



Seventh-day Adventists And Ecology¹

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ELECTRONIC TECHNOLOGY HAS BEEN THE source of new methods of communication and also of new words in the English language, especially “e-words.” One thinks first of all, of course, of “email” (electronic mail) as opposed to “snail mail” – sent with postage stamps through the post office. Some businesses and church congregations even have occasional “e-boards” now. When an important issue comes up that needs a vote before a scheduled board meeting, members are solicited for their input via email. Preceding regular board meetings, “e-agendas” are sometimes circulated. Following a general board meeting, “e-minutes” are sent to save postage. These “e-technologies” have generally been considered useful and have attained broad acceptance.

There is another “e” word, however (one unrelated to electronic technology), that doesn’t always illicit an eager response. Issues involving “ecology” arouse interest in the minds of many people. But, as some have noted, Christians have been slow to respond to ecological concerns. We are often negligent to link ecology with our theology. For example, in a Seventh-day Adventist congregation, I recently heard one of the elders forcefully insist that ecological issues were not a critical topic at all since the world is going to be burned up soon anyway. Even worse, other accusations regarding Christians and ecology have alleged that of all the world’s religions, Christianity has proved uniquely

¹Dr. Jack Blanco, to whom this chapter is warmly dedicated, often sends words of encouragement via email. I have been a welcome recipient.

dangerous to the environment. We are accused of abusing the “dominion” that God bestowed on human beings at creation.²

Critics seem generally correct about Christian negligence of ecological matters – even the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) unfortunately. As Adventists we believe that God created this world and pronounced it “very good!” We also hear occasional sermons about stewardship, which usually focus exclusively on tithing, and mention nothing about our stewardship of the natural world. I am not suggesting that we do not need reminders about careful management of our money, including faithfulness in returning tithes. But when are we ever urged to be mindful of the earth, the water, the air, and the animals? The consistent warning of many scientists is that our planet – its many creatures and its many systems – is not healthy. Mounting evidence points to the fact that God’s created world is indeed “groaning” (Rom 8:22).

Let’s face it, in a “land of plenty” it is not easy to be motivated about being frugal with the earth’s abundant treasures. Yet, when God brought the children of Israel to the “Promised Land” which He described as endowed with “milk and honey,” He carefully instructed His people on good ecology. Moses stresses to the Israelites the sanctity of the land and God’s affection for it:

“The land into which you are about to cross to possess it, a land of hills and valleys, drinks water from the rain of heaven, a land for which the LORD your God cares” (Deut 11:11-12).³

The Mosaic laws took a strong stand on the protection of nature, even outlawing the destruction of fruit trees to aid a military campaign (Deut 20:19). Animals were to be treated humanely also. For

²James Nash is one of many who writes about “the ecological complaint against Christianity.” James Nash, *Loving Nature: Ecological Integrity and Christian Responsibility* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1991), chapter 3.

³Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture references are from the New American Standard Bible (NASB).

example, one should help another’s donkey to stand when it has fallen under a heavy load, even if the animal belongs to an enemy (Exod 23:4-5; Deut 22:1-4). Big work animals were not to be muzzled to keep them from eating while doing the heavy work involved in agriculture (Deut 25:4).⁴ Animals along with the terra firma are included in the stipulations for the weekly Sabbath and the sabbatic year:

“You shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield, but on the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat. You are to do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. Six days you are to do your work, but on the seventh day you shall cease from labor so that your ox and your donkey may rest, and the son of your female slave, as well as your stranger, may refresh themselves” (Exod 23:10-12; cf. Exod 20:8-11; Lev 25:6-7; Deut 5:12-15).⁵

Long before the time of the Exodus, the first chapters of Genesis instruct us concerning the close ties between human and animal life. Jiří Moskala summarizes this linkage in his significant study: (1) Both animals and human beings were created with the “breath of life” (Gen 1:20, 24; 2:7, 19); (2) God blessed them both (Gen 1:22, 28); (3)

⁴Josephus, the first-century Jewish historian, argued that Moses taught compassion for animals: “So thorough a lesson has he given us in gentleness and humanity that he does not overlook even the brute beasts, authorizing their use only in accordance with the Law, and forbidding all other employment of them. Creatures which take refuge in our houses like suppliants we are forbidden to kill. He would not suffer us to take the parent birds with the young, and bade us even in an enemy’s country to spare and not to kill the beasts employed in labor. Thus, in every particular, he had an eye for mercy, using the laws I have mentioned to enforce the lesson;” Josephus, *Against Appion* 2:210-15, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray, vol. 1 (London: Heinemann, 1956).

⁵In this respect, it is of interest to note how the Old Testament patriarchs first tended to the needs of their animals after a lengthy trip, before caring for themselves. For example, Rebecca’s watering the camels of Abraham’s servant before inviting him to her house (Gen 24).

Both humans and animals were given a vegetarian diet (Gen 1:29-30); (4) Animals as well as humans have blood in their veins – that blood being a symbol of life (Gen 9:4-6); (5) They both could be responsible for “murder” (Gen 9:5; Exod 21:28-32); (6) They are both included in God’s Covenant (Gen 9:9-10); (7) Both are under the death penalty if they engage in bestiality (Lev 20:15-16); (8) Both animals and human beings are given Sabbath rest (Exod 20:8-10; Deut 5:14; Lev 23:10-12); (9) Firstborn of humans and animals belong to God (Exod 22:29-30; 13:12-13); (10) Priests and sacrificial animals have to be without spot or blemish (Lev 21:17-21; 22:19-25); (11) Animals could not be sacrificed unless eight days old and then they were to be dedicated to God. The same time period of eight days was given for a boy to be circumcised (Lev 22:27; Exod 22:30; Gen 17:12).⁶

This impressive connection between human and animal life in Scripture is only one of the manifestations of the close linkage between ecology and theology in the minds of the biblical writers. This can be observed from the very opening chapters of Genesis. For example, it is very significant that when on the fifth day of Creation Week as God created the creatures of air and water, He gave them a special blessing. God commanded them to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth” (Gen 1:22). This seems to imply, at the very least, healthy, abundant populations of these creatures.

Later, Noah is told by God to take animals into the ark “to keep this kind alive upon the face of all the earth” (Gen 7:3) during a global catastrophe. The turning point in the flood narrative is seen by many to be Genesis 8:1 – “But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals

⁶Jiri Moskala, *The Laws of Clean & Unclean Animals in Leviticus 11: Their Nature, Theology, & Rationale, An Intertextual Study* (Berrien Springs, MI: Adventist Theological Society Publications, 2000): 298-299. Charles Pinches and Jay B. McDaniel observe similarly: “In the first story of creation, so often recited by Christians and Jews, animals and humans are treated together; both created on the sixth day, they are together given seeds, fruits and green plants to eat, not one another (Genesis 1:30);” Charles Pinches and Jay B. McDaniel, eds. *Good News for Animals?: Christian Approaches to Animal Well-Being* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 1993.

and the livestock that were with him in the ark” – God remembered *and* all the animals with him! After the flood, the animals are explicitly included in the Lord God’s covenant with the earth:

Then God spoke to Noah and to his sons with him, saying, “Now behold, I Myself do establish My covenant with you, and with your descendants after you; *and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you; of all that comes out of the ark, even every beast of the earth.* I establish My covenant with you. . . .” God said, “This is the sign of the covenant which I am making between Me and you and *every living creature* that is with you, for all successive generations. I set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a sign of a covenant between Me and *the earth*” (Gen 9:8-13, emphasis added).⁷

In the oldest book of the Bible, when God speaks to Job out of the whirlwind, it takes four chapters to contain His account of the wonders of the created world. God demands that Job contemplate and appreciate the created world. Philip Yancey is insightful:

God makes most plain how He feels about the animal kingdom in His longest single speech, a magnificent address found at the end of Job. Look

⁷Not only is the covenant made by God with both Noah and all creatures (four times: Gen 9:9-10, 12, 15, 17), but Noah is also reminded that the animals were “with you” (three times: Gen 9:10 [twice], 12). Later, God promises a similar covenant through Hosea:

“In that day I will also make a covenant for them
With the beasts of the field,
The birds of the sky
And the creeping things of the ground.
And I will abolish the bow, the sword and war from the land,
And will make them lie down in safety.
I will betroth you to Me forever;
Yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and in justice,
In lovingkindness and in compassion,
And I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness.
Then you will know the LORD” (Hos 2:18-20).

closely and you will notice a common thread in the specimens He holds up for Job's edification: A lioness hunting her prey. A mountain goat giving birth in the wilds. A rogue donkey roaming the salt flats. An ostrich flapping her useless wings with joy. A stallion leaping high to paw the air. A hawk, an eagle, and a raven building their nests on the rocky crags. That's a mere warmup – Zoology 101 in Job's education. From there God advances to the behemoth, a hippo-like creature no one can tame, and the mighty, dragonish leviathan. "Can you make a pet of him like a bird or put him on a leash for your girls?" God asks with a touch of sarcasm. "The mere sigh of him is overpowering. No one is fierce enough to rouse him. Who then is able to stand against Me?"

Wilderness is God's underlying message to Job, the one trait His menagerie all share. God is celebrating those members of His created world who will never be domesticated by human beings. Evidently, wild animals serve an essential function in "the world as God sees it."⁸

In the book of Numbers, Balaam's donkey, after being beaten, pleads for respect and fair treatment (Num 22:21-33). Even the divine being, which Balaam does not at first see, criticizes Balaam's harshness toward his donkey.

Within the Psalter, God's care for animals seems to have inspired many of the prayers and hymns (as well as some of the admonitions in the book of Proverbs).⁹ The psalmists emphasize how nature reveals the glory of God, and how all of God's creation is included in His care. We are reminded more than once that God provides for the sustenance of the animals: "He gives to the beast its

⁸Philip Yancey, *I Was Just Wondering* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 10-11.

⁹One example: "The righteous know the needs of their animals, but the mercy of the wicked is cruel" (Prov 12:10).

food, and to the young ravens that cry" (Ps 147:9). In fact, the psalms repeatedly turn our attention to the glorious manifestation of life in God's creation:

"Praise the LORD from the earth,
you sea monsters and all deeps,
fire and hail, snow and frost,
stormy wind fulfilling His command!
Mountains and all hills,
fruit trees and all cedars!
Wild animals and all cattle,
creeping things and flying birds!
Kings of the earth and all peoples,
princes and all rulers of the earth!
Young men and women alike,
old and young together!
Let them praise the name of the LORD,
for His name alone is exalted;
His glory is above earth and heaven" (Ps 148:7-13).

Some have wondered if Christians should stop repeating the Psalms about trees shouting to God for joy while people are turning forests into wastelands.

Isaiah instructs that if God's covenant is broken and the responsibilities of stewardship are neglected, despoliation and pollution of the earth will be the result:

The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants;
for they have transgressed laws,
violated the statutes,
broken the everlasting covenant.
Therefore a curse devours the earth,
and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt (Isa 24:5-6).

The prophet Jeremiah concurs with Isaiah, and highlights how the judgment Israel's sins have caused affect the earth:

"Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts:
Behold, I will refine them and try them;
For how shall I deal with the daughter of My people?"

Their tongue is an arrow shot out;
 It speaks deceit;
 One speaks peaceably to his neighbor with his mouth,
 But in his heart he lies in wait.
 Shall I not punish them for these things?" says the LORD.
 "Shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?
 I will take up a weeping and wailing for the mountains
 And for the habitations of the wilderness a lamentation,
 Because they are burned up,
 So that no one can pass through them;
 Nor can men hear the voice of the cattle.
 Both the birds of the heavens and the beasts have fled;
 They are gone" (Jer 9:7-10).

Notice, again, how God includes a lament for His created world in this stern judgment against sin.

The Prophet Hosea exhorts Israel that one of the dire consequences of their gross sinfulness will be severe harm to the animals and land:

Listen to the word of the LORD, O sons of Israel,
 For the LORD has a case against the inhabitants of the land,
 Because there is no faithfulness or kindness
 Or knowledge of God in the land.
 There is swearing, deception, murder, stealing and adultery.
 They employ violence, so that bloodshed follows bloodshed.
 Therefore the land mourns,
 And everyone who lives in it languishes
 Along with the beasts of the field and the birds of the sky,
 And also the fish of the sea disappear" (Hos 4:1-4).

When Joel the prophet describes the coming Day of the LORD,
 again both the animals and the land are shown devastated:

Alas for the day!
 For the day of the LORD is near,
 And it will come as destruction from the Almighty. . . .
 The seeds shrivel under their clods;
 The storehouses are desolate,
 The barns are torn down,

For the grain is dried up.
 How the beasts groan!
 The herds of cattle wander aimlessly
 Because there is no pasture for them;
 Even the flocks of sheep suffer.
 To you, O LORD, I cry;
 For fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness
 And the flame has burned up all the trees of the field.
 Even the beasts of the field pant for You;
 For the water brooks are dried up
 And fire has devoured the pastures of the wilderness"
 (Joel 1:15-20).

The last two verses of the book of Jonah are striking. In a dialogue with Jonah, God patiently enumerates the reasons for His mercy toward the city of Nineveh to his petulant prophet:

Then the LORD said, "You had compassion on the plant for which you did not work and which you did not cause to grow, which came up overnight and perished overnight. Should I not have compassion on Nineveh, the great city in which there are more than 120,000 persons who do not know the difference between their right and left hand, as well as many animals?"

The book ends with God's intriguing reminder of His profound mercy that included not only the wicked Ninevites, but also the animals (Jonah 4:10-11).¹⁰

God's statement to Jonah should not be surprising. We humans get so wrapped up in our busy lives and routines that we forget how important the natural world is to the Creator. However, the concluding question in the book of Jonah pointedly reminds us that even the animal

¹⁰The psalmist was inspired with the same sentiment: "Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains . . . O LORD, You preserve man and beast . . . The LORD is good to all, and compassionate toward all His works" (Pss 36:6; 145:9).

kingdom is expressly included in God's tender regard. By having mercy on Nineveh even the animals can be spared. Christians might be slow in linking theology with ecology, but in God's thinking there is a close link between redemption and creation. Christians treasure the correct doctrine of salvation, but often need a more comprehensive theology of life!

God repeatedly affirms through His prophets that His covenant involves all of the created order, and that ultimately the original perfection of creation will be restored:

"I will make for you a covenant on that day with the wild animals, the birds of the air, and the creeping things of the ground; and I will abolish the bow, the sword, and war from the land; and I will make you lie down in safety" (Hos 2:18).

Within the promises of the final removal of sin and the restoration of edenic perfection, the animal kingdom is pointedly included. The prophet Isaiah waxes eloquent as he describes the righteous reign of Christ reestablishing justice and righteousness on the earth:

And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little boy will lead them, also the cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The nursing child will play by the hole of the cobra. And the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea" (Isa 11:6-9).

This "theology of life" is also found in the New Testament. One can find many references there speaking of God's care for His creation. Jesus' own appreciation for animals is demonstrated by His repeated references to them in His teachings. For example, He compares His care for Jerusalem with a mother hen's concern for her chicks (Matt

24:37). In Luke 12:6, Jesus stresses that even the lowliest of creatures is loved by God: "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God." In teaching of God's love for His human children, Jesus reminds us that not a single sparrow falls to the ground without God's knowledge (Matt 10:29). Another time He again points out the divine concern for earth's smaller creatures: "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them" (Matt 6:26, NKJV). Moreover, He restores health to crippled limbs and damaged bodies as a "preview" of the perfect world He promises where sin, sickness and death will be removed. And Jesus, the Architect of two lavish Old Testament sanctuaries, marvels at the great beauty of the flowers:

"Observe how the lilies of the field grow; they do not toil nor do they spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory clothed himself like one of these" (Matt 6:28-29).

We are regularly reminded throughout Scripture that all the created world is part of God's concern, animals right along with human beings. Nature and wildlife were often sources of inspiration for many of the writers in Scripture, as we have seen. The apostle Paul has a profound theology of creation:

For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together" (Col 1:16-17).

Paul also instructs us that because of the close intertwining of all life, the entire creation has also been affected by human sin, and is enduring the suffering that has resulted. He writes poignantly:

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will

be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now (Rom 8:19-22).

Paul goes even further by declaring that all created life reveals to us the very nature of the Godhead:

Ever since the creation of the world His [God's] eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things He has made (Rom 1:20).

In the final book of Scripture, the entire cosmos is dramatically encompassed with divine judgment. In Revelation 7:1, four angels are pictured, "holding back the four winds of the earth, so that no wind would blow *"on the earth or on the sea or on any tree."* These four were joined by another angel having the seal of God, with the command: *"Do not harm the earth or the sea or the trees until we have sealed the bond-servants of our God on their foreheads"* (Rev 7:3, emphasis added).

After the seventh trumpet sounds in Revelation 11, the twenty-four elders fall on their faces and worship God and they cry out against those who have wreaked havoc on the created world:

"We give You thanks, O LORD God, the Almighty, who are and who were, because You have taken Your great power and have begun to reign. And the nations were enraged, and Your wrath came, and the time came for the dead to be judged, and the time to reward Your bond-servants the prophets and the saints and those who fear Your name, the small and the great, *and to destroy those who destroy the earth"* (Rev 11:17-18, emphasis added).

The Apocalypse closes with the resplendent restoration that the Old Testament prophets promised earlier, reminding us that redemption involves the renewal of God's original creation. Salvation is never described as an escape from the earth, but rather, a reclamation of the

earth! Soteriology (like eschatology) is earth-affirming! The new heavens and the new earth will encompass the whole created world. None of God's creation is irrelevant. He made it and apparently He loves it. Throughout the entire canon we are never allowed to forget the profound value that God places on His created world.

All this surely suggests that authentic Christian faith must include ecological concern. Since God is the creator and sustainer of this world, and we are created in God's image and to be His image-bearers on the earth, surely this includes a loving concern for this world, as is manifested by our Creator. Any negative interference with His creation would be a daring presumption. As we have seen, the biblical prophets have described some of the serious implications involved – and that is what has actually happened. Western countries are contending with polluted air and contaminated water, among other problems. Even Christians have been late to educate ourselves to treasure God's creation as He does. As pioneering ecological theologian Joseph Sittler states:

When we turn the attention of the church to a definition of the Christian relationship with the natural world, we are not stepping away from grave and proper theological ideas; we are stepping right into the middle of them. There is a deeply rooted, genuinely Christian motivation for attention to God's creation, despite the fact that many church people consider ecology to be a secular concern. "What does environmental preservation have to do with Jesus Christ and His church?" they ask. They could not be more shallow or more wrong.¹¹

Secular materialists believe that the world is unfolding in an endless process. Pantheists believe God is in eternal emanation with this cosmos. Atheists think the world evolved out of matter by chance. New Agers worship the earth as divine. By contrast, Christians believe God

¹¹Joseph Sittler, *Gravity and Grace* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 15.

created this world *ex nihilo*— out of nothing. He lavished great care in its design and declared it “very good” (Gen 1:31). And scientists are only beginning to realize how finely-tuned this world, even the known universe, is for supporting life.¹²

Moreover, the Bible writers insist that God is no “distant landlord.” His hand is still seen in the storms, the thunder, and the rain (Ps 77:17-18). He causes the wind and the darkness (Amos 4:13). God is active in and through all of creation, “for in him we live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). In the New Testament when the Lord Jesus walked on earth, He continued to demonstrate lordship over nature:

1. Jesus’ first miracle changed water into wine for a wedding feast (John 2).
2. The stormy sea knew His voice and obeyed His command (Mark 4:35-41).
3. Jesus walked on water (Matt 14:25-27).
4. The fig tree immediately withered at Christ’s command (Matt 21:18-19).
5. Another fish obeyed (Matt 17:24-27; cf. Jonah 1:17, 2:10).
6. Disease was healed by His authority, including the dreaded leprosy (Luke 17:11-21).
7. Even death could not remain in His presence (Luke 7:16; John 11).
8. The heavens, “at the sight of His dying anguish, had hidden its face of light;”¹³ (cf. Matt 27:45).
9. Inanimate nature bore witness to His divinity: “The rocks knew Him and had shivered into fragments at His cry;”¹⁴ (cf. Matt 27:50, 51).

¹²See Lee Stroebel, *A Case for the Creator* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2004).

¹³Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1940),

¹⁴Stroebel.

Ellen White follows this same biblical tradition when she writes:

“It is by the mighty power of the Infinite One that the elements of nature in earth and sea and sky are kept within bounds.”¹⁵

All creation delights to do God’s will. Only disobedient humans beings resist Him. And yet the Creator, “the LORD God of heaven who made the sea and the dry land” (Jonah 1:9) has a tender regard for His erring children, “as well as the animals” (Jonah 4:11).

The biblical doctrine of creation has obvious ethical implications for a Christian ecology. As the hymn writer insightfully put it, “This is my Father’s world.” There is more to good “stewardship” than returning a faithful tithe!

What Can Be Done?

Seventh-day Adventists should be conscientious in recycling everything possible: glass, cans, plastic, batteries, newspapers, phone books, plus using white paper on both sides.¹⁶ Many communities now have set up recycling centers. It takes extra time to sort and store materials at home, and then take the “collection” to a recycling center. But concern for our fast-depleting natural resources and quality of air could be important motivators. Christians especially can rejoice that they are praising the Creator by caring for His creation.

Whenever possible, families could replenish the soil by composting. There are many other issues of water conservation and air pollution that could be addressed. One can easily become informed through the printed and news media. In a time when many Seventh-day Adventists are turning away from a vegetarian diet, perhaps we need to revisit this matter in the light of ecological concerns. Already we are

¹⁵Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1943), 134.

¹⁶E-technology such as email has been a help in conserving paper. Even the postal service has felt the difference in the amount of paper they move.

aware of Ellen White's advanced counsel that meat-eating brings disease.¹⁷ She also instructs concerning the mental benefits of a vegetarian diet:

Meat eating deranges the system, beclouds the intellect, and blunts the moral sensibilities. . . . We are composed of what we eat, and eating much flesh will diminish intellectual activity. Students would accomplish much more in their studies if they never tasted meat. When the animal part of the human agent is strengthened by meat eating, the intellectual powers diminish proportionately.¹⁸

Even more importantly, Ellen White has linked meat eating to spirituality:

A religious life can be more successfully gained and maintained if meat is discarded, for this diet stimulates into intense activities, lustful propensities, and enfeebles the moral and spiritual nature. "The flesh . . . [warreth] against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh" (Galatians 5:17). . . . Eating the flesh of dead animals has an injurious effect upon spirituality. When meat is made the staple article of food, the higher faculties are overborne by the lower passions. These things are an offense to God, and are the cause of a decline in spiritual life. . . . Whatever we do in the line of eating and drinking should be done with the special purpose of nourishing the body, that we may serve God to His name's glory. The whole body is the property of God,

¹⁷For example: "We should strive to understand the wonderful science of the matchless compassion and benevolence of God. Those who eat too largely and those who eat unhealthful food bring trouble upon themselves, unfitting themselves for the service of God. It is dangerous to eat meat, for animals are suffering from many deadly diseases. Those who persist in eating the flesh of animals sacrifice spirituality to perverted appetite. Their bodies become full of disease;" *Mind, Character, and Personality*, 2 vols. (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2001), 2:390.

¹⁸Ibid.

and we must give strict attention to our physical well-being, for the religious life is closely related to physical habits and practices. . . . The highest interests of the being are imperiled by the indulgence of appetites unsanctioned by Heaven. . . . The moral evils of a flesh diet are not less marked than are the physical ills. Flesh food is injurious to health, and whatever affects the body has a corresponding effect on the mind and the soul.¹⁹

Ellen White is no longer alone in connecting meat-eating with spirituality. For example, Stephen Webb refers to this issue through the biblical record of the life of Daniel:

The Book of Daniel, for example, tells the story of how Daniel and his friends refused to eat the impure food of Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king. Instead, they ate only vegetables, and "at the end of ten days it was observed that they appeared better and fatter than all the young men who had been eating the royal rations" (Daniel 1:15). It is tempting at this point to argue that even the Bible understands that eating less meat is better for one's physical as well as spiritual health.²⁰

Adventists have been aware of these issues for over a century. And we have known that the meatless diet is part of the wholistic doctrine of life that the Bible teaches. But perhaps we have not paid due attention to the crucial ecological issues involved with eating meat. When a fourth-generation cattle rancher,²¹ and a Mennonite hog

¹⁹Ibid.; Ellen G. White, Letter 69, 1896; Ellen G. White, *Counsels on Diets and Foods* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald, 1938), 382; Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1942), 315.

²⁰Stephen H. Webb, *On God and Dogs: A Christian Theology of Compassion for Animals* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 22.

²¹See, for example, Howard F. Lyman, *Mad Cowboy: Plain Truth from the Cattle Rancher Who Won't Eat Meat* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001). Lyman is well aware of what goes into US livestock – high doses of pesticides, growth hormone, and the

farmer²² give up raising animals for slaughter and becoming vegetarians, perhaps this is a needful reminder that we should reconsider the critical ecological issues involved in eating meat.

It is not hard to find statistics regarding the wastefulness of a meat diet. There is the "funnel effect" of many pounds of grain fed to a single steer. The same amount of grain could be used to feed far more people. Furthermore, cattle are vegetarians! They get their protein from plants! The huge amount of water that is used to grow fodder for cattle is well-documented. The same amount of water could serve a much larger community of people. Some even argue that not only is our water supply being slowly depleted on this basis alone, but also our deep underground water sources are being polluted by the seepage from the immense amount of cow manure that results from the massive cattle farms maintained in this country.²³ These are but a few of the serious

ground-up remains of other animals. A fourth-generation Montana farmer, he regularly doused his cattle and soil with chemicals. It was only when he narrowly escaped paralysis from a spinal tumor that Lyman began to question his vocation and the effect it was having on people and on the land he loved. The questions he raised and the answers he found led him, surprisingly, to adopt a vegetarian diet. As a result, he lost 130 pounds and lowered his cholesterol by more than 150 points. He is now one of America's leading spokesmen for vegetarianism. Along the way, Lyman learned even more about the alarming dangers associated with eating meat, and blasts through the propaganda of the beef and dairy industries (and the government agencies that often protect them) and exposes an animal-based diet as the primary cause of cancer, heart disease, and obesity in this country.

²²Gary L. Comstock, "Pigs and Piety: A Theocentric Perspective on Food Animals" in *Good News for Animals?: Christian Approaches to Animal Well-Being*, Charles Pinches and Jay B. McDaniel, eds. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 105-127.

²³As Carol Adams documents: "Meat-eaters do not have to pay the true costs for the 'meat' that they eat. The cheapness of a diet based on grain-fed terminal animals exists because it does not include the cost of depleting the environment. Not only does the cost of 'meat' not include the loss of topsoil, the pollution of water, and other environmental effects, but price supports of the dairy and beef 'industry' mean that the government actively prevents the price of eating animals from being reflected in the commodity of 'meat.' My tax money subsidizes war, but it also subsidizes the eating of animals. For instance, the estimated costs of subsidizing the 'meat' industry with water in California alone is \$26 billion annually (Hur and Fields 1985a, 17). If water used by the 'meat' industry were not subsidized by United States taxpayers,

ecological issues related to the meat industry, and we have not even mentioned the cruelty to animals involved in animal slaughter.²⁴ Stephen Webb is correct: "As long as it is more acceptable to say that we love meat than it is to say that we love animals, our views on animals will continue to be deeply distorted."²⁵

A meatless diet allows humans to live in peace with God's creation even before the eschaton. We know from Scripture that after the second coming of Christ, the diet for both human beings and animals in Eden Restored will be meatless, as it was in the first Eden. One day, all killing will cease and people and animals will stop doing harm to each other:

The cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie
down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox...
They will not hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain,

'hamburger' would cost \$35 per pound and 'beefsteak' would be \$89. Tax monies perpetuate the cheapness of animals' bodies as a food source; consequently 'meat' eaters are allowed to exist in a state of denial. They are not required to confront 'meat' eating as a 'pocketbook issue.'" Carol J. Adams, "Feeding on Grace: Institutional Violence, Christianity, and Vegetarianism" in *Good News for Animals?: Christian Approaches to Animal Well-Being*, Charles Pinches and Jay B. McDaniel, eds. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 148.

²⁴Ellen White was sensitive to this issue long ago: "Think of the cruelty to animals that meat eating involves, and its effect on those who inflict and those who behold it. How it destroys the tenderness with which we should regard these creatures of God!

The intelligence displayed by many dumb animals approaches so closely to human intelligence that it is a mystery. The animals see and hear and love and fear and suffer. They use their organs far more faithfully than many human beings use theirs. They manifest sympathy and tenderness toward their companions in suffering. Many animals show an affection for those who have charge of them, far superior to the affection shown by some of the human race. They form attachments for man which are not broken without great suffering to them.

What man with a human heart, who has ever cared for domestic animals, could look into their eyes, so full of confidence and affection, and willingly give them over to the butcher's knife? How could he devour their flesh as a sweet morsel?" White, *Ministry of Healing*, 515-316:

²⁵Webb, 12.

for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:7-9).

As we await this glorious future, as vegetarians we can begin to live by the compassionate patterns of God's governance and care for all of His creation.

Moreover, what we eat matters, and affects us intellectually, morally, spiritually, economically, and ecologically. Seventh-day Adventists could be at the forefront of ecological concerns solely with our long-standing counsel on the dangers of meat-eating. And in the process, we can be offering praise to God for His glorious creation by how we eat and live, finally linking our theology with ecology, as God has been doing all along!

The
Word Of God
For The
People Of God

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