

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

Affiliated with  
The Riverdale Center for Earth Studies  
5801 Palisade Avenue, Bronx, New York 10471  
April 23, 1987

James F. Berry  
Advisory Board  
American Teilhard Assoc.  
Circular #86

Some reflections on the upcoming **North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology**

This conference, scheduled for August 19-22, 1987 in North Webster Indiana is the realization of the vision of a group of ecologists and church men and women who have for a broad objective nothing less than saving the earth from the certain destruction ongoing exploitation of it promises. A committed involvement of the entire Christian community is sought. The conference can only be a first step in a long campaign to bring the problem to a primary place on the Christian agenda, but first steps are very important indeed. The constant message of the conference will be:

The consumerist/materialistic, human-centered life style of most North American Christians is deeply flawed. This is evident in many ways, not the least of which is the permanent damage which has been and is being inflicted on the earth so that trivial, ephemeral, vain and seemingly limitless human wants can be satisfied. A prophetic Christian witness is called for, not only to save the earth and the human species from degradation, but because to make a wreckage of creation is to dishonor the Creator. Our purpose in this conference is to ask the Christian population of North America to heed the warnings of a poisoned natural world and to take up a way of living that accords with the divinely mandated necessity that the earth and all its functioning systems flourish.

We are looking for perhaps a thousand people to attend. Some fifty persons, many of national prominence, have agreed to speak at the conference. There will be keynote speeches at plenary sessions for all participants and there will be workshops and panels exploring many, many aspects of Christian conscience and Christian behaviour as they relate to the human fit in the living world. A document reflecting the sense of the conference will be prepared. Future conferences, perhaps on a regional basis, will be planned for.

This conference has the possibility of being a very important event, a landmark, a turning point. There can be no doubt, it seems to those who worked it up, that our civilization is in the midst of paradigm shift. The daily press and the functioning world of business and commerce and legislation are more and more aware of environmental disaster even while they persist in what Thomas Berry calls their "technological trance". The unjustified and unsupportable belief in the false myth of unending growth encounters a rising skepticism as deadly pollution spreads into every aspect of living. Slowly the perception of the urgent need for a new value system as it relates to the land intensifies. New answers are required.

People look for answers and for guidance in religion and since Christianity is the most powerful religious force in North America it is Christianity which must take on the task. There is doubt in the minds of many whether North American Christianity has the vision and the vitality to do it but no doubt that it has the responsibility. And that is why this conference is of such immense importance. We have to catch the attention of the Christian community and engage its support. There has been considerable success already. The list of sponsors includes prominent representatives of every mainline religion, many evangelicals, lots of nuns and priests, ministers, pastors, preachers, as well as leaders of ecological organizations. Prominent in support of the conference are leaders of the bioregional/green movement. I urge readers of the CFRSL circulars to attend and/or to give financial support. The flyer which accompanies this issue

tells how to do that. (Please acknowledge CFRSL when you contact the office in San Francisco.)

I have two main hopes for the conference. First, I hope that it will prompt the Christian church in North America to begin to abandon its human-centered way of understanding the world. In current religious teaching the human is the only significant consideration. Yet the human is nothing apart from the whole context of life. If we are not embedded in a context, surrounded on all sides by plants and animals, air and water, soil and rocks, we do not exist. If there are no seas rocking back and forth with the cycles of the moon there can be no life. If there is no sun we do not exist. If there is no galaxy there is no sun. If there is no cosmos there is no galaxy. If there is no beginning, no stupendous first singularity there is no cosmos. And if there is no Creator to empower this system with the capability of self-organization everything is meaningless. Human centeredness, anthropocentrism, then, is to be abandoned as an early step in achieving a new Christian understanding of the human role in creation. In the words of Thomas Berry, "The human is non-viable in an anthropocentric context. The earth is non-viable in an anthropocentric context." The earth, a tiny, tiny spot in the universe was so located that life could begin and the earth was empowered to be a self-organizing, self-nourishing, self-educating, self-governing, self-healing community of life. Emphasize "community". The human is one aspect of the life system, not the be-all and end-all of creation but a participant who brings to the community the unique ability to function as the earth become aware of itself, that part of the system able to comprehend and celebrate the magnificence of it all and in doing that to fulfill the human role.

My second hope for the conference is that some small first effort be made toward the invention of the new economics which will be required when human economic behaviour is governed by Christian morality and the new respect for nature. When a drastic decrease in consumption patterns occurs, as this conference will urge, the American economic system will collapse along with the philosophy that underlies it. Once large numbers of people stop going to shopping centers, begin doing without, and begin developing self-reliance, then the purchase of consumer goods will diminish drastically and production will fall off correspondingly. A whole lot of people will be out of a job and therefore without income. So how are we going to take care of that? I don't know but there is plenty of work to be done, plenty of capacity to do it, plenty of resources, and there is plenty of creativity and entrepreneurship. We can work it out. For starters how about taking that thirty billion dollar appropriation for highway construction, justified on the basis of eight hundred thousand jobs and divert it to a grand project to clean up chemical dumps, clean rivers, and restore wetlands. Everybody and everything would be better off.

---

Discussions at CFRSL begin at 7:30 pm. All are invited. Call 847-5819 for directions.

May 6      **GROWTH**      Discussion leaders are Raleigh City Councilwoman **MARY CATES**, Wake County Commissioner **HERB STOUT** and neighborhood activist **HOWARD MILLER**. Please come. It promises to be an open, lively exchange about the explosive growth our area is experiencing.

Advisors to the CFRSL include:

Peter Berg, Thomas Berry, Wendell Berry, Hal Crowther, Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen, David Haenke, Hazel Henderson, Evelyn Mattern, Charles Mulholland, Anne Pflaum, Robert Rodale, Kirkpatrick Sale, Jane Sharp, Charlene Spretnak, Brian Swamee.