

CENTER FOR REFLECTION ON THE SECOND LAW  
8420 Camellia Drive, Raleigh, North Carolina 27612  
(919) 847-5819

Affiliated with  
The Riverdale Center for Religious Research  
5801 Palisade Avenue, Bronx, New York 10471

James F. Berry  
Advisory Board  
American Teilhard Assoc.

October 25, 1983

Circular No.44

"Good people are dangerous," is the opening line in an essay Thomas Berry wrote last Sunday when I asked him to give me some material for a circular. We had talked many times about how American economic activity is what is bringing so much destruction to the earth. As examples, a look at the road construction industry, the paper industry, the petroleum industry, the armaments industry will reveal what prompts that sort of reflection. The most difficult barrier in the way of bringing about change is the conviction of those who manage the economy that what they are doing is good. And there is no doubt whatsoever that many, if not most, of them are admirable in their personal lives, their habits, their civic performance, and their dedication to humanitarian principle. Some practice charity and self-denial of a saintly order. One has the feeling that the heavenly choir looks in a kindly way on how they conform their lives to the dictates of conscience.

Americans grow up believing that if they do what they think is right then they are justified in the eyes of God. They go about their business with a good feeling that comes from belief that their actions further the advance to the Kingdom of God. Their preachers and priests reinforce them at church on Sunday when they come together to be gently admonished to do better, to try harder. But what they are being told to do better at, to try harder for, is in furtherance of what they are already doing.

Thomas Berry carries on:

. . . . Our world is in difficulty just now, not because bad people with evil designs are in charge, but because so many good people with the best of intentions and the most dedicated spirit are so totally wrong in their judgement. To convince good people that they are wrong in judgement is difficult beyond measure. To be good is to be right.

We have elected good people to public positions. We have good people running our corporations, our universities, our professions. They are simply not making right judgements of what are the ecological results of their actions. This is, no doubt, due to their attachment to a false perspective springing out of their commitment to the religious and human-centered ideals of our society. Their commitment does not permit them to see the dark or destructive aspect of our traditions or to understand the altered context in which these ideals will be realized. This change of context reverses the good and evil consequences of our actions.

As an example, we can take the automobile. If we have a few automobiles with a few good roads we might say the automobile is a good thing. But when we get hundreds of millions of automobiles and build an endless number of highways, the automobile threatens the very life of the planet. It is terribly significant that with all our use of the automobile and with a society in which a fifth of the economy is automobile-related, no one has yet written an adequate treatment of the automobile and its consequences on life and the planetary function.

So with our good people and their religious establishments, none of these establishments, it seems, have officially protested in any significant way the destruction of our planet by hazardous waste, acid rain, development projects, road building, black topping or to the loss of four billion tons of top soil each year. Yet

these institutions sincerely believe they work effectively for a better world.

This accords with the ironic interpretation of history. What we are really doing is most often the opposite of what we think we are doing. We think we are improving life. What we are really doing is destroying the planet.

How to find a way out? To propose change to the people who presently run the world seems to be hopeless. University staffs, for instance, are not interested in educating students to perceive the effects of the activities of the corporation they are being trained to work for. Parents are overjoyed when their sons and daughters, having graduated from college, are selected by a multinational firm for employment. To get a job with industry is an occasion for celebration. No matter that the industry poisons rivers, aggressively markets infant formula in Third World countries, makes weapons for all comers, clear cuts forests, and fights environmental legislation. The young graduate, in many cases, does not look to see what the overall effects of the work will be. The satisfaction of knowing that the work one does is wholesome for the life process seems not to be important.

I am of the opinion that a good way to start to bring about a proper respect for the ecology is to seek out these young people on the verge of entering the world of work. I have this idea that young people want to accomplish good things with their lives; that once they see that much of the work being done in our economy produces results prejudicial to the long term survival of the planet as a healthy place for the whole of the life process, once they become aware of that they will look at things differently. Many will conclude that there are better things to do than work for the goals of the multinationals. Many will choose to emulate models not portrayed in the beer commercials. There are models, a good many of them, who spend lives alleviating suffering, correcting injustice, repairing damaged environment, finding ways to harmonize with the earth, rescuing species from extinction, resisting the oil company's invasion of wilderness, and promoting causes that make for ecological health. For the college student to discover these models might be a step into the new world view we have talked about so much.

That established religion has not taken ecology on as a central focus is a terrible reproach. If it does not enter into the struggle for the survival of an ecologically whole earth a new religion must be invented.

-----  
November 30, 1983: The Second Law study group will meet to discuss the establishment of a place where young people troubled about career choices can find material and an atmosphere for serious reflection on what to do with their lives.

John and Mary Beck to ~~at~~, formerly of New  
Alchemy have mailed out the first issue of  
The Council of Earth Stewardship, a periodical  
to reform those who seek to heal the earth.  
Send \$10 to Ocean Arks International -  
10 Shanks Pond Rd. Falmouth MA 02540 to  
get on the mailing list.