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Is the sky falling? was the question brought up last month. Gary Coates says that we are in the final crisis out of which will emerge something much different from what we now know. Maybe better, maybe worse, surely different. Most people I talk to (Thomas Berry excepted) sort of lean back and say, "Well now, that is an overstatement. Who is Gary Coates (he is the editor of Resettling America), and why is he trying to scare us to death? I do not see that the evidence bears him out. Things are not really all that bad. Of course, we need to do some things to clean up the air and water and to keep the soil in place, but we will do what is necessary. Don't get so excited. It is bad for your blood pressure."

Or some people say, "You are trying to fight industrialization in North Carolina. Well, what is your alternative? If you think people are going to give up their washing machines and automobiles and go back to subsistence farming you are crazy." What they seem to be saying is that there is no alternative way to live. The automobile will continue to be the central artifact of civilization and the hi-tech home the central dream. Factories will provide the most desirable form of employment and life will evolve around a day at the plant and an evening at the TV. The Madison Avenue family finding joy in mouthwash, floor wax, deodorant, hair spray, and the final paradise of the beer bust is not a picture of ultimate emptiness but the picture of a grand America. The surrender to the money makers is complete. No life other than the life of the vacuous model finding happiness through toothpaste is within the reach of imagination.

The sky really is falling I am ready to argue. I am not only talking about what is covered in Global 2000; about water, soil, air, ozone, energy, forests, oceans, metals, wastes, radiation, and the extinction of a half to two million species of life. I am also talking about behavior which degrades more and more toward the despicable. In North Carolina, for instance, one only has to look at the way migrant farm labor is treated (growers recently obtained a court injunction nullifying a requirement that they furnish water to the field for drinking or washing off pesticides). Or one has only to look at a judicial and criminal justice system which outrages decency, or at a tax system aimed at the poor ~~to benefit the wealthy and the corporations of special interests~~. And there is a belligerence abroad, a failure of love, sour hatreds, human exploitation, contempt for the peacemakers, an us/them view of the world, the casting of disagreements into a context of demonology, by which those who disagree are classified as devils. There is a conviction on the part of many that wealth bestows goodness and demonstrates superiority, whereas poverty is a sign of divine disapproval and a mark of unworthiness. El Salvador is the metaphor of our time, and Jesse Helms its prophet.

If there is a glimmer of hope it rests, in my opinion, on a new appreciation of what it means to be human, where the human belongs. Gradually penetrating human consciousness is the understanding Darwin and Teilhard and many many others have provided us the illumination to reach. The human is the natural product of the natural order, an earthling. What we must learn, and perhaps are in the process of learning, is the lesson the earth teaches, that everything is connected to everything else. Nature knows no national boundaries. The butterfly in the garden wintered in Mexico, the songbird in Brazil. The water drawn from the well was snow on the western mountains a thousand years ago. The rain is water lifted from the ocean a continent away. The oxygen comes from a leaf in an Indonesian forest. Food is the result of an earth

technology so complex it will never be fully detailed. We are creatures of the earth and we participate in the great mysteries of the earth. While we are each different we share an identity. We are subjective and at the same time we belong to a communion that links us up to one another in a way beautifully described by Walt Whitman. The earth requires universal love and that demand is even more exacting, more immediate and more dire in its consequences than is the scriptural law. The central focus of love is the earth itself for it is the earth that the human begins to comprehend as the mythic as well as the hard reality.

I saw a TV program showing the annual movements of caribou herds across Canada and Alaska. The herds number in the hundreds of thousands always on the move over a vast territory, repeating a cycle of life that has persisted for millenia. This cycle may be interfered with by roads and pipelines, and extinction threatens. In the view of a human who shares in the life process that produced the caribou, the migration routes are sacred and must be left alone. No human requirement takes precedence over the established rights of these animals. Similarly the fly way routes of the Monarch butterfly from Mexico to New Jersey are sacred.

Are there alternatives to industrialization? Of course there are, and the failures of industrialization are so obvious and so life destroying that alternatives must be found. Industrialization means General Electric in the back yard and on the rivers. In New York you are cautioned to eat not more than one meal per week of fish taken from fresh water, none if you are pregnant. In Ontario, California the economy is desolate. That's what GE means in two places. The alternatives are to be found in achieving local self reliance in food, in sun technologies, in the revival of crafts, in mass transportation and in cleaning up the environment. Let North Carolina be what it is and become a pleasant neighborly community. As soon as enough brain power is turned to finding ways to live with the earth the answers will come thick and fast. North Carolina is not Yankeedom and GE is not the answer.

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June 29, 1982 - Don Huisingh, Governors Task Force on Toxic Waste. "How Serious  
7:00 p.m. are the Problems?"

September - Les Real on the "Evolution of Human Consciousness".

October - Murray Bookchin