Let the Wilderness be Glad! The Apocalypse and the Environment

by Barry Casey

The best thing about the *Junior Guide* when I was a junior was the illustrated weekly story about the adventures of some wild animal. Harry Baerg's lithe pen-and-ink drawings opened a door of mystery into another world in which animals moved purposefully, quietly, and modestly. It intrigued me that they could communicate with each other; I always assumed that if we could translate wolf-talk, it would come out sounding a bit like the dialect of English which my German neighbor spoke.

The most enchanting idea, however, was that this world existed silently and hidden alongside my own. While I went to school, played baseball, and did my chores, the "other world" was charged with abundant energy. One could feel its electricity in the forest; the trees fairly quivered with it. I longed to be accepted and to speak its language, to know its secrets and then to simply merge into it like a river vanishing underground. I longed to really "be with" nature even though I felt somehow that one could not remain long in that other world without bruising it.

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We are both attracted and repelled by nature: it lures us and terrifies us. I lived one year in British Columbia's Okanagan Valley, within sight of Black Mountain. Every night before going to bed, I would peer out at its bulk against the stars, imagine myself alone on its shoulders, and shiver excitedly—despite the warmth of my own kitchen. It was beautiful, but it could also kill. The starkness and power which drew the eye in admiration were also the elements of a brute indifference to the frailty of human travelers. That I could quite possibly die in the midst of such raw beauty was a paradox worth contemplating.

In years to come I discovered another paradox—one which I have not ceased to be troubled by. In my biology and geology classes at Pacific Union College, I studied under professors whose understanding and respect for the earth was deep and invigorating. On Sabbaths I learned that we would soon be leaving this old earth, that what really mattered in life was getting out of this world and into the next.

Could it be, I wondered, that Adventist belief in the imminence of the Second Coming of Christ precluded concern for the rights of the planet? But where was the justice in using and disposing of nature and

its resources without a thought to our responsibilities toward it? Because we were promised an earth made new, did we have the right to hasten the death of the old one? In the years since college my questions have become more acute as I have learned about specific threats to the environment.

According to the Office of Endangered Species in the federal government, over 200 plants and animals in the United States alone are in danger of becoming extinct.[1] Paul Opler, a biologist working at the Division of Biological Sciences, a research institute in Washington, D.C., estimates that, around the world, one species now becomes extinct every day. By the end of the century, one species may be eliminated every minute.

More ominous is the endangering of American lives by the more than 100 million pounds of toxic chemicals dumped into the nation's waterways each year. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the government agency responsible for regulating and monitoring the quality of the nation's environment, admits that it does not have accurate data about what percentage of those wastes are radioactive. (The EPA is dependent for its information on voluntary reports from major industrial dischargers.) Independent organizations point to specific cases to support their assertion that the problem of radioactive wastes ("radwastes") is critical.

Between 1974 and 1977, for example, measurements off the New Jersey coast revealed levels of radiation 260,000 times above the "normal" level. Radioactive isotopes—Plutonium 239 and 240—were found in edible fish at levels 5,000 times higher than normal.[2] In 1980, under pressure from the California State Health Agency, the EPA released a study it had made six years before which revealed that 18 miles from San Francisco, near the Farallon Islands, radioactive levels in ocean bottom sediments were 2,000 times higher than normal "background" radiation levels. This was the direct result of dumping by the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory of between 26,000 to 36,000 drums (each drum holding 55 gallons) of high-level radwaste in one decade alone (1946–1956). Between 1946 and 1970, six other corporations and laboratories had licenses to dump their radwastes in the same area, all of them as loosely regulated by federal agencies as was the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory.

America is not the only country engaged in dumping radioactive waste into the seas. Western Europe countries alone, by most recent account, currently lead the pack, annually dumping more than 5,000 tons into the Irish Sea. According to its plans in 1982, Japan may have begun dumping as much as 100,000 tons of radioactive garbage into the Pacific annually.[3]

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These radioactive wastes endanger humans by polluting a sea food chain. The radioactive material escapes from leaky drums, is taken up by plankton, which are eaten by fish, which, in turn, are consumed by humans. Damaged drums rot completely in 20 years and even undamaged barrels rot in 40 years. In the late 1980s and the 1990s radioactive waste will increasingly be escaping from these decomposing containers.

Much of the current struggle in the United States over environmental pollution concerns the EPA's administration of its "Superfund," a $1.6 billion grant intended to help clean up the nation's most hazardous toxic-waste dumping sites. Some have charged that the EPA has allowed major corporations—some cited for violations of procedures for storing toxic wastes—overly-extended periods of cleanup time.

The Reagan administration has proposed extending corporation cleanup deadlines for four to six years. It has also drafted legislation allowing industrial manufacturers of toxic chemicals to escape uniform, national standards for pretreatment of discharges into publically-owned treatment plants. Further, the administration has proposed an EPA budget that would reduce funds for pollution research and control by 45 percent. The National Wildlife Federation and National Clean Air Coalition objects to other proposed cuts in the EPA's budget—money to reduce sulfur dioxide emission (the major contributor to acid rain), although the EPA itself estimates "the cost of *not* controlling acid rain is $5 billion a year in damage to aquatic systems, forests, crops and other resources."[4]

This year will be crucial to the future of the United States' environment. In 1983 the U.S. Congress must decide whether to reauthorize seven of its key environmental laws: the Clean Air Act, the Clean Water Resource Act, the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, and the Toxic Substance Control Act.

With such environmental issues confronting us, how are we to think about nature—that aspect of reality which Adventists are fond of calling "God's Second Book"? Do we—responsible Adventists and citizens—think of ourselves as part of nature or separate from it—or perhaps even opposed to nature?

Adventists have long sought a holistic view of life in which the physical, mental, spiritual, and social elements work together in harmony. Because we believe in God the Creator, we believe we are to love the earth and care for it. But we also know we are to expect and long for the end of the world and the creation of a new earth. How are we to bring these two imperatives together?

One possible solution lies in a way of thinking about nature which regards humans as coexistential with, rather than separate and over against, nature. Further, this viewpoint suggests that through the creative use of imagery and symbols, Adventists may cultivate a 'contemplative realism' toward the natural world which can make a positive statement about moral responsibility. As people who deeply believe in the sovereignty of the Creator God, we cannot help but feel a sense of outrage at the despoiling of what God has made. We share in that process of despoiling, and thus we share in the responsibility of all people to treat the natural world with respect and care.

Creation, Dominance, and Separation

Judaism introduced into the ancient Near Eastern world a new concept of time which also had implications for the way in which nature was perceived. In the Canaanite nature religions, time was cyclical and seasonal; one's existence was linked with the natural cycles of the sun and moon, the seed-time and the harvest. The mountains and rivers teemed with life, both natural and supernatural, and the *cosmos* (or world) was a circle which enclosed both gods and humans. Since time was cyclical and thus repetitive, the future was experienced as the present replayed. In the eternal present, humans and animals existed on a continuum, rather than in a hierarchy of value. Further, there was little or no distinction between sacred and profane, since nature included all living things in a sacral relationship under the gods.

The Hebrew view of the Creation is a radical departure from this closed system. It distinguishes nature from God and humans from nature. It opens up the closed circle of time and turns it into an arrow shooting toward the end of history. Instead of all natural things being part of the divine reality, the Hebrews divest nature of all divinity. Only God is worthy to be worshipped as Creator and Sustainer of life.

Instead of a cosmological/spatial view of reality, the Hebrews arrive at a historical/temporal view.

This is the beginning of what German sociologist Max Weber called the *disenchantment* of nature, meaning not disillusionment but a straightforward, matter-of-fact approach to nature. The first account of Creation in Genesis both establishes the principle of human dominance over nature and gives supreme value to human life. To be created in the image of God means to have dominion over the earth, to be God's viceroy in subduing nature, and to be separate and above the rest of the created world.

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Commentators on Genesis have noted that the concepts of humans' divine likeness and their dominance over the natural world are held very closely together in the creation story of Genesis. As God's power extends over every sphere, so human power extends over the limited sphere of the natural world. Thus, although human power and dominance are necessarily finite in comparison to God's power, they are absolute with regard to the natural world.

The Hebrew verb for "have dominion" (*radah*) expresses a kind of vehemence, notes Bruce Vawter in his commentary on Genesis. "It does not imply some kind of benign presidency over a docile and pacific nature. It occurs in sufficient rarity in the Hebrew Bible that its frequent usages in connection with kingship (I Kings 5:4; Psalms 72:8, 110:2; Isaiah 14:6; Ezek. 34:4, for example) convince us that it was part of the technical language of royal rule—and royal rule, it hardly need be pointed out, was an absolute in the world of Genesis."

But what kind of "dominion" or "dominance" was called for? The ancient Near Eastern kings had about them something of the divine; there was an aura which bleeds through even in the stiff poses of figures on clay tablets. Their power was assured over all that they possessed. Yet the Priestly Writer's perspective on human domination is modeled on God's domination. The kingly rule and power are ideally to be established and carried out along the following lines:

> Not by appearance shall he judge,
> nor by hearsay shall he decide,
> But he shall judge the poor with justice,
> and decide aright for the land's afflicted.
> He shall strike the ruthless with the rod of his mouth,
> and with the breath of his lips he shall slay the wicked.
> Justice shall be the band around his waist,
> and faithfulness a belt upon his hips.
> (Isaiah 11:3–5)

Here the concepts of justice and responsibility not only become consequences of true kingly rule, but they also appear as confirmation of kingly authority. The true principle of human dominance is based on justice, not rapacity, and the far-sighted exercise of responsibility with regard to the natural world is an indication of true humanity. Here is where the biblical creation story strikes a note different from that of Near Eastern creation myths, in that its view of human power is based on justice and even-handedness rather than on a magical or military metaphor of power. Although it is not explicitly stated, the biblical creation story encourages a view of the natural world which takes into account not merely nature as a means but also an end in itself. In other words, the original biblical creation story sees nature as having worth, both in itself and for humans—an idea that will be examined later. Just how far

Western attitudes toward nature have distorted this position will become apparent also.

The biblical view of Creation frees both humans and God from being defined solely by their relation to nature. It also makes nature wholly available for human use and takes away the fear of reprisals by the gods of mountain and valley. Nature is desacralized, exorcised of divinity and demon, freed from all magical power, and, above all, objectified.

This objectification helped to provide the basis on which modern scientific and ethical theory concerning nature arose. "The idea that man stands apart from nature and rightfully exercises a kind of authority over the natural world was thus a prominent feature of the doctrine that has dominated the ethical consciousness of Western civilization. There is no more important source for the idea of mastery over nature."[7]

Western Science and Secularism

Western Christendom, unfortunately, early interpreted the high value placed on humans by God as a consequent *devaluing* of nature. Nature was valuable only because of its value for achieving human ends, not because of any intrinsic worth.

The fourth-century Christian polemicist Lactantius firmly draws the line between humans and nature, and establishes the relative value of each, when he compares the world to a house which "made for the purpose of being inhabited, has no sensibility by itself and is subject to the master who built or inhabits it." He then concludes that man is not a part of the world "in the same manner in which a limb is a part of the body; for it is possible for the world to be without man, as it is for a city or a house."[8] In his zeal to preserve Christianity from the idolatries of pantheism and animism, Lactantius cuts off any possibility of humans' taking nature on its own terms or exercising more responsibility toward it. It is simply there to be used, a dead thing yielding nothing more than its mere components. Further, by placing humans existentially outside the world, he confines human experience to the realm of the mind and ignores sensory experience.

Thus, the Christian tradition, which was also the background of scientific thought until the end of the nineteenth century, provided an image, drawn from the biblical creation story, of man as the lord of the earth. William Leiss points out that the significance of this imagery is the political setting given to the Genesis account.[9] God, the Lord and Ruler over all, gives subordinate authority to humans to manage the affairs of the earth. The difference between power exercised with responsibility to achieve justice and power that merely subjugates is subtle. It is not surprising, then, that the Western scientific tradition largely comes to think of nature in terms of subjugation, mastery, and dominance.

The 17th-century philosopher-scientist Francis Bacon saw his work as a scientist and a Christian to be instrumental in repairing the damage done in the world by the Fall. While he intended his research and methodologies to glorify God through science, many of the metaphors which pervade Bacon's treatises have an aggressive, even hostile, overtone to them. Outlining his method of experimentation, he summarizes: "For you have but to follow and as it were hound nature in her wanderings, and you will be able, when you like, to lead and drive her afterwards to the same place again."[10] For experiments to be successful, says Bacon, it is necessary to lay traps for nature in order to discover her secrets. Once the secrets have been disclosed, a scientific method can be developed which will allow for repeated experiments. Nature is here personified as a woman who can be intimidated and coerced into divulging her most precious secrets—secrets which are then exposed to public examination and discussion.

The presuppositions of another 17th-century scientist, René Descartes, also reveal a firm grounding in the Christian tradition and the principle of human dominance. To Descartes, the natural world reflected a rational order because it had been brought into being by God. "Furthermore, the discovery of *that* order was of supreme value since it led to knowledge of God himself."[11] Descartes' famous dualism between spirit and matter, however, "allowed scientists to treat matter as dead and completely separate from themselves, and to see the material world as a multitude of different objects assembled into a huge machine."[12] This mechanistic and reductionistic image of nature found its ultimate expression in Newtonian physics, which dominated science from the latter part of the 17th to the end of the 19th century.

This *disenchantment* of nature, although the absolute precondition for the development of natural science, drove a wedge between humans and nature. The fact that it was based on the biblical account of Creation only strengthened the attitude of human dominance over nature. Even when biblical authority was being vehemently questioned in the 19th century, the presupposition of human dominance was never in doubt.[13]

Fortunately, the concept of man as the lord of the earth has been balanced, at least in theory, by the Christian doctrine that

Resources for Study and Action

The most valuable resource for those concerned with the environment is the National Wildlife Federation's annual *Conservation Directory*, which lists all federal, state, and interstate commissions and agencies dealing with environmental issues, as well as congressional committees overseeing environmental legislation. It even includes international organizations and listings of persons in charge of environmental concerns in almost every country in the word. ($9.00, plus $1.55 shipping charge. Send to **National Wildlife Federation**, 1412 16th St., NW, Washington, D.C. 20036). Citizen groups especially recommended include the following, listed alphabetically.

Center for Environmental Education, Inc.
625 9th St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20001
The Center encourages citizen involvement in the improvement of environmental quality and publishes on a quarterly basis *The Whale Report* and *The Seal Report*.

Defenders of Wildlife
1244 19th St., NW
Washington, D.C. 20036
Defenders is dedicated to preserving wildlife and protecting natural habitats from encroachment and exploitation. It publishes *Defenders*, a high-quality bimonthly journal.

Environmental Action Foundation, Inc.
724 DuPont Circle Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20036
Founded in 1970, EAR researches and develops educational programs on issues such as solid waste management, toxic waste, solar energy, and nuclear power. Publications include *Power Line* and *Exposure*.

Environmental Policy Center
317 Pennsylvania Ave., SE
Washington, D.C. 20003
This association concentrates on educating legislators on Capitol Hill concerning the issues of energy and water conservation, nuclear power and weapons, water and farmland protection.

Friends of the Earth
1045 Sansome St.
San Francisco, CA 94111
Friends is a world-wide organization committed to the preservation, restoration and rational use of the earth. It frequently publishes exquisitely produced books on wilderness areas.

Sierra Club
530 Bush St.
San Francisco, CA 94108
Perhaps the most widely known of environmental actions groups, this organization not only seeks to influence legislators and educate the public, but sponsors camps, wilderness outings, films, exhibits, and conferences in order to teach people to love and care for the earth. Among its publications are the *Sierra Club Bulletin* and *Wildlife Involvement News*.

humans are accountable to divine authority for their actions. As long as Christianity was part of the larger fabric of society, these two emphases could exist in a healthy tension. But when religion's influence began to decline with the increasing secularization of society, all that remained was the secular use of the principle of human dominance.

Alternative Views

Granted, then, that Western society's use of the biblical view of relations between humans and nature has been skewed with increasingly ominous results, where are we to turn? Some would suggest, with Theodore Roszak, the way of the Native American, whose relations with nature are an extension of his own being. The spirits of the meadows and animals fill his life with meaning; all his movements in nature are made with the consciousness that his world is animated by divinity. But the idyllic nature of this position is marred by the fact that the animistic world is also one of dread and superstition. Further, the Native American may have had reverence for nature, but he often held human life to be very cheap. Also, primitive animism is not something secular urban dwellers can easily assimilate.

Another alternative is the Eastern Taoist position of benign noninterference in nature. Here, one does not directly confront nature or try to master it, but rather learns to work within it. If Westerners would say they had "conquered" Mt. Everest, the Taoist would say he had "befriended" the mountain. The *Tao*, or Way, is to seek harmony between all things through a kind of active passivity. Abandoning all desires leads to the cultivation of gentleness, humility, and grace. One does not "attain" or "achieve", but rather "becomes" and "follows."

As appealing as Taoism may be, the fact is that we would have no science or technology under such a philosophy. Furthermore, it is not likely that Taoism could offer any resistance to the rapaciousness of post-industrial exploitation of the environment.[14]

The common weakness of all three positions—Western Secularism, Native American Animism and Eastern Taoism—lies in their understanding of how humans are to relate to nature. The *Western* tradition separates humans from nature in order to objectify nature for instrumental purposes. The result is that nature is exploited and devalued. The *Native American* position regards humans and nature within the same sacral sphere but with the result that humans are devalued. The *Taoist* view regards humans and nature as parts of an ultimate cosmic harmony, with the result that immediate environmental concerns are seen against the backdrop of aeons and thus lose their urgency.

It is clear that a position needs to be developed which would allow the objectivity necessary for individual human consciousness distinct from nature, but which would also encourage a genuine participation in nature in a kind of spiritual empathy. This cannot be the sort of sentimentality which thinks of animals as humans in disguise. There needs to be a certain tough-mindedness to this vision which regards animals just as they are—sentient beings with varying degrees of intelligence, instinct, and purpose. It should also be a position which would combine the spiritual with the empirical, and religion and art with science and technology. What we need is an approach based on adequate scientific information, technological skill, and the vision to encourage long-range planning and rigorous efforts.[15] Such a position might be termed the attitude of "contemplative realism," when seen from an Adventist Christian perspective.

Contemplative realism attempts to avoid the view that all science is evil.

Contemplative Realism

Contemplative realism is, first, contemplative because it seeks to approach the world from a meditative, open, and searching stance rather than a mechanistic, closed, and dominating one. It is contemplative because it draws on Western Christians' disciplines of prayer and meditation and, to a lesser extent, disciplines of the East, such as yoga and Zen meditation. It tries to find a fruitful tension between science, religion, and art instead of considering them disparate elements of human knowledge.

Contemplative realism acknowledges the conflicts and contradictions inherent in a technological society's approach to nature. Thus, a contemplative "realist" understands that a new consciousness regarding the relation of a consumer society and nature takes time and patience to develop, but he is optimistic of change. The realism sanctions the most beneficial scientific methods to safeguard nature. Contemplative realism attempts to avoid the romanticized view that all science and technology is evil, while still remaining watchful of the attitude of some scientific technocrats who believe that "if it can be done, it ought to be done."

Briefly put, contemplative realism would regard the human/nature relation as follows:

a) Humans are not separate from nature or above it, but coexistential with it, while still maintaining a distinct personal consciousness. Personal consciousness, from a Christian perspective, is necessary for the concept of being made in the image of God. Yet, the very fact of personal consciousness means that humans can *choose* to regard themselves as co-existent with nature. That they have the ability to choose is testament to their "Godwardness"; that this coexistential position is what they choose is testament to their struggle to become fully human.

b) Nature and its creatures are regarded on their own terms as a "given" in the world. Nature is neither "better" nor "inferior" to humans, but simply different.

c) Coexistence presupposes the intrinsic value of both humans and nature in relationship. In addition, the Christian believes created things have value because God created them, and consequently God's creatures have certain basic rights.

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d) Coexistence also presupposes the instrumental value of nature and the responsible stewardship of the earth by humans. The contemplative realist would not regard the resources of nature as inexhaustible riches but rather as something to be drawn on sparingly, used carefully, and disposed of cautiously.

One of the impulses behind contemplative realism is the longing to really "be with" nature, to feel the vitality of its life and the pain of its death. We are far removed from that sort of empathy, bound up as most of us are inside walls, cars, and ourselves. And yet we can learn to see and feel, if we are willing to undergo the discipline.

Annie Dillard, author of the Pulitzer Prize-winning book *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek,* advises that:

> All that I can do is try to gag the commentator, to hush the noise of useless interior babble that keeps me from seeing . . . The effort is really a discipline requiring a lifetime of dedicated struggle; it marks the literature of saints and monks of every order East and West . . . [16.]

Acknowledging that the mind is often like a muddy river filled with slow-moving trash, she encourages us to let the river flow and to raise our sights:

> You look along it, mildly, acknowledging its presence without interest and gazing beyond it into the realms of the real where subjects and objects act and rest purely, without utterance. 'Launch into the deep," says Jacques Ellul, 'and you shall see.'[17]

Relating how she avoids detection while stalking shy muskrat, she says she does not freeze to one spot:

> Instead of going rigid, I go calm. I center down wherever I am; I find a balance and repose. I retreat—not inside myself, but outside myself, so that I am a tissue of senses. Whatever I see is plenty, abundance. I am the skin of water the wind plays over; I am petal, feather, stone.[18]

This centering, calming repose lies at the heart of all spiritual meditation, and it seems to be the way into the depths of nature.

In our reflection on contemplative realism to this point, there has been little that could be called overtly Christian. Rather, the basis of what we have discussed could be seen as a kind of spiritually enlightened humanism. This is not wrong, of course, but for the Adventist Christian who lives within a larger reality, it is not adequate for his or her worldview.

Adventist Christians are in a unique position to comprehend the inclusiveness of the relation between humans and nature because their creational and apocalyptic consciousness regards the cosmos, from beginning to end, as an organic reality in which every part relates to the others in a significant way. Just as God brought the world into being, so God will consummate all things in righteousness. What began in freshness and grandeur, then withered and died, will be brought to new life and glory. Those whose lives have been blasted by despair will be given hope. The world will be made new.

The Bible communicates these powerful concepts not through abstractions but through vivid symbols and myths. I am convinced that Adventism's message of Sabbath and eschaton may be communicated powerfully and creatively when it opens itself up to the power of symbols and myths.

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Symbols, said Paul Tillich, point to a deeper reality. Not only that, but they also participate in the reality to which they point. For example, when a citizen sees his country's flag while abroad, he is moved with thoughts of home, familiar customs, and perhaps even concepts of freedom and well-being. The flag not only points to the reality of his country, but it also stands in place of that country while the citizen is in a foreign realm. Should anything happen to disgrace the flag, the citizen would feel the country and its freedoms had been disgraced also.

Further, symbols open up levels of reality to us which we would otherwise never become aware of, and they find corresponding elements in our souls which leap to life when touched by the sacred. True, Protestantism's (and Adventism's) wariness of the richness of symbols stems from a realistic assessment of the tendency of humans to turn symbols into false gods. But in so doing, it closes off one of the most powerful avenues through which God may communicate with us.

Myths, including those of the Bible, may be thought of as illuminating and perennial insights into reality. They are the age-old

stories out of which we form our own stories for our time and place. They are *not*, it should be made clear, falsehoods, fairy tales, untrue stories, or deliberate attempts to deviate from the truth. Myths are not merely arid constructs created by those whom Jerry Falwell calls "secular humanists": merely fragments of traditional Christian belief wrung dry of any supernaturalism. On the contrary, myths, as defined above, restore to the human experience the open-ended qualities of wonder, awe, and a sense of the presence of the holy.

Of course, myths may be used in the worship of false gods. The venerable myth that human effort brings results and rewards is often subverted into the crassness of materialism and the callousness of supply-side economics. Even more pointedly, the myth of humans created in the image of God has been perverted, as we have seen, into a legitimation for wholesale destruction of the natural world. The ultimate expression of this (and here we have a myth that is decidedly false!) is that we can both win and survive a nuclear war. Humans create their own god and call it Man, and Man attempts to become Creator and Destroyer without the authority to be either one.

However, the power of myths is that they can be experienced endlessly because their meanings are not exhausted in one application, but can be found in a thousand forms and a thousand situations. In the specific sense in which we are using it, the story of the Incarnation survives the ages because the story of God becoming human strikes a chord deep within the human psyche.

The contemplative realist grasps the fact that the redemptive power of myths and symbols is drawn from their ultimate mystery. We can never say, for instance, that we have "solved" the mystery of the Incarnation or that we understand completely the symbolism in the Lord's Supper. The most we can do is to humbly deny that we have the last word and gratefully remain open to further experience. We must resist the well-intentioned Protestant tendency to explain everything on the basis of how it is used. We must not be so rationalistic as to prevent the great biblical myths and symbols from grasping our entire beings, for we only learn through participation. "A true symbol must be *lived into*," says Theodore Roszak. "That is how its meaning is found."[19]

Three of the most powerful symbols of the Bible, symbols which are true, in the deepest sense of the word, as descriptions of reality, shape our response to the world. The power of the creation story lies in its evocation of awe at the loving purposes of the Creator God; the power of the Incarnation story is found in the Creator God slipping quietly into the created world; the power of the story of the Second Coming is the Creator God setting things right in the created world by destroying that which corrupted and despoiled its beauty and grace.

The Adventist who is guided by contemplative realism sees that this world—however shabby its glory has become—is very precious to God. He or she sees also that, through a long process, humans have become separated from nature, deaf to its voice, and numb to its rhythms, and that this separation is manifested in violence toward nature. Furthermore, inasmuch as the biblical creation story portrays humans in the image of God, with a concomitant responsibility toward nature, such separation from nature means a fracturing within ourselves. We have been freed from the terrors of nature-worship only to find ourselves in a bleak and inexplicable world in which our technology rebounds on us with a vengeance. We are fast approaching a state in which our technical capabilities will outrun our ethics. If we really believe that "this is my Father's world," like the hymn says, we will realize that we will never be whole unless we love the natural world and care for it.

The Adventist contemplative realist is also acutely aware of the contradiction to this vision posed by the presence of evil. We are afraid of the natural world, and with good reason, because, unlike the almost infinite variability of human responses to a given situation, nature has a kind of blunt and brutal predictability. While humans condition, dodge, reinterpret, and flout laws, the natural world simply reacts. It can be debated whether hurricanes, tidal waves, or floods are evil, but the fact remains that we often interpret them as such. But if we can come to regard ourselves as coexistent with nature, we will learn to live with the ambiguity of a world existing in the thick of a Great Controversy. That is not to say we are resigned to evil in any form; on the contrary, we must resist evil with all our strength. But if we take Paul seriously, we will realize that we are inextricably tied up with this world, and it with us.

We are called to follow the way of justice and righteousness not only in the sphere of human relationships but also in the natural world.

It is not simply one's personal salvation "in the body" that lies up ahead, but the *entire* created order that is to be made new. Paul speaks of the created universe eagerly waiting for the eschaton when "the universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality and enter upon the liberty and splendour of the children of God. Up to the present, we know, the whole created universe groans in all its parts as if in the pangs of childbirth" (Rom. 8:21–22, NEB). It is this universe which Christ created and holds together, which he has also reconciled and will, at the consummation of history, offer up to God (Col. 1:16ff.).

It is this world and this created order which has suffered much at the hands of sinners. Jeremiah thunders to the people of Israel that "your wrongdoing has upset nature's order, and your sins have kept from you her kindly gifts" (Jer. 5:25, NEB). Linking the despoiling of nature directly with political corruption and economic oppression, Jeremiah's message reminds us that we live within a complex organic reality rather than a mechanistic one. We cannot simply cordon off our political and economic actions from our environmental concerns. We are called to follow the way of justice and righteousness not only in the sphere of social relationships but also in the natural world. Really, we must see that we do not have the "world of nature" and the "world of humanity," but *one* world in which everything has consequences for preservation or destruction.

Drawing from the rich heritage of creational, eschatological, and apocalyptic symbols and myths in the Bible, Adventist Christians who are contemplative realists can bring a perspective on the interrelatedness of all created things to the foreground of the discussion of environmental issues. As Adventist Christians we look for the day when the "heavens will roll up like a scroll" and "the earth will be made new." We believe that God's purposes for this world are inclusive of all reality, that they are not isolated for the "remnant" who are saved but include the earth itself and ultimately the universe. If this is our vision of the future, we cannot short-change the present by ignoring the destruction of the earth through a misguided apocalyptic other-worldliness.

Paul Ricoeur, a contemporary philosopher, has said that symbols invite thought. Symbols also lead to action. If we can grasp the richness of the creation event of God, the poignancy of the incarnation, and the power of the eschaton—if we recognize that these stories reveal the meaning of our existence—we can embody that meaning in our lives. Those old stories surely call us to be personally responsible for our actions toward nature. They call us to raise a prophetic voice in our time against

government agencies whose primary concern is corporate profits rather than corporate responsibility. They call us to love the earth and its creatures, to join with groups which seek to protect the rights of animals and the environment. They call us to feel deeply the pain of the created world and to speak for that which has no voice. They call us to plunge ourselves into life and history, to seek to love the world as fervently and persistently as did Jesus, and finally, to realize that we are his creatures, too, and thus to long for the time when all creation will be reconciled in God.

Because we live in the hope of a time when God "will be all in all" (I Cor. 15:28) and the universe shall be a temple of praise to God and "the home of justice" (2 Peter 3:13), we are outraged that our rivers are poisoned with mercury and our air with pollutants. We are as agonized over humanity tearing apart a wilderness for a few thousand barrels of oil as we are when we sin against God by murdering or betraying one another. Our agonies are refracted into a million tiny movements; the universe writhes in pain, waiting to be released.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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3. *Ibid*, p. 24.
4. *Conservation* '83, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 2. National Wildlife Federation, NW Washington, D.C.
5. Harvey Cox, *The Secular City: Secularization and Urbanization in Theological Perspective*, rev. ed. (New York: MacMillan Co., 1965), p. 21.
6. Bruce Vawter, *On Genesis: A New Reading* (New York: Doubleday and Co., 1977), pp. 57–58.
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9. Leiss, p. 83.
10. *The Advancement of Learning: Works, IV*, 296 quoted in Leiss, p. 59.
11. John B. Cobb, Jr., *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology* (Beverly Hills, CA., 1972), p. 34.
12. Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), p. 8.
13. Cobb, p. 32.
14. Let us summarize the three positions we have outlined:

1. The Secular Principle of Human Dominance (Western tradition)
   a) By divine decree and technological expertise, humans are to rule and subjugate nature.
   b) Nature has only instrumental, not intrinsic, worth.
   c) Humans are separate from, and above, nature.
2. Animistic/Pantheistic (Native American tradition)
   a) Humans coexist with nature and its creatures out of fear of and reverence for the gods of heaven and earth.
   b) Nature is experienced as having both intrinsic and instrumental value.
   c) Humans are not separate and above nature, but coexist within the same sacral unity.
3. Active Nonaction (Taoist)
   a) The recovery of the primordial harmony between heaven and earth is sought through active nonaction and noninterference.
   b) Nature is valued both instrumentally and intrinsically.
   c) Humans are not separate from nature nor above it but are simply one part among many.

15. Cobb, p. 46.
16. Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Bantam ed. (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), pp. 34–35.
17. *Ibid*, p. 205.
18. *Ibid*, p. 129.