

Institute for Christian Teaching  
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**STEWARDSHIP OF THE ENVIRONMENT:  
AN ADVENTIST IMPERATIVE**

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Prepared for the  
26<sup>th</sup> International Faith and Learning Seminar  
held at the  
Geoscience Research Institute, Loma Linda, California, U.S.A.  
July 16-28, 2000

### **Introduction**

Among Seventh-day Adventist Christians, stewardship is a concept largely associated with the body temple, time, talents and treasure, with most emphasis being placed on stewardship of treasure. A friend of mine who once served as a Conference Stewardship Director admitted during a personal interview that he was disappointed one day when he bought two books bearing stewardship titles only to discover much to his dismay that the books were dwelling on stewardship of treasure. As one reads the bulk of Adventist literature on stewardship he or she discovers that the subject of stewardship of the environment is either given little attention or is not mentioned at all. These observations make it clear that stewardship of the environment is a peripheral subject in Adventist thinking. The aim of this paper is to; 1. Point out some impediments that have contributed to Adventist's lack of high level of awareness and commitment to environmental care; 2. Give reasons why Adventist should view themselves as key players in matters of the environment. 3. Examine three working relationships between humans and the environment. Although we shall discuss the environment in general we shall at the conclusion of this paper make practical suggestions with regard to handling of natural disasters and responsible use of land.

### **Impediments to Environmental Stewardship Among Adventists**

According to Gene Johnson there are three prevailing concepts among Seventh-day Adventists which hinder them from a higher level of awareness and participation in matters of the environment. The first concept is based on the belief that the Lord is coming soon and that at His coming He will destroy the earth. The natural conclusion following this trend of thinking is "why worry about something that will be soon destroyed"<sup>1</sup> The second factor is what Johnson refers to as "fanatiphobia" which is actually fear of being labeled on "ecofreak" if one emphasizes environmental concerns.<sup>2</sup> The third factor has to do with accepting other people as one's role models in matters of environmental care. The problem with this pattern of operation is that one ends up doing wrong things to the environment because others are doing it.<sup>3</sup> We may also add another factor which we will refer to as the "battlefield mentality". Those who operate under his mode of thinking treat this world as a battlefield where they are contending with forces of evil. Naturally people do not care much for the battlefield as they do for their homes. These are some of the factors that we see as impediments to Adventist's environmental awareness.

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<sup>1</sup> Gene Johnson "Keepers of the Garden" Ministry (August 1988): 12.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 13

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 13

Meanwhile, the world is experiencing many environmental changes, some positive, some negative, some brought about by human activity, some brought about by spontaneous natural powers, some originating from divine power while some originate from demonic forces. The bottomline is, whatever change comes and whatever its source, it does affect human life one way or another and for that reason humans have to reckon with it.

The world outside is taking environmental issues seriously. This is demonstrated by the amount of literature that is coming out to address matters of the environment. As I write now I have before me a good number of books recently published by non Adventists on the subject of the environment. Major meetings concerning the environment have been conducted in places like Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; Nairobi in Kenya; Kyoto in Japan and many other places all over the world in this last decade. Government agencies, religious organizations and private organizations are all involved. All these are involved for various reasons and to achieve different purposes. We want to highlight reasons why Adventists must be involved. Following are the reasons we shall discuss in the paper:

1. God created this world perfect
2. God created man a steward
3. When man fell God reconciled man to himself
4. The Sabbath serves to remind men to inculcate a culture of environmental care.
5. God's example challenges human beings to care for the environment,
6. God will actually redeem this world.

## 6. The World at Creation

God created a perfect world described as very good at the time of its completion (Gen. 1:31). The Hebrew word "bara" used in connection with creating the world means to begin and has connotations of making something new.<sup>4</sup> Ellen White gave a beautiful description of the world as it came from God's hands. She says:

"As the earth came from the hand of its Maker, it was exceedingly beautiful. Its surface was diversified with mountains, hills, and plains. interspersed with rivers and lovely lakes; but the hills and mountains were not abrupt and rugged, abounding in terrific steeps and frightful chasms. There were no loathsome swamps or barren deserts, graceful shrubs and delicate flowers greeted the eye at every turn. The heights were crowned with trees more majestic than any that now exist. The air, untainted by foul miasma, was clear and healthful."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> William Gesenius A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament and Trans. Edward Robinson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), 94.

<sup>5</sup> Ellen G. White. Patriarchs and Prophets (Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association 1958), 44.

This was the first state of the world. It was marked by beauty, goodness, perfection and cleanness. This is the place Adam and Eve had for their first home and it is the natural environment they were commanded to execute their dominion over. It was not only good because of conditions in the natural environment, it was also good because it was disease free, pain free and death free. It is important to us in that it reveals God's original ideal environment for us which should serve as our model home even today. It is important also because it tells us this world belongs to God, its Creator.

### **God Created Man a Steward**

God created man as a steward. A steward in Mel Rees' definition is "one who manages the property of another"<sup>6</sup> That man was created a steward is made evident by the nature of responsibilities and commands God issued to humans at creation. The key terms we shall consider in this respect are:

1. image of God.
2. be fruitful and multiply
3. subdue the earth
4. dominion
5. dress it and keep it.

#### **A. Image of God**

The image of God as elucidated upon most insightfully by Angel Rodrigues means that humans resembled God in all areas of being. i.e. morally, mentally physically and socially.<sup>7</sup> Among all His earthly creatures, it is only to humans that God could make the social appeal. "Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them" (Exodus 25:8). It is only to humans that God could make the intellectual appeal, "Come now, let us reason together" (Isa 1:18). It is only to humans that God could give the mental task to give names to animals (Gen 2:19). Rodrigues also observed that it takes a mind that can comprehend an animal's characteristics in order to come up with a name that corresponds to those characteristics.<sup>8</sup> In short humans were at creation equipped with the ability to shoulder responsibility and therefore could function as God's stewards over the environment.

#### **A. Be Fruitful and Multiply**

The expression "Be fruitful and multiply (Gen 1:28) usually associated with human

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<sup>6</sup> Mel Rees Biblical Principles for Living and Living (Allanta: J.A. Thomas and Associates. 1995).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Angel Rodrigues, Stewardship Roots (Silver Spring: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists 1994), 5-6.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 5-7

procreation actually has direct implications on humans as productive managers of God's creation. Judeo-Christian scholars who recently produced a book on environmental stewardship also indicated that this expression has to do with humans joining God in making "provision for our temporal well-being and enhancing the beauty and fruitfulness of the rest of the earth."<sup>9</sup> The call to be fruitful therefore is to be viewed as indicating the call by God to humans for productive and fruitful management of the world. To the Adventist Christian it is a clarion call for him/her to play an active role in the management of the environment.

### **C. Replenish and Subdue the Earth**

This expression does not license humans to abuse the world but it encourages them to make good use of its resources. A perceptive comment on this passage was given by a panel of Judeo-Christian scholars whose work was edited by Michael B. Barkey. They said: "The Hebrew for conquering or subduing, (i.e. "koveish") clearly distinguishes between annihilating and conquering. The former is a verb for utterly destroying one's enemy. The latter refers to leaving one's enemy's resources and abilities intact and even enhancing them, but redirecting them for one's own end. That is what we are told to do with the natural world. We may not destroy, but we may use them in every possible beneficial manner."<sup>10</sup> The message to the Adventist Christian is clear. Take care of the world and use its resources without damaging it. Be productive without being destructive.

### **D. Dominion**

What God did in His sphere, taking care of the universal environment, humans were to do, taking care of the earth's environment. It is therefore not surprising that after God created humans in His own image He gave them dominion over the entire earth. "And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness and let them have dominion over the fish" of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over the earth and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." (Gen. 1:26). The word "dominion" has to do with humans receiving administrative rule over the earth from God. This word carries connotations of "benevolent kingly care."<sup>11</sup> Implied in human dominion over the world therefore is the concept of care. As a good benevolent king takes care of his subjects, humans are supposed to take care of their environment. The word dominion reminds humans that they have a kingship role to play over their environment. Michael Barkey warned against misuse of one's dominion. He said: "If man executes dominion in a way

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<sup>9</sup> Michael B. Barkey, ed. Environmental Stewardship in the Judeo-Christian Tradition. (Michigan: Acton Institution for the Study of Religion and Liberty, 2000). 9.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 10

<sup>11</sup> Rodrigues. p. 8

that ultimately destroys nature's creative potential or denies the human family the fruits of creation, such actions, constitute an offense against God's original plan of creation."<sup>12</sup>

Human dominion over the earth therefore has the well being of humans at heart and the welfare of the environmental as a matter of prime importance. Humans should nourish the environment if they are to be nourished by it. The relationship between humans and the environment is one of interdependence.

### **Dress it and keep it**

The expression "dress it and keep it" (Gen 2:15) conveys the idea of serving the environment. In the words of Professor Richard Davidson at a Faith and Learning Seminar held at Loma Linda University in July, 2000, the two words "dress" and "keep" in Hebrew respectively mean "to serve" (adad) and "to guard" (samar).<sup>13</sup> According to Caleb Rosado these terms express a sense of caring for rather than the usual sense of exploiting and raping the earth as many think the word dominion implies.<sup>14</sup>

The terms discussed point to one truth, that God created humans as stewards and He expects them to exercise their stewardship responsibilities over the environment, among other things.

### **Qualities of A Good Steward**

Two qualities stand out as demanding discussion with regard to attributes of a good steward; faithfulness and accountability.

#### **A. Faithfulness**

The apostle Paul writing to the Corinthian church said: "Moreover it is required in stewards that a man be found faithful" I Corinthians 4:2. The Lord Jesus appealed, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his Lord shall make ruler over his household to give them their portray of meat in due season. Blessed is the servant, whom his Lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath" Luke 12:42-44. In the two texts just cited stewardship is associated with faithfulness. The word faithful comes from the Greek word, pistos which means "genuine and trustworthy."<sup>15</sup> It has connotations of

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<sup>12</sup> Barney. 32

<sup>13</sup> This insight was given by Dr. Richard Davidson of Andrews University during a Faith and Learning Seminar in California at Loma Linda University in July, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> Caleb Rosado: This information is found in an unpublished work by Caleb Rosado. The paper is plainly focused on the value of the Sabbath for man today.

<sup>15</sup> Wilgrum-Green. The New English Greek Concordance and Lexicon (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1982), 714.

dependability and reliability. It calls Christian men and women to a life of dependability to the Lord in all areas of life including environmental care. Describing a steward Ellen White says the steward must identify with the master's interests and should attempt to do as the master would do if he were presiding over his own goods.<sup>16</sup>

Faithfulness, then is a pivotal quality in stewardship. To Adventists the call to faithful stewardship is a call not only to good environmental care but more importantly, it is a call to a good relationship to God. In fact we seek the relationship to God as the basis of successful stewardship because it is in the framework of a good relationship between the Divine and the human that God's interests are revealed to man and it is also in the framework of a good divine - human relationship that humans find both the motivation and the capacity to implement God's design for the environment.

#### **A. Accountability**

The next essential attribute of a steward is accountability. Accountability means the "quality of being accountable or responsible."<sup>17</sup> This term has connotations of answerability and being held responsible. This concept has been well illustrated in the parable of the talents where the Lord says He shall require recipients of talents to give an account of how they made use of the talents (Matthew 25:14-30). The world, like talents, has been divided into many small parts with each person receiving his/her portion. Each one of us will give an account of how we used our portions. The Lord says He will destroy those who destroy the earth. (Rev 11:18).

#### **The Problem of Sin**

God originally made a perfect world. Sin entered and changed the whole picture. Sin turned man from a faithful, dependable, responsible steward into a selfish unreliable being. According to Rodrigues sin led humans to strive selfishly for self-preservation.<sup>18</sup> Sin actually leads one to sacrifice his/her relationship to God, fellowmen and the environment on the altar of self gratification. Man's sin affected the environment. Ellen White described the relational changes that came between humans and other creatures after the fall of Adam and Eve. She captures the sad picture in the following words "Under the curse of sin all nature was to witness to man of the character and results of rebellion against God. When God made man, He made him ruler over the earth and all living creatures. So long as Adam remained loyal to Heaven, all nature was in subjection to him. But when he rebelled against the divine law the inferior creatures rebelled

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<sup>16</sup> Ellen G. White. *That I May Know Him* (Washington DC: Review and Herald, 1964), 220.

<sup>17</sup> Merrian Webster *Webster's New International Dictionary* (Toronto: The Webster's Dictionary Company, 1976), 13

<sup>18</sup> Rodrigues. p. 13

against his rule”<sup>19</sup>

In addition to nature’s rebellion Ellen White describes changes in creation that subjected Adam and Eve to emotional trauma. These include the falling and decaying of leaves and flowers. Weather patterns changed also.

This was but the beginning of the manifestation of sin’s consequences over the natural environment. Some consequences that came upon the natural world on account of the entrance of sin include things like volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, landslides, floods, storms, Elnino currents and global warming. In addition to natural disasters above there are environmental problems that came as a result of human mismanagement of the environment. These include things like air pollution, water pollution, deforestation, soil erosion, land mine problems and many other problems. These problems above brought untold misery to human life. Diseases of various kinds and painful deaths have been witnessed on account of the above listed consequences of sin. Sin ruptured humans relationship to the environment. It is because of sin that the “whole creation groweth and travaileth in pain together until now” (Rom 8:32).

### **Reconciliation**

Sin destroyed God’s image in man and without God’s image humans lost the capacity to function as God’s faithful stewards. In order to restore man to the status of a faithful steward, God came up with a plan of reconciliation. God effected the plan by sending His Son Jesus to come into this world to die in order to reconcile humans to God. Once accomplished, reconciliation had implications on human’s relationship to God and the environment. Reconciliation leads one to a place where he/she recognizes and accepts their place in the universe, and rejects usurping of God’s authority or claim of ownership. One reconciled operates as a faithful steward. We need to emphasize that when one is reconciled to God and is restored of His image what changes is not the environment around. What changes is the individual’s perception of himself/herself in relationship to the environment. Once the individual is reconciled he/she is expected to give their surroundings quality care as was given to the Eden home by Adam and Eve. Environmental change then comes as a result of a spiritual change in man. The essence of the message of reconciliation is “back to Eden” and also “forward to Eden” encouraging the believer to look both back to Eden created and to look forward to Eden restored.

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<sup>19</sup> White, Partriachs and Prophets (Mountain View: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1958), 59.



### **The Sabbath And Environmental Stewardship**

The doctrine of the Sabbath stands as a symbol of environmental care. The following discussion largely based on Samuel Bacchiocchi's insights identifies links between the Sabbath doctrine and the environment.

- The Sabbath helps man to recover scriptural values that ultimately equip him to act as God's steward of the body temple and the rest of the created order.<sup>20</sup>
- As a memorial of creation the Sabbath reminds human beings that this world though marred now by effects of sin was originally created good and for that reason it still has value before God.<sup>21</sup> Humans ought to value it as well.
- To the extent that the Sabbath offers humans an anticipation and foretaste of the new heaven and new earth (Isa. 66<sup>22-33</sup>), it reassures humans that God values it because he shall restore it.<sup>22</sup>
- To the extent that the Sabbath reminds humans that they share with the earth in the creation, sanctification and redemption and final restoration, the Sabbath leads humans to view the world as a working partner.<sup>23</sup>
- Sabbath keeping by Christians is a form of acknowledging that God is the Creator and Owner of everything. Humans view their role as that of stewards of God since they own nothing but owe everything to God.<sup>24</sup>
- The Sabbath calls on man to refrain from gainful use of the environment and thus inculcate in humans a culture of environmental recovery as opposed to a culture of environmental exploitation.<sup>25</sup>

Adventists being sabbath keepers should therefore demonstrate a high commitment to environmental care since the sabbath provides them with so many pointers concerning the value of this world and humans' responsibilities and obligations to it.

- **God's Care for the Environment**

God's care for the environment is exemplary to human beings. The Bible has several passages on God's care for the environment. We shall focus on two passages only, one from the Old Testament and the other from the New Testament for purposes of making our point. In the Old Testament the passage that speaks most forthrightly of God's care for the environment is Psalm 104. Reading through it one gets the impression that all creatures live from day to day because of God's providential care and

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<sup>20</sup> Samuel Bacchiocchi, Divine Rest for Human Restlessness (Berrien Spring: Biblical Perspectives 1988), 205

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 206

<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p.208

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 208

<sup>24</sup> Ibid. 209

<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 209

that the earth remains firmly positioned because of God's sustaining power. We shall capture some of the texts in this Psalm which portray the Lord as Provider of the needs of all creation.

"He sendeth the springs into the valleys, which run among the hills. They give drink to every heart of the field, the wild asses quench their thirst. By them shall the fowls of heaven have their habitation, which sing among the branches. He watereth the hills from his chambers, the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man; that he may bring food out of the earth" (Psalm 104<sup>10-14</sup>). And also, "these all wait upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season." (Psalm 104<sup>27</sup>). Whereas G.C. Leupold suggested that the theme to Psalm 104 is "God's Superlative Greatness" we suggest that the theme to this Psalm is "Environmental Care, God's Business" since the Psalm portrays the Lord deeply involved in caring for the environment.<sup>26</sup> In the New Testament the Lord stands again as the Arch-model of environmental care because he is portrayed as the God who feeds the fowls of the air and clothes the flowers of the field. (Matthew 6<sup>25-28</sup>).

To Christians God is our example in all things and His care for the environment should inform our relationship to the environment as well.

### **The World's Redemption**

This world will come to an end state of perfection through divine intervention. In that intervention the earth will experience renewal and not annihilation as aptly pointed out by Angel Rodrigues. Listen to his insights:

"The apocalyptic conflagration of the natural world is to be understood as an act of redemption, which leads, to the renewal of creation and not to its extinction. It is a transitional point from a world infected by sin to one liberated from it. It is not a denial of nature but a reaffirmation of its goodness, the experience of nature can be contrasted with that of the wicked powers. They will be totally destroyed, extinguished from God's universe, without any possibility of re-creation. They will be condemned as essentially evil. Not so with the natural world. The final conflagration is its liberation".<sup>27</sup>

Rodrigues further asserts "Nature is not expecting a future participation in the eternal destruction of the wicked but rather "into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom 8<sup>21</sup>).<sup>28</sup>

We see that God values this world in that although it has been infected by sin God still preserves it. It has survived the entrance of sin, the Noahic flood and it will, by God's grace survive the apocalyptic conflagration. It is true that the world as it exists now will soon come to an end, and it is true that this world is the battlefield between good and evil but nevertheless, on account of the fact that we are now reconciled to God, and an

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<sup>26</sup> H.C. Leupold, Exposition of the Psalms (Michigan: Baker Book House 1992), 723,

<sup>27</sup> Rodrigues, s. 15

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. s.16

account of the fact that God has given us the Sabbath, and on account of the fact God Himself has given us an example of environmental care, and an account of the fact that God is going to redeem this world, we ought to care for it. It is our home now and will be our eternal home after its redemption.

### **Basic Assumptions that Govern Relationships Between Humans and the Environment**

Generally there are three assumptions which govern humans in their relationship to the natural world. The first assumption sees nature as superior to man. The second assumption views nature as equal to man whilst the last assumption views man as superior to nature. Each of these assumptions is based on one, or more philosophic and religious foundations. We shall take each assumption at a time and suggest the possible religious or philosophic foundations that form its basis. We will also point out the implications of each philosophy's views on the human/nature relationships.

A.

#### **i. Nature is Superior to Man**

Under the assumption that says nature is superior to man we shall consider two philosophies: Naturalism and African Traditional Religion

i.

Naturalism is a philosophy which essentially teaches that humans have no control over nature but are themselves subject to nature. In addition, this philosophy teaches that people do not possess the capacity to make moral choices since in this philosophy's view everything a person does is governed by either heredity, environment or both. Karl Beckson in the "Colliers Encyclopedia" agrees with most of the facts concerning naturalism as described above but he also goes on to shed more light on the subject by noting that naturalism is a philosophy derived from Darwinian conception of nature which emphasizes "man's animal nature and denies his relation to any supernatural reality."<sup>29</sup> Naturalism has the following implications to man's relationship with the environment.

1. Man is a slave of nature and must therefore serve nature's needs.
2. Man operates on animal instincts and is therefore not accountable for his actions.
3. Since naturalism says there is no God there is no reference point for what is right and what is wrong.
4. Since nature is man's master, man should not explore nature or interfere with

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<sup>29</sup> Collier's Encyclopedia. 1974 eds. s.v. "Halsey, D. William" and "Shores, Louis" by Karl Beckson.

nature. Man should give nature the respect he gives to either a human master or to God.

The major problem of naturalism is that it has not only reversed God's order for the relationship that should exist between man and the natural world but that it has also dismissed God out of the picture altogether. If we were to summarize naturalism's essence on the basis of the description's above, we would conclude that nature is divine, humans are nature's creation, God does not exist. We therefore reject naturalism because of the role-confusion that it promotes in the God-man-environment relationship.

## **II. African Traditional Religion**

The African Traditional Religion rests firmly on the foundation of worshipping God through the ancestors. Dead people, especially the elderly, are viewed as still alive and still taking care of the family that remains. In connection with the environment, it is believed that certain spots of ground or hills, water pools or forests are the dwelling places of ancestors and therefore constitute "holy ground" whose trees or general vegetation should not be tampered with. One who chooses to "meddle" with those places, does so only at the risk of incurring the wrath of the spirits. In the traditionally protected woodland sites of Zimbabwe, it will be noted that there are places regarded as sacred which are supposed to be "places of respect for the ancestors to prevent epidemics, famines and droughts."<sup>30</sup>

The implications to man's stewardship of the environment are largely negative.

Problems associated with the special "sacred places" include:

- 1 The institutionalization of worship through dead people.
- 2 Giving to hills, rivers or trees respect that is due to God alone.
- 3 Belief in the existing of sacred places discourages beneficial use of natural resources by people.
- 4 Promotion of a religion born of fear.
- 5 Man cannot be a good steward if he/she fears some places over which he/she should exercise control.

Clearly man cannot be a good steward of God if he worships God through channels other than Jesus Christ who reconciles us to God. Fear is a wrong motivation for execution of any duty, including caring for the environment. We therefore reject African Traditional religion to serve as the ideology or religious base that informs our relationship to the environment.

Both Naturalism and African Traditional Religion unfortunately seem to agree on placing

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<sup>30</sup> Jeanette Clarke. Building on Indigenous Natural Resource Management (Harare: Earthware Publishing Services, 1994), 10

man below the rest of creation, a place which is clearly contrary to revealed religion and therefore deserve not only to be mentally rejected but also to be practically discarded by every serious minded Christian.

These teachings reduce humans to the place where humans worship what they ought to manage and fear what they ought to explore. These teachings are therefore serious impediments to productive stewardship. We therefore agree with Sammuelle Bacchiochi when he says "Secular ideologies can only motivate people to respect nature and its resources out of fear of punishment and annihilation if environment laws are disregarded. Fear of consequences, however, can at best restrain some from exploiting, polluting or destroying the environment, but it cannot produce a genuine love and respect for all forms of life. Fear can compel but does not convince."<sup>31</sup>

- **Nature is equal to man**

The second assumption we shall look at is the concept of egalitarianism. According to this concept, all created living things are equal and no one species of living things should claim superiority over others

**1) Nature is Equal to Man**

Among theories that view nature as equal to man are: 1. the concept of egalitarianism and the theory of evolution. Egalitarianism claims that all living things are equal. On account of this equality no one species of living things should claim superiority over others. One of the proponents of this position, Bill Mollison along with Reny Mia Slay pointed out;

"I think harmony with nature is possible only if we abandon the idea of superiority over the natural world. Levi Strauss said that our profound error is that we have always looked upon ourselves as "Master of creation", in the sense of being above it. We are not superior to other life forms; all living things are an expression of life. If we could see that truth, we would see that everything we do to other life-forms we also do to ourselves. A culture which understands this does not, without absolute necessity, destroy any living thing."<sup>32</sup>

This is the position advocated by most environmental activists. Its dangers are:

- 1 Egalitarianism causes unnecessary sense of guilt. e.g. If an individual cuts a tree or kills an animal, egalitarianism seems to equate this with the killing of a person since "everything we do to other life forms we also do to ourselves."
- 2 It contradicts the plain Bible teaching which says God created man in a

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<sup>31</sup> Samuel Bacchiochi, p. 205

<sup>32</sup> Bill Mollison's and Reny Mia Slay Introduction to Peramaculture (Harare: Fambidzanai Training Center. 1991), 1

superior state to that of other life forms.

This concept, we see as discouraging man to use with a free conscience those forms of life God placed under his dominion at creation and therefore must be discarded.

The other teaching which promotes equality of humans to the rest of creation is the theory of evolution. Evolution teaches that human beings are “a result of the long process of unaided evolution that converted primitive protoplasm into each one of us.”<sup>33</sup> Following are the dangerous implications of this teaching as noted by Judeo-Christian scholarship.

- 1 There is no Creator and no instructional manual for life.
- 2 Humans are obliged to follow their instincts.
- 3 Since God is not there, there is no one to take care of the cosmic threats to the earth.
- 4 Human beings are nothing more than sophisticated animals.
- 5 Animals have the same rights as humans since “We are all animals and no animal should have any special species-specific rights that all other animals do not enjoy.”<sup>34</sup>

The theory of evolution and its erroneous implications we reject because it reduces human beings to the level of animals. Judeo Christian scholarship also contemptuously responded to the theory of evolution. Here is their statement of response:

“Again if we are nothing but sophisticated animals, it is only right that important decisions should be made for us by the elite group of people playing the roles of zoo-keeper or farmer... Since nature is the ultimate good, our zoo- keepers will determine that no burden is too heavy for us to shoulder in service to our god of nature.”<sup>35</sup>

The theory of evolution is to be viewed, as an enemy of responsible stewardship and therefore Adventist Christians have no option but to shun it. It was never God’s plan that a human being should relate to animals as an animal to another animal.

### **Man’s Superiority to Nature**

That humans were created in a superior position to the rest of this world’s creation we have already demonstrated in the discussion focusing on the creation of man and the commands God gave to human beings at creation. In this part we shall only discuss a few but key principles that should govern human beings in their relationship to the environment.

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<sup>33</sup> Barkey, p. 22

<sup>34</sup> Ibid. p. 22

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. 15

As stewards of God human beings should feel free to use the earth's resources, but in so doing they are not to abuse the environment. Talking to this principle Barkey rightly noted "The principle at work here is of course precisely the same biblical principle that prohibits self-maiming, destroying a rented apartment or even having an abortion. This is to say tenants do not have the same rights as owners. We humans do not own the world, our bodies or the habitations we rent. Thus we may improve them but not destroy them."<sup>36</sup> This principle clearly discourages wanton destruction of God's creation and calls on humans to act as responsible stewards with a mission to develop the world, making it a better place to live in.

The second principle enjoins that human needs take precedence over the needs of subhuman forms of life. The rest of creation should be viewed as serving the purpose of meeting human needs and when there is a conflict between human needs and animals needs, human needs deserve to be considered first over and above animal needs. On account of this principle we reject the position of those who view animals as deserving equal rights to humans.

Inasmuch as we value development we need to avoid that kind of development which endangers human life like the manufacture and use of weapons of mass destruction. During the second world war for instance, two nuclear bombs were exploded, one at Hiroshima and the other at Nagasaki in Japan and more than eighty thousand innocent civilians were killed. Richard Nixon warned the world on the dangers of using weapons of mass destruction. Noting that the first and second world wars which were fought using conventional weapons for the most part accounted for the loss of more than sixty five million lives, Nixon went on to forecast that a third world war which may make use of nuclear weapons is likely to bring civilization as we know it now to an end.<sup>37</sup>

Our appeal is that the world should focus on betterment of human life. We cannot afford development which reverses the gains of civilization and adds misery to human life. In fact that development is not development at all but a denial of faithful stewardship before God. We support the kind of development that adds to human health, freedom, prosperity, and happiness. Such development glorifies God. We also want to underscore the fact that the earth's resources should be used responsibly.

- **Practical Suggestions**

In this section we have two subsections. In each subsection we identify an environmental issue, justify its selection, and proceed to give theological and practical

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<sup>36</sup> Barkey, 10.

<sup>37</sup> Richard Nixon. Real Peace (Boston: Little, Brown and Company 1984), 9-10.

suggestions of tackling the issue under consideration. The two areas to be considered are: natural disasters, and land.

### **A. Natural Disasters**

A disaster is a calamity, catastrophe or devastating event which is characterised by heavy losses of human life, aggravated human suffering, and other losses that lead to increased human misery. A natural disaster fits in with the above definition but it is caused by unusual natural phenomena like earthquakes, volcanoes or monsoon winds. We shall focus our attention on cyclones, because the sad memories of three devastating cyclones that hit Madagascar, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe in the period from February to March, 2000 is still fresh in the minds of millions of inhabitants of this Southern part of Africa. The deadly cyclones named Eline, Gloria and Hudah brought about heavy physical, biological, social and economic losses to the region. We shall cite some of the losses here:

A Zimbabwean national newspaper "The Chronicle" of March 10, 2000 reported that 270 000 people had been displaced by the floods in Mozambique and 20 000 were reported as left stranded by the storms.<sup>38</sup> 130 people were reported dead in Madagascar in the same issue while 10 000 were reported as left homeless and 12 000 stranded.<sup>39</sup> The March 6, issue of the Chronicle reported that a million people in Mozambique urgently needed food, medicine and shelter. The March 7 issue reported that 100 people had been killed by floods in Zimbabwe.<sup>40</sup> The same issue also reported that in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe 1, 2 billion worth of maize crop had been destroyed by the cyclones.<sup>41</sup> On March 12 the Chronicle carried the sensational story of a woman who had given birth on a tree in Mozambique. She had been there for five days when the helicopter that rescued her and her new born baby arrived.<sup>42</sup>

On March 19 it was reported that there was an outbreak of waterborne diseases like diarrhea, bronchitis and conjunctivitis in the 65 refugee camps where the flood victims were staying in Mozambique with 492 people confirmed dead.<sup>43</sup>

Considering the magnitude of suffering of millions of people in the Southern African region faced during the cyclone, I thought it necessary to share practical suggestions on dealing with natural disasters of this type. I have divided the suggestions into three parts: 1. What can be done before a disaster occurs? 2. What can be done when a disaster is happening? 3. What can be done after the disaster? Most insights were included by students from the department of Environment Science, Solusi University.

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<sup>38</sup> Stranded Mozambicans Spotted The Chronicle 10 March, 2000. p3

<sup>39</sup> Ibid p3

<sup>40</sup> "Cyclone Victims Get Donations" The Chronicle 15 March, 2000 p2.

<sup>41</sup> "Cyclone destroy \$1,2bn Crops" The Chronicle 7 March, 2000 p1

<sup>42</sup> "Flood Baby Faces Uncertain Future" Sunday News 12 March, 2000 p1

<sup>43</sup> "Fresh Rains Cause More Misery in Mozambique" Sunday News 19 March, 2000 p2.



### **Period Before the Disaster**

We subscribe to the old adage that says prevention is better than cure, and we therefore propose that before a cyclone occurs the following preventive measures be taken:

1. National prayer and call to repentance; We do understand that prayer and repentance can change things. In the Bible we find the story of Jonah which indicates that God had intended to destroy Nineveh on account of her sins. When Jonah preached and the people repented, God stayed away the judgment he had pronounced. (Jonah 3<sup>1-10</sup>). In Egypt God poured out His plagues on the nation only after Pharaoh had rejected God's message. (Exodus 8 – 13). If Pharaoh had responded positively to God's word the plagues on Egypt might not have come. In Sodom and Gomorrah God rained brimstone and fire only after the citizens had spurned God's message that came through Lot. (Gen 19<sup>1-25</sup>). We are advocating that when predictions of a national disaster are made, a national day of fasting, prayer and confession must be set apart when the nation as a whole turns to God in prayer. When people pray, God intervenes and disaster is averted.
2. When a storm is already on its way we still feel that prayer may accomplish what technology alone is not able to do. When the cyclones were wreaking havoc in this Southern African region cyclone detectors were able to tell the velocity of the cyclone and estimate the amount of destruction it could cause but they were not able to control the storm. God is able to stop a coming storm or to change its direction in answer to prayer. Sometimes prayer is the only thing that can work. In the Bible we see God opening the Red Sea (Exodus 14<sup>21</sup>), the Jordan, (Joshua 3<sup>15-17</sup>), and we see Jesus stilling storms (Matthew 8<sup>26</sup>). When a disaster is on its way let us remember to pray.
3. Governments and Humanitarian Organizations should keep equipment for rescue operations always in place. Helicopters makeshift tents and medical supplies must be always in place.
4. Technology is challenged to come up with storm detecting equipment which can detect bad weather patterns way in advance in order to allow for reasonably good time of notifying and evacuating potential victims of storms.
5. Governments and humanitarian organizations including churches should include in their organizational budgets a disaster relief fund so that when a disaster strikes those funds are employed to service the needs created by the disaster.
6. It is, we feel, the responsibility of the government to give public warnings to people through the media concerning a looming disaster.
7. People in general should be trained in skills of survival.
8. People must be evacuated from areas of danger to safer areas. Action must be swift

### **The Period When A Disaster is Taking Place**

1. When a disaster is in process urgent action must be taken to rescue people involved. Governments should bury all political differences and embark on one mission, saving lives with a sense of urgency. More lives are lost sometimes because help comes too late. Governments should appeal for help from the international community. We are a global village in the sense that information today moves very fast. This arm of technology must be used to the advantage of those people affected by disasters. We should globally act in concert to serve life. If only the global community had responded with one accord during the cyclones in Southern Africa, many lives would have been saved.
2. Christians must be involved in rescue operation from the beginning, giving whatever assistance they are able to render. For the church, it is important to note that when we demonstrate love to people when they are in crisis, they will in most cases believe what we preach. We Christians should regard world crises as opportunities for service, evangelism and growth.
3. Christians should care for bereaved families, counselling them.
4. Treatment should be given to those hit by disease because of the storms.
5. Government along with humanitarian organizations should source shelter, clothing and food for those affected.

### **5. What to Do After a Cyclone**

1. Help families rebuild their homes.
2. Continue to give medical attention to those who will still be sick.
3. Since most of the affected people will have lost almost all of their possessions it is vital on the part of those well positioned to help to continue sourcing for as much material help on behalf of the affected. These people must be helped to begin all over again, otherwise they will forever constitute a group of people permanently incapacitated. They may suffer the aftermath of the disaster the rest their life and even pass on that tragic legacy to the next generation, we encourage each person to feel that we are each other's keeper. Let us extend brotherly love to one another when the need arises.
4. Rebuild all destroyed buildings, roads and communication facilities and restore destroyed land to its original state.

### **Land Use**

The issue of land use is of our concern in this paper because of various factors related to land on the continent of Africa. To begin with, the Zimbabwean national newspaper,

“The Herald,” noted with concern the fact that forty percent of the world’s agricultural land is in the process of being degraded due to soil erosion in Central America, soil nutrient depletion in Africa, and salinization in Asia.<sup>44</sup> The same article in the Herald also reported that the world which is currently producing 1,8 billion metric tones of grain will need an additional 40% in the next two decades.<sup>45</sup>

Because of improper land use in some cases the harvests are poor and malnutrition is widespread on the continent and the infant mortality rate is high. On the political scene the issue of land distribution took centre stage in the rundown to the parliamentary elections of June 2000 in Zimbabwe. How much the Zimbabwean experience has influenced other countries on the continent is not clear. The United Nations has also reported that the Sahara desert is spreading at the rate of twelve to nineteen kilometres per year due to agricultural activities of nomadic herders. If we average the spread of the desert to fifteen kilometers per year and then think of the amount of land area that will have been turned to desert in ten years time the issue of proper land use becomes a pressing need for urgent consideration and redress on the continent of Africa.

#### **4. Land As A Gift from God**

Land should be treated as a gift from God. Firstly it is God who created the world and gave it to Adam so that he could manage it, (Genesis 1<sup>26-28</sup>). To Abraham and his descendants God repeatedly impressed the idea that land is a gift from Him. “Now the Lord had said unto Abraham, “Get thee out of thy country and from thy kindred and from thy father’s house unto a land I will show thee” (Genesis<sup>123</sup>). “And the Lord said unto Abraham, after that Lot was separated from him, “Lift up thine eyes, and took from the place where thou art, northward and southward and eastward and westward, for all the land which those seest, to thee will I give and to thy seed forever” (Gen. 13: 14-15). To Moses in Midian the Lord said “I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt.... And I am come down to deliver thou out of the land of the Egyptians and to bring them up out, of that land unto a good land flowing with-milk and honey” (Ex 3:7-8). To Abraham and his descendants, land was viewed as a gift from God. God wanted the nation of Israel to also grasp the reality that humans were supposed to value their relationship to God above their relationship to land. They were to value the giver above the gift. For that reason God promised to bless Israel on condition of loving obedience. If Israel obeyed God, God would prosper them with good health, abundance of children, good agricultural yields, protection from enemies, and abundance of rains (Deut 2-8<sup>1-14</sup>).

On the other hand disobedience on the part of Israel would reap divine curses like poor agricultural yields (Deut 28<sup>24</sup>), death (Deut 28<sup>20</sup>), disease (Deut 28<sup>24</sup>), defeat

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<sup>44</sup> Forty Percent of World’s Agricultural Seriously Degraded. The Herald, 22 May 2000, 4.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid. p4

in war (Deut 28<sup>41</sup>) and many other problems. Land is a gift to be used with reference to the Giver, God. God is concerned with our attitude to Him and one another.

### **Practical Suggestions on Land Use**

Bill Mollison and Mia Reny Slay came up with suggestions which we view as invaluable in land use methods and we are going ahead to endorse them.

1. In interacting with the environment one should think of the long term effects of his or her actions.
2. Plan for sustainability. Sustainability has been defined as the use of the earth's resources in the present which does not compromise the good of the next generation.
3. Increase the yields; work always with a view to increase production..
4. Reafforest the earth and restore fertility to the soil.
5. Use everything to its maximum level and recycle all wastes.
6. Respect life in all forms; do not engage in reckless destruction of life of either animals or plants.
7. Use low energy environmental systems like solar energy, wind and water to generate energy.
8. Change our philosophy from one of consumption to one of production. <sup>46</sup>

We may add to this list suggestions on three things that may be done to deal with deserts.

1. Open up irrigation schemes in the deserts and turn them to productive land.
2. Explore deserts for mineral wealth that may be lying hidden underground.
3. Find ways of arresting further spreading of the deserts, for example let those people with expertise such as those linked with deserts which have been turned to productive land as the Californian deserts come and begin productive projects in deserts like the Sahara.

With see these suggestions as of great value in land use because they seek increased productivity and land protection at the same time.

### **Conclusion**

We propose that Adventist Christians should be proactive in matters of environmental care. The message of the environment has its roots in the Bible, Believing as we do in the doctrines of creation, reconciliation, the sabbath and redemption we have no excuse to remain aloof on matters of the environment. We should, on account of our rich understanding of these great truths play a leading role in environmental care. By God's grace we can.

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<sup>46</sup> Bill Mollison R.M. Slay Introduction to Premaculture (Harare: Fambidzanai Training Centre, 1991) p3