

THE ANGEL OF HISTORY, THE STORM OF PROGRESS, AND THE ORDER OF THE SOUL

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He who fights the future has a dangerous enemy. The future is not; it borrows its strength from the man himself, and when it has tricked him out of this, then it appears outside of him as the enemy he must meet.

Søren Kierkegaard

Anyone who has felt a baby being born, or had a whale come up under a boat, understands that ideas are no big deal. Ideas come and go, like rain in a ditch at the side of the road. It is a defining aspect of modernity to treat ideas as matters of utmost importance. Within that importance, however, the immanence of earth has lost its significance.(1)

Raymond Rogers

Those who formulate policy should recognize that if humans pit themselves against the fundamental dynamics of cosmic nature, they are certain to lose. . . . It might be argued that war and civil disorder are presently the greatest threats to the human future. One need not minimize their dangers to also recognize that attrition of the Earth's biosphere and life support systems could continue unobtrusively under conditions of peace until a point is reached at which environmental disintegration led to societal disintegration.(2)

Lynton Keith Caldwell

Over the Amazon With the Storm of Progress

A year ago this past January, under the light of the full moon, I looked from the window of a jetliner over a vast expanse of the Amazon watershed. I saw the large, slowly winding main trunk of the great river gradually disappearing into the eastern horizon. Just ahead I saw the confluence of a large tributary which had begun its multi-stream course on the flanks of the northern Andes. Closer at hand, and just below, another major watercourse curled into view from under the body of the plane, and meandered for some distance on a northward course before it, too, merged into the main body of the Amazon River.

I was not prepared for this view. I was transfixed for an hour, taking in the slow rolling scene of the slow rolling rivers and the vast forest of this still largely intact upper basin region. I

The Angel of History, The Storm of Progress, & The Order of the Soul

knew the route and had followed the flight path monitor closely on the overnight trip to Buenos Aires two weeks earlier. But two weeks earlier there had been cloud cover, no moonlight, and I was sitting on the side facing the Andes.

Looking far to the east I could see clusters of lights at points along the river bank signaling human settlements. Scanning closer as we came directly over course of the river, I could also see much smaller clusters of lights coming farther up stream. A few lights were also dotted here and there on small tributaries now visible. These settlements rose up in my mind's eye: A fishing village here, rubber tappers there, hunters, loggers, mineral prospectors, plant researchers, and diesel generators pushing like a demon ever deeper into the biotic integrity of the land. Indigenous peoples, nomadic resource raiders, and bio-pirates all mixed up on the leading edge of the great storm of progress.

Then the scene changed. Coming even with the great river, and looking to the land flowing north and east, I began to see rectangular outlines and distinctly different shadings in variegated blocks. Between them and through them ran arrow straight lines of a much lighter hue. Roads through the forest, and whole tracts of forest gone. I have seen a lot of clear-cut forest land close-up, but from 36,000 feet the vast scale of this destruction was stunning. When I was earlier looking down on forest land yet intact, I thought hard about the communities of life that are tucked into every nook and cranny of this region. Now, those of nocturnal habit would be out. Later, with the sunrise, another group of residents, adapted differently, would employ their life skills to good effect. With the clear cutting, this fabric of life is blasted, smashed to smithereens. With clear cutting, the storm of progress has truly mounted to hurricane force.

Lifting my eyes to gaze one last time over the whole panorama rolling out to the horizon, another story of this land came into view. Fire. Faint to the southeast, a few smudges of orange flame and hanging smoke. But then east and north, more fires, some small, some very large, considering the distance at which I was seeing them. Another feature of the storm. Fire storms, preparing the way for further progress. The beef industry, the soybean business, all for export, moving in. I slumped back in my seat and heard the lyrics of the lead song on Bruce Cockburn's album, "Big Circumstance." This classic song from 1988 by this Canadian singer-song-writer is titled "If a Tree Falls."

Rain forest
Mist and mystery
Teeming green
Green brain facing lobotomy
Climate control centre for the world
Ancient cord of coexistence
Hacked by parasitic greedhead scam -
From Sarawak to Amazonia
Costa Rica to mangy B.C. Hills
Cortege rhythm of falling timber
What kind of currency grows in these new deserts,
These brand new flood plains?

The Angel of History, The Storm of Progress, & The Order of the Soul

If a tree falls in the forest does anybody hear?
If a tree falls in the forest does anybody hear?
Does anybody hear the forest fall?

Cut and move on.
Cut and move on.
Take out trees.
Take out wildlife at the rate of a species every single day.
Take out people who have lived with this for 100,000 years.
Inject a billion burgers worth of beef -
grain eaters, methane dispensers
Through thinning ozone,
waves fall on wrinkled earth
gravity, light, ancient refuse of stars.
Speak of a drowning -
but this, this is something other.
Busy monster eats dark holes in the spirit world
where wild things have to go
to disappear
forever.

If a tree falls in the forest does anybody hear?
If a tree falls in the forest does anybody hear?
Does anybody hear the forest fall?

At a certain point in our lives it is important to understand more and more that there is something which cannot be understood. We can call this knowledge the wisdom of the soul. Coming to this knowledge is not a matter of chronological age. It is a matter of a certain kind of experience of the world. And the earlier in life we come to this experience, the greater our chances of living within the order of the soul. We can come to this kind of experience in delight, wonder, and awe. We can come to it in agony, anger, and action. Wherever on this spectrum we come to this defining experience, its signal characteristic is communion - that merging of identity with a form, presence, or process of the great world beyond the boundaries of our skin. The work of artists often moves within this range of experience. Poetry, painting, music and all the other forms and processes that spring to expression in the work of artists, often opens to communion and the order of the soul. The lyrics quoted above run the gamut of this experience. This song and this artist's presentation of his vision and pain had long since contributed to my image of the Amazon. My recent, unanticipated experience of the Amazon landscape by moonlight has enlarged my sense of communion, made newly visible to me the order of the soul, and added to my knowledge of what it is that cannot be fully understood but, nevertheless, in our hope for the future, must be communicated among us. I come to this occasion to share some of the images and some of the thinking that keeps me on track in this journey of faith.

On the Ground With the Angel of History

When ever I have the opportunity to prepare a presentation for a Quaker gathering, I am drawn to ponder on issues pounding hard on the shores of faith. In recent times the range of issues and the force of events have dramatically escalated. Any number of concerns or profoundly challenging events that are daily before us could be the focus of an entire lecture. Instead of choosing a single theme and focusing in the usual way, I would like here, however, to share with you several probes. A probe, as you may imagine, is a brief foray into a topic that opens it up for further consideration. I will, therefore, be presenting thoughts on several themes with which I have been engaged over the last few years as I have worked to understand the unfolding of the human story, and, in particular, the human-earth relationship.

We are now seeing more and more clearly that there are no single focus issues, and that justice, equity, peace, and the integrity of Creation form a coherent framework of spiritual development, religious responsibility, economic behaviour, public policy, and human betterment. In this expanded context, the juxtaposition of a series of probes may be useful. We have a new sense of holistic vision, but specific probes may offer some useful illumination.

You may be wondering about the title of this lecture. I, too, am still wondering about it. It came to me like a kind of large swooping bird that alighted on the page and refused to clear off even when encouraged to do so. I tried several other titles, but the more I looked at this one and the more it looked back at me, the more it seemed to stick, the more it seemed to be right for what I thought I wanted to say. This will give you an idea of how I work. I have found that writing is not so much a process of recording what I think, as it is a way of discovering new images and new thoughts that would not have come to me had I not set out on the journey of writing. So with the Angel of History as our guide, with the Storm of Progress at full pitch, and with the Order of the Soul struggling to keep its head above the waters of fatalism, I will try to coordinate this exploration in a way that reaches a helpful focus for living into the future. I am one who takes seriously Kierkegaard's warning on the danger of fighting the future. I am, however, also convinced that we must choose the future as never before. We must collectively choose, design and create alternatives to the trajectory that is now sweeping us into increasing social violence and ecological degradation. I am looking for a way of life that grows from and sustains the Order of the Soul.

The appearance of such a high flying title does not come, however, out of the blue. Many things we read or hear feed into the images that form our thoughts. And so it was that while pondering this title, I realized it had two primary sources, sources that will help set the stage for what follows. The first is from philosopher and cultural analyst, Walter Benjamin. Walter Benjamin was a good friend of the great Swiss painter, Paul Klee. He collected Klee's work and at one point acquired a painting titled, "Angelus Novus." In the spring of 1940 Benjamin completed a short work called, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in which he wrote the following:

A Klee painting named "Angelus Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the

The Angel of History, The Storm of Progress, & The Order of the Soul

angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. The storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress.(3)

The second source of my title is from a song by Leonard Cohen, writer, poet and musician from Montreal. The title song in his album called, “The Future”, has the following refrain:

Things are going to slide in all directions
Won't be nothing you can measure anymore
The blizzard of the world has crossed the threshold
And has overturned the order of the soul.

The references overlap. The “storm of progress” becomes the “blizzard of the world”, and that which the angel longs to accomplish - “awakening the dead and make whole what has been smashed” - is beyond his power. The storm has crossed a critical threshold and “has overturned the order of the soul.” Such are the apprehensions and the images of the artist, the seer, and the poet. I take these images seriously because I think it is true, as Marshall McLuhan once said, that “artists are the antenna of the species.” And I am further convinced, as Kenneth Boulding, Quaker economist and world systems analyst, has so clearly shown (4), that to understand the processes of life and societal development we must understand the role of the “image”, and the way, for humans, a complex inventory of images build into stories of various kinds, and, frequently into a primal or master story that makes sense of the human situation in the world. Those of you who know the work of Thomas Berry will see where these thoughts are headed. In thinking about the human situation, he observes that “We are in trouble just now because . . . we are between stories. It’s all a question of story.”(5) This may seem like simplistic observation, but once we understand that all knowledge is rooted in images, and that the way images are combined into convincing stories creates behaviour, we can see the aptness of Berry’s observation.

Into the Storm of Progress

Seeing the Amazon by moonlight has lodged an image in my mind that is among the strongest and most deeply imprinted experiences of my life. It resides in a zone of memory that comes into focus unbidden and with great frequency. It has become one of those constant images that connects. I have always had a weakness for landscapes. I more-or-less fall instantly love with new landscapes, and fill up with emotion on return to ones well known. (I agree with Stendhal when he says, “The purpose of home is to make your heart leap.”) But to be so powerfully imprinted by a landscape from over six miles in the air, and at night, is hard to account for. It is a puzzle, but a puzzle with an answer. And the answer lies in the image, and in

The Angel of History, The Storm of Progress, & The Order of the Soul

all the prior images and the stories they compose about this region of earth that I have had the good fortune to encounter.

Now the irony of my story does not escape me. My experience of the Amazon was delivered while cradled in the wings of an agent of the storm of progress - aboard a jetliner, an ozone blasting jetliner. This is not a trip we ever imagined making, but when our son married a woman from Buenos Aires, and a grand celebration with her family and friends was scheduled, we hesitated not minute in booking our flight. Such are the wonders of progress. We now have a whole new sense of connection with another part of the world, another sense of home through our daughter-in-law and her welcoming and gracious family.

When I speak of the storm of progress, I am not speaking as a Luddite, as one who wishes that technological innovation had been stopped with the water wheel and the iron tipped plow, although there are good reasons to think that might have been judicious. From an evolutionary point of view, from an ecological perspective, and from within the human story, it is an objective fact that the history of progress since the 16th century has been a storm. Not “like” a storm, but an actual, objectively trackable storm - a turbulence of change, mounting in intensity, scale and scope, still cresting in successive waves of disruption and reconfiguration. The disruptions have been horribly damaging to the social systems and ecosystems that have suffered them. The reconfigurations have been wonderfully, though perhaps superficially, beneficent to those who have prospered and claimed the lion’s share of the booty and privilege.

It was once thought that as the storm ran its course, virtually everybody would benefit in a way that would be well worth all the disruption and suffering. The utopian optimists like to call this process “creative destruction.” Now that this optimistic scenario is clearly not the case, not even for those with most of the booty and privileges, a great loss of faith stalks the land. And the storm, rather than running its course, like a natural storm, and allowing for recovery and adjustment, shows no signs of abating. Innovation is all the rage. Innovation is expected to produce progress. But the great doubt, the loss of faith now active in the culture, is that innovation and economic growth is not necessarily progress.

When Quaker Institute for the Future held its first Board meeting in Philadelphia, I arranged for Board members to be billeted with area Friends. After our first evening meeting, Phil Emmi, Director of the Urban Planning Department at the University of Utah, arrived at the home of his hosts, Pat McBee and Brad Sheeks, after Pat had gone to bed. The next morning Phil was at the breakfast table contemplating his coffee when Pat came into the kitchen. Pat, being a direct and forthright Friend, briskly asked, “What’s your name, and what brings you here?” Phil looked up, and, as Pat tells it, without missing a beat, replied, “My name is Phil Emmi and I am here because progress has been betrayed.” When I first heard this story, I thought ah ha, now that’s the mark of discriminating intelligence, and a perfect line of orientation of our new Quaker think tank.

There are forms of progress that truly advance human betterment and ecological integrity and many of them are being betrayed by scenarios of development that literally decompose social and biotic resilience. This is what the angel of history is trying say, “Wake up! The outcome of the human story is at stake! What is smashed is smashed, but some integrity remains;

the fecundity of earth, the solidarity of human communities at their best, some good tools, some old manuals of practice.”

But who is this angel of history? If, as Walter Benjamin says, “the storm is blowing *from* Paradise,” and the angel of history is storm driven, she is then clearly an exile, a homeless angel, a lonely spirit in a hurricane of troubles being blown increasingly beyond recovery, increasingly beyond the threshold that overturns the order of the soul. I submit that the Angel of History is a mirror. In our contemplation of this figure, we are given an image of the postmodern human, a figure transfixed by the force of progress, but steadily losing the sense of wholeness and integrity, steadily losing the order of the soul. Which brings me to the next theme I wish to probe.

Angels of History & the Will of God

The first step in this exploration will be upstream into history. I want get below the full force of the storm for a bit and take a look back toward its origin, back toward one of the drivers of the storm. This will be a small expedition into cultural archeology.

In the course of my work I recently received a book with a title that immediately commanded my attention - *An Angel Directs the Storm: Apocalyptic Religion & American Empire*, by British theologian, Michael Northcott. We have here another angel of history, but, it is clear from the title, an angel of a very different sort. On investigation I learned that this image comes from the time of the American Revolutionary War. Soon after the publication of the Declaration of Independence, a Virginia statesman, John Page, wrote the following in a letter to Thomas Jefferson: “We know the race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong. Do you not think an angel rides in the whirlwind and directs the storm?”(6) This angel reappears in George W. Bush’s first inaugural address. In speaking about the destiny of the nation, and its determination to confront all enemies with the force of American strength, he says the struggle will ultimately be successful because it is “the angel of God who directs the storm.”

We are here dealing with one of the master narratives of the Western tradition - the story of the “will of God.” The history of this narrative as applied to the founding of the United States is well known and not surprising given the theological world view of the time. What is surprising, and more than a little suspect, is that a refurbished vision of this kind is now being promoted as a way to understand contemporary world history and America’s role in shaping and controlling the world economy. It is more than surprising. It is alarming.

It is especially alarming because there is considerable evidence that a significant number of players in the Bush administration, and many of its key supporters, actually believe as a matter of religious faith that the US has become the world’s victorious superpower because it is the will of God. The US, as a chosen nation, is divinely ordered to prevail until such time as the apocalypse unfolded and the end of history is at hand. The idea of an apocalyptic end to human history does not trouble them. It is clear from their reading of the Bible that God wills it. To be an agent of the apocalypse is to be doing the will of God. Reflecting on this theological mindset within the governing structure of the current administration, Bill Moyers recently observed, “The delusional is no longer marginal.” Those in the current administration, who do

not exactly share this Americanized biblical world view, support the policies it requires for military and economic reasons. The delusion is useful.

How have we gotten into this situation? How has it come about that the idea of the will of God has now become a malignant threat to the human future and to the future of biospheric integrity in general? Where does this kind of idea of the will of God come from?

If we turn to the Hebrew scripture and the story of the Israelites' invasion of Canaan, we can see very clearly where it comes from, and how it began the journey which led it to become one of the master narratives of Western civilization. Historically, the first codification of a supreme deity appears in the Egyptian cultural tradition long before the tribes of Israel were removed from the Nile delta into the wilderness of Sinai. Although cast out from the wealth of Egypt, the Israelites carried Egypt's unique religious innovation - the idea of monotheism - with them and employed it to powerful effect, both as a force for tribal cohesion and as the conquering force of divine will.

Elijha and the Victory Over Canaan(7)

When the Israelites moved to invade and colonize Canaan, the physical takeover of land and settlements was only a part of the conquest. A well developed religious culture with diverse sites of practice also had to be defeated. The local deities that symbolized the powers and processes of earth were not just an affront to the Israelites' supreme, invisible deity, but remained a constant and alluring temptation to the children of Israel themselves. So prone were they to turn their eyes and religious affections to the forms and process of earth, and away from the highly abstract conception of an invisible, supremely all powerful god, that, according to the record, the priests and prophets of Yahweh were often marginalized. Finally, with Elijha, so the story goes, it comes to a critical test. Under the leader Ahab and his assistant, Obadiah, the Israelites had apparently accommodated so completely to the worship of local deities, including Baal, that the prophets of Yahweh were living in caves, exiled away from the settlements. It was also a time of drought "and there was a sore famine in Samaria." In the third year of this period, Yahweh speaks to Elijah: "Go shew thyself to Ahab; and I will send rain upon the earth." Elijah does as he is told but Ahab calls him a "troublemaker" in Israel. Elijah fires back, "I have not troubled the house of Israel, but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and hast followed Baalim."

Elijah proposes a test and convinces Ahab to let him try it. Ahab agrees to gather all of Israel to Mount Carmel along with four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal. The people and prophets assemble. "And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, how long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word." Elijah then issues his great challenge - the setting up of competing stone altars complete with wood and slaughtered bullocks on top. The contest is for each side in the dispute to pray to their respective deities, calling for the wood to spontaneously ignite and burn the offering. Well, of course we know outcome, so classic has this story become in the subsequent history of biblical faith. The prophets of Baal do their utmost to no avail. Elijah mocks them, making fun of the fact that none of their deities seem to be listening. Have they fallen asleep he asks? Have they gone out walking and can't hear your prayers, he taunts? When

evening comes, Elijah swings into action. He builds up the altar of the Lord. He digs a trench around it. He stacks the wood. He lays the bullock on the altar. He commands that four barrels of water be poured over the whole arrangement - bullock, wood, and altar; not once, not twice, but three times, so that the trench fills with water. Elijah makes a prayer to Yahweh, fire falls on the altar and burns, not just the wood and the sacrificed bullock, but the stones of the altar and all the water in the trench.

“And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, the Lord, he is the God; the Lord, he is the God.” But this is not the end of the story. Elijah was taking no chances. In current jargon, he had earned political capital and he knew how to spend it. “And Elijah said unto them, take the prophets of Baal; let not one of them escape. And they took them: and Elijah brought them to the brook Kishon, and slew them there.” Elijah then ascends Mount Carmel, falls to earth with his head between his knees and commands his servant to look toward the sea. Seven times he makes this command until a cloud appears, the sky turns dark, and they rush back down mountain to take shelter from the storm. The rains have come. The drought has ended. The will of Yahweh has been accomplished and the reward has been given.

What are we to make of this story? Those who regard Hebrew scripture as a document of singular revelation from an otherwise unknown and unknowable God have laboured for generations to draw guidance from its stories. The story of Elijah, empowered by Yahweh, defeating the indigenous religion and its world view, has become a flagship story of faith for Jews, Christians, and Muslims. The world view of Islam flows from this same cultural history, a matter to which I will return. For those who see the significance of scripture within the larger context of human cultural development in general, the story of Elijah is no less important, but in a rather different way. Like the story of Abraham and Isaac, which signals the end of human sacrifice, the story of Elijah signals the victory of a particular structure of belief; the belief that the personal moral will of Yahweh is the metaphysical reality that organizes and commands the world.

The work of Gordon D. Kaufman (emeritus Professor of Divinity at Harvard University) is especially instructive on this critical juncture in the trajectory of Western civilization. In a variety of studies, he shows how the die was cast when Israel won the great religious struggle with Canaan, and personal moral will triumphed over the powers and processes of earth.(8)(9) Moral will, as personified in and derived from Yahweh, came to be seen as the only significant metaphysical reality. The powers and processes of earth that were symbolized in the god Baal, and in a variety of other local deities, came to be seen as without any significant metaphysical reality. Guidance became located within a structure of stories about the will of a supreme god, and human agency on behalf of this will became one of the master narratives that gave Western civilization its distinct character, motivation, and energy.

From that time on in Hebrew culture, and eventually in Christian and Islamic cultures, all the models of metaphysical understanding and religious behaviour are framed within the supremacy of personal moral will. From the stories of Yahweh and his intervening behaviour on behalf of his devotees, through the religious warrant under which Christian Europe carried out its modern global colonization project, the imposition of personal moral will over all other sources of power, and over earth processes in general, has been the main story line of the Western

tradition. Scholars of this history have shown that European culture and Middle East culture are “sibling civilizations.”(10) Islamic culture has its origins in this history. It is a constituent part of the Western tradition. Islamic Jihad, for example, is a perfectly consistent expression of the will of God (Allah) as a singular and absolute metaphysical reality.

The Quandary of Metaphysical Guidance

I have included this story in some detail because I want to emphasize the quandary we are now in over this construction of reality. With the rise of militant Islam, and especially with the events of 9/11 2001, Friends have revisited the peace testimony with some anguish. Some Friends and Friends organizations have not hesitated to advance a heightened sense of relevance for the peace testimony. Other Friends found these expressions ringing hollow in their minds, and their own sense of moral response remained confused. The confusion stemmed from feeling that a response must be made to the militant’s attacks, but not seeing any way for the peace testimony to make such response. One Friend publicly wondered if, in times this bad, an argument might be made for withdrawing from political life altogether and developing a Quaker version of the Anabaptist two kingdom theology?

Christian and Jewish fundamentalists have no doubt that war against their militant Islamic enemies is exactly what God wills. Islamic militants are absolutely certain that war and violence against non-Muslim enemies and apostate Muslims is the very essence of God’s will. As between Christian, Jewish and Islamic fundamentalists there is not much difference on this matter of the will of God. They all hold to it as the absolute metaphysical reality of the world, as the only thing that makes sense and the only thing that matters. They are all Eiljah’s children. This is, essentially, a family fight - the worst kind - over resources, territorial dominance, and cultural influence. This situation comes right out of the victory of Israel over Canaan and the world view that was carried into the sibling civilizations of Christendom and Islam.

What could be more painful? What could be more distressing? The master narrative on which the whole meaning of our cultural history hangs is now the agent of endless war at best and unimaginable disaster at worst. We can object as much as we want, we can tell the fundamentalists they have it all wrong about the will of God, but logically it won’t wash. Their case is perfectly consistent with the deepest roots of the tradition. Violence, war, and even genocide are incidental matters within the scope of this history. When it comes to territory, resources, dominance and cultural influence, personal moral will projected into absolute metaphysical guidance trumps compassion and justice every time.

I am not satisfied with this scenario. My probe seems to have entered a theological black hole and left me stranded in a kind of wasteland. But I have arrived at this point because I am passionately worried about two things: I am worried about the deterioration of biospheric integrity under the domination of the biblical world view, and about the spiritual survival of human communities in a deteriorating biosphere. We face two catastrophes: The collapse of biotic carrying capacity within ecosystems, and the collapse of faith in the human future. The first is the loss of earth’s self renewing biotic resilience, and the second is the loss of spiritual resilience - the blizzard of the world crossing the threshold and overturning of the order of the soul.

When I get into this kind of discouraging spiral, I feel, as John Woolman says, “a stop in my mind.” I am not constitutionally disposed to this kind negative thinking. I agree with Lewis Mumford, the great cultural historian, who said near the end of his life that he would die a happy man if he knew it could be written on his gravestone that “everything this man said about the future turned out to be wrong.” Unfortunately, much of what he said has turned out to be true and then some. That future about which he was thinking is now with us, and it is, if anything, even more difficult than he imagined it would be. So while I apologize for the discouraging effect, I do believe it is essential to understand the situation we are in if we are to work effectively to redeem it. There is no mystery about ecological collapse, and about what could have been done to have avoided it. There is no mystery about the fact that ecosystem collapse of various kinds in various places is well underway. There is no mystery about the intimate connection between the fate of ecosystems and the fate of the human condition. So the question is what do we do now about this reality, about salvaging the ecological situation and spiritual survival?

In this regard much can be offered to good effect that focuses on the ecological reconstruction of our lives and communities. This is of primary importance. But my concern for spiritual survival has also taken me into these matters of cultural archeology and world views. Action requires faith, and faith requires a world view, a way of understanding our situation that makes sense to us, a believable story. When the world changes, world views change, and we find our bearings in a new understanding, a new story. Such was the case with early Friends, and, I believe, such is our case now. For early Friends the whole structure of institutional Christianity became unbelievable. The institutional story of Christianity gave way and was replaced in their understanding with the presence of Christ as an inward teacher and the process of learning as a new spiritual path. We are now faced with, perhaps, an even more difficult transition.

A Blessing and a Curse: The Natural History of a World View

The dilemma of this analysis and the journey of this transition warrant careful review. A strong argument can be made for the great blessings of Western civilization. It can be readily shown that our tradition has produced significant and lasting ethical advance in social behaviour. Its powerful and unique imagination stands behind astounding scientific discoveries and technological innovation. Its genius has been central to institution building, effective political administration, and great economic development. Unfortunately, the lineage of destruction that has also been sponsored by this triumphant world view is a daunting counterweight to all these blessings. The storm of progress is still building. The wreckage is still piling up. By all the biotic and societal indicators, this way of organizing and operating the human world is on a trajectory of dissolution and, perhaps, catastrophe. No history of blessings can offset such an outcome. No temporary benefit can justify running such a risk.

In order to deal with this troubling history there is a current line of reasoning that says it is not fair to bring all these destructive aspects of Western civilization into account because they are obviously the result of failures to understand and faithfully uphold the best aspects of the personal moral will tradition as first developed within the tribes of Israel, and then reconfigured in Christianity and Islam. I have great sympathy for this argument. Unfortunately, history gives no exemptions after the fact. The cultural history that has been made is the history we have.

The Angel of History, The Storm of Progress, & The Order of the Soul

Although we may not like it, the plain fact is the metaphysical tradition of supreme moral will has been the sponsoring agent of such cultural phenomenon as the rise of Constantine Christianity, Islam's spread into Europe, the Christian crusades against Islam and Islam's response in return, European religious wars and persecutions, a holocaust of witch hunting against women, colonial imperialism in general and the genocidal destruction of indigenous peoples world wide in particular. In addition, patriarchy, slavery, capitalism, totalitarian communism, fascism, and militarism all arise within the sanctioning ethos of the Western world view.

All these events and movements emerged from a metaphysical world view in which personal moral will is the organizing and driving force. All these movements, activities, and cultural tendencies, all these social, economic and political institutions were undertaken and came about because men believed absolutely in the rightness of what they were doing and regarded their own moral will as aligned with the will of God, the will of history, the will of the people, etc.. Even the case of Germany's National Socialist movement, and the project of cultural reconstruction, European domination, and ethnic extermination which Hitler and his colleagues undertook, was framed precisely within the terms of the metaphysical supremacy of moral will. They had no doubt they were creating a better world, and that the destruction which they employed would, in the end, produce a result that would justify its cost. (It should be noted, by way of clarification, that "moral," in this context of this discussion, does not necessarily mean "good." It means a governing rationale, a justifying structure of belief that guides behaviour. It means that whatever action is undertaken is believed to be called for and guided by divine will, the will of history, the will of the people, duty, honour, destiny, revenge, justice, loyalty, - some version of an absolute metaphysical belief.)

Again, I would agree that much good has been done within this way of understanding, organizing and operating the world. The great storm of progress has had its blessings. But, at the same time, this history has been, and is, so paradoxically disabling, so humanly destructive, and so ecologically degrading as to be mentally and emotionally numbing. Viewed objectively, it is so painful that it is almost impossible to avoid some degree of denial. We may wish to disown it, but it will never abandon us. The storm of progress will likely appear to our far descendants (if we have any) as it has appeared to many indigenous peoples - as a disease of the mind resulting in a maladaptive and disruptive interlude in the overall scope of the human-earth relationship.

The Order of the Soul Overturned

What does it mean to say the blizzard of the world - storm of progress - has overturned the order of the soul? Is this anything more than poetic hyperbole? I think it is. I think it is the metaphorical rendering of a reality that is coming increasingly into view, a reality that is colouring the human horizon in a distinctly ominous way. From among the multiplicity of examples that could be marshaled to illustrate this societal regression, I wish to mention just one. What is the prime signal that a society has lost faith in the future, that the order of the soul on which a hopeful outlook depends is being overturned? As I have pondered this question no sharper answer has come to me than this: The failure to comprehensively care for and support the well being of children; the failure to nourish, protect, and provide for the young at every state of growth.

Societal regression in the care of children is increasingly structural. Jurisdictions that are, or are trying to become, intensely capital driven and largely market dominated have little capacity for the equitable care of children. Almost 13 million children in the US live in poverty.(11) Poor children, of course, live in poor families, unless they are homeless, which is also a reality. How many more live in households just above the so-called poverty line, and on an insecure and declining income? The result for children of these high stress situations often ranges from abuse to neglect to abandonment. This is not the place for piling up research findings, but I wish to cite one particularly egregious US policy context. Children in poverty are almost always malnourished. “Malnourished” is a euphemism for chronic starvation. Chronic starvation of the body means developmental impairment of the brain. Cognitive dysfunction, learning disabilities, and disturbed behaviour are the direct result of this developmental compromise. The utter falseness of the current federal administration’s “no child left behind” slogan is revealed in the defunding and dismantling of significant child nutrition support programs.(12) Kurt Vonnegut, novelist and acute observer of the American scene, recently asked in his typically deadpan way; “Can’t we at least agree to share the wealth with the babies?” Apparently not. This deliberate neglect would be incomprehensible to persons in traditional and tribal societies. Modern societal regression, in this respect, is stunning.

The layers of social disregard that have accumulated in the US political economy are often difficult for Americans to recognize because they seem normal. But they are not normal, not in comparison with most other wealthy nations. Eliot Currie, Professor of Law at the University of California, Irvine, puts the case as follows: “We are the industrial nation with the weakest and least reliable supports for the young: we have no system of family allowances, no universal health care system, no paid parental leave to care for children, no national apprenticeship system to link school with stable and rewarding work. . . . We have increasingly become, as two British observers put it, the land of the ‘nonhelping hand.’”(13)

The steadily rising rate of suicide among young people seems to me the starkest evidence that the storm progress has overturned the order of the soul.(14) Girl on girl violence has grown to the extent that it is now a new field of social research. Children killing children is no longer shocking news. And one final note on this that is too glaring to omit. I have, in this case, no research evidence but simply an irrepressible sense that the disrespect, indignities, abuse, violence and killing that now flow from the policies and behaviour of the current US government are warping the psyches and trampling the souls of all Americans, but especially the young, in such a way that it is hard to see how the spiral of regression can be arrested and reversed.

Archeological and anthropological literature offers a variety of instances in which environmentally linked societal regression can be clearly seen. The history and fate of human settlement on Easter Island is perhaps the best known (15), but the story of the Ik people in contemporary Uganda is even more instructive. The removal of this cultural group from its home territory to make way for a national park resulted in societal disintegration so complete that recovery has been impossible. Their loss of environmental security led to the breakdown of social relationships. Rank individualism, with regard to resources for survival, replaced the highly cooperative and sharing behaviour of former times. The increasing failure to care for and nurture children emerged as a key element in the disintegration of Ik culture. Anthropologist,

Colin Turnbull, writes: “. . . the Ik clearly show that society itself is not indispensable for man’s survival . . . he is perfectly capable of associating for purposes of survival without being social. . . That is how it is with the Ik. They are brought together by self-interest alone . . . Does that sound so very different from our own society? In our own world the very mainstays of a society based on a truly social sense of mutuality are breaking down.” (16)

A little over a decade later Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of Britain, speaking as an advocate of neo-conservatism, declared that “there is no such thing as society.” In her world view, and in that of her supporters, the only reality that mattered was individual competing interests and the special groupings that advanced individual interests. Thus has the wind been sown, and thus is a whirlwind of societal regression continuing to be reaped.

The Temptation of Fatalism & How to Avoid It

From the evidence before us it seems highly probable that circumstances of ecological disruption, economic instability, and societal regression are now entering a stage of confluence and have landed us in a condition from which it will not only be difficult to recover, but from which it may be difficult to even see how a recovery could take place. This is a critical and fateful difference, a real spiritual danger. It is the difference between retaining the energy of faith and the mind of hope in difficult circumstances, and finding faith drained away and hope closed down when no image of a positive future can be held in focus. I do not think we have reached that point in our culture, but it is not hard to imagine the conditions that could trigger this kind of psychic collapse. We need to be especially vigilant about advance warning and attentive to mutual support against this danger.

Trying to understand the relationship between economics, ecology, and societal regression runs the risk of opening the door to fatalism. Trying to understand the way in which the ecological crisis of human adaptation is related to the Western world view runs the risk of cultural despair. Trying to understand the way in which the elevation of personal moral will into a metaphysical absolute has sanctioned patriarchy, domination and war runs the risk of throwing faith into a black hole. Having raised these issues and run these risks, issues and risks that bear directly on how we function in the daily tasks of life, I feel under some obligation to offer further navigation. I have struggled with the temptation of fatalism. I have noticed I am not alone in this struggle. I have noticed in many circumstances among Friends a kind of background struggle that haunts our deliberations - a struggle between fatalism and faith.

It is not surprising that we are tempted by fatalism. The tension of the economics/ecology conflict and a failing environmental adaptation is very difficult to live with. The tension of societal regression and, now, of endless war greatly compounds the problem of faith, the problem of a hopeful outlook for the future. Fatalism about the human future is an alternative story that offers relief from these tensions. We literally cannot live without some kind of faith, some kind of story that makes sense of things. Fatalism is a kind of faith substitute. Fatalism provides a believable story for bad times: And it is better to have a bad story that is believable than no story at all.

In this context there are, however, at least three important observations about fatalism, observations I can offer as an antidote, or, perhaps, as an inoculation. First, fatalism about the conflict between economics and ecology is based on the idea that economic behaviour functions according to a natural law of self interest governed by mathematical calculations and that nothing, not even the prospect of catastrophe, can alter its operation. This dogma of economics is, within the scope of human history, demonstrably false. It is only 250 years old. The evidence from a cultural perspective is that this so-called natural law is an astutely composed feature of property, financial, and commercial relationships that were assembled to advance wealth creation at the beginning of the industrial era.(17) Suffice it to say, at this point, that relationships that were once composed can surely be recomposed, and that ecologically oriented economists and community development practitioners are now doing just that.(18) The capital driven system may not yield gracefully, but a strong current of ecological sanity is beginning to reshape the cultural stream bed.

Secondly, fatalism as a relief for the above noted tensions, and as an attempt at certainty is a flawed resolution, even in its own terms. If we adopt the fatalistic world view, and the deterioration of the human-earth relationship continues as forecast, we will never know if it was a true assessment of the human situation. This is an important argument. Calling attention to the fact that even fatalism fails the test of certainty cancels out the power of its temptation. Once we realize that human cultural adaptation to the various ecosystems of earth is always an open, emergent process, the book on future options cannot be closed. A live current of doubt will forever disturb the comfort of the fatalistic faith and cleave the focus of its certainty. Always, at the deep core of consciousness, the certainty of fatalism is compromised as we realize - it doesn't have to be this way. Things could be different.

Thirdly, fatalism is a closed loop positive feedback system. (In this case the term "positive" means the feedback increases the tendency to fatalism, that is, it just makes things worse) There is simply no point in taking a fatalistic view of the human-earth relationship. Taking such a view is to help set up a bad self-fulfilling prophecy. A view that holds out for positive change and the growth of a mutually enhancing human-earth relationship helps set up a good self fulfilling prophecy. Given this inescapable social dynamic, why would anyone of good will choose fatalism? I am not suggesting a naive cheerfulness or a Pollyannaish outlook. I am suggesting rather an intransigent allegiance to human betterment within the regenerative powers of earth.

Reciprocity, Communion, and the Order of the Soul

What if Canaan had won the religious struggle with Israel, or, at least, had been able to work out a reasonable coexistence? What if the natural powers and processes of earth had continued to be recognized as metaphysically and spiritually significant, and had continued to play a role in shaping the cultural experience of Mediterranean and, eventually, European peoples? What if the animistic world view - the oldest of human traditions - had been incorporated into the cultural mix that became Western civilization? How might the history of the world have been different? Of course, we do not know, but the question is instructive. It is not unreasonable to imagine that people and planet might have been better served, in the long run, by a metaphysical understanding that honoured the powers and processes of earth. It is true;

this world view has often carried a load of superstition that has had unfortunate behavioural results. But the same thing can quite fairly be said of the tradition that did win out and become the way of the West. It seems superstition is a human phenomenon to work with and accommodated whether the context is animistic or monotheistic.

A part of our problem is that world views are mostly invisible. The observation that our history has been under the metaphysical supremacy of personal will is likely to be met with the question, “What other kind of history is there?” This is a fair question. It is not easy to step out from under a well ingrained world view. An answer can be gleaned, however, by noticing a significant omission in the list of cultural phenomenon mentioned above. Science is not included. Science grows from curiosity about design and diversity. Although scientific thinking started out as a branch of theology, the more it grew, the less inclined its proponents were to see the world as a projection of personal moral will. While it is unfortunately true that much scientific work has often been swept up in struggles driven by personal will, the part of science we call “natural history” has not generally suffered this fate.

Natural history not only resisted the attempt of 19th and 20th century social Darwinists to co-opt it for the “natural right” of domination, but, together with its theoretical offspring, ecology, it has established an alternative world view. The work of natural historians and ecologists (both theoretical and historical) has created a story of earth and its life communities distinctly different from previous histories. This story provides a useful answer to the question, “What other kind of history is there?” The history of earth process and the ever renewing fecundity of the biosphere is a different kind of history. It is the history of the context within which all human settlement and adaptation is worked out.(19) (20) (21) It is the story of the interweaving of many relationships in continuously reciprocal ways. It is a story that includes personal moral will as an attribute of the human, but embeds it in earth process and in a cosmos of reciprocity. This is a new kind of history, a new story about the integrity of Creation and the powers and processes of earth that inform and sustain the ecological world view. It is a story about reciprocity rather than personal moral will.

It is not, strictly speaking, a new story. For a very long time the so-called, non-historic indigenous peoples of the world have been telling metaphysical stories about the powers and process of earth, and about the human-earth relationship, based on the experience, understanding and practice of reciprocity. This world view, once condemned by monotheism as superstition, can now be understood in scientific terms as a reasonable representation of the reality of earth process.(22) (23)

It is easy to imagine that ancient earth based metaphysical traditions began when what might be called a “soulful” quality emerged in human experience. We might imagine this as a growing disposition to step back just a bit from the immediate flow of sensations and events into an open space of contemplation. As this experience developed, a kind of primal connection with the powers and processes that permeate the world and human experience must have further enriched the soulful sense - the sense of an interior reality, the sense of spirit within the form.

It is this primal experience with earth’s landscapes, with forest land and open plains, with deep valleys and high mountains, with the flow of rivers and the beauty of lakes, with the bounty

of plants and the intelligence of animals, with fire and storms, with the great sun filled, cloud piled skies of day, and the deep spangled beauty of dark nights; and the moon - that ever changing body of soft light, companion of longings and dreams - all this, along with the heights and depths of social relations underlies the history of human development and the growth of that interior sense we call the soul. From the beginning, all these aspects and processes of earth have been the formative context of neurological, cognitive, and emotional growth of the human. The perceptual and cognitive skills, and emotional repertoire we have as humans has been shaped and conditioned - literally created - by this very particular kind of world, a world that, for all its hazards and unaccountable eccentricities, yet displays a consistent pattern of renewal that we recognize as integrity, and a coherent pattern of relationship that we recognize as reciprocal. And out of this history of development we have come into a sense of the order of the soul that parallels the integrity and reciprocity of earth's whole community of life. This is not surprising. We are part of this community. The order of the soul has a home.

The Great Transition

I previously suggested that we are likely in a time of transition comparable to the one early Friends engaged when they moved the focus of spiritual life from a concern for personal security after death to a concern for communal learning in the present. That shift has given Quakerism its distinct character and has been the foundation of its efficacy in human betterment work. The forms of learning that came to characterize Friends knowledge and practice laid the foundation for the emergence of human solidarity as the spiritual discovery of the 20th Century. Friends' testimonies codify this heritage of learning and, I believe, provide a context for understanding and implementing the transition for which we now must work. It is to a consideration of these testimonies that I will shortly turn.

My sense of the transition in which we are engaged involves a move from the old world view based on the metaphysical supremacy of personal moral will, and the endless theological struggle to rearrange this heritage is a credible way, to an ecological world view in which emergence, presence, interdependence, reciprocity and learning guide and inform both the human-earth relationship and human relationships in general.

Understanding this transition can be a difficult point, and a closer look may be helpful. If metaphysical understanding is now moving beyond the supremacy of personal moral will and into a sense of whole earth reciprocity, does this mean, in plain language, that nature replaces God as the focus of spiritual experience? This is not the conclusion to which this narrative leads. It is important to realize that the idea of nature is a cultural story we tell about earth. The story of nature has been composed by culture as a way of making sense of earth, but it is not the same thing as earth. Earth is something else entirely, and the reality of the cosmos lies yet beyond earth. Seeing the story of nature as a God substitute runs into the same difficulty that has befallen the story of Yahweh. Nature is a concept that has arisen within our cultural history. It served as an integrating story for some time, but now no longer adequately covers the way we experience and understand the powers and processes of earth or the human-earth relationship.

I think it is fair to conclude there is no God substitute. The Hebrew god, Yahweh, was born into Western cultural development in a particular and unique way.(24) The story of Yahweh

is a matter of the history of Western cultural and religious life, a matter of heritage. There can be no substitute for cultural heritage. It is what it is for each of us, and we all deal in one way or another with accommodation and resolution.(25) The experience of the ineffable, the numinous, however, continues. The understanding that there is something that cannot be understood deepens. With the right kind of attention, this understanding becomes a fully rounded sense of presence, a presence that emerges into guidance about the life of the world in general, and the human-earth relationship in particular. I think what we want to know is how to honour and keep faith with our heritage, while, at the same time, helping to reformulate it in ways that keeps faith with the literal ground of our existence - the biotic integrity of earth.

I suspect this transition is not a matter of preference. I suspect that at the level of collective cultural guidance, the old world view has now become seriously dysfunctional. The resurgence of domineering fundamentalism that is now driving both the social and biotic worlds into increasingly destructive zones is likely a spasm before collapse. That is the hopeful view. If it does not collapse, if there is not a great turning away from the idea that the world is organized and operated by personal moral will, and only one interpretation of this metaphysical reality is correct and this interpretation is duty bound to defeat all the others, then the clash of cultures will likely explode in ways horribly destructive to both human and biospheric well being. It already has. Either way, a collapse of credibility for this metaphysical understanding seems a likely outcome. Either enough people will see the dysfunctional cultural guidance it offers, and the extreme danger toward which it leads, and be led to recalibrate the whole human project, or a post-catastrophe remnant will likely say about us, their predecessors, "What in the world were they thinking?" What indeed?

Friends & the Great Transition

Our human situation at the beginning of the third Christian millennium requires not just an expansion of generic environmental awareness, but a fully rounded ecological consciousness that brings the sense and practice of cooperative reciprocity into every strand and loop of behaviour and enterprise. With human solidarity as our steadfast compass setting, and a close reading of earth process, human settlement and adaptation can achieve a certain harmony within the integrity of earth's biotic community. We have clear models, both past and present.(26) (27) (28) (29)

Quakers, in particular, it seems to me, have a ready entrance into this task. Friend's testimonies codify the spiritual learning that blossomed with such authenticity in the 16th Century, and has continued to shape the values, behaviour, and activities of Friends to the present day. Friends' testimonies, and the activities that have flowed from them, have greatly influenced the movement for human betterment that has grown over the years into a full recognition of the spiritual significance of human solidarity. With their roots firmly planted in the spirit nourishing soil of human solidarity, and their branches reaching out into many pathways of human betterment, Friends testimonies are like a small grove of old trees that still bear the seeds of social sanity, seeds that Friends carry into the world and plant in all manner of circumstances according to their calling and life work.

Having these kinds of images in mind, I was startled by another remark of Phil Emmi at the previously mentioned meeting. In the course of our collective discernment, Phil, at a moment of open waiting, suddenly said, “We need Quaker testimonies for the organic world.” As I have lived with, studied, and pondered Friends testimonies, I have often found them naturally translating into the language of ecological consciousness, but Phil’s remark now started me thinking systematically about this correspondence. The outline that follows is the result. I hope this final probe will turn into an agenda of faith, supporting both good work and spiritual survival.

Friends Testimonies & the Ecological World View

The following outline lists key words and concepts traditionally associated with Friends testimonies, followed by a second listing in italics expressing each testimony in terms of the ecological world view. The second list begins with a key word or phrase that can serve as a shorthand reminder of the testimony’s expanded context. To the usual five testimonies - simplicity, peace, equality, integrity, and community - I have taken the liberty of adding a sixth - service. Service is understood as integral to the testimonies, but, in this case, it is important to give it distinct articulation.

Simplicity - a functional and harmonious approach to the arrangements, fixtures and tools of life and work; materially non-acquisitive; frugal; unadorned; non-aggrandizing; spiritually centered; attentive to relationship and direct experience.

Localization - ways of life and means of livelihood anchored in local and regional ecosystems, economies and communities; the production, use and recycling of local goods and services; decision making at the level of interest and competence nearest to the consequences of the decisions (this principle is also called “subsidiarity”).

Peace - reverence for life and the practice of respectful, nurturing relationships; nonviolent living; conflict prevention; conflict resolution; relationship building work to reduce and eliminate the causes of war and violence.

Mutually Enhancing Human-Earth Relationship - ways of life and means of livelihood that do not degrade ecosystem resilience; ecologically sound economics; ecosystem harm reduction.

Equality - recognition of basic dignity; extension of basic respect; human solidarity; equitable access to the means of life; equitable access to development resources.

Ecological Footprint - shared life space; shared draw on resource base and ecological services; habitat preservation; biodiversity preservation; cultural preservation.

Integrity - truthfulness; ethical consistency; trustworthiness; unwavering commitment to human betterment; unwavering focus on nurture and well being; working for a sense of cohesive meaning in the nourishment of souls.

Ecological Sound Adaptation - design for living according to the integrity of the biotic environment; ways of life and means of livelihood that are congruent with earth's life support processes and systems; active enhancement of biotic processes and systems.

Community - mutual support; enhancement of relationships; cooperative reciprocity; sharing of spiritual and physical commons; ceremonial representation and enactment of social and spiritual reality.

Social Ecology - ecological relationships inherently interactive and therefore social; the whole ecosphere as a domain of social relationships; human communities always within the relational context of earth's commonwealth of life; ceremonial representation of this reality.

Service - life and work orientation around contribution to community; human services; education; health; useful goods and services; spiritual vision and aesthetic creation; public policy and civic engagement; social justice; economic security; whole life development.

Stewardship - working to advance a mutually enhancing human-earth relationship; ecosystem restoration; energy use conservation; transition from nonrenewable to renewable energy and materials; local production for local use; green building; environmental education; local currencies; ecological footprint reduction; ecological sound economic activity.

This translation of Friends testimonies into the ecological world view creates a new zone of learning and action. It invigorates learning by focusing it on the first order realities of the human-earth relationship. It galvanizes action by embedding it in a seamless blend of spiritual tradition and spiritual innovation - human solidarity and human betterment on one hand, and the recognition earth's ecological integrity on the other: Two hands working together at one task.

The Experience of the Divine and the Ecological World View

Our religious life, our spiritual survival, and the fate of the human, now hang on our engagement with this encompassing task, the task Thomas Berry calls, "the great work."⁽³⁰⁾ We are, perhaps, in a situation that both mirrors and reverses the experience of ancient Israel. We are looking again into the land of Canaan, the landscape of earth's biotic integrity. A new sense of the Divine is emerging that will enable us to become useful and contributing citizens within the whole community of life in this land, rather than invaders, displacers, exploiters, and destroyers, as in the past. We may not have an adequate name for this new sense of the Divine, and that may be a good thing. A little caution is in order after several millenniums of such certainty and such mixed guidance. In this new psychic space, in this new perspective of the spirit, a new metaphysical reality (new to the Western Tradition) is emerging. Cooperative reciprocity, reverence for life, and nurture are replacing the domination of personal moral will and the ethos of human aggrandizement.

Whether this new sense of the Divine and its full functional effect on behaviour will emerge in the current and rising generation is a troubling question. On the face of it, the prospects do not seem hopeful. It seems likely a great fling of human aggrandizement and a great behavioural sink of societal regression are yet to be played out. But, at least, we are now at a

point in the human situation where the options are clear. Either the processes of cultural and economic development become infused with the ethos of cooperative reciprocity and ecological resilience, or the trajectory of unlimited economic growth, inequitable capital accumulation, intense competition, wasteful consumption and resource wars will continue to grind earth's ecosystems into subsidence and societal health into regression, and, perhaps both, into collapse.

There can be no doubt that in the long run the powers and processes of earth will prevail. At what cost to humans depends on the adaptive stance we take. If we can shift our collective focus to the human-earth relationship, and build the discipline of cooperative reciprocity into every level of this relationship, we will have a better chance of redeeming our culture from its renegade status, and, perhaps, giving our story the prospect of a much longer and more equitable run than is currently in view.

At some point down this road, the Angel of History may find a resting place under a great tree by a clear flowing stream, the Storm of Progress now a painful memory in sad poetry, while nearby children gather flowers on their way to decorate the pavilion where citizens from the surrounding settlements will soon gather to honour the Order of the Soul in the Great Commonwealth of Life.

As we gain skill in making this shift, we may be pleasantly surprised to find ecological consciousness and the presence of the Divine pivoting into a single focus. In the simplicity and clarity of this revelation we may pause and wonder why it has taken us so long to get our bearings.

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