Heaven and Earth: Thinking Through Environmentalism

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When the Nobel-prize winning poet, Derek Walcott, published his first poem at the age of fourteen on his native Caribbean island of St. Lucia, he was hardly prepared for the reprimand that would come, in printed verse no less, from his town's local priest. The poem was a song of praise of nature, about finding God amidst "wanderings among the quiet woods," an experience he hoped would 'be my first lesson from the Holy book." The priest chided him (in lines of his own that exhibited, ironically, an inferior skill for verse) for his youthful exuberance and foolish preference for sermons preached by "the tree, the ant, the sod" instead of heeding revelation. He wrote: "God wills that man should hear from man/ the truths of faith that led above." That the priest insisted on a stark division between the revealed Word and nature's inspiration and was unwilling to build on the inspiration the boy poet had discovered was poor instruction. Fortunately Derek Walcott was not deterred and went on to become one of the greatest poets of the English language, one possessed of an exceptional devotion to the natural beauties of the Caribbean.

The priest, of course, was not wrong to teach that revelation through prophets must not be displaced by whatever portion of God's presence we might experience in the outdoors. It is, however, a penurious conception of revelation that insists on such mutual exclusion and that cannot imagine a continuity of feeling, of imbued meaning, that we might experience on a pew and in the woods. Our understanding of God's revealed word today would be unthinkable if all fourteen-year-olds were prohibited from finding God in the woods! Joseph too was reprimanded for declaring what he had seen and felt among

the trees near his home: a God whose body of flesh and bone seemed to challenge the prevailing view that heaven and earth, spirit and body, could not share the same space harmoniously.

My early teens were neither marked by signs of remarkable poetic nor prophetic gifts. Indeed, it would be closer to the truth to say that I can only look back on those years with a shudder! But what imbues those years with a softness and a holiness, despite my shameful awareness of myself as an earthy embodied individual being, are my experiences in the woods of Connecticut and on the Long Island shore where I was raised. I can still feel the humid summer air sticking to my skin, hear the chorus of a million insects milling in the still air, and smell the brackish leaf mulch forming beds of loam around the banks of the small stream that provided home for minnows and frogs in my back yard. Wordsworth once described himself as a young boy "in the hour/ Of thoughtless youth" playing "like a roe/… o'er the mountains" of England's Lake District, and I think he accurately captures the anonymity a young adolescent can uniquely experience in such locales:

> …The sounding cataract
> Haunted me like a passion: the tall rock,
> The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,
> Their colours and forms, were then to me
> An appetite; a feeling and a love,
> That had no need of a remoter charm.

To my young mind, exploring nature—diving into the saline waters of the Sound, wandering through woods in search of sites for makeshift forts, catching frogs and

salamanders and staring at their strange little eyes—all offered a balm for what C. S. Lewis once called "the wound of individuality" because it provided a way of communing with something greater than myself but something that was also embodied and thus not alien to my physical self. I had my adolescent difficulties in coming to understand the restored Gospel, but I intuited that a belief that rejected celibacy for its priesthood also potentially included the idea of the blessed state of physical existence. Nature seemed a holy extension of my body, and my senses seemed to be the portholes through which I communicated with my natural kin.

Unfortunately, so much of our modern technologically-enhanced life has divorced us of this kinship, whether because of the virtual reality of television and the internet, our controlled climates, or because we no longer produce our own food. Because our alienation from nature begins so early, our exposure to it begins to fill us with a kind of nostalgia for something more, as if we were seeking something lost. And what specifically is it that we have lost? A purely ecological view of human existence would suggest that what we long for, what we vaguely recall in those moments of the disappearing self, is an understanding of our merely embodied, biological identity as physical beings who too easily succumb to the illusion of our separateness from the physical world; we must not be deceived, in other words, by what appears to be our distinct and exceptional capacity for conscious thought because our true and only home is the earth. A view of human existence that insists on our merely spiritual identity would argue that we long for a sense of belonging to God that nature only helps us to begin to intimate; we should not be deceived, in other words, by the appearance of things and by

our sensual experience of our kinship with them because our true and only home is heaven.

Joseph Smith's vision suggests the possibility that we have lost both and that this is simply a false dichotomy. His vision and subsequent revelations contained in the Doctrine and Covenants and The Pearl of Great Price consistently teach that we are both embodied and inspirited, biological and spiritual, and that these are not temporary contradictions that will be resolved in death's separation of the spirit and the body and of heaven and earth. Spirit is matter, the Prophet explained, and all physical life was created spiritually before it was physically on the earth; all things, therefore, hide beneath their tangible surface a spiritual entity that inhabits the same space. He taught: "the elements are eternal, and spirit and element [or physical matter], inseparably connected, receive a fullness of joy. And when separated, man cannot receive a fullness of joy" (D&C 93:33–34). Cannot receive a fullness of joy! Our happiness is limited if our physical experience is not enhanced by the spirit and if our spiritual experience is not enhanced by physical life. The Prophet's revelations make it clear that our eternal life will be an embodied one, like God's, and that the earth will become the site of the highest level of exaltation. Nature, then, provides a profoundly unique and valuable opportunity to understand the delicate balance between the spirit and the body, heaven and earth.

So it was that I attended my Sunday School classes and despite my adolescent reluctance to throw myself wholly into my religion, I remember the doctrines that first grabbed my attention. I instinctively recognized the truth that animals and trees were "living souls" and were thus my kin (Moses 3:9). I hadn't always heard the voice of the Lord in my meetings but I had spent enough time under the stars and floating in the sea to

implicitly trust the idea that "all things denote there is a God" (Alma 30:44) and that "all things are created and made to bear record of [Christ]" (Moses 6:63). My young mind was being prepared to understand just how interfused all things were by the light of Christ, as the Prophet revealed in section 88:7–12 of the Doctrine and Covenants, but when I contemplate those words now— "as also he is in the sun […] as also he is in the moon"—I can see my teenage self surrounded in His light even in the midst of my adolescent angst, my body glistening in the sun after a dip in the sea or bathed in moonlight on my lawn at night where I often sat to ponder life's purpose. Although I sought nature so I could be alone to sort out my choices, away from the human missives from family, church, and friends, on a jetty overlooking the Sound one night at the age of seventeen I finally came to realize that I was never alone, that I was surrounded by His love and light, that I could repent and follow Him and that it would be my choice.

I did not fully appreciate the broader global implications of these doctrines until I became aware of the extent of our contemporary environmental crisis. In college at Stanford University, in graduate school at UC Berkeley, and into my early thirties as a professor at Northern Arizona University, I learned about the frightening and increasing rates of species extinction world wide. I remember hearing the early debates about global warming and have noticed the growth of what is now a remarkable consensus among scientists about its reality. Of course there were the disappearing rain forests, deforestation and soil erosion in poor countries, the millions who live without safe drinking water, the disasters of pollution, but closer to home I read about the disappearing water tables in the American West, even as I was part of the increasing growth. And I

watched as our dependence on oil implicated us repeatedly in conflicts in the Middle East and threw us into war.

Throughout my education, I had always felt a respect for the environment and an instinctive belief in the need for restraint and conservation, but I wasn't able to formulate a way for me to act. As I reflect on this now, I can find at least three reasons this was the case: I could not overcome my own inertia to change my life, the problems often seemed too complex to know exactly how to act, and in my undergraduate experience at Stanford it seemed environmental issues were always discussed in the context of population control; you weren't a true environmentalist unless you committed to having no more than two children. I was frequently interrogated about how many children I planned to have (I have four, which is one more than I think I said at the time I wanted). Extreme restrictions on family size never sat comfortably with me, but I didn't know how to argue the issue. Besides, I didn't hear environmental lessons in church, and the scriptures seemed to indicate that alarmism was unwarranted since the fate of the earth was in the hands of the Lord. I believed in principles of stewardship but stewardship over the fate of the earth in an age of global environmental problems challenged me to understand where and how I could enter into the fray. It didn't help that the general culture of environmentalism, as far as I could see while studying in California, didn't seem friendly to Christians. Christians of all stripes seemed easy targets for our belief in the millennial reign of Christ, our reluctance to unduly limit the size of our families, and our trust in divine providence.

At Northern Arizona University, however, I made friends with a small group of scholars who were intensely interested in broad questions about how we can define and

use our quality of life, economic choices, and beliefs so as to benefit more effectively the well-being of the physical world now and in the future. I took the opportunity to attend a workshop aimed at helping professors in all fields to see the relevance of their field of study to questions of sustainability. Sustainability was defined in terms of principles, not policies, and they included the notion that individual choices should be valued by their effect when we imagine that they are made by an entire society and over several generations. If one gum wrapper is left at a lakeside, it may not be measurable, but if we all individually assume that we only need to measure the individual effect of our puny acts, then we are all justified in throwing wrappers to the ground. A collective group acting with such impunity wouldn't take more than a few weeks to make an enormous mess, and if thousands do so on a weekly basis for several generations, worse still. As I heard these discussions, I couldn't help thinking that I had heard them before in LDS teachings about the law of consecration, the spirit of Elijah that inspires us to consider the effects of our actions on future generations and to measure them against the examples set by our ancestors, and Christ's teachings about moderation. It represented such a high standard that I also reflected on the need for patience and tolerance, since it didn't seem likely that anyone could live in such a way that nothing they did would cause harm if replicated worldwide. As Jesus had taught, "he who is without sin … ."

One day while walking with a colleague, a Jewish scholar who studied Judaism's environmental values, I spoke of LDS beliefs about the spiritual creation that came before the physical one, the fate of the earth as the site of the celestial kingdom, the Word of Wisdom and its emphasis on eating meat sparingly, and a variety of other doctrines that seemed relevant to environmental problems. She insisted that I research this further and

publish something. She was sure people outside Mormonism were not aware of these unusual doctrines and that perhaps Mormons themselves would benefit from contemplating further what our scriptures teach about environmental stewardship. Thus began a wonderful journey of discovery.[1] It seemed as if everything I had learned and come to believe in shone in a new light of understanding. As I read deeply in the literature about religion and the environment and about environmental problems generally, and as I continued my personal study of the Gospel, it was hard not to feel excited by the answers it seemed the restored Gospel provided.

I learned that some scholars had argued that the Judeo-Christian tradition bore responsibility for the environmental crisis. Specifically these scholars saw the biblical injunction to assume dominion over the earth as a license to act without regard for the well-being of God's creations. They likewise pointed to Christianity's outright rejection of animism, the idea that all living things had spirits, as enabling this amoral view of our use of nature because, arguably, we are not likely to feel an ethical sense of responsibility toward something we view as dead matter. Furthermore, they insisted that Christianity's tendency to value the spirit over the body and heaven over the earth had led to an attitude of indifference towards the world's degradation. If the earth is going to be destroyed anyway and we will eventually depart it, why bother protecting it?

While the logic of these arguments made perfect sense to me and I had no doubts that many Christians were guilty as charged, I simply didn't believe in that version of Christianity, and because I had studied our doctrines, I knew this was not simply due to my own idiosyncratic way of seeing things. Christianity was also used to uphold slavery,

[1] I did eventually publish an essay in response to this encouragement: "The Environmental Ethics of Mormon Belief. *BYU Studies* 40:2 (Summer 2001): 187–211.

but it was also a chief inspiration for the abolitionists. Besides, it isn't pragmatic to suggest that a worldview held by millions should simply be discarded. Seeking common ground is more effective since environmental problems are global and require global solutions. In my mind this necessitates working together across distinct values and traditions with tolerance, in cultures of large and small families, among farmers and urban professionals, believers and non-believers, first and third world, etc.

It would be far more effective to rethink Christianity itself and all of the best religious traditions to find solutions to our contemporary problems. As one such critic put it wisely, "What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship. More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecological crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one."[2] In my research I was pleased to learn that an entire generation of Evangelicals, Baptists, Catholics, Muslims, Hindus, Jews, and other religious people the world over had responded to these criticisms in one of the most significant shifts in the history of religion, and they had given faith-based reason to the notion of a religiously motivated environmental stewardship.

This literature of ecotheology, as it is known, consistently argued that if the body is viewed as something alien and inherently hostile to the desires of our spirit, then we come to understand ourselves as beings whose real home is not earth nor whose real identity is physical. Concern for the well-being of the body or of the rest of creation is viewed as an expression of faithlessness. Hence the logic that concludes that there is no need for urgent action to save the planet, because we all know that the earth is going die. Taken to its logical conclusion, this view completely privileges the spirit over the body

[2] "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment* (New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 191, 193.

and leads to a dangerous weakening of our capacity to be accountable moral agents. We become content with a panglossian view that reassures us that all that happens in this life, regardless of the damage done to the earth, is for the best. Environmental degradation, or any form of human evil, becomes a manifestation or sign of God's will since it is believed to fulfill prophecy. The Savior warned us about accountability in case we are tempted by such strange theology: "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe unto that man by whom the offence cometh (Matthew 18:7).

I reluctantly had to admit to myself that despite the fact that we alone seemed to possess the most complete and explicitly stated doctrines that outlined these environmental principles, I had heard such apathetic thinking in my church meetings. I had heard that it apparently wasn't a good thing to be a "tree-hugger." Recycling, wilderness preservation, ethical consumption, protection of endangered species, reduction of waste or of our use of water and gasoline—even just for the sake of living modestly—were never mentioned in our Sunday lessons or seemed to play a role in the planning of our ward activities. Indeed, they seemed implicitly absent in the doctrines we learned in the restored account of the creation, in temple worship, and in our discussions of church welfare principles. While I heard plenty about the dangers of moral pollution, I scarcely heard a word of concern about any of the major environmental issues of our day; it was as if they did not exist. We spoke often of the importance of watching our thoughts, of circumspection in all of our actions toward our fellow human beings, but nothing at all about our treatment of animals, our use of natural resources, or about the need to concern ourselves with where our goods and services came from. Most often I believe that this

was due to apathy and lack of information, but it was surprising to me to learn of some members' outright opposition to any form of environmentalism. Although the vocal opponents were few, they were the only ones who seemed to address environmentalism at all. Hence, the impression was created, even if it was not fully articulated or justified, that a good Mormon would not make a good environmentalist and for good reason.

This was especially disappointing given our extraordinary doctrines about modest and consecrated living, trees and plants as living souls, and the sanctified earth as our eternal destiny. Why, given the fact that the body's eventual resurrection does not justify our neglect of the body, would we conclude that an impending millennium justifies inaction in the face of the earth's mistreatment? I went through the scriptures in search of any doctrines that would explain to me why I should not accept stewardship over the well-being of the environment. I could find none; I did find scriptures, however, that seemed to echo with the readings I had done among other religious traditions. In Doctrine and Covenants I found strongly-worded warnings against excess. In section 59:18–22, I read:

> Yea, all things which come of the earth, in the season thereof, are made for the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart; Yea, for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul. And it pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man; for unto this end were they made to be used, with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion.

I had read these verses before merely in the context of this section's teachings on the Sabbath day, but nature appears here, as it does elsewhere in the scriptures, as both a resource to be used with moderation and as a sacred source of aesthetic pleasure. (See

how in Moses 3:9, for example, the Lord states that trees were created so that we could behold them as well as use them as a resource.) What a wonderful principle of balance! The Lord instructs us to be responsive to his creations, to be fulfilled and awed by the simple fact of their existence. Once we have elevated our sensibilities to be able to do this, we are then permitted to take only what we need for our sustenance. This will endear to us the places we inhabit at the same time that we learn to use them judiciously. Consumption, when it is informed by this kind of spiritual and aesthetic capacity, will not corrupt us because our passions will be kept in check by a recognition of the Lord's gifts.

Another important consideration appears to be the needs of the poor. In section 104, in a verse Mormons often cite in defense against those who argue for extreme population control measures, we read that "the earth is full and there is enough and to spare." What is not as frequently cited is how these verses explain that this promise is contingent upon our willingness to consume modestly. We are told that every man is "accountable, as a steward over earthly blessings" and that

> It must needs be done in mine own way; and behold this is the way that I, the Lord God, have decreed to provide for my saints, that the poor shall be exalted, in that the rich are made low. […] Therefore if any man take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment. (Doctrine and Covenants 104:13–18)

I do not doubt the Lord's capacity to provide for however many of his children come to earth, and I have therefore never felt the need to impose restrictions on the size of my

family merely on the basis of concerns about overpopulation. I do not mean to minimize the problems caused by growing populations, especially in areas of the world whose economies and environments are not currently able to sustain that growth or where women are not full partners in reproductive decision-making, and I understand well that my American patterns of consumption of all manner of natural resources is disturbingly disproportionate to the rest of the world, but I have always felt uncomfortable with the misanthropic and often racist attitudes that belief in population control fosters and the tendency it has had to create repressive forms of political power. I do not mean to suggest, in other words, that I see Mormon belief as indifferent to the responsibility of parents to plan their family size carefully. It is not well known outside of the Church, and sometimes within it, that the Church does not categorically oppose the use of birth control and that there is no overt policy that we are obligated to have the largest family possible.

If we wish to defend the right to exercise our own conscience and bring children into the world according to our right to inspiration, we would do well to live up to the high standard of modest living imposed by these verses. I for one feel a persistent and nagging worry that I and my family do not exercise enough restraint on our spending and consumption. I suspect that the Lord wants us to have these worries. I would like to believe we might someday learn how to use a more fair proportion of the world's resources (something I am not convinced small families do better than large ones). I believe that the Lord cares more about what kind of children we are raising rather than how many and that the kind he wants are not merely morally clean non-smokers and non-drinkers but also modest consumers, respectful toward all life and grateful users of His

resources, and generous in their willingness to sacrifice so that others might have the same opportunities they enjoy. Given the disparity of wealth in the world, it is foolish for the fortunate small fraction of God's children who have educational and economic opportunities to be ungrateful. But it makes reason stare to conclude that such opportunities are providentially given merely so that these few can devote themselves to consuming at will the smorgasbord of First World amusements while millions go without the bare necessities of life. It is the height of folly to believe that such carefree living will leave no mark on the environment and have no consequences for future generations, and I believe it a desecration of the value of religion to suppose that our God sanctions such a view. This has never been the case in past societies, and although it is prophecy that the world will end, we would do well to avoid contributing to its death. I eventually came to understand in my teens the need to avoid the "eat, drink, and be merry" crowd, but sometimes I find myself part of the same crowd, only now we are eating and drinking fast food hamburgers and soda, throwing away our garbage with indifference, having no idea where our clothes and food come from and not caring, and generally bristling at any suggestion that there is something wrong with this picture.

Our doctrines of stewardship don't teach me which organizations I should join, who I should vote for, or how many children I should have. They also don't tell me when to cut trees and when to preserve them, and they certainly do not seem to suggest that all use of natural resources is categorically wrong or that the protection of the environment should trump all other human concerns. But that does not free me of the responsibility to define proper and moderate use according to the principles of gospel living. The scriptures insist that I should deliberate carefully about use and that my deliberations should be informed

by a profound appreciation for the beauty and wonder of God's creations I am contemplating using. I don't know why some Mormons therefore conclude that environmentalism should be viewed as the enemy. I might not like every version of environmentalism and I might not always come out on the environmentalist side of an issue as it is defined politically, but why should I disparage what environmentalists are trying to do? And why should I pretend that my religion gives me license to use nature however and whenever I please? Is it really more valuable to spend my time and words finding fault with environmentalism and justifying the status quo or to give my attention to changing my life to meet the high demands of stewardship as the gospel defines it?

Once possessed of the conviction that the gospel teaches environmental stewardship, it is a dangerous temptation, however, to blame the Church and its leadership for giving inadequate attention to good stewardship and to see Mormons as a fallen and wayward people. Many people fall prey to the temptation to become a Johnny-one-note, playing the same monotonous theme over and over in their minds and only hearing messages that resonate with that theme. It might be a book or a radio program that has placed a new idea in the mind, and instead of experimenting on the word through diligent additional education, the idea becomes a slogan, a triumph over others. The messages of the restored gospel are so many and they create such wonderful and complexly beautiful and harmonious sounds. Why should I only listen for the bass line, or for notes in the key of C sharp? Why should my concerns that we become better environmentalists mean that I refuse to be moved whenever I am called to repentance, reminded to do my home teaching (even if I must serve someone with different political beliefs, class background, or educational opportunities), or taught about service during General Conference? If it is

spiritually debilitating to fear new knowledge and to sustain one's activity in the church simply by shutting down curiosity and refusing to ready widely, leaving the church because one has only just begun an education on an issue that has created temporary dissonance hardly qualifies as an alternative. Thirst for righteousness and truth, forbearance, and the capacity to bear all things qualify us for the work of growing in our knowledge of what is true. Why anyone would turn away from what are arguably the richest environmental doctrines in the Christian world because of their environmental convictions is beyond me. But sometimes others in the church feel uncomfortable with their questions and lead them to believe that their concerns are unfounded, unfaithful, morally suspect, even hedonistic. This doesn't excuse their leaving but they are just one example of many kinds of individuals with a viewpoint that with the right nurturing can find fertile ground in the church to benefit all of us.

Apparently we have not been listening to church teachings contained in restored scripture, the temple, and taught by our church leaders. If we have the ears to hear, the sermon of environmental stewardship has been preached many times. President Hinckley has said "The earth is His creation. When we make it ugly we offend Him" (NE 48 April 1983). Neal Maxwell observed:

> True disciples […] would be consistent environmentalists—caring both about maintaining the spiritual health of a marriage and preserving a rain forest; caring about preserving the nurturing capacity of a family as well as providing a healthy supply of air and water […]. Adam and Eve were to "dress the garden," not exploit it. Like them, we are to keep the commandments, so that we can enjoy all the resources God has given us,

> resources described as “enough and to spare” (D&C 104:17), if we use and husband them wisely. (A Wonderful Flood of Light, 103)

During the energy crisis of the 70s, which is starting to pale in comparison with current problems, the First Presidency said: “We urge Latter-day Saints and all citizens to join in efforts nationally and locally to conserve precious energy resources. Worshippers should walk to church meetings where it is feasible” (21). These are just a few samples of many similar Church teachings that are not rare or hard to find, just hard, I suppose, to hear.

What environmentally-minded critics of the church miss are the many unspoken environmental strengths of Mormon practice. Our scouting program teaches and promotes stewardship principles at the crucial age of adolescence when environmental awareness is just beginning. We have a history of creating a strong sense of place in our communities, which is no small accomplishment in an age of rapid movement and displacement that often renders people indifferent to the places they inhabit. We understand the need for sacred spaces in nature (usually nearby our places of residence) and often send our youth into the woods for Enos-like experiences of their own. We have a tradition of family gardening that serves to teach a relationship to the earth that grocery stores simply cannot provide. Our welfare system promotes modest use, recycling of clothing and other materials; church ranches and farms are developing sustainable practices; we sacrifice not only our tithing but our fast offerings to help keep in check our material ambitions.

Can we do better in these and other areas? Of course. But the point is that despite our failings, we are a resourceful, industrious, and conscientious people who know how to act collectively. We are, in other words, an important ally because of our tremendous

potential, and so for some environmentalists to conclude that it would be better to disparage Mormons or any other Christians because of their shortcomings will only serve to weaken the collective force we need to muster to conquer our environmental problems. Sometimes it seems that critics of the Church and critics of environmentalism alike prefer to get in their jabs rather than to seek common ground so as to work cooperatively for solutions, and this unfortunately comes at the expense of the environment itself. It has always proved easier to find fault with others than to use our beliefs as a mirror for finding fault with ourselves. We certainly would not want to live without convictions, but it is important to remember that no matter how true, strongly held beliefs run the risk of becoming a part of our self-image before they have become a part of our character, and religious worship, like so much political propaganda, becomes a form of self-affirmation. Thus religious devotion leads to expending energy so as to be right instead of doing the self-questioning necessary to become good.

Recently, I had the privilege of working with colleagues to hold a symposium at Brigham Young University to explore LDS perspectives on environmental stewardship.[3] Over three hundred people were in attendance; members of the church participated from all walks of life: law, ranching, academia, public policy, wildlife management, and other fields. As the symposium was concluding, a man approached me and thanked me on behalf of his son, who had also attended the symposium. His son was a teenager still searching for his testimony of the gospel but already intensely interested in environmental stewardship. His son was beginning to feel that his fellow church members did not appreciate his interest, and this was slowly driving him out of the

[3] A subsequent book of the symposium proceedings was published. *Our Stewardship and the Creation: Latter-Day Saint Perspectives: Latter-Day Perspectives*. Eds. George B. Handley, Terry Ball, and Steven Peck. Provo: Religious Studies Center, 2006.

church. The father felt that the symposium had provided an important encouragement to the boy for having a strong conscience as well as an invitation to bring his convictions to the gospel table. I thought of similar students I had met at BYU, Utah State, and elsewhere, and youth I had known, including the boy I once was. I thought what a blessing it would be to congratulate them for caring about such serious topics at such a young age and to do all we can to bring them into the fold rather than unnecessarily alienating them.

As I serve in the Church, I hope that I am true to the generous impulses of the doctrines of the restoration, which unlike the attitude of Derek Walcott's priest, are the opposite of penurious. I prefer to the priest's overly zealous orthodoxy, the generosity of vision expressed by our prophet:

> [The restoration of Christ's church and gospel] must be our great and singular message to the world. We do not offer it with boasting. We testify in humility but with gravity and absolute sincerity. We invite all, the whole earth, to listen to this account and take measure of its truth. God bless us as those who believe in His divine manifestations and help us to extend knowledge of these great and marvelous occurrences to all who will listen. To these we say in a spirit of love, bring with you all that you have of good and truth which you have received from whatever source, and come and let us see if we may add to it. This invitation I extend to men and women everywhere with my solemn testimony that this work is true, for I know the truth of it by the power of the Holy Ghost. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen. (General Conference, October 2002).

The doctrines of the restoration, such as those pertaining to environmental stewardship, are like magnets or wide nets that draw in the many fragments of truth dispersed across the planet, expressed within innumerable philosophies and worldviews whose relationship to eternal verities is always worth exploring. We do this, as Alma instructed, by suspending disbelief and experimenting with the word so as to find out what fruit it bears. While the fundamental truths of the gospel, of God's nature and Christ's mission, and of the restoration are known, the truth of all things is yet to be known and therefore the world is always worth listening to and learning from. Our guide in the midst of potential confusion is, of course, the Holy Ghost. But it is more than this. It is also, according to Mormon, charity, or the true love of Christ in our own hearts, and as Mormon states, "if ye will lay hold of every good thing, ye certainly will be a child of Christ" (Moroni 7: 19). Once possessed of this remarkable gift to desire the good, we learn to bear all things, even when all things don't always make sense, because we want to know all things, and we become possessed of an unquenchable thirst for all that is virtuous, lovely, of good report, or praiseworthy.

Over time we may find that our knowledge and sense of the good and true have become more broad, more generous, more faithful even at the same time that we have learned to live with more exactness "according to every word that proceedeth forth out of the mouth of God" (D&C 98:11). My incipient environmentalism might have pulled me apart and away from the God of revelation but has instead helped me to hear God's inspired messages from his prophets as well as from good people in the world and from nature itself. This has allowed my joy to deepen on both the pew and in the woods,

something I hope increases my chances for happiness on earth and in heaven, which I can only pray will be the same place.