CENTER FOR REFLECTION ON THE SECOND LAW

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Everybody lives inside the context of some sort of "Story". In Thomas Berry's thinking the Story sustains, shapes emotional attitudes, provides us with life purpose, energizes action, consecrates suffering, integrates knowledge, guides education, enables us to answer the questions of children and provides a context in which life can function in a meaningful manner. Jeremy Rifkin calls a world view "a frame of reference for organizing life's activities." Marilyn Ferguson says, "A paradigm is a framework of thought. . . a scheme for understanding and explaining certain aspects of reality." Thomas Kuhn writes about scientific paradigms as ". . . universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide model problems and solutions to a community of practitioners." This definition has been carried over into other fields and comes close to the dictionary definition, "An outstandingly clear or typical example." It is an example of problem definition and problem solving that worked in the past in a memorable case, and is referred back to when a new problem confronts an adherent to the paradigm. The English Common Law is a good example. A puzzle (a case) is solved by searching back through history to find clear and typical precedent(s) supporting a particular decision. Puzzle solving is done by comparing the present with similar successfully-dealt-with puzzles of the past. The way Christ lived is a paradigm for the personal conduct of many, many millions. Thomas Berry says we are in between stories, and Bill Moyers, looking at his home town of Marshall, Texas in a program on Twentieth Century history, used the same words: "If we are in between stories," he said, "there are elements in Marshall which cling to the past." And at that point, he pictured a Sunday School class at one of the churches there. It was a strange moment for me. Here was a foremost observer of the American scene whose intuition about life in this nation has led him into the same language and probably the same meaning as ". . . our tranditional story is non-functional in its larger social dimensions even though some believe it firmly and act according to its dictates. It works in its limited orbit. It is an encouragement to us as individuals. Yet the dissolution of our institutions and our life programs continues." (from The New Story by Thomas Berry.)

Which brings me to say that I think the move into the emerging New Story is going to be hindered by one of the principle keepers of the Old Story, the Christians. Christianity has failed to give significant attention to the life process. It has most assiduously sought to protect life in its human manifestations but has almost totally ignored the life process as that process has been ever more clearly revealed over the years since Charles Darwin wrote the Origin of Species. Succeeding biologists and naturalists have described how ecology works, the importance of and the interrelations between the natural features and the life forms that they support. The critical values of air, water, soil, sun, and living things are values Christians have not been involved in. Suicide, fratricide, genocide, infanticide are powerfully condemned. But, more importantly, biocide and geocide need at least equivalent condemnation for which there is little hope unless a New Story emerges requiring that:

Any person, program, profession, institution or activity can be judged by the extent to which the person, program, profession, institution or activity fosters or obstructs the integral functioning of the earth community. (Teilhard in the Ecological Age. Thomas Berry. Copies available from The American Teilhard Association, P.O.Box 67, White Plains, NY 10604)

Growing numbers of commentators on how the world works say much the same thing in a great variety of ways and with mounting confidence. The natural world is home to us and its devastation is unforgiveable. Why do we foul the air and the water, and block out the sun, and let the soil wash away, and destroy the habitat of the animals It is as wrong as anything has ever been. It has been possible to do such things because the Old Story does not condemn them; rather the Old Story says that the earth is for exploitation; the earth is the enemy; the earth is to be dominated; the purpose of work is to bring the earth into submission; the purpose of science is to achieve mastery over the earth; the glory of the human is the subjugation of the earth; the human is not of the earth, but belongs to heaven. Christianity is focussed on the hereafter and its function is to define and to provide access to the hereafter. And the economic system requires our accelerating conversion of the earth into junk. In North Carolina, the Old Story is the controlling story, and there is no significant opposition to it.

Clay Stalnaker, the theologian and philosopher who keeps me straight on many things, has made me read Thomas Kuhn's <u>Structure of Scientific Revolutions</u>, Stephen Toulmin's <u>Return of Cosmology</u>, Erwin Laszlow's <u>The Systems View of the World</u>, and Gary Gutting's <u>Paradigms and Revolutions</u>. There are a lot of people out there worrying about the beginning and the end of all things. It is a common human affliction. And so this summer there is going to be a seminar where the subject will be <u>THE STORY</u>. We will inquire into and discuss Stories Old and New, and how they do affect and ought to affect the way we think about ourselves and the world.

January 25, 1984 7:30 p.m. At the Center

Dr. Henry A. Bent, head of the Chemistry Department at NCSU, is going to lead the discussion. The way it came about is that I sent Henry a copy of a lecture Ilya Prigogine, the Nobel prize winning chemist, gave. Prigogine called his lecture Man's New Dialog with Nature, and I got real excited when I read it because it seemed to me that it helped out a lot for a scientist like Prigogine to say:

- This...leads to the conception of matter as active, as in a continuous state of becoming. It deviates significantly from the classical description of physics, of change, in terms of forces or fields. It is a momentous step to go away from the royal road opened by Newton, Maxwell, and Einstein. But I believe that the unification of dynamics and thermodynamics paves the way to a radically new description of temporal evolution of physical systems, a description which again, to my mind, is much closer to what we see on the macroscopic level, be it in the nonliving or the living world.
- . . . I hope that I have shown to you that we begin to be able to overcome the contradictions which we had inherited from the 19th century.

Henry is not as awestruck as I am with Prigogine. And Henry is a philosopher in his own right, not to say an eminent chemist in his own right. So he is going to tell us how he sees all of this. He will bring along a couple of chemical experiments on which Prigogine based so much of his thought and a movie on the Second Law. It ought to be one of the best nights the Second Law Group has ever had.