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## Higher Education, Church, and Environmental Values

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# HIGHER EDUCATION, THE CHURCH, AND ENVIRONMENTAL VALUES

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Conventional wisdom among environmentalists has it that the villains of the current ecological crisis can easily be identified: General Motors, Exxon, the Army Corps of Engineers, to name a few. These “villains” are particularly easy to blame because they are so visible and, of course, because they have indeed made a major impact—and not always a salutary one—upon the environment.

On the other hand, corporation managers argue that industry simply responds to the insatiable demands of the consumer and that if people would not buy two and a half ton automobiles and aluminum throw-away beer cans no one would manufacture them.

Thoughtful people on both sides of this controversy have come to see the futility of such easy polarization. They understand, for instance, that upper middle class Sierra Club members and university professors, even ecologists, continue to spend most of their above average incomes on themselves and their families for summer homes, second cars, electric clothes dryers, and travel to Europe. In so doing they almost certainly place greater strains on the environment than the typical American household. And, on the other side of the ledger, American business spends hundreds of millions of dollars annually persuading consumers that they need such ecologically dubious items as trash compactors and frost-free refrigerators.

What is not so evident, however, even to many thoughtful people, is that before any lasting changes are likely to take place in the way we treat our environment there will also have to be some fundamental changes in the way we all—businessmen, politicians, educators, and consumers—perceive it, and react to it. To date, most discussion about environmental change has focused on business and government. But there are two other institutions, the university and the church, which, because of the major impact they exercise on forming people’s values, may ultimately have to undergo changes just as sweeping as those now being demanded of business and government.

Although the university and, to a lesser extent, the church are often mentioned in connection with contributing solutions to the

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environmental crisis, little is heard about how these institutions have contributed to the creation of the crisis.<sup>1</sup> A closer look at the goals and operational values of these institutions suggests that their part in bringing on the environmental crisis is far from incidental.

Such an examination of the modern university quickly reveals that the basic commitment of this institution is to an objective-analytical-empirical approach to knowing and knowledge. This is hardly surprising, for at a very early stage in the development of modern science such an approach to knowledge showed itself to be very useful to man as a way of gaining power over his environment. Francis Bacon in the *New Atlantis* (published posthumously in 1627) portrays the arts and sciences as encouraging invention so that nature could be changed and made more adaptable to human purposes.<sup>2</sup> Descartes saw the superiority of general physics over scholastic philosophy precisely in the fact that physics made it possible for humans to make themselves "masters and possessors of nature."<sup>3</sup> As the German phenomenologist Max Scheler has pointed out, it was one of the great discoveries of modern thought that such power over nature could best be achieved by treating the world as value-free and focusing on the descriptive-analytical task. "To conceive the world as value-free," he writes, "is a task which men set themselves on account of a value: the vital value of mastery and power over things."<sup>4</sup>

By focusing on the *how* of nature rather than the *why*, science offered the possibility, via technology, of increasingly effective control over the natural environment and later, with the help of behaviorist psychology, even over man himself. Western man became intoxicated with his ability to alter and rearrange his environment. He called the shots. Nature "obeyed." The natural contours and the biological particularities of widely varying ecosystems were forced to capitulate to the orderly plane geometry mentality of the surveyor as he marched relentlessly across the North American continent. And with the rise of the industrial revolution, man himself was required to submit to the enslaving regularity of the mechanical clock and the

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1. I should say that I am not primarily concerned here with the possibility that Columbia University, for example, may be contributing to the environmental crisis by maintaining an inefficient heating plant, or that the American Lutheran Church may be operating a press that wastes paper resources. For all I know, these may be true, but they are largely symptomatic of a deeper malaise.

2. F. BACON, *NEW ATLANTIS* 34-46 (G. Smith ed. 1900).

3. R. DESCARTES, *DISCOURSE ON METHOD* 45 (L. Lafleur trans. 1960).

4. M. SCHELER, *DIE WISSENSFORMEN UND DIE GESELLSCHAFT (GESAMMELTE WERKE, BAND 8)* 122, n. 2 (2d ed. 1960). See WILLIAM LEISS, *THE DOMINATION OF NATURE* 109 (1972).

machine.<sup>5</sup> The natural forms and rhythms of the living landscape and of the human being, both infinitely more “sophisticated” than Western man’s highly vaunted but ecologically insensitive technology, were largely ignored.

Our universities have so strongly stressed the utilitarian value of descriptive, scientific knowledge that they have tacitly set aside the consideration of other values at least as important for the total process of higher education, for example beauty, goodness, and ultimate meaning. What modern man so desperately needs is a new balance between use and enjoyment, between doing and being, between utility and beauty. And the role of the university in helping to create such a balance in man could be a great one. University curricula need not be organized—as many currently are—in such a way as to enforce technological specialization, a specialization frequently tied to the needs of industry and the military, which fund many university programs. Rather the university could encourage a greater freedom in educational goals less tied to the technocracy, thereby encouraging a diversity of talents and a balance between many different modes of understanding.

The objective-analytical method of knowing the world, the detached method of scientific observation which has come to dominate the humanities as well as the natural sciences, separates the knower from what is known, for it sees love, commitment, joy, hate, and passion as hindrances to the exercise of true objectivity.<sup>6</sup> Our schools and universities have shown little patience with other types of knowledge—for example, what theologian Bernard Meland terms the “appreciative consciousness.”<sup>7</sup> The role of intuition, body wisdom, feelings, and subjectivity in the learning process have at least been peripheral concerns. Philosopher of science Jacob Bronowski writes of the “habit of truth” in relation to the scientific community—that is, the scientist’s fidelity to experienced fact.<sup>8</sup> Such faithfulness to objective reality is essential to the successful application of the scientific method. But it need not, it must not, constitute the whole

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5. L. MUMFORD, *TECHNICS AND CIVILIZATION* 12-18 (1934)

6. The issue, however, is not simply how one enters into the creative act of knowing but rather what finally qualifies as reliable knowledge. The creative moment itself is largely the same whether in science or in the humanities. It is certainly not simply the collection of quantifiable data but rather the intuitive leap, the flash of insight, the sudden discovery of hitherto unrecognized patterns and relationships. No more than the artist or the poet can the scientist afford to focus on only one thing at a time. If his vision were only linear and sequential he would be quite unable to grasp the significance of the whole. Frequently it is precisely in the relaxation of his effortful attention that he is “given” the insight that escaped him so long as he concentrated on “controlling” the data.

7. B. MELAND, *HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE HUMAN SPIRIT* 74-78 (1953).

8. J. BRONOWSKI, *SCIENCE AND HUMAN VALUES* 27-48 (rev. ed. 1965).

of education. The university must also commit itself to a habit of beauty, of wisdom, of goodness. Admittedly, these qualities will of necessity be far more subjective and difficult to define. But if education is to reflect accurately the richness and depth of the human spirit and of culture rather than focus narrowly on the quest for control, then educators must make a conscious choice to include these in the total curriculum.

Following in the tradition of Francis Bacon and the *New Atlantis*, Bronowski defines science "as the organization of our knowledge in such a way that it *commands* more of the hidden potential in nature" (emphasis added).<sup>9</sup> "Man masters nature," he writes, "not by force but by understanding."<sup>10</sup> In other words, the scientist, by means of his knowledge, becomes dominant over nature; he is able to command and control his environment.

Such power over nature is an integral part of the strength and glory of Western culture. But it is a dangerous power. Not only can such power blind us to other kinds of knowing, but it can also fill us with pride and cause us to misunderstand both other cultures and important currents in our own culture. Bronowski writes that "the cultures of the East . . . have remained fixed because they lack the language and the very habit of fact."<sup>11</sup> But such a statement reflects a specialized and limited use of the term "fact." It betrays Western culture's lack of respect for what cannot be grasped analytically and verified empirically.

The very terminology we use in academic settings reveals our bias. We "pursue" knowledge, "attack" problems. Our thoughts are "sharp," our ideas "incisive;" we refer to the "cutting edge" of a discipline, and so on. What an aggressive view of the mind and the intellectual process! Actually, many of life's most deeply felt and beautiful "facts" are not "hard facts" but soft, vague, and constantly changing. How do you quantify or scientifically delineate the visual experience of an ocean sunset, the sensations of holding another human being close, the intensity of an outburst of anger? Such realities simply cannot be understood and explained through the techniques and vocabulary of modern science; they require instead the intuitive tools more common to the artist or poet than to the technician.

Unfortunately, what cannot easily be put into words or described in mathematical symbols tends to remain outside the mainstream of the intellectual life of the modern university. Western man has little

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9. *Id.* at 7.

10. *Id.* at 10.

11. *Id.* at 43.

understanding of the meaning of silence or of cultures in which language plays a less prominent role. Even before radio and TV, the silence of the Trappist monk appeared mysterious and baffling, if not downright neurotic, to most Westerners. Today this distrust of silence is even more pronounced, for a whole generation has grown up with media which at all costs have to keep talking, moving, acting. Little wonder that it's so hard today to be comfortable simply "doing nothing."

Western man has used his technology to make colossal changes in his natural environment, and thus has dealt with his world in concrete and specific ways. However, on the intellectual level he has tended to think of nature abstractly, avoiding face-to-face confrontation. Unwilling to go beyond language and mathematical symbols, he has remained at the level of laboratory objectivity and has not let nature through to touch him. Philosopher Alfred North Whitehead once noted that "in the modern world, the celibacy of the medieval learned class has been replaced by a celibacy of the intellect which is divorced from the concrete contemplation of the complete facts."<sup>1 2</sup> It may be that rather than deeply loving particular places and things, modern man has fallen in love with the idea of places and things, with the idea of being wealthy, of being loved, and with the idea of having universal knowledge of nature.<sup>1 3</sup> In this sense he does not love nature at all but only the idea of nature. Western man must learn to love nature in its existential immediacy, if there is ever to be a deep or enduring change in the way he treats the environment. He must learn to see nature as more than raw material for consumer production, more than a scientific data bank for the development of abstract theory. Only in this way will he gradually realize a new sense of modesty in relation to the world about him and discover that understanding at times may involve precisely the willingness to let nature remain free from man's manipulation. Rather than always insisting on controlling nature, forcing it to yield to the imperious quest for knowledge, modern man must also learn to be passive and receptive before the mystery of being and learn also what it means for nature to reveal itself: addressing, changing, even "controlling" him.

There is a kind of *hubris* in the Western world, a belief that man not only transcends nature—which in some sense I believe he does—but also that he can largely ignore nature. Rather than taking time to gain a holistic and truly ecological understanding of planet earth, he

12. A. WHITEHEAD, *SCIENCE AND THE MODERN WORLD* 283 (1925).

13. Cf. D. DE ROUGEMONT, *LOVE IN THE WESTERN WORLD* 38-42 (M. Belgion trans. 1956).

forges ahead, convinced that his technical powers will rescue society from any and all mistakes.

The response to such overweening confidence, however, need not be the repudiation of science and technology or a return to a primitive, subservient worship of nature. The image of the noble savage is no more attractive than that of the rationalist of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment or that of the twentieth-century entrepreneur-engineer. Man *is* a free spirit. He can and does improve the world as it is given to him. Against the nature romantics and ecological primitivists I would argue that it is man's abuse of technology, rather than technology as such, which is our problem. We have lost a necessary balance. But science and art can and do work together. The Golden Gate Bridge is an aesthetic as well as an engineering triumph, and even a well-designed pair of needle-nose pliers demonstrates the conjunction of art and function, extending the creative abilities of the hand, at the same time pleasing to see and touch.

But even if the university wanted to deepen and enlarge its conception of education, is it really free to do so? Most university faculty and administration would prefer to think they are, but it is not at all clear this is the case. Current methods of financing public education in America are based on such close ties between government, business, and education that it is very debatable how much freedom to change really exists. Most students, from kindergarten to Ph.D., have only limited economic freedom to choose an education whose style, values, and goals are compatible with their own deepest convictions. On the level of primary and secondary education, there is more than a little coercion in the case where the state legislates that an individual must attend school until he is sixteen but then offers virtually no choice as to where he will get his education. This clearly results in a situation where only the affluent have significant choice and freedom in education.

But this is true on the college level as well. Only students from affluent families have the economic freedom to choose outside of a fairly narrow range of educational options. It might be objected that colleges and universities have deliberately tried to remain value-neutral and that within this basically value-free context students and faculty are free to choose their own values. To a degree this may be true, but such a view reflects only a very superficial appraisal of what really happens in a state university setting. *If* a given subject matter is taught, and *if* a particular style of learning (for instance, an emphasis on the appreciative consciousness as well as the analytical-descriptive) is available, then a very considerable degree of academic free-

dom exists. But it is hardly adequate to boast of academic freedom when certain subject matters, goals, values, styles, and so on are ruled out ahead of time by virtue of the close ties between the dominant cultural values, government, and the university.

Thus, for example, in an age of environmental crisis, one could argue that it is just as important to expose students in our schools and universities to beauty, to examples of civic virtue and moral responsibility, perhaps to alternate political ideologies such as socialism or marxism, as it is to teach them the rigors of scientific method. It might even be more important to teach students to respect and love the earth than to further instruct them in how to analyze and control it. But since such values are still held only by a minority of the population, they play a minor part in most public education.

I believe America has reached a level of maturity where academic freedom could be advanced another step. Considerable thought has already been given to alternative methods of funding education that would bring about a significant increase in freedom of teaching and learning. One good example is the so-called voucher system in which government would fund individual students rather than institutions. By gradually (perhaps over a period of 5-10 years) disestablishing education (just as our founding fathers "disestablished" the church by refusing to accept a state-supported religious establishment) and moving towards a complete voucher system, students would begin to have the freedom to learn within settings of their own choosing. Vouchers could be related to family income in such a way that students from poorer families would have considerably larger vouchers, permitting them to compete for places in the very best schools.<sup>14</sup>

It might be objected that such a voucher system would result in a fragmentation and diversification of society and an increase in ideological tensions. That is a distinct possibility. Those who have fought for freedom of speech, freedom of worship, and academic freedom have usually been aware of the fine line between sound diversification and chaotic fragmentation. Nonetheless, they have

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14. New York is one of a number of states which currently have voucher type programs in operation, although on a limited basis. Under the Tuition Assistance Program (TAP), benefits to individual students of up to \$1,500 are available. For the 1975-76 school year \$98 million was budgeted for this program, of which roughly 60% was to go to students attending independent institutions. For the 1974-75 school year New York State gave a total of \$146.3 million to the private education sector, including grants to institutions as well as to individual students. This figure represents 13% of the total \$1.1 billion state budget for higher education. The percentage of students in New York State educated in independent colleges dropped from 62% in 1959-60 to 37% in 1974-75. It is still too early to know whether the TAP program will in any way retard or perhaps even reverse this trend.



insisted on these freedoms because they knew that the available alternatives were even less attractive. Some degree of spontaneity, disorder, and disruption may be the inevitable price of freedom, but it is a price worth paying considering the alternative of government control and economic coercion.<sup>15</sup>

Within a truly free system of teaching and learning, the close ties between education and knowledge as control referred to above could be challenged by those who chose to do so. In all likelihood, most schools would continue to emphasize science, technology, and the various skills needed to compete successfully in a modern technocratic society. But at least other options would be available. It is extremely important that the university respond to the current widespread indifference and even hostility of many students toward our present educational system as a challenging opportunity to consider alternative methods of establishing teaching and learning as a vital and freedom-giving experience that will serve to enhance and sustain the quality of our lives.

Next to our schools and universities, it may well be that the church has the greatest potential for shaping such a new consciousness of nature. If on the one hand the university has taught scientific abstraction and has sought knowledge for the sake of controlling nature, the church on the other hand has for the most part been silent on this issue. At least until very recently, most of the church's leading thinkers largely neglected a theology of nature. Noted Swiss theologian Emil Brunner went so far as to describe nature as nothing more than the scenery or stage setting for the unfolding history of man's salvation.<sup>16</sup> With such a belittling view of nature's intrinsic value, it is hardly surprising that the church failed to sense the urgency of environmental issues. Historian Lynn White, Jr. has even

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15. Under a voucher system, public schools and universities would continue to exist. The best of them would grow. On the other hand, there would now be the economic freedom to choose other kinds of education. Insofar as society would still have an interest in minimum levels of achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics, minimum standards could be set in these areas by local school boards. Beyond that, the whole teaching-learning experience would be opened up on all levels, becoming in effect a kind of free market system. If public institutions were able to offer sufficiently attractive programs, they would maintain themselves and even grow. For an interim period of ten to twenty years government could ever continue to pay for the maintenance of school buildings. On the other hand, if public schools were not able to draw sufficient numbers of students, some buildings and even entire campuses might have to be sold to private groups who were able to compete more successfully.

If local, state or federal government felt certain basic societal needs were not being met under the free market system, then special incentives could be offered to draw students into these areas. These incentives could either take the form of larger vouchers for student choosing these fields or of grants to institutions specializing in these fields.

16. E. BRUNNER, *REVELATION AND REASON* 33, n. 4 (O. Wyon trans. 1946).

argued that our present environmental crisis in no small measure results from Christian theology's emphasis on man as lord over nature.<sup>17</sup> Biblical scholars and theologians have quarreled with details of his interpretation; nonetheless, it is clear that at the very least Christendom provided a setting congenial to the rise of modern science and technology and also that the church seldom challenged the growth and development patterns which have become dominant in the Western world.

Today, however, there are important indications, including the publication of numerous articles and books, that the church is responding to the challenge of the environmental crisis. Certainly there is much that the church can do to educate people in new ways of relating to the environment, especially in understanding the relationship between man and nature in other than economic or utilitarian terms.

There are a number of simple and straightforward themes implicit in the church's theological and Biblical heritage that would appear to be directly relevant to the current environmental situation. Perhaps the most obvious of these is that *the world belongs to God*. It does not belong to you. It does not belong to me.<sup>18</sup> No species, no minority, can selfishly dictate the destiny of other members of the whole without offending all. We do not have to read far, either in the Bible or in ecology texts, before this point becomes clear. In other words, from a Biblical perspective, man's dominion over nature is always limited, not only by the biological and physical restraints of planet earth, but more basically by God himself. Ecologists have understandably recoiled at the image of man as lord over nature, for they have failed to grasp the import of the more basic Biblical affirmation that God is lord over man. Thus man's freedom to "subdue" nature is always limited and under a higher authority.

A second, equally simple, point is that *God likes the world he created*, not just parts of it but the world in its totality.<sup>19</sup> Again we don't have to limit our vocabulary to traditional Biblical phraseology. From a more naturalistic or pantheistic perspective, we could say that the natural order is good because it satisfies the needs of the whole. Nature is "pleased" with the balance that has been struck. And this suggests that nature in its entirety has value: *all* of nature,

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17. L. White, *The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis*, 155 SCI. 1203-07 (1967).

18. If you have trouble with such intentionally simple religious terminology or with the term "God," just substitute the word "nature," or any other word signifying an all-inclusive, macrocosmic, unifying dynamic. The point remains no less valid.

19. "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good." Genesis 1:31.

both the living and the non-living; the human and the non-human; plants as well as animals; sticks, air, water; everything.

My third point is that creation, as understood in both the Biblical tradition and in the principles of modern science, involves interrelationship and wholeness, not incidentally, but fundamentally and necessarily. Wantonly to disrupt the relational and holistic qualities of our environment is to rebel against the most basic structure of the world which God has presented to us.

This is not to argue that the structures of the world are unchanging nor is it to accept without question the theory that greater diversity in an ecosystem contributes to greater long-range stability, a position that has been seriously challenged in at least one recent scientific study.<sup>20</sup> It is rather to affirm that the world does not present itself to us in bits and pieces but rather as a total field of experience. Everything is related to everything else. The great whales of the oceans, the alligators, lions, redwoods, the phytoplankton: all of these play an important part in the web of life, in the wholeness and interrelatedness of nature. Furthermore, even if greater diversity does not have immediate survival value, for most people it usually makes an environment both more interesting and more attractive aesthetically, and so has value. Poet Robinson Jeffers writes:

Integrity is wholeness. The greatest beauty is organic wholeness, the wholeness of life and things, the divine beauty of the universe. Love *that*, not man apart from that, or else you will share in man's pitiful confusions or drown in despair when his days darken.<sup>21</sup>

The Judeo-Christian understanding of history constitutes a fourth important element in any theological analysis of man and nature. Biblical religion at its best has always maintained a creative balance between purpose and meaning. On the one hand, man's activities are goal-oriented. His life is purposeful; it involves work, achievement, and production. He gives his attention to what is useful. One of his tasks is to exercise dominion over nature. Genesis 2:28 commands man to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it." He is also enjoined to "have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." Without question, these are strong directives (indeed, they have become something of an obscenity for many environmentalists), but in the Genesis text they are balanced with the further instruction that man is "to till [the garden] and keep it"

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20. D. Goodman, *The Theory of Diversity-Stability Relationships in Ecology*, 50 Q. REV. BIOLOGY 237-66 (1975).

21. Robinson Jeffers, quoted in NOT MAN APART 20 (1975).

(2:15).<sup>22</sup> One might say that for the Biblical writers the real question is not whether man will rule over nature but rather, "What kind of a governance will this be?"<sup>23</sup>

But the Biblical understanding of man, on the other hand, presumes that man's existence has meaning not just because it is purposeful and contributes towards the realization of specific historical goals. In theological language, God is not to be found only at the end of history in the coming of the "kingdom of God." He is also present in each successive moment of man's existence. The kingdom is future event, but it is also present reality (realized eschatology). Man is to work and give his attention to what is useful, but he is also to enjoy life, to be open to celebration, delight, worship, and contemplation. Theologian Romano Guardini goes so far as to suggest that the liturgical worship of the Catholic Church, formally analyzed, is more nearly play than work. The liturgy, he writes,

is life pouring itself forth without an aim, seizing upon riches from its own abundant store, significant through the fact of its existence. . . . It unites art and reality in a supernatural childhood before God. . . . It has no purpose, but it is full of profound meaning. It is not work, but play. . . . It is in the highest sense the life of a child, in which everything is picture, melody and song.<sup>24</sup>

Such worship is, of all human activities, the least goal-oriented. "The soul," concludes Guardini, "must learn to abandon, at least in prayer, the restlessness of purposeful activity; it must learn *to waste time for the sake of God*" (emphasis added).<sup>25</sup>

Such discussion may seem far removed from the current environmental crisis, but it is not. For unless Western man discovers a new balance in his life between work and play, production and praise, development and celebration, the useful and the "useless," he will find it impossible to reach a harmonious relationship with himself, his fellows, and the world around him. He will remain trapped in a utilitarian view of life which sees nature as existing only in its potential for development. Cost-benefit ratios will continue to dictate land policy. Forests will be viewed solely in terms of obtainable board feet, the majestic redwoods as a source of tomato stakes and lawn

22. See H. SANTMIRE, *BROTHER EARTH: NATURE, GOD AND ECOLOGY IN TIME OF CRISIS* 80-97 (1970).

23. It is hard to conceive of man at all apart from his possessing a power over nature. *Homo sapiens* as we know him has always also been *homo faber*. When the first cave man learned how to control fire, when he began to use simple stone tools, when man first learned to plant seeds and practice animal husbandry, he was in a very real sense ruling over nature.

24. R. GUARDINI, *THE SPIRIT OF THE LITURGY* 179-81 (A. Lane trans. 1935).

25. *Id.* at 183.

furniture, the great Blue Whale as raw material for cat food and beauty creams.

Another way of expressing the same basic idea is to say that the dialectic of use and enjoyment must also be part of the new balance. Theologian Joseph Sittler claims that "abuse is use without grace; it is a failure in the counterpoint of use and enjoyment."<sup>26</sup> Part of his inspiration for this particular comment came from a saying that is attributed to Thomas Aquinas, the great thirteenth-century theologian of the Catholic Church; "It is of the heart of sin that men use what they ought to enjoy and enjoy what they ought to use."<sup>27</sup> What Aquinas meant, I think, is that such a thing as money is to be *used*, for instance to facilitate trade and travel, but not valued as an end in itself (as in the case of a miser). On the other hand, something like wine is to be *enjoyed* in itself but should not be permitted to become necessary to one's life (as in the case of the problem drinker). In connection with the environment, both use and enjoyment are appropriate, each in their own time and way. But for modern technological man the counterpoint has been broken: He knows well enough how to use nature but has very little sense of nature's possessing intrinsic value or as having value for the human spirit over and above its utilitarian value to society. Nature becomes simply a resource to be utilized.

A fifth affirmation growing out of the Judeo-Christian heritage is that the healing of nature will come about only with the healing of persons and of institutions. As Reinhold Niebuhr has so ably argued, finite man, unable to accept his existential insecurity or to find a deeper grounding in faith, lets his anxiety drive him to exploit other people and his environment.<sup>28</sup> One of the great ironies in man's quest for power is that it is precisely modern technological man, who wants to secure his present life and live fully in the present—free from entangling beliefs about heaven and hell, eternal life, the existence of a transcendent God—who appears least able to do so. When death comes to be experienced mainly as negation and as confrontation with the abyss, man must at all costs keep control of himself and his environment. He must speed up the tempo of his life so that he will not lose out on anything before death strikes. Thus there is his constant manipulation of himself, his retreat from genuine spontaneity, his fear of ecstasy. He must produce and achieve to demonstrate to himself that he really exists, that he is more than a random

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26. J. SITTLER, *THE CARE OF THE EARTH AND OTHER UNIVERSITY SERMONS* 97 (1964).

27. *Id.* at 95.

28. R. NEIBUHR, *THE NATURE AND DESTINY OF MAN* 182-86, 192-93 (1941).

flicker in a cold and unseeing cosmos. He has to surround himself with power and things in a compulsive but largely futile attempt to insulate himself from the inevitable uncertainties of life. He refers to his stocks and bonds as "securities." He zealously guards his position, his reputation, his property. He is constantly on trial; he is tense, harried, full of care.

America's current environmental and energy dilemmas tend to confirm this analysis. Insofar as death is perceived as the diminishment of life and not, as in most religious cultures, as a rite of passage to fuller life, modern secular man comes to value growth as an end in itself. So great has been the psychological need to keep growing, to keep producing more energy and things, that Western man simply has not been able realistically to assess the long-range implications of his economic activities. To question technology's "limitless" ability to provide for our expanding "needs" is not just to disagree but to speak heresy. It is to attack the efficacy of the cult, the power of the technological sacraments to continue to perform the miracle of transubstantiation, to improve, to perfect, to sanctify "undeveloped" nature.

The irony is that much of this frenzied economic activity has only brought us closer to what we fear most: the final loss of control and encounter with nothingness. Our indiscriminate use of pesticides in the post World War II period well illustrates our predicament. In our impatience with the messiness of ordinary life, and in our compulsive need to remain in control by tidying up everything irregular in the environment, we saturated our fields with massive applications of DDT and other hard pesticides only to discover that insects have an amazing capacity—far better than our own—to develop resistance to chemical sprays. By establishing too rigid a control over nature, we ultimately lose all control.

The sixth and final environmental affirmation which I would ground in the Judeo-Christian heritage is that *environmental solutions must always be undertaken within a framework of social justice and concern for all elements of society*. As Norman Faramelli of the Boston Industrial Mission has pointed out, there is a real danger that ecology could become a kind of white, middle-class, suburban cop-out from other important social and economic concerns. Faramelli refers to a black urban leader who recently said: "The one thing I don't look forward to is living in a pollution-free, unjust, and repressive society."<sup>29</sup> For years wealthy suburbs have used zoning to

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29. Faramelli, *Ecological Responsibility and Economic Justice: The Perilous Links Between Ecology and Poverty*, 11 ANDOVER NEWTON Q. 84 (No. 2, November 1970).

keep out the undesirables, and now, as even the most imaginative and ecologically responsible developers are finding out, "concern for the environment" is becoming one of the most widely used techniques for rationalizing and perpetuating such exclusivism.

The black man's uneasiness about ecology makes even more sense when we recall the anti-urban, anti-institutional orientation of Thoreau and John Muir, two of the patron saints of the environmental movement. Some environmentalists still appear to be far more interested in the fight to save the polar bear from extinction than they are in the human suffering of East Harlem or Appalachia. And many young nature lovers openly admit that they intend to ignore the problems of the big cities as they retreat into what Wellesley College chaplain H. Paul Santmire labels "the cult of the simple rustic life."<sup>30</sup>

Whenever environmental matters are dealt with outside of the context of concern for distributive justice, there is a strong likelihood that society will end up forcing the poor to pay for the achievement of a quality environment, a particularly irritating form of injustice, since it is not the poor who have overstrained the environment through high levels of material and energy consumption.

Both the university and the church must change if society is to achieve harmony with the natural environment. Neither institution, however, should focus too exclusively on what is wrong with the environment—on the ugliness, the deterioration, the pollution—and not spend enough time thinking positively about what a quality environment would look like. Both church and university must plan creatively for the future, imagining the shape of various alternatives—wholly, not simply fixing up the broken bits and pieces. This will require a new openness to both form and function, to the subjective as well as the empirically verifiable, to color, texture, and feeling. It will not be adequate to opt for problem solving to the exclusion of planning. For problem solving is oriented towards the past, toward what is wrong. Planning, on the other hand, tries to envision what is right, what an alternative future for man and his environment might look like.

Both the church and the university must create an atmosphere where individuals will be free to develop an overall sensitivity to people and things which would approach the world not simply as something to be analyzed, attacked, or controlled, but also as that which is to be loved, caressed, felt, enjoyed. To do this it is not necessary that the university repudiate the "objectivity" of the

30. Santmire, *Ecology and Schizophrenia: Historical Dimensions of the American Crisis*, 9 *Dialog* 181-85 (1970).

scientific method or the control-oriented stance of technology. They have a very necessary place. But these must be balanced by the many other ways to relate to the world around us. Nor is it necessary for the church to turn away from her own Biblical heritage. Rather, it is a question of re-ordering priorities within this heritage, as she attempts to articulate a distinctively twentieth-century theology of nature. As the church realizes that her past acquiescence in the exploitation of nature constituted a violation of her own Biblical and theological foundations, she will be more open to reassessing the current environmental situation and better able to generate the requisite moral energy and fervor for preserving nature.

We must find ways of liberating education from the competitive, achievement-oriented position it now occupies in the Western world. We would do well to remember that our word school comes from the Greek *schole* and the Latin *schola*, terms which originally meant leisure. At its best, learning will involve a strong element of playful discovery—the irrepressible, joyful curiosity of a child who encounters a new and exciting world about him. Memorization and discipline will not be ruled out, but the heavy, dull seriousness which often binds and crushes people instead of liberating them will have to change.

Finally, Western man (including those of us who know a great deal more about ecological realities than we are putting into practice) will have to find ways of getting free from his compulsive need to grasp after more and more things, or more and more power over things. New and tougher legislation, technological innovations, economic and social changes of far-reaching scope will most certainly be needed. But along with these, there must come about a growth in man's spirit. Unless we, and the major institutions that we support, recognize that man's spirit itself is the ultimate front line of the environmental crisis, we will only continue to nibble away at the edges.