

Struggling Against the Manipulators

“For our struggle isn’t against enemies of flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this present darkness...” Ephesians 6:12

Wendell Berry is a prolific poet and novelist, also a farmer and environmentalist, who takes the Gospel seriously. Many Christians, myself included, find his writings edifying as we also struggle to take the Gospel seriously.

In 1991 he published a poem, *Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front*, that deals with the struggle to not allow other forces – the *rulers* and *authorities* above, also called *powers* and *principalities* in earlier translations of the New Testament – to govern our lives. What we’re up against aren’t enemies of flesh and blood – although there are some of those also – but powers and authorities who use whatever means necessary to know what and how we’re thinking so they can manipulate us. Manipulate us into buying (or buying into) products, services, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions that serve a certain few. As Walter Lippman said, “The public must be put in their place so responsible men can make decisions apart from the herd.”

Berry’s poem is filled with things one can do to be unpredictable to those who want to run our lives for their benefit. One of the things he says is this: *Want more of everything ready-made...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...”*

Isn’t that true? All I have to do is order a pullover online for Cheri for her birthday, and suddenly my computer is infested with popup advertisements for women’s clothing. Soon, not only do I get the next company catalog, but catalogs from all the other companies to whom my address was sold. Had I been able to follow a pattern and sew the article of clothing myself, the bleeps wouldn’t know as much about me as they do. But no. I had to buy it ready-made.

Many of us can remember a time when not everything was ready-made. My dad and his brother-in-law built the house I grew up in one summer between school terms. I twice started a church. When I was in elementary school, my mom and grandmother made my shirts out of flour sacks. (General Mills did not have a swoosh.) Most women couldn’t make denim jeans, but they knew how to make them last longer by ironing patches to the knees, which were the first things to go. (Much like getting older.) And how many kids grew up making their own fun with old boxes and ragdolls and hoops for toys? There was a time when it was much harder for the politicians and corporations to get a glimpse at what is going on in our minds.

Of course, we live at a time when information is plentiful and easily available. If one wants to make or attempt something from scratch, he/she can go online and get the materials and instructions. These days there seems to be a college or university on half the street corners in Albuquerque. But most every time one even makes an inquiry, one’s interest is being recorded and sold in an attempt, as Berry says, *to predict the motions of your mind.*

It's an overlooked fact that wanting more of everything ready-made gives those who want to manipulate us more power over us. And this isn't to say that ready-made items are bad. It's to say that God created us to be fully-alive human beings. And we're not when our life is little more than wanting to obtain the next generation of an iPhone or the next bite of political pablum or the next half-baked truth. If that's the case, we're largely-manipulated human beings, not fully-alive human beings.

Control the rabble. Fabricate consumers of products, beliefs, attitudes, and opinions. Make obtaining "things" the essence of life. It's a principal of those in power, or who think they are. I think it was Jesus who said, "*My kingdom is not of this world.*" So, be in the world, but not of the world. Question. - DJ

