

The following reflection was offered by Brian Edward Brown for TBFED CEC July 16, 2020 based upon the selection from "The World of Wonder" in *The Sacred Universe* pp.172-73 ("There is now a single issue before us: survival....We fail to recognize our obligation to bow before the majesty of the mountains and rivers, the forests, the grasslands, the deserts, the coastlands.")

I found myself returning to the fact that we read the starkness of Berry's sentence about the singular issue of survival in the midst of a threat to our survival from a viral pandemic. Yet, as serious as that contagion remains, and as we naturally express the gravest concern about our capacity to survive its impact, Berry, 20 years ago, was addressing a magnitude of survival that dwarfs the pandemic. He was speaking of an issue and a threat that yet remains of the most paramount significance 20 years after he wrote. It is that survival of the planetary body of the Earth in the integral functioning of its life birthing and life sustaining creativity-- that dynamism, richness, and sheer vitality of its waters, soils, atmosphere and the innumerable communities of its fauna and flora that inhabit those realms.

For Berry, it is precisely human failure to adequately see and then cherish that very vitality, that very dynamism of the integral Earth body that has rendered it so vulnerable to human depredation. He speaks in these paragraphs of the American colonizing experience as the arrival of a "predator people on an innocent continent." And of course, the examples of the predation, begun in those first generations of conquering and subduing the land, continue unabated still and can be specified in a host of ways in the degraded condition of planetary waters, soils, atmosphere, and the diminishing species of that once thriving biodiversity of plants and animals. But here, it isn't Berry's intention to enumerate examples of Earth's spoliation. They are clear and persuasive enough to raise that critical initial question of Earth's survival. So he isn't interested in cataloging the destructive human behavior, so much as he is in identifying the source of that behavior which he notes as a failure to see the true identity of the world around us. A bit more specifically, he points to the distorted vision of Cartesian dualism--the philosophy that depicted the human as the sole possessor of interiority, subjectivity, awareness, consciousness. All other forms of the natural world were rendered inert, complex arrangements of barren matter, so many intricate pieces in a mechanistic clockwork universe. Through this Cartesian gaze the universe was effectively reduced to a mere collection of objects rather than a communion of subjects, as Berry so often reiterated in his essays. The living Earth, so reduced to deadened natural resources, existed for the exploitive purposes of the human as just so much stuff for the satisfaction of human consumption and ultimate disregard.

So the survival of the Earth body that Berry addresses lies in the retrieval and recovery of "the World of Wonder", a world long hidden and still imperiled by a failure to see beyond the confines of our own arrogance and self-centered absorptions, and to see with the eyes of reverence the presence of the Sacred which would reveal itself to us in the full expanse of those innumerable subjects whose lives it animates. And in seeing with the eyes of reverence, we not only move towards the survival of that

threatened world, we simultaneously affirm our own survival, by activating a depth of meaning and fulfillment in the communion we would there realize and experience.

Importantly, it is from the survival of that deepest sense of fulfillment and purpose, in and through our reverent communion with the beings of the Earth, that we would dispose and open ourselves to a critical influx of psychic energy, that sense of resilient enthusiasm and joy. That is the survival energy that we are in such great need, that is the survival energy that will support and guide us in the great work that is here upon us, the energy to repudiate the heavy, dysfunctional failure of a sightless past, and the energy required to bring forth new modes of living with, on, and as Earth.

(So perhaps we could just take a few moments and sit with that language of survival; how do we resonate with that sense of self survival and planetary survival? And from there we can continue our conversation.)

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