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The Ecozoic Reader

CRITICAL REFLECTION, STORY AND SHARED DREAM EXPERIENCE
OF AN ECOLOGICAL AGE



“The historical mission of our time is to reinvent 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.”

—Thomas Berry

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The Great Work

We are about the Great Work.

*We all have our particular work—some of us are teachers,
some of us are healers, some of us in various professions,
some of us are farming.*

We have a variety of occupations.

*But beside the particular work we do
and the particular lives we lead,
we have a Great Work that everyone
is involved in and no one is exempt from.*

*That is the work of moving on from a terminal Cenozoic¹
to an emerging Ecozoic Era² in the story of the planet Earth...
which is the Great Work.*

- Thomas Berry

¹ Our current geo-biological era, the Cenozoic Era, began 65,000,000 years ago following the mass extinction of dinosaurs and many other species. Now Earth is undergoing another mass extinction of plant and animal species, this time caused by the impact of human activity on the community of life systems. The Cenozoic Era is ending.

² That another geo-biological era will follow the Cenozoic Era is not in question. What is in question is whether humans and other forms of life as we know them will continue to flourish. Will we achieve a viable mode of human presence on the Earth? The “Ecozoic Era”—a time of a mutually enhancing relationship of humans and the larger community of life systems—represents the hope that we will.

American Global Hegemony Versus the Quest for a New Humanity

By Preston M. Browning, Jr.

On March 20, 2003, the day after the United States began its attack on Iraq, I was in Oaxaca, Mexico. Since it was a national holiday marking the arrival of spring, school children were in evidence everywhere, and, in fact, in the central plaza first, second and third graders were performing—dancing and singing—for admiring parents, grandparents and other onlookers. How different our two countries are, I thought. While Mexicans celebrate new life emerging from the Earth, our government rains down death from the sky.

I had arrived in Mexico earlier in March after a lecture tour down the East Coast, giving a talk to university students and others entitled “Toward a Politics of Justice, Compassion, Sustainability and Hope.” I had organized this talk around four propositions: first, that the United States has become an empire, one that has caused great suffering to peoples in the Two-Thirds World since the beginning of the 20th century when U.S. forces brought about the deaths of a million Filipinos, most of them civilians, and since 1945 has been responsible for what some critics call “the third world war.”¹

My second proposition is that our country is in the grips of a profound pathology which manifests itself in such ways, as a kind of love affair with violence and an addiction to war, and that we are “in denial” about our addiction. The third proposition is that the Earth, our exceedingly lovely but fragile planet home, is in serious danger of ecological collapse and that instead of devoting untold billions to wars and preparations for wars, our nation should undertake an effort, comparable to the Marshall Plan or John

¹ Former CIA operatives calculate that during this time the number of deaths caused by U.S. invasions, CIA-orchestrated coups, low-intensity wars, etc., number approximately eight million. “What I’ve Learned About U. S. Foreign Policy: The War Against the Third World,” a two-hour video featuring Martin Luther King, Jr., Bill Moyers, Ramsey Clark, and John Stockwell, a 12-year veteran of the Central Intelligence Agency. In numerous books, Noam Chomsky has documented the U.S. onslaught against Third World peoples. See, for example, *Pirates and Emperors, Old and New: International Terrorism in the Real World*, (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2002).

Kennedy's campaign to put a man on the moon, designed to develop a sustainable economy based on renewable energy sources. The final proposition argues that only a monumental transformation at a deep psychic and spiritual level is likely to prevent our self-destruction and that this transformation, if it occurs, must be accompanied by a political "revolution" if we are to avoid environmental meltdown in the decades ahead.

My lecture was based, in part, on the conviction that today the American way of life—four percent of Earth's population consuming twenty-five percent of available resources and forty percent of the petroleum, while squandering our national treasure on armaments wildly disproportionate to the need—is obviously not sustainable. Moreover, our consumer appetite contributes directly to the poverty and suffering of 2.5 billion people in the less developed countries. We insist on obtaining "our raw materials" at rock bottom prices, and when a nation such as Chile or Guatemala or the Dominican Republic has elected a government dedicated to obtaining a fair price for their copper or bananas or sugar, the United States has seen to it, through CIA-orchestrated coups or outright invasion, that such nations learn the lesson that the American Empire tolerates no opposition.

In addition, throughout the twentieth century, the United States has supported some of the world's most bloody and rapacious dictators. From Indonesia, to Haiti, to Nicaragua, to the former Zaire, where President Mobutu murdered hundreds of thousands of his people and stole enormous sums from the public treasury, American support for tyrants has been consistent. Though U.S. leaders have claimed that such support has been critical in order to check the spread of communism or to create "stability" in the targeted countries, the result has been to vest economic and political power in oppressive, autocratic leaders subservient to United States elites and eager to cooperate with the multinational corporations which, according to one former CIA agent, now "own the earth."²

Invariably, these corporations are drawn to countries where wages are depressed, labor unions are outlawed or labor organizers intimidated or assassinated (as was the case in El Salvador and Guatemala in recent decades), and environmental laws are lax or easily circumvented. The hundreds of maquiladoras lining the Mexican-U.S. border, where the labor force is made up almost entirely of young women who report working

² John Stockwell, in a speech at the University of Illinois at Chicago, January 1991.

conditions that include long hours, low wages and, sexual intimidation by supervisors, provide examples of the exploitation in which the United States is complicit.³ Such disparity in wealth and freedom to pursue a fulfilling life as exists between the majority of North Americans and the peoples of the Global South portends only more political turmoil and wars in the twenty-first century. The U.S. government, in fact, in a document titled “Vision for 2020,” has noted that the gap between the haves and have-nots will widen in the new century and that therefore the United States must be prepared to conduct military campaigns from space in order to protect our “national interests.” The militarization of space and its use in insuring the supremacy of the United States in any future conflicts—commercial or otherwise—has been documented by several authors, including Rosalie Bertell.⁴

Thus, at the moment in our planet’s and our species’ history when there is an overwhelming need for global cooperation and global planning for humankind’s entrance into the Ecozoic era, and when many of our fellow inhabitants on Earth appear eager for the new beginning called for in the *Earth Charter*, America, once the “city on a hill” supposedly lighting the way for other nations, now seems blinded by its greed and its multiple addictions—to endless consumption, to military solutions to international conflicts, and to lies from leaders in government, industry and the military about the true state of our nation and Earth.

Any clear-sighted perception of the realities of our era must, I believe, acknowledge that we are at a crisis point in the evolution of the universe, Earth and our species. Decisions we humans now make will determine the future for all other species and for Earth itself. This destiny places upon us a responsibility of almost unimaginable and unbearable weight. It also offers us an opportunity of breathtaking magnitude and consequences, a gift for which the only appropriate response is profound gratitude.

³ There are many sources documenting the horrific conditions experienced by workers in the *maquiladoras* of Mexico and other Latin countries. June Nash, an anthropologist who delivered the keynote address at a conference on “Women and Globalization” in Costa Rica , April 1, 2003, entitled “Women In Between: Globalization and the New Enlightenment,” tells of numerous unsolved murders of young women workers in the border sweatshops. See also Melissa W. Wright, “The Dialectics of Still Life: Murder, Women and Maquiladoras” in Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, eds. *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism*, 125-147.

⁴ *Planet Earth: The Latest Weapon of War: A Critical Study Into the Military and the Environment*. (London: The Women’s Press, 2000).

To properly acknowledge the true nature of this moment in the history of evolution, we humans ought, I think, to declare ourselves citizens of the cosmos. If that goal sounds too grand and too abstract, let us declare ourselves citizens of planet Earth, dedicated to its health and sustainability. And let us recognize that no matter what our race or religion, our nationality or profession, our social class or our economic standing, we are part of an interdependent whole—in metaphysical terms the web of being, in more practical terms that collection of individuals we call the human family, each of whose health and happiness depends ultimately on the health and happiness of every other human being. As Martin Luther King, Jr., reminded us in his great “I have a dream” speech, quoting John Donne, “No man is an island . . . [each is] a part of the maine.”

To sustain such a vision, we—East and West, North and South—require a spirituality capable of embracing the marvelous diversity and complexity of this human family. What is required, I submit, is a spiritual globalization, a globalization based on love, not hate; on cooperation, not exploitation; on hope, not fear. In contrast to the economic globalization already under way, the globalization of which I speak would honor the unique knowledge and skills of indigenous peoples everywhere; would strive to implement programs of health care for all, whatever their incomes; would see to it that water, electricity and other essentials do not become the property of corporations interested in maximizing profits instead of human welfare; would encourage small-scale economic ventures such as the microlending enterprises pioneered in Bangladesh; and would work to ensure that laborers were paid a fair wage for their labor and that work places were safe and environmentally friendly. In addition, a spiritual globalization would have as its ultimate goal a planetary society and culture “fit for human beings,” one whose every feature tended to nurture human life and, indeed, all forms of life on the planet.

Utopian? Many will say yes. I say that the peril and the opportunity of our moment in history demand thinking so bold, so creative that only ideas once dismissed derisively as “hopelessly utopian” can answer to the longing of billions of our brothers and sisters on the Earth for a just, peaceful and sustainable planetary society—and to the call of the cosmos itself.

Fortunately, we are not without thinkers who possess the wisdom and the courage to articulate a vision of such a society. For example, implicit in everything Thomas Berry has written is the understanding that only if humankind can begin seriously to enter into a new relationship with the evolutionary processes that brought our species into being, one that acknowledges our kinship with all of the created order and deals with the rest of creation with respect and a deep concern for equity and justice, is continued human life on Earth likely to be possible.

Father Berry's challenge to the present generation—and those that come after—is indeed revolutionary. For he calls upon this creature which normally fears fundamental social and intellectual change and clings tenaciously to habits of mind rooted in past experience, no matter how dysfunctional they may have been rendered by changes in the material culture due to science and technology, to make a leap of faith into an utterly alien mode of existence. Here is what he claims we must do.

Our challenge is to create a new language, even a new sense of what it is to be human. It is to transcend not only national limitations, but even our species isolation, to enter into the larger community of living species. This brings a completely new sense of reality and of value.⁵

How, we may reasonably ask, do we who have long been accustomed to think of ourselves as liberated from the superstitions of pre-modern, “primitive” peoples, who depend for our daily effectiveness and happiness upon telephones, automobiles and computers, who normally enjoy nature only as we observe it in zoos or during a brief summer vacation in national parks or the Canadian Rockies, who have “conquered” Earth's highest peaks and “tamed” its wildest and most recalcitrant forces, and whose sense of self-worth is often intimately related to this power to dominate and subdue—how do we “transcend . . . our species isolation [and] enter into the larger community of living species”? As recent American and world history has shown us, it is difficult enough to transcend “national limitations,” let alone our isolation from all other species.

⁵ Thomas Berry, “The Ecological Age,” in *The Dream of the Earth*, 42 (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988).

I raise these issues not to question the power of Thomas Berry's thought but instead to focus attention upon the impediments standing in the way of this critical move from isolation, warfare and domination to cooperation, mutuality, and recognition of the unity which, finally, binds all of creation into one potentially harmonious reality. I raise these questions also because of my belief that no matter how grand and beneficial to human welfare America's contributions to modern civilization have been, the United States today constitutes the single most grave threat to the human enterprise and indeed to the survival of life on planet Earth.

Berry's vision encompasses something like a recovery of the experience of the sacredness of all creation as a *sine qua non* of "a new sense of what it is to be human." But in a society such as ours from which the very notion of the sacred has almost entirely disappeared, it will not be easy to convince large numbers of people that their way of life is itself a kind of profane desecration.

Jerry Mander's *In the Absence of the Sacred: The Failure of Technology and the Survival of the Indian Nations*⁶ is a disturbing analysis of the forces in the modern world, often most fully developed in America, that conspire to render the experience of the sacred something that we may read about in anthropological texts or accounts of "native" life such as *Black Elk Speaks*⁷ but never hope to know for ourselves. And, since we have never known what it is like to live within sacred space or perceive a manifestation of the sacred in an eagle or buffalo, we exist with only a faint glimmer of what we have lost, what our technological society has denied us, and what our addiction to "progress," to wealth, and to things places beyond our consciousness. In the absence of the sacred, we live radically diminished lives, immersed in a stream of sensations, desires, fears, hopes and uncertainties, with even our religions, since they too are largely devoid of a profound sense of the sacred, frequently becoming little more than palliatives assisting us in getting through the day—and the night.

As we examine the impediments that our society places in the way of the creation of the new consciousness projected in Thomas Berry's vision, we must emphasize the role of our technology-driven, commercial culture in

⁶ San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1991.

⁷ As told through John G. Neihardt, 21st Century Edition (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 2000).

deepening human alienation from the natural world and those feelings we associate with an experience of the sacred. Mander refers to the “drive of Westerners to convert wild, uncontrolled, and unexplored terrain into productive commodity forms”⁸ Nothing is exempt; nothing, as we used to say, is sacred. An artist, Elisabeth Garsonnin, puts the case starkly:

I can readily identify with the young people today; how trapped they must feel. The natural world is almost gone, and it’s being replaced by this awful hard-edged commercial creation, with technohumans running it. They’re already in Antarctica. They’re in all the jungles Their satellites are photographing everything. They know what’s in the ground and what’s on the land. Soon they’ll be on Venus and Mars. And they’re inside human cells. Where is there left for the mind to flee? They’ve even invaded the subjective spaces, the fantasy world. As an artist I feel that the sources of creation are being wiped out and paved over. It makes the only viable art protest art It means they already have us confined; we can only react to *them*. I am so sad.⁹

The compulsion to control, to dominate, to subdue “the Other”—whether it be dark-skinned peoples, the natural world, or women—has long been a salient feature of the Western male psyche and much has been written about this phenomenon. Here I wish only to stress the degree to which the elites who staff the military-industrial complex and frequently serve in government appear to be indistinguishable from the technohumans Garsonnin refers to. They are intent, it often seems, upon converting the entire creation into commodities or armaments.

These commodities, we should remember, are often little more than baubles or new-fangled gadgets designed for the person who already has a house stuffed with things—things which perhaps suffice to fill, for the moment, the emptiness that commentators claim haunts the American psyche. It should be clear, however, that the never-ending consumption of commodities is a fruitless and finally self-defeating response to the human search for meaning and fulfillment. But our society, with its “junk culture” (the phrase is Robert Bly’s) and its lack of a persuasive and coherent vision of what “a society fit for human beings” would look like, offers no real

⁸ Mander, 138.

⁹ Quoted in Mander.

alternative to the desacralized, “hard-edged” world that our commercial culture, with its addiction to the bottom line, touts as the only world there is. If alarming numbers of our young people despair and commit suicide or, worse yet, kill their schoolmates and teachers before ending their own lives, such desperate measures ought to be sufficient warning that our way of life is in serious need of repair—or, more likely—a revolutionary overhaul.

But the failure of our educational institutions and other organizations involved in creating systems of value and meaning—churches, corporations, the media—to provide genuine alternatives to the dominant culture, which, according to E.M. Adams, the author of *A Society Fit for Human Beings*, is radically deficient in those features which a fulfilled human life requires, makes inevitable the pathologies plaguing our national life.¹⁰ If, as the old saw has it, one cannot make a silk purse out of a sow’s ear, neither can one expect to make a healthy individual out of the images and messages which our society communicates to its children.

In more than a half dozen books, Adams, emeritus professor of philosophy at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, has examined the evolution of Western societies since the early modern period and offers a persuasive diagnosis of the intellectual and spiritual sickness that he believes characterizes contemporary life in those societies. Put simply, having chosen an understanding of human reality almost exclusively in terms of what can be known through the senses—what can be observed and measured and tested—thinkers in the West gave up the humanistic understanding inherited from the past. Science and the scientific method became supreme and with the development of highly sophisticated technology gave us the wonders of modern medicine and telecommunications and space travel that we now take for granted. But in the process, something critical was lost: a coherent vision of those elements that constitute a healthy human being and of a society capable of sustaining emotionally and spiritually healthy individuals. Having subjected all other human needs to the requirements of the economic order and having identified the acquisition of wealth and power as the ultimate goal of human life, the Western mind has become deranged.

“With the humanistic (that is, the moral, civic, artistic, and religious) culture intellectually undermined and with the dominance of the economic order driven by the rationality of individual self-interest maximizers, the

¹⁰ Albany: The State University of New York Press, 1997, xvi-xvii.

social infrastructure that nourishes the human spirit and supports the civic enterprise has progressively disintegrated. There is little wonder many families are dysfunctional, the crime level is high, psychotherapy is a thriving business, and antidepressant drugs are big money-makers.”¹¹

If Adams’ analysis is correct, then our situation is indeed desperate. As he states, “the values of our culture are inverted, . . . the virtues required for the success of our economic and military systems are morally corrupting, [and] our dominant intellectual vision of humankind and the world generates a profound human identity crisis and undercuts the humanistic dimension of the culture that supports the human enterprise”¹² And, I might add, because we lack leaders capable of “the vision thing,” we are on a collision course with disaster. What, one may ask, are we to do? Where may we turn for guidance?

In an ideal world, the United States would be a leader moving toward a global community fit for human habitation. Unfortunately, rather than being a source of healing and nurture, we are too often the source of the sickness. We export our violence and our junk culture to the far corners of the Earth, and the globalization and market economy our leaders seek to impose—through such agreements as NAFTA and the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), as well as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank—on the weak and the poor around the globe lead finally to more concentration of wealth in the hands of the few and more dispossession for the many.

Human evolution toward a genuinely new understanding of our place in the cosmos requires a profound metamorphosis in the direction of unity, sympathy, compassion, fellow-feeling and awareness of a shared destiny. We must learn to love, as W.H. Auden put it, or die. We must, in short, transcend our normal ego-protecting, boundary-building anxiety and possessiveness and learn to live in a new reality where the old barriers to compassion are overcome. In the most extreme sense, I believe, Thomas Berry is calling us to emulate such people as Jesus, Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King, Jr.

¹¹ Adams, xvi-xvii.

¹² Adams, xvii-xviii.

Such heroic self-transcendence is difficult for human beings at all times and in all places, but for rare individuals in the past it has been possible. The critical question for North Americans today is this: Is self-transcendence possible for substantial numbers of us who, according to some of our most perceptive critics, suffer from a severe case of narcissism?

In *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*,¹³ Christopher Lasch analyzed American society from numerous perspectives, revealing the degree to which narcissistic proclivities dominate the American psyche. The contemporary Narcissus, he writes, “demands immediate gratification and lives in a state of restless, perpetually unsatisfied desire,” devoid of interest in the future and with a barren inner life characterized by “pseudo-awareness of himself.” Like several other scholars and critics intent upon diagnosing the pathologies of contemporary American life, Lasch cites capitalism as the source of many of our national maladies. For under the conditions of advanced capitalism, everything tends to become a commodity and even the self does not escape the ubiquitous forces of an aggressive and all-embracing program of commodification.

In one chapter Lasch uses the thought of the Marquis de Sade to illuminate the stage of entrenched narcissism at which he believes life in the United States has arrived. Sade, Lasch reminds us, reduced human beings “to their sexual organs,” suggesting that they are “interchangeable,” a move parallel to “the capitalist principle that human beings are ultimately reducible to interchangeable objects.” Moreover, in Sade’s “ideal society,” pleasure becomes life’s only business, pleasure, however, that is indistinguishable from rape, murder, unbridled aggression. In a society that has reduced reason to mere calculation, reason can impose no limits on the pursuit of pleasure—on the immediate gratification of every desire no matter how perverse, insane, criminal, or merely immoral.¹⁴

One may argue, of course, with Lasch’s conclusions, noting that many Americans would not agree that the pursuit of pleasure is life’s ultimate purpose. Yet it is hard to deny, I think, that the narcissistic personality pervades our culture, ceaselessly demanding attention to the desires of the self and the satisfaction of its insatiable appetites. Psychiatrist Trevor Turner offers contemporary evidence supporting Lasch’s theory. In “I shop,

¹³ New York: Warner Books, 1979, 23.

¹⁴ Lasch, 132.

therefore I am,” he notes that there “seems to be a rising demand for ‘lifestyle’ medications and even several new ‘conditions,’” for example, “sexual-addiction syndrome” for those whose sexual habits drive them from partner to partner in seemingly uncontrollable promiscuity.¹⁵

Why not, he asks, “malignant self-actualization syndrome” to designate the extreme preoccupation with the self so rampant in America today? Citing an abundance of evidence, everything from an “obsession with appearance” and the cosmetic surgery industry to an “increasingly privatized lifestyle,” Turner contends that increasingly we are a people focused on the needs and desires of a self isolated from community and incapable of relationship with others. “Your own flat, your own car, your own space, your own ‘personal’ computer are the sacred must-haves of today.”¹⁶ “ME” might be said to be the logo best characterizing contemporary American society from Madison Avenue to Main Street.

Narcissism and addiction are, I believe, two sides of a coin. The capitalist market place, which in its present form cannot exist without manufacturing endless, insatiable desire, inevitably leads to an addictive society. Turner puts the case this way:

If we take drug and alcohol addicts as the ultimate example of those serving their own needs to the detriment of others—ranting, robbing or ruining so as to ease *their* personal pain—we can also see how subtler addictions are fiercely reinforced by our highly controlled society We are so hooked on a thousand creature comforts, in the West at least, that we do not see the dependency downsides of coffee (anxiety), sugar (obesity), cars (heart attacks) or additives (tantrums).¹⁷

The human Turner describes may be more visible to Americans than Thomas’ vision of a new humanity, but I think such a vision lingers in the memory of some who felt the excitement and promise of the revolutionary moment in their country’s history, when it appeared possible to begin anew. These are most frequently the poor and dispossessed, in my experience—people who, having almost none of the things we North Americans consider

¹⁵ Trevor Turner, “I shop, therefore I am,” *New Internationalist* (April 2003), 13

¹⁶ Turner, 14.

¹⁷ Ibid.

necessary for a fulfilling life, yet manage to share the little they do have. They live, moreover, closer to nature and participate in the rhythms of the natural world in a way we have long abandoned. Is it possible that they, and billions like them in India, Cambodia, Angola, Ecuador and other Two-Thirds World nations, might lead the way in bringing about the revolution in consciousness that Thomas Berry envisions as necessary for Earth's survival as a habitat capable of supporting humans and other living beings?

Perhaps it is. But the change will occur only if in the coming decades there is a dramatic slowing of the economic globalization that now threatens to impose the values of the "free market" upon peoples in every corner of the globe. What is at stake is not only the destruction of centuries-old customs and habits rooted in the belief that resources rightly belong to all the people of a given locale and ought not to be monopolized by private concerns. At stake also is the ultimate condition of the human mind and soul. For the corporate executives, government officials and bureaucrats seeking a global marketplace where all human activities are subject to their control leave an indelible imprint not only upon the economies of villages and cities, but work a kind of perverse magic upon the inner life as well. Ultimately, they "colonize" the unconscious.

As Elizabeth Garsonnin claims, there's "nowhere that's not being made over" and, as she implies, the inner world is no more immune to the power of technology yoked to the capitalist market than the outer. Sadly, the new humanity which seems to be emerging in our era is not that hoped-for in Thomas Berry's vision but one embodying the character traits of the addictive consumer anxiously serving the desires of a self which knows and cares little about the needs of billions of other selves on the planet. Moreover, as we have learned painfully in the United States and other Western nations, the capitalist market, with its billions spent on aggressive advertising, is masterful in creating desires which bear no relationship to actual needs.¹⁸

¹⁸ See Richard Lichtman, *The Production of Desire: The Integration of Psychoanalysis into Marxist Theory*, (New York: The Free Press, 1982). Lichtman writes with remarkable perspicacity about the impact of advanced capitalism on human beings: "In this society most men and women still live lives of quiet desperation . . . This is an age of muted desperation, where the voice of rebellion speaks obliquely, often in grotesque cries and pleadings." Lichtman, 286-87. A statement by Paul Baran seems especially apt both for Lichtman's argument and my own: "[P]eople steeped in the culture of monopoly capitalism do not want

Perhaps most discouragingly, the American Empire, to which we all contribute through taxes, now seems totally in the hands of men whose agenda apparently includes U.S. global hegemony by overwhelming military power and the export of America's commercial values and popular culture to every land on the face of the planet.

With the combination of triumphalism that accompanied the Iraq war and the fear that followed the attacks of September 11, 2001, skillfully manipulated by the Bush Administration to stifle dissent, the American people appear, for the most part, little inclined to consider alternatives to the status quo. Thus it requires considerable faith and courage to continue to believe that a new humanity is possible and to continue to work for a world order that does not depend on fear, force of arms and domination.

At the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, then secretary general of the United Nations, said, "To the ancients nature was the dwelling place of the gods. The Earth had a soul. To find that soul and restore it, this is the essence of Rio." To find that soul and restore it is surely the challenge of our time.

Thomas Berry is correct, however, in saying that we cannot go back. We must go forward. We in the West, the principal source of the virus that is destroying our habitat (Mary Evelyn Tucker), will have to trust the emerging global spirit now manifest in dozens of ways and in dozens of places. And we will have to trust, I think, the people. The people organize. The people march. They people demand justice. In Latin America, for example, following centuries of colonialism, imperialist exploitation and brutal dictatorships, the people are stirring, electing former labor leaders and indigenous candidates to the highest national offices. In Argentina, whose economy was wrecked by adherence to neoliberal practices imposed by the IMF, unemployed workers have occupied abandoned factories, formed cooperatives, and begun the process of creating an economy independent of the international marketplace. In both Bolivia and Ecuador, governments have been elected on platforms stressing economic justice for the dispossessed masses. Brazil's new president, "Lula" da Silva, a socialist and former union organizer, has declared his opposition to economic models

imposed from abroad and is adamant in his commitment to a new Brazilian society, emphasizing the elimination of hunger and attention to the needs of the country's poorest citizens.¹⁹

Those of us seeking the restoration of Earth's soul can take heart from such striking instances of human ingenuity and courage. We may also be inspired by the struggles of indigenous peoples as they strive to maintain their habitats and traditional ways. An organization located near my home in western Massachusetts, the Sacred Earth Network, works with native peoples on two continents. Through the East-West Indigenous Exchange, Native Americans have visited the indigenous people of the Altai region of Siberia; and in the fall of 2003 a group of Altaians will travel to the United States, visiting Native Americans in New England and Canada.²⁰ One hoped-for result of these exchanges is a deeper understanding of the wisdom that has permitted indigenous people all over the globe to survive for millennia, a wisdom that will be sorely needed as humankind enters the Ecozoic era.

* * * * *

As I look out my study window this early June morning, my eye is ravished by the astonishing tapestry of colors nature has chosen to offer me. Prominent among them is the lavender of lilac and the yellow of buttercups and dandelions. But the color that forces me to gasp is green, a green so lavish, so ubiquitous, so insistent upon my attention and admiration that I cannot conceive of a time when nature will have been so ravaged by human greed, moral blindness and carelessness that it fails to answer to our expectation of spring's return each year.

Well over a hundred years ago, the English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins, in "God's Grandeur," wrote these words: "The world is charged with the grandeur of God/ It will flame out, like shining from shook foil." Later in this sonnet we read, "And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil . . . the soil is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod." The poet's acute anguish over humankind's destruction of nature seems at first unrelieved. Yet in the poem's second part, we find these words: "And for all this, there lives the dearest freshness deep down things . . . Because the

¹⁹ Quoted in Fritz Hull, ed. *Earth and Spirit: The Spiritual Dimension of the Environmental Crisis*. (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1993), 8.

²⁰ "Newsletter," The Sacred Earth Network, Amherst, MA. (Spring 2003).

Holy Ghost over the bent/ World broods with warm breast and ah! bright wings."²¹

Today many of us have difficulty believing in the traditional Judeo-Christian God that was still possible for Hopkins. But many of us *do* believe. Whether our vision is influenced by Buddhist principles, by the beliefs of indigenous peoples, or by a more systematic intellectual understanding of the divine such as one finds in process thought or panentheism, I expect few of us struggling for a new humanity would call ourselves atheists. Even a number of scientists, working at the cutting edge of research in chemistry, physics and biology, now acknowledge the presence of a reality that eludes the scientific method. Some name it: *spirit*.²²

The word brings me back to earlier reflections. In his "Preface" to *Earth & Spirit: The Spiritual Dimension of the Environmental Crisis*, Fritz Hull writes:

The word spiritual /today/...often refers to a more collective experience of the numinous or sacred quality of the universe, to God, and to the essential importance of a vision of life infused with a sense of the sacred. Increasingly this word suggests that which touches our deepest instincts, pierces our illusions, and opens us to everything in the world that expresses love and truth.²³

Thus, sensing the growth of such a spirituality around the world, I find my pessimism tempered. I sense that there is an emerging global consciousness, "species consciousness" in the language of the psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton, which has given rise to such documents as the "Earth Charter" and which was on glorious display in a host of countries prior to the Iraq war. And in this longing for justice and peace, a profound spirituality is evident.

²¹ *The Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), 66.

²² See, for example, Rupert Sheldrake, *The Rebirth of Nature: The Greening of Science and God*. (Rochester, VT: Park Street Press, 1991). Also George F. R. Ellis, "Cosmology and Religion" in Clifford N. Matthews, et al., eds, *When Worlds Converge: What Science and Religion Tell Us About the Story of The Universe and Our Place In It*. (Peru, IL: Carus Publishing Co., 2002).

²³ Hull, 8-9

Human beings have, in the past, changed ways of thinking and behaving, taken new paths and approached life in radically new ways. Therefore I cling, stubbornly and irrationally perhaps, to the conviction that our destiny is not to obliterate ourselves or to become a global herd of self-absorbed consumers obediently responding to signals emanating from Hollywood or Madison Avenue.

The profound spiritual authenticity of a Rachel Corrie, sacrificing her life to save the home of a Palestinian family from an Israeli bulldozer; the determination, patience and firm conviction of the rightness of their cause of the Mothers of the Disappeared, who have gathered outside the Presidential Palace in Buenos Aires, Argentina, once a week for 26 years; the faith of indigenous peoples worldwide that they will not only survive but flourish, represented by an indigenous leader in Ecuador who said, “We are like moorland grass that grows again after it has been uprooted, and from this grass we will sow the world”;²⁴ these examples give me hope.

And whether we realize the new humanity that Thomas Berry envisions or not, I feel exhilarated to be alive today, willing and able to join in the quest.

²⁴ Quoted in Luis Angel Saavedra, “Growing from the grassroots,” *New Internationalist* (May 2003), 28.



To a Dying Planet

By Preston M. Browning, Jr.

You were generous,
unstinting, mad to nurture,
forgiving,
hospitable as a Greek.
You took abuse.
You sickened.
On your knees you coughed,
strangling on soot and dark slime.

Some took notice.
Most took as always,
took with both hands—
like Flaubert's heroine
stuffing the precious powder
toward her heart
till breath was stilled.

You struggled to outlive them.
Anyone seeing you from afar
might have believed
your watery blue veins
a sign of stoic undauntedness.

At your burial
galaxies sang of your fortitude.
No word was spoken
of the killers' end.

You and the Center for Ecozoic Studies: The Meaning of Membership

By Herman F. Greene

CES will cease to be a primarily subscriber-based organization and become a member-based organization. Read this article if you are interested in finding out what membership in CES would mean for you.

In the last issue of this *Reader*, I wrote an article on CES' history and where it is going. Now I would like to relate CES' future direction to you, our readers and friends.

The work of CES in the future will be done by its members around the world and a few people in North Carolina and elsewhere who attend to CES' institutional functions.

CES offers itself as a way for some people involved in the Great Work to share with each other their critical reflections, stories and dream experiences about the transition to an Ecozoic Era. We hope this will be meaningful for a few, somewhere between 200-1,000 people, in and outside the United States.

CES will also offer itself as a vehicle for some people to create and share educational programs that relate to the Great Work.

CES offers itself as a way to create links and to support individual and group Great Work initiatives.

Membership in CES entails a personal commitment to research, education and artistic expression concerning the Ecozoic Era and how to bring it about. We hope that membership in CES will be part of a member's self-identification.

We put research before education and education before action, because there is much still to learn and reflection should precede action. Research can be theoretical, "book-learning," or applied/practical—just trying

something new. Education involves integration—mind, body, spirit and heart. Action is a response to in(ward)-formation. Artistic expression is research, education and action, . . . the culmination of human experience expressing truth beyond words.

CES supports open inquiry and dialogue and seeks to avoid convention whether from left or right. While the dis-establishment plays a crucial role in bringing into being the Ecozoic Era, the Great Work must provide answers for a new establishment meeting the needs of some 10 billion people who live in an interdependent relationship with an historically un-natural, domestic and wild, other-than-human natural world. In this sense, the task of the Ecozoic movement is like that of the modern movement, which began 500 years ago. “Ecozoic” should be the name for post-modernity, that which comes after the modern period. CES offers a virtual community to work on what this means.

CES will not seek to grow as an institution in a conventional sense. CES is undergoing a metamorphosis in which it becomes its members.

If you do not personally know Thomas Berry, then you may not know his wry sense of humor. When I was telling him about CES before it started, he chuckled and said, “Then if you succeed, you will be bogged down by all those institutional matters.”

Being bogged down by institutional matters means paying staff salaries and having to keep raising money to fund them; acquiring or leasing real estate buildings and equipment and having to pay for and maintain them; and having a communications system and process that responds to the institution’s stakeholders.

CES is a “little” institution, so we can’t avoid such things entirely. What we are committing ourselves to is, rather than thinking in institutional terms, to let CES serve those who find the connection it offers meaningful. Whatever institutional growth there is in CES should follow from this connection.

What CES is in institutional form is minimal. When you look at who the subscribers to the Reader are, the subscribers are a powerhouse. What we

are proposing is that subscribers and those who would be new subscribers re-envision their relation to CES as membership.

CES will commit itself to continued publication of the *Reader* in both paper and online versions and to the other matters described in the last *Reader*. In addition, CES will commit itself to improving its responsiveness when contacted and in making more material available through its website.

In return, CES is asking you to consider becoming a member of CES.

In general, The Ecozoic Reader will cease primarily to be a subscriber-based publication and, instead, will become a benefit of membership in CES. The Reader will, however, also be available to anyone online at no cost. In addition, there will be other arrangements for obtaining the Reader by libraries, by bookstores, in single or multiple copies for educational uses, as complimentary copies to authors and others, etc.

You may suggest other benefits of membership and probably over time additional benefits will emerge.

CES will base membership dues on the actual cost of services provided. CES recognizes that some of its members will be in areas of the world where the cost of services in US dollars is high and accommodation will be made for this. Likewise accommodation will be made for students and others of limited financial means wherever they may be.

Information on membership in CES is being sent out with this *Reader*, and is available on our website or by contacting the CES office by e-mail, phone or fax.



Community and the New Tribalism

By Tim Watson

As global consciousness continues to shift, some people are giving fresh attention to our precious inheritance: the ancient wisdom of indigenous peoples. Today, there are those of us who are reviving a sense of honoring Earth that is reminiscent of Native American beliefs. Honoring Earth, our life-sustaining source, is merging with visions for future community.

Think back to the time when our forebears poured across the New World sweeping away most indigenous cultures before them. In the midst of that setting, these newcomers to the Americas often found value in rugged individualism and independent self-sufficiency. As more of us awaken to the need to heal our Earth, our belief in these old values is changing. More and more of us see the time is coming when nature must rebalance herself, forcing humanity to rethink how we live.

Think back to your feelings when you last crawled through rush hour traffic, or looked at a landfill looming in the midst of what was once pristine countryside. Those realities are manifestations of the old vision. For just a minute, let's apply our imagination to what might be called present-day Earth Spiritualism.

One concept offering hope towards renewed balance with nature is the emerging technology of “permaculture”—a term coined in 1978 by Bill Mollison, an Australian ecologist. Permaculture attempts to mimic cyclical patterns found in nature whereby everything is recycled back into the ecosystem without creating what we call “waste.” Over the intervening years people living independently, and in communal groups, have been refining ecologically balanced ways to engage in food production, building construction, wastewater treatment, and land stewardship. This concept offers us a more promising future when compared with the old paradigm of unhealthy mass-produced food, and seeming governmental indifference to rapid worldwide ecosystem change.

Another evolving view closely related to permaculture includes community planning and use of appropriate alternative technologies on a global scale. A wealth of information has emerged having to do with sustainable and reclamation practices. Visionary people are changing the way we can plan our future. An inspirational source comes from the architect William McDonough coauthor of *Cradle to Cradle – Remaking the Way We Make Things*. Paul Hawkins and Amory Lovins, coauthors of *Natural Capitalism – Creating the Next Industrial Revolution*, offer us other fresh ideas which extend the range of human concerns beyond the individual “me first” mindset. These developments point the way towards Earth-friendly community thinking, and a clear departure from the illusion of independent action once deemed appropriate by our forebears.

We are awakening to the realization that everything we do makes a difference to all life forms. Here we find a new light of understanding known as “interdependence” amongst the peoples of Earth. Our world view is ranging beyond immediate family loyalty and materialism. We are learning to believe it is essential to become inclusive of all living things, if humanity is to survive.

Another step along our evolutionary path is reclaiming a more balanced ecosystem. It has to do with our need to reconnect with Earth herself. As we approach our future with a renewed sense of reverence for Creation, we are discovering a natural attraction to living in right relationship with Mother Earth. We find ourselves yearning towards reshaping caring human attitudes within ourselves, our children, and those whose lives we touch. One could call this yearning New Tribalism. Out of our heart-felt desire to connect and rebalance with Mother Earth and ourselves, the idea of New Tribalism flows towards an innate willingness to redefine our community relationships, and base our individual lifestyle decisions on the pragmatics of Earth stewardship.

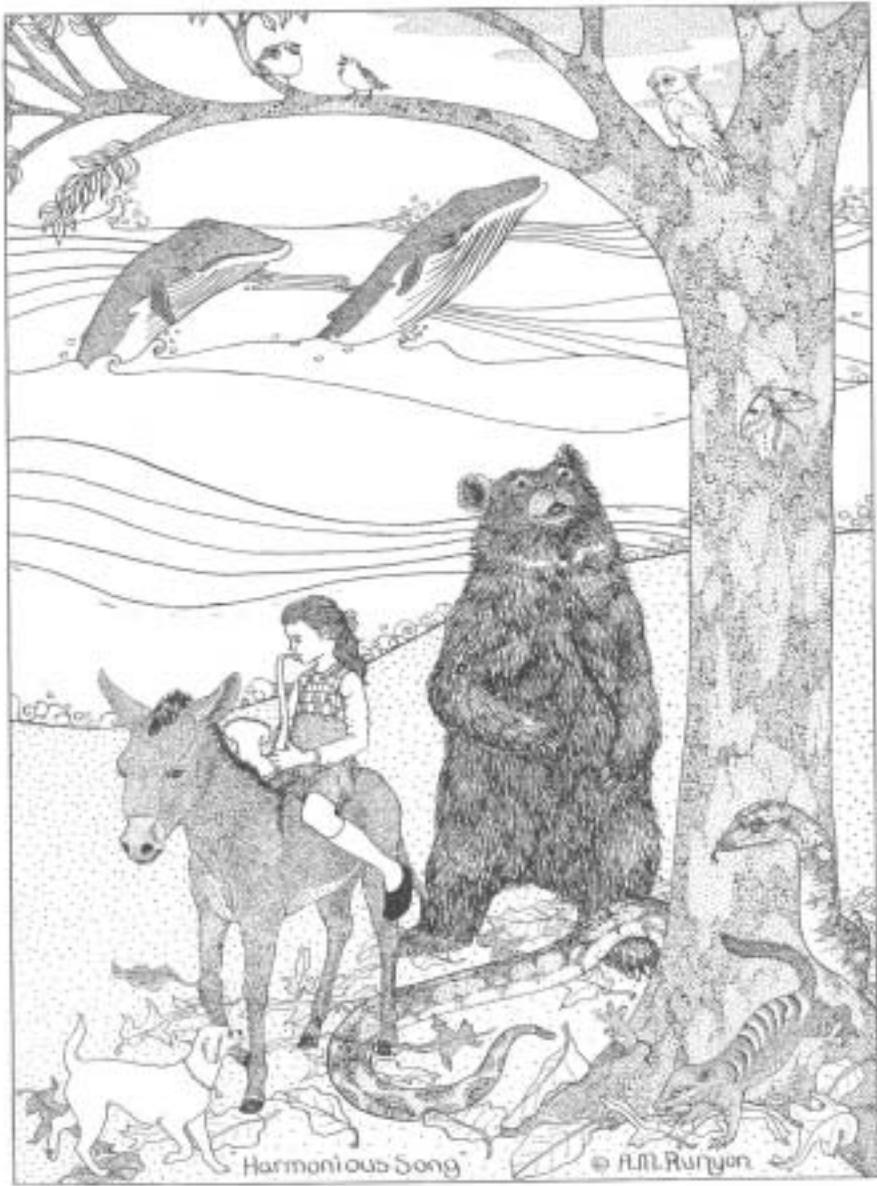
Why are these values being seen as pragmatic? Because the successes of our tenure here on Earth, just like the success of our child-rearing endeavors, must begin with caring from the heart. In this we find a connection with Earth Spirit attuned to our native ancestors wisdom. Their presence in the Americas left the New World unchanged for many millennia because they engaged in a tribal society that saw nature as being fundamental to life. Our ancestors walked upon Earth reverently, as we are remembering to do.

Is there time to heal the imbalances Western technology has wrought? Yes, providing each of us reassesses the way we live as individuals within our hearts, and the way we envision our future communities. The concept of New Tribalism embraces an alternative vision to urban sprawl and mounting landfills, and draws us closer to our source of life, the very Earth we walk upon.

What might be most characteristic of New Tribalism? Its hallmark is the emergence of highly individuated members of society willing to voluntarily step into the circle of ecozoic community. Such people feel a strong interdependence with all life forms here on Earth, and they see their individual participation as essential to making a difference for future generations.

In the realm of community, where functional human needs must be fulfilled, a sense of right relationship with all life, of self-expression, and of connectedness with our neighbors becomes the fabric of New Tribal community. Generating a sense of social belongingness is one of its goals. We begin to achieve these objectives by first ensuring that each community member has the opportunity to express his individuality. In today's tribal setting, we include encouraging the creation of private habitat—a sense of “home” that is uniquely beautiful to each individual. From this protective home sanctuary our community member is free to incubate his or her own inner journey, and then emerge recharged to engage in fulfilling whatever role is desired within the community. Community design needs to express this transition through the creation of common spaces that differentiate between private and public domain. In this way implied boundaries can be created to enhance both a feeling of safety, and harmonious interaction among people. All this is woven into the fabric of living in harmony with Earth.

Just as was so for our ancestors, deep down the human spirit yearns to sense we are equitably connected to creation. How we choose to live in our physical setting, and our choices for meeting basic human needs, has everything to do with generating this sense of equity, and the success of our future.



The World of Wonder

By Thomas Berry

What do you see? What do you see when you look up at the sky at night? When you see the blazing stars against the midnight heavens? What do you see when the dawn breaks over the eastern horizon? What do you see, what do you feel standing on the levee in the evening as the mighty Mississippi rolls on its way to the Gulf? What are your thoughts in the fading days of summer as the birds depart on their southward journey, or when the leaves turn brown and are blown away? What are your thoughts when you look out over the ocean in the evening? What do you see?

Earlier peoples saw in natural phenomena something of a real world, an abiding world, a world beyond this ephemeral appearance, a world imaged forth in the wonders of the sun and clouds by day and the stars and planets by night, a world normative for us here on Earth, a world that enfolded the human in some profound manner. This other world was the guardian, the teacher, the healer, the source whence humans were born, were nourished, protected, guided—the destiny to which we returned.

Above all, the surrounding world provided the psychic power we needed in our moments of crisis. Together with the visible world, this other world and the human world, we formed a meaningful threefold community of existence. In China the Human was a Third with Heaven and Earth. This other world consisted of powers dealt with as persons. Rituals were established whereby we could communicate with each other. We formed a single integral community, a universe.

Humans positioned themselves at the center of this universe. This could be done anywhere, for it has long been understood that the universe is centered everywhere. The Indian tribes would offer the sacred pipe to the powers of the four directions to establish themselves in a sacred space where they entered into a conscious presence to each other. Humans would consult the powers for guidance in the hunt, strength in wartime, healing in time of illness, support in decision-making. In India, in China, in Greece, in Egypt in Rome, pillars were established that were experienced as sacred centers to

provide the point of reference for human affairs, to bind heaven and Earth together.

There were also rituals whereby the human project validated itself by seasonal acknowledgement of the various powers of the universe, as with the Iroquois in their great autumn thanksgiving ritual where the sun, the Earth, the winds, the waters, the trees, the animals, each in turn received expressions of personal gratitude for all those gifts that made life possible. Clearly these peoples saw something different from what we see.

Because in recent centuries we could not see this other dimension of the universe, because we lost our communication with this other deeper reality of things, we now find ourselves on a devastated continent where nothing is holy, nothing sacred. We no longer have a world of inherent value, no world of wonder, no untouched, unspoiled, no unused world. We have understood everything. We have used everything. By developing Earth we have been reducing the planet to a new type of barrenness. We are told by biologist such as E. O. Wilson that no such extinction of living forms has occurred since the great extinction some 65 million years ago.

There is now only one issue before us, the issue of survival, not merely physical survival, but survival in a world of fulfillment, survival in a living world, where the violets bloom in the springtime, where the stars shine down in all their mystery, survival in a world of meaning. All other issues have dwindled in significance whether in law and governance, in religion, in education, in economics, in medicine, in science, in the arts. These are all in disarray just now because we told ourselves: We see! In reality what we saw was a continent available for exploitation.

When we first arrived on this continent some four centuries ago we also saw a land where we could escape the monarchical governments of the European world. We saw a land awaiting our coming, a land where we could escape from our former world of royalty and subservience. A land of abundance. A land where we could own property to use as we wished. As we became free from rule over ourselves we became rulers over everything else. We saw the white pine forests of New England, six feet in diameter, forests ready to be transformed into lumber. We saw meadowland for cultivation, rivers full of fish beyond anything we could imagine. We saw a continent awaiting exploitation by the chosen people of the world.

When we came in those opening years of the seventeenth century, some four centuries ago, we saw ourselves as the most spiritual of peoples with our religion, as the freest of peoples in our political traditions, the most learned of peoples with our universities, the most competent of peoples in the skill of our technologies, the people most prepared to exploit every economic advantage. We saw ourselves as a divine blessing for this continent. In reality we were a predator people on an innocent continent.

Here I would like to take you to other places and other times, to places far different from the world before us, far different from Charles Street, from the quarter, from the commercial world of buying and selling. I would take you faraway to the darkest southern region of Africa, to the world of the Bushmen. Laurens van der Post, a writer from that region, grew up in intimate association with the bushmen who lived there, a people still in their native setting, a people now passing in history, their great days forever gone. In his story of a Bushman settlement entitled, *A Far Off Place*, an old man advises a young boy as they find themselves in the bush.

“Remember always, Little Cousin, that no matter how awful or insignificant, how ugly or beautiful, it might look to you, everything in the bush has its own right to be there. Life in the bush is necessity, it understands and accepts all forms of necessity. It will always forgive what is imposed upon it through necessity. But it will never understand or accept anything less than necessity. And remember, everywhere it has its own watchers to see whether the law of necessity is being observed. You may often think that deep in the darkness and the density of the bush you are alone and unobserved, but that, little cousin, would be an illusion of the most dangerous kind. One is never alone in the bush, one is never unobserved.

“It is true, there are many parts of the bush where no human eye might be able to penetrate, but there is always, like some spy of God Himself, an eye upon you, even if it is only the eye of some animal, bird, reptile or little insect, recording in its own way in the book of life how you carry yourself. And besides the eyes—do not underrate them—there are the tendrils of the planets, the grasses, the leaves of the trees and the roots of all growing things, which

lead the warmth of the sun deep down into the darkest and coldest recesses of Earth, to quicken them with new life. They too shake with the shock of our feet and vibrate to the measure of our tread and, I am certain, have their own ways of registering what we bring or take from the life for which they are a home.” (p.79).

When we think of America in its larger destinies, we might wish that such advice been given to us when we first arrived on these shores. We might wish that this guidance had been given us frequently during these past four centuries. When we first arrived on the shores of this continent we had a unique opportunity to adjust ourselves and the entire course of western civilization to a more integral presence to this continent.

Instead of the advice of the old Bushman we had the advice of Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes, the advice of the enlightenment philosophers, the guidance especially of John Locke with his empiricism. Soon afterward, in the year when we made our Declaration of Independence in 1776 we received the advice of Adam Smith in his *Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, a book of enormous influence in world of economics from that time until the present. Our political independence provided an ideal context for economic dominance over the natural world.

We had the feeling that as heirs to the biblical revelation granted our ancestors, the planet belonged to us. We never understood that this continent had its own laws that needed to be obeyed, its own revelatory experience that needed to be understood. We have never joined the great community of life here, we never felt that we should obey the primordial laws governing this continent, that we should revere every living creature we found here from the lowliest insect to the great eagle in the sky. We never recognized our obligation to bow before the majesty of the mountains and rivers, the forests, the grasslands, the deserts, the coastlands.

No one told us, as the Old Man told the young Bushman, “No matter what you may think about the natural world, everything has its own dignity, however absurd it may seem to you, and we are bound to recognize and respect it as we wish our own to be recognized and respected.” Then he tells us, “There is balance and proportion in all being, that should you exceed this balance, you shatter the harmony which they serve and set up a tyranny of

action and reaction for which all of us, not least of all you, some time, somewhere, will be called to reckoning.”

Unfortunately there was no one to instruct us in this manner. The indigenous peoples of this continent might have told us the same things, but we never addressed ourselves to them. We could be scandalized that they were considered simply lazy because they insisted on living rather than working. They were a scandal to the settlers who wished to teach them how to exploit this continent.

We wished to teach them our ways, we would never have thought that they could teach us the intimate ways of this continent although we constantly depended on the Peoples living here to guide us in our settling here. We never saw ourselves as entering into a sacred land, a sacred space. We never experienced this land as a living presence not primarily to be used but to be revered and communed with.

Rene Descartes had taught us that there was no living principle in the singing of the wood thrush or the loping gait of the wolf, or the mother bear cuddling her young. There was no living principle in the peregrine falcon as it soared through the vast spaces of the heavens. There was nothing to be communed with. Nothing to be revered. The honeybee was only a mechanism that gathered the nectar in the flower and transformed it into honey for the sustenance of the hive. There was no way that it could appreciate the gratitude that we might express for the honey we gathered from his hive. There was no way for the maple tree to know of the gratitude that we might express for the sugar we obtained from its sap.

As we are told by one scientist. “The workings of life are not mysterious at all. They are obvious, explainable, and thermodynamically inevitable. And relentlessly mechanical.” The view of another renowned scientist is “ For all our imagination, fecundity and power we are no more than communities of bacteria, modular manifestation of the nucleated cell.”

We need to recover our vision. We might go to the desert or to some place deep in the mountains, or to the shores of the sea. There we might really see, perhaps for a first time we might really see the dawn appear in the eastern sky with its first faint purple glow spread over the horizon, then the slow emergence of the great golden sphere. Then, in the evening we might

see the flaming sunset in the West. We might see the stars come down from the distant heavens and present themselves almost within reach of our arms if we would stand on tiptoe.

So too with the change of the seasons. The springtime awakening of the land as the daisies blossom in the meadows, as the dogwood tree puts forth its frail white blossoms. We might experience the terrifying moments when the summer storms break over the horizon, when the lightning streaks across the sky, the moments when the terror of darkness envelops us in the deep woodlands, or when we experience the world about us as a vast array of powers asserting themselves. When we see all this we might begin to see our way into the future.

To think of this continent, we must place ourselves in the Great Central Valley that lies between the Appalachian Mountains to the east and the Rocky Mountains to the west. Here we would be amazed at the Mississippi River with its deluge of water that flows down through this valley, then on into the immense Gulf that borders the southern shores of this continent. This massive flow of water that, in its total system, including the Missouri flowing in from the Northwest, constitutes what might be the greatest river system on the planet, drains the entire continent from New York and the Appalachian Mountains in the East, to Montana and the Rocky Mountains in the West.

This region includes the Great Plains, the tall grass lands that extend from Indiana in the east westward to the short grass lands across the river which extend on to the mountains. This is a territory to be honored in some special manner. The region to the west of the river has what may be the deepest and most fertile soils on the planet, soils that elsewhere are only inches in depth, here are several feet deep, soils formed of the debris washed down from the mountains over the long centuries. Not only ourselves but a large part of the human population of the world depends on this region. Such precious soil, a gift to be carefully tended. This center of commercial wheat and later corn production began in New York in the early 19th century then extended ever westward until now it can be located in those Kansas fields of grain that extend beyond the horizon.

The dominant feeling of this continent experienced here in the Mississippi basin is westward in its mystery, its adventure, its promise; eastward in its history, its political dominance, its commercial concerns.

Westward the soaring redwoods, the Sequoia, the Douglas Fir, the Lodgepole Pine; eastward the Oaks, the Beech, the Sycamore, the Maple, the Spruce, the Tulip Poplar, the Hemlock. Rocky Mountains to the west. Appalachians to the east. Together the wonder of the continent, all the continents and the all-encompassing sea.

Concerning this future we might make two observations. First, the planet Earth is a one-time project. There is no real second chance. Much can be healed. The planet has extensive powers of recovery, but they themselves are limited. The North American Continent will never again be what it once was. The manner in which we have devastated the continent has never occurred previously. In prior extinctions, the land itself remained capable of transformations that would now be much more difficult. Secondly, we have so intruded ourselves, so debilitated the continent in its primordial powers that it can no longer proceed simply on its own. We will be involved in the future in some comprehensive manner.

We cannot make a blade of grass, but there will be little life development in the future if we do not accept the living forms of this continent, and protect and foster them. For us to carry this through, a change must occur deep in our souls. We need our technologies, but this is beyond technology. Consistently our technologies have betrayed us. This is a numinous venture. A work of the wilderness. We need a transformation such as occurred with Aldo Leopold when he saw the dying fire in the eyes of a wolf that he had shot. From that time on he began to see the devastation that we were bringing upon this continent

We need to awaken the wilderness itself to a new vitality in its own existence, since the work to be done is a wilderness work. It's the wild that is creative. As we are told by Henry David Thoreau, "In wildness is the salvation of the world." Regretfully we have little time for such brooding thoughts, for the communion coming to us through these experiences, something present, something calling us, something daunting, something stunning in its beauty, something beyond comprehension in its reality.

Here I would like to return to the narrative of the Bushman Elder in his brief conversation with Francois, his Little Cousin. There he spoke extensively of the surrounding Bushman's world indicating just how we should be present to whatever territory we happen to be in. The universe

itself is the supreme manifestation of the sacred has traditionally been fundamental to establishing a cosmos, an intelligible manner of understanding the universe or any part of the universe.

That is why in the earliest phases in the awakening human consciousness the origin of things was experienced as a supremely nourishing principle, as a primordial maternal principle. The Great Mother. This principle experienced by the indigenous peoples of this country as the Corn Mother, or as Spider Woman by some of the indigenous tribes of this country. As the Corn Mother, an ear of corn was enfolded with the infant in the cradle as providing a sacred presence for the soothing and security that the infant needs to feel deep in its being from the moment the infant emerges from the warmth and security of the womb into the chill and changing world of life.

Not only the human world but the entire planet world is held securely in this sacred enfoldment. We need this security, this presence throughout our lives. The sacred is that which evokes wonder. We know some things but only the shadow of things. We go to the sea at night and stand along the shore. We listen to the urgent roll of the waves reaching ever higher until it reaches its limits and can go no farther, then returns to its inward peace until the moon calls again for its presence on these southern shores. The lights of some distant city keep us from that all-encompassing serenity we long for but seldom attain.

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The North American Continent

By Thomas Berry

In these opening years of the 21st century as we gather here in this great central valley of the North American continent, we reflect, in a moment of quiet, on our dwelling place here on this continent.

When we came to this continent, it was a glorious land of woodlands and prairie grasses, of a vast open sky, a land of buffalo and elk, a land of abundance shaped through the centuries with their summer storms and winter chill.

Today we come to this valley from the coastal plains, the Atlantic shores, the Northeastern woodlands, the Appalachian hill country, from the Great Lakes to the north, the Gulf regions to the south, from the grasslands, the mountains and the deserts to the west, the redwood forests along the Pacific shores, from the rainforests in the shadow of Mount Rainier, from the far North where the boreal woodlands sweep down from Alaska across central Canada, to the storm-beaten cliffs of the North Atlantic.

We come here today, to this valley, as on a pilgrimage,
from all these regions and from regions beyond.

We come to reflect on how, centuries ago, we might have joined the community of life here,

we might have established an intimacy with this continent in all its manifestations.

We might have seen this land as a divinely blessed land to be revered and dwelt in as a light and gracious presence.

We might have felt the divine in every breeze that blew across the landscape, seen in every flowering plant, wondered at in every butterfly dancing across a meadow in daylight and in every firefly in the evening.

But if in the past we have not been sensitive to the deeper meaning of this continent,
We come here today as pilgrims, not simply to this place along the grasslands but to the entire continent.

Pilgrims, penitent, we bring with us the promise of dedicating ourselves to relieving the oppression we have imposed in the past and beginning a new era in our presence here today.

We begin to understand that the way to the world of the sacred is through the place of our dwelling.

We are finally awakening to the beauty of this land.
We are finally accepting the discipline of this land.
We are finally listening to the teaching of this land.
We are finally absorbed in the delight of this land.

We have come from the far regions of this continent, each of us with our distinctive experience
of the regions whence we come.
We reflect on the 200 million years since this continent broke off from the other continents
and began its distinctive development.

While we learn the sacred quality of this continent in its spatial extent,
we also experience those historical moments of grace whereby all the various features of this continent took on their present modes of expression.

The story of this continent is now our own story,
for while we came here in the later stages of its history we are now integral with what takes place here.
Throughout the future, the story of this continent and our own story will be a single story.

Today we begin to right an ancient wrong,
we wish especially to restore to this continent its ancient joy.
For while much of what we have done is beyond healing,
there is a resilience throughout the land that only awaits its opportunity to
flourish once again with something of its ancient splendor.

So far as we are able, we wish to evoke these powers to their full expression
so that the primordial liturgy of divine praise that once
arose from this continent might again burst forth
in a new brilliance of expression.

We are concerned for the children, the children of every living being on this
continent,
the children of the trees and grasses,
the children of the wolf, the bear and the cougar,
the children of the bluebird and the thrush and the great raptors that
soar through the heavens
the children of the salmon that begin and end their lives in the upper
reaches of the great western rivers,
the children, too, of human parents.
For all the children are born into a single sacred community.

It is increasingly clear that none of the children,
nor any living being on this continent or throughout the entire planet
has any integral future
except in alliance with every other being that finds its home here.

Tonight we come here as pilgrims to this continent to beg a blessing from its
mountains and valleys, and from all their inhabitants.
We beg a blessing that will heal us of our responsibility
for what we have done,
a blessing that will give us the guidance and the healing that we need.

For we can never bring a healing to this continent
until we are first blessed and first healed by this continent.

To make ourselves worthy of this blessing is the task to which we dedicate ourselves in these opening years of the 21st century that all the children of Earth might walk serenely into the future as a single sacred community.

Remarks made originally by Thomas Berry at a Conference on Caring for Creation held in Kansas City some years ago.

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The Center for Ecozoic Studies

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of the Center for Ecozoic Studies (CES) is to contribute through education, research and the arts to the realization of the Ecozoic Era. CES emphasizes critical reflection, story and shared dream experience as ways of enabling the creative advance needed to bring into being a new mode of human civilizational presence, and also discerning the practical steps leading toward the Ecozoic. CES is dedicated to the principle that we live in a meaningful, continuously evolving universe. In such a universe, the Ecozoic Era is a process concept—not something to be arrived at, but rather something ever to be created. Its hallmarks are inclusiveness, interdependence, and appreciation; communion, differentiation, and subjectivity; and sensitivity, adaptability, and responsibility. It crucially involves more just and cooperative relationships among humans, as well as transformed relationships of humans with the larger natural world.

Officers and Directors

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Membership and Subscription Information

A subscription to *The Ecozoic Reader* is a benefit of membership in CES.

Membership in CES means a personal commitment to research, education and artistic expression concerning the Ecozoic Era and how to bring it about. It also involves support for the institutional work of CES.

Dues are \$25.00 US per year for individuals and \$35.00 US for a couple (outside of the USA, Mexico and Canada, add \$15.00 US). Sustaining memberships are \$125 US.

Membership forms and a description of member benefits may be found at www.ecozoicstudies.org or contact CES as indicated on the back cover.

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Submissions for Publication

We invite you to share with us your thoughts, poetry, art, music, dance, ritual, meditation, story or dream experience of the Ecozoic Era and your insights on how to realize it.

To submit an item for publication, send a printed copy of the item and the electronic file(s) on diskette (formatted for PC) to Center for Ecozoic Studies, 2516 Winingham Road, Chapel Hill, NC 27516 USA. Or, e-mail your submission to ecozoic@mindspring.com. Please send your contact information and a brief biography. Publication and copyright guidelines are available at www.ecozoicstudies.org.

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Artwork	front cover and throughout
<i>Annie Marshall Runyon</i>	
American Global Hegemony Versus the Quest for a New Humanity.....	1
<i>Preston M. Browning, Jr.</i>	
To a Dying Planet	18
<i>Preston M. Browning, Jr.</i>	
You and The Center for Ecozoic Studies: The Meaning of Membership.....	19
<i>Herman F. Greene</i>	
Community and the New Tribalism.....	23
<i>Tim Watson</i>	
The World of Wonder.....	27
<i>Thomas Berry</i>	
The North American Continent	36
<i>Thomas Berry</i>	



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