

DOMESTIC

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NC NEWS SERVICE

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(EDITORS: The following story will be illustrated in the Catholic News Report (CNR) filmstrip for the week of March 2. NC Photos is issuing two photographs to go with the story.)

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NATIONWIDE TEACH-IN WILL FOCUS ON ENVIRONMENT (1,000) 2/25/70 - Wed.

By Kim Larsen
(NC News Service)

WASHINGTON (NC)--Today's youth will not meekly accept the deteriorating condition of the earth they will inherit tomorrow.

They demand a planet of quality instead of the rapidly developing "cesspool of the universe," as one expert has described the globe resulting from past and present haphazard stewardship of the earth.

They are literally sick of the air they breathe, the water they drink, and the noise they are forced to hear. And they seek a remedy before this sickness figuratively halts human life.

The inheritance awaiting today's youth repels them. They want no part of it, and they are switching their attention from a war they abhor in Asia to the more deadly environmental crisis.



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Youth's concern will receive its first nationwide attention April 22 when students plunge into environmental teach-ins on campuses throughout the country.

They say that the teach-ins will be as massive as the Vietnam anti-war rallies conducted last year. They hope the teach-ins will be more successful, however, because they consider the stakes even greater.

The students are attacking a problem that does not tear the nation apart as does the Vietnam War.

Conservatives, liberals, radicals, reactionaries, Republicans, Democrats, and independents alike are growing more concerned over the threat of "eco-catastrophe," or a disastrous imbalance of nature.

The concern for the rapidly deteriorating environment is increasing through political means, but the students also are developing a sense of ethics about the problem.

The crisis, according to Barbara Reid, a student from Michigan who is coordinator for teach-in events in the Midwest "is a moral issue in the deepest sense and a political issue in the pragmatic sense."

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Miss Reid said the teach-ins would focus on local levels. A national office here was established to serve^{only}/as an information clearinghouse and to provide coordination where needed.

There is no set policy for the teach-ins. Each campus will conduct its teach-in in the way it feels is best suited to local problems. Miss Reid said response from college and high school campuses has been big. To date, she has heard from 200 campuses in her region.

Sen. Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin, who originated the April 22 teach-in idea and helped form the national coordinating office, said he expects up to 1,000 college campuses to sponsor teach-ins.

There will be no "typical" teach-in, Nelson said.

"Each campus will develop its own program," he said in an interview with NC News. "We have urged them to make it community-wide."

The teach-ins will include panel discussions, lectures by major speakers, and demonstrations--such as conducting mock premature funerals for today's children. A group of students in San Jose, Calif., already has staged a demonstration by buying a new automobile and then burying it.



Miss Reid said students will try to convince citizens to boycott products like DDT and detergents containing high phosphate compounds.

"This is an educational process to convince people they don't need many of these consumer goods," Miss Reid said.

Nelson said Americans today "live in a consumer society that seeks unimportant creature comforts." He is hopeful the teach-ins will change priorities.

The morality factor is slowly developing and could possibly become the guiding force in combatting the environmental crisis.

"There is a problem in getting short-lived creatures to address themselves to long-term problems," the Wisconsin Democrat said.

Although he believes it would be an oversimplification to say that greed is at the heart of the environmental problem, he said avarice and the demand for an ever higher standard of living are culprits.

He also views over-population^{as}/a serious problem. If population continues increasing, Nelson said, there will be a catastrophe.

"The planet has a limited capacity to support life," the senator said. "We've probably well passed that level in terms of capacity to support the people we now have in a quality environment."

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He thinks birth control programs should be made available to the public. The students will discuss birth control during the teach-ins.

Birth control, Nelson said, cannot be imposed on people. "They have to settle the problem as individuals."

Another "religious" problem entering into the issue is the traditional Christian-Judaic belief that man is more than just a part of nature. A passage from Genesis is sometimes cited to defend the rape of the earth:

"God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image and likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle, over all the wild animals and every creature that crawls on the earth.'"

Such a point of view tends to overlook that God also "saw that all he had made was very good," which would imply that good stewardship is required.

But traditional belief in domination of nature and the newly developing Christian concern for the earth pose a problem in battling the desecration of the world. Nelson said he sees a conflict between the two beliefs.



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Overcoming the traditional belief, he said, requires the development of an ethic that man is a part of the scheme of things.

Apart from ethics, Nelson said, "it is simply a matter of survival."

"There needs to be a fundamental re-evaluation of life," Miss Reid said. She foresees citizens beginning "to question these fundamental suppositions" that allowed the environmental crisis to develop in the first place.

Father Patrick McDermott, S.J., an assistant director of the Division of World Justice and Peace, United States Catholic Conference (USCC), noted that the traditional belief can be interpreted in various ways.

"It's going to take a change of mentality," he said, for the environment to become livable again.

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Younger Christians, he said, are grasping for a communitarian view of religion--and preserving the environment is a community endeavor. He sees the two working together nicely.

But he is afraid many people will lose interest in the problem, just as they seem to have lost great interest in the peace and civil rights movements.

Is it possible that President Nixon's new interest in the environmental problem is merely an attempt to draw attention away from the Vietnam War? Nelson believes not.

He said that Nixon probably realized most Americans had not paid enough attention to the problem--and that the President saw the need for bringing it to their attention.

The problem is to prepare everyone to act, now that the problem has been recognized, the Senator said. He views the teach-ins as an attempt to get citizens to assert positive efforts.

Because the environmental teach-ins are "a new thing," Miss Reid said, "none of us knows how the thing will develop."

But the teach-ins will not just be talk, she said. "We're not playing games; we're serious," Miss Reid declared.

"April 22 will be a beginning, not the climax."

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C O R R E C T I O N

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In Add sent on page 10 of Monday's domestic service, to lead in Saturday's domestic service, CORRECT paragraph beginning, MICHIGAN-OHIO etc., to read:

...Planning Council. Mrs. John Casey of etc. (NOT Msgr.)

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