

Religious

THE POTENTIAL OF THE SCIENCE-RELIGION CONFLUENCE FOR AFFECTING POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION

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The author's understanding of the full scope of God's covenant after the Flood, together with the scientific insights of systems theory, guided him to implement a new approach in administering national restoration and protection policy. He is convinced that attempts by Congress to dismantle such legislation as the Endangered Species Act of 1973 are founded upon fear of the potential power of the conjunction of spiritual values with scientific insight.

I've been doing some reflection about what lies at the intersection between religion and science. And I've had to do it in the pressurized atmosphere of contention, of change, of radical proposals coming at us—really unprecedented kinds attacks upon the whole idea of community.

I am reminded, here in Boston, of Paul Revere, sounding a warning across the land. We have our own obligation to sound the alarm. When Paul Revere was riding, the agreed-upon lantern signal in Old North Church was "One if by land, two if by sea." And it occurred to me that, if he were here tonight, he'd look up at Old North Church and he'd be terrorized. He'd see *three* lanterns burning, because this attack is coming by land, by water—from every side. It's an attack upon the whole notion of public lands, of any kind of public interest in the landscape. It's an attempt to repeal the 1972 Clean Water Act, all of the wetlands provisions and things that were begun to enable us to regain some sense of stewardship over the rivers and lakes.

I want to concentrate now, for a few minutes, on the Endangered Species Act of 1973, because it has become the flash-point for contention. It is the one law that is stir-

ring the most passionate attempts at appeal in the United States Congress. It's been really singled out in a very special way. I'd like to reflect on why that is, and on why I think that the Endangered Species Act becomes a metaphor, if you will, for the efforts we make to bridge science and religion, joining them together in a harmonious way.

I have always sensed that the Endangered Species Act was undergirded by a kind of implicit sense of values, of really powerful, generalized values. I recall an Eco-Exposition in Los Angeles, not long ago. Somebody from my Department put up a sheet of paper and invited a group of schoolchildren to write on that sheet of paper their answers to the question, "Why should we save endangered species?"

These were sixth, seventh, and eighth graders, giving their responses, and I've written down some of their answers. One youngster said, "Because God gave us the animals." Another child, named Travis, said, "Because we love them." A third one answered, "Because we'll be lonely without them." Another one said, "Because they're part of our life. If we did not have them, it would not be a complete world." Someone

else said, "The Lord put them on earth to enjoyed, not destroyed." One answer I jumped out at me: down at the bottom of the page, someone had scrawled just three words: "Because we can." Now in thinking about that, I turned to reflect about the debate going on in the United States Congress, because Congress doesn't think that we can.

The new leadership in the Congress believes that the Endangered Species Act is exclusively a debate about utilitarian values. Nothing more. Admittedly, they define utilitarian fairly broadly: If a species is charismatic, let's save it. That takes care of lions and tigers. If some species are good for game hunting, let's save them—those species are invited "onto the Ark." For those who like to go fishing, they'll save the fish—but not *all* fish, mind you, because in the eyes of this Congress, most fish are "trash fish."

Congress has taken it upon themselves to redefine creation. They're willing to save fish you go fly-fishing for, or bass fishing. Or if a plant species might conceivably be a potential source of medicines—like the Pacific yew tree or the Madagascar

and I've thought back over my own childhood. I grew up in one of the most remarkable places in this land, a little town named Flagstaff, in northern Arizona. It is nestled at the foot of a great blue mountain that rises 6,000 feet above the town, straight up out of the desert. It's got a snow-capped summit that most of the time is obscured in the clouds. And as I was growing up, I always had a mystical attachment to that mountain. I knew it was a manifestation of something larger than physical reality. But in the church that I attended, the connection was never made.

I went to Sunday Mass from my earliest memories until I left that town in high school, and we never got outside the four walls of the church. There was never a connection made with the landscape. We were living in the most mystical, evocative landscape in the world, and the connection just wasn't there. In the religious tradition that I grew up in—in that particular generation and time and phase—our relationship to the natural world was without voice. The view of this relationship was a reflection of the prevailing utilitarian view of the natural world, with its long precedence in philosophy and theology.

I felt then that I had to go to another religious tradition to make the connection. Now the remarkable thing was that just such a religious tradition was on the other side of that same mountain. It was a Hopi Indian friend of

mine who, one summer, led me by the hand out to the pueblos, sitting up on the enchanted mesas, extending off to the north.

It was a summer morning in June, the *kachina* dancers were filing into the plaza. And in the most literal way, he explained to me that these *kachinas* come from the summit of that sacred mountain, where they are the intermediary between the Divinity and

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periwinkle—they'll concede that further discussion might be warranted for such species. But there is no other criterion that suggests that there is any other obligation. And therefore, they feel that their first task is to abolish the Endangered Species Act in its present form.

I've had occasion to think about this issue of values and this utilitarian approach,

us. And as I watched this ritual unfold in the plaza, I felt the poverty in the midst of my own rich religious tradition. That connection with the landscape just wasn't there. Later in the summer, my friend took me back for the Snake Dances, and I saw another of the pageants in the Hopi sacred cycle unfold in the plaza. They prayed for rain and released the serpents to carry the message back into a landscape saturated with sacred meaning.

I began to wonder whether my only choice was to embrace someone else's culture, or whether I might turn back and have a second look at my own religious tradition. Like most of us, what I did was head back to my own religious tradition.

The Catholic priests who taught me were not big on having us rummaging around in the Bible independently. But being a brave, adventuresome soul, I went back and started exploring in Genesis, and I was immediately taken by the accounts of Creation and the Deluge. I'd always heard the rationalization that God gave dominion over the Earth to humankind.

But then I read carefully for the first time the account of the Deluge. And I read the familiar parts about Noah being commanded to take the species, clean and unclean, two by two, seven by seven, all of Creation into the Ark—*not* two charismatic species, *not* those waterfowl that we hunt, *not* the potential sources of medicine—but two by two, *all* of Creation. And in rereading it, what came through to me finally was the covenant at the end that runs between God and Noah and his children. But that covenant, sealed by the rainbow, also runs between God and the Earth. That's when I

"closed the triangle" and began to understand that there *is* a connection—that this landscape and that great blue mountain *are* sacred, that it *isn't* some piece of property, that it *is* God's Creation.

Enlightened by this journey, I've had occasion to begin to think about the meaning of the Endangered Species Act, and the reason that it is so threatening to those people in their radical quest to erase the architecture of protection that we've built up over the decades, as a people. I began to see that the reason it's so threatening is precisely because it is so laden with spiritual value. I began to understand that the Endangered Species Act really is, intentionally or unintentionally, a reflection of the command of Genesis, of the covenant of Genesis. It speaks of the potential of spiritual values.

The children who were writing their messages on the board at the Eco-Exposition implicitly understand those spiritual

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values, even if the United States Congress doesn't. Our task, therefore, is to begin to appreciate that the reason why it is so threatening is that it represents an incredibly powerful conjunction of spiritual values and science.

Informed by that conjunction, I began to examine my conscience, if you will, about the administration of this Endangered Species Act. I began to see some really important things. I saw that my predecessors and a lot of really well-intentioned scientists and

administrators across the past twenty years have been administering the Endangered Species Act in a manner that is really devoid of this understanding of its spiritual values. They have tended to intervene one species at a time, not seeing the totality of creation. They have managed one crisis after another, at the eleventh hour precisely, because the scientists hadn't had the stimulus of the values statement behind the injunction to protect biodiversity.

And so, as we began to look at how we administer the Endangered Species Act, watching both the values and the science, we came to some surprising conclusions. The first really big one was in the Pacific

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Northwest, where the Spotted Owl had been the subject of contention for some ten years and had reached an absolute impasse. I began to see it in a different way (I saw it wasn't about an owl; it's about the setting in which the owl lives. The Spotted Owl is a warning signal about a *system in crisis*).

And all of a sudden, with that insight, we were able to step back and see that we needed to erase the lines on the map and look at the Cascade Mountains from Puget Sound clear down to San Francisco Bay. We needed to look not at *one bird*, but at *hundreds of species*. We managed to get the scientists together and to strip off their jurisdictional badges and look at the *entire system*, infused and hopefully inflamed by the value judg-

ment that it is our job to protect biodiversity, God's Creation.

Out of that came an unprecedented study, based on the viability of the different species, based on forestry practice, and so forth—just looking at the whole thing as a system and reassembling it as a system, from the Spotted Owl, to the Marbled Murrelet, to the fish spawning in the stream. As an act of faith, we believed that in the end there would be room for humankind—that if this way of approaching the landscape is a reflection of a larger purpose, then we are a part of that purpose.

And that's what this "new look" is about. It isn't about creating more wilder-

ness areas, exclusively. We used to do that. That was an interesting view of Creation, but it wasn't perfect, because it didn't deal with *humanity's place in Creation*. We can't deal with Creation by "fencing off the back forty." We can't do that, because everything relates. Ultimately, we're driven

to look at the whole thing, to see it whole, and then to ask what the moral injunctions are upon *us* as a species, to live a little more lightly upon that landscape and to see it whole.

The second conclusion we've reached, in watching both the values and the science in our administration of the Endangered Species Act, is how to approach the Florida Everglades. Here was a National Park with a fence around it, and it was collapsing, desiccated, dead. The reason is that Creation isn't very susceptible of being partitioned into little squares while we say, "Well, here's a representative sample of God's Creation, and we're going to set it aside as we lay waste to the rest of it."

The problem wasn't in Everglades National Park; the Park Rangers had taken great care of it. The problem was two hundred miles away to the north, in Lake Okeechobee. The problem was the water supply: that artery of water had been severed by the Corps of Engineers, to drain the swamps to create a vast developed area of agriculture; and in the process, the system was collapsing. So we were driven, once again, to consider what the value issues are here. This forced us to bring in the State of Florida, the developers, agriculture, the Water Management District, sixteen different federal agencies, and others. This issue, ultimately, is about how we live on the landscape.

The ecosystem called Florida is all connected. Ultimately, our job of restoration and protection entered every facet of life in the whole community, and we had to find some way to stitch that hydrological system back together. We are on the road to getting that done, notwithstanding what's going on in Washington. People in Florida seem to have an intuitive appreciation for the rightness of this way of doing it.

I've got to say again and again that their sense of the rightness is a combination of my ability to persuade them that biodiversity is a valid scientific concept and, more importantly, of their own internal spiritual values. They understand and believe the injunction of Genesis. They understand that there is something beyond a utilitarian issue here. It isn't exclusively about short tons of sugar cane and tons of fish catch in Florida Bay. It's about a larger issue called "humility in front of God's Creation." How powerful an idea that it! It's not just an idea—it's a reality! And when that comes together with the scientific concepts, the possibilities are enormous.

This is the big realization that has confronted me, in terms of policy. I'm increasingly certain that the reason this law is such a flash-point is precisely because the people who are out to destroy all that we've created understand that this is "The Big One," because it is so laden with spiritual values. It drives them absolutely crazy.

I'll give just one example of that. A couple of weeks ago, a number of your

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Churches wrote letters to the Congress, making this point, in your respective ways, about values. Those letters were offered into the record of the House Natural Resources Committee. This is routinely done. They're always accepted. The Chairman of the Committee refused your letters. He would not allow them into the record.

That, to me, is a statement that the new leaders of Congress understand the power of the confluence of these two streams of science and religion, and of our place and our role—not regarding *our property*, but regarding *God's Creation*. And so I urge you to continue to find the places where the tributaries of science and religion flow together and create a mainstream. Ultimately, the political process is dominated by and determined by values.

Bruce Babbitt was the Governor of Arizona from 1977 till 1987. After practicing law for a number of years in the Washington, D.C. area, in 1993 he was appointed by President Bill Clinton to be the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, a position he holds today.

After graduating from the University of Notre Dame with a B.A. in geology, he earned an M.S. degree in geophysics from the University of Newcastle, England. He then turned to the study of law, earning an L.L.B. degree from Harvard Law School.

Secretary Babbitt's tenure as Secretary of the Interior is marked by important initiatives in administrative policy: large-scale, consensus-based environmental restoration projects with an awareness of ecosystem dynamics. He describes the evolution of this approach in his essay here, which he gave as the keynote address at a conference in November 1995. Entitled "Consumption, Population & the Environment: Religion & Science Envision Equity for an Altered Creation," the conference was presented by the Boston Theological Institute together with the American Association for the Advancement of Science.

7/29/00

READER'S VIEW

Babbitt's spiritual beliefs help him care for the earth

Several weeks ago, Dan Popkey wrote a column exploring the connection between Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt's pro-environmental policies and his spiritual beliefs.

Popkey described the secretary's Catholic upbringing, his rancher family's opposition to saving the Grand Canyon, and an epiphanous experience with a rattlesnake, which helped transform Babbitt into a conservationist. Popkey concludes that all of these details lend some credence to Congressman Helen Chenoweth-Hage's contention that Babbitt is unconstitutionally foisting his personal religious views on the rest of the nation.

This sort of argument completely misses the point. While Secretary Babbitt's policies are undoubtedly rooted in his spirituality, Congressman Chenoweth-Hage's quite divergent views are just as deeply grounded in her own religious outlook. The question is not whether our relationships with the rest of the creation are shaped by our spiritual values, but rather, what set of values are doing the shaping.

Congressman Chenoweth-Hage's real dispute with Secretary Babbitt lies in their conflicting interpretations of



DAN FINK

Scripture. Babbitt emphasizes the story of Noah's ark, and the presence of God's hand in the genes of every unique species. By contrast, Chenoweth-Hage, like most fundamentalists, focuses on a literal understanding of Genesis 1:28: "Fill the earth and have dominion

over it." On the surface — and Chenoweth-Hage's politics certainly follow this surface reading — the verse seems to portray God as giving humankind free license to do whatever we wish with the natural world and its creatures.

But my tradition does not interpret the verse this way. Rashi, the pre-eminent medieval Jewish Torah commentator, noted that the Hebrew word for dominion (*v'yirdu*) can also mean "to descend." This comes to teach that when we act as worthy stewards of God's creation, we exercise dominion, but when we abuse our power and damage God's world, we descend below the level of the beasts and they take dominion over us.

Our task is further clarified at the end of the creation narrative, when God places the humans in the Garden and tells us to "work it and watch

over it." And lest we forget our proper place and act as if nature was nothing more than our private property to exploit, the Psalmist reminds us: "The Earth is the Lord's, and all that is in it." In short, Jewish environmental ethics follow Secretary Babbitt's interpretation much more closely than Congressman Chenoweth-Hage's.

There are many ways to understand Scripture. However, before Congressman Chenoweth-Hage (who is not otherwise known for her staunch advocacy of church-state separation) lambastes the interior secretary, let her consider: Is it really so wrong to choose the interpretation that counsels compassion for all of the creation? Shouldn't we read the text in a manner that affirms the intrinsic worth of all God's creatures, rather than one that sees them as human playthings?

After all, in the Genesis story, at the end of each day's work, God gazes out at the trees, birds, fish and animals, and pronounces them all to be good. Surely we should not condemn the Secretary of the Interior — the man responsible for our entire nation's ecological treasures — for doing the same.

Dan Fink is the rabbi for the Ahavath Beth Israel congregation.

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✓ REVISIT FEB 7

"Between the flood and the rainbow"
OUR COVENANT: TO PROTECT THE WHOLE OF CREATION

A wolf's green eyes, a sacred blue mountain, the words from Genesis, and the answers of children all reveal the religious values manifest in the 1973 Endangered Species Act.

Feb 13, 1996 in St. Louis

Remarks of U.S. Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt
Before the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council

I began 1995 with one of the more memorable events of my lifetime. It took place in the heart of Yellowstone National Park, during the first week of January, a time when a layer of deep, pure snow blanketed the first protected landscape in America. But for all its beauty, over the past 60 years this landscape had been an incomplete ecosystem; by the 1930s, government-paid hunters had systematically eradicated the predator at the top of the food chain: the American grey wolf.

I was there on that day, knee deep in the snow, because I had been given the honor of carrying the first wolves back into that landscape. Through the work of conservation laws, I was there to restore the natural cycle, to make Yellowstone complete.

The first wolf was an Alpha female, and after I set her down in the transition area, where she would later mate and bear wild pups, I looked through the grate into the green eyes of this magnificent creature, within this spectacular landscape, and was profoundly moved by the elevating nature of America's conservation laws: laws with the power to make creation whole.

I then returned to Washington, where a new Congress was being sworn into office, and witnessed power of a different kind.

Attack on water, land, creatures

First I witnessed an attack on our national lands, an all-out attempt to abolish our American tradition of public places -- whether national parks, forests, historic sites, wildlife refuges, and recreation areas. Look quickly about you, name your favorite place: a beach in New York harbor; the Appomattox Courthouse; the great western ski areas; the caribou refuge in the Arctic; or the pristine waters off the Florida Keys. For each of these places is at risk. Last month in the Denver Post, the Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Public Lands estimated that his committee may have to close more than 100 of the Park Service's 369 units. In these times, it seems that no part of our history or our natural heritage is sufficiently important to protect and preserve for the benefit of all Americans.

Next I witnessed an attack that targets the 1972 Clean Water Act, the most successful of all our environmental laws. Until

that Act passed, slaughterhouses, pulp mills and factories from Boise to Boston to Baton Rouge spewed raw waste into our waterfronts. Yet 23 years later, as I visited America's cities, I saw that Act restoring those rivers, breathing new life into once-dead waters. I saw people gather on clean banks to fish, sail, swim, eat and live. I saw that, as the Act helps cities restore our waters, those waters restore our cities themselves. And then I saw Congress rushing to tear that Act apart.

But finally, more than any of our environmental laws, the Act they have most aggressively singled out for elimination -- one that made Yellowstone complete -- is the 1973 Endangered Species Act.

Never mind that this Act is working, having saved 99 percent of all listed species; never mind that it effectively protects hundreds of plants and animals, from grizzly bears to whooping cranes to greenback cutthroat trout; never mind that it is doing so while costing each American 16 cents per year.

For the new Congress -- while allowing for the above charismatic species, plus a dozen other species good for hunting and fishing, plus, just for good measure, the bald eagle -- can find absolutely no reason to protect all species in general.

Who cares, they ask, if the spotted owl goes extinct? We won't miss it, or, for that matter, the Texas blind salamander or the kangaroo rat. And that goes double for the fairy shrimp, the burying beetle, the Delphi sands flower-loving fly and the virgin spine dace! If they get in our way, if humans drive some creatures to extinction, well, that's just too bad.

Over the past year that is, I think, a fairly accurate summary of how the new majority in Congress has expressed its opinion of the Endangered Species Act.

The values of children

They are not, however, the only Americans who have expressed an opinion on this issue.

Recently I read an account of a Los Angeles "Eco-Expo" last April, where children were invited to write down their answers to the basic question: "Why save endangered species?"

One child, Gabriel, answered, "Because God gave us the animals."

Travis and Gina wrote, "Because we love them."

A third answered, "Because we'll be lonely without them."

Still another wrote, "Because they're a part of our life. If we didn't have them, it would not be a complete world. The Lord put them on earth to be enjoyed, not destroyed."

Now, in my lifetime I have heard many, many political, agricultural, scientific, medical and ecological reasons for saving endangered species. I have in fact hired biologists and ecologists for just that purpose. All their reasons have to do with providing humans with potential cures for disease, or yielding humans new strains of drought-resistant crops, or offering humans bioremediation of oil spills, or thousands of other justifications of why species are useful to humans.

But none of their reasons moved me like the children's.

For these children are speaking and writing in plain words a complex notion that has either been lost, or forgotten, or never learned by some members of Congress, and indeed by many of us.

The children are expressing the moral and spiritual imperative that there may be a higher purpose inherent in creation, demanding our respect and our stewardship quite apart from whether a particular species is or ever will be of material use to mankind. They see in creation what our adult political leaders refuse to acknowledge. They express an answer that can be reduced to one word: values.

My religious experience in church

I remember when I was their age, a child growing up in a small town in Northern Arizona. I happen to have learned my religious values through the Catholic Church, which introduced me to an encompassing theology, a sense of ordered moral purpose, and examples of love, mercy, and healing. These inspire me still.

But as with all the great Western wisdom, traditions, and disciplines, the voice of organized religion in its way, like the sciences and humanities in their ways, seemed to me largely silent on behalf of the natural world, relegating it to a kind of secondary status. Nature is here, it's lovely, it's a resource. But as anything intrinsically and fundamentally sacred, and therefore binding us morally to its protection...I heard little of that in my education.

Teachings may have been there. Indeed they were there, and are here, available to us all. God calls us to stewardship in Genesis. God enters into covenant with all Creation, not just humankind, under the rainbow following the great Flood. The Psalm proclaims that "The Earth is the Lord's" But in my childhood, or as a young man, I did not hear this message steadily proclaimed as a central message of organized religion. And perhaps I did not search it out enough myself.

Yet, outside that church I always had a nagging instinct that the vast landscape was somehow sacred, and holy, and connected to me in a sense that my catechism ignored.

A Sacred Blue Mountain

At the edge of my home town a great blue mountain called the San Francisco Peaks soars up out of the desert to a snowy summit, snagging clouds on its crest, changing color with the seasons. It was always a mystical, evocative presence in our daily lives. To me that mountain, named by Spanish missionaries for Saint Francis, remains a manifestation of the presence of our Creator.

On the opposite side of the blue mountain, in small pueblos on the high mesas that stretch away toward the north, lived the Hopi Indians. And it was a young Hopi friend who taught me that the blue mountain was, truly, a sacred place.

One Sunday morning in June he led me out to the mesa top villages where I watched as the Kachina filed into the plaza, arriving from the snowy heights of the mountain, bringing blessings from another world.

Another time he took me to the ceremonials where the priests of the snake clan chanted for rain and then released live rattlesnakes to carry their prayers to the spirits deep within the earth.

Later I went with him to a bubbling spring, deep in the Grand Canyon, lined with pahoos -- the prayer feathers -- where his ancestors were believed to have emerged from another world to populate this earth.

By the end of that summer I came to believe, deeply and irrevocably, that the land, and that blue mountain, and all the plants and animals in the natural world are together a direct reflection of divinity, that creation is a plan of God, and I saw, in the words of Emerson, "the visible as proceeding from the invisible."

Genesis and the Deluge

That awakening made me acutely aware of a vacancy amidst my own rich religious understanding, and what seemed to me a very muted voice from our religious community. It did not seem fitting for me to embrace a borrowed pagan culture. I felt I had to turn back and have a second look at my own tradition and legacy, and discover, or recover, in my own heart and understanding, the vision and support for my belief in the sanctity of the natural world, the sacredness of that blue mountain.

This has led me into a deep religious inquiry, and one in which I increasingly see I am not alone.

There are those industrial apologists who, when asked about Judeo-Christian values relating to the environment, reply that

the material world, including the environment, is just an incidental fact, a backdrop, with no particular imperative -- that to be faithful to the Creator we must care for the Creation.

They see in the first verses of Genesis a kind of Catalogue of Commodities -- land, waters, fish, birds, and swarming creatures -- over which we can feel free to exercise a form of "dominion" governed entirely by what they choose to define as basic to human need or desire, to whatever end, in whatever manner, under no moral code or sanction.

We find out differently in the Flood, as they should read a few verses on. We discover that we really did profane the Garden, and that there really are consequences here for what scripture chooses to designate quite simply as "sin."

But the account of the Deluge is not one of punishment alone. It conveys the most comprehensive and intimate message about Life here on Earth, and what Earth means to God and how God chooses to love it, to enter into Covenant for its protection, and by so doing offering us both moral guidance and spiritual inspiration.

Noah was of course commanded to take into the ark two by two and seven by seven every living thing in creation, the clean and the unclean. Our Creator did not specify that Noah should limit the ark to two charismatic species, two good for hunting, two species that might provide some cure down the road, and, say, two that draw crowds to the city zoo.

No, He specified the whole of creation. And when the waters receded, and the dove flew off to dry land, God set all the creatures free, commanding them to multiply upon the earth.

Then, in the words of the covenant with Noah, "when the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between me and all living things on earth."

And listen to how Creation is described thereafter in Psalms: "The pastures of the wilderness drip, the hills gird themselves with joy, the meadows clothe themselves with flocks, the valleys deck themselves with grain, they shout and sigh together with joy."

Centuries later we sing, "purple mountains' majesty" and "amber waves of grain." It is not so far a reach, it turns out, for me and for all of us, to experience a feeling of homecoming here. As a prodigal people, I believe we can rediscover how familiar, if once forgotten, it is to regard our religious faith, the natural world, and our national vision as so intrinsically intertwined. A Homecoming, at last.

Are we alone in this thought?

This is, of course, my own personal interpretation of the Bible, based on my own personal experience. I can only speak for myself.

Although, whenever I confront some of these anti-environmental bills that are routinely introduced, bills sometimes openly written by industrial lobbyists, bills that systematically eviscerate the Endangered Species Act, I take refuge and inspiration from the simple written answers of those children at the Los Angeles expo.

But I sometimes wonder if children are the only ones who express religious values when talking about endangered species. I wonder if anyone else in America is trying to restore an ounce of humility to mankind, reminding our political leaders that the earth is a sacred precinct, designed by and for the purposes of the Creator.

I got my answer last month.

I read letter after letter from five different religious orders, representing tens of millions of churchgoers, all opposing a House bill to weaken the Endangered Species Act. They opposed it not for technical or scientific or agricultural or medicinal reasons, but for spiritual reasons.

And I was moved not only by how such diverse faiths could reach so pure an agreement against this bill, but by the common language and terms with which they opposed it, language that echoed the voices of the children:

One letter, from the Presbyterian Church, said: "Contemporary moral issues are related to our understanding of nature and humanity's place in them."

The Reform Hebrew Congregation wrote: "Our tradition teaches us that the earth and all of its creatures are the work and the possessions of the Creator."

And the Mennonite Church wrote: "We need to hear and obey the command of our Creator who instructed us to be stewards of God's creation."

A Great Awakening

And suddenly, at that moment, I began to understand exactly why some members of Congress react with such unrestrained fear and loathing towards the Endangered Species Act. I understood why they tried to ban all those letters from the congressional

record. I understood why they are so deeply disturbed by the prospect of religious values entering the national debate.

For if they heard that command of our Creator, if they truly listened to His instructions to be responsible stewards, then their entire framework of human rationalizations for tearing apart the Act comes to nought.

But as I began to look further, I saw the strength and the words and the direction of religious thought today goes both deeper and further than the Endangered Species Act.

As I spoke with congregations around the country, with leaders of the churches I began to see something stirring across the American landscape in every single community.

You hear me struggling to evoke what I am increasingly discovering as I have traveled around the country this past year: A Great Awakening.

The American religious community -- convinced of scientific evidence and consensus, and acting across a remarkable spectrum of faith groups -- is arraying its ancient and authoritative teachings for action in response to the crisis of planetary environment.

Where once it may have been more muted, the religious voice is seeking to uplift our vision on this issue, to be guided by moral standards in defense of the commons and the common good, to inspect or acknowledge our habits of wastefulness and to change them, and to link indissolubly the cause of equity and environment, and the well-being of habitat and humankind.

This is not, as one participant put it; "The Environmental Movement at Prayer." Nor is it, I can assure you, an adjunct to this administration. Far from it, and long beyond it or any Congress. I have encountered it as scholarly and deliberate, acting from reflection, not reflex. Its roots are in Genesis, not Earth Day. It is the religious community being religious.

It is happening at the highest levels of governance as when the leaders of all branches of American Judaism collectively state:

"The ecological crisis hovers over all Jewish concerns, for the threat is global, advancing, and ultimately jeopardizes ecological balance and the quality of life. It is imperative, then, that environmental issues also become an immediate, ongoing and pressing concern for our community."

Breaking Ground from Grass Roots

This Great Awakening is breaking ground from the grassiest of grass roots, in congregations of all denominations from all parts of the country.

Children from the Mainline Reform Temple in Wynnewood, PA have painted fish on sewers to discourage dumping where it threatens the purity of local waters.

And I was touched to hear the story of Christ the Good Shepherd Orthodox Church here in St. Louis, where once, in celebration of Epiphany, services were held on the banks of the Mississippi. A sacred cloth would be thrown into the waters, and children would swim out to retrieve it, symbolizing joy in creation and stewardship. But now the waters are too dirty for the children, and the cloth is retrieved by a string. For the moment, WE must be that string, holding fast to the sanctity of God's river, even as we work to restore it, so we can watch the children swim once again in its waters, on Epiphany.

I conclude here tonight by affirming that those religious values remain at the heart of the Endangered Species Act and at the core of our conservation laws as a whole; that they make themselves manifest through the green eyes of the grey wolf, through the call of the whooping crane, through the splash of the Pacific salmon, through the voices of America's children.

We are living between the flood and the rainbow: between the threats to creation on the one side and God's covenant to protect life on the other.

Why should we save endangered species?

Let us answer this question with one voice, the voice of the child at that expo, who scrawled her answer at the very bottom of the sheet:

"Because we can."

Revisiting Habits of the Heart
by Robert N. Bellah et al.

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ARLINGTON VA 22202-2244

"In writing *Habits of the Heart* we clearly underestimated the ideological fervor that the neocapitalist position was able to tap. The consequences of radical individualism are also more evident today than they were a decade ago."

Radical Individualism

MAR 9 1997

Stewards of creation

by Bruce Babbitt

Scalia's comments—an interpretation that the justice's critics have either deliberately ignored or failed to comprehend: "St. Paul's remark about himself and the other apostles being 'fools for Christ's sake' was meant to draw the contrast with the haughty and self-satisfied. It was a remark born of humility when faced with God's power over our lives. Contrary to the protests against Justice Scalia's speech, a responsible use of judicial reasoning, as well as intellectual objectivity, would seem to require such humility." •

Saint watching

It is my high regard for dust
that brings me here.
Wrapped in today's news,
the uncomfortable discovery
of my latest magnificent defeats,
I seek a language
born outside time.

I want to see through everything,
catch heaven's angels
chewing the fat,
watch the sad side
of the terrestrial machine
slam shut for the night.
The Saints have seen such things.

I must persuade myself to rejoice
no matter how tangled
I become in prayer.
I must study the faces of Saints,
learn the history written there.
Dare I memorize their lush
and perfect urges?

Their grace clutters everything,
the wonders of DNA and prayer,
voluptuous meditations,
the history of old age,
the sacred darkness
and the mysterious dance.
Dare I bite at their heels?

I tell my body yes. The soul follows.
The id prays for mercy.
All at once my subconscious
begins dreaming without a net.
I'm Saint watching again,
imagining myself in their strange
and peaceable kingdom.

Fredrick Zydek

JUST OVER a decade ago I took my son hiking in the White Mountains of western Arizona. I remember in particular that he asked a child's question: "Dad, are there wolves living here?"

As a partial answer, I later read him the moving passage about Arizona in *A Sand County Almanac* which describes how the author, like other federal agents at that time, had shot one of the last remaining wolf packs. His action was part of a national eradication policy in the early years of this century, based on the assumption that "because fewer wolves meant more deer, no wolves would mean a hunters' paradise." But Aldo Leopold experienced a conversion after he

reached the wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes, something known only to her and to the mountain. . . . I now suspect that just as a deer herd lives in mortal fear of its wolves, so does a mountain live in mortal fear of its deer.

On another occasion, one morning in January 1995 in the heart of Yellowstone National Park, I stood knee-deep in snow that blanketed the first protected landscape in America. As interior secretary I was helping to carry the first gray wolves back into that landscape. I was there to restore the natural cycle, to help make Yellowstone complete. The first wolf was an Alpha female, and after I set her down in the transition area, where she would later mate and bear wild pups, I looked through the grate into the eyes of this magnificent creature. I too saw the green fire flare up—a fire brought back by

America's conservation laws, with the power to help restore God's creation.

Between those two events, separated by nearly a century, there awoke in America a profound new sense of national stewardship, a shift that has been embodied in our most important conservation law: the 1973 Endangered Species Act.

I then returned to Washington where a newly elected Congress was armed with an agenda that was both hostile to God's creation and determined to dismantle the very legal tools—especially the Endangered Species Act—that allow us to restore that creation.

These legislators claim that God gave Adam and his descendants "dominion" over creation with instructions to "subdue" it as they see fit. Thus absolved of responsibility, leaders in Congress maintain that DDT "should not have been banned" because it "drove up the cost of doing business"; that "150 national parks of the some 368 need to be dropped"; and that the Environmental Protection Agency is "the Gestapo of government." Whereupon they quietly proceed to introduce bills that would dismantle laws like the Endangered Species Act and the 1972 Clean Water Act.

Whatever our differences on specific matters of policy, many of these leaders show a deep and pervasive hostility not only to the environment but to the values expressed by America's religious people, both those in the church hierarchy and those speaking from the pews.

For example, this past October

Bruce Babbitt is U.S. secretary of the interior and a former governor of Arizona. This article is adapted from an address he gave in April at the annual convention of the Association of Church People, held in Mesa, Arizona.

...bers from the Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, Mennonite and Jewish faiths all wrote letters opposing a bill intended to curdle the Endangered Species Act. They opposed it not for technical, scientific, agricultural or medicinal reasons, but for *spiritual* reasons. These letters were submitted to be entered in the Congressional Record, a routine and almost invariably honored request. But the committee chairman at first refused to admit the letters; only after protest over their exclusion were they grudgingly allowed. What was so politically dangerous about the letters? To find out, I obtained copies and read them.

Said one: "Our tradition teaches us that the earth and all of its creatures are the work and the possessions of the Creator." Another: "We need to hear and obey the command of our Creator who instructed us to be stewards of God's creation."

In January, after the Evangelical Environmental Network unveiled a nationwide campaign to support the Endangered Species Act as "the Noah's ark of our day" and warn that a bill in Congress might well sink it, the network's supporters were suddenly rebuked as less than honest. Accusing these evangelicals in an open letter of "using the pulpit to mislead people," House leaders criticized them: "As religious people, you have a high obligation to seek the truth, even in the political arena."

But even if Congress keeps you off Capitol Hill, even if its members force you to wait behind a long line of corporate lobbyists who are clutching their due bills after financing the previous congressional election, you may find, as I did, that the only political arena that matters is out in the American landscape, far from Washington.

A year ago I traveled beyond the beltway to see how the rest of America felt about bills to close national parks, repeal stormwater treatment and permit the extinction of species. Here are a few examples of what I found:

■ At a Los Angeles zoo, I spoke last spring hundreds of children were invited to write answers to the question "Why save endangered species?" One child, Gabriel, said, "Because God gave us the animals." Travis and Gina wrote, "Because we love them." Another answered, "Because we'd be lonely without them." Still another wrote, "Because they're a part of our life. If we didn't have them, it would not be a complete world. The Lord put them on earth to be enjoyed, not destroyed."

Conservation did not begin as a partisan issue. It began as a covenant with God.

■ On the banks of the St. Johns River in Jacksonville, Florida, a fisherman said we need to restore the river for recreation, a civic scientist said we need to have drinkable water, an environmentalist said we need clean streams for waterfowl

and wildlife, and a restaurateur said we need a clear waterfront as a magnet to draw people and business. But then a minister rose and said, beyond all those reasons, we need to restore

the river because God gave us the rivers, and he allowed us to be unfounded was simply and unapologetically wrong.

■ On the banks of the Kentucky river in Frankfort a group of doctors, parents, teachers and scientists convened to share a concern: We have a moral obligation, they said, to be stewards of the land and its waters. When I noted the unity of their voices a woman chimed in, "Well, Mr. Secretary, you are in the Bible Belt!" If so, that belt encompasses the entire nation. For in each city I traveled to, North, South, East or West, I heard a familiar spiritual answer.

■ On a cloudy, windswept morning in Portland, religious groups helped plant native willow and Oregon grape to restore the streambank of Fanno Creek.

■ At the New Waverly Baptist Church in West Dallas, congregants discovered the disastrous health effects a nearby lead smelting plant was having on neighborhood families. They succeeded in having the plant closed and have since convinced the city to establish a health clinic in the church basement.

Congratulations to the Century writers named 1995 award winners by the Associated Church Press

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Magazine Department
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AWARDS OF MERIT

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October 25

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April 5

Vigen Guroian
Critical Review
"Dancing alone—
Out of step with Orthodoxy"
June 7-14

Harriet Richie
Devotional/Inspirational
and Seasonal Piece
"He'd come here"
December 13

■ At the Full Circle House of Prayer in Port Huron, Michigan, a group of nuns brought together members of the community to learn how to control invasive pests in order to protect local wetlands.

■ Children from the Mainline Reform Temple in Wynnwood, Pennsylvania, have painted fish on sewers to discourage dumping where it threatens the purity of local waters.

stewards of the land. How can we work together—in our respective callings—to protect God's creation?

We can continue to awaken others to our task of stewardship of the land. America's religious community—convinced of scientific evidence and consensus and acting across a remarkable spectrum of faith groups—is arraying its ancient and authoritative teachings for action in response to the global environmental crisis.

We can assert and amplify our values, whether or not Congress wants to hear about them.

We can listen when the bishops of the Catholic Church declare: "As individuals, as institutions, as a people, we need a change of heart to preserve and protect the planet for our children and for generations yet unborn," and we can answer, "Amen."

We can endorse the hundreds of evangelical scholars and national executives who have signed and distributed an "Evangelical Environmental Declaration."

We can praise the leaders of American Judaism who state that "the ecological crisis hovers over all Jewish concerns, for the threat is global, advancing, and ultimately jeopardizes ecological balance and the quality of life."

We can support the Protestant communions, acting within the National Council of Churches, that have brought together, as no national environmental organization has, constituencies opposing pollution and racism.

Finally, we can remember that conservation did not begin as a partisan or even a political issue. Nor did it begin on Earth Day. It began in that time between the flood and the rainbow, a time that begins with the break of each new day. You can help by asking your leaders, your congregations and yourselves to transcend the narrow partisan differences, which can only drive us toward destruction, and instead uphold our moral obligation as stewards of God's creation, which can only bring us closer to the hope and renewal that was and is the promise of His covenant.

The fool jots down a bedtime prayer

Lord, you know my mind
and all its convolutions;
How all things are lost,
and nothing;
every forgotten moment
of the hand, the eye,
incorporated
into the way I
comb my hair, the slant
of these words across the page.

If you dredged the bottom
of my brain, what ancient things
would be unearthed?
Crayon marks in primary colors
scribbled by a two-year-old
on the inside of my cranium?
Deeper and older,
drawings of extinct bison
on dark artery walls?
Veins clogged with primordial ooze?

Since I do not know
the composition of my mind,
just how am I supposed to pray?
The language spoken by saints
is to me an unknown tongue,
as foreign as the glottal click
of Folopa hunters in the
rain forests of New Guinea,
as lost as Ugaritic etched into
shattered stone stela.

All my meanings tangle
as rhizomes in sod
beneath the rustle of prairie grass.
If only one word,
like a blade of little blue stem,
could break through,
one pure word pulling
clouds of metaphor into your sight,
I think I could lay-me-down-to-sleep
then,

and leave it to you to whistle up the
morning

Kathleen L. Housley

During the course of my travels, in which I watched America's environmental awakening unfold, I reread Genesis in light of the comments I had heard in so many communities. We all remember the Deluge as an account of sin and punishment, of destruction followed by hope and renewal. But upon reading it once again, I found still more meaning.

Noah was commanded to take into the ark two by two and seven by seven every living thing in creation, the clean and the unclean. Our Creator did not specify that Noah should limit the ark to two species good for hunting, two species that might provide some cure down the road and, say, two species that draw crowds to the city zoo. No, he specified *the whole of creation*.

And when the waters receded and the dove flew off to dry land, God set all the creatures free, commanding them to multiply upon the earth. Then, in the words of his covenant with Noah, "when the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between me and all living things on earth."

Why is this Genesis passage relevant in the modern political arena? Because we are still living between the flood and the rainbow: between threats to creation on the one side and God's covenant to protect life on the other, between the incomplete landscape I grew up with and the full restoration of wolves that my son will know.

Two things are needed for the latter vision to flourish. The first is our conservation laws—laws that preserve habitat, protect national parks and restore our lakes, rivers and shores. The second is something less visible and more fundamental than the laws themselves: the spiritual and moral values that are embodied in those laws. Without those values we cannot develop as responsible

U.S. Secretary of the Interior
Bruce Babbitt

Remarks At University of Virginia in Charlottesville, VA
Thursday, October 19, 1995

Bill, thank you very much. It's a great pleasure to be here and, of course, I accept the comparison with Thomas Jefferson.

Although, I come to this great university today in an ambiguous frame of mind. For I've only been on the campus of UVA once before, when I was a federal employee in Washington, and I met by chance, on an airplane ride, an enchanting young woman who attended Sweetbrier College nearby. Well, I sought her out there only to find that she was already going out with an upperclassman from UVA. So I came here, looked around, found that the competition was formidable, and I simply turned my back on your great university. But eventually prevailed to win the heart of the woman who became my wife.

(laughter)

Jefferson, father of biodiversity

Now then: to Thomas Jefferson.

To me the most profound summation of this man was written by Jefferson himself. Having been variously Delegate to the Virginia Assembly, Governor, Ambassador to France, Secretary of State, Vice President, Two-term president of the United States, it was back in retirement that he wrote his epitaph: "I want just a few words on my gravestone: Author of the Declaration of Independence, Author of the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedoms, and Father of the University of Virginia."

That stands as a powerful statement that what matters about our time here on the earth is that it is deeds, not titles, that matter.

Lastly, let us pay homage to Thomas Jefferson where -- I'm sure nobody else has ever done that from this podium before -- among his manifest achievements, I am here today to disclose to you that Thomas Jefferson is also the father of biodiversity.

Having sent Lewis and Clark West and built this splendid place, he in fact wrote something which has an eerily modern quality to it:

"For if one link in nature's chain might be lost, another might be lost, until this whole of things will vanish by piecemeal."

A relentless, retrograde assault

So it's in that spirit that I come here today to reflect briefly with you about this natural landscape and American heritage that we share. Because it is under assault in the Halls of the United States Congress in the most relentless, determined, retrograde movement of the 20th Century.

I was in Richmond yesterday. I went down the James River. It's an extraordinary river, the rapids running as if in a wilderness area right through the heart of urban Richmond. It's a river which has come back to life. The herring, the shad, the sturgeons are now migrating up the river. It has been cleaned up. It is living proof that we can restore this landscape. And the tool of restoration in Richmond was and remains the Clean Water Act.

But the leadership of this Congress is now trying to tell the American people that it's time to repeal the very heart of the clean water Act that has led to the restoration of the waters and the reconnecting, not only of the rural landscape, but the urban landscape of this country.

Sacred ground

I was at Appomattox this morning, the clouds lifting above the landscape. It was a beautiful morning, and I stood at that courthouse on that sacred ground, in the continuing pageant of American history, and reflected on the meaning of that moment on April 9, 1865.

I told the people that were there: The US Congress is considering the disposition of this sacred land. They have before them a bill that the leadership is sponsoring and pushing to begin a process of closing down national parks and national historic sites, including specifically: The Appomattox National Historic Site.

We are engaged in a knockdown drag out fight this week over a bid by the oil companies, that are swarming over Capitol Hill saying, we bought this election fair and square in 1994, it's our entitlement now to open up the last 10 percent of the Coastal shoreline called the Alaska National Wildlife Refuge.

Why is this happening?

What I'd like to do just for a moment, rather than indulge in the usual polemic (though I'm inclined to do so about what's going on), but I'm on a University Campus and I'd like to reflect with you for a moment about why it's going on and what it is that we as American citizens can do to deepen the wellsprings of our commitment to our natural heritage, and the diversity and beauty of this landscape.

I think at the roots of all of this drive to appropriate and destroy our natural heritage is what I call a utilitarian view of the landscape, we are a society which in some respects has become disconnected. It's a society being led by people who say that this landscape is a material artifact to be used, misused, disposed of in whatever way is convenient today, that it is nothing except a material, utilitarian fact.

It seems to me that those of us who see this landscape differently must ask ourselves, must look deeply inside our heritage and our history and say "Why is it that we see this landscape differently? In a word, what are the values that connect us to the landscape?"

Religious values

I started thinking about values, because I am a Christian, I grew up in the Catholic Church. And I suppose instinctively when I think of values I go back to my early days in church on Sundays. I grew up in a little town in Arizona, beneath a giant volcanic mountain sitting on the edge of the Grand Canyon. An enchanted landscape.

I thought of my mornings in church where, from the pulpit, all I heard was that the one sacred landscape in the world was the Holy Land, a half a world away.

I never once heard a description from that pulpit of what was palpably an enchanted land around us. Right outside the windows of the church, was that magnificent blue mountain, soaring up six thousand feet into the air above that church. And I began thinking, that my inchoate kind of connection with that landscape was finally explained to me by my neighbors out there in Arizona by my neighbors, the Hopi Indians.

Sacred mountains, serpents, springs.

The Hopi Indians live on a high plateau, in small pueblos in a really genuinely enchanted landscape. And my friends, as I went to school with them, pointed to that blue mountain and said: That is a sacred mountain. And they took me by the hand and they took me out in the summer to these mesa tops, way out in the painted desert and introduced me to their ceremonials in the summer. The plaza fills with dancers, who are invoking the Kachina spirits who literally lived on that sacred landscape.

They took me back later in the summer as they prayed for rain, with serpents, snakes in their hands, implicitly saying that Nature Counts. Nature is charged with meaning. And we are connected to it in every act we do.

I watched them pray to planted corn in the fields. I went with them to their place of emergence of a bubbling spring in the Grand Canyon called Sepa-pu, and from which their ancestors

emerged. And I thought, Do I have to go to a native american culture, to find the sacred connection to this landscape?

Genesis and the Covenant

At that point I began going back on my own. I picked up the Bible to see if I could discover something in my own tradition that no one had ever preached to me in any significant way.

I went back first, of course, to the story of the Deluge, and I read through it. I first read the familiar part, as Noah leads species seven by seven and two by two onto that Ark. But then I read the part at the end, the restoration when the Creator restores all of the species down to "The creeping creatures."

The Creator then turns around and makes a covenant with Noah. A covenant, sealed by a rainbow in the sky, a covenant for the protection of God's creation In all of its diversity.

And then I understood that not even Thomas Jefferson formulated the first biodiversity treaty. Because it came straight out of Genesis. It is a view which says again and again in Revelation and many other places: This Creation is Sacred. It is the Work of the Creator. And we have a corresponding set of obligations.

I remember Walt Whitman saying: I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journeywork of the stars.

Now, if my interpretation is correct, one may ask What does it mean in the real world down here back on the ground? Not just Sunday but on every day of the week.

To me it means one thing: Values matter.

Ultimately, all policy is derived from those values. This value, if we see ourselves as stewards on a landscape, is sacred because it was put there, not just for our use, but for the pleasure of the Creator.

Reconnecting landscape

When we start thinking a little bit about it. In the first century of the conservation movement, we tended to see the landscape as separate.

That's the meaning of all those wilderness areas out West; that's the meaning of Grand Canyon and Yellowstone and Denali. They're magnificent achievements, and John Muir was right.

But they are limited achievements in this sense: Don't you see they are about nature as separate. They make a statement that's incomplete. Because it's a statement that says we can discharge our obligation to this landscape by fencing off the

back 40, making it a national park, and then implicitly being left to do as we please on the rest of it.

We've learned some bitter lessons in the past century. And that is that you can't put a fence around the back 40 and separate the rest of the world. That's the story of the Everglades. The everglades are on the brink of extinction. Not because the NPS isn't doing its job. They are. But it's because, the sources of the everglades, the River of Grass of Margery Stilman Douglas'. The sources are half a state away in Lake Okeechobee. Hydrologically connected, then connected again to Florida Bay and the reefs and the Florida Keys.

Everything is connected.

And so ultimately we are driven to an individual task, asking as a biological fact: How do we live in equilibrium with this landscape, and acknowledging as a spiritual fact that we must live in a balance with the landscape around us.

Ultimately, urban design, architecture, environmental science, the way we conduct our economy, and the land you walk on in your daily life is an indispensable part of this universe that has to be connected to us. And that correspondingly, each one of us has to answer the question of How do I live more lightly on this landscape? How do I do my part to connect it all up, and lead this society in a direction where we can live in balance, peacefully, on this sacred landscape.

Thank you.

America Awakens to be Stewards of God's Creation

By Bruce Babbitt

Nearly a century ago, the federal government systematically extirminated gray wolves from America, destroying the natural balance of our wilderness landscape. Last year we brought wolves back, compelled by a will to replenish God's creation. Between those two events there awoke in America a profound new sense of moral and spiritual stewardship, a shift embodied in the landmark 1973 Endangered Species Act.

But now, for some reason, our newly elected Congress seeks to put our stewardship awakening back to sleep.

These legislators claim that God gave Adam and his descendants "dominion" over Creation with instructions to "subdue" it as they see fit. Thus absolved of responsibility, leaders in Congress maintain that DDT "should not have been banned" because it "drove up the cost of doing business;" that "one hundred and fifty national parks of the some 368 need to be dropped;" and that the Environmental Protection Agency is "the Gestapo of government." Whereupon they quietly introduce bills that dismantle the entire framework of our conservation laws.

Then, when religious leaders protest this abuse of Creation, they are either dismissed or rebuked.

Last October five leaders from the Presbyterian, Methodist, Evangelical Lutheran, Jewish, and Mennonite faiths, representing tens of millions of churchgoers, all wrote different letters opposing a bill to cripple the Endangered Species Act. These

letters were submitted to the Congressional Record, a routine request. But the committee chairman at first refused to admit them; only after protest over their exclusion were the letters begrudgingly allowed.

Why the threatened ban? What was so politically dangerous? One wrote: "Contemporary moral issues are related to our understanding of nature and humanity's place in them." Another letter: "Our tradition teaches us that the earth and all of its creatures are the work and the possessions of the Creator." A third: "We need to hear and obey the command of our Creator who instructed us to be stewards of God's creation."

It seems only when those religious leaders supported legislation could they speak with authority and deliberation. For in January, after the Evangelical Environmental Network unveiled a nationwide campaign to support the Endangered Species Act as "the Noah's ark of our day" and warn that a bill in Congress may well "sink" it, they were suddenly rebuked as less than honest. Accusing them in an open letter of "using the pulpit to mislead people," House leaders criticized them: "As religious people, you have a high obligation to seek the truth, even in the political arena."

Congress may keep religious leaders off Capitol Hill, but in the "political arena" that counts, far beyond the beltway, America continues to awaken to its stewardship responsibility.

For as I traveled around the country see how Americans felt about bills to close national parks, repeal stormwater treatment, and permit extinction, here's what I found:

- At a Los Angeles "Eco-Expo" last April, hundreds of children were invited to write down their answers to the basic question: "Why save endangered species?" One child, Gabriel, answered, "Because God gave us the animals." Travis and Gina wrote, "Because we love them." Still another wrote, "Because they're a part of our life. If we didn't have them, it would not be a complete world. The Lord put them on earth to be enjoyed, not destroyed."

- On the banks of the St. Johns River in Jacksonville Florida, a minister rose and said, beyond utilitarian reasons, we need to restore the river because God gave us clean rivers and to allow pollution was simply, unequivocally, "wrong."

- I joined a Wednesday night interfaith meeting at the Peachtree Presbyterian Church in Atlanta. There, the minister read us Psalm 24 that proclaims "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein; for he has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers."

- Upon one of those rivers, on a cloudy, windswept morning in Portland, religious groups helped us plant native willow and Oregon grape to restore the streambank of Fanno Creek.

- At the New Waverly Baptist Church in West Dallas, congregants discovered the disastrous health effects on neighborhood families from a nearby lead smelting plant.

- At the Full Circle House of Prayer in Port Huron, Michigan, nuns brought together members of the community to learn how to control invasive pests in order to protect local wetlands.

- Children from the Mainline Reform Temple in Wynnewood, PA have painted fish on sewers to discourage dumping where it threatens the purity of local waters.

Just two months ago, Pope John Paul II reminded the world that while the scripture allows humans have a "privileged position" on Earth, "this is not authority to lord over it, even less to devastate it." The season of Lent, he said, offers us a "profound lesson to respect the environment. Among the negative outcomes of this culture of domination is a distorted use of nature that disfigures its face and jeopardizes the equilibrium. And it does not slow even with the threat of ecological disaster."

During the course of my travels, and watching America's environmental awakening unfold in cities and towns everywhere, I turned back to reread Genesis, in light of the comments I had heard in so many communities.

We all remember the Deluge as an account of sin and punishment, of destruction followed by hope and renewal. But upon reading it once again, I saw still more meaning. Noah was of course commanded to take into the ark two by two and seven by seven every living thing in creation, the clean and the unclean. Our Creator did not specify that Noah should limit the ark to two charismatic species, two good for hunting, two species that might provide some cure down the road, and, say, two that draw crowds to the city zoo.

No, He specified the whole of creation. And when the waters receded, and the dove flew off to dry land, God set all the creatures free, commanding them to multiply upon the earth. Then, in the words of His covenant with Noah, "when the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between me and all living things on earth."

We are still living between the flood and the rainbow: between threats to creation on the one side and God's covenant to protect life on the other; between the incomplete landscape I grew up with and the full restoration of wolves that my son will know.

Only two things stand between these two visions: Our secular conservation laws, and the spiritual and moral values that are embodied in them. Without those values, we simply cannot develop as responsible stewards of the land. With them, we move ever closer to His rainbow covenant.

"Between the flood and the rainbow"
OUR COVENANT: TO PROTECT THE WHOLE OF CREATION

A wolf's green eyes, a sacred blue mountain, the words from Genesis, and the answers of children all reveal the religious values manifest in the 1973 Endangered Species Act.

Remarks of U.S. Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt
Delivered in Boston, Nov. 11, 1995
At the National Religious Partnership for the Environment

I began 1995 with one of the more memorable events of my lifetime. It took place in the heart of Yellowstone National Park, during the first week of January, a time when a layer of deep, pure snow blanketed the first protected landscape in America. But for all it's beauty, over the past 60 years this landscape had been an incomplete ecosystem; by the 1930s, government-paid hunters had systematically eradicated the predator at the top of the food chain: the American grey wolf.

I was there on that day, knee deep in the snow, because I had been given the honor of carrying the first wolves back into that landscape. Through the work of conservation laws, I was there to restore the natural cycle, to make Yellowstone complete.

The first wolf was an Alpha female, and after I set her down in the transition area, where she would later mate and bear wild pups, I looked through the grate into the green eyes of this magnificent creature, within this spectacular landscape, and was profoundly moved by the elevating nature of America's conservation laws: laws with the power to make creation whole.

I then returned to Washington, where a new Congress was being sworn into office, and witnessed power of a different kind.

Attack on water, land, creatures

First I witnessed an attack on our national lands, an all-out attempt to abolish our American tradition of public places -- whether national parks, forests, historic sites, wildlife refuges, and recreation areas. Look quickly about you, name your favorite place: a beach in New York harbor; the Appomattox Courthouse; the great western ski areas; the caribou refuge in the Arctic; or the pristine waters off the Florida Keys. For each of these places is at risk. Last month in the Denver Post, the Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Public Lands estimated that his committee may have to close more than 100 of the Park Service's 369 units. In these times, it seems that no part of our history or our natural heritage is sufficiently important to protect and preserve for the benefit of all Americans.

Next I witnessed an attack that targets the 1972 Clean Water Act, the most successful of all our environmental laws. Until that Act passed, slaughterhouses, pulp mills and factories from

noise to restore to Baton Rouge spewed raw waste into our waterfronts. Yet 23 years later, as I visited America's cities, I saw that Act restoring those rivers, breathing new life into once-dead waters. I saw people gather on clean banks to fish, sail, swim, eat and live. I saw that, as the Act helps cities restore our waters, those waters restore our cities themselves. And then I saw Congress rushing to tear that Act apart.

But finally, more than any of our environmental laws, the Act they have most aggressively singled out for elimination -- one that made Yellowstone complete -- is the 1973 Endangered Species Act.

Never mind that this Act is working, having saved 99 percent of all listed species; never mind that it effectively protects hundreds of plants and animals, from grizzly bears to whooping cranes to greenback cutthroat trout; never mind that it is doing so while costing each American 16 cents per year.

For the new Congress -- while allowing for the above charismatic species, plus a dozen other species good for hunting and fishing, plus, just for good measure, the bald eagle -- can find absolutely no reason to protect all species in general.

Who cares, they ask, if the spotted owl goes extinct? We won't miss it, or, for that matter, the Texas blind salamander or the kangaroo rat. And that goes double for the fairy shrimp, the burying beetle, the Delphi sands flower-loving fly and the virgin spine dace! If they get in our way, if humans drive some creatures to extinction, well, that's just too bad.

Over the past year that is, I think, a fairly accurate summary of how the new majority in Congress has expressed its opinion of the Endangered Species Act.

The values of children

They are not, however, the only Americans who have expressed an opinion on this issue.

Recently I read an account of a Los Angeles "Eco-Expo" last April, where children were invited to write down their answers to the basic question: "Why save endangered species?"

One child, Gabriel, answered, "Because God gave us the animals."

Travis and Gina wrote, "Because we love them."

A third answered, "Because we'll be lonely without them."

Still another wrote, "Because they're a part of our life. If we didn't have them, it would not be a complete world. The Lord put them on earth to be enjoyed, not destroyed."

Now, in my lifetime I have heard many, many political, agricultural, scientific, medical and ecological reasons for saving endangered species. I have in fact hired biologists and ecologists for just that purpose. All their reasons have to do with providing humans with potential cures for disease, or yielding humans new strains of drought-resistant crops, or offering humans bioremediation of oil spills, or thousands of other justifications of why species are useful to humans.

But none of their reasons moved me like the children's.

For these children are speaking and writing in plain words a complex notion that has either been lost, or forgotten, or never learned by some members of Congress, and indeed by many of us.

The children are expressing the moral and spiritual imperative that there may be a higher purpose inherent in creation, demanding our respect and our stewardship quite apart from whether a particular species is or ever will be of material use to mankind. They see in creation what our adult political leaders refuse to acknowledge. They express an answer that can be reduced to one word: values.

A sacred blue mountain

I remember when I was their age, a child growing up in a small town in Northern Arizona. I learned my religious values through the Catholic Church, which, in that era, in that Judeo-Christian tradition, kept silent on our moral obligation to nature. By its silence the church implicitly sanctioned the prevailing view of the earth as something to be used and disposed however we saw fit, without any higher obligation. In all the years that I attended Sunday mass, hearing hundreds of homilies and sermons, there was never any reference, any link, to our natural heritage or to the spiritual meaning of the land surrounding us.

Yet, outside that church I always had a nagging instinct that the vast landscape was somehow sacred, and holy, and connected to me in a sense that my catechism ignored.

At the edge of my home town a great blue mountain called the San Francisco Peaks soars up out of the desert to a snowy summit, snagging clouds on its crest, changing color with the seasons. It was always a mystical, evocative presence in our daily lives. To me that mountain, named by Spanish missionaries for Saint Francis, remains a manifestation of the presence of our Creator.

That I was not alone in this view was something I had to discover through a very different religion. For on the opposite side of the blue mountain, in small pueblos on the high mesas that stretch away toward the north, lived the Hopi Indians. And

It was a young Hopi friend who taught me that the blue mountain was, truly, a sacred place.

One Sunday morning in June he led me out to the mesa top villages where I watched as the Kachina filed into the plaza, arriving from the snowy heights of the mountain, bringing blessings from another world.

Another time he took me to the ceremonials where the priests of the snake clan chanted for rain and then released live rattlesnakes to carry their prayers to the spirits deep within the earth.

Later I went with him to a bubbling spring, deep in the Grand Canyon, lined with pahoos -- the prayer feathers -- where his ancestors had emerged from another world to populate this earth.

By the end of that summer I came to believe, deeply and irrevocably, that the land, and that blue mountain, and all the plants and animals in the natural world are together a direct reflection of divinity, that creation is a plan of God, and I saw, in the words of Emerson, "the visible as proceeding from the invisible."

Genesis and the Deluge

That awakening made me acutely aware of a vacancy, a poverty amidst my own rich religious tradition. I felt I had to either embrace a borrowed culture, or turn back and have a second look at my own. And while priests then, as now, are not too fond of people rummaging about in the Bible to draw our own meanings, I chose the latter, asking: Is there nothing in our Western, Judeo-Christian tradition that speaks to our natural heritage and the sacredness of that blue mountain? Is there nothing that can connect me to the surrounding Creation?

There are those who argue that there isn't.

There are those industrial apologists who, when asked about Judeo-Christian values relating to the environment, reply that the material world, including the environment, is just an incidental fact, of no significance in the relation between us and our Creator.

They cite the first verses of Genesis, concluding that God gave Adam and his descendants the absolute, unqualified right to "subdue" the earth and gave man "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." God, they assert, put the earth here for the disposal of man in whatever manner he sees fit. Period.

They should read a few verses further.

For there, in the account of the Deluge, the Bible conveys a far different message about our relation to God and to the earth. In Genesis, Noah was commanded to take into the ark two by two and seven by seven every living thing in creation, the clean and the unclean.

He did not specify that Noah should limit the ark to two charismatic species, two good for hunting, two species that might provide some cure down the road, and, say, two that draw crowds to the city zoo.

No, He specified the whole of creation. And when the waters receded, and the dove flew off to dry land, God set all the creatures free, commanding them to multiply upon the earth.

Then, in the words of the covenant with Noah, "when the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between me and all living things on earth."

Thus we are instructed that this everlasting covenant was made to protect the whole of creation, not for the exclusive use and disposition of mankind, but for the purposes of the Creator.

Now, we all know that the commandment to protect creation in all its diversity does not come to us with detailed operating instructions. It is left to us to translate a moral imperative into a way of life and into public policy. Which we did. Compelled by this ancient command, modern America turned to the national legislature which forged our collective moral imperative into one landmark law: the 1973 Endangered Species Act.

Lost values, fragmented creation

The trouble is that during the first twenty years of the Endangered Species Act, scientists and administrators and other well-intentioned people somehow lost sight of that value -- to protect the whole of creation -- and instead took a fragmented, mechanistic approach to preserve individual species. Isolated specialists working in secluded regions waited until the eleventh hour to act, then heroically rescued species -- one at a time.

Sometimes the result was dramatic recovery, but often the result was chaos, conflict, and continuing long term decline. In the Pacific Northwest, for example, the spotted owl was listed even as federal agencies went forward with clear cutting. Efforts to save the alligator proceeded even as the Everglades shrivelled from diverted waters. They listed California salmon runs even as water users continued to deplete the spawning streams.

It is only in the last few years that have we recovered, like a lost lens, our ancient religious values. This lens lets us see not human-drawn distinctions -- as if creation could ever be compartmentalized into a million discrete parts, each living in relative isolation from the others -- but rather the interwoven wholeness of creation.

Not surprisingly, when we can see past these man-made divisions, the work of protecting God's creation grows both easier and clearer.

Reconnecting ecosystems

It unites all state, county and federal workers under a common moral goal. It erases artificial borders so we can see the full range of a natural habitat, whether wetland, forest, stream or desert expanse. And it makes us see all the creatures that are collectively rooted to one habitat, and how, by keeping that habitat whole and intact, we ensure the survival of the species.

For example, in the Cascades, the spotted owl's decline was only part of the collapsing habitat of the ancient forests. When seen as a whole, that habitat stretched from Canada to San Francisco. Not one but thousands of species, from waterfowl of the air to the salmon in their streams, depended for their survival on the unique rain forest amidst Douglas fir, hemlock and red cedar.

Our response was the President's Forest Plan; a holistic regional agreement forged with state and local officials and the private sector. Across three state borders, it keeps critical habitat intact, provides buffer zones along salmon streams and coastal areas, and elsewhere provides a sustainable timber harvest for generations to come.

That's also the lesson of Everglades National Park, where great flocks of wading birds are declining because their shallow feeding waters were drying up and dying off. Only by erasing park boundaries could we trace the problem to its source, hundreds of miles upstream, where agriculture and cities were diverting the shallow water for their own needs. Only by looking at the whole South Florida watershed, could state and federal agencies unite to put the parts back together, restore the severed estuaries, revive the Park, and satisfy the needs of farmers, fishermen, ecologists and water users from Miami to Orlando.

This holistic approach is working to protect creation in the most fragmented habitats of America: from salmon runs in California's Central Valley to the red-cockaded woodpecker across Southeastern hardwood forests; from the Sand Hill Cranes on the headwaters of the Platte River in Central Nebraska to the desert tortoise of the Mojave Reserve. I'd like to say that the

possibilities are limited only by our imagination and our commitment to honor the instructions of Genesis.

Let us answer

But more and more, the possibilities are also limited by some members of Congress. Whenever I confront some of these bills that are routinely introduced, bills sometimes openly written by industrial lobbyists, bills that systematically eviscerate the Endangered Species Act, I take refuge and inspiration from the simple written answers of those children at the Los Angeles expo.

But I sometimes wonder if children are the only ones who express religious values when talking about endangered species. I wonder if anyone else in America is trying to restore an ounce of humility to mankind, reminding our political leaders that the earth is a sacred precinct, designed by and for the purposes of the Creator.

I got my answer last month.

I read letter after letter from five different religious orders, representing tens of millions of churchgoers, all opposing a House bill to weaken the Endangered Species Act. They opposed it not for technical or scientific or agricultural or medicinal reasons, but for spiritual reasons.

And I was moved not only by how such diverse faiths could reach so pure an agreement against this bill, but by the common language and terms with which they opposed it, language that echoed the voices of the children:

One letter, from the Presbyterian Church, said: "Contemporary moral issues are related to our understanding of nature and humanity's place in them." The Reform Hebrew Congregation wrote: "Our tradition teaches us that the earth and all of its creatures are the work and the possessions of the Creator." And the Mennonite Church wrote: "We need to hear and obey the command of our Creator who instructed us to be stewards of God's creation."

And suddenly, at that moment, I understood exactly why some members of Congress react with such unrestrained fear and loathing towards the Endangered Species Act. I understood why they tried to ban all those letters from the congressional record. I understood why they are so deeply disturbed by the prospect of religious values entering the national debate.

For if they heard that command of our Creator, if they truly listened to His instructions to be responsible stewards, then their entire framework of human rationalizations for tearing apart the Act comes to nought.

I conclude were tonight by affirming that those religious values remain at the heart of the Endangered Species Act, that they make themselves manifest through the green eyes of the grey wolf, through the call of the whooping crane, through the splash of the Pacific salmon; through the voices of America's children.

We are living between the flood and the rainbow: between the threats to creation on the one side and God's covenant to protect life on the other.

Why should we save endangered species?

Let us answer this question with one voice, the voice of the child at that expo, who scrawled her answer at the very bottom of the sheet:

"Because we can."

"Between the flood and the rainbow"

OUR COVENANT: TO PROTECT THE WHOLE OF CREATION

A wolf's green eyes, a sacred blue mountain, the words from Genesis, and the answers of children all reveal the religious values manifest in the 1973 Endangered Species Act.

By U.S. Secretary of the Interior
Bruce Babbitt

I began 1995 with one of the more memorable events of my lifetime. It took place in the heart of Yellowstone National Park, during the first week of January, a time when a layer of deep, pure snow blanketed the first protected landscape in America. But for all its beauty, over the past 60 years this landscape had been an incomplete ecosystem; by the 1930s, government-paid hunters had systematically eradicated the predator at the top of the food chain: the American grey wolf.

I was there on that day, knee deep in the snow, because I had been given the honor of carrying the first wolves back into that landscape. Through the work of conservation laws, I was there to restore the natural cycle, to make Yellowstone complete.

The first wolf was an Alpha female, and after I set her down in the transition area, where she would later mate and bear wild pups, I looked through the grate into the green eyes of this magnificent creature, within this spectacular landscape, and was profoundly moved by the elevating nature of America's conservation laws: laws with the power to make creation whole.

I then returned to Washington, where a new Congress was being sworn into office, and witnessed power of a different kind.

Attack on water, land, creatures

First I witnessed an attack on our national lands, an all-out attempt to abolish our American tradition of public places -- whether national parks, forests, historic sites, wildlife refuges, and recreation areas. Look quickly about you, name your favorite place: a beach in New York harbor; the Appomattox Courthouse; the great western ski areas; the caribou refuge in the Arctic; or the pristine waters off the Florida Keys. For each of these places is at risk. Last month in the Denver Post, the Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Public Lands estimated that his committee may have to close more than 100 of the Park Service's 369 units. In these times, it seems that no part of our history or our natural heritage is sufficiently important to protect and preserve for the benefit of all Americans.

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Boise to Boston to Baton Rouge spewed raw waste into our waterfronts. Yet 23 years later, as I visited America's cities, I saw that Act restoring those rivers, breathing new life into once-dead waters. I saw people gather on clean banks to fish, sail, swim, eat and live. I saw that, as the Act helps cities restore our waters, those waters restore our cities themselves. And then I saw Congress rushing to tear that Act apart.

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A sacred blue mountain

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"Because we can."

LEADING AMERICA CLOSER TO THE PROMISE OF GOD'S COVENANT

Keynote Address of U.S. Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt
Associated Church Press 1996 Annual Convention
Mesa, Arizona
Thursday, April 11, 1996

I'd like to start today by telling you two interrelated stories from my life: one as a father, one as a Cabinet Secretary.

For arriving in Mesa reminds me of a time, just over a decade ago, when I took my son hiking into the White Mountains of western Arizona. I remember, in particular, my son asking a child's question: "Dad, are there wolves living here?" As a partial answer, I later read him the moving Arizona passage in A Sand County Almanac where the author, like other federal agents at that time, had shot one of the last remaining packs of wolves. It was part of a national eradication policy, based on the assumption that "because fewer wolves meant more deer, that no wolves would mean a hunters' paradise." But Aldo Leopold experienced a conversion after he

"reached the wolf in time to watch a fierce green fire dying in her eyes. I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes, something known only to her and to the mountain...I now suspect that just as a deer herd lives in mortal fear of its wolves, so does a mountain live in mortal fear of its deer."

The second story began one morning in January 1995 in the heart of Yellowstone National Park, where I stood knee deep in a layer of deep snow that blanketed the first protected landscape in America. For as Interior Secretary I was helping to carry the first grey wolves back into that landscape. Through conservation laws, I was there to restore the natural cycle, to help make Yellowstone complete. The first wolf was an Alpha female, and after I set her down in the transition area, where she would later mate and bear wild pups, I looked through the grate into the eyes of this magnificent creature; I saw the green fire flare up again, a fire brought back by America's conservation laws, with the power to help restore God's creation.

Between those two events, separated by nearly a century, there awoke in America a profound new sense of national stewardship, a shift that has been embodied in our most important conservation law: the landmark 1973 Endangered Species Act.

I then returned to Washington where a newly elected Congress was armed with an agenda that was both hostile to God's creation and determined to dismantle the very legal tools -- especially the Endangered Species Act -- that allow us to restore it.

These legislators claim that God gave Adam and his descendants "dominion" over Creation with instructions to "subdue" it as they see fit. Thus absolved of responsibility, leaders in Congress maintain that DDT "should not have been banned" because it "drove up the cost of doing business;" that "one hundred and fifty national parks of the some 368 need to be dropped;" and that the Environmental Protection Agency is "the Gestapo of government." Whereupon they quietly proceed to introduce bills that dismantle laws like the Endangered Species Act and 1972 Clean Water Act.

Whatever our differences on specific matters of policy, many of these leaders show a deep and pervasive hostility not only to the environment, but to the values expressed by America's religious leaders, both those in the church hierarchy and those speaking from the back pews.

For example, last October five leaders from the Presbyterian, Methodist, Evangelical Lutheran, Jewish, and Mennonite faiths, representing tens of millions of churchgoers, all wrote different letters opposing a bill to cripple the Endangered Species Act. They opposed it not for technical or scientific or agricultural or medicinal reasons, but for spiritual reasons.

These letters were submitted to be entered in the Congressional Record, a routine and invariably honored request. But the committee chairman at first refused to admit them; only after protest over their exclusion were the letters begrudgingly allowed. Why? What was so politically dangerous about the letters? To find out, I obtained copies, and read each one.

One wrote: "Contemporary moral issues are related to our understanding of nature and humanity's place in them."
Another: "Our tradition teaches us that the earth and all of its creatures are the work and the possessions of the Creator."
A third: "We need to hear and obey the command of our Creator who instructed us to be stewards of God's creation."

It seems only if religious leaders support legislation can they speak with authority and deliberation. For in January, after the Evangelical Environmental Network unveiled a nationwide campaign to support the Endangered Species Act as "the Noah's ark of our day" and warn that a bill in Congress may well "sink" it, they were suddenly rebuked as less than honest. Accusing them in an open letter of "using the pulpit to mislead people," House leaders criticized them: "As religious people, you have a high obligation to seek the truth, even in the political arena."

But even if Congress keeps you off Capitol Hill, even if they force you to wait behind a long line of corporate lobbyists clutching their due bills after financing the last election, you

may find, as I did, that the only political arena that matters is out here on the American landscape, far from Washington.

For example, one year ago I traveled beyond the beltway to see how the rest of America felt about bills to close national parks, repeal stormwater treatment, and permit extinction. Here's what I found;

- At a Los Angeles "Eco-Expo" last April, hundreds of children were invited to write down their answers to the basic question: "Why save endangered species?"

One child, Gabriel, answered, "Because God gave us the animals."

Travis and Gina wrote, "Because we love them."

A third answered, "Because we'll be lonely without them."

Still another wrote, "Because they're a part of our life. If we didn't have them, it would not be a complete world. The Lord put them on earth to be enjoyed, not destroyed."

- On the banks of the St. Johns River in Jacksonville Florida, a fisherman said we need to restore the river for recreation, a civic scientist said we need to have drinkable water, an environmentalist said we need clean streams for waterfowl and wildlife, and a restaurateur said we need a clear waterfront as a magnet to draw people and business. But then a minister rose and said, beyond all those reasons, we need to restore the river because God gave us clean rivers and to allow it to become fouled was simply, unequivocally, "wrong."

- On the banks of the Kentucky River in Frankfurt a group of local doctors, parents, teachers and scientists had "Come to the waters" just as you have today. But whatever their unique line of work, they all shared the same emphasis: We have a moral obligation as stewards to the land. When I noted the unity of their voices, answering on religious grounds, a woman chimed in, "Well, Mr. Secretary, you are in the Bible Belt!" If so, that belt encompasses the entire nation. For in each city I traveled to, North, South, East or West, I heard a familiar spiritual answer.

- I joined a Wednesday night interfaith meeting at the Peachtree Presbyterian Church in Atlanta. There, the minister read us Psalm 24 that proclaims "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein; for he has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the rivers."

- Upon one of those rivers, on a cloudy, windswept morning in Portland, religious groups helped us plant native willow and Oregon grape to restore the streambank of Fanno Creek.

- At the New Waverly Baptist Church in West Dallas, congregants discovered the disastrous health effects on neighborhood families from a nearby lead smelting plant. They

succeeded in having the plant closed and have convinced the city to establish a health clinic in the church basement.

- At the Full Circle House of Prayer in Port Huron, Michigan, nuns brought together members of the community to learn how to control invasive pests in order to protect local wetlands.

- Children from the Mainline Reform Temple in Wynnewood, PA have painted fish on sewers to discourage dumping where it threatens the purity of local waters.

- And just three Sundays ago, Pope John Paul II reminded the world that while the scripture allows humans have a "privileged position" on Earth, "this is not authority to lord over it, even less to devastate it." The season of Lent, he said, offers us a "profound lesson to respect the environment. Among the negative outcomes of this culture of domination is a distorted use of nature that disfigures its face and jeopardizes the equilibrium. And it does not slow even with the threat of ecological disaster."

During the course of my travels, and watching America's environmental awakening unfold in cities and towns everywhere, I turned back to reread Genesis, in light of the comments I had heard in so many communities.

We all remember the Deluge as an account of sin and punishment, of destruction followed by hope and renewal. But upon reading it once again, I saw still more meaning.

Noah was of course commanded to take into the ark two by two and seven by seven every living thing in creation, the clean and the unclean. Our Creator did not specify that Noah should limit the ark to two charismatic species, two good for hunting, two species that might provide some cure down the road, and, say, two that draw crowds to the city zoo.

No, He specified the whole of creation. And when the waters receded, and the dove flew off to dry land, God set all the creatures free, commanding them to multiply upon the earth. Then, in the words of His covenant with Noah, "when the rainbow appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between me and all living things on earth."

Why is this relevant in the modern political arena, as the religious community speaks to and from the pulpit? Because today, we are still living between the flood and the rainbow: between threats to creation on the one side and God's covenant to protect life on the other; between the incomplete landscape I grew up with and the full restoration of wolves that my son will know.

Only two things stand between these two visions. The first is our secular conservation laws, laws which preserve habitat, protect national parks, and restore our lakes, rivers and shores so that, when they are clean, we can indeed "Come to the Waters." But the second is something less visible and more fundamental than the laws themselves. It is the spiritual and moral values that are embodied in those laws. Without those values we cannot develop as responsible stewards of the land. And so I conclude here by asking you who speak to our religious leaders and to our congregations: How can we work together -- in our respective callings -- to protect God's Creation?

We can continue to awaken others to our stewardship of the land. For America's religious community -- convinced of scientific evidence and consensus, and acting across a remarkable spectrum of faith groups -- is arraying its ancient and authoritative teachings for action in response to the crisis of planetary environment.

We can assert and amplify our values, whether or not Congress wants to hear them.

We can listen when the Bishops of the Catholic Church declare: "As individuals, as institutions, as a people, we need a change of heart to preserve and protect the planet for our children and for generations yet unborn," and we can answer, "Amen."

We can endorse the hundreds of evangelical Christian scholars and national agency executives who have signed and distributed an "Evangelical environmental Declaration."

We can praise the leaders of American Judaism who collectively state that "The ecological crisis hovers over all Jewish concerns, for the threat is global, advancing, and ultimately jeopardizes ecological balance and the quality of life."

We can actively support the Protestant communions, acting within the National Council of Churches of Christ, who have brought together as no national environmental organization has, constituencies opposing racism as well as pollution.

Finally, we can remember that conservation did not begin as a partisan, or even a political issue. Nor did it begin on Earth Day. It began in that time between the flood and the rainbow, a time that begins with the break of each new day. You can help by asking your leaders, your congregations, and yourselves to transcend the narrow partisan differences, which can only drive us back toward destruction, and instead uphold our moral obligation as stewards of God's creation, which can only to bring us closer to the hope and renewal that was and is the promise of His covenant.