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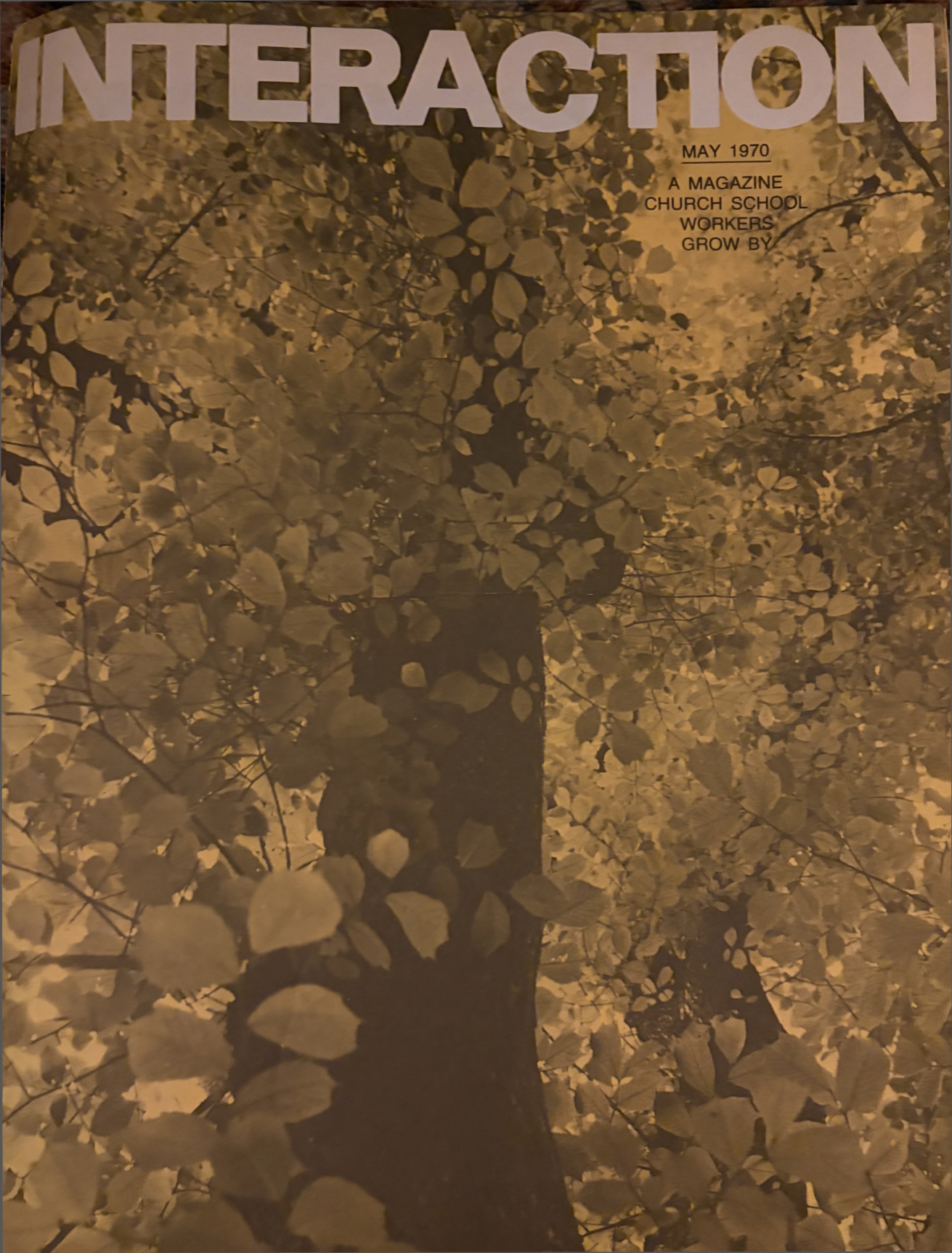

paint nature as mere background for man. God's creative artistry does not produce what is finally only a human portrait. God produces a landscape and a seascape in which man is but one creature among many. This is why the account of the creation in Genesis 1 has the cadence it does: "And God saw that it was good." God is depicted as valuing *every* dimension of His creative works, not just the dimension of man.

The psalmist, with poetic imagination, makes this point, and not without a little humor. He says that God created the sea monsters, those beasts of the deep, so they could play in the sea (Ps. 104:26). This is but another way of suggesting that God takes delight in all the works of His creative hands.

The Biblical point is that God has a special purpose for nature as well as a special purpose for man. God does crown man with glory and honor (Ps. 8:5), but He also bestows His glory on the whole earth (Is. 6:1-3) and the heavens (Ps. 19:1). He makes a covenant with man, but He also makes a covenant with nature. (Gen. 9:12)

It should not seem strange, then, that when the Biblical writers turned their attention more and more to the future dawning of God's kingdom, as they did in the later books of the Old Testament and in the New Testament, the majestic Final Day was seen to be a day of fulfillment for *the whole of nature* as well as a day for man. The final coming of the kingdom of God, according to the Bible, is to bring not only a renewal of man—a new Jerusalem—but also a renewal of the whole cosmos—a new heaven and a new earth! (Rev. 21:1)

Furthermore, within this universal divine theater, man is called to a special relationship to nature, according to the Bible. It is true that man is called to have dominion, both as overlord and caretaker; and that truth is important. But in addition, according to the Bible, *man is called to be a wondering and rejoicing onlooker.* He is called to wonder, for example, at the beasts. Here is Job referring to the hippopotamus: "Behold his strength in his loins, and his power in the muscles of his belly. . . . His bones are tubes of bronze, his limbs like bars of iron." (Job 40:16, 18)

At the same time, man is called to enter into God's joy in all things as they, along with man himself, reflect God's glory. The psalmist expresses this idea when he says: "The pastures of the wilderness drip, the hills gird themselves with joy" (Ps. 65:12). Similarly, the psalmist enjoys the sun, "which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and like a strong man runs its course with joy" (Ps. 19:5). Something of this sense of joy before nature is evident also in the saying of Jesus: "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." (Matt. 6:29)

The question arises, What about man-made things? What about a house, for example, or a machine? This is an especially pressing question for us, surrounded as we are by all manner of man-made things, including our own peculiar "sea monsters"—the jet airplane, the rocket, the computer, etc.

Perhaps the answer to the question is already before us: We can relate ourselves to the great modern machines as Job related himself to the hippopotamus—with wonder. We can relate ourselves to the great modern scenes, the skyline of our great cities, for example, or the sight of the inner parts of a computer, as the psalmist related himself to the sun or to the verdant hills—with joy. What a fantastic and delightful sight a modern airplane is! Praise the Lord! That ought to be our mood, not fear or anxiety, not neutrality or indifference.

This overall approach to the material world must be distinguished from *adoration* of nature. That is idolatry, something the Biblical writers constantly opposed. First things first, and the first thing is to worship God and do His will. Nature ought never become an object of veneration. The prophets emphasized this. Look not to nature and the so-called gods of nature, they said, but look to the Lord and His will.

And God's will is that first and foremost there should be social justice in the city of man. "Let justice roll down like waters," said Amos (5:24). Once that commitment has been made, then and then only is man called to wonder at the works of God in nature and to enjoy them.

So, when we read and understand the Bible rightly, we will keep from abusing nature ourselves and will enjoy it as well as use it without abusing it. On the other hand, as God's children we will work for social justice and human welfare in general and will do whatever we can to end the pollution of nature especially when it poisons the life of man.

* Scripture quotations are from the *Revised Standard Version of the Bible*, © 1946 and 1952 by the Division of Christian Education, National Council of Churches, and are used by permission.

Part of our problem, indeed, seems to be that we have misinterpreted the Biblical approach to the material world. We have misread the Scriptures in that we have focused our attention largely on one particular theme: The dominion of man over the world. Moreover, we have tended to lift that theme out of its Biblical context and have treated it as a cardinal principle in itself.

Man's dominion over nature is the theme the astronauts took with them to the moon on behalf of Pope Paul. On the way back they read to all the peoples on this planet from Psalm 8, which begins by looking at nature as the work of God: "When I look at Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars which Thou hast established; what is man that Thou are mindful of him?"

But the psalmist quickly shifts his attention to man's glorious dominion: "*Yet* Thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honor. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet."

Mankind's God-given dominion is most certainly a Biblical concern. It appears perhaps most memorably in the Book of Genesis, where newly created man is commanded by God to "fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). *But dominion is not the only Biblical concern, nor is dominion unlimited.* Let us look further at the way the notion of man's dominion is carefully guarded in the Bible.

Man is given dominion over his world so that he might have well-being: ". . . plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine to gladden the heart of men . . ." (Psalm 104:14-15). But man is not given nature to abuse, whether by whim or by habit. "A righteous man," says the Book of Proverbs, "Has regard for the life of his beast" (Prov. 12:10). Likewise Israel was commanded not to destroy the young in a wild bird's nest. (Deut. 22:6-7)

According to Biblical thinking, man was to tend to his own well-being first of all, but he was not to abuse nature in the process.

Man is also seen as having certain responsibilities in relation to nature. He is created "to till the earth and keep it" (Gen. 2:5, 15). In accordance with this, Israel's law required that on the seventh year the land should be left to lie fallow—not only for the sake of the poor, but also for the sake of the wild beasts (Ex. 23:10). According to Biblical thinking, man was to tend to his own well-being first of all, but he was not to abuse nature in the process.

At the same time we must note that the Biblical approach to nature does not really revolve around the idea of man's dominion. Rather, it revolves around the idea of *God's* dominion. What God is doing with and for nature, not what man is doing, is the central Biblical concern.

What, then, is God doing with and for nature? From a Biblical perspective, God not only created the whole world way back at the very beginning; He is actively creating the whole world at this very moment. This is clearly expressed in Ps. 104:10: "Thou makest springs gush forth in the valleys; they flow between the hills." Surveying all the innumerable things of creation, the psalmist then holds to the present tense: "When Thou sendest forth Thy Spirit, they are created; and Thou renewest the face of the ground." (V.30)

So God is seen creating all things *now*, as one who works powerfully and majestically with and throughout the whole universe. More than that, the Bible understands God to value material things *in themselves*, not only as agents through which He blesses man. God is viewed as creating the world daily for the sake of man, but He is seen as creating the world daily—with all its myriad of creatures—also because He wants to have that kind of world for Himself.

When God paints the world, we might say, He paints man in the picture, but he doesn't

"Jack and Jill went
up the hill
to fetch a pail
of unpolluted water."

Reprinted from *Phi Delta Kappan*

seven million pounds. Today the lake simmers with human and industrial waste, and it has virtually no fish left.

Massive continent-long strips of concrete and asphalt cover more and more of the land and cut away at neighborhood and wilderness areas. Everywhere, in the countryside and in the city, the refuse of planned obsolescence piles up.

Each year Americans discard seven million autos, 20 million tons of paper, 48 billion cans, and 28 billion bottles and jars, much of it in the form of indestructible plastics and aluminums. It was the mayor of Detroit, I think, who said that we may be known as the generation that went to the moon while standing knee-deep in garbage!

All church people, too, have a hand in all this. If the many millions of North American Christians had behaved otherwise, we might not even have a problem today. Somehow our church generally has not taken its *stewardship of the environment* seriously. We rarely talk about it from our pulpits or teach it in our church schools. But the time has come for a change.

The time has come for us Christians to reflect carefully about our behavior toward the material world in which we live. If we do not pause to think now, we may find that our environment has been irretrievably polluted. If this happens, ours will be at least a sin of omission in letting this tragedy take place, and perhaps also a sin of commission in contributing to what happens.

In reflecting on this problem, we would do well to see what Scripture has to say about the subject. It's not that the Bible offers any immediate cure-all, but it does offer perspective and guidance.

Recent pollution alerts experienced by people in larger North American cities no doubt caused some folks to shake their heads and ask, "Why don't they *do something about this mess?" But an old saw says, "Bad politicians are elected by the good people who don't vote for them," and this principle can be applied to pollution and other despoiling of our natural environment. The dismal picture of nature stripped of its beauty may well be traced to the good people who "do nothing" to change the scene for the better. Becoming aware of one's Christian responsibility for his environment can't start too early. Maybe you can start some thinking about this matter in your church school. In any case, this article, prepared by the Lutheran chaplain of Wellesley College for joint release by* INTERACTION, Resource, *and* The Lutheran Teacher, *will cause you to think.*

MAN NATURE AND GOD

by H. Paul Santmire

In California not too long ago the Sierra Club organized several projects to get discarded cans and bottles picked up in wilderness areas. Over a 5-year period this modest clean-up program removed over 43 tons of refuse! Everywhere, it seems, even in the alleged sanctity of wilderness areas, we are spoiling our environment.

The story of pollution in our time is astounding. North American air, especially in places like New York City, Los Angeles, and Gary, Ind., may well be cancer inducing, just as cigarette smoke seems to be. Our milk and fish and hundreds of other foodstuffs are contaminated by DDT.

Almost everywhere in the nation our water is in short supply and becoming more and more undrinkable. In 1956, for example, Lake Erie was relatively clear and full of fish. The yearly catch of blue pike alone was some

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