



Interview

Jo Ann Davidson

Daughter of missionary parents, Jo Ann Davidson is also a fourth generation Seventh-day Adventist. She recalls her mother saying to her, "the blessings of being a Seventh-day Adventist have surely seeped into your genes and chromosomes by now!"


Formerly a home schooling mom and music instructor, Jo Ann now teaches in the Andrews University Theological Seminary—the first woman to teach in the Theology and Christian Philosophy Department. She earned her Ph.D. in Systematic Theology from Trinity Evangelical Divinity School (Deerfield, IL) in 2000.

Articles she has written have appeared in the *Adventist Review*, *Signs of the Times*, and the *Journal of The Adventist Theological Society*. Her column, "Let's Face It," which has a woman's slant on theology appears regularly in the journal *Perspective Digest*. She has also authored the books *Jonah: The Inside Story*, published by the Review and Herald, and *Toward a Theology of Beauty: A Biblical Perspective*, published by University Press of America.

Jo Ann finds great fulfillment in her many roles as wife, mother, daughter, sister, auntie, teacher, musician, student and Seventh-day Adventist Christian.

Shabbat Shalom: You have written a significant book on beauty and an article on ecology. Could you explain to our readers the reasons for your interest in these issues?

My interest in aesthetics and environmental concerns are not really unrelated, you might say! Even hymn writers have been constrained to chant: "For the beauty of the earth, for the glory of the skies, for the love which from our birth over and around us lies, Lord of all, to Thee we raise this our grateful song of praise." When studying aesthetics as a requirement for a Master's degree in music, the Greek philosophers' discussions on aesthetics were required reading. But, I recall musing at the time, surely the Creator of Heaven and Earth would have something to say about this topic in His "literary masterpiece," the Scriptures. Later, when studying for an advanced degree in theological studies, I determined to take the op-



portunity to see if my hunch was right. The book you mention is the result.

Shabbat Shalom: How do you reconcile the Christian hope of another Kingdom and the human responsibility for the earth?

The Christian hope of another, future Kingdom and the human responsibility for the present earth should be natural partners. Sensitivity to the extraordinary gift of life itself could be one motive. Moreover, this present life matters. Principles for living in both worlds issue from the same Creator. The natural world deserves protection by those who believe they are created in God's image. Moses, the prophets, Jesus, and Paul all expressed concern for this present world. The psalmist reminds us that "the earth is the Lord's." A "reverence for life" follows naturally from this perspective. Though we yet anticipate that perfect Kingdom, we should guard the priceless value of this present gift of life granted to us.

In fact, salvation itself is earth-affirming. The biblical view of the future includes a resurrection. And Scripture instructs us that it will include a major restoration. Rather than escaping this planet, ultimately God is going to renew it. As the prophet Isaiah promised, "he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken" (Isa 25:8; cf. Rev 21:4). When Jesus walked on earth, he did not just endure the present state of things. He was constantly healing, even raising the dead (Matt 8:16; John 11:38-44). He offered salvation to both body and soul as a "preview" of His perfect kingdom. In so doing, He showed that He has the power to accomplish what He promised about the future world.

Furthermore, while dwelling among us the "Architect" of two lavish Old Testament sanctuaries marveled at the astonishing beauty of the flowers He had created: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;

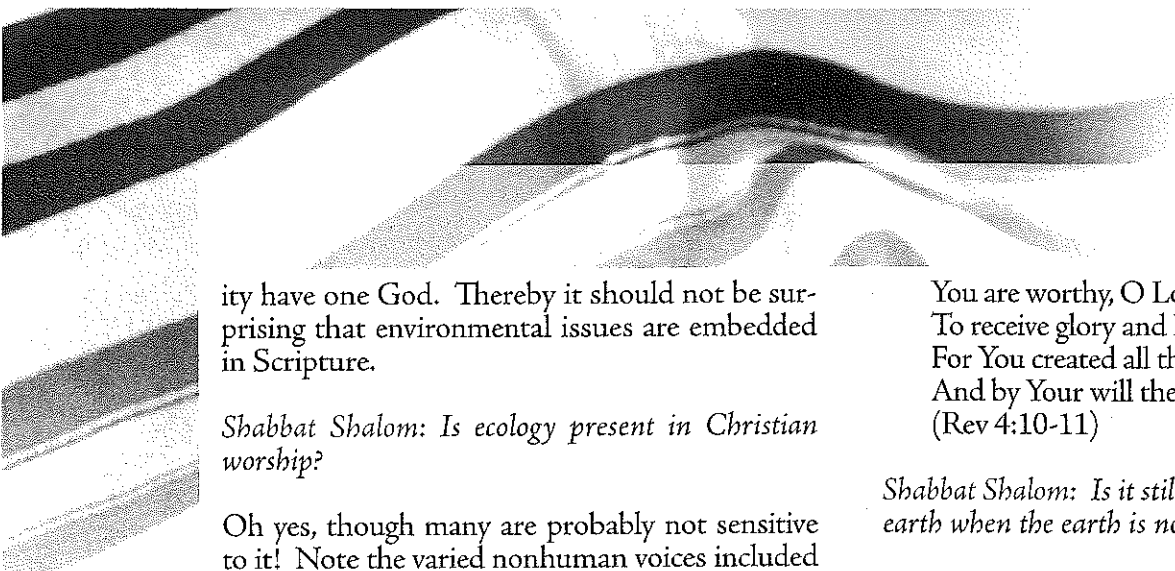
and yet I say to you that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Matt 6:28-29). This present world, though fallen, is of inestimable value to its Creator, implying a positive view of the material world. This "nest" of ours is not, as other creation accounts suggest, the result of some battle among the gods, nor the accidental outcome of impersonal forces, nor an illusion. It was made in great joy, as the Creator mentioned to Job: "Where were you made when I laid the foundation of the earth . . . When the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?" (Job 38:4, 7).

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And the Creator Himself declared it "good!" As the angels sang at the birth of Christ, "Glory to God in the highest," they linked with it "peace on earth."

Throughout Scripture we are never allowed to forget the profound value that God places on creation. Outside the Christian tradition, it has often been difficult to argue for such high worth. Secular materialists contend that the world unfolds in endless process. Pantheists believe God is eternally emanating with this world. Atheists think the world evolved out of matter by chance. New Agers worship the earth as divine. Buddhists and Christian Scientists believe the world is an illusion. By contrast, Christians believe God created this world with lavish care, declaring it "very good" (Gen 1:31), and ever since He has been a concerned "Landlord." The Levites, in their hymn recorded by Nehemiah, sang, "Thou, even thou, art Lord alone; thou hast made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth, and all things therein, . . . and thou preservest them all" (Neh 9:6). God is active in and through all of creation, "for in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

Only in the twentieth century did environmental thinking slowly begin to broaden beyond human concerns. Biblical writers express concern for all creation much earlier. The "book of nature" and the book of divine revelation bear the impress of the same Master Mind. Creation and Christian-



ity have one God. Thereby it should not be surprising that environmental issues are embedded in Scripture.

Shabbat Shalom: Is ecology present in Christian worship?

Oh yes, though many are probably not sensitive to it! Note the varied nonhuman voices included in the worship chorus of the Christian doxology: "Praise Him *all creatures here below!*" The psalmist is not hesitant to credit the many voices of humankind and "otherkind" praising the Creator!

Praise the LORD from the earth,
You great sea creatures and all the depths,
Fire and hail, snow and clouds;
Stormy wind, fulfilling His word;
Mountains and all hills,
Fruit trees and all cedars;
Beasts and all cattle;
Creeping things and flying fowl;
Kings of the earth and all peoples,
Princes and all judges of the earth!
Both young men and maidens;
Old men and children.
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)

Every time the Psalter is used in worship, we could be reminded of the great chorus of praise raising to God from all His many creatures! I admit, however, many Christians perhaps are not tuned into the inclusive language found when praise of the Creator is portrayed.

A glimpse of heavenly worship is granted in Isaiah 6, and we hear the seraphim chanting:

Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
The whole earth is full of His glory.
(Isa 6:3)

In the book of Revelation, the same creation perspective is present there, as the twenty-four elders "give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever" saying:

You are worthy, O Lord,
To receive glory and honor and power;
For You created all things,
And by Your will they exist and were created.
(Rev 4:10-11)

Shabbat Shalom: Is it still appropriate to refer to the earth when the earth is no longer respected?

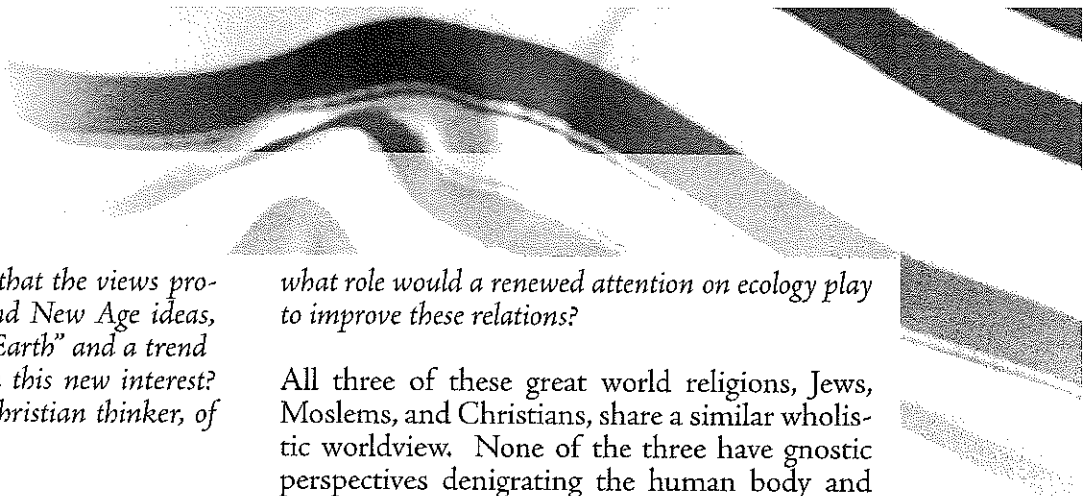
Some have wondered if Christians should stop chanting scriptural passages of rivers and trees clapping for joy in praise to their Creator (Ps 98:8; Isa 55:12) while forests are being turned into wastelands and waterways carry deathly pollution. Our environmental carelessness is muting God's praise.

Moreover, the divine gift of the Sabbath is a paramount environmental blessing, where we can learn to trust the Creator to care for His world. On that day we deliberately remove ourselves from weekly tasks that clamor for our attention and instead worship the Creator. We are liberated from the bondages of materialism and status, freedom from work with freedom to worship. Sabbath is time to enjoy the created world, which should bring praise to our lips.

Shabbat Shalom: Ecological preoccupation has never been so relevant than in our times. How do you explain this new phenomenon?

Well, there are probably several reasons, but surely one is our self-centered concern for our own well-being, for it is now being threatened by the destruction we have caused to the environment. Just last autumn, Matthew Sleeth, an emergency room physician turned environmentalist, spoke at Andrews University, and described how, when his wife asked him what was the biggest problem facing the world, he responded, "the world is dying." It took health and personal safety being threatened for many to open their eyes to the damage modern lifestyles are doing to human life and the world we share with many nonhuman creatures.

Also, the media is forcing attention to the many problems of pollution. Thankfully, much material is being published that can help raise awareness to these issues. We know more than ever that what we eat affects not only our own health but also all creation.



Shabbat Shalom: Do you think that the views promoted by Oriental spirituality and New Age ideas, with their emphasis on "Mother Earth" and a trend toward pantheism, play a role in this new interest? What is your evaluation, as a Christian thinker, of these currents of thinking?

I know of people whose attention has been captivated by New Age ideas and Oriental spirituality, who have changed their life-style habits with a new-found reverence for all life. Others, when they find this connection, turn away from creation care with disgust.

However, though some lifestyle changes are similar, Christian motivation is different. In the Bible, the created world is honored and cherished but never worshipped. There is never any confusion between the Creator and the created. "Mother Earth" is not a god or goddess. This world is the "nest" lovingly prepared by God for all His creatures. Christians understand that God's providence for this earth has continued ever since. For example, Psalm 104 describes a sequence corresponding with the first seven days of creation week in Genesis 1, but now all the verbs are in the present tense!

Concomitantly, there is no hierarchy of spirit over matter in Scripture. That dichotomy is present in various religious traditions whereas, for many Christians, though we still await the future kingdom of peace, we will be finally delivered from the bondage of death and all of creation will be restored with us. The day of resurrection will be a renewal of all that has been lost because of sin.

Evolutionary optimism has led humankind to determine they could finally cancel all problems plaguing humanity by pushing their own agenda on the created world. In the process we have lost the wisdom embedded within nature and its many systems. The negative consequences of this attitude have caused this planet to "groan" (Rom 8).

Shabbat Shalom: Considering the painful history of Jewish-Christian and even Jewish-Moslem relations,

what role would a renewed attention on ecology play to improve these relations?

All three of these great world religions, Jews, Moslems, and Christians, share a similar wholistic worldview. None of the three have gnostic perspectives denigrating the human body and human life. Physical life matters. Both body and soul are of value.


Thus all three include lifestyle issues as fundamental. One can find Christian, Jewish, and Moslem writers extolling the vegetarian diet because of a reverence for life, and also, a prohibition of alcohol.

These two dietary "ingredients" involve the issue of huge waste in producing them. If all people were vegetarians and didn't drink intoxicating beverages, and thereby all the grain and water used to produce the meat diet and alcoholic beverages were available for food, there would be a super-abundance of grain, food, and water for everyone. There is much evidence documenting the extreme waste involved with industrial farming and the making of alcoholic beverages.

The vegetarian diet is more and more being linked to environmental concerns. In the Old Testament, flesh meat is never included in the foods linked with Israel: pomegranates, wheat, barley, olives, dates, figs, honey, and grapes. Later, when the prophet Nathan chastises David for his behavior in stealing Bathsheba from her husband, he uses an analogy of a p^{er} lamb to David, a former shepherd:

There were two men in one city; the one rich and the other poor. The rich man had many flocks and herds; but the poor man had nothing, save one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished up, and it grew up together with him and with his children. It ate from his own food and drank from his own cup, and lay in his bosom, and was to him like a daughter. (2 Samuel 12:1-4)

There is no hierarchy of spirit over matter in Scripture.



David's response reveals his tender heart toward animals:

David's anger burned greatly against the man and he said to Nathan, 'As the LORD lives, surely the man who has done this deserves todie. He must make restitution for the lamb-fourfold because he did this thing and had no-compassion.' (2 Sam 12:5-6).

In the tradition of Judaism, there is no special prayer for the eating of meat, as there is with foods such as bread and vegetables. The rabbis believed that the laws of *kashrut* were intended to teach reverence for life and to refine the appetites. Rabbi Kook regarded the Edenic commandment to "eat nuts, herbs and green things" as symbolic of Torah's intention of ultimate justice for the animal.

Shabbat Shalom: The book of Genesis urges humans to have dominion over the earth. How do you understand this Biblical injunction?

Another issue that is often confused: what do "rulership" and "dominion" mean in regard to this earth? Humans are given rulership over creation in the same way the sun and the moon "rule" over the day and night (Gen 1:16): they assume their divinely given niche in the earth with all the other creatures who have also been given life by God. The Creator reveals Himself as a divine Shepherd in both the Old and New Testaments: a shepherd that gives his life for the sheep, seeks the lost, and tends and cares tenderly for the flock. And human beings, created in the image of God, should reflect the same. Indeed, in Genesis 1 the new earthlings are given the task "to serve" and "to keep"—meaning at the very least to protect. This involves loving actions and attitudes. Harsh control and careless management is not implied.

One final point: ignorance of cruelty to animals involved in a meat-based diet is still widespread. Perhaps if more people were aware of the "inhuman" treatment animals are made to endure so that human beings could eat meat, there would be a turning away from flesh foods with loathing.

Shabbat Shalom: What practical lessons would you suggest to help us to address and solve these problems?

There are many helpful books and resources now to inform our thinking and our hearts. I have found in my own life that the more I learn about the earth sciences, the more sensitive I become toward environmental issues, and the more grateful I am for life in all its varied forms.

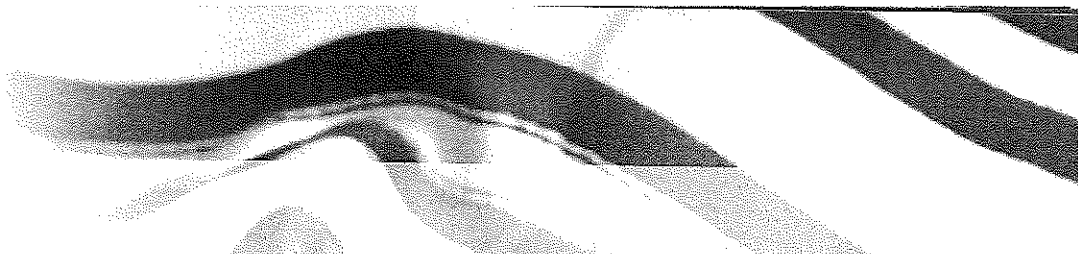
And, most importantly, the Creator has offered the Sabbath: an ecology of time! With modern artificial lights and technology, humans began to think they could control time and progress. From the very beginning of creation week, God provided the Sabbath day, the ultimate gift of time. There are more verbs connected with the creation of this day than any of the preceding six. For God blessed this day, sanctified, and rested on it. After the first six days, God ceased creating. Work and rest at the same time is impossible. This is not a negative prohibition. Six days God created tangible matter, on the seventh day He provides a special gift of time. Six days work and one day rest becomes the rhythm of life. This weekly cycle is still embedded in our calendars. It is a way of life that honors all creation and our own lives with rest, granting us time to draw close to the Creator and rest in His finished work.

Some educators wonder if the computers and electronic games that have emptied playgrounds and kept children from enjoying outdoor activities is part of the reason for so many major problems in schools. Being in the fresh air and sunshine and close to nature seems to have a nurturing, healing effect on the human body. The Sabbath day provides the time for this healing to take place.

Shabbat Shalom: Do you have a last important recommendation or insight to share with our readers regarding ecology and the environment?

Lukas Vischer has written a book on animals for the World Council of Churches in which he argues that the Bible as a whole is good news for animals:

The vegetarian diet is more and more being linked to environmental concerns.



The testimony of the Bible sees humans and animals in close community. They are near to one another. Even though the special role of human beings is emphasized, scripture as a whole takes for granted that animals are part of the environment.

The degradation of animals to the status of objects finds no justification in the Bible. While the cultural roots of it are in antiquity, it is essentially the product of the sequence of modern thought since Descartes (1596-1650), which has made humankind the center of the universe and has seen the outside world as subject to the human mind.¹

If Christians were to think more biblically, and less like Descartes, they might have better attitudes toward animals. Since God created and cares about animals, and we are created in His image, it follows that we too should care for them also. Vegetarians save lives!

Animals have intrinsic value quite apart from their usefulness to humans. They are a valued part of the interconnected and diverse world that Christians call "creation." They have their own unique ways of being related to God and bringing Him praise. And they can be our teachers, if King Solomon was correct: "Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!" (Prov 6:6)

Environmental care can even have an evangelistic effect. Aldo Leopold, a pioneer in the environmental movement, wrote in his journal:

What value has wildlife from the standpoint of morals and religion? I heard of a boy once who was brought up an atheist. He changed his mind when he saw that there were hundred-odd species of warblers, each bedecked like to the rainbow, and each performing yearly sundry thousands of miles of migration about which scientists wrote wisely but did not understand. No 'fortuitous concurrence of elements' working blindly through any number of millions of years could quite account for why warblers are so beautiful. No mechanistic theory, even bolstered by mutations, has ever quite answered for the colors of the cerulean warbler, or the vespers of the

woodthrush, or the swan song, or—goose music. I dare say this boy's convictions would be harder to shake than those of many inductive theologians. There are yet many boys to be born who, like Isaiah, 'ay see, and know, and consider, and understand together, that the hand of the Lord hath done this.' But where shall they see, and know, and consider? In museums?²

Obviously, one can come closer to the Creator when enjoying His works of creation just as He did.

¹Charles Birch and Lukas Vischer, *Living with the Animals: The Community of God's Creatures* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1997), 2.

²Aldo Leopold, *Round River: From the Journals of Aldo Leopold* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), 24.

Enjoy!

It is like a king who has filled his place with enjoyments; if he has no visitors, what pleasure does he derive from them? Thus, when the Angels objected to the creation of humans, God replied: "And of what use are all the good things I have created, unless humans are there to enjoy them." *Bereshit Rabbah*, 8, 5

Fun Facts on

Aluminum

- During the time it takes to read this sentence, 50,000 12-ounce aluminum cans are made.
- 350,000 aluminum cans are produced every minute!
- There is no limit to the amount of times an aluminum can may be recycled.
- Once an aluminum can is recycled, it can be part of a new can within six weeks.
- Because so many of them are recycled, aluminum cans account for less than 1% of the total waste stream of the United States, according to EPA estimates.

Paper

- Recycling a single run of the Sunday New York Times would save 75,000 trees.
- If one had a 15-year-old tree and made it into paper grocery bags, about 700 of them could be made. A supermarket could use all of them in under an hour!
- In 1993, U.S. paper recovery saved more



Ecology

by: (Jo Ann Davidson)

- than 90,000,000 cubic yards of landfill space.
- Each 2,000 pounds of recycled paper can save 17 trees, 380 gallons of oil, three cubic yards of landfill space, 4,000 kilowatts of energy, and 7,000 gallons of water. This represents a 64% energy savings, a 58% water savings, and 60 pounds less of air pollution.
- The 17 trees saved can absorb a total of 250 pounds of carbon dioxide from the air each year. Burning that same ton of paper would create 1,500 pounds of carbon dioxide.

Plastic/Styrofoam

- Americans use 25,000,000 plastic bottles every hour! Most of them are thrown away.
- Plastic bags and other plastic garbage thrown into the ocean kill as many as 1,000,000 sea creatures every year.
- Recycling plastic saves twice as much energy as burning it in an incinerator.

Glass

- Every month we throw out enough glass bottles and jars to fill up a giant skyscraper. All of these jars are recyclable.
- The energy saved from recycling one glass bottle causes 20% less air pollution and 50% less water pollution than when a new bottle is made from raw materials.

Trash

- Seventy-five percent of our trash can be recycled.
- About one-third of an average dump is made up of packaging material.
- Every year each American throws out about 1,200 pounds of food waste that could be composted.
- Rain forests are being cut down at the rate of 100 acres per minute.
- A single quart of motor oil, if disposed of improperly, can contaminate up to 2,000,000 gallons of fresh water. Recycling can help correct our anti-life habits.