

We must deal with the earth on the earth's terms

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CORPORATE AMERICA AKA **BIG BUSINESS**

“**T**he human community and the earth community, together form the single sacred community. We go into the future as a single sacred community or we both perish in the desert.” That’s the core message Thomas Berry has been presenting to audiences of late. The desert, for him, is the wasteland created by the industrial giants who see the earth as a storehouse designed for exploiting, and a bottomless receptacle for disposal of residues.

Which brings up the subject of how to think about industrial America or what some call Corporate America, that community of national and international commercial enterprises devoted to production and sales; that section of the economy controlled by large companies devoted to making money or to maximizing the bottom line.

Corporate America owns most of the resource base and the land that holds it, owns the means of production; owns the jobs and with the jobs controls access to money and access to the market; has heavy influence over the universities; propounds much of the philosophy by which we live; effectively controls important segments of the government. Most importantly, Corporate America controls major segments of the principal avenues into our minds: the TV, the radio and the newspaper. They have secured acceptance for their dominant role in our economic and political lives to the point where they are almost universally presented as a benign presence in the nation and the world. The success of the big corporations is a matter of major governmental concern at all levels. National, State and local governments are exceedingly anxious to please Corporate America.

Inasmuch as the state of mind in which we function controls the decisions we make it must be said that we tend to believe that what makes for corporate health is in the interests of us all. “What’s good for GM is good for the nation.” We seem generally to be satisfied with production and consumption as a way of life, not realizing that the success of such a system depends on a continuing assault on the natural world. The voice speaking to us most persuasively wants us to be satisfied. That voice is the voice of Corporate America. What we ought to want, it seems to me, is a political/economic arrangement that makes for moral justice and the well-being of all the earth community. But, since the corporations have substantial control over the public discourse it is most difficult to get this subject into debate. The way we think is pretty much the way the corporations want us to think.

Corporate America closely resembles the abstraction economists have devised called *homo economicus*, an imaginary creature who acts only in accordance with self-interest, whose wants are insatiable, who is unconcerned with other people’s satisfactions or sufferings, and knows neither benevolence or malevolence. Economists regularly use this creature in their analyses despite the fact that it has little similarity to real people. But it does have great similarity to the profit oriented corporation.

Corporations hold only to one measure of value: money. They are devoid of spirituality and incapable of morally directed behavior; devoid of compassion; practically devoid of any but money accountability; have little comprehension for justice and peace except as it affects the bottom line; profit from war; succeed by depleting whatever resource they depend on, while dumping poisonous wastes into the commons for the human community and the earth community to deal with. Examples abound: petroleum, timber, agriculture, chemical, transportation and their support industries. Corporate America deals with the earth and earthstuff by converting resources into money at the fastest possible rate, and maximizing profits, primarily over the short term. Growth is a primary goal.

We know all this but we allow corporation values to overwhelm human values and even religious values. Indeed, it seems true that insofar as the human and religious values of compassion function in this society, corporation dominance is strengthened because suffering is relieved to the point where public disorder is averted.

It can be rightly said that corporations are committed to death, to the death of the seas, the forests, the atmosphere, the soil, and therefore the extinction of life on earth. A thousand-year-old redwood is only worth what it will bring on the market after it is cut. Using the logic of the corporation, if interest rates are high enough, it makes sense to hunt the blue whale to extinction. The money return on the profit from taking the last pod of whales now will be greater than what could be realized through exploiting the progeny of the last pod over several years.

A principal if not the principal argument for the continued dominance of the corporation is the fact that huge numbers of people derive their means of livelihood from employment by corporations. If those corporations go under so do their employees. And that gets us down to the nub. What gets protected, the wage of the worker or the future of the life system. We can go along with Corporate America and survive for a while longer, or we can decide that future desolation is not preferable to present difficulty. If we take the latter course we can throw off the grasp that Corporate America holds on our minds and start thinking for ourselves. There is enough stuff, there is enough money and there is enough brains. Stop thinking like the corporations want us to think and start thinking in terms of how best the human community and the earth community, together the single sacred community, can go into the future.

Religion, I believe, has always been extremely uneasy with acceptance of the corporations as controlling in our political and economic lives. Religion is, or ought to be, a powerful voice for morality and justice. Those considerations are absent from the value system of the corporation. David Brower in a talk given in San Francisco a couple of weeks ago (I have a video) said "We cannot have peace on earth unless we make peace with the earth. This is going to require every sector of human society and it will particularly require the best organized sector of society, the church."

I believe that our main appeal to the public mind has to be one of morality and justice in accompaniment with one decisive provision. Income must be provided to everyone while a new economy is put in place. For some ideas on this see *FOR THE COMMON GOOD* by Herman Daly and John Cobb, Beacon Press and *ENVISIONING THE SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY* by Lester Milbrath, SUNY Press.

But the first step toward an intelligent approach to the problem is to throw off the grasp Corporate America holds on our minds.

Raleigh, "The City of Oaks" plans to construct Western Boulevard Extension. This road will needlessly destroy a unique forest and meadow area that serves as one of the "lungs" for downtown Raleigh. Call Beth Pastore, 833-9657 or Denis Wood, 832-1120 to get involved in protecting this open space from the crazy people who think the automobile is god.

We have 20 copies of the paperback *DREAM OF THE EARTH*, \$9.⁹⁵ plus one dollar mailing.

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