

## The Mad Monk

Andrew Kimbrell

Andrew Kimbrell is an environmental attorney and writer who directs the International Center For Technology Assessment. He is author of *Fatal Harvest; The Tragedy of Industrial Agriculture* (Island Press), with other recent works including two Schumacher lectures, "Cold Evil: Technology and Ethics" and "Salmon Economics (and other lessons).



More than twenty-five years ago I would regularly visit an esoteric book shop near Greenwich Village in New York City aptly named "The Mad Monk." The small store's crowded shelves contained myriad spiritual and progressive books and periodicals. I went there. However, primarily for one reason. On a low shelf at the back of the store was a series of large paper-bound blue volumes with the imprint Riverdale Center for Religious Research. They were the essays of Thomas Berry. Every few months a new volume would arrive, which I eagerly grabbed up and read with that unalloyed excitement attendant to having discovered a great soul and intellect.

The scope of Berry's learning and wisdom was unprecedented in my reading. His insights were (and are) keen, deep and profoundly empathetic to his subject matter which ranged from Asian religions, Teilhard de Chardin, Carl Jung and Mircea Eliade to economics, the destructive "entrancement" of modern technology, and the looming environmental crisis. Perhaps most remarkably, Berry's essays, whether about a spiritual tradition, a thinker, or the natural world, always manage to capture something of the numinous in the subject on which he writes. His works are infused with a kind of enthusiasm (that reminds us of that word's roots "en-theos-ism"—seeing God in all things.)

I finally met Father Thomas in 1981 when he gave a guest sermon at a Methodist Church in Park Slope, Brooklyn. His theme was cities could be redeemed through a kind of ecological atonement (at-one-ment with Nature) that would lead them to comport themselves with the ecosystems in which they are situated. At the time I was in great spiritual turmoil, and I asked him if he would give me instruction. Kind and generous, as always, he agreed and there began my two-year tutelage under Father Thomas. It was really a (small c) catholic education involving all manner of spiritual, psychological, literary and ecological lessons. Most immediately it did result in his baptizing me into the Catholic Church. But his patient mentoring transformed me not only spiritually, but also practically. The work I am doing as an environmental attorney and writer I owe in great part to his early and continuing guidance and inspiration.

More specifically, I continue to take as a first principle in my life and work this admonition of Father Thomas: "The first condition for...entering a future...is to realize that the universe is a communion of subjects, not a collection of objects. The devastation of the planet can be seen as a direct consequence of the loss of this capacity for human presence to and reciprocity with the non-human world."

With Thomas' guidance I continue to work with others around the world to re-imagine and recreate my profession, the law, as a true com-

ponent of the Earth Project. This means fashioning a legal regime that is Earth centered, a new kind of Natural Jurisprudence that can truly address the myriad environmental and social crises now upon us. Of course as Father Thomas has often noted, all professions need to undergo this transformation in the understanding that "...the human project is itself a component of the Earth project, that our intimacy with the Earth is our way to intimacy with each other. Such are the foundations of our journey into the future." In this and in so many other insights and visions Father Thomas's work provides us all with an invaluable road map to achieve the *Pax Gaia* upon which our very physical and spiritual survival depends.