

Enduring Principles Series

Sacredness of Creation

by Susan D. Skoor

My husband, John, and I always loved nature. Walking along a sandy beach or forest path, we celebrated God's creativity and the world's beauty. Then one night, while walking on a beach, a giant wave swept over us and pulled John and his sister, Debbie, into the ocean. Debbie and I survived; John did not.

Although I continued to feel God's Spirit through those dark days, I no longer could trust or enjoy God's creation. Beaches were not places of peace and beauty. Waves frightened me with their pounding violence and unpredictability. About a month and a half after John's death, at the urging of a good friend, I tried a retreat in the Colorado mountains to begin a journey of healing.

It started with a series of mishaps. Distracted by my thoughts, I rear-ended a car stopped on the freeway. I spent the rest of that day dealing with insurance and repair estimates. The next day, snow barred access to the cabin. Alone and miserable, I wandered snow-covered parks and sat on a snow bank watching ice swirl in a black stream. I thought of the ocean wave that killed my husband, and shivered.

"This water is life-giving," I repeated. "It nourishes the trees, provides life for fish and microbes." Unbidden, a new thought came: "It's also death-dealing. If a dam broke, a wall of black water and crushing ice could destroy everything. Nature is life-giving and death-dealing.... And so am I!"

I remembered the car accident. On a journey of renewal, I had unintentionally become an instrument of harm. All created things have potential to be both life-giving and death-dealing. Creation is like that. It nourishes and destroys, just as human beings both support and damage one another. God does not initiate natural disasters. They are part of the cycle of life and death built into creation. But God's grace is extended to all. My journey of healing had begun.

For two years, I confronted the ocean in many forms: Alki Beach, Seattle, Washington; the Oregon coast; Tahiti; and Australia. Finally, at the 2009 Hawaii Reunion, I waded into the ocean, up to my neck—and the fear dissolved. Beaches once again are places of renewal and beauty, as well as power and destruction.

Nature reminds us of our vulnerability and the close link between life, death, and resurrection. Nature touches us with beauty, teaches us about diversity, and makes visual the cycle of loss, grace, and recovery. God's creation humbles us, so we find our place not as conquerors and masters, but as participants in a network of interdependent organisms flourishing only in the Creator's hand.

In the beginning, God created and called it all good.

The story of creation in Genesis 1 affirms the good that God placed in all created things. God's Spirit moved over a watery chaos, and by God's Word, the Creator established order and life. Like the chorus to a mighty hymn, the story presents one central theme, "And God saw that it was good."

Understanding the basic goodness built into creation impacts how we treat one another and the world. Some Christians give up on this world and think only of the afterlife. Some rejoice when a hurricane or earthquake causes devastation, because they think it heralds Jesus' return.

Community of Christ proclaims something different.

This is the world God created—the world God redeemed through Jesus' love and compassion. God continues to yearn toward this world and love it. We are called to help God restore broken, sad places to their intended goodness and wholeness. We call it "bringing forth the cause of Zion," the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed.

Spirit and material, seen and unseen, are related.

During the first two centuries of the rise of Christianity, alternative ways of understanding Jesus' teachings developed. Some religious groups, now known as Gnostic, were based on the ideas that: 1) salvation depends on gaining secret knowledge known only to a few; and 2) the physical world is evil, the spiritual world is good, and the two are completely disconnected.

They believed an evil god created the physical world and a different, holy god created the spirits, which became trapped in

About this Series

The [Enduring Principles](#) are at the heart of how we express ourselves. When they become the descriptors of our behaviors—rather than mere ideals—we truly will become the Community of Christ that God is calling us to be. Follow the Commentary Series, August 2009 to April 2010, in the Herald and e-Herald, [online](#) and by [e-mail](#).



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Explore the sacredness of creation more deeply through these scriptures:

- Genesis 1
- Doctrine and Covenants 90:5e
- Doctrine and Covenants 28:8c-d
- Doctrine and Covenants 163:4b
- Isaiah 40:28
- Psalms 104:10-11, 14, 30
- II Corinthians 5:17

For Further Reflection,
Discussion, and
Discernment

created things. As a result, some Gnostics renounced all physical things to concentrate on the spiritual. Others went to excess in eating, drinking, and immoral living, because they believed what they did in this life was unrelated to the spiritual world. Gnosticism died out as a movement, but Gnostic ideas still challenge us today.

Community of Christ affirms that spirit and element cannot be separated. "...Spirit and element, inseparably connected, receiveth a fullness of joy; and when separated, man cannot receive a fullness of joy" (Doctrine and Covenants 90:5e). God the Creator made both physical and spiritual reality, and they are to be equally cherished. They are intertwined in a joyful wholeness that can be expressed only when we fully embrace both aspects of our nature. Thus, we refer to our bodies as the temple of God, and strive to be wise stewards over our physical well-being. The natural world is a treasure, no less important to God than the spirit that flows through all creation.

We join with God as stewards of care and hope for all creation.

Genesis 1:28 tells us to "subdue" and "have dominion" over creation, words that have led to misunderstanding and violence against nature. Wars ravage the land and cause famine, sickness, and poverty. Wealthy nations squander basic resources of water, oil, land, and air, while others die for lack of these resources. Those of us who rely on petroleum products (petrol, plastics, and synthetics) have become complacent about this nonrenewable resource. The recent global recession reminds us that "unrestrained consumption" cannot continue without devastating consequences. As always, it is those who have least who suffer most.

The earth lovingly created as an environment for life to flourish, shudders in distress because creation's natural and living systems are becoming exhausted from carrying the burden of human greed and conflict. Humankind must awaken from its illusion of independence and unrestrained consumption without lasting consequences.—Doctrine and Covenants 163:4b

If we are made in God's image, then we are to act as the Creator might act toward a beloved creation. We must halt insensitive pillage of the world's resources. We must replace superiority over creatures of the earth with equality among all parts of creation. Recognizing our interconnectedness prompts us to keep the world in balance.

It's easy to speak of the sacredness of God's creation and the need for wise management of natural resources. It's harder to make lifestyle changes. Choices that seem small can create great change, if we act together.

Affirming the sacredness of creation means taking responsibility for the earth God gave us, and preserving it for future generations. (See Small Steps Add Up sidebar.) It's a spiritual challenge as much as a physical one. Make it a matter of prayer—and make a difference today.

God is still creating to fulfill divine purpose.

Creation is an ongoing process. God creates all that exists, and sustains all that is. The ancient Jews' belief in God's unceasing creation is reflected in their rhythm of days. Day began with sunset, a meal and bed, while God continued creating through the night. When morning came, the day was half over. They rose to join in what God had begun. How beautiful! God recreates each day, each moment, physically and spiritually.

As Christians we affirm that God's creative work continues in new life. We wake each day with the promise of resurrection. God gives us space and time to be in relationship with the Divine for renewal and life-giving activity. We join God wherever the divine work is in progress, to touch lives with hope and joy, and to fulfill God's divine purpose.

Small Steps Add Up

Put a checkmark next to activities you are already engaged in as an individual, family, or congregation. For the unchecked, what keeps you from joining those efforts? Could those barriers be removed if you approached honoring creation as both a spiritual and physical challenge?

- Support local food banks, farmers' markets, peace initiatives.
- Explore and support local conservation efforts.
- Pay attention to what you do with bottles and cans.
- Walk more; drive less.
- Turn off lights.
- Eat less meat and processed foods.
- Put purchases in cloth bags, not paper or plastic.
- Begin a community garden outreach project.
- Start a support group for those who want a "greener" lifestyle.
- Inventory use of water, heat, and other resources; then cut back.
- Sponsor classes on earth topics, such as global warming.
- Use compact fluorescent light bulbs.
- Initiate or support tree-planting projects.
- Host guest speakers: forest rangers, utility companies, marine biologists, firefighters.

- Sponsor a street cleanup.
- Plan a worship service about the sacredness of creation.
- Sponsor a monthly “meatless day” or “car-free day.”

Find more tips for your home and office on the Earth Stewardship checklist: www.CofChrist.org/earthsteward.

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