

them in this I am sure.

6) The atmosphere of the classroom will be that of love and concern for each individual. One would expect nothing less from an education that has as its motivating force the fellowship and friendship of covenant life with God. Just as God loves each of His children as individuals so that He sent Christ to die for their sins, so also the father in his family must love each of his children. Because I represent the parent in the classroom I must love each child. In doing so I will seek their highest good. In doing so I will help each one develop as an individual. May God give me grace to implement this philosophy.

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## Caring for Our World

by Mr. Doug DeBoer

*This article submitted by Mr. Doug DeBoer, faculty member of the Protestant Reformed Christian School of Hull, Iowa, was presented originally as a speech at the P.R.T.I. convention of 1983.*

Taking care of our world is a popular subject. All one has to do is pick up the newspaper or turn on the radio or television to read or hear of an ecological issue. Management of resources was really brought into the limelight during the tenure of Interior Secretary James Watt. Organizations such as the Sierra Club never saw so much money and support headed their way. Many such organizations were sad to see him resign because they wanted land and resource issues to remain in the spotlight. The whole country still seems to be focused on environmental issues. I was able to gather information from sources ranging from the *National Geographic* to *Sports Illustrated*, from local news to national news, from pamphlets to full length books such as *Earthkeeping: Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources*. These issues are faced by Christian and non-Christian alike. How to teach and what to teach students regarding these issues are questions faced by public school teachers, Christian school teachers, and Protestant Reformed school teachers. This topic could be discussed at any teacher's convention.

Why discuss it here? Just because everyone else is interested in discussing it? That shouldn't be the only reason because Christians always should have been interested in such a topic. Hopefully, Christians were thinking about and dealing with these issues long before ecology became so popular in the late sixties and seventies, and now into the eighties. Waste and needless destruction should never be approved by the Christian. Taking care of our world must always be an issue with us.

However, because everyone is discussing the topic it is on our minds. Whatever the world is greatly concerned with is also a concern for us. Certainly, Christians have spent more time and effort writing and thinking about the creation of the world after Darwin than before him. People are greatly concerned about caring for the world's resources. We should spend time thinking about where we stand on this issue of caring for our world.

In order to understand what our view should be we will first look at the way Christian and non-Christian have viewed our world in the past and present. Most men have looked on their world as exactly that — *their* world. It belongs to us they say. Man's world is his own world and thus man is responsible to only himself. Man rules the world for his own glory. Everything that is done on earth is done to make his life "better." Man says — and this includes Christians — that the world is here to provide me with what I need. The Bible does teach that we are given dominion. The only problem with this is man's sinful nature; greed gets in the way. Man has no idea or loses sight of what his true needs really are. When we pray for our daily bread we have things mixed up. Our daily needs are food, clothing, and shelter. Our needs are not fine cars, single-dwelling homes, and fine coats. I am not saying there is anything wrong with these things in and of themselves, but think a moment, man has exploited the earth because he wants these things and more.

But you say, "If farmers have bumper crops and developers keep developing, will not the schools and churches be in better condition? Is it not good to wish for these things to happen? Am I not supposed to wish for a healthy economy?" What if the farmer can only increase his crop yield by using great amounts of pesticide? I know that these great amounts are harmful not only to the pests but also to the birds that eat the pests and other animals which are considered important to the balance of nature. I know that poisonous chemicals don't just dis-

appear off the face of the earth. Do I condone the use of more and more pesticide because it will help the farmer with his crop? But what about the rest of God's creation? What about the intricate balances in nature? Once we throw those off we simply have more and more problems in trying to restore balance. I must talk to the farmer's sons and daughters in school concerning pesticides. If greater and greater amounts of poison are needed for a tremendous crop, we ought to examine closely what we are doing to God's creation.

One of the biggest environmental issues today is the tremendous loss of cropland each year to development. Once things are built on farmland the land cannot be used for agriculture. This development puts more pressure on the fields that remain — thus depleting the soil more quickly. Should I talk about such things with my students? Should I approve all these developments without some serious thought? Again, if this all-out development is what it takes for a healthy economy, maybe I had better not wish for the kind of economy I think I need. The dollar should not be my only consideration.

It is true that a fuel, such as coal, is in the earth to be used by man. The problems enter in when we take the coal out of the earth. Sometimes the coal is so close to the surface that the earth is scraped away and the coal is taken up. Obviously this is going to upset the habitat of the living things above the mine. Any animals which dwell there are forced to move, and as for the plants, it is all over. Remember, this does not need a second thought because the earth is here to make my life as pleasant as possible. However, in almost all states where coal is mined there are laws that say the earth must be replaced once the mining is done. The problem is that many mining companies do not obey the laws. The soil that is near the mine erodes or is leached; soon the area is void of vegetation and the drinking water of nearby homes becomes very poor, if not harmful. But we have laws. In an eastern coal-mining state a lawyer prepared to take some of the companies to court who were not following proper procedure in repairing the areas upset by the mining. The U.S. government would not help him in his prosecutions. It seems the government does not wish to prosecute because it will cost the coal companies too much money. The economy will suffer.

Man has also looked on the world's resources as limitless, which I think is easy to understand. One can read stories of how a squirrel was once able to go from the southern border of Michigan to the Straits of

Mackinac without ever touching the ground, simply jumping from limb to limb. When the white man first came to North America the forests probably did look to be without end. It certainly helps explain why so much chopping was done.

This idea of unlimitedness (even though today many are seeing things differently) has led to some of the problems that we face today. I believe that one of the reasons why we don't re-cycle very many things is because we believe that there is plenty more of whatever we need. Certainly there is plenty — more ore out there to make more cans and other steel things. We say, "Why use it over if you don't have to?" What do ideas like this lead to? They lead to landfills with iron contents higher than our mines of iron ore have. Is it using our earth wisely when we dump whatever we used because there seems to be plenty more? Is the value of things only in their scarcity? States such as Michigan, Iowa, and Oregon have encouraged re-cycling of bottled and canned beverages by requiring a deposit on bottles and cans. So people in these states dutifully return their bottles and cans to be re-cycled due to the might of the dollar. Should we need the dollar to motivate us?

This belief in unlimitedness has also contributed to needless soil erosion. When farmers first started working the fields of Iowa there was on the average three feet of top soil; now there is eight inches. This is within a little over one hundred years. You don't need to be a mathematician to compute that this doesn't project out to very many more years. Farmers have begun to be more careful for they know that if their soil is gone their land is worthless. They have cut down considerably on soil erosion. The end is good, but what about the motive?

The struggle of man with the taking care of the world always comes down to money. Even Christians seem to fall into the trap of always trying to earn more money, get a bigger profit, and have more and more of this world's goods. To serve God and to love our neighbor does not always stay at the forefront when it comes to business. With this type of philosophy, resources and good care for our world go down together.

In contrast to man's erroneous view we must teach the Biblical view of our world. Our world is God's world. We are only stewards, caretakers of this creation. We must care for the earth. We must keep it healthy for as John Muir said, "Only a healthy earth can provide for us and so we must guard, not destroy, its delicate cycles and balances." But should we be concerned with only man's benefit? If one reads

scripture passages such as Psalm 104:10-11, 16-18, 20-22 and Job 38:25-27, 39-41 the picture is broader than many seem to think it is. These passages teach that God provides and is watching over all things. If God provides for animals then shouldn't we attempt to provide for them also. Not just the ones that benefit us directly, but all the animals. I think that it has been proved that the best way to provide for wild living things is to preserve some of their natural habitat. Saving one endangered animal that may have had a fin clipped or wing severed, through such means as surgery may make national news, but it is not really providing and caring for the creation as we should. We must think about other living things even when it isn't so convenient for us to do so. Wouldn't it have been more convenient for Noah if he had taken only domesticated animals? God's care extends to all His creatures, shouldn't ours? As caretakers we must balance human versus non-human needs. This is not to say that non-human is more important than human, but non-human is still important.

We can now understand why ecology is important for our schools. The only way we can properly care for God's creation is if we understand His creation. We must have a knowledge of living things and their interactions with each other and their environment. If we don't know that the burning of coal and oil produce oxides which mix with water and other materials in the air to produce acid rain, and do not understand that acid rain can affect wildlife, plants, and soil in an adverse way, we are going to have great difficulties in the future with our environment. Ignorance is not bliss. Things on this earth are interdependent.

Before I talk about specific things to do in the classroom, I want to re-emphasize our reason for action in the taking care of our world. We must act out of obedience to our calling as stewards; we must not act simply on the basis of more or less money. We must make students aware that they are responsible to God in their caring for the earth just as much as they are responsible to God in their relationship to others. We teach them to love our neighbor for God's sake; we must teach them to care for the world because it is God's world.

In trying to find specific things I found a great deal of help in *Earthkeeping*. Although I could not agree with many things in this book, it does have some very good ideas for individual action in caring for our world in appendix A entitled, "What You Can Do." The first thing that we as teachers must do is be open to the wonders of creation.

We must see, understand, and point out to our students the seasons and the effect they have on wildlife, the growth of plants, insects in the grass and on the window, changes in weather, ponds, rivers, and lakes — not just their beauty, but the life that is in and around each one. This is not done merely by mouthing these things. Students can tell a “fake” without any trouble. We as teachers must truly see the wonder of God in these things. We must pass this wonder to our students.

One activity which would deepen their awareness and appreciation for nature would be to take them to wild places where man has not heavily intruded. However, you do not have to go far to show them that other living creatures abound. Go through the school yard. Have the students take soil samples right at school and see what they can find. It has been estimated that there are 200-1,000 pounds of earthworms per acre. Show them that life abounds. Ordering magazines such as *Ranger Rick* also helps to create more knowledge of and respect for God’s creation.

Discussion should take place in the classroom on the use of resources. Possible topics could be: insulating and car-pooling. Discuss re-cycling tin cans and glass bottles. Should we bring them back even if we are not paid for them? What about shoes? Do you throw away the whole shoe just because the soles are shot? Is it wise to use things like plastic silverware, paper towels, or paper plates? Is this a justifiable waste of resources just for a matter of convenience? We should also discuss who is responsible for the care of resources? Is it only about individual responsibility that we should worry? The United States government owns over half of the land in our country with their greatest holdings being in the West. Obviously, they have responsibility. How much must we be concerned with their problems? If the administration’s initial stand on acid rain is any indication, our government needs a great deal of help. We encourage writing to Congress on other issues. What about writing on ecological issues? Certainly we have a distinct view.

Another suggestion for the classroom is to send for materials put out by the U.S. government (even though this seems contrary to what I just wrote). Some of these are very worthwhile and are made specifically for use in the classroom. One that I found worthwhile is *Conserving Soil* by the U.S.D.A. Included in the book are transparencies, duplicating masters, and a sixteen-page teacher’s guide. Something like this is ideal for an interdisciplinary unit on ecology. History, English,

science, geography, Bible, and math could all be studied from this book. Even a short week of ecology taught in this way would be very beneficial. Very effective units could be set up using such diverse disciplines as history and science.

I would like to sum up by paraphrasing a story entitled "The Web of Life" from Joanne E. De Jonge's book *God's Wonderful World*. The story tells of life on the tropical island of Borneo. She tells of her house being made of palm fronds woven together and the caterpillars which would occasionally eat through the roof or wall. This did not cause big problems because there were always more fronds. The rats lived upstairs in the attic and pretty much stayed away from living areas because everyone had cats. They also struggled with cockroaches and lived with lizards who consumed tremendous amounts of mosquitoes and caterpillars. They kept their food in special screened cabinets which had legs that were set in bowls filled with water. Nothing that flew or crawled could get at it. Every week they swept out dead cockroaches that had been killed by small cockroach tablets, and every night they burned a mosquito coil whose smell kept mosquitoes and malaria away. Everything was living in balance.

Scientists had a better idea. They decided to spray DDT to rid the island of mosquitoes. They rained DDT over the entire island and it affected more than mosquitoes because besides killing them it slowed down the cockroaches. The lizards were now fast enough to catch cockroaches. They ate and ate; each feeding adding a little more DDT to their bodies. Soon the lizards couldn't stay on the wall and the ceiling and they fell to the floor. The cats decided they could feed on lizards as well as rats. Slowly the cats were poisoned by the poisoned lizards. Soon cats were dying all over the island. The rats never had it so good. They came from everywhere and nothing could stop them. The handy little food cabinets didn't work against rats. The worst part was that rats bring the plague. The rats became more and more brave; some of them began biting. To make matters worse, the roofs, walls, and supports of the houses were falling apart faster than anyone could fix them. Unaffected by DDT and with not enough lizards around to eat them the caterpillars had gone unchecked. The scientists had made things worse instead of better. The only solution was to try to return things back to the way they were before DDT.

This time scientists dropped cats instead of poison. Each cat had been given its own little parachute and dropped from a helicopter.

They flourished. They never had so many rats to eat. The surviving lizards multiplied, most of the poisoned ones were dead. They began eating the caterpillars. The cockroaches also multiplied, now being held in check only by tablets. People got more cats to keep the rats down and once again kept mosquitoes away with coils. The balance was restored.

“And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good.”

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...it is enough to say that the regenerate mind, taught by the Spirit of God is a far more trustworthy and efficient instrument than the greatest human intellect submerged in the darkness of unbelief.

Mr. Sam Will,  
Dundee, Scotland  
from “A Biblical View  
of the Responsibilities of Parents in Education,”  
March, 1981.

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