

BRIAN SWIMME AND THOMAS BERRY'S VISION OF THE ECOZOIC

By Herman Greene

In the last chapter of Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry's book, *The Universe Story*,¹ they say we have arrived at a critical moment in Earth's history and if we are to have a viable future, we must move into "The Ecozoic era."

Here are some excerpts that last chapter, "The Ecozoic era," which give an overview of their vision:

The terminal phase of the Cenozoic was caused by a distorted aspect of the myth of progress. . . . Progress has been measured, not by the integral functioning and florescence of the Earth community, but by the extent of human control over the nonhuman world and the apparent benefits that emerged for humans. (241)

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This term *progress* is itself something of a parody of the inner dynamics of the universe. . . . That the universe, in the diversity and abundance of its expression, has been so successful over vast periods of time is a wonder that we only now begin to appreciate. (242)

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Presently we seek to remedy the devastation of the planet by entry into a new period of creativity participated in by the entire Earth community. This new period we identify as the Ecozoic era, a fourth biological era to succeed the . . . Cenozoic. (242-43)

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That the universe is a communion of subjects rather than a collection of objects is the central commitment of the Ecozoic. Existence itself is derived from and sustained by this intimacy of each being with every other being of the universe. (243)

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Because of [its] organic quality, Earth cannot survive in fragments. . . . The integral functioning of the planet must be preserved.

¹ Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, *The Universe Story: From the Primordial Flaring Forth to the Ecozoic Era* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992).

To preserve the economic viability of the planet must be the first law of economics.

To preserve the health of the planet must be the first commitment of the medical profession.

To preserve the natural world as the primary revelation of the divine must be the basic concern of religion.

The well-being of the Earth is primary. Human well-being is derivative. (243)

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Without reciprocity the Earth could not survive. Failure to understand this is one of the reasons for the devastation of the late Cenozoic era by its human component. (244)

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In the early civilizations the cosmological order was consistently experienced in terms of human society, and human social order was conceived in terms of the cosmological order. . . .When we propose that the future might be designated as the Ecozoic era we have in mind the restoration, in a new context, of this primordial mode of human awareness. (245)

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It has been difficult for humans to appreciate that the planet is given to us as a one-time endowment. Although the Earth is resilient and has extensive powers of renewal, it also has a finite and a nonrenewable aspect. (247)

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It is already clear that in the future the Earth will function differently than it has functioned in the past. In the future the entire complex of life systems of the planet will be influenced by the human in a comprehensive manner. (247)

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Only a comprehensive commitment to the Ecozoic can effectively counter the mystical commitment of our present commercial-industrial establishments to the Technozoic. There is a special need in this transitional phase out of the Cenozoic to awaken a consciousness of the sacred dimension of the Earth. (251)

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The basic obligation of any historical moment is to continue the integrity of that creative process whence the universe derives, sustains itself, and continues its sequence of transformations. (251)

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The Ecozoic era requires a comprehensive human consensus. It needs such support for its planetwide programs. The entire planet would then be considered as a commons. (254)

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Religion begins to appreciate that the primary sacred community is the universe itself. In a more immediate perspective, the sacred community is the Earth community. The human community becomes sacred through its participation in the larger planetary community. (257)

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Beyond all this and in a sense more encompassing than any of these is the role of women in the future. The need presently is recognition of women in their capacity to interpret the human venture at its most basic level in the context of the universe and the planet Earth. (257)

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Our Cenozoic dictionary cannot deal adequately with the realities of existence in this new period. We need an Ecozoic dictionary. (258)

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Humans are becoming much more sensitive to the nonhuman languages of the surrounding world. We are learning the mountain language, river language, tree language, the languages of the birds and all the animals and insects, as well as the languages of the stars in the heavens. (258)

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What we seldom think about is the human as species. We will never come to appreciate the full significance of human adjustment in this new biological era until we

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begin to think of the human as a species among species. . . .Until we begin to think about our human story as integral with the larger life story and the larger Earth story we will not be fully into the Ecozoic period. (259)

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What the Ecozoic era seeks ultimately is to bring the human activities on the Earth into alignment with the other forces functioning throughout the planet so that a creative balance will be achieved. When the curvature of the universe, the curvature of the Earth, and the curvature of the human are once more in their proper relation, then Earth will have arrived at the celebratory experience that is the fulfillment of earthly existence. (261)