

Enoch's Vision and Gaia: An LDS Perspective on Environmental Stewardship

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Many faithful Mormons are not familiar with pronouncements concerning environmental stewardship by current and former Church leaders because such teachings typically do not receive as much emphasis from the pulpit and in Church curriculum materials as other more core teachings. Nevertheless, the LDS canon of scriptures and the teachings of Joseph Smith and subsequent LDS Church leaders reveal a rich theology pertaining to the origin and purpose of the earth and to our responsibility as stewards over nature's bounty.

This article examines several salient implications arising from the LDS teaching that the earth has a spirit and feels pain as a consequence of the spiritual defilement and literal pollution inflicted on it by human beings, as the remarkable vision of the prophet Enoch suggests. This key aspect of Mormon ecotheology may resonate more with Native American beliefs, Eastern religions, and various philosophical traditions than with traditional Protestant and Catholic conceptions of the earth. In saying this, I do not suggest that other Christian faiths lack an environmental ethic. Indeed, many Christian denominations and other faiths more overtly embrace environmental stewardship in their teachings, liturgy, and policy statements.¹ Nevertheless, the LDS teachings described below, if studied and emphasized, provide profound spiritual insights not readily found elsewhere into our relationship with and responsibility for nature.

Moreover, Enoch's vision of an animistic earth largely com-

ports with the views of some modern scientists and naturalists who suggest that the earth's biosphere can be better understood as a living organism—sometimes referred to as “Gaia”—which maintains an equilibrium and relative constancy of temperature, atmosphere, and biospheric and geophysical cycles necessary to sustain life. As such, from both a scientific and spiritual perspective, environmental science and LDS theology both teach that if we live and consume with no respect for earth's delicate balance, we endanger the earth and ourselves.

The Earth's Spiritual Creation and Destiny

From the pulpit, we commonly emphasize the “preexistence” of mortal persons.² However, one aspect of the LDS concept of the preexistence that is, in some ways, unique to LDS theology³ is its recognition of the preexistence of all of God's creations including animals and plants. Understanding that, in the preexistence, as premortal spirits we rejoiced at the creation of the earth and that some preexistent spirits assisted in the creation itself (Abr. 3:23–24) should heighten appreciation for God's creation while in this life.

The Book of Moses recounts the creation of “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, of which I have spoken, spiritually, before they were naturally upon the face of the earth” (Moses 3:4–5). Referring to the physical creation of plant life, this passage continues: “And out of the ground made I, the Lord God, to grow every tree, naturally, that is pleasant to the sight of man; and man could behold it. And it became also a living soul. For it was spiritual in the day that I created it” (Moses 3:9). Heber C. Kimball taught: “There is nothing on this earth but what came from heaven, and it grew and was created before it grew on this earth”⁴ Similarly, Joseph Fielding Smith explained: “The spirits of men, beasts, and all animal life, existed before the foundation of the earth was laid, and are living entities.”⁵

Our reverence for the earth and understanding of its sacred nature predates our temporal existence. Joseph F. Smith emphasized that, during the preexistence, we concurred with and rejoiced in the plan of salvation which included the creation of the earth as our dwelling place: “Our spirits existed before they came

to this world. They were in the councils of heaven before the foundations of the earth were laid. We were there. We sang together with the heavenly hosts for joy when the foundations of the earth were laid, and when the plan for our existence upon this earth and redemption were mapped out. We were there; we were interested, and we took a part in this great preparation.”⁶

The LDS concept of the preexistence promotes a heightened intimacy with and reverence for the creation of the earth. It emphasizes the need to understand the earth’s importance in the plan of salvation. How can we despoil God’s earthly creations over which we rejoiced in the preexistence?

Similarly, the earth’s final destiny underscores our eternal connection to the earth, if we are worthy. Central to LDS theology is Joseph Smith’s millennial prophecy “that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory” (Tenth Article of Faith). During the millennium, the earth will be transformed to a “terrestrial state,” at which time the Savior will reign and dwell here.⁷ Joseph further revealed that, after the millennium, the earth will again be transformed, this time to a celestial glorified state.⁸ The doctrine that the earth itself will become the celestial abode for the righteous and, therefore, is something to be cherished eternally, contrasts with the traditional Christian belief that “our fundamental purpose on earth was to merit an eternity in heaven” and “the earth was really just a temporary testing ground.”⁹

The Spirits of All Living Things

Early Church leaders taught that, during mortality, all life forms—humankind, animals, and plants—have a spirit which coexists with their physical presence. Brigham Young explained that even natural landforms have a spirit: “The spirit constitutes the life of everything we see. Is there life in these rocks, and mountains? There is. Then there is a spirit peculiarly adapted to those rocks and mountains.”¹⁰ Joseph Fielding Smith explained: “No doubt the spirits that possess the bodies of the animals are in the similitude of their bodies. In other words the bodies of animals conform to the spirits which possess them, and which existed before they were placed on the earth. . . . Naturally, then, there is

some measure of intelligence in members of the animal kingdom.”¹¹

The “spirit,” as understood in LDS theology, is not immaterial. Rather, “all spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure” (D&C 131:7–8). Joseph Smith expounded on the nature of the spirit:

[A] very material difference [exists] between the body and the spirit: the body is supposed to be organized matter, and the spirit by many is thought to be immaterial, without substance. With this latter statement we should beg leave to differ—and state that spirit is a substance; that it is material, but that it is more pure, elastic, and refined matter than the body;—that it existed before the body, can exist in the body, and will exist separate from the body, when the body will be moldering in the dust; and will in the resurrection be again united with it.¹²

The concept that all creation has a spirit is not unique to LDS theology. Fifteenth-century Benedictine monk Basilius Valentinus offered: “The Earth is not a dead body, but is inhabited by a spirit that is its life and soul. All created things, minerals included, draw their strength from the earth spirit.”¹³ Henry More of Christ’s College, Cambridge University, lectured in the seventeenth century on the “Soul of the World, or Spirit of Nature,” which he believed explained the “vital congruity” evident in nature.¹⁴ Henry David Thoreau believed that “the earth I tread on is not a dead, inert mass; it is a body, has a spirit, is organic and fluid to the influence of the spirit.”¹⁵ Russian philosopher Peter Ouspensky reasoned that “there can be nothing dead or mechanical in Nature. . . . [L]ife and feeling . . . must exist in everything. . . . [A] mountain, a tree, a river, the fish in the river, drops of water, rain, a plant, fire—each separately must possess a mind of its own.”¹⁶

Outside Western tradition, the “spirit” component of the earth and nature commonly surfaces. Prevalent in North American native traditions is the concept of “spiritual naturism,” which “implies that everything in the universe is alive and given order and harmony by the Spirit.”¹⁷ In Eastern religions, “all being and things, animate and inanimate, were thought to be permeated with divine power or spirit such as the Tao or, in Shinto, *kami*. . . . Mahayana Buddhists speak of the *dharma*, or Buddha-nature of every object.”¹⁸

LDS theology not only emphasizes that all life forms have a divine spirit, but that the plan of salvation encompasses animal life. As Joseph Fielding Smith taught, “Animals do have spirits and . . . through the redemption made by our Savior they will come forth in the resurrection to enjoy the blessing of immortal life.”¹⁹ According to Bruce R. McConkie, the Savior’s “ransom includes a resurrection for man and for all forms of life.”²⁰ Elder Tad R. Callister wrote, “The Atonement fully extends its redemptive powers to this earth and to all forms of life thereon to the extent necessary to save them from physical and, where necessary, spiritual death.”²¹

The earth’s essence is both physical and spiritual—just like the dual nature of God’s children. But the earth’s and nature’s need for a Savior and the Atonement differs from ours. Christ “offered himself a sacrifice for sin, to answer the ends of the law” (1 Ne. 2:7). But unlike humankind, the earth has been perfectly obedient—it “abideth the law of a celestial kingdom, for it filleth the measure of its creation, and transgresseth not the law” (D&C 88:18–19, 25). Brigham Young instructed the Saints to “always keep in view that the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms—the earth and its fullness—will all, except the children of man, abide their creation—the law by which they were made, and will receive their exaltation.”²² While God’s central “work and glory” is to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39), he declared the creation to be “good” before Adam and his posterity inhabited the earth (Gen. 1:25). The Lord revealed that “heaven, the paradise of God,” contained beasts, creeping things, and fowls of the air, and “every other creature which God has created” (D&C 77:2). No wonder that if we wantonly destroy God’s creations, the Lord has warned that “the blood of every beast will I require at your hands” (JST, Gen. 9:9–11). Joseph Fielding Smith reminded in a 1928 general conference: “So we see that the Lord intends to save, not only the earth and the heavens, not only man who dwells upon the earth, but all things which he has created. The animals, the fishes of the sea, the fowls of the air, as well as man, are to be recreated, or renewed, through the resurrection, for they too are living souls.”²³ If we comprehend that all life has a spirit, is beloved of God, and destined for eternal life through the atonement, would we ever wastefully or wantonly destroy?

Joy Experienced by Living Things

Theologians have debated whether the earth and its nonhuman life forms have any purpose and value other than to feed, clothe, and shelter God's children. A revelation through Joseph Smith assured:

The fulness of the earth is yours, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and that which climbeth upon the trees and walketh upon the earth. Yea, and the herb, and the good things which come of the earth, whether for food or for raiment, or for houses, or for barns, or for orchards, or for gardens, or for vineyards; Yea, 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. Yea, for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul. (D&C 59:16–19)

In the hierarchy of beneficial uses of earth's bounty, the aesthetic attributes of "pleas[ing] the eye and gladden[ing] the heart" and "enliven[ing] the soul" appear to be at least as important as providing food and raiment. Many LDS and other theologians have rejected the notion that the sole purpose of the earth—and its plant and animal life—is only to satisfy the needs of humankind. In the eighteenth century, the Lutheran minister John Bruckner maintained that the "whole plan of Providence" included the "web of life."²⁴ Church leaders and LDS scholars have taught that animal and plant life have the right to exist in their own sphere and to experience "joy." As Hugh Nibley explained, central to LDS theology is the understanding that "while 'subduing the earth' we must be about multiplying these organisms of plants and animals God has designed shall dwell upon it, namely all forms of life, each to multiply in its sphere and element and have *joy* therein."²⁵

The concept that other forms of life experience joy is a logical consequence of the fact that all of God's creations possess a spirit. In 1853, Apostle Orson Pratt stated that "we are compelled to believe that every vegetable, whether great or small, has a living intelligent spirit capable of feeling, knowing, and *rejoicing* in its sphere."²⁶ Joseph Smith revealed that we look forward to "the *happiness* of man, and of beasts, and of creeping things, and of the fowls of the air" that will exist in the next life" (D&C 77:2; emphasis mine). Joseph Fielding Smith similarly taught that "the Lord

gave life to every creature . . . [and] commanded [them] to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. It was intended that all creatures should be *happy* in their several elements.”²⁷ He further explained that all living things have the right to exist and experience joy: “We cannot restore life when it is taken, and all creatures have the right to *enjoy* life and happiness on the earth where the Lord has placed them.”²⁸

The “right” to exist and to experience joy appear connected. Joseph F. Smith proclaimed: “I am a firm believer, with reference to these things, in the simple words of one of the poets: ‘Take not away the life you cannot give, For all things have an equal right to live.’”²⁹ In the nineteenth century, George Q. Cannon taught: “Our Great Creator . . . has bestowed life upon man, and upon beasts, birds, fishes and insects, and no one has the right to take that life, except in the way and under the conditions the Lord prescribes.”³⁰ A 1909 First Presidency message reconfirmed: “The whole animal creation will be perfected and perpetuated in the Hereafter, each class in its ‘distinct order or sphere,’ and will enjoy ‘eternal felicity.’ That fact has been made plain in this dispensation.”³¹

Not understanding that animals experience joy historically contributed to the position by some that nonhuman life had no inherent right to exist. French philosopher Rene Descartes based his conclusion that animals have no rights on the assumption that they have no minds or feelings.³² Pope Pius IX supported the slaughter of animals as a spectator sport for entertainment because animals have no spirit, feelings, or rights.³³

In contrast, an awareness that all forms of life have feelings and divine potential promotes ethical behavior toward nature. When conditions permit animals to follow their instincts, they experience the full measure of their creation and experience joy. What is the source and nature of joy experienced by nonhuman life forms and how does it differ from the joy experienced by humankind? Instinct governs animals’ migratory patterns, breeding behavior, and defense mechanisms. Scientists may struggle to precisely define instinct, but poets and philosophers have long observed this “life force.” Apostle Harold B. Lee suggested that “we might [refer to] . . . the reason in man and the instinct in animal life . . . as the light of Christ.”³⁴ Animals experience joy when they

follow their instincts while human beings experience joy when we overcome the “natural man” (Eph. 4:22–24, 2 Ne. 9:39, Mosiah 3:19, D&C 3:4). When we subdue our selfishness, envy, greed, pride, and lust—characteristics of the carnal man that make us enemies to God—we, too, experience joy. We also experience joy and satisfaction as we make decisions that allow other creatures to live, follow their instincts, and experience joy in their own sphere.

Recognizing the rights of other life forms encourages ethical conduct. Philosophy professor Paul W. Taylor in *Respect for Nature* suggests that moral conduct must be “life-centered” or “biocentric,” meaning that humans accord other life forms the “opportunity to fulfill their various potentials.”³⁵ The United Nations Charter for Nature states: “Every form of life is unique, warranting respect regardless of its worth to man, and, to accord other organisms such recognition, man must be guided by a moral code of conduct.”³⁶ Recognizing that all life has a right to satisfy the measure of its creation—as implied by this U.N. declaration—falls squarely within LDS ecotheology.

Enoch's Vision of the Pained and Weary Earth

Just as the earth and life thereon can experience “joy,” the earth can experience pain and sorrow. Enoch's vision in the Pearl of Great Price constitutes the most poignant confirmation in LDS scripture of the reality of the earth's spirit and capacity to experience pain. Enoch ascended a mountain and “beheld the heavens open” and “all nations of the earth” (Moses 7:3, 23). After observing the Savior's mortal ministry and wickedness of humankind, the account in the Book of Moses records: “Enoch looked upon the earth; and he heard a voice from the bowels thereof, 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?”³⁷ When Enoch heard the earth mourn, “he wept and cried unto the Lord, saying: O Lord, wilt thou not have compassion upon the earth?” Enoch felt so distressed by this vision, he repeatedly asked the Lord, “When shall the earth rest?” He learned that after the Lord comes again “in

the last days, in the days of wickedness” then “the day shall come that the earth shall rest” (Moses 7:60–61).

Some might assert that the “filthiness” referenced in Enoch’s vision and a reference to “pollution” in Doctrine and Covenants 103:14 equate solely to spiritual wickedness, not to literal pollution caused from careless, wasteful, or excessive use of natural resources. This attitude, however, assumes that literal pollution is not a form of sin, a position that is countered by repeated teachings of Church leaders. President Gordon B. Hinckley affirmed, “This earth is His creation. When we make it ugly, we offend him.”³⁸ President Ezra Taft Benson explained the connection between a lack of reverence for life and despoliation of the environment: “If there isn’t a reverence for life itself, there is apt to be little reverence for the resources God has placed here on which we must call. Irreverence for God, of life, and for our fellowmen take the form of things like littering, heedless strip-mining, pollution of water and air. But these are, after all, outward expressions of the inner man.”³⁹ Joseph F. Smith earlier taught: “To Him all life is sacred creation for the use of His children. Do we stand beside Him in our tender regard for life?”⁴⁰

Other Church leaders have taught that God will judge His children on how they exercise their stewardship over the earth. A revelation to Joseph Smith announces: “I, the Lord . . . make every man accountable, as a steward over earthly blessings, which I have made and prepared for my creatures” (D&C 104:13). Brigham Young instructed the Saints: “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, until we cease operating in this existence.”⁴¹ According to Hugh Nibley, “A favorite theme of Brigham Young was that the dominion God gives man is designed to test him, to enable him to show to himself, his fellows, and all the heavens just how he would act if entrusted with God’s own power; if he does not act in a godlike manner, he will never be entrusted with a creation of his own worlds without end.”⁴² Heber C. Kimball recorded that “Brigham Young was speaking of the earth and telling us that we should be cautious how we use it, for it is our mother, and the man that will disgrace his mother is unwor-

thy of her fostering care.”⁴³ More recently, Elder Alexander B. Morrison rhetorically posed questions that the Savior might ask Saints at the final judgement: “‘What have you done with the earth which my Father and I gave you as a home? Have you cherished and protected it? Have you dressed it and kept it, as your father Adam was commanded to do? Or have you laid waste to it, defiled its waters, destroyed its fertile lands, befouled its life-giving air?’ To those questions, I fear there are many, even among those who aspire to become a Zion people, who will hang their heads in shame. The earth groans under the insults inflicted upon it.”⁴⁴

The filthiness humankind has inflicted upon the earth, causing it to mourn and the prophet Enoch to weep, must be viewed as both spiritual disobedience and literal pollution—both forms of wickedness which defile the earth.

Gaia as an Angry Earth

Enoch’s vision of an animate earth—a living being with a spirit, personality, and even gender—might be considered by some as purely metaphorical. Yet the view that the earth is literally a living organism has a long history. Philosophers, poets, Native American traditions, Eastern religions, and early naturalists have opined that the earth is a living organism. In the fourth century B.C., Plato advanced the concept of “Anima Mundi,” which had origins in even more ancient mythology. He asserted, “This world is indeed a living being endowed with a soul and intelligence . . . a single visible living entity containing all other living entities, which by their nature are all related.”⁴⁵ Renaissance philosopher Giambattista della Porta (1535–1615) wrote: “The whole world is knit and bound within itself: for the world is a living creature. . . . When one part suffers, the rest also suffers with it.”⁴⁶ Irish poet George William Russell reflected: “Earth revealed itself to me as a living being. . . . This reverence came to me as a boy listening to the voice of birds one coloured evening in summer, when suddenly birds and trees and grass and tinted air and myself seemed but one mood or companionship, and I felt a certitude that the same spirit was in all.”⁴⁷ In most Native American traditions, according to Native American scholar and filmmaker Teresa C. McLuhan, “the earth is not only compositionally balanced, but the earth also is sacred. She is physically alive and spiri-

tual and human beings must walk with her in goodness, harmony, beauty and interdependence.”⁴⁸

Among modern scientists, James Lovelock first developed the “Gaia Theory,” named after the earth goddess of Greek mythology, to help explain how the earth’s biosphere and atmosphere function as a tightly integrated, self-regulating, evolving system or organism. Lovelock explained, “I am not thinking of the Earth as alive in a sentient way, or even alive like an animal or a bacterium.”⁴⁹ Rather, the earth’s biosphere functions or “behaves” as a living system to maintain temperature and atmospheric conditions in an equilibrium conducive to life through a complex set of interactions or “feedback loops.”⁵⁰

Lovelock and many other climate scientists believe that the earth behaves like a living organism that now suffers from the equivalent of a fever known as global warming or climate change caused by excessive greenhouse gas emissions which disrupt its balance and which, if left unabated, will result in temperature increases which could render much of the earth’s surface uninhabitable by 2100.⁵¹

The ethical and theological implications of climate change warrant careful examination. Lovelock warns: “Unless we see the Earth as a planet that behaves as if it were alive, at least to the extent of regulating its climate and chemistry, we will lack the will to change our way of life and to understand that we have made it our greatest enemy.”⁵² He postulates that, as we commit environmental offenses that alter the delicate harmony and balance that sustain life, “Gaia will look after *herself*. And the best way for her to do that might well be to get rid of us.”⁵³ “Like an old lady who has to share her house with a growing and destructive group of teenagers, Gaia grows angry, and if they do not mend their ways she will evict them.”⁵⁴ Lovelock and other scientists suggest that the earth has the ability to “purge itself of disruptive elements just as a simpler organism remove[s] potentially poisonous liquid and solid wastes and trie[s] to destroy cancers and infections.”⁵⁵

The question is whether the concept of Gaia (whether literal or metaphorical) and Enoch’s vision of the earth as a living entity with a spirit that feels pain for environmental and spiritual sins against her can awaken in humanity a deeper environmental stewardship and conservation ethic. Ironically, in *Our Angry Earth*,

Isaac Asimov and Frederik Pohl dismissed the concept that, as we sin, the earth becomes cursed in the biblical sense; but at the same time, they conceded that the inescapable “consequences of our environmental sins” appears to be the poisoning of the earth and “destruction of the environment we depend on for life.”⁵⁶ In contrast, theologian Richard Baer suggests that “failure to fulfill our obligations as faithful trustees of the gifts of God’s creation will inevitably bring God’s judgment upon us. The earth itself will rebel against our greedy and thoughtless exploitation of nature and our irresponsible fecundity.”⁵⁷

Even if one does not accept certain particulars about Gaia becoming overheated through human activity, viewing the earth as a complex living organism that sustains life through maintaining a delicate balance appears consistent with both science and LDS theology. Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson elaborated on the complexity of the equilibrium between earth’s ecosystems: Life forms on earth have “evolved over hundreds of millions of years to their present condition by the activity of the biosphere, a stupendously complex layer of living creatures whose activities are locked together in precise but tenuous global cycles of energy and transformed organic matter.”⁵⁸ Eighteenth-century Swedish botanist Linneaus, who devised an early plant classification system, explained: “All of animate nature is thus bound together in common interest by the chains of sustenance that link the living to the dead, the predator to its prey, the beetle to the dung on which it feeds. . . . God has set up an enduring community of peaceful co-existence.”⁵⁹ Another early naturalist, Alexander von Humbolt, sought to describe the “harmony of nature” in spiritual terms based on his scientific observations “amidst that solemn and stupendous scenery, those melancholy and sacred solitudes, where [nature] speaks in a voice so well understood by the mysterious sympathy of the feeling heart.”⁶⁰

George Q. Cannon wisely counseled that humankind must take care not to upset the harmony and balance in nature: “An all-wise Creator has arranged many things which puny man does not fully understand. In our attempts to improve on nature we frequently make hideous mistakes. . . . Nothing was created in vain. Everything has its uses, if we but knew them; and efforts to destroy the equilibrium are generally disastrous.”⁶¹ Joseph F. Smith

similarly acknowledged the existence of such a balance and the imperative to avoid unknowingly disrupting nature's balance: "If we could understand all the purposes of God in His wonderful creations, we would avoid diligently the dangers of disturbing the balance in the distribution of life which God so wonderfully ordained."⁶²

Gaia's Theological Implications

To some members of the LDS Church, the idea of an angry or vengeful earth, an earth that is our "enemy," appears to contradict the idea of a benevolent earth created to provide sustenance for Adam, Eve, and their posterity, for it "pleaseth God that he hath given all these things unto man; for unto this end were they made to be used" (D&C 59:20). Yet Gaia's capacity to "feel pain" resonates with Enoch's vision in which he "heard the earth mourn" due to the "filthiness which is gone forth out of me" (Moses 7:48-49).

Some LDS leaders have emphasized that though the earth is holy, as we defile it, the earth will no longer nurture us. Brigham Young taught that "the earth under their feet will be holy; . . . the soil of the earth will bring forth in its strength, and the fruits thereof will be meat for man."⁶³ But he considered those "who pollute the earth" in the same company with "murderers, thieves, robbers, liars, whoremongers, [and] drunkards."⁶⁴ Heber C. Kimball similarly counseled: "Those who live upon this land, or any other that God gives to His people, have peculiar promises made to them. Then do not pollute this land, nor pollute yourselves or your fellow creatures, but let us keep ourselves pure and clean."⁶⁵ John Taylor predicted that eventually the day would come when the earth will be cleansed from the filth which has plagued it: "This earth, after wading through all the corruptions of men, being cursed for his sake, and not permitted to shed forth its full luster and glory, must yet take its proper place in God's creations; be purified from that corruption under which it has groaned for ages, and become a fit place for redeemed men, angels, and God to dwell upon."⁶⁶

LDS scripture repeats the theme of the earth's "curse" as a consequence of iniquity. As wickedness increased in Enoch's day, "the earth trembled, and the mountains fled; . . . and the rivers of

water turned out of their course; and the roar of the lions was heard out of the wilderness” (Moses 7:13). Nephi instructed his rebellious brothers: “Behold, the Lord hath created the earth that it should be inhabited. . . . And he raiseth up a righteous nation, and destroyeth the nations of the wicked. And he leadeth away the righteous into precious lands, and the wicked he destroyeth, and curseth the land unto them for their sakes” (1 Ne. 17:36–38). Alma taught his son: “Yea, and cursed be the land forever and ever unto those workers of darkness and secret combinations, even unto destruction, except they repent before they are fully ripe” (Alma 37:31).

The book of Ether provides a detailed account of the Lord cursing the land as a consequence of wickedness and blessing the land when the people repent. As an otherwise prosperous people grew more wicked during the reign of Heth, prophets warned that “there should come a curse upon the face of the land; yea, even there should be a great famine, in which they should be destroyed if they did not repent.” After the people rejected the prophetic message, “there began to be a great dearth upon the land, and the inhabitants began to be destroyed exceedingly fast because of the dearth, for there was no rain upon the face of the earth.” The fortunes of the people improved as they repented: “Now when the people saw that they must perish they began to repent of their iniquities and cry unto the Lord. And it came to pass that when they had humbled themselves sufficiently before the Lord he did send rain upon the face of the earth; and the people began to revive again, and there began to be fruit in the north countries, and in all the countries round about. And the Lord did show forth his power unto them in preserving them from famine” (Ether 9:28, 30–31, 34–35).

An 1831 revelation that Joseph Smith received stated: “The Lord, in the beginning cursed the land, even so in the last days have I blessed it, in its time, for the use of my saints, that they may partake the fatness thereof” (D&C 61:17). But he warned that “vanity and unbelief have brought the whole church under condemnation” in part as a consequence of failing to repent; as a result, “there remaineth a scourge and judgment to be poured out upon the children of Zion. For shall the children of the kingdom pollute my holy land? Verily, I say unto you, Nay” (D&C 84:57–59).⁶⁷

The notion that the earth would become “cursed” due to humankind’s wickedness is not unique to LDS theology. A repeated theme in the Old Testament is how God punishes the children of Israel for violating His commandments by using natural means such as floods, droughts, and famines. In Hugh Nibley’s words, to the disobedient “all nature becomes his enemy.”⁶⁸ Isaiah prophesied that, during the last day, the greater part of the earth would be cursed due to transgression: “The earth also is defiled under the inhabitants thereof; because they have transgressed the laws, changed the ordinance, broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore hath the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left” (Isa. 24:5–6). Descriptions in the New Testament and LDS scripture of the earth’s final cleansing give horrifying details of earthquakes, famine, pestilence, and extreme heat when “the earth shall burn as an oven” (Nahum 1:5; see also 1 Ne. 22:15; 3 Ne. 26:3; D&C 29:9, 45:50, 63:34, 64:24, 133:41 [cleansing by heat and fire]; Alma 10:22 [famine]; D&C 88:80 [earthquakes]). Only then will the Earth “rest, and be cleansed from the filthiness” (Moses 7:48).

“Mother Earth” as a universal symbol exists in ancient and primitive cultures, although most organized religious traditions do not recognize the literal spirit embodied in the earth as suggested in Enoch’s vision. Understanding that the earth itself possesses a literal spiritual and sacred dimension should heighten humankind’s awareness of, and ethical responsibility toward, nature. As George B. Handley, professor of humanities at Brigham Young University, explains: “The notion that physical matter and all living things have some living spiritual character grants a sacred identity to the nonhuman realm, and this would seem to give us pause to consider the ethics of our use of such inspirited material.”⁶⁹

In *The Voice of the Earth*, cultural historian Theodore Roszak suggests that the widespread belief that “we have no ethical obligation to our planetary home” constitutes a societal “epidemic psychosis” rooted in our spiritual disconnection from the earth:

The Earth hurts, and we hurt with it. If we could still accept the imagery of a Mother Earth, we might say that the planet’s umbilical

cord links to us at the root of the unconscious mind. Our culture gives us little opportunity to stop and to honor that great truth. . . . But sometimes the voice of the Earth breaks through to us in an instant of realization that flashes back across the eons, reminding us of who we are, where we came from, what we are made of. For an instant we touch the great cosmic continuity that is easily lost in the frenzied affairs of the day.⁷⁰

Today our families are threatened by spiritual and temporal destruction as we often unthinkingly defile the earth and consume more natural resources than necessary. The prophet Alma pronounced a blessing on his children and then “blessed the earth” (Alma 45:15). We can do likewise. As explained by Elder Steven E. Snow: “Our generation, more than any other, has the ability to irretrievably change the land. Financial rewards provide tremendous pressure to unleash our technology to reinvent our surroundings. There will be growth; change will come. But failure to care for the land on which we live means turning our backs on a heritage laid down carefully and at such great cost by our forefathers—and will leave us immeasurably poorer.”⁷¹ Perhaps Enoch’s inquiry to the Lord—“Wilt thou not have compassion upon the earth?”—applies to us.

Notes

1. Roger S. Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet's Future* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 81–110, provides examples of environmental declarations from the World Council of Churches, other religious organizations, and specific denominations.

2. First Presidency (Joseph F. Smith, John R. Winder, and Anthon H. Lund), “The Origin of Man,” *Improvement Era* 13 (November 1909): 75–81, rpt., as <http://lds.org/ensign/2002/02/the-origin-of-man?lang=eng> (accessed February 21, 2011): “Man as a spirit was begotten and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father, prior to coming upon the earth in a temporal body.”

3. While the concept of a preexistence is not unique to LDS theology, Terryl L. Givens, *When Souls Had Wings: Pre-Mortal Existence in Western Thought* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6, 217, explains that the doctrine was largely relegated to “the peripheries and underground of Western thought,” leaving the LDS version “in many regards, unique.” Givens’s foundational work handily examines the unique origin and theological implications of the LDS concept of the preexistence but

not its ecological implications (212–20). This observation is not, in any way, a criticism of Givens’s treatment but rather an acknowledgement that the ecological implications of the preexistence fell outside the scope of his examination.

4. Heber C. Kimball, August 2, 1857, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1855–86), 5:137.

5. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols., compiled by Bruce R. McConkie (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1954), 1:62.

6. Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine* (1919; rpt., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977 printing), 93.

7. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 1:84.

8. Joseph Smith clarified that the “sea of glass” (Rev. 4:6) “is the earth, in its sanctified, immortal, and eternal state” (D&C 77:1).

9. Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith*, 90.

10. Brigham Young, “When I Contemplate the Subject of Salvation: A Sermon Delivered on February 12, 1854,” in *The Essential Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1992), 82.

11. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Man, His Origin and Destiny* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954), 194.

12. Joseph Fielding Smith, comp. and ed., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (1938; rpt., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1977), 207.

13. T. C. McLuhan, *The Way of the Earth: Encounters with Nature in Ancient and Contemporary Thought* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 21.

14. Donald Worster, *Nature’s Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 41–42.

15. Roderick Nash, *The Rights of Nature: A History of Environmental Ethics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 37.

16. Peter Ouspensky, quoted in *ibid.*, 65–66.

17. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Religion and the Order of Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 34.

18. Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 113.

19. Joseph Fielding Smith, “Your Question: Do Animals Have Spirits?”, *Improvement Era* 40 (January 1958): 16.

20. Bruce R. McConkie, “Seven Deadly Heresies: Speech Given on 1 June 1980,” <http://speeches.byu.edu/reader/reader.php?id=6770> (accessed February 7, 2011).

21. Tad R. Callister, *The Infinite Atonement* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 87.

22. Brigham Young, September 30, 1860, *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1855–86), 8:191.

23. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Conference Report*, October 1928, 100.

24. John Bruckner, *A Philosophical Survey of the Animal Creation*, 1768, quoted in Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 20.
25. Hugh Nibley, "Man's Dominion, or Subduing the Earth," in *Brigham Young Challenges the Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1994), 6; emphasis mine.
26. Orson Pratt, "Figure and Magnitude of Spirits," *The Seer* 1, no. 3 (March 1853): 34; rpt., Salt Lake City: Eborn Books, 2000; emphasis mine. See Psalm 96:12-13: "Let the field be joyful and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice before the Lord: for he cometh, for he cometh to judge the earth."
27. Joseph Fielding Smith, "Is It a Sin to Kill Animals Wantonly?" *Answers to Gospel Questions*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1963), 4:44; emphasis mine.
28. Joseph Fielding Smith, *Church History and Modern Revelation* (Salt Lake City: Council of the Twelve Apostles, 1946), 210; emphasis mine.
29. Joseph F. Smith, "The Destruction of Animal Life," *Juvenile Instructor* 48 (May 1913): 308-9.
30. George Q. Cannon, "Revelation—Wanton Killing," *Juvenile Instructor* 24 (December 1, 1889): 548.
31. First Presidency, "The Origin of Man," 81; the internal quotation is from D&C 77:3.
32. Worster, *Nature's Economy*, 40.
33. *Ibid.*, 27.
34. Harold B. Lee, *Conference Report*, October 1944, 74. The light of Christ "is in all things, which giveth life to all things, which is the law by which all things are governed" (D&C 88:13).
35. Paul W. Taylor, quoted in Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 155.
36. Preamble, United Nations Charter for Nature, United Nations General Assembly Resolution 37/7, October 28, 1982, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/37/a37r007.htm> (accessed February 8, 2011).
37. David G. Hallman, *Ecotheology: Voices from South and North* (New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 95 (quoting a similar passage in the "Great Euchologion," the chief liturgical book of the Eastern Orthodox Church: "The earth is without words, yet groans and cries: 'Why, all people, do you pollute me with so many evils?"). See also Romans 8:22: "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." Elder Jeffrey R. Holland also described the prophet Zenos on "the earth's reaction to the crucifixion (1 Ne. 19:11-12) in terms that stress the earth's pain: "Nephi and Zenos who clearly understood that Christ is the creator and father of the earth, added this marvelous insight as to why his creation reacted so violently to the crucifix-

ion. This was earth's God being crucified, this was creation's benefactor, this was 'the God of nature' suffering on the cross, and nature would not receive that injustice passively. It reacted in global groaning and sorrow. It reacted in convulsion and outrage and mourning." Jeffrey R. Holland, *Christ and the New Covenant* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997), 43–44.

38. Gordon B. Hinckley, quoted in 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), frontispiece.

39. Ezra Taft Benson, February 1, 1976, quoted in Alexander B. Morrison, *Visions of Zion* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1993), 83.

40. Joseph F. Smith, "Humane Day," *Juvenile Instructor* 53 (April 1918): 182–83.

41. Brigham Young, June 3, 1860, *Journal of Discourses*, 8:67.

42. Nibley, *Brigham Young Challenges the Saints*, 10.

43. Heber C. Kimball, April 27, 1862, *Journal of Discourses*, 9:336.

44. Morrison, *Visions of Zion*, 77.

45. Plato, *Timeus*, quoted in Stephan Harding, *Animate Earth: Science, Intuition and GAIA*, 24.

46. Giambattista della Porta, quoted in Carolyn Merchant, *The World as an Organism* (New York: Harper Collins, 1989), 104.

47. George William Russell, 1932, quoted in T. C. McLuhan, *Cathedrals of the Spirit: The Message of Sacred Places* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), 13, 64.

48. Henrietta Mann, quoted in T. C. McLuhan, *The Way of the Earth* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 416. Henrietta Mann is a full-blood Cheyenne-Arapaho and a professor of Native American Studies, University of Montana.

49. James Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia: Earth's Climate Crisis and the Fate of Humanity* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 162.

50. Harding, *Animate Earth*, 54, 67.

51. Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia*, 60, 62–65. Interestingly, many of the apocalyptic scriptures pertaining to the end of the earth describe heat and fire. Deuteronomy 32:24: "They shall be burnt with hunger, and devoured with burning heat, and with bitter destruction"; Job 24:19: "Drought and heat consume the snow waters: so doth the grave those which have sinned"; 2 Peter 3:10: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up"; Revelation 16:8–9: "And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great

heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory"; 3 Nephi 26:3: "And he did expound all things, even from the beginning until the time that he should come in his glory—yea, even all things which should come upon the face of the earth, even until the elements should melt with fervent heat, and the earth should be wrapt together as a scroll, and the heavens and the earth should pass away"; Mormon 9:2: "When the Lord shall come, yea, even that great day when the earth shall be rolled together as a scroll, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, yea, in that great day when ye shall be brought to stand before the Lamb of God—then will ye say that there is no God?"; D&C 101:25: "And also that of element shall melt with fervent heat; and all things shall become new, that my knowledge and glory may dwell upon all the earth"; Moses 7:8: "For behold, the Lord shall curse the land with much heat, and the barrenness thereof shall go forth forever; and there was a blackness came upon all the children of Canaan, that they were despised among all people."

52. Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia*, 162. Lovelock makes it clear that he does not view the earth "as alive in a sentient way, or even alive like an animal or bacterium. . . . It has never been more than metaphor—an *aide pensée*" (16).

53. Isaac Asimov and Frederik Pohl, *Our Angry Earth* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 1991), 21.

54. Lovelock, *The Revenge of Gaia*, 47.

55. Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 158.

56. Asimov and Pohl, *Our Angry Earth*, vii–viii, 19.

57. Richard Baer, quoted in Nash, *The Rights of Nature*, 101.

58. Edward O. Wilson, *The Future of Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 39.

59. Worster, *Nature's Economy*, 35.

60. Alexander von Humbolt, quoted in *ibid.*, 135–36.

61. George Q. Cannon, "Topics of the Times: Why Continually Want to Kill, Kill, Kill!" *Juvenile Instructor* 34 (August 15, 1899): 492–93.

62. Joseph F. Smith, "Birds," *Juvenile Instructor* 50 (June 1915): 372–73.

63. Brigham Young, April 6, 1852, *Journal of Discourses*, 1:203.

64. Brigham Young, June 12, 1860, *Journal of Discourses*, 8:84.

65. Heber C. Kimball, June 10, 1855, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:261.

66. John Taylor, *The Government of God* (Liverpool, England: S.W. Richards, 1852), 82.

67. Similarly, in the last days, according to the apocryphal *Apocalypse of Abraham*, "all the growing things will be blighted by the . . . great law-

lessness, and the plagues will come over all creatures of all the earth.”
Quoted in Nibley, *Brigham Young Challenges the Saints*, 21 note 48.

68. Nibley, *Brigham Young Challenges the Saints*, 16.

69. George B. Handley, “The Environmental Ethics of Mormon Belief,” *BYU Studies*, 40, no. 2 (Summer 2001): 187–211.

70. Theodore Roszak, *The Voice of the Earth* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 14, 308–9.

71. Steven E. Snow, “Skipping the Grand Canyon,” in Williams, Smart, and Smith, *New Genesis*, 244.