

The New Story

*Comments on the Origin, Identification,
and Transmission of Values*

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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, and we have not learned the New Story. The Old Story sustained us for a long 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 identify crime and 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 unfailing warmth in human association. But it did provide a context in which life could function in a meaningful manner.

Today, however, our traditional story is nonfunctional in its larger social dimensions even though some persons 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 a temporary function. It simply enables us to keep a semblance of meaning in our institutions and in our public life.

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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 begin? My 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 humanity can be given some satisfying direction. We need a story that will educate human beings, heal them, guide them.

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 one-half of the population. Throughout the fourteenth and fifteenth 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 human life. 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 in its functional role. 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 Humankind. It is a sectarian story. At its center there is an intensive preoccupation with the personality of the Savior, 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 dysfunctional 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 religious powers but by an understanding of the Earth process. Although those working in this trend were at first involved to a certain degree with 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 the Western psyche. 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 human mind was advancing. This in turn led to the Enlightenment period of the eighteenth century and to the sense of absolute progress of human inquiry. This found expression in Marie Jean de Condorcet's *Historical Survey of the Progress of the Human Mind*. Here he outlined the ten stages of transformation that human cognition had gone through in its various periods of development until his own time. In the early nineteenth century G. W. F. Hegel was concerned with the inner dialectic of reality within both an ontological and a historical context. At this time also came the doctrines of social development with Jean Baptiste Fourier, Comte de Saint-Simon, and Auguste Comte. Karl Marx brought this movement to its most realistic expression in his *Manifesto*.

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 realms 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 by Charles 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 spatial expansion and its time sequence. A new story of the universe was available in its basic outline.

Just at this moment, however, a sudden shift in the mode of consciousness took place. The scientist-priest-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 the human saw itself less an isolated, Olympian, knowing principle 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 Alfred Russel Wallace and Darwin, to the later cosmic development of the twentieth-century physicists. The final stage has been to see that the human person is not a detached observer of this development but one that is integral to the entire process. Indeed the human 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 of 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 the

believing community has not been concerned with any cosmology, ancient or modern, for the believing community has its real values concentrated in the Savior, 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 reflect the divine exemplar considered by Plato as the *Agathon* ("the Good"), by Plotinus as the One, by Christians as God. All things are beautiful by this beauty. The supremely beautiful is the integrity and harmony of the total cosmic order as St. Thomas Aquinas insists 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 the human 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 *Soliloquy* 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 this 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

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 relationship with a personal Savior 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, 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, extensive cooperation is offered. Persons in the secular scientific professions as well as in modern manufacturing and commercial pursuits have high 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 make the faith prosper. 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 they appear to be. An integral story has not emerged, and no community can exist without a community story. This is precisely why 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. The human venture remains stuck in its impasse. There is no Divine Comedy. The Platonic vision no longer has 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. The child who enters school and begins his or her Earth studies or life studies does not experience any numinous presence. This teaching, which enables children to discover their place in the world of time and space, is one of the most important of all events in their life. Students need a story that will encompass this, and the school at present cannot provide the mystique that should be associated with this story. Even 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 espe-

cially 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 sublimated 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 nonfunctional in the larger dimensions of the human community. Because they are dysfunctional in the larger community they have become dysfunctional for the individual. Therefore the need exists 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. The human is an addendum or an intrusion.

So far, however, spiritually oriented personalities have been pleased because this cleavage provides the human with superior, unearthly quality. The scientist also is pleased, since this leaves him or her free to structure the world of quantitative measurements with the problem of human consciousness. Thus both scientist and believer conspire to keep their positions disengaged from the profound understanding of the Earth process itself. Neither seems to be looking at the reality before oneself; 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, 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 work of Teilhard de Chardin has been to give the integral Story the most complete expression that it has so far attained.

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 the human appears as the moment in which the unfolding universe becomes conscious of itself. The human being emerges not only as an earthling but also as a worldling. Human persons bear the universe in

their being as the universe bears them 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 reality and its meaning for the human. 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-human relations, for the human now in large measure determines the Earth process that once determined men and women. 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 human beings.

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 eternal Logos in a world of fixed natures, values are now determined by the sensitivity of the human 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 scientists themselves—often unknowingly—are 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 scientists. Their taste for the real is what gives to their work its admirable quality. They wish 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 have led scientists to neglect subjectivity and the qualitative aspect of the real, this has been until now a condition for their fulfilling this 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, and the appearance of the human.

The believing redemption community is awakening only slowly to this new contest 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 it 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 human beings to transcend the world. Some years ago it was noted in a survey published in the journal *Science* that Catholics ranked lowest of religious traditions in the country in their production of scientists. Although 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 are 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 the human, where individuals differ from each other more extensively than in any other kingdom. This applies not only to individuals but also to social structures and historical periods of humankind's development. Thus, the law of differentiation is of primary importance in the appreciation of the entire Earth process. There can be no doubt that 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. Here is a first fundamental value, the inherent indestructible value of the individual. But here also is 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 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 be open to 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 one's 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 human beings made their terrifying assault upon the Earth with an irrationality that is stunning in its 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 the human also. Thus, we have the most vast paradox of all, human persons as free, intelligent, numinous beings while negating these very interior qualities by their own objective reasoning mind and subserving their own rationalization. Finally a reversal has begun, and the reality and value of the interior, subjective, numinous aspect of the entire cosmic order are being appreciated as the basic condition in which the story makes any sense at all. 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 the human 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 within 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, within 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 task 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*, which 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 the human have their meaning precisely insofar 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 redemption rhetoric and scientific rhetoric can both be seen, and a new more integral language of being and value can emerge.

CONCLUSION

I would offer a few observations in conclusion. 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 human beings fulfill their 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 the human; to ruin the Earth is to destroy humankind.

Second, 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 culture 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.

Third, 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

human persons into being and guided them safely through the turbulent centuries—there is reason to believe that this same guiding process is precisely what has awakened in the human the present understanding of ourselves and our relation to this stupendous process. Sensitized to this guidance we can have confidence in the future that awaits the human venture.

Fourth, 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.