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**EXPANDING THE GARDEN:  
A CHRISTIAN'S VIEW OF NATURE**

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**Introduction :**

For more than twenty years a loose grouping, collectively referred to as the environmental movement, has agitated for more regulation of the ways we use and abuse our environment. Some in the movement have taken extreme positions, but there is also moderation. The Christian church has not been part of this picture until recently and even now is only a minor contributor. Why? What is there about the Christian world view that produces non-participation in an activity that appears to be for everyone's benefit? Is there a problem with the Christian world view? If so, can it be changed without accommodating to what is sometimes in church jargon called the "world?" Can faith be enhanced through this experience?

**The Historical Role of the Church in Caring for Nature:**

In 1967, University of California historian, Lynn White, wrote a paper that was published in *Science*. The paper, entitled: "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," claimed that the blame for our environmental problems should be placed on our Judeo-Christian heritage. The response was overwhelming.

When I read the White paper, after it was first published, I was stirred in the same way as were many others. Recently, however, I reread the paper and was surprised to discover that my reaction was not the same as before.

A key Bible passage for White was Genesis 1:26-28. He did not quote it or even cite it, but referred to it this way: "And although man's body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature; he is made in God's image." He continued with an observation that he thought came out of this relationship: "Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen . . . (for) man shares, in great measure, God's transcendence of nature.

White went on to trace the development of science and technology in the West which appears to have grown out of Western Christianity. By the eighteenth century, however, the "hypothesis" of God had become unnecessary for many scientists. Nevertheless, White thought that Western science was cast in a matrix of Christian theology and that Christian attitudes about man's relationship with nature continue to prevail in Western society for Christians and post-Christians alike. Consequently, Christianity bears a "huge burden of guilt." Finally, he made this observation: "Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not."

A large number of Christian writers responded to White. Sheldon (1993), writing in *Perspectives On Science And Christian Faith*, observed an increase in Christian literature

addressing environmental concerns in general and Lynn White's charges in particular by 1969. He said the results were two-fold: a reexamination of the Church's theology of nature and a resounding denial that Scripture teaches a dominionistic, utilitarian attitude towards creation rather than one based on loving, nurturing care.

So many responded, in fact, that one sometimes wonders whether or not Christians, in their effort to defuse the charge, give it continued life instead. One might think there is nothing more to be said, but in looking at the question, it appears there is still more.

While a defensive reaction by Christians may be understandable, it is necessary to suggest that White was not entirely wrong. It is not so much that the Christian West had been the exclusive abuser of nature (Many non-Christian cultures have also abused nature), but that the Christian West has abused nature so much. Given the friendliness of Scripture toward nature, one would think that Christians would have been her guardian. On the contrary, Westerners, with a heavy hand provided by Western technology, have damaged nature more than we could have expected, given their Christian heritage. In fairness, however, it must also be noted that the West was first to respond to the environmental crises once it was recognized.

It is appropriate to show that Scripture values nature, but it is also appropriate to confess wrong attitudes that have led to a misuse of nature. It appears that our understanding of Scripture, (misunderstanding?) as it relates to nature, has not kept Christians from harming the environment. Even today, after so much has been written about the environmental crisis, the church's stand at best is a token of what it could have been, and often indifferent or hostile. There is a large amount of suspicion of the environmental movement in the church.

The April 1994 issue of *Christianity Today*, for example, includes a series of articles under the heading of "Eco-Myths" in which it advises: "Don't believe everything you hear about the church and the environmental crisis." The problem these articles underscore is not in what they say so much, but in that they had to be said at all. Evidently the editors felt compelled to speak out against several ideas and attitudes about the church and environmentalism, but unfortunately, some of the ideas they disclaimed have been expressed, not only by environmentalists outside the church, as might be expected given the churches minimal involvement, but also by some within the church. The church's position, at best, appears ambiguous.

Maiyo (1993) notes that far too often the environment is considered a fringe issue by many Christians. Some, in defense of the church, suggest that there is no crisis, for example, while others say there is nothing that can be done. Still others react as Dumont (1993), a writer to the editor of *Christianity Today* when he asserted that the "movement is a religious cult run by men and women with an anti-Christ ideology and activist agenda." Eckmann (1994) commenting "Christianly" on Christian radio from Omaha, Nebraska spoke of the "new left" and associated it with pro-Castroism, feminism, and, strangely, those against pollution. Previously, he had played down species extinction, global warming, and rainforest and ozone depletion as myths.

Lockton (1992), writing in *Dialogue* noted that some fundamentalist Christians have rejected all notions of environmental responsibility which they see as part of a New Age conspiracy to establish Satanic rule over the world. Another reaction found expression in the claims of James Watt, a Secretary of the Interior in the Reagan Administration, as quoted in Regenstein (1991). He suggested that the earth was put here by the Lord for his people to subdue and to use for profitable purposes on their way to the hereafter and that the earth was unimportant except as a place of testing to get into heaven.

Even though much has been written about the positive relationship between Scripture and nature, they need to be repeated often in the hope that the message will eventually reach most Christians, but this repetition alone may not be enough. We also need to see how we have moved away from the relationships our Creator wanted us to have.

### **In The Image of God:**

We now need to consider two texts that have been at the foundation of the problem. The two texts are Genesis 1:28 and Genesis 2:15:

So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress and keep it.

These verses have often been linked to show that "subdue" and "dominate" really mean to "dress and keep." Having dominion is frequently said to require stewardship over nature and while we do not argue with this, as will be shown, the Hebrew words translated as "have dominion" and "subdue" are strong words indeed and hardly in harmony with dressing and keeping. Lockton (1992) points out that these Hebrew words, *radah* and *kabash*, translate as "trample" as in treading grapes in a wine-press and "to place one's foot on the neck of the vanquished." Grizzle and Cogdill (1993-94) point out that the commands "dominate" and "tend" appear antithetical and ask: "Are we really supposed to do both?"

Bandow (1992), reviewing several Christian books on the environment, entitled his article in *Christianity Today*, "Ecoguilt." He suggested that some authors had gone too far in attempting to counter bad press. Grizzle and Cogdill (1993-94) felt, however, that Bandow had himself gone too far in the other direction, when he dismissed some environmental problems. They agreed with him, though, that we should not too quickly abandon the biblical command to "subdue" the earth and "rule over it." They point out that nature, in its present state, is not

all good and that Scripture is requiring a balance between economic and environmental concerns and that we should shift our environmental ethic to explicitly include subduing nature with tending it. While there may be some truth in this for present day conditions, is this what was originally intended?

We have reviewed two contrary views: The first equates subdue with tend while the second says they are different. When dominate and subdue are made equivalent with dress and keep or tend, they are in harmony with the idea of a good creation, but the meaning of the words appear out of harmony with this idea. When the two words are not considered equivalent, the ideas they convey appear to be against the good creation, but more in agreement with the actual meanings of the words. Would God really command man to dominate and subdue — abuse — what he had just called good? How can we understand this apparent contradiction?

"Dominate" and "subdue," are placed between two ideas: One is that creation was good while the other required man to care for it. These ideas modify and moderate the harshness of the words translated as "dominate" and "subdue" when understood literally. Any explanation that does not keep this context has to be suspect. The explanation must also maintain a distinction between "dominate and subdue," on the one hand and "dress and keep" on the other.

The commands to dominate and subdue were given to qualify the idea of man being made in God's image. How can these be harmonious with the God who repeatedly called his creation good? How can these be harmonized with the commands to dress and keep the garden? And how can they be in harmony with His image?

A reading of Genesis 2 suggests that the earth was bare before God created the garden and placed man in it. Eden was not only the home of man, but also of plants and animals. What was outside? No information is given about this, but twice in Genesis one God enjoins creatures, fish and birds first and then man - possibly including land animals - to fill the earth, implying that the earth at that time was not full. Furthermore, when man sinned and was banished from the garden, he was not only kept from the Tree of life, but was also banished to a place outside of the garden where he was required to till the ground. It appears that this had not been necessary inside the garden. Was this merely part of the curse, or was it simply like that outside of the garden? Regardless, it is apparent that outside the garden was different from inside the garden.

One wonders if Eden had not been created as both a model and source of living materials for man to use as he participated with God in enlarging the garden and filling the world with living creatures. As mankind multiplied and his population increased, he was to fill the earth by expanding Eden along with its reproducing creatures until the whole earth was covered with a garden. In this way, he would be working in parallel with God the creator, and thus he would be in God's image.

Mankind was made in God's image by participating in the creation process. Having been given materials, he was to use them creatively and benevolently. This is still true. Maiyo (1993) puts it this way: ". . . human being are dependent upon God for the immediate world; however, they are supposed to till it, keep it and care for it."

People were to be in God's image in relationship with to each other and other creatures. Dominion implies being able to work with nature in this process, not the right to destroy it. In

the words of Lockwood (1991), man was to be both "master and servant." He was God's servant, but was given mastery over nature. Bwana (1989) states that "man's role as master in developing nature's resources was to be guided by his role as a good and faithful servant in providing loving care to God's creation."

A clear understanding of the nature of this dominion, however, can best be seen in Isaiah 11:6: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them." This picture of how man and nature will relate to each other in the restored earth helps us understand the relationship that existed in the beginning.

This suggests that the dominion given to man was more of a response given to him by nature rather than one exacted by him. A child cannot command a powerful lion, for example. That a lion will be led by a child results from an instinct in the lion itself. As it will be, so it was. Perhaps a vestige of this can be still seen in the response of some domestic animals to man.

Only when sin came did animals come to fear and threaten people. After the flood nature changed. Genesis 9:2 records that the "fear of you and the terror of you shall be on every beast of the earth. . ." In sin, man lost his dominion and now attempts to recover it through force, but this is very different from what was supposed to be.

Ellen White, in *My Life Today*, supports the idea of enlarging the garden. She pictures life in the restored earth and "the garden of delight, a sample of the perfect work of God's creation, untouched by the curse of sin - a sample of what the whole earth would have become, had man but fulfilled the Creator's glorious plan." Again, in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Ellen White wrote: "the home of our first parents was to be a pattern for other homes as their children should go forth to occupy the earth."

This explanation tries to maintain the distinction between these two apparently contradictory ideas in Genesis 1 and 2 that speak of dominance and subduing on the one hand, and of dressing and keeping the garden on the other, while still maintaining the idea of stewardship and care for a good creation. Since the positions that have been taken from these texts are not entirely satisfactory, it appears that this clarification should help Christians take a position that is in harmony, both with having dominion and nurturing the garden without damaging either concept. Thus, through this understanding, believers not only have a rationale to care for nature, but also a biblical mandate to do it.

Man was placed under God, of course, but over nature. Nature was under man and subject to his benevolent decisions and man was to also care for nature, just as God cares for all of His creation.

Man was not God, as some pantheistic environmental enthusiasts like to think, but he was in God's image, was like God in certain respects and especially in his relationship to nature. Although this is no longer as true as it was in the beginning, it is possible to move back in that direction, thankfully. Man was given his work as a co-creator; at the same time, he was to keep his faith and assurance in the ultimate Creator?

## Remembering The One Who Created

In doing this God-given work of caring for nature and filling the earth, man was not to forget his relationship with his Maker. Before all, God set aside the seventh day because on that day He finished His work (Genesis 2:2&3). This is further endorsed by the fourth commandment (Exodus 20:12) which specifically associated the Sabbath with the creation of all things. Additionally, Jesus pointed out that the Sabbath was made for man (Mark 2:27).

In doing his work, man was not to lose sight of the source of his creative power and delight. The Sabbath was a time for man to delight in his Maker. As he worked in the garden and even extended it to other parts of earth, there was danger that some would come to see themselves as creators apart from God and take credit to themselves. Fallen man has often done this. The Sabbath was to be a constant reminder that man was not the ultimate creator, but still a creature. It not only provided physical rest, but more importantly, it was to remind of the creative and sustaining Source of all things so that, in this correct relationship, we would maintain our assurance that God values and keeps us. If in our own creative activity there is danger of forgetting our Creator-creature relationship, then having us stop this activity to participate in a different activity that specifically reminds us of this relationship was vitally important. This was the purpose of the Sabbath.

People were to rejoice in all the plants and animals that had been provided and express gratitude to the Creator for them. This would remind them that all life was not only made by God, but was also kept by Him. As the population of people and animals grew and spread around the world, man was constantly to remember his relationship with the Creator that made it possible. Creation was good, and so was man, but it could only be kept that way in the renewing relationship with the Creator.

The Sabbath, correctly understood and observed, kept man from placing either too high or too low a value on himself and others, including plants and animals. When he remembered his true context, selfishness could not develop, for the Creator supplied all needs. There was no need to worry, for, in this context, greed made no sense at all.

In sin, however, man has often forgotten who he is. This results in abuse of both his fellows and nature. Today man often places either too high or too low a value on himself and others, including nature. God must have known what would happen when we forget Him, so He specifically told us to remember our relationship with Him as creator, redeemer, and sustainer; to remember Him on the Sabbath.

By putting aside his work on the Sabbath, man was acknowledging God as the ultimate source. This would only be possible during the time designated by the Creator. Any other time would be placing man above God and just would not satisfy man's need to trust the Creator as continually interested in his well-being. He sustains us.

If the Sabbath was important for man before the Fall, how much more important must it be today! Paul, writing in Romans 8:19 - 22, suggests that nature suffers as consequence of sin and will also be liberated when we are. Just as man was placed under God, so nature was placed

under man. The relationships were parallel. Just as man is alienated from his Maker, so nature is alienated from her master. As God cares for His creation, so man was to care for nature. Unfortunately, man lost his dominion and now attempts to get it back by force. Thus nature suffers. Nature, however, really does matter. A return to a correct relationship with our Maker will be good for nature in an ultimate sense, but it should also be good for nature now. As man gets nearer to his original state, so will nature.

Why would God mandate Sabbath-keeping in His commandments? How is the Sabbath good for man today? Only as we maintain the relationship enjoined by that commandment, would we be able to keep any of the others. Only as we understand and internalize the Creator-creature relationship can we evaluate our own position and correctly relate to our Maker and to others of His creatures. Only as we really understand His keeping power and will to do it, can we allow our anxious spirits to rest. This is the rest provided by the Sabbath, a rest that enables each one to unselfishly reach out to all other creatures.

Lockton (1922) observes that the Sabbath is a key Adventist belief, though more often it has been non-Adventists who have seen its relevance to the environmental debate. He also notes that Adventists have tended to be more preoccupied with the process of creation than with its significance. He questions (Lockton 1991), "Have we concentrated exclusively on the veracity of the creation account and thus failed to see the significance of the creation?" Perhaps we have also been so concerned that we keep the correct day for the Sabbath that we have not been concerned about understanding its meaning? It is quite possible, as we well know, to strictly revere the right day, but fail to enjoy the promised rest.

Joan Huyser-Honig (1992) in *Christianity Today* writes that evangelicals (and she might have broadened this to include all Christians) need to reclaim their ancient biblical teaching that God is Creator and Redeemer. This is the message of Revelation 14:7 which counsels in the context of God's impending judgement, to worship Him who made heaven, and earth, and the fountains of waters. Maiyo (1993) observes that Adventists are in a better position to tackle the environmental questions and provide better leadership in this area because of the Sabbath and Creation. But this is only possible when we truly understand how Sabbath rest is obtained. Adventists may pride themselves in observing the correct day. Let us beware that while knowing this, we fail to understand and use it correctly.

Sabbath rest is the assurance that God is in control. Revelation 13:17 looks forward to a time when God's followers will not be permitted to buy or sell. Then they will have to possess the assurance of His keeping care that Sabbath rest provides. Then, this rest will be fully realized as He provides for our needs. No wonder we are admonished to worship Him who made heaven and earth and the fountains of waters.

#### **The Incarnate Jesus:**

Jesus, through the incarnation, gave value to flesh. Romans 8:3 points out that: ". . . what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh."



That the Creator stepped into His creation is truly amazing. One can imagine a painter painting himself in one of his paintings, but for the Creator to become one with His fallen creatures is almost beyond belief. Clearly there could be no stronger statement about the value He places on us and on His creation. Bonhoeffer speaks of the image of God in man being lost, so the Creator assumed the image of fallen man so that, in this amazing way we may still be in His image.

The highest view of life can be seen in the death of Jesus. Cullmann (1960) contrasts the deaths of Socrates and Jesus; the Greek view of life and death with the Jewish view. Socrates welcomed death as crossing a portal into a higher existence. Jesus feared and trembled before death as eternal oblivion. There was no ascent to a higher existence in view for Him; at that time He had even lost sight of the resurrection. Only as death is real, can we see life - all life - as truly valuable. If death results in an eternal bodyless and improved existence, then death resulting from sin makes no sense at all; life as we know it makes no sense either. Scripture fails too.

If death is real annihilation, however, as Jesus' seems to indicate by His own reaction to it, then life takes on meaning and value. The body becomes important; something to protect and save. Furthermore, the resurrection of Jesus to physical bodily life, tells us that we too can look forward to living bodily lives after the resurrection of the just, albeit in bodies that have lost the effects of degeneration.

Jesus' death must also be seen as the ultimate rest in the Father's care. The lesson Jesus attempted to teach his disciples time and again, He lived and died by. He lived in full assurance of the Father's care and He died in it too. In death He rested from an accomplished work for our salvation. That His rest in death occurred on the Sabbath day is significant. For us, then, the Sabbath takes on additional meaning; not only can we rest in the Creator's continued care, but in His salvation as well.

Then Jesus rose from death to apply the rights He had earned for us. After resting in an accomplished task, He used His own merits for us.

Not only did Christ give value to flesh in Himself, however, He passed that value to fallen flesh by raising it, through the Holy Spirit, to a new condition. Paul, in Galatians 2:20, notes that "I have been crucified with Christ. . . and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God." In 1 Corinthians 6:19 this is further clarified when Paul suggested that our bodies are temples of the Holy Ghost. This is an amazing possibility.

### **Jesus And Nature:**

Jesus, during His ministry, was an out-doors-man. As he developed His ministry, it quickly became necessary to abandon teaching in synagogues. They were closed to Him. Barclay (1987) points out that by far the greater part of His teaching was done in the open air. Jesus lived a simple life, ate simple food, and didn't even have a house of his own. He tread lightly on nature. Even though teaching in the open air became a necessity, it is also safe to say that it was the environment of choice for the message He needed to give.

It is often said that Jesus spent much time out-of-doors. Can that be established? A survey of Jesus' activities in the four Gospels was quite revealing. Jesus' activities were studied to reveal his location on different recorded occasions and then it was determined whether He was indoors or outdoors at the time. The results, as follows, show that Jesus' activities were out-of-doors about two thirds of the recorded times:

Matthew = 70.42 percent out-of-doors	Mark = 73.75 percent out-of-doors
Luke = 60.75 percent out-of-doors	John = 60.38 percent out-of-doors

Average for all four Gospels = 66.78 percent out-of-doors

Outdoor teaching required certain outstanding qualities. Barclay (1967) notes that outdoor teaching has to be immediately arresting, of universal and lingering appeal, and understandable by ordinary people. Thus Jesus taught in parables. But there was one overriding advantage to teaching in the open air.

When the disciples proudly pointed out the magnificent temple, Jesus informed them that it would be torn down and not one stone left standing upon another. Even today, magnificent churches, likewise built to glorify God, are more often monuments to man's creativity. While creativity is a wonderful gift, we must never forget the source of this power in us. We have difficulty, however, keeping ourselves out of the picture.

By teaching in the open air, Jesus was free from man-made distractions. Ellen White (1892) notes that "Christ came to teach men of God, and he made manifest the fact that everything in nature teaches of spiritual and eternal things." To teach spiritual lessons, the out-of-doors is un-surpassed. Correctly understood and appreciated, nature, although marred, still points to the Creator.

Nature and the Sabbath teach the same lessons. Ellen White comments on this in *Counsels on Health*: "Christ's purpose in parable teaching was in direct line with the purpose of the Sabbath. God gave to men the memorial of his creative power, that they might discern Him in the works of His hand."

She pictures Jesus and the disciples on their way to the synagogue crossing fields, passing along the shore and under trees (*Education* p. 251), In *My Life Today*, Ellen White observed that "The Sabbath bids us behold in His created works the glory of the Creator. And it is because He desired to do this that Jesus bound up His precious lessons with the beauty of natural things. "

Jesus used nature to teach us the attitude we must have in a correct relationship with God. He admonished His disciples in Matthew 6: 26, 28-30: "Oh ye of little faith!" or "Where is your faith?" He spoke, in the same passage, of the Father's care:

"Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not more valuable than they? So why do you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the

field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin; And yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Now, if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is, and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will He not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore, do not worry. . . ."

These are precisely the lessons we must learn today too, especially today. These are the attitudes we must learn from nature and the Sabbath. Nature is a valuable source of examples of the Father's care of both nature and us. Nature and the Sabbath teach the same lessons: the Father knows our needs, do not worry, for not even a sparrow falls unobserved by the Father.

In our materialistic society today, these are lessons we have forgotten. It will take effort to assimilate them now, but it can and must be done. Cheryl Jetter (1991) writing in the *Adventist Review*, recounts her experience from the sixties to the nineties searching for meaning in life. She concludes: "But I also realize enormous changes will have to occur, particularly among we who have American values and Western thought systems, before people and the earth can live together in a relationship that simultaneously nurtures both.

#### **The Roots Of Our Problem:**

How did we get away from the kind of worship our Maker so desires us to experience? How can we recover a correct understanding of the creature-Creator relationship? Can the Sabbath help us to regain it? If Scripture values nature, as many have pointed out, why do Christians appear to value nature so little?

The value Jesus placed on nature has already been described. This view of nature appears to have been widespread among Jews and first century Christians alike. Norman (1992) writing in the *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*, notes: ". . . for Jewish writers, by and large, God was intensely and personally interested in His creation. . ." He further notes: "Paul's cosmology, which was based upon a transcendent God who reconciled the world through Jesus Christ, and who, as a personal Being, was interested in His creation, was totally opposed to the philosopher's general tenet that the transcendent entity ruling the cosmos was reason. . . Paul's cosmology announced that there was a God in heaven who cared about men."

What changed? Why? As the church developed in the centuries following the time of Jesus, and especially after the second century, certain Greek philosophies influenced Christian thought and doctrine. Among these were Platonism, Neoplatonism, Gnosticism and Pantheism.

Platonism and Neoplatonism believed in an ultimate and timeless reality beyond the world of senses. Human life was both corporal and spiritual and perceived dualistically. It was the spiritual life that really counted.

Gnosticism also had a dualistic view of life. The world was believed to have been created by a lesser imperfect being and was, as a consequence, lesser and imperfect too. In this inferior creation, however, mankind had received a divine spark and it was possible for the supreme

transcendent being to awaken that spark and for it to be reintegrated with the divine source. It was this spirit alone that produced humanity and it was what was capable of being saved.

Pantheism viewed nature as embodying God. This view of nature has captured the imagination of some environmentalists and partly accounts for the paranoia expressed by some Christians relative to the environmental movement.

Francis Schaeffer has written of Greek ideas and philosophies influencing doctrines of the Christian church and their impact today. Perhaps he was reflecting on Lynn White's prediction that the solution for the ecologic crisis would have to be religious:

It is well to stress, then, that Christianity does not automatically have the answer; it has to be the right kind of Christianity. Any Christianity that rests upon a dichotomy - some sort of platonic concept simply does not have an answer to nature, and we must say with tears that much orthodoxy, much evangelical Christianity, is rooted in a platonic concept, wherein the only interest is in the "upper story," in the heavenly things - only in "saving the soul" and getting it to heaven. In this platonic concept, even though orthodox and evangelical terminology is used, there is little or no interest in the proper pleasures of the body or the proper uses of the intellect. In such Christianity there is a strong tendency to see nothing in nature beyond its use as one of the classic proofs of God's existence. . .

Santmire (1985), writes metaphorically of ascent. He notes that when ascent is dominant, then the overflowing goodness of God will be viewed as the first stage in a universal divine economy whose final goal is the ascent of the spiritual creatures alone to union with God." He continues: . . . "The metaphor of ascent can lead to a thoroughgoing religiometaphysical dualism, as in Gnosticism. Here the material world is envisioned as a vast prison, not in any sense a place of blessing, to which the only appropriate response will be the desire to escape: to rise to the highest levels of true being, far above the evils of nature."

These philosophies which influenced Christian doctrine, in the words of James Nash (1991): ". . . dismissed the theological and ethical relevance of the biophysical world from which it was alienated, and thereby gave tacit (rarely explicit) permission for environmental destruction to proceed as an ultimately and morally immaterial matter." Walsh and Middleton (1984) observe: "To this day Christians are still not free, in either their world view or lifestyle, from the debilitating effects of this unbiblical dualism."

Greek philosophies demeaned nature and the concept of creation along with the God of creation, and anything linked with these was correspondingly reduced in value. It is not difficult to see that these could lead to a number of theological misunderstandings that are still prevalent today: the immortal soul, the ascent of a conscious spirit at death, an eternally burning hell, the evil nature of flesh leading to celibacy and monasticism (although some monastic orders were service oriented), and the reduced value placed on remembering the Creator, Sabbath keeping, so that even the day could be changed. This change was quite

complex involving many factors, including social and political forces, but it is safe to say that dualism, especially Gnosticism, did nothing to protect it. Christians have lost much. We must get back to where we were.

Conversely, a return to a correct understanding of and relationship with the Creator and the creation, establishes and undergirds a number of important Christian doctrines: creation and its associated Sabbath to remember the Creator, the reality of death (as contrasted with an ethereal bodyless and eternal existence of some kind after death), and the resurrection among others. These understandings give real meaning and significance to the atonement of Christ. Of what importance was the incarnation and death of Jesus if man went on living anyway? They undergird Christian charity and care giving. They provide a Christian rationale for healthful living. Caring for nature becomes Christian and is no longer of no consequence to the Christian, for creation contains important messages to us from the Creator. Nature, at its ecological best, also models the importance of relationships; we need each other.

Christians may ignore and deny the influence of Greek philosophies in Christian doctrines, but one need not be conscious of the source of ideas to believe them. In fact, failure to know the philosophical bases of ideas, may only enable one to believe error more tenaciously.

Holms (1975) notes that "evangelicals have stressed the "how" of creation, yet the biblical teaching has more far-reaching essentials — one is in the character of theism as against Gnostic dualism and pantheism and naturalism." Rasi (1991) observes that Christians have to fight on two fronts: naturalism and neopanteism. Naturalism does away with God and pantheism puts him inside of everything. While these appear very different, he also notes that they both appeal to human pride by "placing human beings at center stage." Furthermore, as a consequence of Greek philosophies that were integrated into Christian doctrines, Christians also have to exercise caution on a third and even more subtle front, within their very own doctrines.

#### **Summary:**

The church has been slow to join the environmental movement and has been blamed for the problem. Many have denied this, with justification, but some in the church misunderstand the importance of nature and give the accusation credence through their activities and statements. Genesis teaches that man, in God's image, was given dominance in association with filling and subduing the earth. This can be seen as extending the garden which he was to dress and keep. The Sabbath reminded man that in all of his creative activity, he was to always remember that God was the creator, sustainer, and source. Jesus, in His incarnation and death, placed high value on mankind and nature. Consequently, He lived lightly in nature and used nature as a source of spiritual lessons. Erroneous philosophies, however, influenced Christian doctrines so that, even today, many Christians unknowingly subscribe to Gnostic ideas.

These ideas have had a serious impact on the way we look at nature and God the creator. A return to our primitive biblical understandings and relationships, however, gives strength to fundamental Christian doctrines and gives us both a reason and a requirement to care for nature, God's work of art, for it is an important means of His divine communication.

### **Finding Faith Through Nature: An Application:**

How can we apply ideas about the value the Creator places on nature so that dualism in whatever form it takes, can be philosophically and Christianly dealt with? Is there anything we can do to better prepare students and in so doing integrate faith into the science curriculum? What can be done that would enable us to put the Creator in His proper place?

It must be made clear that Christian teachings and doctrines are not indifferent to the plight of nature. To ignore nature is to ignore our own well being and that is unacceptable from any angle, including the teachings of Christianity. "God made it; we need; let's keep it," must be our position. Furthermore, Christian witness should have more impact if it does not ignore the environment. Loconte, reporting in *Christianity Today* (1993) quoted Carl Sagan: "It's clear that sciences alone cannot by any means provide the moral impetus that religion can." While we may rejoice at this acknowledgement of the place of religion in solving the environmental crisis, we must remember the advice of Schaeffer (1970), already referred, to when he looked to Christianity for the answer to the environment: ". . . it has to be the right kind of Christianity."

It is clear, however, that a Christian's view of nature will be very different from the typical environmentalist. That does not mean they cannot work together, but it does mean that a Christian's answer may be have different nuances and approaches.

How can these ideas be applied in the classroom? In today's university curriculum, nature is, for practical purposes, almost totally within the jurisdiction of the sciences. Holms (1975) points out that "the least far-ranging impact of Christian theology is in the natural sciences, despite the fact that more has probably been written about the relationship of Christianity to science than to other areas." He further notes the "sad paradox" that science declares nature to be intelligible and rationally ordered while others observe that life is devoid of meaning and intelligible order.

Science, because of restraints inherent in the definition of science, has difficulty staying within the limits of science while speaking of faith. Thus a scientist, who is a Christian, may be indistinguishable in the classroom from his non-christian counterpart. With this dilemma in mind, Arthur Holms divides scientists into two camps: the metaphysical naturalists and the methodological naturalists, the latter made up of scientists who are Christians. This dilemma is the heart of the problem of integrating faith with the natural sciences. Must a scientist who is a Christian be indistinguishable from his naturalist counterpart?

The study of nature need not and should not be the the sole responsibility of the sciences. Many other disciplines have a right and duty to speak about nature from their vantage points. Certainly, nature is a source of inspiration in the arts and students need to be taught to see

nature aesthetically. Since nature is one way in which the Creator communicates with us, there is also a spiritual dimension that should be studied; there are theological implications. Economics must take nature into account and unless it does, nature will have the last word as people mindlessly extract from her. Nature study also has a place in the humanities, for is not man an important component of nature? Does not nature impact man? It is also important that students and teachers know the philosophical bases for their understanding of nature. Clearly then, nature must be approached through interdisciplinary studies. This would appear to be not only an opportunity for the Christian college, but a requirement as well.

In an earlier faith and learning workshop, John Wesley Taylor (1988), from Montermorelos University, proposed an interdisciplinary course that would integrate faith with studying nature. Many disciplines would be brought together to understand both creation and the Creator. This would appear to be a sound approach and beginning toward giving students a philosophical undergirding for understanding creation. At the same time, it would allow science teachers to clarify their own positions. When we understand the bases for our own thought patterns, we will be able to modify our world view as necessary. This will be important as we make decisions in our complex society. The Holy Spirit, enabling and working through better understanding, will help us trust the Creator to keep us and to convey this assurance to others. This is the ultimate integration of faith and learning.

It is important, however, that we not wait until students are in university to begin reversing errors. We should begin doing this with children at an early age. They need to be taught, in simple ways, the meaning and significance of creation and how it points to the Creator. Correctly presented, children should have little difficulty in understanding these basic concepts.

I would propose developing educational materials, possibly to be circulated through some type of simple periodical or newsletter, that would help parents and others involved in child evangelism, to find lessons in nature for use on Sabbath afternoons especially, for this is the most appropriate time for such activities. These would teach about nature in nature and the God of nature. It should invite input from both parents and children. In our urban society, this appears to be more important than ever.

We need to develop ways to foster consciousness about the environment and a willingness to participate as good stewards of creation. Bwana (1990) emphasizes the use of the school environment for teaching stewardship of nature. He urges campus beautification and involvement in community preservation and restoration of the environment. Since the beautiful campus speaks of the Creator, the campus beautification activity reacts on those so involved to enhance faith. Boughman (1994) notes that: "As Christians, we have a God-given mandate to care for the earth. . . As Seventh-day Adventist educators this mandate should be taken to its fullest potential. We could make our campuses the most beautiful places on earth if we were willing. We could leave areas of the campus in a natural state for study of animals and water life. We could plant trees, shrubs, and flowers in an attractive manner which will draw us closer to God.

These are some possible approaches to the problem of integrating faith with the study of nature and natural science. There are other ideas and approaches that may be thought of. Nevertheless, all of them should lead to greater trust in the Creator and better use of nature, His gift to us.



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