

MANIFESTO: THE MAD FARMER LIBERATION FRONT

by Wendell Berry

Love the quick profit, the annual raise, vacation with pay.
Want more of everything ready-made.
Be afraid to know your neighbors and to die.
And you will have a window in your head.
Not even your future will be a mystery any more.
Your mind will be punched in a card and shut away in a little drawer.
When they want you to buy something they will call you.
When they want you to die for profit they will let you know.
So, friends, every day do something that won't compute.
Love the Lord. Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.
Denounce the government and embrace the flag.
Hope to live in that free republic for which it stands.
Give your approval to all you cannot understand.
Praise ignorance, for what man
has not encountered he has not destroyed.
Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millennium.
Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.

Say that the leaves are harvested when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophesy such returns.
Put your faith in the two inches of humus that will build under the trees
every thousand years.
Listen to carrion--put your ear close,
and hear the faint chattering of the songs that are to come.
Expect the end of the world.
Laugh. Laughter is immeasurable.
Be joyful though you have considered all the facts.
So long as women do not go cheap
for power, please women more than men.
Ask yourself: Will this satisfy a woman satisfied to bear a child?
Will this disturb the sleep of a woman near to giving birth?
Go with your love to the fields.
Lie easy in the shade. Rest your head in her lap.
Swear allegiance to what is highest your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicians can predict the motions
of your mind, lose it.
Leave it as a sign to mark a false trail, the way you didn't go.
Be like the fox who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Return to Berry's poem and review these lines: "Love the Lord. Love the world. Work for nothing./ Take all that you have and be poor." What does it mean to "*take* all that you have and *be* poor"? In what ways do these tasks call us to be courageous? What other lines from the poem strike you as daunting and inspiring?
2. In his remarks, Alex mentioned GK Chesterton's comparison of the poet and the logician. Review the differences between these. Which is the more courageous stance?
3. The speaker in the poem seems to suggest that we are not merely organisms in an environment. Rather, to be human is to be a self in a world, a world in which the human being—unlike the animal—is free to live authentically or inauthentically, to practice authentic speech and seek true understanding or lapse into idle curiosity and false speech. But in contemporary American society a radical faith in the physical sciences as the primary domain of the real—along with a powerful consumer economy fueled by constant technological advances—makes it all too easy for us to become blind to what we are.¹ St. Paul perhaps had these forces in mind when he talked about "principalities and powers" (Ephesians 6:12). How might courageously "practicing resurrection" move us toward a proper confrontation with these sources of blindness? When "generals and politicians can predict the motions of [our] minds," how do we recover our true selves?
4. Turning back to Berry's poem, what images propel you to rethink what it means to practice resurrection in your academic pursuits? When might we be compelled to confront "principalities and powers" in our academics?
5. What vision of community does the poem present us with? What aspects of life together require courage if we are to flourish?

COLLECT FOR THE SECOND SUNDAY IN LENT

ALMIGHTY God, who sees that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves; Keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

¹We are indebted to Farrell O'Gorman for helping us frame a proper understanding of selfhood in the face of contemporary pressures. He ably does so in his book *Peculiar Crossroads: Flannery O'Connor, Walker Percy, and Catholic Vision in Postwar Southern Fiction* (LSU 2004).