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THE LAND - INHABITING IT IN PRINCIPLE AND PRACTISE

CFRSL's Fall conference at Camp New Hope is the subject of this issue. The conference will consider the land, how it is owned and used; how its benefits are distributed and enjoyed. The land is the support for everything, central to every phase and aspect of life. Here, we are talking about those small segments of land which we are in contact with, where we walk and where our dwellings are located, where the trees we are in personal contact with grow; where the soil is which supports the garden; we are talking about farms and farmland; about forests and wilderness. And we are also talking about the 2.128 million acres owned by Weyerhaeuser and eight other timber corporations, distributed over 75 North Carolina counties. And we are talking about the growing centralization of ownership and the crazy idea that the land must be made to produce at a maximum pace every year without letup from year to year, the bottom line insanity that industry brings to its interaction with the natural world in any context. "To hell with everything but money and power."

The Institute for Southern Studies has just published a book which lists, with its owner, every parcel of land in North Carolina over 300 acres. The principal author, Bob Hall, visited every one of the 100 counties in the State and went over the court house records. It is the only such study ever done in the United States and it deserves a whole lot of attention. In the summary of findings in the back of the book we find:

...large landowners exert enormous political clout....In 1984, land developers, realtors and contractors gave more money to North Carolina politicians than all the campaign contributions made by manufacturers; they gave more than all the doctors, or utilities or banks.....If huge corporate farms are allowed to drain thousands of acres of marshland, or if large landowners can keep out other enterprises, then they can determine the economic destiny of a multi-county region. If a developer or major mining company can escape regulations, then the water resources for tens of thousands of people can be ruined. If large landowners depress county revenues through political control of its taxing authority, then they can adversely affect the county's entire population.... All these things are happening now in North Carolina.... The problems are especially exaggerated in counties where 40% or more is controlled by big landowners.

Everywhere in North Carolina, citizens must intensify their scrutiny of major landowners. Most important, they must insist that elected and appointed officials stop making policies based on the two old notions that (a) people can do whatever they want with their land and (b) any development which increases the tax base is good for the community. It's time to stop treating big landowners like agents of the king.

The keynote talk on Friday evening, October 28, at Camp New Hope will be given by John Hart, author of **THE SPIRIT OF THE EARTH - A Theology of the Land**. (Paulist Press, \$8.95). Hart's book is a deeply Christian analysis of our situation today as inhabitants of a land being devastated because of wrong practises of ownership and use. Hart makes it clear from the very beginning of this book that a philosophy of maximizing profit on a short term basis has lead to the erosion, the corrosion, the overworking, the poisoning and the paving over of the land; to the conversion of prime farmland to urban development. Like Wendell Berry, Hart is clearly one who treasures the virtues of husbandry, thrift, workmanship, family, community, brotherhood and sisterhood in the sense that St. Francis meant those words.

It is Hart's belief that the core of the problem lies in the way custody of the land is held. Ownership as it pertains to the land is an unreal idea. To Hart the land is owned by God and humans have stewardship over it with the duty to see to it that the land flourishes and that the inhabitants equitably share in its benefits. In his book he is speaking mainly about rural land but he leaves no doubt that the principle applies to all land. The fact that our society regards land as a commodity to be exploited, to be bought and sold with little regard for the common good; even in the belief that the common good is best served when the maximum exploitation is exercised, is a frightening misunderstanding of the human purpose in creation. In this Hart is strongly influenced by his extensive study of the Native American understanding of the land, of the spiritual values that the land underwrites and sustains. How could the priest or the poet speak if they had never seen a bluebird, or a creek bank or a spreading chestnut, mighty oak or majestic mountain?

Hart proposes reforms in the way we regard and treat the land. He will propose those reforms in his Friday night lecture. There will be responses and discussion. On Saturday the participants will divide into two groups to critique Hart and his ideas from two standpoints: his theology and ethics, and the practicality of his reforms. Resource persons from various disciplines will be present. Designated writers will interpret the mind of the group for discussion at plenary sessions. Workshops will be repeated so all will participate in both.

Anthony Hecker, theologian and Clayton Stalnaker, Associate Professor of Religion and Philosophy at NC State U. will lead the critique of Dr Hart's presentation as it is founded on the basic values of our society, Judeo-Christian, Secular, and the non-Christian religions. In particular the Native American attitudes toward the land will be featured.

Jeffrey J Smith, a specialist in the land views of Henry George and the principles of the community land trust as a means of keeping land out of the hands of the money makers will lead this workshop.

Saturday evening, Bob Hall, mentioned above will tell the story of his book *WHO OWNS NORTH CAROLINA*.

Saturday evening there will be a celebration of the land following Native American custom.

Sunday morning the writers will present a suggested statement representing the mind of the conference for discussion, and adoption. General open discussion and evaluation.

THE CONFERENCE FLYER WILL BE MAILED OUT IN A FEW DAYS.

Total for all events, bed and meals, about \$90

Friday evening Oct. 28, until noon Sunday Oct. 30

September 20. CFLRSL Discussion group will meet to talk about the future of
7:30 PM the Center and to hear Billy Cummings of Chapel Hill describe
his vision of bioregionalism for our region. Please come.
Call for directions.

ADVISORS TO CFRSL

Peter Berg, Thomas Bery, Wendell Berry, Hal Crowther, Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen
David Haenke, Hazel Henderson, Bill Holman, Evelyn Hattgen, Charles Mulholland, John Papworth, Anne Pflaum,
Beth Pflaum, Robert Rodale, Kirk Sale, Jane Sharp, Charlene Spretnak, Clay Stalnaker, Brian Swinne