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"It's all a question of story", says Thomas Berry in one of his essays, "We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in-between stories." "Story" in this context means the account of how things came to be and how humans fit into the created order. It's how we explain ourselves and our society to ourselves.

I (Laurens van der Post) once had a discussion with Jung about Bushman stories and my belief that whole civilizations had been destroyed because their stories had been taken away from them by the intrusion of a physically powerful and alien culture. At the end of an account still fresh because I had just come from the Kalahari Desert, he nodded his fine white head as the wind released a far-off refrain among the leaves of the trees he had planted as a young man at Bollingen, because they were living and viable thoughts of God to him. He went on, in that deep bass voice of his, to tell me at great length how his work as a healer did not take wing - the metaphor is mine - until he realized that the key to the human personality was its story. Every human being at core, he held, had a unique story and no man could discover his greatest meaning unless he lived and, as it were, grew his own story. Should he lose his story or fail to live it, he lost his meaning, became disoriented, the collective fodder of tyrants and despots, or ended up, as so many did, alienated and out of their own minds. (Laurens van der Post in an article called 'A Story is the Wind' printed in Resurgence, an English magazine, issue #117 July/August 1986; US address is Rodale Press, 33 E. Minor Street, Emmaus, PA 18049.)

The article searches for explanations for the long history of human failure for the dark need in the individual and society for tragedy and disaster. "Surely these things are rooted in some undiscovered breach of cosmic law..." Story here not only locates one in space and time, tells how things came to be, and gives a sense of direction, but shapes emotional attitudes, provides life with purpose, energizes action, consecrates suffering, integrates knowledge and guides education. More than anything else story is spiritual, religious, the source of meaning, the determinant of right and wrong, definer of relationships to one's self, one's neighbor, and to the context of life, the environment. Humans need meaning both as individuals and as a society. They have to answer a fundamental need to be good so they build a structure to evaluate themselves against, a structure of belief, a world-view, a value system, a set of basic assumptions. Sometimes this is called paradigm and sometimes story.

"Story" is the subject of an article in the November issue of "New Options", a very good monthly eight-page newsletter out of Washington, DC (P.O. Box 19324, Washington, DC, 10036). The article is written by Donald Michael and Walter Truett Anderson. It is called "Now that 'Progress' No Longer Unites Us." I pick up on it because "story" has become a favorite subject, because I think it ought to be central to any analysis of how we should be looking at the present and into the future, how we find guidelines for human behaviour. M & A find that belief in progress, which has been the unifying framework within which people of vastly different persuasions could function, is losing its power to bind the society together. They identify five "stories" which compete with the "Progress" story for dominance in the upcoming new era. They identify them as the Fundamentalist Story, the Islam Story, the Marxist Story, the Green Story, and the New Paradigm Story. After describing what they mean by each they state:

The overwhelming need of our time is the emergence of a global culture containing some norms, values, beliefs, myths, concepts, that can -- if only in the most tentative

way - thread through the multifold world-views and provide some basis for accommodation among them.

To put the matter somewhat differently, we will have to have some information that is common to all people. In order for people to recognize the presence of global problems and move toward solving them there will have to be some common foundation of data and concepts.

Thus the challenge that the human species now confronts is essentially a learning challenge.

The authors are going to expand their article into a more detailed presentation for Technological Forecasting and Social Change and for the Journal of Humanistic Psychology to be printed in 1987. So I suppose it will be revised.

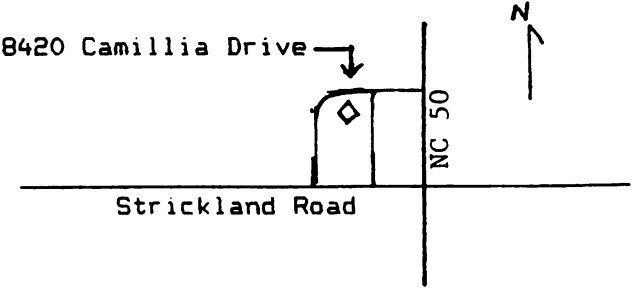
It would be my proposal that they begin their treatment of "story" with the most fundamental of all stories, the Earth story, as it has unfolded over the past hundred and fifty years into the most powerful origin story humans have ever been made aware of. That is the cosmic story, the universe story, the evolution story, that every educated person in the world is being taught. Thus, it seems to me that this stupendous, unlearned, unappreciated story already provides "some norms, values, beliefs, myths, concepts for binding together a global culture"; to "thread through the multifold world-views and provide some basis for accommodation among them"; and provide a common foundation of "data and concepts" for learning. When this evolution story is accepted as true, it magnificently illuminates all other origin stories, as Teilhard recognized and wrote about and as the creation-centered philosophers of our time are now teaching.

This Earth story has meaning which goes far beyond the discovery of an explanation for the appearance of the physical human. The integral spiritual aspect is the unique quality that the human, embedded in nature, brings to creation. The species human now must recognize that the human story is an aspect of the Earth story, must recognize that the human story must be conformed to the Earth story, if either the Earth story or the human story is to advance along the evolutionary path the Creator intends, as that path is revealed through the scientific researches of recent decades. Reasoning along these lines leads precisely to the conclusion that the human is nonviable in an anthropocentric context; that the Earth is nonviable in an anthropocentric context. That this statement is true is attested to by the terrifying assault the self-centered human species is now making on the Earth. Anybody ought to be able to perceive that the killing of the Earth is also the killing of the human along with everything else. The Earth story must control the human story.

Going back to the competing stories that M & A have described, it then becomes possible to find each of them flawed insofar as they do not conform to the Earth story. Thus, it seems to me that such an approach as has been outlined here must lead to an advocacy of the Green story. I am sure that when they expand this article they will expand the descriptions they give each of the stories. They ought to describe the Green story as one that is built on the Earth story. The primary theme of the Green story is ecological wisdom. At least that is the way I see it. I realize that the Greens in Germany have compromised their positions out of political exigency, but it is still the essence of Green thinking to promote a flourishing Nature along with a flourishing human.

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JANUARY 1ST - BERRYS' ANNUAL OPEN HOUSE  
1:30 - 5:00 PM



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