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HELP THE KIDS TO GET IT RIGHT

There was considerable feedback last month commenting on #106. The whole idea of trying to help kids get it right as they begin to record their own adult stories seems to make a lot of people want to say something. Isn't there some way we can get to the kids and convince them that the world we are turning over to them is dreadfully damaged, and the system of values we have followed is deeply, deeply flawed. The value system requires militant support of economic growth and the exploitation of damn near everything. The natural treasure must be converted into money, the rivers and the oceans and the atmosphere are sewers, the soil must be pushed beyond its capacity to produce, wilderness has no intrinsic worth, animals have no rights; women, minorities, children, the third world may be impoverished in the name of profits. The exploiters have been successful beyond their own wildest dreams. Greed has become enshrined to the point where its successful practise puts the whole nation in awe and excites no noticeable resentment.

Some of the brightest people in the nation devote their efforts to selling cigarettes and beer. Many of the best scientists work on projects aimed at further exploitation of the natural world, not on saving it. A huge majority of us believe earth exploitation can just keep on forever, ignoring the obvious fact that we are turning the world into wasteland while we live in the narcotic condition of teeveeland where everything is just fine. If one speaks of a sense of unease as Jimmy Carter did once, fury erupts from everywhere. The bubble of illusion is fragile and it might burst. It has been kept intact now for several years through intensive propaganda, "trickle down", a hugely exaggerated fear of the Russians, and through stealing from our children. The manipulators have done their work.

But some are beginning to realize that the bubble is built on the false assumption that the earth is an infinite resource and an infinite sink; and that humans have the right to do anything they please to do with the earth. Poisoned air, poisoned water, poisoned soil, a silent spring is what results, and that's what we are turning over to our successors. But it's not that alone. The root problem is that we are giving them the same mind set which allowed us to do all the damage.

So we turn to the young ones, those with the shining eyes and zest for their encounter with life hoping that we can dispel the illusions they have been fed all their lives about everything coming out just fine. Mostly the stories they know are TV stories with happy endings. Their schools and churches have led them to expect that their own stories will end happily if they just become dutiful servants of General Electric and the American dream of a house in the suburbs with two cars, two kids and a dog, and, not least, a never failing trash pickup. Their principal training and education has been controlled by the likes of GE and Ronald Reagan. The real values are those which enhance market performance and the bottom line of profit and loss; the important goal is to have a good job so you can buy a lot of stuff and have a lot of fun centered around drinking lots of Budweiser and Miller's beer. "It doesn't get any better than this."

We have got the job of convincing our kids that there are some real values to life and living which have been concealed from them because the educational and religious establishments have gone all out of sync with reality. It is not OK to embrace the values of GE and Ronald Reagan and the marketplace. The real values are those which demand the fostering of life, of the life process, of creation; which demand the recognition of divinity in the created order, the natural order, and the acceptance of a role in the created order. "I am, therefore I have a function."

Perhaps there is hope for a happy ending. It lies with the kids, but we must give them a step up as they come on the scene. The elders of a society have the job of passing on wisdom. If we have something important to tell we must somehow elbow our way into the arena and tell it. There is not enough time for the kids to learn it

all by themselves. But, it is not enough for them simply to become conscious of the facts about oceans going dead, soil loss, wilderness loss, species loss, ozone layer, greenhouse effect etc. The facts can puncture the bubble, alright, but a new value system has to replace the old one.

The new story of how things came to be, of how it came about that I am just here at this time, the origin story, the achievement of identity, one's placement in a context, relationships, rights and obligations; these are the things to be talked over and examined and examined again and again. When one discovers that the human is making a glorious earth into a poisoned wasteland, it is about as plain as it can be that the current concept of how to inhabit the earth is monumentally wrong.

Well, if we are so monumentally wrong, what's monumentally right?

~ A flourishing earth whose diversity of creatures and creaturely habitat is respected and celebrated as divine revelation, enjoying divine approval, whose devastation must be halted.

~ A human population which acknowledges its origin in the earth process with an obligation to honor and foster and celebrate evolving, ever complexifying life. Acceptance of the human as a functioning member of the community of life, responsible to contribute to it, not to wreck it.

~ Realization that the human adventure, the human journey, is an aspect of the planetary, the cosmic journey, and subject to it.

~ The application of human genius to learning about how the world works, to understanding the earth and the cosmos; to the identification of joy and happiness with the accumulation of knowledge about the wonder and the beauty of creation.

~ The application of uniquely human capacities to creation purposes, earth purposes. How can the human work for the perfection of the earth process?

~ Adoption of a philosophy centered around the well-being of the whole of the life process instead of a around the human as the only subject of interest.

Is it so hard to perceive and do something about the insanity of economic growth, of dependence on earth destruction for human fulfillment. Time Magazine tells us in a remarkable issue dedicated to the planet earth that "no attempt to protect the environment will be successful in the long run unless ordinary people - the California housewife, the Mexican peasant, the Soviet factory worker, the Chinese farmer - are willing to adjust their life styles. Our wasteful, careless ways must become a thing of the past. We must recycle more, procreate less, turn off lights, use mass transit, do a thousand things differently in our everyday lives. We owe this not only to ourselves and our children but also to the unborn generations who will one day inherit the earth."

Good for Time magazine. They have made a very welcome first step. But they have not mentioned at all a need to make a fundamental change in the way we understand the human presence on the earth. They are human centered. It would be good if the editor would go up to Riverdale in the Bronx and talk with Tom Berry about life centeredness and then to do another editorial. It's not an adjustment we have to make, it is a role reversal with enormous implications in the whole political, social and economic structure.

A flyer giving notice of an International Workshop by a group called EARTH ETHICS IN RELIGION is enclosed. I never heard of this group before but they look like something we ought to be interested in. Tom was asked to be one of the speakers and he wanted to go but could not so he told me I ought to go; so I am.

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