

THE BIOCENTRIC INSTITUTE

The Biocentric Institute conducts programs and studies directed toward the enhancement of quality of life for all peoples.

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MEMORANDUM

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RESPECT is a word very much in fashion these days. Everyone, it seems, wants to be respected even more than to be loved. Failure to show respect can be fatal in inner cities, and honor killings have long standing in societies with rigid codes of behavior. Why have we become so sensitive to affronts to dignity, but so oblivious to the lack of respect so many show to the fragile planet on which humankind depends for its existence?

Environmentalists worry that our advanced industrial societies are establishing a civilization at the expense of a thoroughly denatured planet. “Is this fear an overreach?” asks William B. Dickinson, a former Washington editor and journalism professor, in this communication from the Biocentric Institute. The nonprofit foundation conducts programs and studies directed toward the enhancement of quality of life for all peoples. “Where is the respect when air, water and soil are so compromised that human health and life itself are imperiled?”

Dickinson is heartened by evidence that environmentalism and religion are making peace. The Biblical language giving mankind dominion over plants and animals is increasingly seen as implying stewardship rather than exploitation. Pope Francis, in a book written in 2010 when he was archbishop of Buenos Aires, said that mankind sometimes lost respect for nature. “Then ecological problems arise, like global warming,” he wrote. The consequences of poor stewardship were not lost on Bible Belt survivors of the Dust Bowl years in the nation’s heartland. They saw the great black clouds of blowing dust as God’s wrath over farmers’ greedily plowing under native buffalo grass in order to plant ever bigger wheat harvests.

“So where’s the respect?” Dickinson asks. “First, we have to accept the limitations of growth on a finite planet, one protected by a narrow band of atmosphere beneath which pulsates a wealth of animal and plant life that took eons to develop but can be compromised or destroyed in a few generations. Our sophisticated space telescopes tell us how vast and unwelcoming the universe really is. We will have to make do with the world we inhabit.”

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