



Publication of
The Institute for Ecosophical Studies

Fall, 1990
Vol. VI, No. 3

THE WRITINGS OF JIM BERRY, Part II

We are proud in this last issue of Ecospirit quarterly to feature further selections from the newsletters of Jim Berry. Jim runs the Center for Reflection on the Second Law, 8420 Camellia Drive, Raleigh, N. C. 27613. Jim's leadership among North Carolina environmentalists reflects his pained concern for what is happening to his own home state as well as nationally and globally.

Unlike many environmentalists, Jim has an explicit philosophical framework which undergirds and directs his ecological thought and action. His philosophy is rooted in the thinking of his brother, Thomas. Berry of the Riverdale Center for Religious Research in New York. Tom is also the author of The Dream of the Earth (Sierra Club, 1989) and a popular lecturer and writer.

Jim is planning a conference over the weekend of November 16-18, 1990. Tom will be one of the leaders and the Peruvian Economist Alfredo De Romaña will be the other. Write Jim for details. In fact, subscribe to his newsletter! Jim's forthright honesty and unswerving attention to the roots of the earth's malaise gives his voice its unusual ring of authenticity.

We consider it most fitting that we end our tenure with a liturgical piece by a Trappist Brother, Paul Quenon, O.C.S.O. Paul is himself an artist and combines the artist's sensitivity to the natural order with his rootedness in the ancient Benedictine tradition. Brother Paul's piece seems to be a liturgical satire on the recent uprooting of a long row of sweet gum trees in front of Gethsemane monastery in Kentucky. One would hope that the Benedictines will explore their rich tradition and contribute to the eco-sophy (earth wisdom) so essential if we and the earth are to be reconciled biospiritually.

-- Paul Larson & Don St. John

ECOSPIRIT -- FAREWELL (over)

ECOSPIRIT QUARTERLY -- FAREWELL!

"For everything there is a season and a time for every purpose under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 3:1). We feel that the season for letting-go of Ecospirit, at least in its present form, has come. When we began this quarterly nearly six years ago there were very few similar publications. Today we can point to a number of excellent periodicals and newsletters whose primary concern is ecological values or spirituality. Most of these are self-subsistent and reach a large reading audience. Even the mainline environmental groups are now addressing philosophical and spiritual issues that they would not touch five years ago. Unfortunately, they are still largely unprepared to radically critique the economic forces that are implementing a fallacious worldview and hence they can offer little advice for change beyond legislative reform.

We wish to thank those who have supported us in a variety of ways over the past five years. We especially thank the Lehigh Valley Association of Independent Colleges as well as Moravian College for their support. We appreciate the kind words of encouragement many of you have given. Perhaps we can keep in touch in another way.

The decade of the 90s will be of crucial importance for the well-being of Gaia. We must all channel our energies in those directions that will best utilize our respective talents. We encourage our readers to continue in their dedicated work.

Don St. John and Paul Larson, co-editors

CORE CONCEPTS FOR TALKING TO STUDENTS

This apology to students is also an apology by parents to their children. In it Jim challenges youth to accept "that the well-being of the natural world takes on co-equal status with the well-being of the human.

You are members of a generation which inherits a diminished earth; degraded air and water and soil and sunshine. Wind, water, earth and fire, the basic supports for life, are all badly damaged. If you carry on with the life style and the philosophy of your parents and grandparents your children will inherit an uninhabitable earth. You must live lives radically different from the lives they lived. Your principal problem is to defend the earth from further damage and to inaugurate the great healing of the earth that is so essential. For the earth is now in a state of extreme distress from which it is doubtful that complete recovery can be made. But if recovery is possible the contribution of your generation is critical to it. You must form a new understanding of how the human species relates to the rest of creation.

The proof that we, your parents, have wrongfully perceived the meaning of our presence in the world is in the fact that our lives are considerably without meaning and that the earth is being turned into a wasteland. If nothing else convinces you of this, look at our behavior. The majority, while we are not involved in the drug culture or in crime, are committed to consumerism, the supreme pathology of our time; the pathology that is wrecking the earth.

What we aimed at in the past few hundred years we were successful at achieving and now we find that principal parts of that achievement and the basic goals were based on exploitation: exploitation of native peoples and minority races, exploitation of women, and above all, exploitation of the natural world. The Europeans came to the new world with plunder on their minds and that has never

changed. Plunder is still a ruling motivation in our culture, which, combined with a shortsighted disregard for those who succeed us, results in what we see today, a society with little meaning and without meaningful goals. We treasure freedom of the individual and individual goals are possible, thus we have a small population of noble persons who spend their lives in the search for knowledge, the pursuit of justice and the relief of suffering; otherwise wealth and power, if not just survival, are the goals for individuals. But noble community goals are nearly non-existent and nobody has ever heard of specific goals. No wonder youth is soured, alienated, and has turned to empty-headed consumerism, thrill seeking, sports and drugs. We thought that science and technology would bring on an earthly paradise and now that science and technology have done their best we are flooded with labor saving appliances, and amusements and trash piles so huge we are going to drown in them, and we are immersed in a deep sense of malaise. We have fifty thousand nuclear bombs. Just a few will bring on nuclear winter but greedy and power-mad people can persuade us that we need more. And can sit and be entertained continually, while our minds atrophy and turn rancid.

The culture is brainsick as well as soulsick. The culture made it OK to destroy the source of life, to lay waste that which the human can not do without. A culture which allows its top soil to be washed away and blown away and paved over can only be called sick. Thomas says the culture is autistic which is certainly true, but I say it is brainsick, that its thinking apparatus is diseased.

The noble people in the society today are those who work for justice for the oppressed and relief for those who suffer. But who is thinking of what the rescued ought to aim their lives toward? After you are made whole, then what?; after you are saved, then what? Do you join the meaningless yuppies in suburbia leading empty suburban lives? Those are the questions that Thomas asks and the answer

our society gives is a blank stare. The truth is that you are not being urged toward more meaningful goals by the teaching establishment, by your parents or by the culture, beyond the sub-goals of social justice and a good conscience. If you want to spend your life in service to a higher good nobody has any guidance to give you.

Almost nobody, that is. There is Thomas. It is Thomas and a group of those who understand him who now strive to define the goals of the reinvented human: species goals, goals derived from pondering on the meaning of the human species as members of the earth community and having responsibilities pertinent to the success of the earth and the earth community.

Heretofore the culture has never defined for itself, or even thought about, programs for contributing to the success of the life system of planet earth. Heretofore the culture has been autistic, unable to include any but the human in its pursuit of well being. As a result, when you graduate and set out to make your way through life there will be very little prospect for getting work which will be fulfilling as well as rewarding. That must be changed.

The changes that are necessary are as earth shaking as the changes that have characterized any great shift in perceptions. One could liken the change to that which began when the fifteenth and sixteenth century philosophers reinterpreted the meaning of the earth and inspired the birth and flourishing of the mechanical age and industrialism. But unlike that entry into a new age this one can not be done gradually. the earth is in such extremity that its rescue has to begin immediately on a broad front.

"Well now", you say to me, "how do I go about it?" And I answer that the outlines of how to go about it are emerging, but they are very faint. In the future, decisions must be made in the understanding that the well being of the

natural world takes on a co-equal status with the well being of the human.

The economic system is particularly critical. Current economics is based on growth and maximum production and consumption. The earth can not endure that approach. We must take up an economics based on conservation of the natural wealth, the capital of the biosphere, and on minimum production and consumption. It is certain, I believe, that there is enough, and more, of what is needed for human well being and earth well being as well. What we do not have is a system for seeing to it that every creature has access to what is needed. Also there is surely enough brainpower to invent an adequate distribution system. If the economic problem can be solved, the rest can be also.

Your future is to be found in working toward a situation where the human species is devoted not only to its own welfare but to the welfare and the success of the whole life community. This is not a matter for dismay but for joy and celebration.

II

ULTIMATE QUESTIONS AND THE UNIVERSITY

In this article Jim Berry identifies causes for the failure of higher education in the "university." He then draws upon his brother's writing to outline an interdisciplinary curriculum focusing on the question "How did the world....?"

The following is found in the last chapter of the book For The Common Good, written by Herman Daly and John Cobb.

The world constructed by those who refused ultimate questions is not more safe, more just, more loving, or more hopeful than the ones constructed by cultures preoccupied with ultimate questions...It may be thought that the refusal to spend time with ultimate mysteries has cleared the mind of superstition and error, that people have understood the limits of what can

be known and have appreciated the relativity of beliefs and opinions. We have seen that built into the very structure of modern thought are assumptions, false assumptions, that take on the form of absolutes and that the university has been so organized as to discourage any question or challenge to these absolutes. We suspect that the modern mind has been more successful than its predecessors in squashing heresy. It has declared the heretic's teaching meaningless rather than false, thereby justifying ignoring it rather than attempting to show its error.

What Daly and Cobb are telling us here, I think, is that the reason today's human is adrift and pretty much leaderless is the absence of a story that explains how the human fits into the world. And they are saying that the modern university has abandoned efforts to examine ultimate questions in favor of a narrow focus on narrow disciplines. No attempt is made to help the student find an answer to questions which ask how the human relates to creation. Recall Thomas' words: "It's all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The old story, the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it is no longer effective. Yet we have not learned the new story." Cobb and Daly would add to that, "And the university is not a help."

The national leaders, the universities and the people themselves are, by and large, seized with the idea that the corporate industrial model together with the free market financial model, dedicated to competition, productivity, consumerism and growth, is the right model for humans to organize around. But this model is increasingly being recognized as a model which brings on death. Corporate America is devoted to the maximization of money profit. Its value system does not include life sustaining values, human or

non-human. For some two hundred years or more the strength of the hold of the Corporate philosophy over our society and our minds has been growing until now it has us by the throat in an unrelenting grip of death. The air, the water, the forests, the soil, are all approaching a terminal condition as a result of the Corporate way of dealing with Earth. The drive for growth and for greater power does not give way to the fact that the earth's vital processes are being shut down. The need for the human to honor the ultimate mysteries of life and the sacredness of air, water, earth and fire, of wilderness and wild things, all give way to industry's deadly appetite for "resources" to convert into dollars. Watch the tragic drama of the National Forests in the Pacific Northwest. Watch the wreckage of the countryside as the society gives ever greater worship to god the automobile.

One might propose to the university powers a college curriculum which would provide a degree of basic familiarity with cosmology, astronomy, geology, geography, biology, archeology, anthropology; the history of cultures, the history of the land, of agriculture, of politics, economics and science, of theology, philosophy and ecology; and maybe some other subjects. While each of these fields of study requires a lifetime to master, a person can learn enough of the basics of each so that greater understanding can be available with which to confront the basic question: "How did the world...?"

We touched on most of these subjects in Sunday school, and grade school and high school. All courses would have as a pervading theme the objective of providing help in answering ultimate questions and the overall direction would integrate the studies into a unified approach. This is interdisciplinary stuff and it is suggested despite the fact that such an approach is little practiced and has little status in today's university if Daly and Cobb are to be believed. But the interdisciplinary approach is essential if the goal is to find how the human fits into the earth. This approach to college education runs

directly counter to that approach which provides skills in exploiting the earth as our present orientation to the success of the corporate world of business and engineering emphasizes.

III

FRANKENSTEIN

Jim Berry devoted a recent issue of his newsletter to describing the interconnection between American universities and Corporate America. He titled that newsletter FRANKENSTEIN.

David Noble's book America by Design published in 1977 by Oxford University Press, was subtitled Science, Technology, and the rise of Industrial Capitalism. It is a detailed accounting of how the big corporations came to occupy a central position in research and education and to wield enormous influence in government. I went back to read it because more and more I have come to believe that the complex of national industrial corporations represents a gigantic unified force in our society; that it adheres to no moral code and has no concern for the well being of the earth or the life system. And I think we have no possibility of recovering a healthy ecology unless we come to recognize that the success of the corporate world means the impoverishment of everything else. It wields enormous power and no counter to that power is operating to control it. Government, the university, most of the press are its close allies and the church is silent.

Noble's book tells how the science-based industries, principally electric and chemical, turned to the educational world for support in their early developing. Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, as well as other similarly oriented schools, provided initial research backup. Soon nearly every major university was doing both theoretical and applied science. From the mid 1800s forward, the educational establishment became more and more associated with industry. General

Electric, AT&T and Westinghouse were prototypical firms profiting from the alliance and from patent control and mergers. By the 1890s they had already achieved giant size and great power.

Throughout the book Noble emphasizes the key part played by the science-trained engineer in the growth of industrial capitalism. The engineer not only took charge of production and production methods, but early in the history of the corporation rose to management positions and not long after took over top management. Engineering schools included such courses as finance contracts, personnel classification and labor relations in their curricula. The engineer/manager was a planned-for combination.

This is noteworthy since Corporate America thinks of personnel management in terms of "human engineering." The human element in production is but one of several, all of which are to be marshalled efficiently in the name of productivity. The commodification of the human arises out of the scientist's need to classify, to quantify and to measure. The university product was itself a unit of production.

When World War I made it necessary that the efforts of the entire nation be coordinated these giant firms furnished not only the materials required, they furnished the organizational brains, the organizational models, a considerable part of the leadership, and experience in bringing many sectors together in united effort. It already had a beginning partnership with the universities. Now that partnership would become solidified and permanently established. The dominance of the corporation in the economic life of the nation was set.

The reason for going into this history is to give some background showing how corporate power got its start. Technology expressed through the national corporation captivated the mind of the country more than a century ago and has strengthened its hold ever since. The

scientist/engineer/manager has prevailed and now holds a Frankenstein grip on this society. It is a single minded force characterized by a moronic and arrogant concentration on its own success without regard to what that success means to the earth and the life system itself. Yet, it attracts many of the most able people in the country. How does it come about that a top managerial talent becomes CEO of a firm like Pepsi Cola, making a huge salary pushing junk at a world staggering from exploitation?

With few exceptions this society serves the interests of the corporation. The economy is geared to corporate activity and many if not most individuals depend in one way or another on the corporate economy for access to the necessities of life. Government at all levels is devoted to the success of the corporations, going to great lengths to make conditions attractive to them. And it is clear that the schools of business and engineering are organized to satisfy the needs of the corporation for workers trained to fit into the corporate structure.

But what are the goals of the corporation? There is only one. The goal is to achieve ever greater productivity at least cost so that money return is maximized.

The corporations, particularly the giants, own the land and the resources, the means of production and access to jobs and so access to income; they have achieved major control over the education system, and in particular own the media and thus a principal access to our minds. Corporate America now proposes to provide a news service (Channel 2) to children in grade school so that they can bring two minutes a day of advertising before the students. Pretty soon the teachers will be paid to wear corporation logos. All the superior athletes, all the beautiful people, all the movie stars have become servants of the corporations. Why not the teachers? Perhaps that is a way for them to get adequate pay. And the minds of the children will be more firmly shaped to

believe the lies the corporations want them to believe.

It is worth repeating that the corporations have no purpose other than to make money. And the imperatives are such that they have to make money over the short term. Discounting methods make it impossible for the corporate managers to leave convertible resources alone. They must convert what is convertible into money at the fastest possible rate. The optimum management of money turns the proper management of resources upside down. Money becomes not a measure of value but value itself. Insanity has taken over. But true insanity is not insanity in the logic of the corporate market. Money grows, so trees must be stopped from growing, soil must be wasted, water must be poisoned, so that earthstuff can be transmuted into money; because money grows through some mad alchemy, invented by the greedy and the demented money-makers. Money can be accumulated in senseless and obscene amounts by senseless and obscene people while poverty and hunger stalk the earth, and the natural world is turned into a wasteland.

The true role of the corporate-owned TV and radio and newspaper is to tell society the monstrous lie that the corporation is a benign presence, meaning us well, doing everything it can to make our lives fully and happy. It has convinced us that we need all kinds of stuff we do not need; that the important is trivial and the trivial important. Marketing is a corporation endeavor and uses all the managerial and manipulative powers that psychology has mustered to make us believe what it wants us to believe. So they own us; own our means of livelihood; own the land and the water and the air and the market and the educational system and the information system - our own minds.

RITE FOR THE FELLING OF THE SWEET GUMS

By Bro. Paul Quenon, O.C.S.O.

Gather by full light of day with chains, fork lift, winch, two bulldozers, one large and one small, as principal celebrant and deacon in an unbloody sacrifice.

Tear open the skin of the earth around the roots. Offer no prayer, no invocation, no thought, no memory, Runt and gouge underground like principal swine, with unbounded lust for severing the arteries of life.

Relentless accompaniment of grinding and groaning.

FIRST LAMENTATION

What guilt have they incurred, the guardians of our avenue, who have stood in file before our gatehouse as shade against the sun and as shelter against the wind? They hailed our every arrival and shadowed every departure.

Is grandeur counted as their guilt?

PENITENTIAL RITE AND EXECUTION

Read aloud a list of sins, including liability, moribundity, littering, dropping, especially with disregard for parked automobiles. Mount a ladder and secure a noose around the neck of the tree. At the signal, pull rope and fell the giant.

SECOND LAMENTATION

No terrible crack of doom, no thunder of judgement fills the air, but a sign and a single unresisting impact on the earth. A wind spreads out as you breathe forth what those branches caged around, those quivering leaves played about - now one long expiration cools the sweating crowd.

PROCESSION

Back a flat truck into position, procure chains. With fork-lifts raise the deceased and lower him into the bier, bound securely like a slave for deportation.

PROCESSIONAL MANTRA (sub voce)

"O if we knew what we do when we delve or hew."

Hitch the corpse to a tractor and drag along the ground as punishment for all wartime enemies ancient and new, imagined or real. On arrival at dumping ground, roll the mutilated body down the slope and leave in the common grave.

THIRD LAMENTATION

What awaits us when protecting divinities are destroyed? Is danger speeding to our door? Will blessings never more pass this gate? Worry not superstitious fool! All that enters now is harmless and profane. No clouds of mystery overshadow this barren gateway. All fearful, all holy things shy off before a supermarket door.

LITANY (chanted while cleaning up the debris.)

For flattened spots with asphalt tops

- be praise!

For whitewashed walls where sunshine falls

- be praise!

For open skies that bore the eyes

- be praise!

For squared-off space that box out grace

- be praise!

For melting tar, for baking car

- be praise!

For urban tones in rural zones

- be praise!

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Logo: Rudy Hilt

Typing: Carol Newell

The Institute for Ecosophical Studies is
an educational non-profit organization
located at but independent from Moravian
College.

Ecospirit was aided by a grant from the
Lehigh Valley Association of Independent
Colleges.

INSTITUTE FOR ECOSOPHICAL STUDIES
c/o Donald P. St. John, Ph.D.
Moravian College
Bethlehem, PA 18018

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