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RIVERDALE PAPERS V

The New Story

Contemplation and World Order

The Spirituality of the Earth

Creative Revolution

The Indian Future

Vision Quest of the American Indian

By Thomas Berry

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The New Story: Comments on  
The Origin, Identification and  
Transmission of Values



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 not functioning properly. We have not learned the New Story. The Old Story sustained us for a long period of time. It shaped our emotional attitudes, provided us with life purpose, energized action. It consecrated suffering, integrated knowledge, guided education. We awoke in the morning and knew where we were. We could answer the questions of our children. We could identify crime, punish criminals. Everything was taken care of because the story was there. It did not make men good, it did not take away the pains and stupidities of life, or make for unflinching warmth in human association. It did provide context in which life could function in a meaningful manner.

Presently, however, our traditional story is non-functional in its larger social dimensions even though some believe it firmly and act according to its dictates. It works in its limited orbit. It is an encouragement to us as individuals. Yet the dissolution of our institutions and our life programs continues. We see this in every phase of our present society. Aware of the nonfunctional aspects of the traditional program some persons have moved on into different modern programs. But these programs, for the most part, have quickly become tangential. Most are revealed as ephemeral, as incapable of sustaining the life situation of this late twentieth century. Other persons are returning to the earlier religious fundamentalism. But this too is quickly seen as a sterile gesture. Security is not there. The basic elements in the



religious community of the modern world have become trivialized. What we offer our society serves only as temporary function. It simply enables us to keep a semblance of meaning in our institutions and in our public life.

When we look outside the traditional believing community we see a society that is also dysfunctional. Even with advanced science and technology, with superb techniques in manufacturing and commerce, in communications and computation, our secular society remains without satisfactory meaning or capacity to restrain the violence of its own members. Our miracle machines serve ephemeral purposes.

So we begin to talk about values. Where can we be going? My own suggestion is that we begin where everything begins in human affairs, with the basic story, the account of how things came to be at all, how they came to be as they are, and how the future life of man can be given some satisfying direction. We need a story that will educate man, heal him, guide him.

### The Believing Redemption Community

Western society did have a functional story up until somewhere around the fourteenth century. The Black Death can be taken as the traumatic moment of our civilization. It is estimated that this Plague, which began in Constantinople in 1334, within twenty years killed off between one third and two thirds of the population. Throughout the 14th and 15th centuries there was a decline in the whole of Europe. In London the last of the great plagues was in 1665. There were two basic



responses to this terrifying experience of the Plague. From these two responses were formed the two communities of the present, the believing religious community and the secular scientific community.

The believing community had recourse to supernatural forces, to the spirit-world, to the renewal of esoteric traditions, sometimes to pre-Christian beliefs and rituals that had been neglected in their deeper dynamics since the coming of Christianity. Even within traditional Christianity there was an intensification of the faith experience, an effort to activate supernatural forces with special powers of intervention in the phenomenal world now viewed as threatening to man. The sense of human depravity increased. The need for an outpouring of influences from the higher numinous world was intensified. Faith dominated the mental faculty. Redemption mystique became the dominant form of Christian experience. This excessive emphasis on redemption, to the neglect of creation doctrines, had from the beginning been one of the possibilities in Christian development. The creed itself is overbalanced in favor of redemption. Thus the integrity of the story was affected. The primary doctrine of the Christian creed, belief in a personal creative principle, became increasingly less important. Cosmology was not of any particular significance. This response, with its emphasis on Redemptive Spirituality, continued through the religious upheavals of the sixteenth century, on through the Puritanism and Jansenism of the seventeenth century. This attitude was further strengthened by the shock of the Enlightenment and Revolution periods of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.



We in America who remain members of the believing redemptive community represent the most modern phase of this tradition. We have kept this Christian story and shaped our world accordingly. We have our parallel society, our own schools, our own hospitals, our own social groups, our own worship, our own moral teaching, our own aesthetic, our own professional societies, our own associations at every level, our own publications, our own financial resources.

This American version of the ancient Christian Story has functioned well in its institutional efficiency and in its moral efficacy. But it is no longer the Story of the Earth. Nor is it the integral Story of Mankind. It is a sectarian story. At its center there is an intensive preoccupation with the personality of the Saviour, with the interior spiritual process of the faithful, and with the salvific community. It is little wonder that we now discover that our story is disfunctional in the larger cultural, historical, and cosmic perspectives. The tragedy is that for a while we came to accept this situation as the normal, even the desirable thing. As with every isolated life system, however, this system is inevitably experiencing a deactivation. The believing community is in an entropy phase of its existence.

#### The Scientific Creation Community

The other response to the Black Death was the reaction that led eventually to the scientific secular community of our times. This reaction sought to remedy earthly terror not by supernatural or re-



ligious powers but by an understanding of the earth process. Although those working in this trend were at first involved with a certain amount of the esoteric and Platonic traditions they did emphasize the necessity for empirical examination of the phenomenal world and its expression in quantitative terms. Scientific inquiry became the controlling human preoccupation, pushed by obscure forces in the unconscious depths of western man. The telescope and microscope were invented. New forms of mathematical expression were created. A scientific priesthood came to govern the thought life of our society. Men looked at the earth in its physical reality and projected new theories of how it functioned. The celestial bodies were scrutinized more intently, the phenomenon of light was examined, new ways of understanding energy evolved. New sciences emerged. The Novum Organum of Francis Bacon appeared in 1620, the Principia of Isaac Newton in 1687, the Nuova Scienza of Giambattista Vico in 1725. All of this led to an awareness that the mind of man was advancing. This in turn led to the Enlightenment period of the 18th century and to the sense of absolute progress of the human mind. This formed expression in Condorcet's Historical Survey of the Progress of the Human Mind. Here he outlined the ten stages of transformation that the mind of man had gone through in its various periods of development until his own time. In the early nineteenth century Hegel was concerned with the inner dialectic of reality within both an ontological and an historical contexts. At this time also came the doctrines of social development with Fourier, St. Simon and Auguste Comte. Karl Marx brought this movement to its



most realistic expression in his Manifesto.

But all of this was only preparatory to a new discovery whose magnitude and effects on human life are still not measured. While these changes in the mode of human perception and of social structure were taking place, evidences were appearing in the realm of geology and paleontology indicating that there was a time sequence in the very formation of the earth and of all life forms upon the earth. Finally it dawned upon western consciousness that earlier life forms were of a simpler nature than later life forms, that the later forms were derived from the earlier forms. The complex of life manifestations, had not existed from the beginning by some external divine creative act setting all things in their place. The earth in all its parts, especially in its life forms, was in a state of continuing transformation. Discovery of this life sequence was brought to its first full expression in Darwin in his Origin of Species in 1859. After Darwin the physicists in their study of light and radiation came almost simultaneously to an understanding of the infra-atomic world and the entire galactic system. Insight into both the microphase and macrophase of the phenomenal world was obtained and the great unity of this universe became apparent in its spacial expansion and its time sequence.

Just at this moment, however, a sudden shift in the mode of consciousness took place. The scientist-priest-prophet-mystic suddenly became aware that the opaqueness of matter had dissolved. His science was ultimately not the objective grasping of some reality extrinsic



to himself; it was rather a moment of subjective communion in which man saw himself less an isolated olympian knowing principal than a being in whom the universe in its evolutionary dimension became conscious of itself.

Thus the sequence from an awareness of spiritual development of the biblical world to the mental development of the Enlightenment, to the social and historical development of the sociologists, to the ontological development of Hegel, to the biological development of Wallace and Darwin, to the later cosmic development of the twentieth century Physicists. The final stage has been to see that man himself is not a detached observer of this development but that he is integral to the entire process. Indeed man may now be defined as the latest expression of the cosmic-earth process, as that being in whom the cosmic-earth human process becomes conscious of itself.

Thus a new creation story has evolved in the secular scientific community, the equivalent in modern times to the creation stories of antiquity. This creation story differs from the traditional Eurasian creation stories much more than these differ from each other. It seems destined to become the universal story taught to every child who receives formal education in the modern form anywhere in the world.

#### The Earlier Christian Cosmology

The redemptive believing community first dazzled by this new vision of developmental time, then frustrated by an inability to cope with



the new data, lapsed unenthusiastically, into its traditional attitudes. In recent centuries indeed the believing community has not been concerned with any cosmology, ancient or modern, for the believing community has its real values concentrated in the Saviour, the human person, and the believing church.

There is indeed a surviving cosmology in which even the redemption story takes place and which to some extent still plays a role in the Christian story. According to this story the cosmos and every being in the cosmos reflects the divine exemplar considered by Plato as the Agathon, the Good, by Plotinus as the One, by the Christian as God. All things are beautiful by this beauty. The supremely beautiful is the integrity and harmony of the total cosmic order as Saint Thomas insists upon so constantly. This requires the perfection of each part, the proper relating of the parts to each other and the final integrating of the parts in the whole. Thus there is the love of oneself, of others, then of the total cosmic complex, and finally the love of God who is the primordial eternal reality in whom every reality finds its primordial eternal image.

The human mind ascends to the contemplation of the divine by rising through the various grades of being from the lowliest forms of existence in the earth with its mountains and seas to the various forms of living things, and so to man and consciousness, to the soul and from the inner life of the soul to God. This sequence is portrayed most beautifully in the *Symposium* of Plato and in the *Solliloquy* of



Augustine as he meditated with his mother by the window. So Bonaventure could write on the reduction of all the arts and sciences to theology, for all eventually depended upon the divine reference. So too the journey of Dante through the various spheres of reality up to the divine vision in itself. Initiation into the basic human and Christian values was initiation into this cosmology. Christian spirituality was built up in this manner. The mysteries of Christianity were integral with this cosmology. The difficulty with <sup>this</sup> cosmology is that it presents the world as an ordered complex of beings that are ontologically related as an image of the divine; it does not present the world as a continuing process of emergence in which there is an inner organic bond of descent of each reality from an earlier reality.

### The Impasse

Yet in their functional roles neither this traditional cosmology nor the new scientific cosmology is of serious concern because of the shift in the western religious tradition from a dominant creation mystique to a dominant redemption mystique. This Christian redemptive mystique is little concerned with any cosmological order or process since the essential thing is redemption out of the world through a personal Saviour relationship that transcends all such concerns. Even the earlier mystical experiences of ascending to the divine through the realms of created perfections are diminished. There eventuates an acosmic, ahistorical religious mood as a dominant response to the awesome experience of the earth and its demonic powers. But now this excessive redemptive emphasis is played out. It cannot effectively dynamize activity in time because



it is an inadequate story of time. The redemption story has grown apart not only from the historical story but also from the earth story. Consequently an isolated power has eventuated that is being victimized by entropy.

If this is the impasse from the side of the believing redemption community of America, the impasse from the side of the secular scientific community, committed to a developmental universe, is its commitment to the realm of the physical to the exclusion of the spiritual in the creation story. This has been the tough, the realistic position, the rule of no-nonsense action. Thus the Darwinian principle of Natural Selection involves no psychic or conscious process but a fierce struggle for earthly survival which gives to the world its variety of form and function. Because this story became too exclusive in its physical biological version of the cosmic-earth process, the society supported by this vision is also victimized by entropy which is expressed in its lack of meaning. It is not an integral story.

We must not think that these two communities, both now in a state of entropy, have no regard for each other. Extensive courtesies are extended, even extensive cooperation is offered. Persons in the secular scientific professions as well as modern manufacturing and commercial pursuits have extensive regard for the religious dimension of life. But this is either an extrinsic dedication of their profession or their business to religious goals or a simple form of reverence. Many are themselves religious personalities of intense dedication to the saving mysteries of religious faith. They spend time and energy in seeking to



prosper the Faith. They wish to serve, to give themselves a spiritual discipline.

Those in the religious community have their own esteem for the integrity of those engaged in scientific technological commercial activities. These phases of life have their consecration. Training in the professions takes place in the religious schools. It even dominates the curriculum. So what's the fuss about? The answer is that surface agreement is not depth communion or the basis of sound cosmic-earth-human values. The antagonisms are deeper than appear. An integral story has not emerged and no community can exist without a community story. This is precisely why the communication between these two is so unsatisfying. No sustaining values have emerged. The problems of the human are not resolved. The human adventure is not dynamized.

Both traditions are trivialized. Their extrinsic union is even more trivialized. The human venture remains stuck in its impasse. There is no Divine Comedy. The Platonic vision has no longer the excitement it had for Augustine or for Bonaventure or for Dante. Even when we read Plato or Augustine or Bonaventure or Dante we no longer have the experience they had. Their suppositions are not ours. Proof of this is that the child who enters school and begins his Earth Studies or his Life Studies does not experience any numinous presence. This teaching that enables the child to discover his place in the world of time and space is one of the most important of all events in the life of the child. He needs a story that will encompass this and the school presently cannot provide the mystique that should be associated



with this story. The religious oriented school that has only extrinsically adopted the modern sense of the earth cannot evoke this experience in the child.

The story is not complete; it has no human or spiritual aspect. This is especially significant because the child's schooling now fulfills a role in our society similar to the role of the initiation ceremonies in earlier societies. The secular society does not see the significance of its own story while the religious society rejects the story because it is presented only in its physical aspect. The creation process has been sublated by the redemption process. The totality of the numinous is subsumed in the redemption experience. All real values are redemptive values. Yet, as we have seen, these values have become non-functional in the larger dimensions of the human community. Because they are disfunctional in the larger community they have become disfunctional for the individual. Therefore the need to establish a deeper understanding of the spiritual dynamics of the cosmic-earth process within which the redemption process functions. From the empirical inquiry into the real it has become increasingly clear that from its beginning in the galactic system to its earthly expression in human consciousness the universe carries within itself a psychic as well as a physical dimension. Otherwise human consciousness emerges out of nowhere and finds no real place in the cosmic story. Man is an addenda or an intrusion.

So far however, spiritually oriented personalities have been pleased because this cleavage provides man with superior, unearthly quality.



The scientist on the other hand is pleased since this leaves him free to structure his world of quantitative measurements without the problem of human consciousness. Thus both scientist and believers conspire to keep their aloof positions disengaged from the profound understanding of the earth process itself. Neither seems to be looking at the reality before them; else it would be evident that the cosmic-earth-human process requires both a physical and a psychic phase from the beginning. As soon as this is recognized, and the Story of the universe is presented in its integral form, then a new world appears for both the scientific and the believing community. Once again a universal cosmological myth attains its primacy in human understanding of the universe and in the direction of human affairs.

### The Story

The Story of the Universe is the story of the emergence of a galactic system in which each new level of being emerges through the urgency of self-transcendence. Hydrogen in the presence of some millions of degrees of heat emerges into helium. After the stars take shape as oceans of fire in the heavens they go through a sequence of transformations. Some eventually explode into the stardust out of which the solar system and the earth take shape. Earth gives unique expression of itself in its rock and crystalline structures and in the variety and splendor of living forms until man appears as the moment in which the unfolding universe becomes conscious of itself. Man emerges not only as an earthling but also as a worldling. He bears the universe in his being as the universe bears him in its being. The two have a total presence to each other.



If this integral vision is something new both to the scientist and to the believer, both are gradually becoming aware of this view of the real and its meaning for man. It might be considered a new revelatory experience. Because we are moving into a new mythic age it is little wonder if a kind of mutation is taking place in the entire earth-human order. A new paradigm of what it is to be human emerges. This is what is so exciting yet so painful and so disrupting. One aspect of this change involves the shift in earth-man relations for man now in large measure determines the earth process that once determined him. In a more integral way we could say that the earth, that controlled itself directly in the former period, now to an extensive degree controls itself through man.

#### Creation of Values

In this new context the question appears as to where the values are, how they are determined, how transmitted. First it can be said that whereas formerly values consisted in the perfection of the earthly image reflecting an external Logos in a world of fixed natures, values are now determined by the sensitivity of man in responding to the creative urgencies of a developing world. The transforming sequence is in the direction of an increasing differentiation, a deepening subjectivity, and a more comprehensive communion within the total order of the real. The scientist himself (often unknown even to himself) is drawn by the mystical attraction of communion with the emerging creative process. This would not be possible unless it was a call of subject to subject, if it were not an effort at total self-realization on the part of the



scientist. His taste for the real is what gives to his work its admirable quality. He wishes to experience the real in its tangible, opaque, material aspect and to respond to this by establishing an interaction with the world that will advance the total earth-human process. If the demand for objectivity and the quantitative aspect of the real has led him to neglect subjectivity and the qualitative aspect of the real this has been until now a condition for his fulfilling his historical task. The most notable single development within science in recent years, however, has been a growing awareness of the integral physical-psychic dimension of reality. The scientific community is possibly more advanced than the religious community in accepting the total dimensions of the New Story. An abundant interpretative literature has appeared that gives an entrancing, humanly understandable, description of the universe, the emergence of life, the appearance of man.

The believing redemption community is awakening only slowly to this new context of understanding. There is a fear, a distrust, even a profound aversion to the earth and all its processes. Probably no Catholic theological seminary in the country has an adequate course on creation as this is experienced in these times, whereas there is a long list of courses on redemption: Soteriology, Christology, Ecclesiology, the Sacraments, Grace, Pastoral Ministry and others concerned with redemption and how it functions in aiding man to transcend the world. Some years ago it was noted in a survey published in the journal Science that Catholics were the lowest of religious traditions in the country in their production of scientists. While this has been challenged in its particulars it probably can stand in its general implications. Such



a situation cannot long endure, however, since a new sense of the earth is arising in the believing community. The earth will not be ignored, nor will it long endure being despised, neglected, or mistreated. The dynamics of creation is demanding attention once more in a form unknown to the orthodox Christian for centuries.

### Identifying Values

In identifying values in this new situation a new type of difficulty emerges. Even when there is a responsiveness to the inner dynamics of the earth process there is a certain dislocation from the clearly established directives of a prior paradigm of the human. Even though this paradigm is no longer effective in dealing with the most basic issues of the present there is a tendency to continue problem-solving within the paradigm rather than an effort to change the paradigm as the only way of dealing with the problems. The basic norms of the new paradigm are continued differentiation, subjectivity, and communion. As regards differentiation it seems that one of the primordial intentions of the earth process is to produce variety in all things from the atomic structures of the living world of plant and animal forms to the appearance of man where the individuals differ from each other more extensively than in any other realm of known reality. Not only individuals but also social structures and historical periods of man's development. Thus the law of differentiation is a primary importance in the appreciation of the entire earth process. There can be no doubt this is the primary aspect of the New Story that is being written, how this differentiation



took place in time and space to produce such a variety of manifestations. There is a first fundamental value, the inherent indestructable value of the individual. But here also the difficulty in the human order for there is no absolute model for the individual. Such personal realization involves a unique creative effort in response to all those interior and exterior forces that enter into the individual life. So too with each historical age and each cultural form there is need to create a reality for which, again, there is no adequate model. This is precisely the American difficulty, a difficulty for which there is no complete answer but only a striving toward. At each moment we must simply be what we are and opening onto a larger life.

After differentiation by far the most important value is subjectivity, interiority. Every being has its own interior, its self, its mystery, its numinous aspect. To deprive any being of this sacred quality is to disrupt the total order of the universe. Reverence will be total or it will not be at all. The universe does not come to us in pieces any more than a human individual stands before us with some part of his being. Preservation of this feeling for reality in its depths has been considerably upset in these past two centuries of scientific analysis and technological manipulation of the earth and its energies. During this period the human mind lived in the narrowest bonds that it has ever experienced. The vast mythic, visionary, symbolic world with its all-pervasive numinous qualities was lost. Because of this loss man made his terrifying assault upon the earth with an irrationality that is stunning in enormity while we were being assured



that this was the way to a better more humane more reasonable world.

Such treatment of the external physical world deprived of subjectivity could not long avoid encompassing man also. Thus we have the most vast paradox of all, man as a free intelligent numinous being negating these very interior qualities by his own objective reasoning mind and subserving his own rationalization. Yet finally a reversal has begun and the reality and value of the interior subjective numinous aspect of the entire cosmic order is being appreciated as the basic condition in which the story makes any sense at all. For if the first theme of the story is differentiation the second theme is the ever increasing awakening of interior consciousness.

The third determining theme of the New Story is the intercommunion of the universe within itself and of each part with the whole. Each atomic particle is in communion with every other atom in the vast web of the universe. This web of relationships throughout the universe is what first impinges on the waking consciousness of man from the beginning. If the larger story of the world process is the account of differentiation and subjectivity it is also the account of deepening communion at every level of reality. It is a more intense communion within the material world that enables life to emerge into being. The living form is more differentiated, with greater subjectivity and more intensive communion within itself and with its environment. All these factors are multiplied on a new scale of magnitude in the realm of consciousness. There a supreme mode of communion exists within the individual, with the human community, within the earth-human complex.



Increased capacity for differentiation is inseparable from this capacity for communion. Together this distance and this intimacy establish the basic norms of being, of life, of value. It is the destiny of our present and all future generations to develop this capacity for communion on new and more comprehensive levels.

### Transmitting Values

As we move now from the creation and identification of value to transmission of values, we must first note that we no longer have the functional initiation techniques whereby the vision and values of earlier generations were transmitted to succeeding generations. Yet there is an abiding need to assist a succeeding generation to fulfill its proper role in the ongoing adventure of the earth process. In the human realm education must supply what instinct supplies in the prehuman realm. There is need for a program to aid the young to identify themselves in the comprehensive dimensions of space and time. This was easier in the world of the Timaeus where the earth was seen as an image of the eternal Logos. In such a world St. Thomas could compose his Summa Theologica. This could then be summarized in catechetical form and taught to succeeding generations.

Now a new way of understanding values is required. The Summa that is presently being written is the Story of the Universe in its cosmic-earth-human phases as this is now emerging into consciousness. In this story human development has gone through a Primal phase dominated by its tribal character, a Civilizational phase of the more massive societies,



a Technological phase wherein the new discoveries were made. Now a numinous integration phase of the earth process is taking place.

It is of utmost importance that the next generation become aware of this larger story here outlined and the numinous, the sacred values that have been present in an expanding sequence over this entire time scale of the world's existence. Within this context all human affairs, all professions, occupations, and creations of man have their meaning precisely in so far as they enhance this emerging world of subjective intercommunion within the total range of reality. Within this context the scientific community and the religious community have a common basis. The limitations of the redemption rhetoric and the scientific rhetoric can both be seen and a new more integral language of being and value can emerge.

A few observations that I would offer in conclusion of this brief paper are as follows:

Within this story a structure of knowledge can be established with its human significance from the physics of the universe and chemistry through geology and biology to anthropology and so on to an understanding of the entire range of human endeavor from language, literature, art, history and religion to medicine and law, to psychology and sociology, to economics and commerce and so to all those studies whereby man fulfills his role in the earth process. In all these studies and in all these functions, the basic values depend on conformity with the Earth process. To harm the earth is to harm man, to ruin the earth is to destroy man.



Secondly, there is no possibility of discovering a functional story for American society or the human community except by discovering the functional story of the cosmic-earth process. If the way of western man and western religion was once the way of election and differentiation from others and from the earth, the way now is the way of intimate communion with the larger human community and with the cosmic-earth process.

Thirdly, the basic mood of the future might well be one of confidence in the continuing revelation that takes place in and through the earth. If the dynamics of the universe from the beginning shaped the course of the heavens, lighted the sun, and formed the earth, - if this same dynamism brought forth the continents and seas and atmosphere, if it awakened life in the primordial cell and then brought into being the unnumbered variety of living beings and finally brought man into being and guided him safely through the turbulent centuries, there is reason to believe that this same guiding process is precisely what has awakened in man his present understanding of himself and his relation to this stupendous process. Sensitized to this guidance we can have confidence in the future that awaits the human venture.

Fourthly, by means of this story the new paradigm of the human is established. With its support we can awaken in the morning and know where we are. We can answer the questions of our children. We can interpret suffering, integrate knowledge, guide education. We can have a context in which life can function in a meaningful way.







Contemplation and World Order

Thomas Berry



If contemplation is to lead an individual to a personal transforming experience of the divine this can be accomplished in a great diversity of spiritual disciplines. There is no need to advert to the condition of the world, whatever it is. The less attention to the world, the better. But if contemplation is to advance the peace and order of the world in some direct manner it requires more careful consideration of just what is dysfunctional in the world and how this can be remedied. For this reason we here present a few observations on the present disorder, its remedy, and how contemplation contributes to this remedy.

The disorder of our times is largely rooted in the schism between the secular scientific society and the spiritual religious society. Any adequate remedy for our troubled world requires the healing of this schism and establishment of a vital presence of the secular and the religious to each other so that meaning and direction can be given to the human process and the psychic energies needed can be evoked from within the available resources.

It is regretful that with all our meditation and all our spiritual efforts at understanding, we have in the recent past made so little advance toward a functional human order. While there have been religious involvements in the social, economic and political dynamics of our times, these have had only limited impact because the religious society is fundamentally redemption oriented and the surrounding society is creation orientated. This situation has come about since the fourteenth century. After the Black Death, which occurred in that century, western religious man became preoccupied with redemption out of the world rather than with transformation of the world. The world was seen in an unfavorable light. What devotion

It is contended that the individual is not a person, but a mere  
instrument of the divine will, and that the only way to  
achieve spiritual perfection is to surrender to the will of  
God, whatever it is. The last attention to the world, the  
contending is to advance the cause and order of the world in some  
direct manner. It requires some practical consideration of how  
functional in the world and how this can be achieved. For this reason  
there is a great deal of attention to the present situation, its causes, and  
how contemplation contributes to this.

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we have to the world is mainly a redemptive-type devotion. We lack a cosmology, an effective creation story, an understanding of the dynamics of history, an emotional response to the world as such.

The world about us seeks a solution of its ills by a scientific understanding of how the world came into being, how it functions, and how it can be made more effective in supplying the basic needs of man. It is preoccupied with cosmology and its extension in history and technology. It is in quest of a comprehensive story of the cosmic-earth-human process. Little can be done for the world except in the context of this vision. Awakening to the cosmic-earth-human process whereby all things have a genetic relationship with each other, is the most significant intellectual achievement of man since the higher civilizations came into being some 2500 years ago. In the 19th century the sequence from simpler to more complex forms of life was discovered. This led to an understanding of the physical evolution of the earth, which in turn led to an understanding of the evolution of the entire complex of galactic systems. The whole was seen as a physical process brought about by random processes. We thus have two orthodoxies confronting each other: the scientific orthodoxy maintaining that the emergence of the universe, of the earth, of life, of man and human history is something physical, determined by random processes; and the religious orthodoxy that is so stunned by the new vision of the developing world that it has retreated deeper into its own traditional ways of experiencing the universe. In consequence of these two orthodoxies, human affairs, even the earth itself, is caught in a vortex of ill-directed activity that threatens to end in self-destruction. The



secular scientific world is seeking its salvation in an increasing manipulation of the natural world and in the exploitation of the energies stored in the fossil fuels of the earth and in the nuclear structure of matter. This manipulative process is inherently inflationary since it exhausts energies that cannot be replaced. In the case of nuclear energy the most deadly toxic forces known to man are introduced into the air, the earth, and the sea.

Yet in spite of its present inadequancies the story of the universe that has emerged from scientific inquiry is the most profound revelatory experience of man since the great traditional religions were born. In its corrected version, this story constitutes the basic hope for a viable future for the human community and for the planet earth. This picture of creation, without the destructive technologies associated with its development, is the only functional view of the universe that is presently available for us. This new cosmological myth is being taught throughout the world to all the children of the human community who are involved in formal education in its modern mode. The difficulty of this myth at present is that it is presented simply in its physical aspects; its numinous spiritual aspect is omitted. Thus the story is distorted. But once this myth is given its integral expression as a numinous-spiritual as well as a mechanistic-physical process, then the human community has a foundation on which to proceed.

World order is a product of the world process. In its human phase world order is a continuing of the cosmic-earth process. The "order" involved is not the order of an abiding image of eternity such as that pre-



sented by Plato in the Timaeus but the order of a universe and a human community that is coming into being. This sense that the human order is a continuation and participation in an emerging world process is preimary in our discussion. There is not and has never been as established world order. There is only the world genesis; a cosmogenesis, biogenesis, anthropogenesis.

Such a process can only be presented as narrative, as story, a story that is being written as it is being acted. The world order has the order of a story not the order of a geometric pattern. It is of utmost importance for us to know the story sequence as this has brought us to the present when we suddenly find ourselves on stage and in command of the entire production.

This brings us immediately to the question of who knows the story? Who can provide an understanding of the precise roles that we are playing? Who will assist us to discover our historical identity? Traditionally the basic orientation to reality in the various societies has been provided by the great religions of mankind. But when we investigate these religious traditions we discover that they are mostly metaphysical in their understanding of reality. The story that they tell is the interior story of the way toward a spiritual liberating experience, such as we find in the religions of India, or they are accounts of the manner in which man integrates his activities within the seasonal sequences of the cosmic cycle as we find with traditional China. Even when we turn to the traditional western world we find that the universe is seen as the image of the divine reality, the Agathon of Plato. The story is the account of a spiritual redemptive process played out within this established context. It is not the story of



a developmental universe. The mustard seed that grows into a tree and fills the whole world is filling up an established space.

In opposition to all traditional stories of the universe the present secular scientific story is a story of the total cosmic process. It is man's first complete historical narrative founded in scientific understanding and objective observation. If we are going to deal with our world we must deal with it within this context. In this context human historical development is seen within a total cosmic process. The forces that existed in the very beginning, in the emergence of the galactic systems some billions of years ago, manifested the same tendencies toward complexity, community, and centration that are now operating in the earth system of which man is the most complete expression.

Not only the religious life of man, but the economic and political life, medicine, law and morality, indeed all the functional aspects of human society must experience themselves within this context to have any grounding in reality. This is the integrating myth of contemporary man. The norm of value within this myth is not the <sup>platonian</sup> correspondence of the created image to the divine reality; it is rather the adequacy of man in enabling the emerging universe to achieve its higher expression in the increasing intercommunion of beings within an increasing diversification. This has been the main theme of the cosmic-earth process from the beginning. In our times we are witnessing a new phase of reflective consciousness. For the first time we know the process and have extensive control over it.

The history of man in the higher civilizations that have emerged since the neolithic period has been the story of man's efforts to identify



himself over against the earth process. This is especially true of the recent period of technological advance. Man represents a new mode of conscious being that rises beyond what preintellectual nature is capable of. Thus the tendency in western civilization to establish man's identity over against the earth process. While this has been important phase of the earth dialectic, it has also had disastrous consequences in the ecological and psychic upset that this has produced.

But now this phase is coming to a close. Man is discovering anew his place within the earth process. He begins to realize that he is not lord of the universe. He depends on the dynamics of the earth to sustain him in his own being and in all his activities. Man must define himself primarily in relation to the earth, not primarily in himself. Man is the consciousness of the earth. The earth in this context becomes the primary subject; man a mode of earth being. This is the new human situation. But once this adjustment of his center of attribution is established, man can then deal with the problem of order.

It is within this context that I would like to situate the type of contemplation that can be effective in assisting toward world order. The first thing to note is that the primary spiritual journey is not the journey of the individual soul to the divine, nor is it the journey of the Christian people, nor is it the journey of the human community, it is the journey of the primordial energy as it has taken shape as the universe has moved toward its highest expression. More immediately it is the journey of the planet earth from the time it took shape out of stardust (when the solar system was formed), formed itself into a ball of molten elements, and



then produced its topography through the course of some billions of years. Once this was achieved the multitude of plant and animal forms took shape in the sea, on the land and in the air, until finally man and the world we see about us came into being. At each level of emergence a higher spiritual mode of expression was achieved until a fullness of consciousness appeared in man. Now we experience the great journey of man to the fullness of his human mode of being.

From that moment, some two million years ago, the entire earth process has been gradually altered under the influence of its most powerful single force, consciousness. But the power of consciousness did not begin to reach its full effect until the technological age appeared and the human system let loose its destructive powers upon the rest of the earth. Now we see that the human life system is integral with the total set of life systems, that the world order is truly the world order and not simply a human order, that man must accept himself in his functional role and submit to the dominance of the whole, not a part over the whole.

This is the context of contemplation. Man is that being in whom the earth reflects on itself. The assumption of this earth mode of consciousness is the primary step toward a contemplation that will be effective in our present situation.

The second consequence of our contemplation should be a functional awareness of the primacy of subjective communion with the world over objective manipulation of the world. One of the great achievements of man during the early period of awakened consciousness was his capacity for subjective communion with the totality of things and with each particular



thing. Each fragment of matter had its own subjectivity, its own interiority, its own spirit presence. It was to this spirit presence that man addressed himself. So with the trees and flowers, birds and animals, so with the wind and sea and the stars, so with the sun and the moon. In all things there was a self, a subjectivity, a center; man communed with this center with a profound intimacy.

That contemplation whereby man sinks deep into the subjectivity of his own being is a primary way of experiencing the totality of things and of so constituting a truly functional world order. This is the order of interior communion not the order of external manipulation or compulsion. Each aspect of reality is discovered in this mutual indwelling which is the supreme art of life. Nothing can be itself without being in communion with everything else, nor can anything truly be the other without first acquiring a capacity for interior presence to itself. These come together in some mysterious way. Thus the deepening of the personal center becomes the deepening of the capacity for communion. Since all things gravitate toward each other, man has only to permit the inner movements of his own being to establish his universal presence to all the earth.

This attraction of things to each other is the fulfillment at the spiritual human level of the attraction of gravitation at the physical level. Through this mysterious force of attraction the least particle of matter is in intimate contact with every other particle of matter even though it is at the far edge of a distant galactic system. The volume of each atom is the volume of the universe if we consider that a thing is where its power is felt.

Based on this principle the various nations of the world and the



various classes of peoples within nations must establish a new paradigm of human relationships. This is especially urgent in a period of such advanced communications technology. The bonds of exterior communion have bound mankind together in new ways which now require a new capacity for subjective communion. That there exists an inherent capacity for this is evidenced by the total process of the universe. This capacity for inter-subjective communion needs to be presented in a compelling cosmic-historical context that arises not out of some religious belief or out of a salvation mystique but out of the very dynamics of reality itself. To understand this both intellectually and emotionally is the basic work of contemplation that would lead mankind to fulfill the next phase of the cosmic story.

A third aspect of the type of contemplation I am suggesting would be the absorption of the new energies that are available to man in the psychic order from his contact with the cosmic-historical process. Almost limitless cosmic power belongs to each of us if only we will absorb it. This was done in earlier times through the cosmic symbolism that was assumed by tribal peoples when in time of crisis they painted the various cosmic symbols on their bodies or decorated themselves with the symbols of the universe, with the sun and moon and stars, with the symbols of wind and lightning, the flora and fauna, even with the rocks of the earth. They thus absorbed the powers of the earth into their own being—both the physical and the psychic powers. We observe this with Achilles in the Homeric story and with Aeneas in the story of Vergil. They could not go into battle until they felt secure in this feeling that the total



cosmic order was functioning within themselves.

We with the historical power. This sequence of historical transformations has had its stupendous cataclysmic moments, but in each case something stupendous has emerged in proportion to the devastation effected. Neither in the earth nor in the individual nor in human history is life development simply a gradual, ordered process of change; it is rather a sequence of crisis moments, upheaval, even of periods of extensive disorder. An appreciation of this in our understanding of the life process of the human community is indeed difficult. Our rejection of disorder and our preoccupation with order may be our most potent source of disorder. What is needed is not primarily order but a process of creative tension. The inability to understand the creative function of disorder is a supreme evil. It leads to a type of paralysis when severe disorder is experienced. Rather than leading to an energizing, creative period it leads to enervation and desperation. It incapacitates a person or a society for incorporating a needed polarity into the thinking process.

The primary need then is to think not of world order but of world creativity. It is precisely because we reject disorder with such vehemence that we are not creating more extensively at the present time. We might understand this better if we consider that there are two forms of advance in the unfolding of reality: the first is the advance within a certain established paradigm of what is desirable; the second is a movement from one paradigm to another. A change of paradigm took place when western society moved from the artistic norms of romanesque architecture to the norms of gothic architecture. Within each of these there were successive stages of development. But there came a time when



it was appropriate that the paradigm be changed. Other instances could be given. There was a period when knighthood fulfilled a vital function in western society. Then came a period when the society was changed and knighthood became an artificial pose. So with other phases of life. The time comes when the paradigm needs to be changed. No amount of improvement within the paradigm will provide a satisfactory answer to the situation.

The difficulty is that of transition. Transition periods are chaotic periods. The new ordering principle emerges only over a period of time. To seek this ordering principle by clinging to a past paradigm of order is to frustrate the emergence of the new ordering principle. What is needed is a willing entry into a period of groping toward the new even when the new cannot be clearly understood.

Such is the function of contemplation at the present time. We are in a period of groping. We do not know exactly what we are groping toward. We are in a situation similar to that of a musician whose mind is haunted by an unheard melody that he cannot identify until it emerges in his mind. He simply knows that he will recognize the melody when it appears. So in scientific discovery. So in all phases of invention or creativity. So in the present. We do not know exactly what type of order is now possible for us, we do not know its exact shape, or perhaps even its immediate governing principle. It is a demonic as well as a divine moment. A sense of total realism is needed to penetrate into the deeper significance of the moment and to guide the transformation that is taking place. There are temptations to flee into an ephemeral futurism, a sterile tradi-



tionalism, or to remain indecisive in the present. These lead to a destructive revolutionary movements, to traditional fixations, or to pure negativism. Too often these are the consequence of only partial views of the situation and represent problem solving within an inadequate paradigm of how the earth-human process takes place. The primary need is not for problem solving techniques but for a new paradigm that goes much deeper and changes things more completely than what has been generally suggested.

My own feeling is that most of the attitudes so far adopted and most of the solutions so far proposed remain within the Christian Redemptive mystique. I am suggesting that the single greatest change needed is a rather complete change to a Creation mystique, and that this creation mystique is provided by an adapted version of the new cosmological myth that is the story side of the modern scientific view of the universe and the forces governing its unfolding reality. This is the musical theme that is haunting the mind of modern man. It is the half-heard song that could awaken contemporary man to the type of activity that would integrate the new world order. The greatest obstacle to our awakening to a full consciousness of this new dynamic of history is probably to be found in the neofundamentalism that presently dominates a large part of our thinking and acting. Because of this neofundamentalism much of the effort being expended by Christians is, I think, leading into deeper frustration. But it is not only the neofundamentalism of Christians that is involved. We live in a world of neofundamentalisms, Buddhist, Hindu, Sufi, Yogic, and many others. This may be a final reassertion of the ancient power inherent in these traditions. But each of these must not only lead to



transtemporal experience, each of these must function within infratemporal history.

For the Christian there is an overwhelming feeling for the redemptive emphasis and little responsiveness to cosmology or creation processes. Christian peoples generally have saviour fixations. This is a great difficulty. Certainly in our seminaries there is nowhere to be found any adequate presentation of the creation process as this is experienced in the present. The courses are on such subjects as Soteriology, Christology, Ecclesiology, on the sacraments, grace, pastoral ministry, and other such courses along with a good bit of sociological study and psychology. The least understood area is that of the creation dynamics. Thus we have no effective story.

Once we accept the new story in its physical and its numinous dimensions we have a basis on which to educate in an integral fashion. When the child gets his Earth Science and his Life Science he will receive the integral world in which he can experience both the divine and the created, a world in which he must live and function. Not only will the educational program become integral but the various aspects of the human order, economic and political, artistic and literary, moral and religious will all derive from a common basis, be invigorated by the same cosmic forces, and move toward the common goal of a complete earth in its highest differentiation and its highest intimacy of the intercommunion of all things.

While this is not a complete set of directives for building the future it does, I hope, indicate a basic stance that needs to be taken, a



position from which we can begin the task in some comprehensive way. It will establish the type of contemplation that we can share with our total society. The religious society will not continue to be an isolated life system victimized by entropy but a part of the integral life system on which everything depends.







The Spirituality of the Earth

Thomas Berry



The subject we are concerned with is the Spirituality of the Earth. By this I do not mean a spirituality that is directed toward an appreciation of the earth. I speak of the earth as subject, not as object. I am concerned with the maternal principle out of which man is born and whence he derives all that he is and all that he has. Man in his totality is born of the earth. We are earthlings. The earth is our origin, our nourishment, our support, our guide. Our spirituality itself is earth-derived. If there is no spirituality in the earth then there is no spirituality in man. Man is a dimension of the earth. These two are totally implicated each in the other.

Not to recognize the spirituality of the earth is to indicate a radical lack of spiritual perception on the part of man himself. We see this lack of spiritual insight in the earlier attitude of Euro-Americans in their inability to perceive the spiritual qualities of the native American peoples and their mysticism of the land. The attack on these spiritual qualities by Christians constitutes one of the most barbaric moments in Christian history. This barbarism turned upon the tribal peoples was loosed also upon the American earth with a destructive impact beyond human calculation.

The fragility of the earth has not yet impressed itself upon us. The brutality of our relation to the earth cannot but indicate a radical absence of spirituality in man, not the lack of a spiritual dimension of the earth. The opaqueness is in man's understanding of the earth not in the earth's  
which  
structure/expresses an abiding numinous presence. The earth process has been generally ignored by religious-spiritual currents of the west. Our alienation goes so deep that it is beyond western man's conscious mode of



awareness. While there are tributes to the earth in the scriptures and in Christian liturgy there is a tendency to see the earth as a seductive reality that brought about alienation from God in the agricultural peoples of the near East. Earth worship was the ultimate idolotry, the cause of the Fall, and thereby the cause of sacrificial redemption by Divine personality. Thus too the Christian sense of being crucified to the world and living only for the Saviour. This personal Saviour orientation has led to an inter-personal devotionism that quite easily dispenses with earth except as a convenient support for life.

This type of redemptive mysticism as it presently exists is possibly related in its origins to the Black Death of the mid-14th century; the most terrifying period in western history, the period when a third to a half of the population died. At least partially in response to this experience direct recourse was had to supernatural forces, to the ancient spirit powers, to esoteric traditions, to submerged pre-Christian rituals. But above all there was a new emphasis on the redemptive forces within the Christian context, a renewal of primordial Faith, of prayer to be sustained in a frightening world. Thus came Pietism, Puritanism, Jansenism and a long list of sectarian movements all with intensive spiritualities, generally with a strong Saviour attachment.

This basic rejection of the earth in its existing form, and the longing for a transformed earth manifested itself in a renewed Millenarism, which in a variety of forms has dominated much western thought in the past four centuries. Millenarism involves a radical dissatisfaction with the earth and with the whole created order.

But while the devotional tradition thought to achieve this by spiritual



processes in a redemptive context, another tradition emerged that sought to deal with the terror of life by inquiry into the functional dynamics of the earth and the entire universe. This led to the secular scientific technological society that now dominates human affairs to an overwhelming degree and establishes the main disciplines in the educational process. Especially when the secular scientific approach to life is supported by the most powerful political form known to man, the modern nation state, the future direction of human affairs as well as the industrial exploitation of the earth is assured. The terror of life was to be answered by the domestication of the earth and the domination of the creative function of the earth by man. This attitude, however designated as secular in form, involved a certain submerged religious dynamic which can be identified as a concern for creation process rather than redemptive process.

Thus we witness particularly in America two paralled societies, the redemption oriented society with its spiritualities and the creation oriented 'secular' society with its "spiritualities." These two communities have given extrinsic recognition to each other. Believing religious personalities are often proud of their acceptance of the modern world of science and technology. Scientists and technologists are often religious believers. Yet both of these societies are trivialized. Redemptive oriented society and its spiritualities are trivialized because they are isolated from the larger dynamics of the human community. The secular technological society is trivialized because it has no depth of meaning, no numinous quality. Resolution of this impasse is the greatest single challenge to a functional contemporary spirituality.



We can produce spiritualities that function in a certain isolated context without regard for the larger society. We can produce spiritualities that offer a redemptive solution for the society. But this latter is not liable to be effective in any extensive degree. It speaks a rhetoric that is not available for secular man or, if it is available, it widens rather than lessens the tragic inner division between the world of affairs and the world of divine communion. It does not offer a way of interpreting the inner life of the society itself in a rhetoric available to the society. It does not establish an understanding of that authentic experience in contemporary life which is oriented toward communion with creation processes. Indeed it does not recognize that the context of any authentic spirituality lies in the creation myth that governs the total life orientation.

This lack of appreciation of the earth process is manifested at the present time by the training that takes place in most seminaries. It is doubtful if there is any seminary in the country where adequate attention is given to creation dynamics in the manner in which creation is experienced in our society. A long list could be drawn up of the courses explaining redemption: Soteriology, Christology, Ecclesiology, Revelation, Scripture, Patristics, Pastoral Ministry and several others. Creation is generally presented as part of the tract on "God in himself and in relation to His creation." But creation in this metaphysical, biblical, medieval, theological context is not terribly helpful in understanding the creation process as this is set forth in the scientific manuals or the textbooks of Earth Sciences or Life Sciences such as they are studied by children in



Elementary, High School, or later in College.

These classroom studies initiate the child into a world that has more continuity with his later adult life in its functional aspect than does the catechetical story of creation taken from biblical sources. This school-room presentation of the world in which the child lives and finds his place in the world is all important for the future spirituality of the child. The school fulfills in our times the role of the ancient initiation rituals which introduced the child to the society and to his human and sacred role in this society. The tragedy is that the sacred or spiritual aspect of the initiation process is now absent. The child is given a physical process, a marvelous story of the emergence of the universe, of the earth and of man, but without reference to the spiritual aspect of this process. It is doubtful if separate catechetical instructions with their heavy emphasis on redemptive processes can ever supply what is missing.

It may be that the later alienation of young adults from the redemptive sacramental tradition is, in some degree, due to this inability to communicate to the child a spirituality grounded more deeply in creation dynamics in accord with the modern way of experiencing the galactic emergence of the universe, the shaping of the earth, the appearance of life, of man, and the historical sequence in man's development.

In this sequence the child might learn that the earth has its intrinsic spiritual quality from the beginning, for this aspect of the creation story is what has been missing. This is what needs to be established if we are to have a functional spirituality. Just how to give the child his integral world-that is the issue. It is also the spiritual issue of the



modern religious personality. Among our most immediate tasks is to establish this new sense of the earth and of man as a function of the earth.

We need to understand that the earth acts in all that acts upon the earth. The earth is acting in man whenever man acts. In and through the earth spiritual energy is present. This spiritual energy emerges in a total complex of earth functions. Each form of life is integrated with every other life form. Even beyond the earth by force of gravitation every particle of the physical world attracts and is attracted to every other particle. This attraction holds the differentiated universe together and enables it to be a universe of individual realities. The universe is not a vast smudge of matter, some jelly-like substance extended indefinitely in space. Nor is the universe a collection of unrelated particles. The universe is rather a vast multiplicity of individual realities with both qualitative and quantitative differences all in spiritual-physical communion with each other.

The individuals of similar form are bound together in their unity of form.

The species are related to each other by derivation: the later more complex life forms are derived from earlier more simple life forms.

The first shaping of the universe was into those great galactic systems of fiery energy that constitute the starry heavens. In these celestial furnaces the elements are shaped. Eventually, after some ten billion years, the solar system and the earth are born out of the stardust resulting from exploded stars. Earth particularly is our concern. So far as we know, earth is the most unique of all heavenly bodies. Here life, both plant and animal life, was born in the primordial seas some three billion years ago. Plants came out upon the land some six hundred million years ago



after the planet earth had shaped itself through a great series of transformations in forming the continents, the mountains, the valleys, the rivers and streams. The atmosphere was long in developing. The animals came ashore along with the plants. As the life forms established themselves over some hundreds of millions of years the luxuriant foliage formed layer after layer of matter which was then buried in the crust of the earth to become fossil formations. One hundred million years ago flowers appeared and the full beauty of earth began to manifest itself. Some sixty million years ago the birds were in the air. Mammals walked through the forest. Some of the mammals, the whales and porpoises and the dolphins, went back into the sea.

Finally some two million years ago the ascending forms of life culminated in the awakening consciousness of man. A wandering food gatherer and hunter during all of this time until some eight thousand years ago man began to settle into village life. This led to the archaic classical civilization which have flourished so brilliantly over the past five thousand years.

Then some four hundred years ago a new stage of scientific development took place which, in the 18th and 19th centuries, brought about man's technological dominance of the earth out of which he had emerged. This can be interpreted as the earth awakening to consciousness of itself in man. The story of this awakening consciousness is the most dramatic episode of the entire earth story.

The spiritual attitude that then caused or permitted man to attack the earth with such savagery as we witness has never been adequately explained. That it was done by a Christian-derived society, and even with the belief



that this was the human and Christian task of man, makes explanation especially harsh for our society. Possibly it was the millennial drives toward a total transformation of the human condition that led man, resentful that the perfect world was not yet achieved by divine means, to set about the violent subjugating of the earth by his own powers in the hope that in this way the higher life of man would be attained, his afflictions healed.

While this is the positive goal sought it must be added that the negative, even fearful, attitude toward the earth resulting from the general hardships of life led to the radical disturbance of the entire earth process. The increasing intensity shown in exploiting the earth was also the result of the ever rising and unsatiated expectation of western peoples. Even further the natural antagonisms of earth were fostered by the Darwinian principle of the Survival of the Fittest, indicating that the primary attitude of each individual and each species is for its own survival at the expense of the others. Out of this strife, supposedly, the glorious achievements of earth would take place. Darwin's blindness to the cooperative and mutual dependence of each form of life on the other forms of life, is amazing since he himself discovered the great web of life. Still he could not appreciate the principle of inter-communion.

Much more needs to be said on the conditions that permitted such a mutually destructive situation to arise between man and the earth, but we must pass on to give some indication of the new attitude that needs to be adopted toward the earth. This involves a new spiritual and even mystical communion with the earth, a true aesthetic of the earth, a valid economy of the earth. We need a way of designating the earth-human world in its conti-



nunity and identity rather than in its discontinuity and difference. In spirituality especially we need to recognize the numinous qualities of the earth. We might begin with some awareness of what it is to be human, what is the role of consciousness on the earth, what is the place of man in the universe.

While the scholastic definition of man as a rational animal gives us some idea of man among the biological species it gives us a rather inadequate sense of the role that man plays in the total earth process. The Chinese have a better definition of man as the hsin of heaven and earth. This word hsin is written as a pictograph of the human heart. It should be translated by a single word or a phrase with both a feeling and an understanding aspect. It could thus be translated by saying that man is the "understanding heart of heaven and earth." Even more briefly the phrase has been translated by Julia Ch'ing in the statement that man is the "heart of the universe." It could, finally, be translated by saying that man is "the consciousness of the world," or that man is "the psyche of the universe." Here we have a remarkable feeling for the absolute dimensions of the human, the total integration of reality in man, the total integration of man in reality.

We need a spirituality that emerges out of a reality deeper than man, even deeper than life, a spirituality that is as deep as the earth process itself, a spirituality that is born out of the solar system and even out of the heavens beyond the solar system. There in the stars is where the primordial elements take shape in both their physical and psychic aspects. Out of these elements the solar system and the earth took shape, and out of the earth, man.



There is a certain triviality in any spiritual discipline that does not experience itself as supported by the spiritual as well as the physical dynamics of the entire cosmic-earth process. A spirituality is a mode of being in which not only the divine and the human commune with each other but man discovers himself in the universe and the universe discovers itself in man. The Sioux Indian, Crazy Horse, called upon these depths of his own being when he invoked the cosmic forces to support himself in battle. He painted the lightning upon his cheek, placed a rock behind his ear, an eagle feather in his hair, and the head of a hawk upon his head. Assumption of the cosmic insignia is also evident in the Sun Dance Ceremony. In this dance the symbols of the sun and moon and stars are cut out of rawhide and worn by the dancers. The world of living moving things is indicated by the form of the Buffalo cut from rawhide, and by the eagle feathers. The plant world is represented by the cottonwood tree set up in the center of the ceremonial circle. The supreme spirit himself is represented by the circular form of the dance area.

So the spiritual personality should feel that he is constantly in communion with those numinous cosmic forces out of which he was born. This cosmic-earth order needs to be supplemented by the entire historical order of man's development such as was depicted on the shield of Achilles by Homer and on the shield of Aeneas by Virgil. Virgil spends several long pages enumerating the past and future historical events wrought on the shield of Aeneas by Vulcan at the command of Venus, the heavenly mother of Aeneas. All these forces are presently available to us in a new mode of appreciation. The historical and the cosmic can be seen as a single process. This vision



of earth-human development provides the sustaining dynamics of the contemporary world.

That there is an organizing force within the earth process with both physical and psychic dimensions need to be acknowledged in language and in imagery. It needs to be named and spoken of in its integral form. It has a unified functioning similar to the more particular organisms that we are acquainted with. When we speak of earth we are speaking of a numinous maternal principle in and through which the total complex of earth phenomena takes its shape. Recently the biologist, Lewis Thomas, when considering the integration of life systems of the earth, had a sudden intuition in which he saw the total life process of earth as a single cell. Such is their radical inter-dependence.

In antiquity this mode of being of the earth was indicated by personification. The name "Earth" itself designates a deity in Hesiod and in the Homeric hymns. This personification is expressed as Cybele in the Eastern Mediterranean and as Demeter in the Greek world. Biblical revelation represents a basic antagonism between the transcendent deity, Jahweh, and the earth mother of the surrounding societies. There is a basic effort here to keep the asymmetry in the relationship between the divine and the created. In the doctrine of the Madonna in later Christian history there are many passages indicating the Mary was to be thought of as the Earth in which the True Vine is planted and which had been made fruitful by the Holy Spirit. This Mary-Earth equation was not as adequately developed as it might have been in association with the doctrine of the Incarnation.

Probably it belongs to the dialectics of history that the direct personal



association of man with the unique historical individuals, the Saviour and His Mother, had to develop before any adequate feeling for the mystique of the earth could take place. Perhaps too a full development of redemption processes was needed before this new mode of man-earth communion could find expression in our times.

However this may be, a shift in attention is now taking place. Several things are happening. The most notable single event is that modern science is giving us a new and more comprehensive account of man's birth out of the earth. The story of the birth of man was never known so well as now. After discovery of the geological stages of earth transformation and the discovery of the sequence of life in ancient fossil remains by Louis le Clerc, James Hutton and Charles Lyell, then came the discovery of the emergence of all forms of life from primordial life forms by Charles Darwin presented in his Origin of Species in 1859. While Darwin saw the birth of man only out of the physical earth, Teilhard de Chardin saw the birth of man out of both the physical and the psychic dimensions of the earth. Thus the whole burden of modern earth studies is to narrate the story of the birth of man from our Mother the Earth.

Once this story is told it immediately becomes obvious how significant the title Mother Earth really is, how intimate a relationship exists, how absolute man's gratitude must be, how delicate man's concern. The long motherless period of modern man is coming to a close. Hopefully, too, the long period of man's mistreatment of earth is being terminated. If it is not terminated, if we fail to perceive not only our earth origin but also our continuing dependence on our earth-mother, then it will be due in no small measure to the ephemeral spiritualities that have governed our own thoughts



and attitudes and actions.

In this mother-child relationship, however, a new and fundamental shift in dependence has now taken place. Until recently the child was taken care of by the Mother. Now, however, the mother must be extensively cared for by the child. The child has grown to adult status. The Mother-Child relationship needs to undergo a renewal similar to that in the ordinary process of maturing. In this process both child and mother experience a period of alienation. Then follows a reconciliation period when mother and child relate to each other with a new type of intimacy, a new depth of appreciation, and a new mode of inter-dependence. Such is the historical period in which we are now living. Development of this new mode of earth-man communion can only take place within a profound spiritual context. Thus the need for a spirituality that will encompass this process.

As a second observation concerning our newly awakening sense of the Earth, we could say that new phase in the history of the Madonna figure of western civilization has begun. Association of the Virgin Mother with the Earth may now be a condition of Mary returning to the center of western civilization. Her presence may also be a condition for overcoming our estrangement from the earth. In the western world the earth known only in itself as universal mother is not sufficient. It must be identified with an historical person in and through whom earth functions in its ultimate reaches. Phrases referring to Mary as the Earth are found throughout western religious literature. Whether this is anything more than a simple rhetorical device needs a thorough inquiry at the present time. But whether or not his relationship is given in any extensive manner in prior Christian



literature it is a subject of utmost importance for our entire civilizational venture. Few if any other civilizations were so deeply grounded in a Feminine mystique than the Medieval Period of Western Christendom. A vital contact with this earlier phase of Western Civilization is hardly possible without some deep appreciation of its Feminine component. Thus we cannot fail to unite in some manner these two realities: Earth and Mary. The Earth needs embodiment in an historical person, such an historical person needs an earth identity to fulfill adequately her role as divine Mother.

A third observation is that emergence of the new age of human culture will necessarily be an age dominated by the symbol of woman. This too depends on the identification of woman with the earth and its creativity. Woman and Earth, these two are inseparable. The fate of one is the fate of the other. This association is given in such a variety of cultural developments throughout the world in differing historical periods that it is hardly possible to disassociate these two. Earth consciousness, woman consciousness; these go together. Both play a stupendous role in the spirituality of mankind as well as in the structure of civilizations. Our alienation from the earth, from ourselves, and from a truly creative man-woman relationship in an overly masculine mode of being, demands a reciprocal historical period in which not only a balance will be achieved but even, perhaps, a period of feminine emphasis.

A fourth observation I would make is to note our new capacity for subjectivity, for subjective communion with the manifold presences that constitute the universe. In this we are recovering the more primitive genius of man. For in his earlier years man experienced both the intimacy and the



distance of his relation with the earth and with the entire natural world. Above all he lived in a spirit world, a world that could be addressed in a reciprocal mood of affectionate concern. This is what gave rise to sympathetic magic as well as to the great rituals, the majestic poetry, and the awesome architecture of past ages. Nothing on earth was a mere "thing." Every being had its own divine, numinous, subjectivity, its self, its center, its unique identity. Every being was a presence to every other being. Among the more massive civilizations China gave clearest expression to this intimacy of beings with each other in its splendid concept of Jen. All beings are held together in Jen as in Saint Paul all things are held together in Christ. But perhaps an even better analogy is to say that while for Newton the universal law of gravitation whereby each particle of matter attracts and is attracted to every other particle of matter in the universe indicates a mere physical force of attraction, the universal law of attraction for the Chinese is a form of feeling identity.

For this reason there is in China the universal law of compassion. This is especially observeable in man, for all men have a heart that cannot bear to witness the suffering of others. When the objection was made to Wang Yang-ming in the 15th century that this is evident only in human relations, Master Wang replied by noting that even the frightened cry of the bird or the crushing of a plant or the shattering of a tile or the senseless breaking of a stone immediately and spontaneously causes pain in the human heart. This would not be, he tells us, unless there exists a bond of intimacy and even identity between ourselves and these other beings.

Recovery of this capacity for subjective communion with the earth is



a consequence and a cause of a newly emerging spirituality. Subjective communion with the earth, identification with the cosmic-earth-human process, provides the context in which we now make our spiritual journey.

This journey is no longer the journey of Dante through the heavenly spheres. It is no longer simply the journey of the Christian Community through history to the heavenly Jerusalem. It is the journey of primordial matter through its marvelous sequence of transformations, in the stars, in the earth, in man toward an ever more complete spiritual-physical intercommunion of the parts with each other, with the whole, and with that numinous presence which has ever been manifested throughout this entire cosmic-earth-human process.







Creative Revolution

Thomas Berry



The 20th century is a time of extraordinary and universal change in human life. Many of the grand achievements of history have come to fruition. Even greater achievements will emerge in the future. Past forms of life are dissolving, new forms are arising. Our life adjustment therefore is not to some new permanent condition of life but to the process of change itself. Our instrument of adjustment is human intelligence. More than ever intelligence must act as a stabilizer that instantly adjusts man to the new situations he must face. We are no longer occupied with solving a single array of problems in the hope of living in a more stable world. Thus we cannot consider these times as a period of transition. The one great transition, perhaps the greatest of all transitions in the past six thousand years, has already been made, the transition from an abiding order of reality and knowledge to an order of continual change.

Awareness of the evolutionary aspect of reality has been long in coming but it has definitely arrived. Henceforth we move from one phase of development to another, from problem to problem rather than from solution to solution. In a deeper sense there are neither problems nor solutions but only a life process. The work of intelligence is to adapt itself to changing conditions created by itself. Intelligence must constantly deal with a dynamic process which always appears in a state of imbalance without itself ever being out of balance. As a man walking we must keep in a state of balanced-imbalance.

This commitment to change in our intellectual vision was first clearly



stated by Hegel and Schelling, was further developed by James and Bergson, and reached its extreme form in Croce and Gentile.

Catholic thinkers, reacting against these philosophies, have found great difficulty in accepting the dynamic aspect of history because of their commitment to an abiding order of things and an abiding order of truth. The very substance of life seems challenged by these new attitudes, especially by this acceptance of profound changes in the most basic of our intellectual conceptions of reality. After the appearance of Modernism, Catholics, as never before, pride themselves on their ability to remain aside from developmental processes. There is fear lest through earthly change a heavenly communication be lost. The difficulty is very real. Yet it is a question whether Catholics have not misunderstood the entire problem, whether they do not have much more to gain than to lose by accepting and entering into this world of change. The position adopted by others may not be satisfactory, but we might expect in such circumstances that a better Catholic attitude toward change and diversity might be developed, an attitude that would keep Catholic thought intimately in relation to contemporary life and that would at the same time enable Catholics to evolve a deeper understanding of their heavenly heritage. On examination we find that these new commitments to a world of change in modern thought are really founded in the Catholic Tradition itself.

As regards our heavenly communication and the difficulty of understanding it in relation to a world of change we might observe that the Logos of Creation is one with the Logos of Revelation. This fact is impressed upon us in many places of the New Testament, especially by Saint John and Saint



Paul. There must, then, be a profound continuity between the two. There must be a unity of origin and end. Creation and Revelation are both gifts from heaven and to be kept and treasured. Both are integrated into an evolving order of reality. Neither Creation nor Revelation are static. They must of their nature be active, active in a fundamental way which involves increasing stages of perfection. Both are subjectively incomplete. The greater the perfection attained the greater the radical differences in the historical stages of development. Both Creation and Revelation are seminal. The seed is one and the process also is one.

Now our response to this single process must have a fundamental unity. Otherwise we are destroyed both as men and as Christians. We cannot assume dual personalities and live two lives at the same time. Efforts to do this result in the schizophrenic personalities that we find too often in the Christian world. -- But herein lies a very great difficulty, for we have the word Humanism to describe our response to the order of Creation and the word Christianity to describe our response to the order of Revelation, but we have no word to designate our total response to the one reality of which both are aspects. This constitutes our greatest difficulty and is the cause of infinite misunderstandings as regards our most fundamental human and Christian problems. More than anything this lack of a name places our difficulties beyond satisfactory solution.

In dealing with our total response to reality we insist then on the unity of the response. We use the expression Humanism - Christianity to describe a response which is a unity rather than a duality. In our reasoning we use the words separately to designate the components of this unity.



But all our thinking is founded on the following propositions:

- 1) Humanism and Christianity are both universal. There are no non-humanist societies and no non-Christian societies.
- 2) Humanism and Christianity are both concerned with the total development of man.
- 3) Humanism and Christianity implicate each other not extrinsically but intrinsically. To be humanist is to be Christian. To be Christian is to be humanist. An un-Christian humanism and an un-humanist Christianity are contradictory expressions.

Humanism and Christianity implicate each other to such an extent that each must simply be itself in order to fulfill its proper function in relation to the other. Let humanism be humanist and it will be Christian. Let Christianity be Christian and it will be humanist. In either case the norm is within. Humanism must be human. Christianity must be Christian.

There is no question of one being normative to the other, of one converting the other. If Christians reject humanism it is because Christians have not understood Christianity. If humanists reject Christianity it is because they have not understood humanism. The relation can be described as neither exclusion nor fusion, but as unity, compenetration and completion. Once this is understood we can pass to the basic issues that confront Humanism - Christianity at the present time. First it might be of value to discuss the universalist developments that distinguish our times for the development of Humanism and Christianity in the West is only a part of a wider Humanist-Christian development common to all the world, though this wider development is not uni-form but multi-form in its manifestation.



Both Humanism and Christianity have attained in historical succession and in diverse cultural contexts a multiform expression that has never yet been fully appreciated. A series of most important truths has been enunciated by historical and cultural relativism in recent decades. Yet the manner in which they have been proposed has led the Catholic Community to react with special severity in favor of historical continuity and cultural standardization. These latter are the twin evils from which we seem unable to escape. In both these aspects of man's development we have thus far sought an exclusive standardized universalism based on medieval western values rather than an inclusive universalism that accepts rather than rejects non-Medieval and non-Western values. This has created a Church - World tension that has done great harm to both. If we managed to endure this needless tension in the past we can do so no longer. Through modern communication media we are now too closely in contact with other cultures scattered throughout the world and through the process of historical change we are forced to exist in a world very different from the world of the supposedly "Christian" centuries. The Catholic West must be reconciled with the World in a way that not only permits but actually inspires extreme diversity both in the cultural and historical differentiation of man's development. The multiform universal order is not a part of the Western cultural and religious order. The western cultural and religious order is rather a part of the universal cultural and religious order.

Possession of a unique spiritual heritage is the thing that in modern times has given to Western Catholicism its sharp aversion from historical



change and cultural diversity. The Catholic Community considers that it has a form of living destined to suppress and replace all other forms of religious, spiritual and even intellectual life. This attitude may be considered the most lasting and most profound as well as the most destructive force within the Western world.

Early Christians understood that the form of Christian living was not a particular but a universal thing, that this new life was an inclusive not an exclusive universalism. It had a claim to be exclusive only because it was first all-inclusive. All the diverse manifestations of religious, spiritual and intellectual life were to find acceptance and fulfillment within a universal Christian order. Yet the difficulty of entering into the universal and multiform life of the great world societies was such that once Christianity attained its first intimate association with western man and raised up a new and unique form of life, it began to cling to this particular form as an absolute reality to be held within an unchanging context. The Medieval Christian order required a heroic effort on the part of the Christian world. It was, then, easy to succumb to the temptation to hold on to this achievement, to emphasize the permanent over the changing and unity over diversity. The abandoned traditions of development and diversity were taken over by heretical forces of the cultural and political order and turned against Christianity, which in response further hardened its position. There had been earlier a strong and partially successful effort toward moving into the new age of the Renaissance and giving Renaissance society a religious expression. But when the 16th century revolt took place against the "worldliness" of this development and a reassertion of



biblical simplicity of Faith was made, then Catholics retreated from both the Renaissance and the Reformation movements back to the Medieval period and have remained there ever since. The later secularist developments of the Enlightenment period and the Modernist movement at the close of the 19th century brought about a new hardening of position against any acceptance of the new theories of development and diversity.

This stiffening of position over against the surrounding world represents a return to the Old Testament position of particularism whereas Christianity was originally known as a universalist tradition in sharp contrast to Jewish exclusiveness. The Exodus of Christianity from Judaism is parallel with the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. Then, just as Israel after entering the Promised Land of Palestine was unable to make an Exodus from Palestine into the World, so Christianity after its Exodus from Judaism into the Promised Land of Medieval Europe was unable to make its Exodus from Medieval Europe into the universal and multiform world of the present. In both cases the Promised Land became a place of confinement and slavery, a new Egypt created from within, not imposed from without.

But even while the Catholic Community has found adaptation to the world order difficult we must consider that the West has traditionally been more concerned with the Outer, non-Western World, than the Outer World has been concerned with the West. The West has felt a consistent inner drive to unify, civilize and Christianize all mankind. Yet because this sense of world responsibility has consistently been subverted to serve political and economic rather than cultural and religious ends, the West has brought about a state of universal revulsion in Asia and Africa against the West.



In the cultural order our attitude toward the Outer World has been less narrow than in the religious order. Yet only certain aspects of non-Western life have been thoroughly appreciated in the West. Intellectually we have achieved only a mediocre appreciation of the thought traditions of other peoples.

In the religious order, Catholics have manifested the strangest ideas of the non-Western world. Other peoples are considered to be pre-humanist as well as pre-Christian. This attitude toward the non-Western world is offensive to other peoples, is an indictment of our own sense of judgement, and a denial of the universal care Divine Providence bestows upon all mankind. It insults other peoples precisely in that which is most sublime in their lives. On investigation we find in these societies humanist and spiritual traditions breath-taking in their sublimity. Our failure to appreciate these achievements is also a betrayal of the finer universalist traditions of the West. However our deepest failure is when we consider these peoples outside the Providential pattern of salvation. Among the greatest failures of Catholic Theology is its inability to construct a Theology of this Outer World. Such a theology must begin with the realization that there is neither a pre-humanist nor a pre-Christian period of mankind. These two are absolutes inseparable from man's existence. As the world in its totality with all its diversity is created by the Logos so the world in its totality and with all its diversity is illumined by the Logos. The creative and illuminative functions of the Logos are coextensive. Both reason and revelation assure us that there is no Outer World as regards this work of the Logos. The expansion of man's cultural and religious life should



lead all men to realize that we live in a single multiform society of mankind and in this society there is in reality no Outer World but only an Inner World in which all the forms of living are intimately in communication with each other.

The real difficulty, the obstacle to be overcome, is within the Western world itself, in the easy illusion that we have fully evolved the humanist and Christian possibilities of man. This is the supreme tragedy of our world, the conviction Christians manifest that the Medieval West attained the total development of the mind and soul of man and that other peoples and other historical periods must attain their human form of life and their spiritual elevation of soul from the Medieval Western world. The people of the Outer World are to be made man and Christian men in a total way under western influence. This assumption betrays both the culture and the religion of the West as well as the cultures and religions of all the world. It can only be considered an act of cultivated barbarism and irreligion. It assumes a total human and total Christian development in the West that is to be communicated to a world which itself contributes nothing substantial in either human or Christian development. In reality there is no total humanist or total Christian development in any particular society or in any particular historical period. There are only partial manifestations of what a human and Christian existence might be. This minimum achievement of the Western world was seen with particular clarity by Dante in the Divine Comedy. For there we find our most vivid picture of the infidelity of the West to its real mission.

However it is not so much the infidelity of the West but the very



fidelity of the West to its positive achievements that ruins any possibilities that the West might have of full development within itself as well as its possibilities of creative influence in the universal order of humanism and Christianity. Good and zealous people are the most dangerous and destructive peoples. Religious people have damaged the universal cause of the West by frustrating the humanist and Christian communication that should pass between it and the nations of the world. This suppression of the finest possibilities within the West results from excessive exaltation of Medieval and Renaissance developments. These earlier forms of Western life were set over against all later forms of Western life. Renaissance humanism has stifled modern humanism the way Medieval Christianity has stifled modern Christianity.

These earlier phases of Western Development were glorious precisely because of their discontinuity with the past, because of their contact with the Outer World and because of their inner freedom of expression. Later these highest achievements became our greatest disaster. High Religion exalted has become a source of religious ruin. High Intelligence too attached to its forms of conceptualization has destroyed intellectual vision. High Art entranced by its own splendor of form and color has suppressed vital artistic expression. Destruction becomes, in the end, the only way to renewal of life. Particular forms of humanism and Christianity must be destroyed as inadequate as soon as they are brought forth in order that mankind may get on with more perfect creative development. The way of human life is one of Creation-Destruction. These are inseparable. Creation without Destruction is Idolatry. Destruction without Creation is Nihilism. The



highest accomplishment of humanism is to condemn all its works as inadequate and yet constantly to bring forth new and greater works, each of which in turn must itself be condemned. The highest Christianity is to pass from one form of expression to another. This is particularly true of its highest spiritual achievements for precisely in these the temptation to Idolatry is most severe. Life must be lost to be found and this in a more profound way than Christians have yet realized.

The great need of contemporary Christianity is to relinquish all medieval forms of expression. The break-up of the Medieval world is not the greatest catastrophe but the greatest blessing that has befallen Western Christianity in the entire course of its existence. Yet Christians of our times still insist on external imitation of what is no longer a source of life. When this happens, when modern Christians seek to live a medieval form of Christianity then un-Christians must carry a great part of the Christian cause in the present. Christians become the worst enemies of Christianity. In this situation we cannot live our own lives but must relive the medieval lives of our predecessors. We cannot think our own thoughts but must rethink theirs. We cannot have any new experience of life but must repeat the medieval experience. In this way the finest spirituality becomes an oppressive materiality. What was dynamic becomes static, what was helpful becomes a hindrance.

To reproduce Medieval Christianity and Renaissance Humanism in the modern world as the proper expression of religion and culture is to desecrate these noble traditions of the past and to commit treason against the present. There is nothing more difficult than to imagine the Great Founders of the



Medieval and Renaissance periods doing what their 20th century imitators are doing. They would certainly feel closer to the revolutionary personalities of the modern period who have adopted an attitude of extreme antipathy toward direct imitation of these former periods.

This brings us to the consideration that the one unfailing glory of the past and the source of hope for the world's future is to be found in the relentless revolutionary tradition of the Western World. This constant inner revolt of the West against itself, this dissatisfaction with all existing contexts of human life is an attitude that is the most dangerous but also the most hopeful in our times. No other society and no other religion has produced such devastating critique of itself or shown such willingness to overthrow all its forms of expression. For this reason the revolutionary trends that came out of the West are now bringing all mankind close to destruction but they are also uncovering new depths of thought and life and religion which could not possibly have been discovered in any other way.

The more carefully we study the modern revolutions the more clear it becomes that they are all in the direct line of descent from the spiritual revolution of Christianity and this in turn goes back to the prophetic and apocalyptic visions of the Old Testament. The prophetic assertion of a coming total change in the human condition is the beginning of that dissatisfaction which has called forth this great succession of revolutions. No established condition of life will ever be satisfactory to a mankind influenced by the prophetic books of the Old Testament and by the Apocalypse of the New Testament. This unrest is the most productive force in the world and at the same time the most dangerous. The challenge to ourselves and to



the world is how to make this revolution creative rather than destructive.

To be truly creative the revolution must be not only against what is evil but against what is good. There is the difficulty. The constant assertion that all achieved good is inadequate. What is real, what is finally good and true, is beyond all form and figure, beyond all tangible, all comprehensible expression.

From the religious point of view the tragedy is that the revolutionary aspects of Western development have been disassociated from the Christian tradition whence they emerged and have passed into the control of anti-religious forces. Thus while in recent centuries the revolutionary movements in thought and life have suppressed many evils and have brought forth much good these movements constantly tend toward channels of expression more destructive than creative. They are now desperately in need of association with Christian thought while Christian thought in turn is equally in need of association with these revolutionary movements. How to attain its share of leadership in the revolution and how to turn these movements into more creative channels, that is the challenge offered us.

Yet at this moment a new difficulty arises for a schism has taken place within the Catholic Community between those sponsoring a modern revolutionary remedy and those sponsoring a medieval conservative remedy.

Those committed to the revolution must bring forth a more substantial basis for their program than they have yet brought forth. This they will discover in the prophetic tradition of the Scriptures. This prophetic tradition has been obscured in our times and kept in the solemn shadows of the past rather than kept active in the present. Yet the renewal of this tradi-



tion among Catholic intellectuals is of primary importance in producing an effective Christianity in our times. The true Catholic Intellectual must be of a prophetic cast of mind, for in the final analysis it is the prophetic type in any civilization that is the mediator between the society and the vision of truth whereby the society is inspired to its most noble deeds. Yet while nothing is more needed by the Catholic Community there is nothing that is more difficult to bring forth in the living present within this Community. The obstacles are bureaucratic legalism, formalistic learning and an affected style of holiness. These three in their biblical setting show up as the king, the scribe and the pharisee. The prophetic opposition to these three is the triple tension in the life of every prophet. But there is also an inner difficulty in the prophetic tradition. That is the rise of false prophets. Every age that is in special need of prophetic vision is beset with great numbers of false prophets who become blind men leading the blind. Thus the need for prophetic vision that is valid vision and capable of meeting the prophetic needs of our society.

In conclusion the main proposals we make in this paper are as follows:

- 1) The Humanist - Christian response to reality is not a dual but a singular thing though we have no word for this but must use a dual expression.
- 2) The Humanist - Christian vision is not uni-form but multi-form, both in the diversity of forms that succeed each other in historical succession in the same society and in the diversity of forms found simultaneously in diverse societies.
- 3) The multiform expression of the Humanist - Christian vision in



different societies must be recognized and brought into more intimate contact with each other.

4) The western-medieval obstacle to further development of this contemporary, universal and multi-form expression of Humanism - Christianity can be removed only by a creative revolutionary endeavor true to the finer aspects of the western revolutionary tradition.

5) This revolution can be best understood and made effective through a study of its prophetic origins and through a renewal of the prophetic tradition in the present.

6) Every humanist and Christian accomplishment must be abandoned immediately upon its completion and new achievements begun. Only thus can the creative effort of the Humanist - Christian world be continued.







The Indian Future

Thomas Berry



The Indian peoples of this hemisphere will soon be ending their first five centuries of contact with the European peoples who have been occupying this region of the world since the early sixteenth century. While there was a certain historical inevitability in this meeting, no adequate interpretation of this event is yet available. It remains, however, one of the most significant events in the total history of the earth. At first glance it was pure tragedy on one side, unmeasured gain on the other. But this is too simple a view. The final score is not yet, in. Just now there is a deeply tragic aspect on the human level for all concerned.

The effects of this meeting have varied in South America, in Mexico and Central America, in the United States, in Canada. If the Spanish, Portuguese, French, English, and Dutch were the earliest to occupy the North American continent, the other peoples of Europe came later. Peoples from Africa were brought here. Then came the peoples of Asia. Among all these peoples the Indian maintains his unique status as the original dweller in this region of the world. He has this position of honor, however, not merely by his temporal priority but by his mystical understanding and communion with the continent. The continent itself and the living beings upon it were safe and the Indian secure until the invasion took place. Since then the continent with its rivers and valleys, its mountains and plains, has been exploited with all the violence that modern science and technology could summon. The Indian tribes have suffered to hold on to their territory and to maintain their way of life. From being one of the freest peoples who ever lived, they have become one of the most confined, culturally as well as physically.

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physically.

Even so there have been renewals within the Indian traditions. Within this century, after the decline in the 19th century, new strengths have developed, numbers have increased, cultural expression has expanded, political competence has grown. Yet the aggression of the Euroamerican against the Indian and his territory continues, directly and in more subtle ways. Extensive efforts of many Euroamericans to improve the situation remain ineffective because there is still too exclusive a commitment to the white man's values, his life style, and his sense of superiority. The very structure of his technological civilization prevents him from communicating in depth with the native peoples.

There does exist, however, a widespread awareness that the Indian on this continent has a significant place in the historical and cultural development of man. Survival and development within his own cultural traditions concerns not only the Indian; it concerns the other peoples of this continent, as well as the human community itself. It concerns the destinies of the universe.

If we assume that the Indian peoples have such significance, it is all the more important that the other peoples of this continent develop attitudes that will make the next five centuries a creative period for the Indian. It is especially important that the Euroamerican develop confidence in the extensive human resources that are available to these original inhabitants of this continent. If we have broken their rhythm of development it is important that we assist in recovery of this rhythm. Only if we recognize and appreciate this rhythm will we be able to step aside to let the deeper qualities of the tradition develop from within.



A first duty of the white man in relation to the Indian is to see that the Indian has the land, the resources, and the independence needed to be himself. This involves radical abandonment of the policy of assimilation. To do this requires much of the white man because of his compulsive saviour instincts. He takes up the burden of saving others even when in fact he is destroying them. The religious personalities from the European culture have been especially limited in their ability to see the profound religious and spiritual qualities of the Indian traditions. European-derived peoples have consistently had difficulty in communicating with others within a shared human context. They have tended to confer salvation--whether political, social, economic, or religious--and have resisted incorporating the resources offered by others into their own process of becoming.

The present discussion is directed to the Euroamerican in the hope that if he understands something of the human resources of the Indian he will become less an obstacle and more of a help. Our presentation is from the cultural-historical point of view. Studies of the tribal cultures of the world, of the more massive civilizations, of modern culture, and the prospects for the future can be a great aid in understanding any people. Within the larger complex of man's cultural transformations each can be seen in itself and in its relations with the others. The history of each helps in understanding the history of the others. Against this background it can be seen that the culture of the American Indian is unique, one of the most admirable of all cultures, destined perhaps for a future historical role of wide significance.

There will be little mention in this essay of the violent forces that



have been at work. We presuppose all the destructive events of Indian-White relationships that have taken place during these centuries: the dispossession from the land, the rapaciousness of settlers, the communication of diseases that wiped out many tribes and critically weakened others, the destruction of the food supply, the corruption and mismanagement of government administrations, the exploitation of natural resources, pollution of air, water and earth, the denial of basic rights, and the betrayal of solemn treaties. All of these and many others are presupposed. Repeated mention of all these events has its uses. It is also useful, however, to reflect on the interior sources of renewal that are available to the Indian. These are the Indian's strength and, if consciousness of them arises, may become the white man's hope.

1) The first basis for cultural survival and renewal for the tribal peoples of America lies in their awareness of having won a moral victory of unique dimensions during the past five centuries. Many peoples have been besieged in the course of history, many have disappeared from the earth, many have survived over long periods to rise in renewed vigor. It would, however, be difficult to find a people who over such a long period have undergone such destructive influences, yet have survived and preserved their identity so firmly as the American Indian.

The Euroamerican has won his battles with the Indian in the military-political order, in the possession of property, in the power to control the exterior destinies of the native peoples; but he has lost in the moral sphere to such a degree that he is himself amazed to discover the depth and violence of his destructive instincts, and this not just as a speculative truth but as



the lived reality of his own existence. That his deeds were done for "sacred" purposes and with the highest cultural intentions is an irony that baffles any human effort at understanding.

But even with such recognition by the white man, no immediate cessation of his aggressive deeds can be expected. The economic and political realities of his life have set him on a course that apparently will continue into the indefinite future. On occasion this aggression can be mitigated, but it can no longer assume the position of righteousness that it once assumed. In principle a counteraction has been initiated that in time must have its effects. The Indian, strengthened by a new consciousness of himself and his resources, is now able to resist more effectively. But whatever the situation it is important that the Indian has not retreated simply into a negative or merely antagonistic position. He has established a creative response rooted in his ability to sustain life in its moment of high tragedy and to continue the basic path of his human development in its most distinctive aspects. This attitude has been adopted on a wide scale by the Indian peoples. Awareness of their moral victory has always existed but it has now led to an increasing confidence and is beginning to function more effectively. The peoples of this continent have a genius that cannot forever be denied its expression.

2) A second support for the native peoples of this continent is the awareness that they give to the human mode of being a unique expression that belongs among the great spiritual traditions of mankind. It is an observed fact in history that high religious traditions are often carried by peoples who are not as numerous, as powerful, or as advanced in science and technology as other peoples. Just as other traditions have their specific glory--as



India has its awareness of divine transcendence and China its mystical humanism, and Europe its sense of an historical divine saviour--the American Indian has his own special form of nature mysticism. Awareness of a numinous presence throughout the entire cosmic order establishes among these peoples one of the most integral forms of spirituality known to man. The cosmic, human, and divine are present to one another in a way that is unique. It is difficult to find a word or expression for such a mode of experience. It might also be called an earth mysticism.

This numinous mode of consciousness has significance for the entire human community. Indeed one of the primary instincts of the human community is to protect and foster such primordial experiences. This task is gradually being recognized even by white peoples who have temporarily set aside many of their own most primordial experiences. These experiences, which generally present themselves as divine revelations, are irreplaceable. They form the foundations upon which the cultural systems of the various peoples are established. They also determine the distinctive psychic structure of the individual personalities within the culture. Together these revelations form the ultimate psychic support for the human venture itself.

While the Indian peoples may not always be reflexively conscious of all this or of the pan-human aspect of such primordial experiences, the Indian has become increasingly aware not only of his own unique qualities, but that he carries a human formation of great significance for the entire human community. Because of his hurt in associations with the dominant political powers of the continent, the Indian might well conceal the inner mysteries of his spiritual traditions lest they be trivialized by a secular society that destroys



the inner meaning of everything he touches. But the reality is there, it is widely recognized. The hope must be that the inner resplendence of this reality will find its fitting modern expression and the wide influence it deserves.

3) A third resource that the native peoples possess is the instinctive awareness of their own qualities of endurance. Those historians acquainted with the larger cultural development of man can witness that frequently the peoples of the earth, the dispossessed peoples, those lowest in the social hierarchy, have greater survival value than those with a higher status, with ruling power, or even with higher intellectual achievements. This happened in Europe. It is evident in India where peoples of a higher civilization invaded the territory in the middle of the second millenium B.C. During the first centuries of occupation the incoming group established itself in a dominant position in the various areas of life. But almost immediately the peoples closer to the earth, the peoples without the more sphisticated culture, the peoples with less political or social prestige, began to make their presence felt in every sphere of life, from the simplest elements of life style to the highest spiritual insights. Such a process of transformation from below continues even to the present: The history of India may accurately be interpreted as the acculturation from below of a dominant social order, external in its origins, massive in its power, and extensive in its intellectual sophistication.

That a similar process is taking place in Latin America is evident. It may not take place to such a degree in North America because of the limited



numbers of native peoples in this region. Still, the influence of the native peoples on the incoming Europeans has been more extensive than is commonly realized. Further modifications can be expected in the future. The total effect may well be a gradual renewal and development of the Indian traditions themselves.

4) One great strength of the Indian peoples lies in their interior communion with the archetypal world of the collective unconscious. This is manifested in their extensive capacity for the use of symbolism, by their visionary experience, by their dream power, and by their use of language. To renew their ancient symbolisms is to renew their ancient techniques of power. Just how these will function in modern times is less clear than we might wish. Yet the Indian capacity to reach deep into the realms of numinous power remains evident in their life, art, literature and ritual observances.

This intimate communion with the depths of their own psychic structure is one of the main differences between the psychic functioning of the Indian and the psychic functioning of the Euroamerican in modern times. The white man has so developed his rational processes, his phenomenal ego, that he has lost much of the earlier communion he had with the archetypal world of his own unconscious. The American Indian, on the other hand, is the living exemplification of recent understanding of the collective unconscious. All the symbolisms are there--the journey symbol, the heroic personality, the symbolism of the center, the mandala symbolism of the self, the various transformation symbols, the great mother.



These symbols have found clear expression in the creation myths, the initiation ceremonies, in the sacred pipe, the healing rituals, the sun dance, the ghost dance, the vision quest. They are also evident in the literature. Portions of the oral literature are passing into a written literature. The hope must be that more of this oral literature will be committed to writing, not only in the tribal languages, but also in English--the most available transtribal language for the Indian peoples. This is important since literature must always be one of the main sources of guidance as well as a main source of psychic energy for the task of renewal. Indeed it is in the new literature of writers such as Scott Momaday that the interior dynamics of Indian renewal find their finest expression, although this expression can be discovered throughout the various forms of artistic creation that are once again emerging. In such periods the first step is in the recovery and renewal of esteem for the ancient arts and literature. Then comes the new art and the new literature which bring the ancient cultural dynamics into present expression. In the future we can certainly expect the Indian traditions of dance and song to emerge in a new creative context.

The arts of the Indian in these past five centuries indicate the capacity to absorb outside influences and to reshape them in accord with their own genius. So with the beadwork of the Indians. There was beadwork prior to the arrival of the white man but this flourished with new vigor once beads from Europe were available in quantity to the Indian. Beads were then able to express visions that they had never expressed previously. They became part of the gorgeous display of the interior grandeur of the human. This capacity for absorption and re-creation in the cultural order could be



illustrated from almost every phase of Indian life. Powerful cultural forces were already at work in the depths of the Indian mode of consciousness, forces that enabled the Indian to interact with the white man's traditions even in such things as the Ghost Dance and in establishing the Peyote cult. Earlier, it can be observed in the religious movement begun by Handsome Lake among the Seneca.

But this is of course only one aspect of the interplay of cultural forces that has taken place between these two peoples. The other aspect is the influence exerted by the native peoples on the incoming European. One of the most fundamental is the influence of the Indian on the development of Modern Dance; Isadora Duncan, originator of interpretative dance in America, was in her early years influenced by the dance rhythms and movements of the Indian peoples. In other realms of life the Euroamerican has also been deeply influenced, so much so that C. G. Jung claims that often in his dealings with Americans in psychotherapy he found an American Indian component in the psyche. The basic ideals of freedom found in the American peoples have been profoundly influenced by the Indian ideals of personal freedom. In the development of the U. S. constitution, there was early reference to the Iroquois confederacy as a model. These are only a few of the areas of influence that have passed into American life from the Indian. The one thing that has not been influenced by the Indian or even modified by these contacts is the white man's idea of private property. But this too may change in the future.

5) A fifth source of strength for the native peoples of this continent is their appreciation of man in his integral relations with the earth. Even those desolate regions assigned to the Indian tribes by the white man seem



to become sources of strength. This has become true particularly for the Navajo. What is profoundly impressive is the subjective communion that takes place between the Indian and the earth and the living beings upon the earth and all the natural phenomena that take place upon the earth.

The intercommunion of life systems, understood with a certain instinctive awareness by tribal peoples throughout the world, is something that the white man with all his science and technology seems unable to appreciate, even when his very existence is imperilled. European man has had a certain sense of himself as above all other living things, as the absolute lord and master of the earth. He sees the earth as divinely presented to him to do with as he pleased. It was there as an eternal reality that would be some inevitable law not only provide man's basic needs, but endure whatever affliction he might lay upon it. The earth, it seemed, would bear any amount of human exploitation, would sustain any amount of damage as an inexhaustible store of nourishment and of energy for man's use. With a supreme shock the white man discovers that the earth is a delicate balance of life systems, that the fuels for his machines are limited, that defacing the earth defiles man and destroys the divine voice that speaks so powerfully through every phase of cosmic activity.

The Indian now offers to the Euroamerican a mystical sense of the place of the human amid other living beings. This is a hard teaching for the white man since it is unlikely that he can undertake the adjustments it demands until he acquires both a new set of values and a new art. This art of communion with the earth the white man can learn from the Indian. Thus a reverse dependence is established: survival in the future may depend more



on the white man's learning from the Indian than on the Indian's learning from the white man.

6) A sixth source of strength for the Indian is his traditional heroic ideal. The Indian has never accepted human life as ordinary, as something that can be simply managed in a somewhat superficial or painless manner. He has realized that life tests the deepest qualities within himself, qualities that emerge in heroic combat not merely with others, but with himself and with the powers of the universe. The sacred function of enemies was to assist each other to the heroic life by challenge, even by the challenge of death. For this to be effective, however, it was necessary that there be a certain equality between the protagonists. The Indian and the white man will long be at war. It has never ceased and possibly will never cease in the foreseeable future. What must be hoped for is not exactly "peace" but a creative tension. Peace does not create heroic achievement. There must be challenge that forces the best that is in man to emerge into its proper expression, challenge that brings about dimensions in human achievement that would not otherwise be attained. Just now, however, the disproportion in size and power seems to remove all possibility of truly creative relationships that would be neither destructive nor paternalistic. Yet in the dialectic of human affairs size and power eventually become self-destructive; the inequalities may eventually be leveled and the ancient fruitful combat relationships revived in a new setting.

What can be said is that the heroic life attitude is available and even demanded in the line of the Indian development itself. The great chiefs of the past have attained an immortal place in the annals of mankind. They are



not simply tribal personalities, nor are they simply personalities of the American continent; they are personalities alongside the greatest leaders known to man. They have exhibited strength, spiritual insight, human compassion, as well as an aptitude for public affairs and a capacity for leadership in periods of unspeakable tragedy. A people who can hearken back to such leaders as Tecumseh, Crazy Horse, and Chief Joseph are necessarily a people capable of amazing human achievement. These men of the past talked with the nations of the world on a plane of equality. They spoke as equals with the highest officials in the land, including presidents in Washington. They stood in their regalia before the world representing something beyond what the white man could understand at the time. They stood as numinous figures in a world that had lost its numinous qualities in favor of the practical qualities of exploitation and oppression.

This tradition of leadership has not been lost, although it has not found its full expression in recent times. Even in the midst of the white man's cities the Indian lives in his own psychic world that seems an indestructible reality. He is not so much in a role of antagonism. His is simply another mode of consciousness, a language that is not only foreign but also mysterious. Translation is less a matter of linguistic skill than of feeling insight.

7) Among the resources least understood by the white man is the powerful intellectual tradition of the pre-Columbian Indian shown by his capacity to interact with, to control, and to develop his environment. Such emphasis is placed on Indian spiritual and aesthetic traditions that there is a tendency to downgrade Indian achievements in the social, scientific, and technological



orders. Here we must attend to the wider range of Indian accomplishments throughout the western hemisphere and see the Indian within the region of the United States as a border group who by choice remained committed to the more free and diversified mode of tribal existence

The greatest single achievement of the Indian was, of course, the occupation of this hemisphere, an event of vast significance but dimly appreciated by historians. After occupation of the hemisphere in a period some twenty thousand years before the earliest neolithic villages of the Near East, the sequence of civilizational development in the Indian World took place at a slower pace than in some other parts of the Eurasian world. The New World civilizations were lacking in many of the achievements of the Eurasian world but achieved much that did not or could not take place in the earlier phases of the Eurasian world.

Many parallel social structures developed in both hemispheres. The great cities of this hemisphere were theocracies; hierarchical social groupings were established; monumental religious centers were erected. Writing was developed. Astronomical calculations of extreme refinement were made. Mathematics of a high order appeared. The zero was discovered, probably at a time prior to the discovery of the zero in India. More animals were domesticated in Europe, but the New World domesticated more plants. It is estimated that Indian-derived plants now provide close to half the world's foods. Principal among these are corn and the potato. Then there are the pumpkin, squash, peanut, and several kinds of beans, among a much longer list that could be drawn up. Corn is the third grain crop in the world, after wheat and rice.



If we consider that an early village neolithic mode of living, with domesticated plants, was achieved in the New World around 3400 BC, we can see that this was not far behind the earliest village life of the Eurasian world. The higher civilizations in the New World, dating from around 700 BC, were not much later in developing than the Chinese, the latest of the Eurasian civilizations. Without compiling more extensive data on the subject, it is clear that the civilizational achievements were fully comparable in their human quality and in the same order of magnitude as the civilizational achievements of the Eurasian world.

If not all of this was spread evenly throughout the North American continent, some of these achievements--especially the domestication of plants, mound-building, the capacity for building advanced shelters, and a number of other features--were very widespread. Few Indian groups lacked corn. Indeed, the basic human capacities were found everywhere in a high stage of development. This was quickly recognized by European settlers and was one reason the Indian was so feared and assaulted. He was a rival who had reached a similar level of human achievement and, often, a higher moral and spiritual level.

The rhythm of Indian civilizational development has been broken, but it has not been destroyed. The psychic structure remains intact and these memories of the past demonstrate that the capacities claimed for the Indian are not a romantic conception of what might have been but a reality which can be again. After the North American Indian groups unite among themselves, and if they then unite with the Indian peoples throughout the hemisphere, a new power may well emerge. That power would affect the civilizational devel-



opment of the western hemisphere more extensively than anyone can now foresee.

Neither the Indian nor the white man has yet shown any adequate understanding of the need to consider the total Indian presence in this hemisphere when considering any phase of Indian development. But this will almost certainly be one of the next stages in the developing of the Indian consciousness as well as in the white man's understanding of the Indian presence to his own traditional European-derived culture.

These are some of the resources of the original peoples of this continent. They are also the basic resources that emerge from the depths of the earth process itself. The destinies of the Indian are inseparable from the destinies of the American earth. As the Euroamerican deals with one, so he will deal with the other--and in the end so will he deal with himself. The fate of the continent, of the Indian, and the white man, are finally identical. None of these can be saved except in and through the others.







The Vision Quest of  
the American Indian

Thomas Berry



The American Indians are a numinous people living in a numinous world. "Numinous" is an ancient word for the divine, the sacred, the real over against the ephemeral, the temporal, the profane. This numinous quality radiates from the absolute eternal reality that makes its presence known throughout the entire visible world. To live within this radiance indicates a special mode of consciousness that most moderns of European descent have lost.

For the Indian this presence of the Great Spirit manifested itself throughout the cosmic order in the four directions, in the sky and in the earth: the six cardinal directions. It was especially evident in growing things, in the four-legged and two-legged beings of earth, and in the winged beings soaring through the sky, especially in the eagle. Man had only to "place" himself in relation to these six special points of reference and he experienced himself contained, protected, and immersed in that mysterious reality whence come the healing and invigorating powers, the "Medicine" that he needed to sustain his life on that sublime level which he felt was the only properly human level.

This numinous quality of life was derived from and expressed in the vision experience, the single most distinctive spiritual characteristic of the Indians of the North American continent. The vision consisted in the interior or exterior appearance of some cosmic phenomenon such as a bird flying or a horse prancing, or the experience of lightning and thunder or seeing someone perform a certain symbolic act. But often it would be less a vision seen than a song heard, or a word spoken. The experience frequently conveyed upon the person a guardian spirit to protect and guide him during life.



Generally the visions were obtained through some form of self-affliction, primarily through isolation, fasting from food and water, and through intensive and prolonged prayer. This was above all a personal, experiential procedure. It was not fully dictated with precise details.

Each person expressed his own interior feelings in his prayer. Also as regards suffering, each person chose the amount that he thought he could endure and that he thought proper with the advice of the spiritual guide that he consulted and who guided him through the more arduous phases of his vision quest. For the Plains Indians especially, suffering in some form was required. Although this was most often simply the isolation from the tribe and fasting over a period of some days, a more arduous program was undertaken on special occasions or when the person felt the need of help to a critical degree. Thus at times an Indian would cut off pieces of his own flesh and offer them to the Great Spirit as the only possession a man has that is truly his own. There is a photograph in the book of James Mooney, *The Ghost-Dance*, of Black Coyote, the Arapaho, with the seventy scars that remained from the pieces of his own flesh that he offered once when his children were dying to obtain the survival of his remaining children. According to Black Coyote himself he did this "in obedience to a dream as a sacrifice to save his children." After his offering no more of his children died.

The success of the vision quest of Two Leggings, the Crow Warrior, was due in part at least to his willingness to suffer to attain a vision. He had tried several times to attain a great vision until finally he



considered that he should make a greater sacrifice, such as a part of his finger in honor of the Great Above Person: "As I walked around I found a root-digger's stick. I turned to the sun and drew out my long knife. On the ground I crossed the knife and stick and then raised my left index finger. I called the sun my grandfather and said that I was about to sacrifice my finger end to him...Kneeling, I placed my finger on the stick and hacked off the end. Then I held the finger end up to the sun with my right hand and said my prayer again." Finally, he heard the words of his first medicine song, which, he tells us, he never forgot: "Anywhere you go, anywhere you go, you will be pleased." (Peter Nabokov: *Two Leggings, The Making of a Crow Warrior*, p.50.)

The ordeal of Wooden Leg, the Cheyenne Warrior, was more customary since it consisted in isolation and prolonged fasting and prayer. Also the purposes of his vision quest could be considered more purely spiritual than those of Two Leggings who thought mainly of becoming a great chief. When he was seventeen years old and about to embark on his vision quest, Wooden Leg told his father: "All during my boyhood and youth the Great Medicine has been good to me. I have fond parents and kind brothers and sisters. I have had plenty of food and have had no bad sickness. No bullet nor arrow has hit me. No serious injury of any kind has fallen upon me. I ought to do something to show my gratitude for all of these favors." With such purposes in mind he fasted and prayed for four days. While on this occasion he received no special vision, he did develop an extraordinary awareness that remained with him throughout his life: "The Great Medicine sees me." (Thomas Marquis, *Wooden Leg*, p. 132. This entire chapter four gives us one of the most impressive accounts that we



have of the vision quest of the Plains Indians. If this is supplemented with accounts in the book on Two Leggings, and with the two books concerned with Black Elk -- Black Elk Speaks and The Sacred Pipe -- a person has an excellent insight into this entire subject of the Vision Quest, how it is obtained, and the numinous world that it created for all those native peoples who have lived on the American continent for these past millenia.)

We should not close this subject of the Vision Quest of the American Indian without more extended reference to one of the most remarkable accounts that we possess of a vision received, the one the Sioux medicine man, Black Elk, recounted in the book entitled, Black Elk Speaks. In this vision, which took place when he was only nine years old, Black Elk was taken into the sky where he saw the Great Spirit in the form of the six Grandfathers who spoke to him of his entire life mission after giving him the symbolic gifts among which were the sacred pipe, the healing herb, and the flowering stick which was to become the center of the nation. "And while I stood there I saw more than I can tell and I understood more than I saw; for I was seeing in a sacred manner the shapes of all things in the spirit, and the shape of all shapes as they must live together like one being. And I saw that the sacred hoop of my people was one of many hoops that made one circle, wide as daylight and as starlight, and in the center grew one mighty flowering tree to shelter all the children of one mother and one father. And I saw that it was holy" (Black Elk Speaks, p. 43). Earlier, amid the horses prancing through the heavens, he saw a black stallion that came and sang a song: "His voice was not loud, but it went all over the universe and filled it. There was nothing that did



not hear, and it was more beautiful than anything can be. It was so beautiful that nothing anywhere could keep from dancing. The virgins danced, and all the circled horses. The leaves on the trees, the grasses on the hills and in the valleys, the waters in the creeks and in the rivers and the lakes, the four-legged and the two-legged and the wings of the air--all danced together to the music of the stallion's song." All of this was also a part of his vision to learn of the terrifying disasters that would befall his people.

In these few paragraphs I have indicated some of the efforts made by the Indian in order to situate himself within the numinous presence and to deepen his encounter with the sacred. This was center and circumference of his existence. Nothing could be done of any significance apart from this presence. Outside this context nothing had meaning. Within this context all things had meaning, and the greatest suffering deepened rather than destroyed this meaning. Above all it gave to the Indian the heroic dimensions of his personality. The Indian did not wish to live simply within the phenomenal world, or even simply within an "ordinary" world. He wished to live sublimely, he wished to do heroic deeds, to suffer to an heroic degree. In doing this he was transformed from an "ordinary" human personality into a "wakan", a sacred personality. He became a numinous being in a numinous world.

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