have well people on a sick planet. Is he right? Discuss with examples.
4. Concerning religion, Thomas argues that the earth and the natural world must be the primary source of wonder, awe and mystery, that the revelations of the natural world must be primary as opposed to verbal or written revelations. Do you agree? As Thomas often says, are we being "autistic" in our religious traditions, not being able to see outside of their humanly constructed context?
5. Thomas argues, building on the thinking of Teilhard de Chardin, that the Universe has a psychic-spiritual dimension from the beginning - the Universe is more than physical processes - there is a psychic meaning to the Universe. He emphasizes that to know the physical properties of carbon but to neglect the role carbon plays in life is to not know carbon. Thomas states that if the universe produces beauty/intelligence/consciousness - then the Universe is an beauty/intelligence/consciousness-producing process. He also says that scientific knowledge doesn't merely resolve mysteries it leads us deeper into the mystery. Are you comfortable with Thomas' view this mystical/spiritual aspect of the Universe? Why or why not?