

CLIMATE CHANGE CHRONICLE 39

A Spiritual Chrysalis

If Earth is in a transition from the Holocene era to the Anthropocene era, we must transition with it. We must find our place in a new kind of Earth. We are, after all, earthlings. We have come from Earth through an evolutionary process. Our consciousness is part of the consciousness of the living Earth and a conscious universe. We are in the Earth... and Earth and the conscious universe are in us.

In this new era we tend to focus on climate change. But our ability to deal with climate change is rooted in our spiritual consciousness—a sustaining and motivating energy source consistent with the new world we have entered. Specifically this means adopting an Earth spirituality.

In this chronicle I will once again use the transition story of the caterpillar and the butterfly.

In the first transition stage the caterpillar begins to gorge itself on surrounding leaves, consuming hundreds of times its own weight. It eventually slows down and spins the cocoon, a protective mechanism that will enable it to continue its transformations.

Many of us have grown up in a particular religious tradition. A tradition might be likened to a cocoon. I am one who has greatly benefited from my Christian tradition. It is a way of living one's life within a particular framework. But there comes a time when certain rules and regulations are inconsistent with the changes taking place in the way we have come to understand the world. So we begin a transition.

In the second transition stage the caterpillar encounters a challenge. Some new cells, science calls them "imaginal cells", begin to emerge. They contain the image of the butterfly. The cells from the caterpillar's immune system fight against these new cells. At first the imaginal cells are defeated. But eventually they outnumber the immune cells and they take over.

We might think of the emerging imaginal cells in our climate changing world as the vision of a new world. We might think of their image as an Earth spirituality—a spirituality that allows them to create a mutually enhancing relationship between our species and Earth.

This action will be resisted by some members of some religious traditions because it challenges the protective cocoon that their religion has provided for them. In religious terms the resisters will be seen as heretics. But the attacks from within the churches

will be nothing compared to the even stronger opposition from the power brokers running those systems that are destroying Earth. They want us to stay in our cocoons where we can't do any damage.

In the third transition to new life the caterpillar dissolves into a liquefied mass. The imaginal cells link together as a community and recycle the mass into a new form of life—the butterfly. They break out of the cocoon into a new and different life.

In this third transition there are three elements essential to an Earth spirituality. First of all the imaginal cells work together as a community and recycle the mass. We can think of this as a new use of traditional elements within existing religions, particularly their spiritualities. And finally, the butterfly is capable of breaking out of the cocoon and living in the real Ecozoic world—just what we are looking for.

A few concluding remarks about an Earth spirituality.

Earth spirituality is not something new. It existed in the shamanic world long before there were any religions. Earth was once seen as the primary revelation. This view is still alive today in many indigenous groups around the world.

All religious faith groups, including Christianity, have within their traditions an Earth spirituality. Think Francis of Assisi. The first thing those of us trying to create a common ground for an Earth spirituality must realize is that we are standing on it.

Many if not most people in the world today have developed their own personal spirituality outside of formal religions. Telling them about an Earth spirituality is not news.

To conclude: our human story began with the big bang and we earthlings are part of a conscious universe. The only part of the story we don't know is whether or not we will accept the challenge of helping Earth heal itself and, in the process, keep us alive and thriving as a species.

That is the spiritual challenge that confronts us. We are trying to create a new Ecozoic world—a 'Home of Living things'.

But what about the rest of the story?

Will our new image of an Earth spirituality become a reality? That depends upon us. But one ironic source of hope might come when we ask ourselves where the imaginal cells came from. They came, of course, from the caterpillar.