

Whither Goeth CES? “. . . into All the World”

By Herman Greene

January 2003 marks the beginning of the fourth year of the life of the Center for Ecozoic Studies (CES). We have never tried to articulate in this journal what CES is about and where it is going. At the recent CES Board retreat, we took note of this omission and decided it was time to do this. We now declare ourselves to the world . . . not for our own sake, but for the sake of the Great Work of bringing into being the Ecozoic Era, a work we share with other people and many other centers of the Ecozoic vision.

Our work involves
many people.

Our work involves many people. It is not the work only of the small group of people located primarily in North Carolina who have brought CES into being. No, we are becoming an organization with worldwide reach.

Our subscribers are those who join with us in the Great Work. Thus, we see this journal and all that we do as a service to those who (i) share with us the tasks of education, research and artistic expression for the realization of the Ecozoic Era, and (ii) find in CES and its members meaningful links in carrying out these tasks.

Now I will tell, in brief, our story. I will describe the core elements of our work and explain our Foundational Documents and where they may be obtained. Then I will discuss our decision to become a membership organization and explain how we understand what it means to be a member of CES. Finally, I will discuss the special projects and international activities in which CES is engaged.

Our Story

CES grew out of the Center for Reflection on the Second Law, a nonprofit organization based in Raleigh, North Carolina (CFRSL), and headed by Jim Berry, Thomas Berry’s brother. In January 1995 I wrote a letter to Jim Berry and Thomas Berry in which I suggested the formation of a “Berry Society” along the lines of the Jung Society. Whether out of modesty or a sense of what was needed and what was not, both of them rapidly rejected a society bearing the name “Berry.” Nonetheless, I presented the idea again at a February 1995 meeting of the Board of CFRSL, and a committee was formed composed of Albert Hardy, Sue Tiedeman, Evelyn

Mattern and me to look further into a way to bring local groups into being that could carry on the work of CFRSL (the work we now call the Great Work). This committee came up with three key ideas: (i) rather than the name Berry Society, we chose the name “Ecozoic Society,” (ii) we identified “three key building blocks” of an Ecozoic Society, which were the New Story, bioregionalism, and ecological spirituality, and (iii) we decided to form support groups that would have a dynamic of reporting, learning, envisioning, and then going into the world to act.

In April of 1996, I spoke with Thomas Berry about our idea of having an organization called the “Ecozoic Society.” At first he liked the idea, and then later he said, “The Ecozoic Society isn’t some little group in Chapel Hill, it’s the whole world.” Ultimately we came up with the name “Support Groups for an Ecozoic Society.” Our work began when we put together a handbook for forming a support group and presented this for the first time in July 1996 at a conference in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, led by Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme. Also at this time I wrote “Call for an Ecozoic Society,” which described the three building blocks and was published in the July 1996 CFRSL newsletter. This article was later republished in *Earthlight Magazine* (Winter 1997-98), along with an announcement concerning the availability of the handbook. As a result of this effort, we fulfilled over 100 requests for the handbook, and we heard that several “support groups” came into being. Each of these groups opened with a discussion of their experiences with nature (to aid in reintegrating humans with the natural world), studied the New Story, bioregionalism or ecological spirituality (to learn about the Great Work), and concluded with an open discussion session (to talk about participants’ own plans, insights and questions).

In September 1998, Jim Berry died, and shortly thereafter his beloved wife Mary also died. These losses had a major impact on CFRSL and the work we were doing with the support groups. For a period, all was still.

Jim had always said that after he died, the Piedmont Bioregional Institute of Chapel Hill (PBI) should take on the work of CFRSL, and gradually this change took place. Consequently, in January 1999, the Support Groups for an Ecozoic Society program shifted over to PBI.

In the next six months, the foundations for CES were laid. In conversations between Albert Hardy and me, the name “Center for Ecozoic

Studies” was chosen. In August 1999 I wrote the essay “Foundational Ideas for the Formation of the Center for Ecozoic Studies” and drafted the first “Concept Paper” describing its proposed structure. In December 1999 the first CES “Service Group” meeting was held, and on January 1, 2000, CES officially came into being.

In September 2000, the first edition of *The Ecozoic Reader* was published and it has been issued quarterly since that time.

In September 2001, the outline of a course to be taught by CES was put forward by Elaine and Nelson Stover, John and Lynda Cock, Julie and Ted Purcell, and Valerie Vickers, with the help of others, called “Our Great Work: Toward a New Earth Resolve.” The course was first offered to the public in August 2002.

In January 2002, CES separated from PBI to become a nonprofit organization in its own right.

The Core Elements of CES’ Present Work

Here are the four core elements of CES’ present work: (i) *The Ecozoic Reader*, (ii) the course, “Our Great Work: Toward a New Earth Resolve,” (iii) Ecozoic Study Circles, and (iv) a website. In addition, CES is involved in various special projects, and participates in conferences, provides speakers and leads educational programs. The work of CES is supported by an administrative function.

The Ecozoic Reader

The Ecozoic Reader is at the heart of the work of CES. Through the Reader, we seek to heighten sensitivity to the integral relation of humans and nature, tell and celebrate the story of the universe, and provide insight into the transition to an Ecozoic society. Thus far, we have not attempted to expand the readership of the *Reader* or expand its format. We feel it is time to do so now. The feedback we have received indicates to us that the *Reader* provides a vessel for communication that would not otherwise exist. Therefore, we are ready to commit to the long-term publication of the *Reader* with all that entails.

The *Reader* depends on articles from its readers. We invite you to share your thoughts, stories, dreams and art regarding the Ecozoic and the Great Work by sending them to us for publication. We also invite you to share the

Reader itself with your friends and colleagues, so they may also share in its benefits.

“Our Great Work: Toward a New Earth Resolve” – Our Educational Programs

CES’ course team feels that the presentation of “Our Great Work: Toward a New Earth Resolve” last September, at the conference EarthSpirit Rising IV outside Asheville, North Carolina, was successful. The team has a goal of teaching the course six times in 2003. Please contact us if you would like to sponsor a course or would like to assist in its further development. An outline and description of the course is on our website. The goal is to develop a course that can be taught many times and in many places by people who receive training. A complete teaching guide for the course, and materials for use in presenting the course, will be developed.

In addition to this course, which focuses on the understanding necessary for the Great Work, CES is developing an experiential course on “Awakening to the Universe” under the leadership of Julie and Ted Purcell.

Ecozoic Study Circles

Someone said, “If you want your movement to grow, go deeper.” Sometimes we hesitate to “preach to the choir,” but historically it is precisely when those who are already committed to a movement of ideas develop the ideas further—in other words, go deeper—that the ideas spread. For several years CES has made available a handbook for forming a group around Ecozoic ideas, but we have not actively promoted formation of such groups. We now feel that it is time for this to occur.

We believe Ecozoic Study Circles are needed because features of the Ecozoic understanding are centrally important and serve as crucial guides and inspiration for action. The Ecozoic emphasis differs somewhat from other environmental efforts. The Ecozoic emphasis is on how humans may live in an integral relation with nature. The human needs to be “reinvented” and move on to create a new mode of civilizational presence. There is an emerging body of understanding about what this reinvention/evolution means. The work of Thomas Berry provides core concepts that are of critical importance in this effort, yet his work must be supplemented by many others. By being a part of an Ecozoic Study Circle people may gain understanding, make decisions about the direction of their lives, and receive support and feedback.

We do not feel everyone should be in an Ecozoic Study Circle or that any individual should feel any pressure to do so. We do hope, however, that these circles can help in strengthening the Ecozoic movement.

The “Ecozoic Study Circle Handbook” is on our website. Copies are also available from our office.

Ecozoicstudies.org – Our Website

The potential services of our website have scarcely begun to be realized. We are revising the website and we intend to make it available to people around the world for learning about CES, the Ecozoic and the Great Work. We welcome your contributions to the website, and your suggestions on how it can be improved.

The Foundational Documents of CES

The Board of Directors of CES has adopted certain documents as being foundational to the work of CES. The primary documents are the three key books that Thomas Berry has authored or co-authored: *The Dream of the Earth*, *The Universe Story* (co-authored with Brian Swimme), and *The Great Work*. The work of CES is based on ideas contained in these books. These ideas hold our work together and center us, but we regard them as springboards, not ends in themselves.

Similarly additional essays and statements by Thomas Berry and others help to ground and center our work. These essays and statements are also springboards, not ends in themselves.

Our Foundational Documents are described on Page 9 of this *Reader*. In addition, you will find on this page citations telling where documents have been published in past *Readers* or in the current issue. Copies of the Foundational Documents, with the exception of the books by Berry and Swimme, are on our website.

Membership in CES

CES has decided to become a membership organization. Concurrently with the publication of this issue of the *Reader*, we are issuing an invitation to our subscribers and others to become members. The essence of membership is a commitment to share with us in education, research and artistic expression leading to the Ecozoic Era. Education could mean teaching in a classroom or teaching your grandchildren about gardening.

Research includes both theoretical and applied research. Theoretical research on the Ecozoic involves all disciplines, from the sciences, to the professions, to the humanities. Applied research might mean changing one's lifestyle as a way of moving toward the Ecozoic, or developing an environmentally restorative product. Artistic expression could mean saying a prayer, doing a dance, writing a poem or singing a song. The Great Work can mean many things, as many things as there are people.

At this point, we don't think the focus of membership should be on CES's organizational concerns, but rather on how people symbolize and act out their own commitment to the Great Work. Certainly, however, we will appreciate the support that members give CES as an institution.

Special Projects and International Activities

In addition to its ongoing programs, CES takes on special projects both in the United States and in other countries. Some of the projects on which we are now working include the translation into Chinese and publication in China of Thomas Berry's book, *The Great Work*; co-convening a seminar on "Ecology and Social Change" at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; and introducing ideas of the Ecozoic and the Great Work into the field of process philosophy. We are also working on developing a study center at a major university, which would examine the components of an ecologically sound society.

On the international front, we have been approached by a person in China about having a CES in China. We believe the Foundational Documents and the Ecozoic Study Circle Handbook will be helpful to those who wish to engage in other countries in the kind of work we are about. We cannot envision the exact form international work through CES will take, but we feel it is important to convey to people in other lands the ideas with which all of us are working.

Join Us

We are only a small group of volunteers, but we have big ideas. One of our Foundational Statements ends this way:

The Great Work. The epic task, or "Great Work," of our time is to bring into being the Ecozoic Era. It is a task in which everyone is involved and from which no one is exempt, and it will require

change in every aspect of human society. On it the fate of the Earth depends, and in it lies the hope of the future.

Join us! We have a Great Work to do.

