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CFRSL's CONFERENCE ON THE LAND

The idea has grown up in this society that land is a commodity that can be disposed of in the same way that other commodities are disposed of; bought and sold on the basis of its money return on the premise that anything at all can be valued in terms of money and transferred around in accordance with the shifting of money considerations. Those persons in our society deemed to be wise, priests and philosophers and ethicists, and learned teachers fall in with this view and transfer land as if there is no other value immanent in it. The money-makers rule supreme and they not only shape the way land is owned and used, they shape the minds of the society to the degree that nobody questions assumptions we have all been persuaded to embrace. We accept our exploitation and the exploitation of the land as if it were good for us.

But the money makers do not seek our health or the health of the land. They seek money and the only way to make money is out of the land. Everything whatsoever is a function of land. Everything is provided by the land, by the earth. All endeavor of any sort is underwritten by the land. But land is no commodity. It is the sacred source of life, the sustenance for life, the essence of beauty, the inspiration for the poet and the musician, the place where trees grow and birds sing and animals run and water flows. Land provides the places where everyone and everything is. "Everything's gotta be someplace."

The land not only yields food and drink and shelter and clothing and all other necessities, it shapes our culture and makes us what we are. To view it as something to be understood in terms of money is sacrilege. But that's what we do. As for wholesomeness and health and spirituality the land is ignored. Why is the land of such little interest to the church? That's Thomas Berry's continual question.

There is no general awareness that the enrichment of the money-makers is synonymous with the impoverishment of the land, the laying waste of the land. We have accepted their standards as the right standards despite a religious tradition that calls the whole idea of materialism and exploitation sinful. Everybody has accepted materialism, almost everybody. Look at the political campaigns. They promise that the money makers are going to make more and more jobs so as to give income to more and more workers, so as to increase profits and the GNP; and make more and more stuff for ever greater junkpiles and more and more wasted land. The impoverishment of the earth is a necessary result of its accelerating conversion into consumer stuff. The land and its inhabitants would be better off if the income were paid for sparing the land rather than wrecking it. Our true problem is whether or not we are going to continue to behave as if the land is a commodity or to begin to appreciate the land as a holy presence out of which all life has evolved and from which flows the support for life. The land holds treasure, is treasure, and treasure must be treasured, maintained, sustained and enhanced, and not laid waste. The money-makers don't care how the land is wasted for their whole intent is to turn it into money. For the money-makers money is the supreme value and economic theory has been arranged so as to support that way of thinking. Not many economists perceive that money and material enrichment is won by the conversion of earthstuff into trash.

" The subject we are concerned with is the Spirituality of the Earth. By this I do not mean a spirituality that is directed toward an appreciation of the earth. I speak of the earth as subject, not as object. I am concerned with the maternal principle out of which we were born and whence we derive all that we are and all that we have. In our totality we are born of the earth. We are earthlings. The earth is our origin, our nourishment our support, our

guide. Our spirituality itself is earth-derived. If there is no spirituality in the earth, then there is no spirituality in ourselves. The human and the earth are totally implicated each in the other.

Not to recognize the spirituality of the earth is to indicate a radical lack of spiritual perception in ourselves. We see this lack of spiritual insight in the earlier attitudes of Euro-Americans in their inability to perceive the spiritual qualities of the indigenous American peoples and their mysticism of the land. The attack on these spiritual qualities by christians constitutes one of the most barbaric moments in christian history. This barbarism turned upon the tribal people was loosed also upon the American earth with a destructive impact beyond calculation.

The fragility of the earth has not yet impressed itself upon us. The crassness of our relation to the earth cannot but indicate a radical absence of spirituality in ourselves, not the lack of a spiritual dimension in the earth...The earth process has been generally ignored by the religious-spiritual currents of the West... there is a tendency to see the earth as seductive reality that brought about alienation from God in the agricultural people of the Near East. Earth worship was the ultimate idolatry, the cause of the Fall, and thereby the cause of sacrificial redemption by divine personality. Thus, too, the christian sense of being crucified to the world and living only for the saviour. This personal saviour orientation has led to an inter-personal devotionism that quite easily dispenses with earth except as a convenient support for life. (This is from Thomas Berry's essay THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE EARTH.)

What seems to be the message here is that human identity is so implicated in the earth, in creation, that failure to recognize that brings on the loss of an essential spiritual dimension in human life. We and therefore our children are ignorant of our origin story and therefore unable to perceive our true nature in any wholesome way. There is a maternal connection to the universe, to the earth and to the local land that has simply disappeared from our awareness. Something historical continues to hold society in a tenuous sort of cohesion still, but it is crumbling. The society is soaked in alcohol and drugs, in street crime, a system of exploitation modeled on the corporate system of exploitation of everything exploitable by fair means or foul. We are aimless, truly aimless. The only admirable goal-consciousness in our society is that of the misery relievers, the generous people who find fulfillment in working to relieve human suffering. I do not perceive though that these holy ones offer life motivation, but only a temporary escape from hunger or sickness. The sickness of moneymania and the ruin of the land remains to be addressed.

THE LAND - Inhabiting It in Principle and in Practise - A conference

So let's talk about the land: at Camp New Hope from Friday evening October 28 to Sunday noon October 30. Good speakers, good workshop leaders, good talk and good food. Amy Hannon will design an Earth Celebration in accordance with Native American custom for Saturday night. This is our third year at Camp New Hope. Maybe it will be as good as the others. For information, write or call CFRSL. (919)847-5819

RALEIGH RESIDENTS PLEASE READ

A COALITION OF ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS, NEIGHBORHOOD RESIDENTS, ADVOCATES FOR THE MENTALLY ILL, AND EMPLOYEES OF THE STATE AND CITY HAS FORMED TO OPPOSE A ROAD PLANNED TO GO THROUGH PROPERTY AT DIX HILL. IT WILL DESTROY AN INCOMPARABLE HISTORIC SITE, DUPLICATE EXISTING ROADS AND WILL SURROUND THE BOYLAN HEIGHTS HISTORIC DISTRICT BY PEDESTRIAN-HOSTILE ENVIRONMENTS ON ALL SIDES. AN INITIATIVE PETITION HAS BEEN ACTIVATED AND IT SEEKS 10,000 SIGNATURES IN OPPOSITION TO THIS ROAD. PLEASE CONTACT BILL HOLMAN, DENIS WOOD, THOMAS BROWNLEE, BETH PASTORE OR NICHOLAS STRATAS TO SIGN UP AND HELP WITH THIS PROJECT.

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