Editorial – The Christian and Environmental Issues

When I was a young high school student in the 1960's our environment of air, earth, and water was taken for granted. We breathed the air, took metals from the earth, placed our rubbish in the bowels of the earth, and drank the water supply without ever thinking about the word *pollution*. In fact, modern economic terms such as inflation, gross domestic product, consumer price index, and exchange rates, were foreign to my vocabulary. Little did I realise that economics and the environment would become so strongly linked. With our economic vision becoming global, as well as an increase in our material standard of living, the need for profit making has enhanced our output of greenhouse gases, our destruction of primal forests, and the chemical and biological pollution of our waterways. Our scientists and public commentators have warned us of the dire consequences of environmental pollution and mismanagement of our resources to the extent that environmental issues have become an important item on the political agenda. But what about the religious agenda? Are environmental issues of concern to the church? While it is true that the church was not at the forefront of bringing environmental issues to bear on the public conscience, the Seventh-day Adventist Church did vote a statement[1] on the environment at its Annual Council in Maryland in 1992. This statement affirms the centrality of the sabbath doctrine in our stewardship of the earth and of the redemption doctrine in bringing healing at both the personal and environmental level. But to what extent does an institutional statement filter down and impact the attitudes of its members? To what extent does one's political and religious affiliation correlate with certain attitudes and public commitment to the preservation of the environment?

Dr Howard Fisher, Senior Lecturer in Geography at Avondale College, discusses some of these issues in his feature article, "The Fate of Nature". He is actively involved in environmental issues and their management with local community organisations and has a keen interest in the topic from a Christian point of view. The relationship between the doctrines of creation and eschatology (study of the end time) and one's attitude to the environment is explored in the article. Dr Arthur Patrick reviews Professor Warren Trenchard's [2], "For the Beauty of the Earth: an Adventist Theology of Ecology" in the review section. Professor Trenchard believes that the Adventist commitment to am‡understanding of creation, sabbath, and sanctuary, makes it imperative that we embrace attitudes of environmental care and concern more openly than we have demonstrated in the past.

But, of course, attitude is one thing and action is another. In 1990 Jane Thayer[3] wrote that, "Words cannot reconcile us. It is by our lifestyle that we protect or plunder it (the earth)". Part of the General Conference statement[4] on the Environment reads, "Genuine progress toward caring for our natural environment rests upon both personal and cooperative effort. We accept the challenge to work toward restoring God's overall design. Moved by faith in God, we commit ourselves to promote the healing that rises at both personal and environmental levels from integrated lives dedicated to serve God and humanity". What, then, can we do individually and collectively to preserve and care for the world in which we live? Think about our use of resources. How can we conserve energy and protect our waterways? Motor vehicles consume energy and pollute the atmosphere. Do we really need the size and number of motor vehicles we currently have? Some of these issues are worthy of personal reflection, group discussion and debate and you will find some questions to begin this process at the conclusion of Dr Fisher's article. I trust that you will find this 4th volume of the journal helpful in your making decisions to be more proactive in caring for our earth over which we have been made stewards. Remember, the work of redemption wrought by our Lord includes not only that of our souls but also our earth.

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References

1 General Conference (1996). *Caring for Creation – A Statement on the Environment,* in, Statements, Guidelines and Other Documents (voted at Annual Council 1992).

2 Trenchard, W (2003). For the Beauty of the Earth: An Adventist Theology of Ecology. *Spectrum*, 31(3), 34–45.

3 Thayer, J (1990). Nature – Our Estranged Partner. *Adventist Review*, April 19.

4 General Conference (1996). Op cit. p 7.