

This story on the Faith-Man-Nature Group is another in the *Zygon* series on institutions that have been operating to relate religion and science.—EDITOR

THE FAITH-MAN-NATURE GROUP AND A RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENTAL ETHIC

by Philip N. Joranson

By the middle sixties some American Christians and Jews had begun to communicate their sense of religious impoverishment in the face of runaway circumstances of environmental abuse and resource use because of the intellectual weakness of their theologies and the paralyzed state of their religious ethics. One of the first initiatives to provide channels for basic scholarship and creative thought for building an explicit, sensitive Judeo-Christian approach to the environment came with the formation of the Faith-Man-Nature Group (FMN). Starting as an outgrowth of the Research Group on Theology and Conservation of the Faculty Christian Fellowship, FMN was formed in the fall of 1965.¹

During the nine years of its activity the group carried on a program that broke much new ground. Having at length, however, reached the operational limits imposed by its largely volunteer basis of functioning in a field now greatly expanded in acceptance and activity, the group's executive committee recently decided (1) to terminate its own pioneering program, with gratitude that it had borne significant fruit in a critical time, and (2) to encourage new organizational initiative, adequate to the changed circumstances, that would provide continuity of attack and communication, nurture interdisciplinary interchange, and furnish the needed financial support, including the paid services of a facilitator-director. We believe that there is great need for such a solidly established successor enterprise and that it might flourish best in a setting that would furnish a strong seminary, university, and environmental studies setting.

It was a founding principle and guiding conviction that progress toward the group's aims was to be basically a partnership of theologians and churchmen with scientists of the environment. The partnership would embrace also those of other disciplines and vocations whose contributions were needed. The group would set up conditions in which this partnership might prosper and in which the partners might learn from each other. In the professional lives of theologians and of scientists of that time there were almost no opportunities of this sort, centered on the environment.

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An active membership was drawn from persons with competence in the relevant fields who shared an interest in creative cooperation. Membership was always open and came to include several persons from other countries. The offices were elective and included chairman, vice-chairman, secretary, and treasurer. Named by appointment were an editor and two or three members who served with the officers on an executive committee.

The flavor, directions, and broad participational basis of the group's origins are faithfully reflected in the proceedings volume published after the Third National Working Conference (the first major one), held in November 1967, in Warrenton, Virginia. Titled *Christians and the Good Earth*, this paperback was edited by Alfred Stefferud, for many years previously editor of the United States Department of Agriculture *Yearbook of Agriculture*.² Among the twenty-five invited participants were the following authors of papers and responses. *Conservationists*—Donald A. Williams, administrator, USDA Soil Conservation Service; Paul Knight, Office of the Secretary of the Interior; Thomas L. Kimball, executive director of the National Wildlife Federation; Monroe Bush, consultant in conservation; Joseph L. Fisher, president of Resources for the Future; Alton A. Lindsey, professor of ecology at Purdue University; and Hardin R. Glascock, executive secretary of the Society of American Foresters. *Theologians*—Harold DeWolf and James C. Logan, both of Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.; Conrad Bonifazi of the Pacific School of Religion; Daniel Day Williams of Union Theological Seminary in New York City; Robert L. Faricy, S.J., of the Catholic University of America; Richard A. Baer, Jr., of Earlham College; and H. Paul Santmire of Wellesley College. *Churchmen*—E. W. Mueller of the Lutheran Council in the United States; C. Holger Hansen of the National Council of Churches; and Robert Anderson, Congregational minister, Missoula, Montana.

Until 1970 the religious basis of FMN activities had been mainly Judeo-Christian. In that year the group decided that its program "must be carried out in an arena that embraces, as far as possible, all religious systems in which there is expressed interest" and said, "We value very highly close association—in the course of their scholarship and of their action programs—between people of different faiths." "But," it also said, "we have well learned the value of providing opportunity for persons to work in close association who share faith within the *same* religious system."

At the opening of the Fourth National Working Conference (also held in Warrenton), in November 1969, the different ways in which nature is approached in the disciplines of theology, philosophy, literature, physics, and biology were contrasted by well-prepared speakers in each of these fields. A theologian and an ecologist both spoke on "Faith and the Informed Use of Natural Resources." Further discussion was stimulated by concluding papers given by a biblical scholar and another theologian. All of the papers were published in *A New Ethic for a New Earth*, edited by Glenn C. Stone.³ This was a joint publication with the Section on Stewardship of the National Council of Churches and its publications division, Friendship Press, which also made possible the addition of papers by Scott I. Paradise and Robert Theobald. H. Paul Santmire published an analysis of this conference, together with an account of earlier developments.⁴

Discussion about politicization of religious concern for the environment in ways that promote justice in the distribution of environmental benefits and in the levels of pollution effects suffered, several theological-perspective presen-

tations, and an environmental life-style commentary were important foci of the Fifth National Working Conference, held in November 1970 in Ashland, Massachusetts. The requirements of social justice in dealing with environmental themes were given further development in succeeding conferences, and Norman J. Faramelli and others provided strong leadership in this area.

How FMN could serve best the churches was a leading concern from the beginning. The Fourth National Working Conference participants issued a statement for press release, and the two paperback books reached a wide audience in the churches.⁵

The Sixth (final) National Working Conference was held in December 1972 near Pottstown, Pennsylvania. The program there featured appraisal of the 1972 Stockholm United Nations Conference on the Human Environment and associated meetings, three evaluations of the environmental bearing of psychologist B. F. Skinner's views, techniques and philosophies of FMN cooperation with the churches, theological exposition of a "Naboth's vineyard principle," and a theological characterization of some Oriental religions with respect to nature attitudes.

By 1972 it was clear that there was interest in the wider participation that would be provided by holding conferences on a regional basis. A successful application for funding to the Office of Environmental Education, Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, made it possible to undertake three regional conferences, each developed by a central committee according to its own plans, attracting substantial participation, and issuing its own proceedings volume. All were designed to deal with values—especially religious values—and the environment. The FMN chairman assisted in planning, and the experience gained in one conference was carried over into the next. The dates, locations, and themes of the three regional conferences are: (1) November 1972 at the University of Connecticut: "Religious Reconstruction for the Environmental Future," (2) April 1973 at Bowling Green (Ohio) State University: "Earth Ethics for Today and Tomorrow: Responsible Environmental Trade-Offs," and (3) June 1973 at the University of Wisconsin—Green Bay: "Ethics for Environment: Three Religious Strategies." Each conference put out a proceedings publication.⁶

Besides holding national and regional conferences, FMN collaborated in various ways with other organizations and institutions, promoted continuing conversation among its members, answered many inquiries from students, professors, ministers, and others, and issued a periodic newsletter called *F/M/N Notes*.

The FMN worked in liaison with the Division of Higher Education of the National Council of Churches, including using funding from specified gifts to be used in the program. At various times cooperation or liaison was also developed with the Institute for Theological Encounter with Science and Technology (ITEST), the Boston Industrial Mission, the Soil Stewardship Committee of the National Association of Soil Conservation Districts, the Office of Environmental Education, the National Audubon Society, the Conservation Education Association, and the College Editors Conference of 1970.

In April 1971 a seminar on the theme "The Environmental Crisis as a Crisis in Values" was held at Catocin Mountain National Park for federal government people working in environmental programs. It was developed jointly by FMN and George Lowe, director of the Office of Environmental Education, and his staff.

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In June 1971 FMN submitted a formal action proposal on world environmental attitudes to the secretary-general for the UN Conference on the Human Environment, which was to be held in Stockholm June 5–16, 1972.⁷ It called for a UN Conference on Environmental Values to be held in the summer of 1974. A half-dozen FMN members were in Stockholm participating in the 1972 Human Environment Conference or the parallel public sessions of the Environment Forum as well as in the daily meetings of the Religious Task Force on the Global Environment.

In the spring semester of 1972 the FMN Group cosponsored a pioneer graduate seminar and public lecture course at the Hartford Seminary Foundation for Seminary and University of Connecticut students. Titled "Perspectives on the Population/Environment Crisis," it was well received and was later described in full, with reproductions of the lectures, in a publication by John Weliczko made possible under a grant from the Edward W. Hazen Foundation.⁸

Altogether ten issues of the occasional newsletter *F/M/N Notes* were issued, the first bearing a July 15, 1967, dateline and the last dated April 1974. Items appearing included news of conferences, other events of interest, announcements, literature lists of wide scope and some reviews, minutes of executive committee meetings, and address lists of members.

Gifts and grants in support of the FMN program came from the Conservation Foundation, the S. F. Shattuck Trust, the Agnes W. Joranson Trust, the Anne Richardson Trust, the Edward W. Hazen Foundation, a grant program of the Office of Environmental Education, and from various private individuals. Payment of annual dues by members was begun in 1970.

In taking action to conclude activities the executive committee notes that the changed circumstances which have come about with development would now require a much more considerable operation, substitution of compensated leadership for the almost entirely volunteer leadership basis of the past nine years, change to an incorporated status, and fund raising on a considerable scale. It urges that a new form of organization be established soon to provide these basic requisites. It is hoped that this account of FMN history will be of assistance in furnishing some of the background for such an undertaking and in underlining the need for it. Exploratory conversation with interested persons, organizations, and institutions is welcome.

Outgoing officers are Editor Glenn C. Stone, also editor of the *Lutheran Forum*; Treasurer Walter E. Jeske, Chief, Education and Publications Branch, Soil Conservation Service, USDA; Secretary Richard A. Baer, Jr., professor, Department of Natural Resources, State University of New York College of Agriculture and Life Science, Cornell University; Vice-Chairman James C. Logan, professor of systematic theology, Wesley Theological Seminary, Washington, D.C.; and Executive Committee members H. Paul Santmire, chaplain, Wellesley College, and Norman J. Faramelli, associate director, Boston Industrial Mission, Cambridge, Massachusetts. Records are in the care of the outgoing chairman, and FMN publications are available from the outgoing vice-chairman.

NOTES

1. *My Conservation—Theological Foundations*, Faith-Learning Study, no. 6 (New York: National Council of Churches, 1964), was prepared in anticipation of the August 1964 meeting of this research group, out of which FMN was later formed.

2. Alfred Stefferud, ed., *Christians and the Good Earth*, FMN Papers, no. 1 (New York: Friendship Press, 1972).
3. Glenn C. Stone, ed., *A New Ethic for a New Earth*, FMN Papers, no. 2 (New York: Friendship Press, 1971).
4. H. Paul Santmire, "The Struggle for an Ecological Theology: A Case in Point," *Christian Century* (March 4, 1970), pp. 275-77.
5. Religious News Service, "Issue Plea on Environment" (November 30, 1969) (reproduced in *F/M/N Notes* [March 20, 1970], pp. 2-3). Edward B. Fiske's "The Link between Faith and Ecology," *New York Times* (January 4, 1970), sec. 4, p. 5, cites an article stimulated by the news release.
6. Philip N. Joranson and Alan C. Anderson, eds., *Religious Reconstruction for the Environmental Future* (South Coventry, Conn.: Faith-Man-Nature Group, 1973); Donald Scherer, ed., *Earth Ethics for Today and Tomorrow: Responsible Environmental Trade-Offs* (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State University Environmental Studies Center, 1974); Dave Steffenson, Robert S. Cook, and Walter J. Herrscher, eds., *Ethics for Environment: Three Religious Strategies* (Green Bay: University of Wisconsin—Green Bay, Ecumenical Center, 1973).
7. "FMN Proposal to U.N. Conference on the Human Environment," *F/M/N Notes* (September 1, 1971), pp. 4-5.
8. John Weliczko, ed., "Priorities in Eden: Perspectives on the Population-Environment Crisis," mimeographed (Hartford Seminary Foundation, Hartford, Conn., 1973).