

An Economy with the Holiness of Life

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“Probably the most urgent question now faced by people who would adhere to the Bible is this: What sort of economy would be responsible to the holiness of life?” (Berry, 1993)

If life is seen as holy, then life is exalted or worthy of complete devotion and life is venerated as sacred.

When Moses was on Mt Sinai, he was instructed by God to tell his people to live in an economy responsible to the holiness of life. In Leviticus, Chapter 25 there are calls to let the land rest every 7 years and to not even harvest volunteer crops. After seven x seven years i.e. 49 years, the next year being the 50th year, is the Jubilee year, a holy year. There will be liberty to all debtors, cancelling all debts and it will be fine to eat volunteer crops. They were to feel free to return to their original home and reclaim it. In modern day parlance the Jubilee was the Great Reset.

God said the land is mine. Let us suppose that God is Holy Creation or Sacred Creation. “Sacred Creation said the land is mine and you are not free to sell it permanently. You are tenants and sharecroppers.”

Recall that the Ten Commandments were also dictated on Mt Sinai. What if we had paid as much attention to the aforementioned land instructions as we have to the Ten Commandments, through history?

In contrast to the seven year plans of Leviticus and the reset of the Jubilee, in the modern era, corporations have the rights of people and their wealth keeps accumulating.

“A New Zealand river was granted the same rights as humans. The worldview of the Whanganui iwi is to treat the river as a living entity, as an indivisible whole, rather than owning and managing it (Roy, 2017). If I was a betting man, I would bet that our survival as a human species will be further advanced by granting these rights to rivers, rather than to corporations, with their awe-insisting cathedrals of glass and steel” (Martin, 2019).

What if we re-phrased Psalm 24? The King James version is “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof.” Perhaps it could be “The Earth belongs to Sacred Creation. Everything in all the world is Sacred Creation.”

“After the great flaring forth of the universe, as Thomas Berry (1990) so aptly phrased it, 13.5 billion years ago, there occurred a great many grand cosmic events. Let’s say the one-year story of Earth begins, about 4.5 billion years ago, on January 1, when Earth formed. On February 18, 3.9 billion years ago, photosynthetic bacteria appeared.

It took until June 11, or 2.5 billion years ago, for oxygen and ozone to become apparent, and it was not until some six hundred million years ago (November 12) that multicellular organisms and animals began to grace our planet. A short while later, 440 million years ago (November 25), plants emerged from the sea.

Although often considered to be from the distant past, dinosaurs arrived relatively recently in Earth's story, 145 million years ago (December 19); they then disappeared in an extinction event, 67 million years ago (December 25 at 10:30 a.m.).

Following the dark period after the dinosaurs' demise, the Cenozoic era began — sixty-five million years ago, on December 25 at 5:30 p.m. The amazing diversity of life this era spawned appeared at a time when many celebrate the joy of a new beginning, with a Christmas feast.

Our species of wonderful creative genius, and also, unfortunately, horrifically destructive capacity, first walked on Earth about two hundred thousand years ago (December 31 at 11:37 p.m.). The Holocene, the last ten thousand years, when conditions have been unusually benign for agriculture, started a mere seventy seconds before the present in the one-year story of Earth" (Martin, 2019).

Now we are in the Anthropocene, even according to geologists. Technological humans have had the impact of shifting earth systems from one epoch to another. Tom Berry argued at a workshop I attended that we have changed the Cenozoic era to the Technozoic and we have the choice, in this present moment of grace, to continue in Technozoic or to shift paths to the Ecozoic era. How will we exercise our option in this present moment of grace?

Let's go back to Wendell Berry (1993). "An economy with ways of human housekeeping, the ways by which the human household is situated and maintained within the household of Nature."

We connect to Earth through land in specific places and in my case it was where I grew up; east half lot 19, Concession 1, Mapleton township (formerly Peel), Wellington County. The Anishinaabe Mississaugas of the Credit and Haudenosaunee managed the land with over 80% forest cover, with forest garden systems (FGS) of 1600 species and 3 sisters' gardens (Martin, 2019). Their lives were in the context of a gift economy.

"From the viewpoint of a private property economy, the "gift" is deemed to be "free" because we obtain it free of charge, at no cost.

But in the gift economy, gifts are not free. The essence of the gift is that it creates a set of relationships.

The currency of a gift economy is, at its root, reciprocity. In Western thinking, private land is understood to be a "bundle of rights," whereas in a gift economy, property has a "bundle of responsibilities" attached" (Kimmerer, 2013).

Our home farm is at the edge of the Haldimand tract and is now owned by our next door neighbours. Neither the Anishinaabe nor the Haudenosaunee pick berries or hunt game there now. How does reconciliation apply to the land held by many private white owners in the modern Queen's Bush from Waterloo & Wellington Counties to Owen Sound?

Which people hold responsibilities for that land now? Only the current owners? Who will have the roles of the clan mothers and clan grandmothers and hereditary chiefs, those who look out for the ecological whole and the Commons? What relationships pertain to this land?

Black families started settling in the Queen's Bush in the 1830s and 1840s (Brown-Kubisch, 2004). They cut trees, planted crops and built cabins. There was a school for black children on west half lot 19 (next door to our farm) built in 1840. However, it burned and was destroyed in 1849.

In a beautifully written account, Geoff Martin (2019) reveals how John and Eliza Little escaped from slavery and settled on lot 20 (on the other side of our farm) in the 1830s. By the early 1860s, the Littles had left for Haiti and Geoff's great-great-great-great grandfather Jacob B. Martin bought the land.

Most black families in the Queen's Bush had very little money after fleeing slavery in the US and when the Upper Canada government surveyed the land and demanded cash for deeds and taxed the properties, black families did not yet have enough cash and had to leave.

As a child, I thought Wallenstein was boring. Now I know three disparate groups collided in Wallenstein in the 1800s. All were connected to the land of the Queen's Bush. The Anishinaabe lived by a gift economy and FGS and teachings of the Seven Grandfathers (wisdom, love, respect, bravery, honesty, humility and truth). African Canadians survived extreme injustice and persevered even without education and having had links severed to their original traditions. They told incredible stories of resilience after escaping and starting new lives in Upper Canada at the end of the Underground Railroad (Drew, 2000). My Mennonite ancestors were pacifist farmers and lived by the knowledge of the Martyrs Mirror. A singular story is about an Anabaptist Mennonite man pursued by a soldier across a frozen river. The Mennonite man made it across, but the soldier crashed through the ice, and was rescued by the Mennonite man. However, the soldier then arrested the Mennonite man, who was burned at the stake.

Given the heritage of these three groups, there was potential for an economy, responsible to the holiness of life. In the end, colonialism prevailed and Mennonites, although pacifists, lived in the private property economy, raised cash, bought land, paid taxes and are still there.

The history of Wallenstein and the Queen's Bush elicits questions for an economy responsible to the holiness of life.

- 1) How can the reciprocity of a gift economy and the teachings of the seven grandfathers inform how land is managed in the Anthropocene?
- 2) How has inequality damaged us and damaged our relationship to land?

3) How do urbanites relate to land and support regenerative management of land?

Increasingly our challenge is to make decisions and to act responsibly for the Commons on land, oceans and even in space around Earth. Part of the holiness of life is agency and freedom for all; not just for the wealthy.

The story of Grand Inquisitor is told in *The Brothers Karamazov* (Dostoyevsky, 1975) and paraphrased in my book (Martin, 2019).

The story is set in sixteenth-century Spain, during the Inquisition. In the tale, Christ returns to Earth for a visit and arrives in Seville. He wants to quietly visit his children during their suffering. While in Seville, he is inspired to perform a few miracles to heal some of his distraught followers; these actions attract the attention of the Grand Inquisitor. This aged cardinal of the Cathedral of Seville promptly jails Christ and then privately questions him. The Grand Inquisitor wants to know why Jesus, his prisoner, is daring to meddle, especially given that it had taken the Church fifteen hundred years to tidy up the mess left by Christ's last visit.

The Grand Inquisitor talks while his prisoner listens. "Was it not you who said so often in those days, 'I shall make you free'?" After chastising the prisoner for offering more freedom than men (gender-neutral language was not a strength of the Grand Inquisitor) could bear, the Grand Inquisitor goes on to argue that the Church had vanquished freedom to make men happy.....

The Grand Inquisitor feels the burden of carrying the freedom of the followers of Christ who have surrendered theirs to the Church in exchange for being fed. He believes they realize there cannot be enough freedom and bread for everyone, that they will never be able to let everyone have their fair share....

Today the spectacular cathedrals of commerce draw our eyes and imaginations up toward fantastic possibilities. Isn't it interesting that the large food corporations, just like farmers, use slogans such as "feeding the world" to put a positive spin on their operations? I wonder if some CEOs would argue (just like the Grand Inquisitor) that "they (the people) will never, never feed themselves."

Remember our ancestors who escaped to North America from the clearances in Scotland, from the potato famine in Ireland, from the persecution of Mennonites in Europe, Russia, and Ukraine, from the horrors of the First World War and the Second World War, and from other global oppression.

If our ancestors could talk to us about how we have become dependent on corporations and vulnerable to excess debt, what would they advise? Surely not to become more vulnerable and more indebted while buying more stuff.

We have several options. The first is to encourage 21st century leadership so that corporate bosses earn in the range of 10 to 30 times the average wage of their employees rather than 100 to 300 times x as much. Second, we could develop a Guaranteed Annual Income to directly address poverty (Segal 2019). A third option, which will reduce GHG emissions, is to get rid of fossil-fuel subsidies, currently \$500 billion to \$600 billion per annum, and to do this by 2020, rather than waiting until 2025 (Rockström et al., 2017). While implementing option three, the fourth option is to leave none behind, as we continue and accelerate our move to a new clean economy.

Our world is bedevilled by the myth, the mystery and some may say the miracle of perpetual economic growth. Is this sacred or holy?

It is possible for us to feel good about using our resources well and to stretch, excel, and actualize ourselves in the visual arts, drama, music, dance, literature, crafts, storytelling, meditation, spiritual rituals, and other distinctly human activities (Martin 2019).

Let's consider Tom Berry's call for 'inscendence' as opposed to 'transcendence' as we seek Wendell Berry's economy, responsible to the holiness of life. Sometimes with inscendence we as individuals or as a species can "descend to our instinctive resources in order to reinvent ourselves."

In 1920, Earl Wilbur, addressed the Ministerial Conference in Oakland, California on the Meaning and Lessons of Unitarian History.

"The early Anabaptists, who are also our historical and spiritual ancestors, in their direct way of Mysticism, made both their denials and their affirmations on the authority of what they deemed the inward witness of the Holy Spirit as interpreter of the Scripture to which they, too, professed to appeal as the final word of God.

And it is noteworthy not only that some of the most outstanding leaders among the Anabaptists of the first generation of the Reformation were anti-trinitarian, but it was out of Anabaptist elements in Poland that the first Unitarian churches there, were for the most part, organized; that Anabaptists assisted in preparing the way for Unitarianism in Transylvania.; that it was their successors, the Mennonites in Holland, who gave our Polish brethren in exile their most friendly reception."

Let's return from the middle of the second modern millennium to the start of the third. Tom Berry (1999) in The Great Work, says "Universities must decide whether they will continue training persons for temporary survival in the Cenozoic Era or whether they will begin educating students for the emerging Ecozoic... We have such vast understanding of the universe and how it

functions and yet we manifest such inability to use this knowledge beneficially either for ourselves or any other mode of earthly being.”

“Those who explore potential plant production in space at the Controlled Environment Systems Research Facility at the University of Guelph (ces1.ces.uoguelph.ca/index.shtml) are clear that space food systems cannot allow waste, but rather require cycling of nutrients, water, and gases. May this wisdom land on Earth” (Martin 2019).

Indigenous people carry wisdom about how to live on Earth for millennia, beyond our focus on quarterly reports, annual meetings, decades of achievement and centuries of colonialism.

“Perhaps the grace of the twenty-first century is that even today “the world’s Indigenous groups ... manage 80 per cent of Earth’s biodiversity, in part because their ancestral lands make up 22 per cent of the world’s land surface” (Chellaney, 2019). We need their husbanding, their traditional knowledge, and their model of respect for Earth” (Martin 2019).

How can we enhance their influence for the sake of all creatures, including us? A good start is to replace our faith in the miracle of perpetual economic growth with respect for the miracle of changing our world views to embrace an economy which is responsible to the sacredness of life.

I close with a snippet from Charles Dicken’s ‘A Tale of Two Cities.’ Mail coach passengers heard a galloping horse. The horse and its rider, Jerry, unseen in heavy fog, halted and then, cautioned by the coach guard, slowly emerged from mist to hand passenger Lorry a note.

“He opened it in the light of the coach lamp and read “Wait at Dover for Ma’amselle.” “Jerry, say that my answer is ‘Recalled to life.’”

Jerry started in his saddle. “That’s a blazing strange answer,” said he, at his hoarsest”

The 1775 answer in the mist pertained to a withering prisoner, Dr Manette, who was ‘recalled to life’ as a physician and doting father. We are also beckoned, nearly two and a half centuries later; ‘recalled to life.’ Our stagnation and decay in today’s prison of increasing greenhouse gases does not have to persist.

If we stop cowering and replace what imprisons us, there are opportunities to be fully alive. Take that ‘blazing strange answer,’ ‘recalled to life,’ act on it, and we may well develop an economy responsible to the holiness of life.

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