

# Of Reverence for Creation

Every way of life produces its own environment and in turn is influenced by that environment. It is possible for a powerful mind to have joy amidst vile surroundings, but it can have greater joy in pleasant surroundings. . . . The story of the Garden of Eden teaches us that environment is important.

“Our Glory or Our Condemnation,” *CWHN* 9:3

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We are being tested to demonstrate to the heavens, to ourselves, and to our fellows just how we would treat the things of a glorious and beautiful world if they were given to us as our very own. . . . We are placed in the position of a lover who is engaged to be married. If he cannot wait until he is properly wed, or if he displays an arrogant and brutal nature toward his promised bride, then the wedding had best be called off—he is not worthy of the prize.

“Brigham Young on the Environment,” 12

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It is through “greater sensibility” that we both enjoy and endure, for the appreciation of beauty is nothing less than the key to survival. Nature has so provided that we actually enjoy most doing and sensing the very things most conducive to our survival.

We delight in performing the most vital functions of life, and so simply by enjoying ourselves, we build up more formidable defenses against the powers of destruction than any accumulation of scientific data or learned admonition could provide. We eat long before we are in danger of dying of hunger and drink long before we reach a critical state of dehydration, simply because we enjoy eating and drinking. If we ate, drank, breathed, and slept only when persuaded by irrefutable scientific demonstration that if we did not do those things we would die, we would not be long for this world.

So it is in all things, and creatures as weak and vulnerable as man must cultivate a salutary sense of what is lovely and desirable and what is wrong and threatening, a feeling that hits them long before they can tell just what a thing is to be welcomed or dreaded.

“Brigham Young on the Environment,” 10

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This earth has been compared by many—most recently by a Latter-day Saint pharmacologist, Dr. A. B. Morrison—to “an exquisitely equipped spaceship.” It is enormously productive and contains unlimited supply for all who come to live on it, as long as they use its bounty “with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion,” the Lord has said (D&C 59:20); that is, properly distributed, without waste or inequality. It contains “all things . . . made for the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart; Yea, for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul” (D&C 59:18-19). Notice here that the eye and the heart have priority over the stomach, that taste and smell have claims equal to appetite, that the enlivening of the soul is as important as the strengthening of the body.

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Where men cannot foresee the distant effects of their actions on the environment because of the vastly complicated interrelationships of the balance of nature, what rule of action shall they follow? Brigham was never in doubt: the one sure guide for him was the feeling for beauty. He knew with Plato that the good, the true, and the beautiful are the same; that what looks and feels and sounds and tastes good is to that degree sound, useful, and trustworthy.

“Brigham Young on the Environment,” 9

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Humility is not a feeling of awe and reverence and personal unworthiness in the presence of overpowering majesty—anyone, even the bloody Khan of the Steppes, confesses to being humble in the presence of God. Plain humility is reverence and respect in the presence of the lowest, not the highest, of God’s creatures. Brigham Young said he often felt overawed in the presence of little children or any of his fellowmen—for in them he saw the image of his maker.

“Beyond Politics,” 283-84

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With all things going in one direction, men, stubbornly going in the opposite direction, naturally find themselves in the position of one going the wrong way on the freeway during rush hour; the struggle to live becomes a fight *against* nature. Having made himself allergic to almost everything by the Fall, man is given the choice of changing *his* nature so that the animal and vegetable creation will cease to afflict and torment him, or else of waging a truceless war of extermination against all that annoys him until he renders the earth completely uninhabitable.

“Man’s Dominion,” 30

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Abraham learned compassion both by being an outcast himself and by special instruction, regarding which there are some interesting stories.

When Melchizedek was instructing him in the mysteries of the priesthood, he told him that Noah and his people were permitted to survive in the ark “because they practiced charity.” On whom? Abraham asked, since they were alone in the ark. On the animals, was the answer, since they were constantly concerned with their comfort and welfare.

Again, Abraham once beheld a great vision (described also in the book of Abraham) of all the doings of the human race to come. What he saw appalled him. He had never dreamed that men could be so bad, and in a passionate outburst he asked God why he did not destroy the wicked at once. The answer humbled him: “I defer the death of the sinner, who might possibly repent and live!”

When Abraham saw with prophetic insight the crimes that Ishmael would commit against him and his house, he was about to turn the youth out into the desert, but the voice of God rebuked him: "Thou canst not punish Ishmael or any man for a crime he has not yet committed!" He learned by precept and experience that men are judged by God not as groups but as individuals.

But Abraham's most famous lesson in tolerance was a favorite story of Benjamin Franklin, which has been traced back as far as a thirteenth-century Arabic writer and may be much older. The prologue to the story is the visit of three angels to Abraham, who asked him what he charged for meals; the price was only that the visitor "invoke the name of God before beginning and praise it when you are finished."

But one day the patriarch entertained an old man who would pray neither before eating nor after, explaining to Abraham that he was a fire worshipper. His indignant host thereupon denied him further hospitality, and the old man went his way. But very soon the voice of the Lord came to Abraham, saying: "I have suffered him these hundred years, although he dishonored me; and thou couldst not endure him one night, when he gave thee no trouble?" Overwhelmed with remorse, Abraham rushed out after his guest and brought him back in honor. . . . "No one who is cruel to any creature," says an old formula, "can ever be a descendant of Abraham."

"New Look at the Pearl of Great Price" (November 1969): 123-25

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God will justify the taking of animal life to sustain man's want, but reserves a special blessing for those who place their own nobility before their necessity.

"Brigham Young on the Environment," 23

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Granted there are different levels and degrees that exist within as well as between species, still it is the privilege of every form of life to multiply in its sphere and element and have joy therein. Adam's dominion was a charge to see to it that all went well with God's creatures. It was not a license to exterminate them. . . .

There is a forgotten teaching of the early Jews and Christians that the dominion that God gave to Adam in Eden over his other creatures was nothing less than the holy priesthood, the power to act in God's stead.

"Brigham Young on the Environment," 21

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It is precisely because men now prey upon each other and shed the blood and waste the flesh of other creatures without need that "the world lieth in sin" (D&C 49:19-21).

"Man's Dominion," 31

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All creatures exist in their own particular spheres. . . . We feel a kinship with the animals—and we should. We are going to live with them in the eternities. We should love the critters, and they [will] learn to love us.

“Nibley the Scholar,” 12

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One morning just a week after we had moved into our house on Seventh North, as I was leaving for work, I found a group of shouting, arm-waving boys gathered around the big fir tree in the front yard. They had sticks and stones and in a state of high excitement were fiercely attacking the lowest branches of the tree, which hung to the ground.

“Why?” I asked.

“There was a quail in the tree,” they said in breathless zeal. “A quail!”

“Of course,” said I, “what is wrong with that?”

“But don’t you see, it is a live quail, a wild one!”

So they just had to kill it. They were on their way to the old B.Y. High School, and were Boy Scouts.

Does this story surprise you? What surprised me was when I later went to Chicago and saw squirrels running around the city parks in broad daylight. They would not last a day in Provo. . . . We have taught our children by precept and example that every living thing exists to be converted into cash and that whatever would not yield return should be quickly exterminated to make way for the creatures that do. . . . I have heard important Latter-day Saint leaders express this philosophy and have seen bishops and stake presidents teaching their reluctant boys the delights of hunting for pleasure.

The earth is our enemy, I was taught. Does it not bring forth noxious weeds to afflict and torment man? And who cared if his allergies were the result of the Fall, man’s own doing, and could be corrected only when he corrects himself? But one thing worried me: If God were to despise all things beneath him, as we do, where would that leave us?

Introduction to “Subduing the Earth,” 85-86

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In the snail-darter debate, the ultimate expression of contempt for life came from a senator from Utah who with heavy sarcasm asked, Why not declare the smallpox virus an endangered species? Where business interests are concerned, small living things are to be esteemed as no more than viruses.

“How Firm a Foundation!” *CWHN* 9:167

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It is significant that in the oldest traditions and records of the human race all those men who turned against God and man are represented at the same time as making war against the animals, the birds, and the fishes, and

destroying the forests and defiling the pure waters. This is told of Satan in the beginning, of Cain, of Ham, of Nimrod, of the Egyptian Seth, of the mad huntsmen of the steppes, of Nebuchadnezzar, of Esau, of Caesar, of Assurbanipal, and so on, all of whom sought dominion over others, over all others, and to achieve it only in one way –by force. The code name for such an order of things and such a program is Babylon.

“Our Glory or Our Condemnation,” *CWHN* 9:13-14

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“All things which come of the earth . . . are made for the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart; yea, for food and raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul” (D&C 59:18). The pleasing of the eye comes first, the gladdening of the heart next; only then come the food and clothing, and that for the benefit of the fine senses of taste and smell, with not a word about efficiency and convenience but with special attention to the enlivening of the *soul*. In his great Bicentennial message, President Kimball deplored the sad ascendancy in our society of the business mentality over the contemplation of the beauty around us.

“From the Earth Upon Which Thou Standest,” *CWHN* 12:551

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[There has always been a philosophy of hunting peculiar to Latter-day Saints.]. . . It’s a frontier attitude, conquering the West, as it were. But of course the presidency of the Church has consistently bucked that attitude. Brigham Young, Joseph F. Smith, and then President Kimball have all talked against it. Joseph Smith never carry anything larger than a pen knife. He who carries a gun will surely regret it. Brigham Young said if the Mormon people weren’t so ignorant, they’d be damned for their treatment of the creatures. President Kimball’s bicentennial talk against hunting was very exciting but it had almost no effect whatsoever. They swept it under the rug. We say a prophet is a prophet and then freely interpret how we want.

“Nibley Talks about Contemporary Issues,” 12