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August 12, 1982

Circular No.30

For over two years we have fumbled and stumbled and groped toward defining what this endeavor is about. The upcoming two or three sessions of the Second Law Study Group may move us ahead. The objective, as always, is to satisfy the deep need to know who we are and why we are, and how we ought to be. Religion and philosophy examine those questions and whatever answers they produce become the forces that drive human action. Whatever we become is the result of actions taken in pursuit of dreams formed out of perceptions of what is "true", "good", "right", "ordained", "sacred", "natural", explained and justified by religion. The "Technological Age" (which many believe is coming to an end) has been energized by a myth which envisions a millennial paradise achieved through the transformation of the earth. Its concomitant presentation of a final happy ending when everything is set right, when suffering is rewarded and evil punished, establishes the necessary hypnotic state rendering a people blind to the despoilation of an earth seen as subordinate and hostile. Work is defined in a recent papal encyclical as divinely ordained for the purpose of subduing the earth, an out-dated concept suited to justify the technological exploitation of every natural thing.

But others are saying that the next quarter century may well be one of the more numinous periods in the history of the western world and even in the global history of humanity. The sacred order is breaking into our present world at a thousand different points. In this country especially, people are awakening from the technological trance that has governed our western mode of consciousness during the immediate past. Now, shocked by the devastation of the earth and the threatening impasse in human affairs men experience the need for a different mode of being, for different values. Other ways of dealing with the inner and outer worlds, other ways of situating the human in space and time, other ways of relating to the earth process are now demanded.

And that gets me started on explaining what the Second Law Study Group will be looking at in the next couple of sessions. First, Thomas Berry will lead a discussion on Future Forms of Religious Experience on 25 August. Then on September 28, Jim Gorman and Leslie Real will talk about meditation, taking as a theme a Thomas Merton title Contemplation in the World of Action.

This is not an abandonment of the study of the future of North Carolina. Rather it is a reversion to a first-things-first approach. The drive toward industrialization in this state aims at the same vision of full employment and a fulfilled capacity for consumption of material things, made possible by an ever expanding technology, as the vision which inspired the now desolate cities of the industrial North. That vision has a religious dimension and a religious justification, and it is so basic and ingrained that hardly anyone questions its validity. The joy in the little town of Oxford over the new Revlon plant is undiminished by any thoughts of what happened in Smithfield when Sylvania moved out.

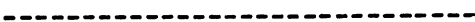
The analysis of the technological vision, the millennial dream, the work ethic, in the religious dimension will be one of the things Thomas Berry will cover; how it shaped the "American Way". And then how a new religion, a new experience of a transcendent numinous mode of being is beginning to emerge. This new consciousness is found more outside than inside traditional religious contexts. The broadened experience is too vast, too pervasive, too elemental to be contained within present statements of belief or practise. It functions at a level beyond the specific religious focus of the

immediate past although this new experience can be seen as continuation and revitalization rather than as break with past religious traditions. So basic is this new experience that it must be considered as reassertion of primordial modes of religious consciousness. Its primitive, often shamanistic, quality leads to new types of spiritual creativity. Its special quality is not only its interiority but also its efficacy in every phase of life. Its most distinctive aspect is in that phase of life that we designate as spirituality. Of the three basic areas of religious life, belief, worship, and spirituality, it is this last aspect that is now the main area of interest.

This turning to interior experience is fostered considerably by influences from the Asian world as well as from the shamanistic experience of tribal people. It is precisely in this new depth of interiority that we are overcoming the doctrinal and worship antagonisms that have characterized the past. (Witness the entry of many Trappist Monks into Zen disciplines.) Persons of differing backgrounds can now enter into profound religious communion with each other. Cultural and historical differentiation will in the future be seen as modes of human experience available to all humankind on a comprehensive scale. To realize that these modes of spiritual experience are not exclusive of each other will be one of the great achievements of future religious consciousness. The immediacy of the human withinness is founded ultimately on the experience of the numinous, on an awareness of the indwelling divine mystery beyond comprehension, of which Augustine said, "it is closer to us than we are to ourselves."

The human will find identity in the evolutionary, historical order. The outcome will necessarily tend to a world politic, a world economy, a world in which the life forces sustain each other within a viable ecological setting. It will become clear that the purpose of life is life. To play one's part in the grand succession of generation after generation always evolving always devoted to the enhancement of every form and manifestation of the natural.

You will realize that the effort here is to lay a foundation in religion for ordering human endeavor away from life destroying technologies and toward life enhancing, life preserving technologies, and to prove that the reasons for doing that are divine. For anyone who finds it difficult to depend on a divine mandate, it is no great drop down to a natural mandate. Redundancy in everything seems to be a universal law, and redundancy in scripture is fourfold: cosmic, verbal, historic, and human. All life repeats that the primary principle of life is life. Absolutely nothing takes precedence over the preservation of the earth's life systems.



August 25, 1982
7:30 p.m.

Thomas Berry

Reinventing Religion

September 28, 1982
7:30 p.m.

Jim Gorman
Les Real

Contemplation in the World of Action