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The Greening of America, Catholic Style, 1930–1950

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Abstract

This article examines the rise and fall of the “green revolution” philosophy

developed by the National Catholic Rural Life Conference in the 1930s as a distinct strain of American environmentalism. After reviewing the evolution of the approach, its maturation around 1940, and its postwar marginalization, the article focuses on three aspects of the NCRLC. First is its ideology, as a “third way,” a distributist alternative to socialism and capitalism. Second is the attempt to foster sustainable agricultural technologies by creating communitarian institutions in which the parish priest was central and by bringing an agrarian curriculum into Catholic higher education. Third is the attempt to ground this orientation toward sustainability in a distinctly Catholic nature spirituality, based on cyclicity rather than space.

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