

“Restoring God’s Creation”

TEXT:
Genesis 1 and 2
Psalm 104

April 22, 1990

This is your Mother Earth speaking today on behalf of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood-sisterhood of our common family.

I am speaking to Christian Americans in particular. You, along with other citizens, are raping me. There is not one among you who is altogether innocent, no not one. You have become so accustomed to abusing me for profit, jobs, luxuries, conveniences, and pleasures that it has become a natural way of life for you. It isn't that you intend to be malicious; it is only that you are thoughtless. But thoughtlessness doesn't clear you in a court of justice.

You have dedicated this day to me as Global Earth Day. The purpose of this day is to awaken you and your thoughtlessness and to move you to do some urgent thinking. This day is to cure you of your social schizophrenia and put you back in touch with the real world that nurtures you and yours. May you see that God has created you to live in community and never

in isolation. What your neighbors in the Amazon do to upset the balance of nature affects you. What you do to make for acid rain affects your Canadian brothers and sisters. Gases from cars and factories in Great Britain kill lakes and forests in Scandinavia. Ozone-depleting chemicals used in the U.S. increase the danger of skin cancer in Australia. The residue of DDT sprayed in Central America affects the Great Lakes region. The ruination of your environment respects no human-drawn borders nor any family's fenced in private property.

While some of you can be critical of the United Nations and the World Council of Churches, were it not for these two global organizations making for cooperation and coordination, you would annihilate me and yourselves within two generations. All of you, my citizens, are very interdependent. Each must learn to care for all, and all must learn to care for each. Not to love your neighbor as yourself is to surely perish.

Sometimes I get the idea that you Christians don't care for me. You sing hymns with words: "The world is not my home, I'm just passing through . . . The angels beckon me through heaven's door, and I don't feel at home in the world anymore." Your scriptures do not suggest that the world is an undesirable place to live. Your scriptures tell you that God created the heavens and the earth and that your Lord perceives earth as being "very good." In fact, God loves the world so much that he gave his only begotten Son that you should not perish.

You read in Genesis: "And God said to man and woman, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.'" Apparently, many of you have taken that to mean you should populate the world even beyond the point of its being able to provide for you — and that the earth is all yours to do with whatever you please. You dare not interpret this as

a license to destroy. This is God's commissioning you to care for the whole of his creation for the good of all. **God has given you a dignity and trusted the stewardship of me to you, so that you may keep up the harmonious relationship of human nature and earth's nature that the Lord has instituted.**

The Genesis creation stories illumine the right relationship of human beings to their Creator and the non-human creation. There is a mutuality and positive reciprocity between man/woman, nature and God. (See Isaiah 35: 5-7.) You read that God put man and woman in the garden to "till it and keep it." (Genesis 2:15)

The Hebrew expression, "to till it and keep it," speaks of everything you humans do to draw sustenance from nature. It involves your forming communities of cooperation and establishing economies for the purpose of satisfying your needs. Tilling does not refer just to agriculture, but to mining and manufacturing and trade — everything that is involved in accepting and using the stuff of God's creation. **Unless you allow the world of nature to flourish, you will perish.**

You, my earth children, have become greedy and obese without realizing it. You are suffering a critical economic-justice crisis in your tilling,

without maintaining equitable distribution of the fruits of your tilling.

You have a biblical theology of the stewardship of the earth. The Psalmist put it in one sentence: "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell in it" (Psalm 24:1). **If you would be good stewards of God's creation, there would be sufficiency for all to live that abundant life Jesus intends for everyone.**

Hear me! This is your Mother Earth speaking: "You are abusing me disgracefully — raping me. You are biting off the very hand that feeds you. Your disposable lifestyle is killing me. You are turning me into a toxic garbage heap that is burying you. You don't believe in washing things anymore; you just throw them away. You even destroy the very beauties God has given you to enjoy. You are upsetting God when you upset the balance of nature that God so wondrously designed.

Several years ago in Borneo, there was an epidemic of malaria. Health officers had the whole area sprayed with DDT to kill the mosquitoes. The insecticide poisoned and partially paralyzed flies, which became easy prey for insect-eating lizards. The lizards became diseased from the DDT in the flies. The lizards, usually able to escape cats, were being killed by the cats

— and the cats, in turn, died. That allowed the rat population to flourish, and the plague threatened the population. It got so bad that they had to parachute cats into Borneo.

The moral: In creating a healthy, safe, and conductive environment for people, the welfare of plants and animals must also be considered.

You are raping me, your own Mother Earth, when you pollute my waterways and airwaves. You are destroying me by over-populating me. Your market demands more and more single use paper and, in so doing, you are raping my forests indiscriminately, expanding my deserts, exterminating my important animals and essential plant life, eroding my soil, and destroying my carbon dioxide filters.

You, my earth children, are not nearly as enlightened or as bright as you pride yourselves in being. You are contributing to your own demise unawares. More people are suffering hunger today than 10 years ago. What you do to me is not just an ecology problem, it is also a social problem and a political problem. Just think — in 1931 the world population was two billion. Within 40 years it had doubled again to eight billion. At the same time, you let your administration get by with refusing aid to countries that provide for family planning. Right-to-life

advocates put down Planned Parenthood, which provides sex education — which, in turn, reduces the cause for abortion.

If China did not limit its population growth by both contraception and abortion rights, they would eat themselves out of house and home into starvation. The Chinese have an old saying that should be the theme for Earth Day: **“If we don’t change our direction, we are likely to end up where we are headed.”**

Over-population is wearing me out more rapidly than you know. Population growth is exceeding the farmers’ ability to keep up. My soils are being so overworked, they are becoming barren where they are needed most. Who but the poor suffer the affluent people’s overkill and superfluity? You are making a wider and wider gap between the rich and the poor; and that is always a far greater threat to national and international security than the insane arms race.

Believe me, I know your environmental problems are very complex. If you outlaw a certain kind of coal because of its toxic gases, you cause certain of your coal miners to become economically deprived. When you legislate against certain indiscriminate logging, you have children demonstrating before a legislative body with signs, “Please

don’t put my daddy out of work.” When you endorse clean air legislation, manufacturers — to comply with the Environmental Protection Agency — install very expensive equipment. The cost is passed on to the consumer, and the poor become poorer. **How will you balance costs and values, profits and persons, reforms and taxes, desires and necessities, pleasures and essentials, social health and special interests?**

This I do know! You Christians ought to be most highly motivated to practice environmental stewardship. If you are accountable to God for every idle word you speak, do you think you are going to be held any less accountable for everything you waste and all that depletes God’s good creation?

Listen, O Earth children! The future of your children, your children’s children and all who come after you is in grave jeopardy. You have already so upset my balance by your pollution, over-population, and disturbance of non-human life that enables and supports human existence, that your very survival is at stake. Your Bible reminds you that “the whole creation has been groaning in travail” and that “the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God” (Romans 8:21,22). **This is not speaking only of spiritual**

redemption, because God never intended that saved souls should live in a decayed world.

Let this decade of the 90s be the “Turnabout Decade” — not just for the sake of prudence and survival, but because the endangered planet is God’s creation, and you would be judged as faithful stewards of what God has entrusted to you to manage for him. God is making you co-creators with him in the restoration of his creation. Your first mission may be the reconciliation of souls with God through Christ Jesus; but your second is like unto it — the redemption of earth that sustains you here, even as heaven shall sustain you.

This is a time of judgment. The Bible reads, “God comes to judge the earth. God will judge the world with righteousness, and the peoples with God’s truth.” (Psalm 96:13)

Everyone of you can take steps, however small and unspectacular, to turn things around in restoring God’s creation. You can plant a tree. Just think, a single red maple planted in your yard will absorb as much as 48 pounds of poisonous carbon dioxide a year. Over its lifetime, one maple tree will generate \$31,000 worth of oxygen and recycle \$37,500 worth of water.

You can compost leaves and

lawn cuttings and kitchen scraps. You can recycle paper, plastics, scrap metals, and glass. You can cease buying throw-away products, use public transportation, exercise influence on political bodies, keep yourselves informed, and introduce your children to natural wonders. You must come to grips with problems too long evaded and face the challenge of ecologically responsible living. This means you must accept the costs and pains of transition that have begun but need to be greatly accelerated.

You Christians are called upon to balance your quest for personal salvation with reverence for nature. Either you live for the common good of all, or you live for no good or God at all!

What do you hear God saying to you through the Psalmist?

O Lord, how great and all-powerful You are!
And how beautiful is the world You created for our habitation!

Even before man and woman were brought forth from the dust, You prepared for them a place to live and grow. And everything man and woman saw about them reflected the beauty and power of the living God.

There was clean air.
Pure water from snowcapped mountains flowed

through green valleys and gathered together to become great lakes.

The skies shone with a million lights.

The land brought forth flowers and fruits to delight the eye and palate of God's creature.

And every part of the land and the waters that covered the land and the skies that looked down upon the land were filled with uncountable forms of life; the world was vibrant and alive.

Your power and Your beauty were spread throughout the universe, but it was only upon the heart of man that You imprinted Your image.

And these creatures, in their short stay upon this world, were destined to be Your sons and daughters and co-workers in the ever-continuing process of creation.

Your creative activity has never ceased.

It continues in and through the life of creature man/woman.

Limited and fallible as man and woman are, their mind and hands are assigned to corral Your lifegiving energies and to direct them in controlling and replenishing the earth that life might be given and sustained throughout the world.

O Lord, how great and all-powerful You are!
And how beautiful is the world You created for our habitation!

(Psalm 104 paraphrased by Leslie Brandt,
inclusive language by Robert H. Meneilly)

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