



John Wesley Taylor V

Caring for God's World Is Very, Very Good

As a child, I grew up not far from a rain forest. Quite often, our family would hike through the forest, and I would marvel at the towering trees covered with epiphytes, the birds that called from the green canopy, and the translucent butterflies that fluttered in the occasional pools of sunlight. At night, I would listen to the logging trucks lumber by, carrying to port the massive logs to cut from trees that had been growing for centuries. And I felt a certain sadness. I also remember, at that time, my sense of pride as I completed the construction of a wall-to-wall desk for my bedroom, made from a single slab of mahogany. Disconnect.

Not so long ago, I spotted a late-model, zero-emissions car, with a “Go Green!” sticker displayed on the bumper. In a steakhouse parking lot. Disconnect.¹

Sometimes in schools, we talk about global warming and the ozone layer; we make posters to “Save the Dolphins” and create murals on protecting our planet. Then we buy disposable plates and utensils, leave lights on and faucets running, and toss our trash into a single receptacle. Again, a disconnect.

As Christians, why should we care about the environment, anyway? Didn't God make us the masters of the Earth,² to use it for our benefit? Aren't human beings of greater value than animals, trees, and rivers?³ Weren't the Israelites punished for worshiping the earth and what is in it?⁴ Don't we believe in the Second Coming, when the Earth will be consumed by fire,⁵ and God Himself will create “a new heaven and a new earth”?⁶ Isn't our commission to save souls,⁷ rather than save the planet?

While valid concerns, perhaps we should start with a different question: As Christians, why shouldn't we care about the environment? The answer is simply: Caring for the creation is biblical.

It all begins with God, the Creator, who brought into existence a physical world which He viewed with delight.⁸ He then created human beings in His image—to reflect His character and priorities—and placed them as stewards of His creation.⁹ They were commissioned to serve and preserve the planet and all that was in it¹⁰—a divine commission that has never been rescinded. In essence, the earth is the Lord's,¹¹ and we are to be responsible

trustees of the ecosystem in which we live.¹²

God remains vitally connected with and protective of His creation.¹³ At the time of the Flood, for example, God not only preserved the various species,¹⁴ but also explicitly included the animals in the subsequent covenant relationship.¹⁵ Instructing the Israelites regarding His expectations, God stipulated kindness to animals, as well as a sabbath rest for the land and the animals.¹⁶ Even in war, the environment was to be protected.¹⁷

Conversely, God is distressed when His creation is desecrated and exploited.¹⁸ Through the prophet Ezekiel, for example, God decried those who contaminate and destroy the ecosystems: “Woe to the shepherds of Israel who only take care of themselves! . . . Is it not enough for you to feed on the good pasture? Must you also trample the rest of your pasture with your feet? Is it not enough for you to drink clear water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet?”¹⁹ In Revelation, the 24 elders, seated next to God's throne, cry out, “The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come . . . for destroying those who destroy the earth.”²⁰

So what are we to do? What are the implications for Adventist education? That is the focus of this special theme issue.

Humberto Rasi starts us on the journey with an exploration of 10 biblical concepts that form the building blocks of our relation with the environment. Rodger Jones follows with a look at how principles and practices of environmental awareness might be taught at elementary, secondary, and tertiary levels. Mark Carr then addresses how Christians should treat animals, particularly in research, including strategies for developing ethical policies for educational institutions.

Other articles examine the influence of humans on species extinctions (William and Floyd Hayes) and how Adventist institutions might best practice environmental care (John Ashton). The issue concludes with a number of intriguing case studies by Lori Futcher and Joy Veverka, and an array of practical suggestions by Carrie Wolfe of what we can do in our schools and in our lives to better practice environmental stewardship.

It is all good, very good. Connect.

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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. In all fairness, the steakhouse also featured an excellent salad bar. So perhaps, only a potential disconnect.
2. Genesis 1:28. All Scripture quotations in the article and endnotes are from *The Holy Bible, New International Version*. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.
3. Matthew 6:26; 12:11, 12.
4. Isaiah 44; Romans 1:25. A similar pantheistic worldview pervades the New Age “Mother Earth” perspective.
5. 2 Peter 3:10-12.
6. Isaiah 65:17; Revelation 21:1.
7. Matthew 28:18-20.
8. In Genesis 1, God repeatedly assesses the creation as “good” and “very good,” conveying its God-given value. See also Exodus 20:11; Nehemiah 9:6; Psalm 95:5; Jeremiah 32:17; John 1:3; Ephesians 3:9; Colossians 1:15-17; Hebrews 1:2; and Revelation 4:11; 14:7; 11:17, 18.
9. Genesis 1:26-28. God’s command that humans were to have dominion over all created things has been used irresponsibly as an excuse to plunder the Earth. To *have dominion*, however, means *to be in charge of*. Thus, God put us in charge of *caring* for His creation.
10. Genesis 2:15. The Hebrew words *abad* and *shamar* in this passage, rendered in the KJV as *dress* and *keep*, could also be translated as *serve* and *preserve*.

In fact, the word *shamar* is also used in the Aaronic blessing (Numbers 6:24), “The Lord bless you and keep you.” In the same way that we wish for God to preserve us, we are to protect and care for His creation.

11. Exodus 9:29; Deuteronomy 10:14; 1 Chronicles 29:11; Job 41:11; Psalm 24:1, 2; 89:11; 95:3-5; 104:24; 1 Corinthians 10:26.
12. Leviticus 25:23-24; Psalm 8:6-8; Luke 16:2-13.
13. Job 12:10; Psalm 65:9-13; 104:10-14; 145:9-17; Isaiah 43:20, 21; Matthew 6:26; 10:29; Luke 12:6; Hebrews 1:3.
14. Genesis 6:19-21; 7:3; 9:1.
15. Genesis 9:8-10; 9:12-17. A covenant that includes the creatures of the field and the birds is also referenced in Hosea 2:18.
16. Exodus 23:4, 5, 10-12; Leviticus 25:2-7; Deuteronomy 5:12-15; 22:1-4; 25:4; Proverbs 12:10.
17. Deuteronomy 20:19.
18. Isaiah 24:4-6; Hosea 4:1-3; Joel 1:15-20; Zechariah 7:8-14; 11:1-3. Jeremiah, for example, writes: “I brought you into a fertile land to eat its fruit and rich produce. But you came and defiled my land” (2:7). “How long will the land lie parched and the grass in every field be withered? Because those who live in it are wicked, the animals and birds have perished” (12:4). “It will be made a wasteland, parched and desolate before me; the whole land will be laid waste because there is no one who cares” (12:11).
19. Ezekiel 34: 2-4, 17, 18; Isaiah 5:8-10; 24:4-6; Psalm 107:33, 34.
20. Revelation 11:18.

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