

September 15, 1971

Dr. Laben M. Melnick
1419 N. Negley Avenue
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15206

Dear Dr. Melnick,

Thank you for your letter of August 30th and for the very interesting enclosures. They include some references that would have been difficult for me to track down and which I am grateful to have. Besides the citations therein, is there to your knowledge an injunction in Isaiah against the abuse of the land?

Back to your main point I must plead guilty to having entertained a rather superficial acceptance of some of Professor Lynn White's propositions. I neither pretend nor aspire to theological expertise but, in agreement with White, it does seem to me that monotheism liberates man from animistic worship of the earth and of other "natural" phenomena. It then gives him a moral license to develop and practice technology; and other aspects of the moral law give man a unique place in nature. If the matter stopped here I would continue to adhere to White's argument. However, religion is very much more than the profession of fundamental axioms. Everything hangs on how these are interpreted and the development of the law of daily behavior. Here, of course, we find the most extraordinary discrepancies. And, of course, it is just here that the Judaic tradition comes through with the most extraordinary vigor and integrity.

The ecological religion must be viewed as a kind of pagan revival. If it succeeds I foresee adjulatory lip-service to the gods of the earth coupled with the most self-serving and systematic evasion of these principles in practice.

May I commend to you a very interesting volume "This Little Planet" edited by Canon Michael Hamilton and put out in paperback recently by Scribners. A chapter by Bonifazy was particularly fascinating as an exploration in Christian theology. May I also encourage you to take up these questions with my brother Dove Lederberg who has a particular interest in them from a vantage point of a Hassadic scholar. You can communicate with him at #4 Mishmar, Havgul Street, Ramat Eshcol, Jerusalem. I visited him quite recently and found him very much interested in questions along these lines.

Sincerely yours,

Joshua Lederberg
Professor of Genetics

JL/rr
Enclosure