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## **To Care for the Earth, by McDonagh**

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there is money in logs" (p. 128). We might say the same for Manobo culture and the present destruction of the forests.

This small book, clearly and graphically written, deserves our attention because it may help us see what lies below the surface of our daily lives.

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TO CARE FOR THE EARTH. A CALL TO A NEW THEOLOGY. By Sean McDonagh. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1986 and Quezon City: Claretian Publications, 1986. xii + 224 pages.

What used to be a feeble plea by a few to moderate the use of the world's natural resources has now grown into an urgent call by all sectors of society throughout the world. Besides the environmentalists, politicians and church leaders have now joined in alerting the world to the danger of indiscriminate and wanton destruction of our natural environment.

McDonagh's *To Care for the Earth* is another addition to the growing literature on the subject. It is based on his reflections on his experience as a missionary priest trained also as a sociologist and theologian, and a witness to the unbridled denudation of the southern Philippine forests where his mission is located. Logging companies and landless peasants have been destroying vast areas of forest land, such that if the "present trend continues, all the primary forests [of the Philippines] will be gone before the year 2000" (p. 33). And, as everyone knows, once the forest cover is gone, the soil is quickly eroded, its fertility is exhausted, and ordinary rains inevitably lead to flooding.

Though by no means exhaustive, McDonagh presents enough evidence and statistical data to make a good case for his concern. Modern industry, pesticides, and artificial fertilizers produced by the modern chemical industry, all in the name of agricultural growth, are the main pollutants of our rivers and seas, threatening, and in places, destroying useful marine life. The situation today, the author writes, is "similar to that of a man who is so preoccupied with his need for firewood and is so impressed with the power-saw in his hand that instead of just cutting a branch, he is sawing down a tree which is tilted in his direction" (p. 61). How explain this myopic attitude?

Following the opinion of an expert in Teilhardian thought, McDonagh suggests that "modern western people have lost a meaningful sense of identity" (p. 61). Men today do not seem to know who they are, what their purpose and role in life is, etc. They have become, in other words, incapable of reaching beyond themselves, incapable of that transcendence which distinguishes human from



mere animal existence. Prescinding from the question of who is to blame, the fact is that people today are immersed in the here and now, caught in the vise of a consumer society that is crunching away the very same people who make it possible.

So far, so good. But the second part of the book, titled "A Call To A New Theology," does not convince with equal cogency. The discussion of the secularization of knowledge and the suggestions offered to give modern men a new sense of values tend, in my opinion, to be simplistic. Calling on the ecological views of the great Christian mystics, Benedict, Francis, or Hildegarde, is stretching the point, to say the least. And not all will agree that by "addressing God, in the second preface of Lent, 'you teach us to live in this passing world with our hearts set on the world that will never end,' the Church is unwittingly legitimizing the behavior of those who destroy the Earth" (p. 158). How this encourages an attitude of "indifference which is destructive" (*ibid*) is not clear.

McDonagh deserves our congratulations for articulating one of the most serious and urgent human problems today. But, just like the others before him, concerned and aware of the heedless destruction of our natural resources, his positive suggestions will not be accepted by all. This, precisely, is the heart of the matter: we all (?) know what should *not* be done, but we are not too sure of what *ought* to be done. But to have made the world aware of the dangers facing us is already half the solution. As they say, an enemy we know is not as dangerous as one we do not know.

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