

“The Historical Mission of Our Time”

Thomas Berry at UNC Chapel Hill, June 1997

Summary

In broad brush strokes Thomas Berry outlines how we arrived at the current crisis moment in Earth-human relations, provides a diagnosis, and a prescription to remedy the situation which he calls "the historical mission of our time" or "The Great Work".

Thomas summarizes the situation succinctly in three phrases:

"In the 20th century the glory of the human has become the desolation of the earth. The desolation of the Earth is becoming the destiny of the human. All human institutions, professions, programs, and activities must now be judged primarily by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore, or foster a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship."

He outlines "The Great Work" of our time equally succinctly:

"The historical mission of our times is to re-invent the human at the species level with critical reflection within the community of life systems in a time developmental context by means of story and shared dream experience."

Questions/Points for Discussion

1. Thomas states that in transitioning to the Ecozoic era *"All human institutions, professions, programs, and activities must now be judged primarily by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore, or foster a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship."* How are we doing as individuals and institutions in the areas of economics, politics, law, religion and education? What could we do better?
2. Thomas emphasizes that everyone, wherever they are, in the vocations they are in, is equally important in effecting the transition to an Ecozoic era. It requires primarily a change in perspective and emphasis. Discuss what this means for you in your life.
3. Thomas always stresses the need for the human species to re-invent itself and that this is done through cultural shaping forces. What areas of culture in your specific cultural setting would need to be adjusted, modified, or jettisoned in order to enhance the transition towards a more mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship?
4. Thomas says that "The Universe Story" is humanity's contemporary epic story much in the same way that Homer, Virgil, Augustine, and Dante used story to give context, meaning and purpose to their people in their time and place. Discuss how "The Universe Story" does this for you. Is it thrilling and inspiring enough to shape you and your culture?
5. "The dream drives and guides the action - we need to dream the Ecozoic into being - we can only overcome a distorted dream with a more valid dream" Thomas says. Discuss what exactly is the distorted dream in which we currently live in the Western World and what might a new dream, the dream of the Ecozoic Earth, look like.