

# The Environmental Ethics of Mormon Belief

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The time has come to find common ground between environmentalism and Mormon belief. The perceived divide between the two has all but shut down the possibility of dialogue. Some Mormons dismiss the political causes of environmentalists as being the fears of faithless hedonists, just as otherwise responsible environmental scholars and activists sometimes perpetuate myths and inaccuracies about what they perceive to be the anti-ecological stance of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But Mormon belief has more than enough in common with environmentalism to promote genuine and productive change in our environmental behavior. Not only is Mormon doctrine environmentally friendly, but it also provides powerful moral incentives for ecologically sustainable living. Furthermore, Mormon principles contain striking parallels with recent work by ecotheologians and other religiously minded environmentalists.

## Misleading Perceptions

Some critics have gone so far as to accuse The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints of officially encouraging anti-ecological positions. A survey of Christian denominations in the United States indicated that The Church of Jesus Christ was one of only a few churches that had no formal environmental policies and no institutional entities dedicated to fostering more sustainable environmental practices.<sup>1</sup> Although the Church has clearly taken stances on political issues that pertain directly to moral issues, its policy is typically one of political neutrality. On the issue of the environment, Elder Vaughn J. Featherstone of the Seventy recently explained that the Church teaches principles favoring conservation and sustainability and that environmentalism is not incompatible with Mormon belief. Nonetheless, he insisted that Church leaders “don’t dictate” what specific political actions should be taken in order to fulfill the mandate to be good stewards.<sup>2</sup> Failing to understand this policy of political neutrality, Max Oelschlaeger, a professor of environmental philosophy, mistakenly concluded on the basis of the survey’s findings that the “only denomination that has formally stated its opposition to ecology as part of the church’s mission is the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.”<sup>3</sup>

Because of Church leaders' reticence on the politics of environmentalism on one hand and an explicit anti-environmentalism expressed by several prominent Utah politicians on the other, a recent article by religion scholar Richard Foltz depicts Mormonism as an aggressive, profit-minded corporate culture. Mormons, he claims, are people who "have lost their way" spiritually and who "don't know who they are anymore." Foltz comes to the unfortunate and misleading conclusion that it is not clear whether an environmental ethic "is with or against the current of formal LDS teaching" or if caring for creation is merely one of many potentially heretical "private theologies."<sup>4</sup>

The Judeo-Christian tradition in general has been charged with anti-environmentalism. In 1967 historian Lynn White launched his criticism of this tradition for faulty ethics that, in his view, promote an arrogant assumption of our right to rule over nature with impunity. While much debate has ensued regarding the accuracy or fairness of White's claims, many environmentalists nevertheless agree with White's chief point:

What we do about ecology depends on our ideas of the man-nature relationship. More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecological crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one. . . . Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious.<sup>5</sup>

Global-warming expert Bill McKibben explains that understanding the justification for White's sharp criticisms of traditional Christianity "requires only a trip to Utah." In an embarrassing oversight of the religious persecution that placed early Mormons in a drama of desperate desert survival, an oversight accepted by many environmentalists, McKibben censoriously notes that in Utah "the state motto is 'Industry' and the Mormons have made a great project of subduing nature, erecting some towns in places so barren and dry and steep that only missionary zeal to conquer the wild could be the motivation."<sup>6</sup>

For some environmentalists, the inherently anthropocentric, or human-centered, views of the Western tradition are so deeply engrained in our ways of thinking that it seems unlikely any form of Western religion can be used to articulate more ethical principles of living within creation. For this reason, some strains of environmentalism have become dominantly and thoroughly anti-Western in their approach.

If Christians attempt merely to condemn this tendency in environmentalism and choose to ignore the ecological crisis itself, they make the same mistake. It would be more powerful to seize the opportunity to decry the "moral and spiritual vacuum" that is the chief reason for our environmental crisis.<sup>7</sup> As former President Ezra Taft Benson warned the members of The Church of Jesus of Christ:

You are among those who must undertake the task of alerting mankind to problems with regard to his physical environment, but do you not see that if you attempt to do this without giving heed to the spiritual law involved, you undertake an impossible task.<sup>8</sup>

In what follows, I will outline the principles of this spiritual law by examining Mormon belief regarding the spirit and the body, the spiritual matter of nature, the human role within God's creations, and social ethics.

### **The Spirit and the Body**

How we conceive of the relationship between our body and our spirit has a direct correlation to how we perceive mortality itself in the context of eternity. This perception, in turn, largely motivates our sense of ethics in relationship to all physical life. As Wendell Berry puts it, "The question of human limits, of the proper definition and place of human beings within the order of Creation, finally rests upon our attitude toward our biological existence, the life of the body in this world."<sup>9</sup> If the body is viewed, as it is in traditional Christianity, as something alien and inherently hostile to the desires of our spirit, then we come to understand ourselves as beings whose real home is not earth and whose real identity is not at all physical. Concern for the well-being of the body or of the rest of creation is viewed as an expression of faithlessness. Hence the logic that concludes, What need is there for urgent action to save the planet when we all know that the earth is going die? Why bother trying to preserve earthly life when we know it is God's prophesied plan to have it obliterated?

To the extreme, then, completely privileging the spirit over the body can lead to an almost complete shutdown of our capacity to be accountable moral agents. We become content with a Panglossian view that reassures us that all that happens in this life, regardless of the damage done to the earth, is for the best. Environmental degradation becomes a manifestation or sign of God's will. Strange theology, indeed.

Given the dangers of this kind of patent complicity with a wide range of devastating events, many environmentalists have strongly argued for doing away with such thinking altogether in order to more fully embrace the urgent need to care for the body of the earth. This approach, however, potentially also becomes strange theology since such thinking would exempt the spirit from creation and lead us down a dangerous path of physical hedonism wherein we imagine that we are our own creators and that physical well-being is all that matters. The belief in eternal life provides a crucial context within which to grant accountability to all human earthly action. But we are likely to accept our responsibility only if the relationship between our actions and their spiritual consequences is understood to be an intimate one.<sup>10</sup> Otherwise, we are left with two extremes, as Berry

argues, “between those who despise the body for the sake of its resurrection and those, diseased by bodily extravagance and lack of exercise, who nevertheless desire longevity above all things.”<sup>11</sup> What is called for is a theology that is simultaneously earth and body centered, but that is so within the context of a spiritual understanding of the reality of eternal life, a theology that Mormonism uniquely offers.

Latter-day Saint scriptures adamantly oppose the traditional notion that the body and the spirit—and earth and heaven—are dualities that are permanent and irreconcilable. While they may operate as dualities in mortal experience, higher spiritual states are represented as a harmonious reconciliation of those pairs. God and Jesus Christ, though of supreme spiritual power, are believed to be two separate beings, neither of which is limited by the fact that he inhabits an immortal physical body (D&C 130:22). Christ’s Resurrection points to our ultimate destiny as eternal, embodied beings. The highest heavenly reward will be to live again on the earth, not as reincarnated beings, but as resurrected beings with God and Jesus Christ and with the potential to enjoy all of God’s power. The earth itself will have received its “paradisiacal glory” (A of F 10). As Brigham Young explained, “The earth is very good in and of itself, and has abided a celestial law, consequently we should not despise it, nor desire to leave it, but rather desire and strive to obey the same law that the earth abides.” He later added, “We are for the kingdom of God, and are not going to the moon, nor to any other planet pertaining to this solar system. . . . This earth is the home he has prepared for us.”<sup>12</sup>

But what are the environmental advantages of such beliefs about the body and the earth? They teach important principles about the need for body and spirit to work together and the ethical demand that our spiritual aspirations must translate into actions of meaningful earthly consequences. They emphasize the sacred nature of the body and of the earth and the need to keep them clean and beautiful in both a moral and a physical sense. If our bodies are temples of our spirits, so too is the earth the tabernacle of its spirit. To be without profound gratitude or careful, ethical participation in the proper maintenance of either is to take Christ’s suffering and mighty Atonement for granted and to be unworthy of his gift of renewed life.

The realities of the earth and of bodily experience, though potentially deceiving, are not categorically illusory and should therefore not be shunned unthinkingly for the sake of a higher spiritual morality. Joseph Smith taught, “The elements are eternal, and spirit and element [or physical matter], inseparably connected, receive a fullness of joy; And when separated, man cannot receive a fullness of joy” (D&C 93:33–34). This passage implies that our moral capacities can be more fully realized in mortality

and in relationship to the flesh of our own bodies, the bodies of other human beings, and the bodies of all physical creation. Joseph F. Smith stated that “it has always been a cardinal teaching with the Latter-day Saints that a religion which has not the power to save people temporally and make them prosperous and happy here, cannot be depended upon to save them spiritually, to exalt them in the life to come.”<sup>13</sup> That is, earthly and heavenly life are not radically divorced from one another but are part of a continuum; the building of the kingdom of God begins with our efforts in this life and will continue in the next.

The unique and salutary contributions of Mormon belief to an environmental ethic are particularly evident in our understanding of the conditions imposed on Adam and Eve in Genesis but then reiterated with greater clarification in the Pearl of Great Price. Adam and Eve are “cursed” to labor by the sweat of their brow and to bring forth children in suffering (Moses 4:22–23). The Fall, in the Mormon view, is both a consequence of choice and, more significantly, an opportunity to enable us to choose to “have joy” (2 Ne. 2:25). Our biological struggle to feed and reproduce ourselves, again, is not to be mourned but to be embraced within the guiding principles of the plan of salvation. The conditions of human probation, rather than curses, are blessings because they are the ethical testing ground to restore our relationships—to God, to land, and to our bodies—that characterized the experience in the Garden of Eden. Nor, in Mormon belief, has the Fall resulted in a categorical divorce between our biological nature and our spirituality. Such a divorce has brought Christianity the deserved criticism waged by Karl Marx and others who sensed the danger of a system of belief and values derived in seclusion from the fundamental tasks of feeding, reproducing, and sheltering ourselves.

Of course, given the significant advances of technology over the last century or so that have so clearly helped to free us from the realities of physical labor with the land, mortal hardship, and sexual reproduction, one wonders what additional understandings of our doctrine will be necessary to return us to a more complete and less ambivalent acceptance of the conditions imposed on our first parents. In light of such modern problems, for example, we view such teachings as former President Spencer W. Kimball’s emphasis on family gardening as a profound environmental ethic that helps us to remember our relationship to land and to our own bodies. The Word of Wisdom can similarly be seen as containing an important environmental ethic since it teaches us that our spiritual and physical health are interdependent and that health of spirit and body is contingent on an ethical relationship of moderation to other living forms created by God.<sup>14</sup>

## The Spiritual Matter of Nature

One reason why traditional Christianity perceived an inherent divide between the spirit and all physical creation and therefore lost much of its ethical force for meaningful earthly living, as some scholars contend, was because it rejected categorically the pagan notion that nature was animated by spirit. Once all physical creation was conceived of as dead matter, indifferent to God's will or to human choices and alien to the nature of God, the door was opened for wanton exploitation. If nature has spirit, then presumably it has intelligence and some degree of autonomy apart from human agency and in this sense is a spiritual sibling engendered by God's creative activity.<sup>15</sup> Of course, the ever-increasing authority granted by Western society to modern science has also contributed to this view of nature as a kind of morally neutral laboratory for our own experimentation.<sup>16</sup> Technology and scientific knowledge are often viewed in our society as morally neutral categories, and therefore advances in either area are categorically positive, regardless of their environmental costs.

But if we are to turn to some notion of animism in order to justify our ethical relationship to nature, how exactly can we define this spiritual quality of natural things in a way that is consistent with Christian beliefs? Many environmentalists have become attracted to pagan notions of animism because those notions grant significant independence and a sacred identity to the nonhuman realm and to its varied particular parts. Such reformulations of animism will presumably mean we will be more likely to consider the feelings or consciousness of animals, plants, rivers, and mountains. However, as an environmental ethic, pagan animism paradoxically gives us dangerous license to dismiss our obligations to the natural world since nature's identity and felicity are conceived to be *totally* independent of the effects of human action. And if nature is independent of human beings, in a pagan world it also enjoys a greater degree of independence from the notion of a chief divine power to which all creation is accountable.

Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, general secretary of the Reformed Church in America, stipulates that the traditional Christian notion of creation *ex nihilo* essentially presents the same problem as pagan animism since it, too, creates a dualism that separates nature from God. At the same time, he rejects the pantheism offered by the Catholic theologian Matthew Fox and Vanderbilt Divinity School Professor Sallie McFague, who have presented a notion of nature as the very bodily material of God.<sup>17</sup> Although their notion helps to remind us of the sacred quality of nature, it leaves unclear the basis on which we can develop an ethical relationship to the nonhuman world. Does it make ethical sense to argue that we are stewards of the body of God? If nature is the body of God, then it must be perfect and in no need of human effort. We are left to merely worship and submit

to God-in-nature. And this position dangerously mythologizes nature by taking it entirely out of the context of human history, leaving it subject to the temptation to “[worship] and [serve] the creature more than the Creator” (Rom. 1:25). As Granberg-Michaelson explains, the quest is to identify a “theology that safeguards nature’s difference but within a relationship to deity and to human life,” one that sees nature as subject to historical contingency but not in ways identical to human development.<sup>18</sup>

Those who have most successfully identified such a theology are Methodist theologian John Cobb, Episcopalian theologian Michael Northcott, and Reverend Paul Santmire of the Lutheran Church.<sup>19</sup> In 1972, Cobb, building on Alfred Whitehead’s ideas, proposed that all matter “had a purpose, a capability of being fulfilled or being denied that opportunity.”<sup>20</sup> On the basis of his reading of Aquinas and the letters of Paul, Northcott articulates a “natural law ethics,” in which “nature is recast as material stuff . . . [with] intelligible order and moral value.”<sup>21</sup> What is powerful about this conception of physical matter is that it grants agency and intelligence to the nonhuman realm in a way that is codependent with human beings. It implies that nature is within history. As Santmire astutely claims, our modern environmental crisis

has its deepest roots in what may be called *the challenge of historical existence*, which is the challenge to man to be authentically the historical creature he has evolved to be. . . . [H]istory brings with it anxieties and responsibilities which can weigh so heavily on man that he frequently tries to relinquish his historical destiny for something less, a sheerly natural destiny.<sup>22</sup>

This ambivalence about our own historical accountability has a long history in the New World. Recently, scholars such as William Cronon have begun to rethink our ideas of wilderness in order to suggest that mythologizing nature and stripping it of its human history can contribute to a politics of dispossession of perceived “outsiders.” The erasure of human history also then renders our own accountability for such actions invisible within the landscape.<sup>23</sup> The dangerous appeal of pagan animism, for Santmire, is precisely that it offers an “escape from the rigors of historical existence and . . . a refuge . . . in a time of socio-religious fragmentation.”<sup>24</sup> Some environmentalists, charges Santmire, have been seduced by what he calls the “cult of the simple rustic life,” which “brings with it an implicit—sometimes explicit—social irresponsibility.” This leads to mistaken logic that “the social ills of the city can wait, while we seek to heal the world of nature.”<sup>25</sup>

One of the chief reasons for the profound moral relationship between human beings and other creations is that, as Joseph Smith taught, all things are composed of both physical and spiritual matter (D&C 131:7).<sup>26</sup> The Pearl of Great Price describes a spiritual and physical creation: “I, the Lord

God, made the heaven and the earth, And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew. For I, the Lord God, created all things . . . spiritually, before they were naturally upon the earth” (Moses 3:4–5). This record of the creation goes on to describe the spiritual matter of plant life: “Out of the ground made I, the Lord God, to grow every tree, naturally, that is pleasant to the sight of man. . . . And it became also a living soul. For it was spiritual in the day that I created it” (Moses 3:9). Again in the case of animals: “Out of the ground I, the Lord God, formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; . . . and they were also living souls” (Moses 3:19). We are also told of the following experience, although whether it is symbolic or literal is not revealed:

He [Enoch] heard a voice from the bowels [of the earth], saying: Wo, wo is me, the mother of men; I am pained, I am weary, because of the wickedness of my children. When shall I rest, and be cleansed from the filthiness which is gone forth out of me? When will my Creator sanctify me, that I may rest, and righteousness for a season abide upon my face? (Moses 7:48; see also D&C 88:18–19, 24–25)

And since all living things have spiritual matter and moral intelligence, they are also subject to the conditions of the Fall and of redemption. This is clearly explained in Doctrine and Covenants 29:24–25:

All old things shall pass away, and all things shall become new, even the heaven and the earth, and all the fulness thereof, both men and beasts, the fowls of the air, and the fishes of the sea; And not one hair, neither mote, shall be lost, for it is the workmanship of mine hand.

Although in Mormonism the spiritual matter of nature is not to be worshipped, as it may be in forms of pagan animism, we nonetheless believe we have a kinship with all other living souls. The link that connects us to the physical world is the light of Christ, our mutual creator, who enlightens and enlivens all creation:

The light of truth . . . is the light of Christ. As also [Christ] is in the sun, and the light of the sun, and the power thereof by which it was made. As also he is in the moon, and is the light of the moon, and the power thereof by which it was made; As also the light of the stars, and the power thereof by which they were made; And the earth also, and the power thereof, even the earth upon which you stand. And the light which shineth, which giveth you light, is through him who enlighteneth your eyes, which is the same light that quickeneth your understandings; Which light proceedeth forth from the presence of God to fill the immensity of space—The light which is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed, even the power of God who sitteth upon his throne, who is in the bosom of eternity, who is in the midst of all things. (D&C 88:6–13)

All creation, then, although various in form, is united by Christ. Physical creation is not Christ, per se, but, similar to what ecology has taught us



about our biological kinship with nature, neither is the nonhuman physical creation *totally* distinct from us spiritually.

If we have the eyes to see, “all things are created and made to bear record of [Christ], both things which are temporal, and things which are spiritual; things which are in the heavens above, and things which are on the earth, and things which are in the earth, and things which are under the earth, both above and beneath” (Moses 6:63; see also Alma 30:44). Part of this spiritual experience is nature’s gift of pleasure. Doctrine and Covenants 59:18 states, “All things which come of the earth, in the season thereof, are made for the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart.” Although the scriptures teach that God expects us to make use of nature, here he prioritizes aesthetic value over utilitarian or even recreational values. This is because nature’s intrinsic aesthetic values bear witness of Christ’s love, and therefore we have an ethical responsibility to demonstrate due appreciation. As Joseph F. Smith has said:

We have eyes and see not, for that which we cannot appreciate or admire we are largely blind to, no matter how beautiful or inspiring it may be. As children of God, it is our duty to appreciate and worship Him in His creations. If we would associate all that is truly good and beautiful in life with thoughts of Him, we would be able to trace His handiwork throughout all nature.<sup>27</sup>

If nature is a witness and a gift of Christ, purely selfish use of nature or misrecognition of its sacred qualities is a sin of considerable measure.

What is particularly powerful about this conception of the spiritual qualities of physical creation is that, in Mormon theology, when we are moved upon by the light of Christ in nature, we are reminded of who we are and where we came from. Nature is a space where we can find renewed strength to assume our human responsibilities because it is informed by God’s light but is also part of our mortal sphere. In the Latter-day Saint view, we cannot arrogantly presume to recover what we believe is nature’s lost innocence, but neither can we pretend that its apparent purity contrasts our own inherent evil.<sup>28</sup> Simply put, nature teaches us to repent.

Because of the Mormon conception of our premortal life and its suggestion that we witnessed and may have participated in the very creation of the world under Christ’s direction, we have a unique opportunity to always remember our intimate relationship with creation. If we forget that intimacy, we are more likely to assume godlike ownership over it, as if we are always entitled to reenact that first moment in which Adam and Eve were given the world to name as they pleased. As renowned microbiologist René Dubos claims, “Man . . . achieved his humanness by the very act of introducing his will into natural events. He became what he is while giving form to nature.”<sup>29</sup> The only difference in Mormon belief is that, even in the beginning, the Garden of Eden was never free of the constraints of human

history. In a sense, there is no original Adam or Eve, no first-time entrance into an unhistoried earthly place, since even Adam and Eve, though understood doctrinally to be the literal first human beings, are children who have forgotten everything, including their previous names and roles in the creation.

Nature is always edenic, not because it is always virginal and outside of human history, but only because, like the original garden, we approach it in a state of forgetfulness. Nature appears to us as raw unnamed material, but our interaction with it should slowly become a process of remembering and removing the veil to discover the divinity within nature and within ourselves. That is, our contact with the divine will forever be tinged with traces of historical, human, earthly contingency and will at the same time be both a renewal and an account of what we had once forgotten.

### **The Human Role within Creation**

A crucial question for any Christian approach to environmental ethics is the definition of the human role within God's creation. Most environmentalist critics of the Judeo-Christian tradition take issue with the idea posited in Genesis that man was given "dominion over . . . the [whole] earth" and the seemingly boundless right to "subdue" animal and land as we see fit (Gen. 1:28). This anthropocentric view has been revised by many strains of environmentalism in order to avoid showing "respect for man at the price of disrespect for the environment."<sup>30</sup> The more extreme environmental movements have displaced human beings altogether from the center of God's creation and have argued instead for a biocentric universe in which all biological life is of inherently equal value. Such is the position of the Deep Ecologists, for example, who insist that the "rights of the individual should be subordinate to the well-being of the whole. If it comes down to human suffering or the environment suffering, man should suffer."<sup>31</sup>

While it is clear that the anthropocentric view as articulated by these critics needs revision, it is puzzling why some would wish to diminish the central importance of human choices, since they are clearly at the center of the environmental crisis. Environmental problems are human problems and need human solutions. Mormon belief makes an important contribution since it clarifies the ethical dimensions of our divinely assigned role as "lords" with "dominion" over the earth. In Latter-day Saint doctrine, we are clearly at the center of all God's creation, since we alone were created in his image and sent to earth to prove ourselves worthy of growing spiritually in the next life until we become like God. However, a Mormon view agrees with ecotheologians who have emphasized that it is precisely because we are at the center of God's creation and because we are given stewardship

over the earth that we are held morally responsible and accountable to God for our interaction with all living things.

Hugh Nibley explains that the responsibility to have dominion over creation that God assigned to Adam and later to Noah and to Abraham is “nothing less than the priesthood, the power to act for God and in his place.”<sup>32</sup> While this may be true, there is no reason to believe that the environmental ethics of Mormon belief do not apply to women and men alike. Within Mormon belief, such responsibilities of stewardship have never implied that God gives us the right to act as gods ourselves. That is, as men and women we are his agents in earthly matters. This implies a theocentric view that is rather distinct from an anthropocentric one since it means we must always defer to the authority of a higher power and can never use that authority to subjugate what the Lord has put in our charge.

Is there any reason to believe that “principles of righteousness” should not be consistently adhered to when acting in our assigned roles as stewards of the earth as well as of each other (D&C 121:36)? Should not men and women also demonstrate “persuasion, . . . long suffering, . . . gentleness and meekness” when interacting with God’s creations (D&C 121:41)? If we do so, the scripture promises, “Thy dominion shall be an everlasting dominion, and without compulsory means, it shall flow unto thee forever and ever” (D&C 121:46).<sup>33</sup>

Subduing the earth, then, involves a fundamental recognition of our stewardship rather than our domination of nature. Of course, the ethical demands of this role are also its greatest dangers, since God places in our hands enormous responsibility and authority, and historically this has often led to an arrogant assumption of right rather than a more humble acceptance of responsibility. As the scripture explains, “We have learned by sad experience that it is the nature and disposition of almost all men, as soon as they get a little authority, as they suppose, they will immediately begin to exercise unrighteous dominion. Hence many are called, but few are chosen” (D&C 121:39–40). Within this role is contained a warning against its own likely abuses, akin to those criticized by biocentric environmentalists. Although the notion of stewardship is ethically rich, it is, as Northcott argues, “a highly problematic notion in ecological terms. The fundamental problem with this metaphor is the implication that humans are effectively in control of nature.”<sup>34</sup>

In Mormon belief, Satan takes particular advantage of this tendency toward godlike arrogance; he opposes principles of righteousness by seducing us with commodification and ownership of land, with the idea that land is a right of ownership, not a gift of stewardship. As Hugh Nibley explains, ancient literature confirms that the anti-Christ “argued from a position of strength and promised ‘all the kingdoms of the world’ (Luke 4:5–8)

with all their power and glory to those who would worship and follow him.”<sup>35</sup> Beginning with Adam down to Jesus Christ, Satan tempted the righteous to take the treasures of the earth, natural materials converted into valuable commodities, and exchange them for “services of important people in key positions; you end up running everything your way.”<sup>36</sup> Granberg-Michaelson concurs; turning land into an exclusive commodity is a “grab for God’s own power. . . . Rather than preserving all life, humanity believes it can take life into its own hands. . . . And rather than regard the life of creation as God’s gift, humanity now tries to act as though it owns the creation.”<sup>37</sup> This opposition to God’s power is what Latter-day Saint scriptures define as priestcraft, the attempt to commodify truths and material things that rightfully and originally belong to God for the sake of individual gain and political and social dominion over others (2 Ne. 26:29). As the law of consecration also implies, ownership of land and natural matter, without due consecration to the Lord, is inherently contrary to the governance of the kingdom of God.

While the scriptures clearly do not share the misanthropic views of those who advocate extreme measures of population control, Latter-day Saint doctrine declares that the earth and all living things were created with divinely appointed purposes, and our stewardship is precisely to ensure that they fulfill them. Joseph F. Smith taught, “Take not away the life you cannot give, for all things have an equal right to live.”<sup>38</sup> This ethic regarding the reproductive rights of all creation, not those of the human population alone, inheres in the command to multiply and replenish the earth, according to Hugh Nibley.<sup>39</sup> That the Lord also commanded fish, for example, to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters” demonstrates the egalitarian interdependence of the human and nonhuman realms (Gen. 1:22). Our obedience to God’s will is the key to protecting creation’s right to thrive within the elements God provides. Even fidelity in marriage is mentioned as a key to ensuring that “the earth might answer the end of its creation” (D&C 49:16). Similar to John Cobb’s view of all physical matter, Latter-day Saint scripture declares that “there is an opposition in all things” and that therefore morality permeates all matter (2 Ne. 2:11). Without oppositions and our human capacity to choose between them, all creation would fail to fulfill its purpose:

And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. If ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness, there be no happiness. . . . And if these things are not there is no God. And if there is no God we are not, neither the earth; for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon; wherefore all things must have vanished away. (2 Ne. 2:13)

Essential to the process of creation is the opposition of all things that makes moral choice possible.

The inherent opposition in things, in turn, implies that human redemption cannot be separated from the redemption of all creation. As Brigham Young explained, "Each person belonging to the human family has a portion of labor to perform in removing the curse from the earth and from every living thing upon it. When this work is performed, then will they possess all things."<sup>40</sup> The Latter-day Saint version of the traditional Judeo-Christian creation story emphasizes that all nonhuman matter obeyed God's voice, "even as they were ordered" (Abr. 4:7; see also Hel. 12:8). The Fall means that, even though nature continues to obey God, because of our disobedience nature is antagonistic to human endeavor and will remain so until we learn the lessons of the original harmony with nature that Adam and Noah and presumably others enjoyed.

In marching from Kirtland to Missouri, some early Mormons encountered a rattlesnake, which they prepared to kill, but Joseph Smith stopped them. He taught that "men must become harmless before the brute creation, and when men lose their viscious dispositions and cease to destroy the animal race, the lion and the lamb can dwell together, and the sucking child can play the with the serpent in safety."<sup>41</sup> George Q. Cannon similarly taught that "the time will come when man and animals which are now wild and ferocious will dwell together without hurting each other. The prophets have foretold this with great plainness. But before this day comes men will have to cease their war upon the animals, the reptiles and the insects."<sup>42</sup> The implication is that any millennial cleanup of human error will require some level of prior repentance for our own antagonism toward nature. As the scriptures additionally make clear, when we accept our stewardship duties toward all creation, even our own physical bodies will begin to be sanctified and renewed (D&C 84:33).

Both the Bible and latter-day scriptures are replete with examples of land bestowed as a gift and blessed by God because of the righteousness of those who occupied it.<sup>43</sup> That is, human obedience to a covenant of creation participates in the redemption of all living things. Christian environmentalists see this as an important element in environmental ethics. As one scholar, William Dryness, contends, "Morality, [man's] response to God, and fertility of the earth are interrelated."<sup>44</sup> Northcott adds that "devastation of the land is not only seen as the judgement of a wrathful God. It is also interpreted as the consequence of the human rebellion against the created order and wisdom of nature."<sup>45</sup> For this reason, he argues that "the recovery of an ecological ethic in the modern world requires the recovery of a doctrine of creation redeemed, and the worship of a creator who is also redeemer of the creation. It will involve . . . [a] God as creator to all that is created . . . and not simply to the life of certain elected souls." Such a doctrine of mutual redemption "restore[s] relationality between persons and God, and

between persons and created order.”<sup>46</sup> One rather simple formula for an environmental ethic that results from this covenant is that when land becomes unfruitful and fails to fulfill its divinely appointed purposes, this natural degradation is a sign, not of God’s willed destruction of his creation, but of our need to repent of our rebellion against creation.

This interdependence of nature and human beings has been criticized by some for its arrogant assumption that nature is somehow flawed or incomplete without the transformative power of human endeavor.<sup>47</sup> They argue that consequently we have never fully appreciated nature’s superior ability to sustain itself over time. But such criticisms tend to imply that human beings would be more helpful if they did nothing or that nature would be better off if we had never existed. As an ethic, this misanthropic impulse is potentially dangerous. A conception of nature in need of redemption leaves nature ever subject to our agency, bringing it into the realm of ethics by implying that we are “co-workers with God in the redemption of nature.”<sup>48</sup> And the fact is, as global warming trends seem to suggest, we have already affected creation to such a degree that its very life may depend on future corrective action on our part. We simply cannot afford to do nothing. Self-hatred and remorse alone will only hasten the end.

Understanding the need to work with nature “as fellow citizens of the Kingdom of God,” as Paul Santmire suggests, means that we recognize both the intrinsic value and right of nature to enjoy its purposes and our need to act with nature toward our mutual redemption.<sup>49</sup> Our role as participants in the redemption of nature, however, does not exclude the need for the Atonement, since our efforts at self-reform and at redeeming the earth will inevitably both fall short. Northcott points to Colossians 1:20, which says “Having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.”<sup>50</sup> But faith in the Atonement, of course, never justifies inaction, since actions are also needed, as the Book of Mormon explains: “It is by grace that we are saved, *after all we can do*” (2 Ne. 25:23; italics added).

If it is true that human beings are the only ones of God’s creations capable of disobedience to God’s commands, human moral action is integral to the process of ongoing creation, of natural regeneration and redemption. George Tate explains, “If ongoing creation depends upon obedience and if, of all creation, only we human beings have the freedom not to obey, what happens when we choose not to obey? We thwart, deform, and undo God’s creation.”<sup>51</sup> Creation is ongoing and open-ended because it is subject to the continual ethical dimension of human agency and, as Granberg-Michaelson states, because of “the continual, preserving, and creative activity of God within the creation.”<sup>52</sup> Our choice is not to control creation but either to contribute to and enhance it for the sake of

life in all its varieties or to degrade and defile it. Protecting biodiversity is integral to this process. Brigham Young states, "The very object of our existence here is to handle the temporal elements of this world and subdue the earth, multiplying those organisms of plants and animals God has designed shall dwell upon it."<sup>53</sup>

The interdependence of ongoing creation and human moral action means, as Hugh Nibley contends, that "moral and physical cleanliness and or . . . pollution" are inseparable.<sup>54</sup> Brigham Young taught the early pioneers this interdependence:

You are here commencing anew. The soil, the air, the water are all pure and healthy. Do not suffer them to become polluted with wickedness. Strive to preserve the elements from being contaminated by the filthy, wicked conduct and sayings of those who pervert the intelligence God has bestowed upon the human family.<sup>55</sup>

Joseph F. Smith likewise declared that "men cannot worship the Creator and look with careless indifference upon his creatures. . . . Love of nature is akin to the love of God; the two are inseparable."<sup>56</sup> Nature is, like our fellow human brothers and sisters, a partner and a testing ground in working out our salvation. Mormon belief, therefore, upholds an anthropocentric view of the world but not without important caveats regarding our ethical responsibilities toward nonhuman creation.

### **Social Organization**

The environmental ethics of Mormonism go beyond our responsibilities toward nature; they also include our most basic duties toward our fellow beings. As much as it is concerned with nature, environmentalism is essentially a field that concerns itself with how we manage the use and distribution of the world's resources in order to feed and sustain over time all sectors of the human community on a planet of limited resources. It is not enough to take pleasure and show respect for nature; Latter-day Saint scripture requires us to use its resources wisely and justly: "And it pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man; for unto this end were they made to be used, with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion" (D&C 59:20). Inherent in creation is an ethic of social justice and egalitarianism in the human realm.

The Latter-day Saint conception of the kingdom of God has always held that the well-being of the earth is dependent upon an egalitarian ideal that consistently measures our successes by how well we look after the poor. The law of consecration represents the highest spiritual law by which this is accomplished; only a few believing communities in scripture have successfully lived it, including the city of Enoch, the early Christians under Peter's leadership, and the gathering of Nephites and Lamanites that

greeted Christ in the Americas. The law involves disciplined consecration of all that we have been blessed with for the improvement of those around us. A revelation to the early Saints states:

Thou wilt remember the poor, and consecrate of thy properties for their support that which thou hast to impart unto them, . . . every man shall be made accountable unto me, a steward over his own property, or that which he has received by consecration, as much as is sufficient for himself and family. . . . Therefore the residue shall be kept in my storehouse, to administer to the poor and the needy. (D&C 42:30, 32, 34)

What is significant about this principle for present purposes is that obedience to it has direct environmental implications.<sup>57</sup> Human poverty and environmental degradation are symptomatic consequences of our rebellion against God. Granberg-Michaelson explains that “Old Testament pleas for justice are linked to restoring humanity’s broken relationship to the creation. Injustice has its roots in seizing and controlling part of creation for one’s own selfish desires, and thereby depriving others of creation’s fruits, making them poor, dispossessed, and oppressed.”<sup>58</sup> Indeed, the great challenge of human sustainability appears within reach as long as we are willing to recognize that

the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and that which cometh of the earth, is ordained for the use of man for food and for raiment, and that he might have abundance. But it is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin. And wo be unto man that sheddeth blood or that wasteth flesh and hath no need. (D&C 49:19–21)

Unequal distribution of earthly resources or excess consumption directly inhibits our spiritual progress: “For if ye are not equal in earthly things ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things” (D&C 78:6). Brigham Young insisted that “it is not our privilege to waste the Lord’s substance.”<sup>59</sup> Excessive consumption at the expense of others or of our environment is therefore never justified since such behavior violates the tenets of Christ’s governance that requires strict adherence to the care for the needy, careful resource management, and a profound disavowal of materialism.

The proper and equitable distribution of wealth means that the earth will be able to provide for us sustainably, as demonstrated in Latter-day Saint scripture:

I, the Lord, stretched out the heavens, and built the earth, my very handiwork; and all things therein are mine. And it is my purpose to provide for my saints, for all things are mine. But it must needs be done in mine own way; and behold this is the way that I, the Lord, have decreed to provide for my saints, that the poor shall be exalted, in that the rich are made low. For the earth is full, and there is enough and to spare; yea, I prepared all things, and have given unto the children of men to be agents unto themselves.



Therefore, if any man shall take of the abundance which I have made, and impart not his portion, according to the law of my gospel, unto the poor and the needy, he shall, with the wicked, lift up his eyes in hell, being in torment. (D&C 104:14–18)

While this scripture is often cited in the Church to counter arguments for greater population control, it clearly demonstrates that the promise of sufficient natural resources holds weight only if we learn to consecrate our blessings for others and live with appropriate moderation.<sup>60</sup> If Satan's plan of attack against the kingdom of God is to teach that power comes from owning the earth, selling it, and building up secular power on the basis of extortion of the earth's treasures, Brigham Young countered by reminding us that "not one particle of all that comprises this vast creation of God is our own. Everything we have has been bestowed upon us for our action, to see what we would do with it—whether we would use it for eternal life and exaltation, or for eternal death and degradation."<sup>61</sup> The Book of Mormon also warns against "withholding your substance, which doth not belong to you but to God" (Mosiah 4:22).

While it is true that the wealthiest countries have been in the best position to begin repairing the environmental damage that often sustains economic growth, it is erroneous to conclude that high concentrations of wealth necessarily mean higher environmental ethics. It is equally true that the standard of living in the United States cannot be duplicated worldwide without significant depletion of natural resources and catastrophic environmental degradation.<sup>62</sup> The question, then, is how the most powerful and wealthy communities can energize themselves to safeguard against unnecessarily rapid depletion of goods and resources, so as to reverse the trend where the world's poor typically suffer environmental consequences disproportionate to their rates of consumption. The law of consecration, as Doctrine and Covenants 104 explains, depends upon our use of agency, our voluntary sacrifice of goods and resources. It does not require despotic centralized control over the distribution of resources; its power is in its spiritual focus on the human heart and the need to overcome its selfish impulses in the interest of the larger human and biological community.

Of course, this strength is also its weakness since the Mormon approach to correcting our environmental practices will perhaps always be delayed by the seemingly eternal quest of overcoming the self and establishing Zion communities. Although this does not lend itself to a terribly effective political strategy, it nevertheless reminds us that direct political action may not be enough; the reason we need religion to change our environmental practices, as White once argued, is because it is a matter of preparing our hearts ultimately to sacrifice all that we have. At the same time, with greater awareness of the environmental consequences of our

economic choices, Mormons may sense a greater urgency to devote themselves religiously to the covenant of consecration. The environmental ethics of Mormon belief demonstrate that earthly action on the behalf of a broadly defined community and individual personal devotion to God's will must simultaneously be cultivated.

### Conclusions

In the early years of settlement in the West and again in the early part of the twentieth century, Latter-day Saint leaders and the Wasatch communities tapped into the environmental potential of their doctrines with moderate success.<sup>63</sup> However, the Latter-day Saint contribution to the environmental crisis has, until very recently, remained relatively silent.<sup>64</sup> Such silence has provided fodder to critics of Mormonism in the polemical debates about environmental issues in the West. The critics' misunderstandings, unfortunately, rarely receive a response since it would seem that even Mormons themselves have not always fully appreciated the relevance of their doctrines to environmentalism. As a result, the valuable environmental implications of Latter-day Saint doctrines have languished. They have been replaced in the popular imagination with myths of a great millennial cleanup of environmental waste that justify inertia and inaction regarding the well-being of Christ's (Jehovah's) creations.

The sometimes polarized and angry rhetoric of environmentalism corresponds to an equally angry and polarized view of godless federal forces that invade local communities without consideration. Our languished environmental doctrines have somehow made it possible for some Mormons—whose scriptures declare trees and animals to be living souls—to forget such restored doctrines and scoff at the idea of “tree huggers” and others who are portrayed as pitiless and faithless worriers about the feelings of nature.

Nor have Mormons as a whole been exempt from the consequences of the vast “unsettling of America” that Wendell Berry describes as a steady process by which the majority of our population over the last century or so has become increasingly removed from the day-to-day land ethics of family farming.<sup>65</sup> Berry argues that this has created a culture in America that allows us the illusion that we can make choices independent of their environmental consequences. Within this culture, which has divorced the human community from creation, most theologies have struggled to reassert their relevance to all living things.<sup>66</sup> How else can we explain the strange split in logic that understands a connection between the body as sacred and the need to keep it morally and physically clean—despite inevitable physical death—but does not often accept the same ethics with regard to animals or land?

But Mormonism has additional circumstances that have added to that struggle. It is a religion that has suffered considerable persecution, leaving a scar that manifests itself at times in a defensiveness against outside forces. Unfortunately, Mormon culture is at the point where even simple environmental ethics, as opposed to politics, are rarely mentioned over the ward house pulpit. Because of Mormonism's obscure beginnings and its miraculous transformation into a worldwide church, it is rare within this culture to conceive of growth as anything but a sign of divinely sanctioned progress.<sup>67</sup> It is also a religion that believes in modern-day revelation, and as such, intense political pressures that want to shape the Church in conformity with recent "greening" trends will likely result in increased reticence. Again unfortunately, it is inevitable that a church that believes so strongly in the privilege and authority of prophetic revelation will never be fully understood by contemporary society. But precisely for these reasons, it is time for Mormons themselves to appropriate their own environmental ethics before they become transformed beyond recognition in the political and cultural fray.

Running through the literature of many environmentally concerned Christians is the assumption that the power to change our environmental behavior lies with the local church. There, it is believed, principles of sustainability can be taught and demonstrated by example, hopefully giving those principles ethical meaning. Ironically, recent sociological studies indicate that, at least in the case of our relationship to animals, "the more frequently an individual attended religious services, the higher the probability that his or her attitudes toward animals would tend toward those of dominion or even outright negativity."<sup>68</sup>

More sociological work needs to be done to understand this disappointing tendency, particularly within the Mormon community, since an environmental ethic is prevalent virtually in every corner of Latter-day Saint revelations and scriptures. Certainly we should remember that, as environmental scholar David Kinsley has warned, "it is tempting to assume that ecological spirituality leads to ecologically enlightened practices." "A wide variety of factors," in addition to religious beliefs, influence our behavior. Such disparities should be enough to caution us against "assuming that religious beliefs, themes, practices relating to ecology have a direct and dominant effect on the actual ecological situation of the cultures and societies in which we find them."<sup>69</sup> Otherwise, we risk viewing prevailing political or cultural views in Utah, for example, as *necessarily* having a sound doctrinal basis and official Church sanction.<sup>70</sup> The danger of equating Utah politics with Church sanction is twofold. It blinds us to the ways in which Mormon belief promotes environmental ethics that may not

show up on the politically correct radar screen. And it therefore blinds us to the need to improve environmental behavior in ways other than from the pulpit.

For this reason, we must be cautious about assuming that the power of the environmental ethics of Latter-day Saint belief would necessarily increase solely with more frequent iteration in Church. While more explicit and direct instructions from Church leadership would no doubt help to distinguish doctrine from myth, the truth is that the sermon has already been preached. Religion's power lies not so much in the sermon as it does in the believers' capacity to bring to fruition, through ethical and moral action, the spoken or written word of God. In other words, religion's power is realized when it becomes a system of self-circumspection and self-regulation that then moves us outward to the world around us. Religion is not fruitful when its power is based merely on what it explicitly says or does not say or when religion is used as a measure of what we believe we have already become. Religion should not be a scaffold to maintain the privilege of being right so much as it should be a ladder that prompts us in doing and becoming good.

Ultimately, if the environmental crisis is as broad and pervasive as it appears, clearly it cannot be tackled in ideological or religious camps. Therefore, greater dialogue between different value systems and a more sincere effort to find the necessary common ground for that dialogue are absolutely necessary. Religion needs environmentalism as much as environmentalism needs religion.

Perhaps the greatest power of Mormonism is also its greatest hope for making a lasting contribution to the environmental crisis. That power, I believe, lies in the restored earthly doctrines that I have outlined and that are subsumed in the law of consecration. With greater attendance to the practical measures needed to bring that law's principles into practice, we will of necessity find significant and beneficial environmental ramifications. Such an emphasis, given recently by Elder Joe Christensen, who warned against the dangers of material excess,<sup>71</sup> provides the hope that we can focus on principles of sustainable living and not on the ugly polemics of politics. Grounds do exist for genuine dialogue between environmentalists and Mormons. As God's children, we bear a heavy moral responsibility to act as stewards of all God's physical creations and to treat them with respect and sustaining love.

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2. Glen Warchol, "Environmentalism, LDS Church Need Not Be at Odds, Panel Says," *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 26, 2000, B2.
3. Max Oelschlaeger, *Caring for Creation: An Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 204.
4. Richard C. Foltz, "Mormon Values and the Utah Environment," *Worldviews: Environment, Culture, Religion* 4 (spring 2000): 11, 4, 14.
5. Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Routledge, 1996), 191, 193.
6. Bill McKibben, *The End of Nature* (New York: Random House, 1989), 74–75.
7. Michael S. Northcott, *The Environment and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 312.
8. Ezra Taft Benson, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1988), 643.
9. Wendell Berry, *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture* (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996), 97.
10. On the relationship between the body and the spirit as it informs an environmental ethic, see also H. Paul Santmire, "Historical Dimensions of the American Crisis," in *Western Man and Environmental Ethics: Attitudes toward Nature and Technology*, ed. Ian G. Barbour (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1973), 66–92; and Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, *A Worldly Spirituality: The Call to Redeem Life on Earth* (San Francisco: Harper and Rowe, 1984).
11. Berry, *Unsettling of America*, 106.
12. Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–86), 2:302–3, June 3, 1855; 8:293, 294, June 12, 1860.
13. Joseph F. Smith, "The Truth about Mormonism," *Out West* 23 (September 1905): 242.
14. For example, eating less red meat, as the Word of Wisdom counsels in Doctrine and Covenants 89, would go a long way in reducing many significant environmental problems. Cattle are known to be a major source of methane gas, one of the leading causes of ozone depletion, as well as a major cause of deforestation.
15. On this point, see White, "Historical Roots," 189. See also David Kinsley, "Christianity as Ecologically Harmful and Christianity as Ecologically Responsible," in *This Sacred Earth*, 108; and Northcott, *Environment and Christian Ethics*, 324. Wendell Berry writes, "The great disaster of human history is one that happened to or within religion: that is the conceptual division between the holy and the world, the excerpting of the Creator from the Creation." Wendell Berry, "A Secular Pilgrimage," in *Western Man*, 134.
16. White argues this point in a follow-up essay to his 1970 argument against traditional Christianity. Lynn White, "Continuing the Conversation," in *Western Man*, 55–64.
17. See Matthew Fox, *The Coming of the Cosmic Christ: The Healing of Mother Earth and the Birth of a Global Renaissance* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1988); and Sallie McFague, *Super, Natural Christians: How We Should Love Nature* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1997).
18. Granberg-Michaelson, *Worldly Spirituality*, 69.

19. See H. Paul Santmire, *Brother Earth: Nature, God, and Ecology in Time of Crisis* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1970); John B. Cobb Jr., *Is It Too Late? A Theology of Ecology* (Beverly Hills, Calif: Benziger Bruce and Glencoe, 1972); and Northcott, *Environment and Christian Ethics*.

20. Roderick Nash, "The Greening of Religion," in *This Sacred Earth*, 210.

21. Northcott, *Environment and Christian Ethics*, 254.

22. Santmire, "Historical Dimensions," 85–86.

23. William Cronon, "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature," in *Uncommon Ground: Toward Reinventing Nature*, ed. William Cronon (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 69–90. See also George B. Handley, "A Post-colonial Sense of Place and the Work of Derek Walcott," *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 7 (summer 2000): 1–23.

24. Santmire, "Historical Dimensions," 87.

25. Santmire, *Brother Earth*, 43, 44.

26. On Joseph's denial that spirit is immaterial, see David L. Paulsen, "The Doctrine of Divine Embodiment: Restoration, Judeo-Christian, and Philosophical Perspectives," *BYU Studies* 35, no. 4 (1995–96): 38.

27. Joseph F. Smith, cited in Aaron Kelson, *The Holy Place: Why Caring for the Earth and Being Kind to Animals Matters* (Spotsylvania, Va.: White Pine, 1999), 24.

28. For a trenchant but sometimes overstated critique of the ethical dangers of Christianity's self-assigned role as the redeemer of nature, see Carolyn Merchant's powerful essay "Reinventing Eden: Western Culture as a Recovery Narrative," in *Uncommon Ground*, 132–59. I argue that it is precisely this element of a buried human history already present in nature that serves to keep a check on the dangers of exploitation.

29. René Dubos, "A Theology of the Earth," in *Western Man*, 47.

30. Gabriel Fackre, "Ecology and Theology," in *Western Man*, 117.

31. David Kinsley, *Ecology and Religion: Ecological Spirituality in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1995), 188. For an overview of Deep Ecology and its environmental ethics, see George Sessions, ed., *Deep Ecology for the Twenty-First Century: Readings on the Philosophy and Practice of the New Environmentalism* (Boston: Shambhala, 1995).

32. Hugh W. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless: Classic Essays of Hugh W. Nibley* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1978), 88. Nibley's article was first published as "Man's Dominion," *New Era* 2 (October 1972): 24–31; and reprinted in *New Era* 11 (January–February 1981): 46–53. It was also published as "Man's Dominion, or Subduing the Earth," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, ed. Don E. Norton and Shirley S. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1994), 3–22.

33. Granberg-Michaelson agrees that humanity is called upon to "uphold God's rule over the creation. The unique function of humanity, as contrasted to other creatures, is that humanity, in God's image, has both this power and possibility. But that is conferred upon humanity for the purpose of acting on God's behalf as a guarantor of the preservation and order of life for the whole creation." Granberg-Michaelson, *Worldly Spirituality*, 62.

34. Northcott, *Environment and Christian Ethics*, 129. That this priesthood covenant connects the human community both to God and to the land is made apparent not only in the Old Testament but also in the scriptural discourses about the various promised lands of the Nephites, the Jaredites, and the Mormons. Some critics, like W. J. T. Mitchell, have raised important criticisms of the long-standing intolerance in

monotheistic cultures for polytheistic and animistic peoples, an intolerance that has often led to the dispossession of idolaters for the sake of purifying and possessing the “promised land” for worshippers of the true God. W. J. T. Mitchell, “Holy Landscape: Israel, Palestine, and the American Wilderness,” *Critical Inquiry* 26 (winter 2000): 193–223. In light of these criticisms, it is worth noting that the Book of Mormon offers an important caveat to this tradition because, even though it prophesies the expulsion of the Lamanites from their lands by the arrival of the Europeans, or Gentiles, its message is one of ethnic inclusiveness. Indeed, in 3 Nephi we even have an example in which the righteous Nephites and Lamanites enter into a covenant of land cooperation with former Gadianton robbers on the basis of the Nephite understanding of their own promised land as a gift (3 Ne. 6:3). The Book of Mormon conceives of land as a gift, but a gift from one’s Father who is also Father to one’s enemies, who may have a competing claim on the land. The Book of Mormon is ultimately a story of competing and overlapping, but equally legitimate, claims on the promised lands of the Jews and the Gentiles, the Nephites and the Lamanites. That is, land as promised gift does not eradicate competing claims and histories in the land but must ultimately be reconciled to the incongruities of New World history. Land as gift, as long as it is understood in a covenantal relationship, does not have to result in the kind of dispossession that Mitchell reminds us often accompany the belief in promised holy lands.

35. Nibley, “Subduing the Earth,” 87.

36. Nibley, “Subduing the Earth,” 93.

37. Granberg-Michaelson, *Worldly Spirituality*, 66. Also, Northcott insists that the Bible portrays creation as a “gift not as right, as promised land held in trust, not owned or possessed by humans” and that “the commodification of land was one of the first steps in the transformation of relations, both material and cultural, between humans and nature which preceded the modern environmental crisis” (Northcott, *Environment and Christian Ethics*, 181, 190–91).

38. Hugh W. Nibley, “Brigham Young on the Environment,” in *To the Glory of God: Mormon Essays on Great Issues—Environment—Commitment—Love—Peace—Youth—Man*, ed. Truman G. Madsen and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 14, as quoted in Joseph Fielding Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 2 vol. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1939) 1:371–72. Nibley’s article was also published in Norton and Ricks, eds., *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, 23–54.

39. See Nibley, “Subduing the Earth,” 87. In Genesis 1:22, the Lord explains that the command to multiply and replenish, or fill, the earth relates to his creations in the sea as well as on earth. This agrees with the view of Northcott who writes of a “cosmic covenant” God established with Noah and other early biblical prophets that pertains to the welfare of all living things. See also Granberg-Michaelson, *Worldly Spirituality*, 78–79; and Paulos Mar Gregorios, “New Testament Foundations for Understanding the Creation,” in *Tending the Garden: Essays on the Gospel and the Earth*, ed. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1987), 85.

40. Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 10:302, June 4, 1864.

41. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 71.

42. George Q. Cannon, “Editorial Thoughts: Revelation—Wanton Killing,” *Juvenile Instructor* 24 (1889): 549.

43. Several theologians have made similar claims. See Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 47–48; Santmire, *Brother Earth*, 30; Santmire, “Historical Dimensions of the American Crisis”; Northcott, *Environment and Christian Ethics*, 179–80; and Wendell

Berry, "Getting Along with Nature," in *Home Economics: Fourteen Essays* (San Francisco: North Point, 1987), 6–20. A gifted land, as biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann of the United Church of Christ argues, "is also land in history, land not usurped or simply mastered, but a land with its own history. Therefore this people does not own the land but also belongs to the land. In that way, we are warned about presuming upon it, upon controlling it in scientific and rational ways, so that its own claim, indeed its own voice, is not heard or is disregarded." Brueggeman, *The Land*, 192.

44. William Dyrness, "Stewardship of the Earth in the Old Testament," in *Tending the Garden*, 57.

45. Northcott, *Environment and Christian Ethics*, 171.

46. Northcott, *Environment and Christian Ethics*, 222, 223.

47. Merchant, "Reinventing Eden," 132–59.

48. This statement is attributed to Eric Rust, as quoted in Nash, "Greening of Religion," 214.

49. Santmire, *Brother Earth*, 98.

50. Northcott, *Environment and Christian Ethics*, 203. See also Mar Gregorios, "New Testament Foundations," 88–89.

51. George S. Tate, "Obedience, Creation, and Freedom," *Brigham Young University 1994–95 Devotional and Fireside Speeches* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Publications and Graphics, 1995), 244.

52. Granberg-Michaelson, *Worldly Spirituality*, 58.

53. Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 9:168, January 26, 1862.

54. Nibley, "Brigham Young on the Environment," 4.

55. Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 8:79, June 10, 1860.

56. Kelson, *Holy Place*, 107.

57. Northcott, *Environment and Christian Ethics*, 269.

58. Granberg-Michaelson, *Worldly Spirituality*, 86.

59. Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 11:136, August 1–10, 1865.

60. Aaron Kelson concurs on this point:

Those of us who believe that the ecological problems caused by people are at least as much the result of what we are rather than how many of us there are, and Latter-day Saints are certainly among this number, have a tremendous responsibility. We have a solemn obligation to distance ourselves from those practices and trends that lead to the destruction of the Creation and to the related suffering of our fellow beings. We have an obligation to show the world that people can live peaceably with the Creation. (Kelson, *Holy Place*, 159–60)

61. Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 8:67, June 3, 1860.

62. For a powerful Christian perspective on the relationship between over-consumption and environmental degradation, see Michael Schut, ed., *Simpler Living, Compassionate Life: A Christian Perspective* (Denver: Living the Good News, 1999). Also see the Public Broadcasting System documentary *Affluenza*, produced by John de Graaf and Vivia Boe, KCTS Television, 1997.

63. For an excellent historical overview of early Latter-day Saint environmental practice, the historical forces that drove it underground, and its resurgence in the early twentieth century, see Thomas G. Alexander, "Stewardship and Enterprise: The LDS Church and the Wasatch Oasis Environment, 1847–1930," *Western Historical Quarterly* 25 (autumn 1994): 340–64. For other historical essays on Mormon environmental practice, see Richard H. Jackson, "Righteousness and Environmental Change: The Mormons



and the Environment,” in *Essays on the American West, 1973–1974*, 5 (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press): 21–42; Jeanne Kay and Craig J. Brown, “Mormon Beliefs about Land and Natural Resources, 1847–1877,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 11 (July 1985): 253–67; and Terry B. Ball and Jack D. Brotherson, “Environmental Lessons from Our Pioneer Heritage,” *BYU Studies* 38, no. 3 (1999): 63–82.

64. Others who have recently written about the rich environmental beliefs of the Church include Hugh Nibley (Nibley, “Subduing the Earth,” 85–99; and Nibley, “Brigham Young on the Environment,” 3–29) and Aaron Kelson (Kelson, *Holy Place*). An encouraging collection of essays, Terry Tempest Williams, William B. Smart, and Gibbs M. Smith, eds., *New Genesis: A Mormon Reader on Land and Community* (Layton, Utah: Gibbs-Smith Publisher, 1998), also explores the experience of a variety of Latter-day Saint people, including Church leaders concerned with place; this book is discussed in Constance K. Lundburg, brief notices, *BYU Studies* 39, no. 1 (2000): 220–21. See also Michael G. Alder, “Earth: A Gift of Gladness,” *Ensign* 21 (July 1991): 27–28; and Kristen Rogers, “Stewards of the Earth,” *This People* 11 (spring 1990): 10–16.

65. Berry, *Unsettling of America*, 3–14.

66. Berry points to one important antidote to this unsettling: the tradition of rooting oneself in a particular place and taking responsibility for its future well-being. Berry, *Unsettling of America*, 4. While it is not always clear that rootedness translates into environmentally ethical behavior, clearly Brigham Young’s claim “This is the right place” is an important reminder of the value of working with nature’s accidents in a particular place rather than always seeking a more promising bluff around the next corner.

67. The President of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Gordon B. Hinckley, addressed the St. George Area Chamber of Commerce in 1998 and said: “It may be foolish to say to any member of a chamber of commerce—and particularly to realtors—that I hope you won’t continue to grow. If you do, then the culture, the spirit, and the ambiance of the community will change as it already has done so in a measure.” Williams, *New Genesis*, xii.

68. Granberg-Michaelson, *Tending the Garden*, 3.

69. Kinsley, *Ecology and Religion*, xx–xxi.

70. Such is the erroneous logic of Richard Foltz, who gives The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints credit for every anti-environmental manifestation in the state of Utah but refuses to see any link between Mormonism and the politics of many prominent Utah environmental activists. Indeed, he seems unaware of many such examples or surprised to find the few he mentions. Foltz, “Mormon Values,” 1–19. A more balanced view is offered by JoAnn Valenti, a non-LDS scholar at BYU whose research shows that “[positive] attitudes toward the environment in the Mormon population are more present than what you find in a cross-section sample of the U.S. public.” She argues against the blindness I refer to: “There’s a tendency to buy into a paranoia that I don’t see as productive or constructive. I think there is an element of mythology, misinformation, paranoia, suspicion and distrust that taints our ability to see the positive and to look forward. We’re more reluctant to assume something good is going to happen.” Quoted in an interview by Alexandra L. Woodruff, “Being a Mormon Environmentalist,” *Canyon Country Zephyr* (August–September 2000): 22–25.

71. Joe J. Christensen, “Greed, Selfishness, and Overindulgence,” *Ensign* 29 (May 1999): 9–11.