

CENTER FOR REFLECTION ON THE SECOND LAW
8410 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.

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Three Comments and a Request

Thomas Berry The National Catholic Reporter carried an article by Michael Farrell in its November 13 issue called "Thomas Berry's Biocracy." Farrell captured the real Thomas very well. He had flown to New York in the morning, done a 3-4 hour interview, and flown back to Kansas City the same day. It takes most people a whole lot longer than that to understand the Galileo of the Hudson. For a copy of the NCR piece write them at PO Box 419281, Kansas City MO, 64141. (I don't know the cost. Maybe \$2.50)

What Thomas is doing is redefining the human place in creation, and that is why I use the Galileo word. We have depended on religion and philosophy to provide us our story of who we are and how we came to be and why; excluding science. There has been mystery but there has also been a certitude that has prevented us from questioning whether popes and saints and enshrined thinkers really had it right. Thomas, following Teilhard, reasons that if the human is an evolved species, then human identity is not sufficiently derivable out of classical religion or philosophy. If the human is a product of the universe, of the earth process, then the human must find meaning within the universe-earth meaning. That is and must always be the great mystery as God is the great mystery. But it surely follows that an offense against the earth is a sin. Human qualities and human characteristics are to be employed in the interests of the universe, of the earth, not in destruction of it. We find the human to be a dimension of the universe, inside the system, not outside it, not a steward, not an owner or manager but its consciousness, its admirer and celebrator. "The human is the earth become aware of itself ... All human institutions, professions, programs, and activities must be judged primarily by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore or foster a mutually enhancing human-earth relationship."

It could be pointed out here that the problem that besets the North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology stems from the origin story and whether there is revelation in evolution. Is the universe "a gloss on the bible" or is it primary to our understanding of who and what we are? "The human can be adequately seen only in its cosmological role, just as the cosmos can be adequately seen only through its human manifestation."

Economics as if the Earth Matters: The Case Against Growth. We had our conference at Camp New Hope, the lovely place in the woods. More than eighty people showed up, some from far places like Minnesota, Michigan, Vermont, New York, DC and from all around North Carolina. The speakers were just fine. Herman Daly and Paul Wachtel are real human beings full of compassion and conscience and insights and qualifications to speak about the conditions of our times; able to reflect with perception on what is going on and to shine a light on dark places. The responders fulfilled their role with intelligence and grace. Some pointed out where they thought Daly or Wachtel were wrong; some elaborated and enlarged what had been said. I wish there had been more people there from the commercial world. I invited a lot of bankers and lawyers and news people but the dedicated growth zealots did not come. It looks like anyone who is concerned with looking into the future ought to get informed about what people like Daly and Wachtel have to say; ought to find out what the green people are about; how the earth lovers think about economics. But they are not yet ready. I wonder if it is our fault. Do we fail to find a way to discuss things with them out of arrogance or fear? We must try harder.

I will not try to review the conference here. There are tapes and they record the formal side of the conference. They are being copied and will be made available. If you want a copy let me know. There will be six of them, I think, and they will cost something like \$3 apiece. They do not give a complete picture of what went on but they do reflect the thinking of some bright people who think a lot about the condition of the society. A major part of a conference like this is what goes on when it is not in formal session; the conversation at meals; walks in the woods; gatherings around the fireplace; music, dance, song and ritual. I think we will do it again next year and talk about life styles and how to make community and get along without wrecking the earth. This is truly heavy stuff. It threatens current ways of doing things and those who look the other way have reason to do so. There is change in the wind.

A Thought Experiment. Once or twice we have talked about work, jobs and income. Paul Wachtel proposes an original way to think about this. Suppose that, for one year, there were no automobiles made or purchased. The earth would be better off in a lot of ways. The only segment of the population that would be badly hurt would be the workers who make the cars. Their ability to purchase what they need to live and take care of their families would be severely curtailed. Everybody and everything else would be better off with some not very important inconveniences entailed in making the old car do for a little longer. All the things the workers needed would still be available but access to them would be denied for lack of purchasing power. The failure would be a failure of distribution means, not a failure of production. The job of the worker then could be seen as what provides access to the distribution pipe. The worker, in this analysis, is doing something that does not need to be done in order to procure what is truly needed. And this can be put so: The ethics of our society makes it necessary to manufacture things that are not needed in order to get things that are. That is why there is such huge pressure for new jobs. Why wouldn't it be better to revise the distribution system so that needs could be satisfied without ruining the earth? Answering that question is the job of the new economics.

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Once a year we ask for donations. An envelope is included for that purpose. If you do not make a donation we still want to hear from you if it has been a long time since the last contact between us. The mailing list has been holding at just over 500 for the last year or so, but it is about to take a jump. The budget is a little less than \$2000 a year. Contributions are tax deductible within the provisions of new tax laws.

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