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THE POTENTIAL OF THE SCIENCE-RELIGION CONFLUENCE FOR AFFECTING POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION

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The author's understanding of the full scope of God's covenant after the Flood, together with the scientific insights of systems theory, guided him to implement a new approach in administering national restoration and protection policy. He is convinced that attempts by Congress to dismantle such legislation as the Endangered Species Act of 1973 are founded upon fear of the potential power of the conjunction of spiritual values with scientific insight.

I've been doing some reflection about what lies at the intersection between religion and science. And I've had to do it in the pressurized atmosphere of contention, of change, of radical proposals coming at us—really unprecedented kinds attacks upon the whole idea of community.

I am reminded, here in Boston, of Paul Revere, sounding a warning across the land. We have our own obligation to sound the alarm. When Paul Revere was riding, the agreed-upon lantern signal in Old North Church was "One if by land, two if by sea." And it occurred to me that, if he were here tonight, he'd look up at Old North Church and he'd be terrorized. He'd see *three* lanterns burning, because this attack is coming by land, by water—from every side. It's an attack upon the whole notion of public lands, of any kind of public interest in the landscape. It's an attempt to repeal the 1972 Clean Water Act, all of the wetlands provisions and things that were begun to enable us to regain some sense of stewardship over the rivers and lakes.

I want to concentrate now, for a few minutes, on the Endangered Species Act of 1973, because it has become the flash-point for contention. It is the one law that is stir-

ring the most passionate attempts at appeal in the United States Congress. It's been really singled out in a very special way. I'd like to reflect on why that is, and on why I think that the Endangered Species Act becomes a metaphor, if you will, for the efforts we make to bridge science and religion, joining them together in a harmonious way.

I have always sensed that the Endangered Species Act was undergirded by a kind of implicit sense of values, of really powerful, generalized values. I recall an Eco-Exposition in Los Angeles, not long ago. Somebody from my Department put up a sheet of paper and invited a group of schoolchildren to write on that sheet of paper their answers to the question, "Why should we save endangered species?"

These were sixth, seventh, and eighth graders, giving their responses, and I've written down some of their answers. One youngster said, "Because God gave us the animals." Another child, named Travis, said, "Because we love them." A third one answered, "Because we'll be lonely without them." Another one said, "Because they're part of our life. If we did not have them, it would not be a complete world." Someone

else said, "The Lord put them on earth to be enjoyed, not destroyed." One answer really jumped out at me; down at the bottom of the page, someone had scrawled just three words: "Because we can." Now in thinking about that, I turned to reflect about the debate going on in the United States Congress, because Congress doesn't think that we can.

The new leadership in the Congress believes that the Endangered Species Act is exclusively a debate about utilitarian values. Nothing more. Admittedly, they define utilitarian fairly broadly: If a species is charismatic, let's save it. That takes care of lions and tigers. If some species are good for game hunting, let's save them—those species are invited "onto the Ark." For those who like to go fishing, they'll save the fish—but not *all* fish, mind you, because in the eyes of this Congress, most fish are "trash fish."

Congress has taken it upon themselves to redefine creation. They're willing to save the fish you go fly-fishing for, or bass fishing. Or if a plant species might conceivably be a potential source of medicines—like the Pacific yew tree or the Madagascar

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periwinkle—they'll concede that further discussion might be warranted for such species. But there is no other criterion that suggests that there is any other obligation. And therefore, they feel that their first task is to abolish the Endangered Species Act in its present form.

I've had occasion to think about this issue of values and this utilitarian approach,

and I've thought back over my own childhood. I grew up in one of the most remarkable places in this land, a little town named Flagstaff, in northern Arizona. It is nestled at the foot of a great blue mountain that rises 6,000 feet above the town, straight up out of the desert. It's got a snow-capped summit that most of the time is obscured in the clouds. And as I was growing up, I always had a mystical attachment to that mountain. I knew it was a manifestation of something larger than physical reality. But in the church that I attended, the connection was never made.

I went to Sunday Mass from my earliest memories until I left that town in high school, and we never got outside the four walls of the church. There was never a connection made with the landscape. We were living in the most mystical, evocative landscape in the world, and the connection just wasn't there. In the religious tradition that I grew up in—in that particular generation and time and phase—our relationship to the natural world was without voice. The view of this relationship was a reflection of the prevailing utilitarian view of the natural world, with its long precedence in philosophy and theology.

I felt then that I had to go to another religious tradition to make the connection. Now the remarkable thing was that just such a religious tradition was on the other side of that same mountain. It was a Hopi Indian friend of

mine who, one summer, led me by the hand out to the pueblos, sitting up on the enchanted mesas, extending off to the north.

It was a summer morning in June, the *kachina* dancers were filing into the plaza. And in the most literal way, he explained to me that these *kachinas* come from the summit of that sacred mountain, where they are the intermediary between the Divinity and

us. And as I watched this ritual unfold in the plaza, I felt the poverty in the midst of my own rich religious tradition. That connection with the landscape just wasn't there. Later in the summer, my friend took me back for the Snake Dances, and I saw another of the pageants in the Hopi sacred cycle unfold in the plaza. They prayed for rain and released the serpents to carry the message back into a landscape saturated with sacred meaning.

I began to wonder whether my only choice was to embrace someone else's culture, or whether I might turn back and have a second look at my own religious tradition. Like most of us, what I did was head back to my own religious tradition.

The Catholic priests who taught me were not big on having us rummaging around in the Bible independently. But being a brave, adventuresome soul, I went back and started exploring in Genesis, and I was immediately taken by the accounts of Creation and the Deluge. I'd always heard the rationalization that God gave dominion over the Earth to humankind.

But then I read carefully for the first time the account of the Deluge. And I read the familiar parts about Noah being commanded to take the species, clean and unclean, two by two, seven by seven, all of Creation into the Ark—not two charismatic species, *not* those waterfowl that we hunt, *not* the potential sources of medicine—but two by two, *all* of Creation. And in rereading it, what came through to me finally was the covenant at the end that runs between God and Noah and his children. But that covenant, sealed by the rainbow, also runs between God and the Earth. That's when I

"closed the triangle" and began to understand that there *is* a connection—that this landscape and that great blue mountain *are* sacred, that it *isn't* some piece of property, that it *is* God's Creation.

Enlightened by this journey, I've had occasion to begin to think about the meaning of the Endangered Species Act, and the reason that it is so threatening to those people in their radical quest to erase the architecture of protection that we've built up over the decades, as a people. I began to see that the reason it's so threatening is precisely because it is so laden with spiritual value. I began to understand that the Endangered Species Act really is, intentionally or unintentionally, a reflection of the command of Genesis, of the covenant of Genesis. It speaks of the potential of spiritual values.

The children who were writing their messages on the board at the Eco-Exposition implicitly understand those spiritual

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values, even if the United States Congress doesn't. Our task, therefore, is to begin to appreciate that the reason why it is so threatening is that it represents an incredibly powerful conjunction of spiritual values and science.

Informed by that conjunction, I began to examine my conscience, if you will, about the administration of this Endangered Species Act. I began to see some really important things. I saw that my predecessors and a lot of really well-intentioned scientists and

administrators across the past twenty years have been administering the Endangered Species Act in a manner that is really devoid of this understanding of its spiritual values. They have tended to intervene one species at a time, not seeing the totality of creation. They have managed one crisis after another, at the eleventh hour precisely, because the scientists hadn't had the stimulus of the values statement behind the injunction to protect biodiversity.

And so, as we began to look at how we administer the Endangered Species Act, watching both the values and the science, we came to some surprising conclusions. The first really big one was in the Pacific

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Northwest, where the Spotted Owl had been the subject of contention for some ten years and had reached an absolute impasse. I began to see it in a different way I saw it wasn't about an owl; it's about the setting in which the owl lives. The Spotted Owl is a warning signal about a *system in crisis*.

And all of a sudden, with that insight, we were able to step back and see that we needed to erase the lines on the map and look at the Cascade Mountains from Puget Sound clear down to San Francisco Bay. We needed to look not at *one bird*, but at *hundreds of species*. We managed to get the scientists together and to strip off their jurisdictional badges and look at the *entire system*, infused and hopefully inflamed by the value judg-

ment that it is our job to protect biodiversity, God's Creation.

Out of that came an unprecedented study, based on the viability of the different species, based on forestry practice, and so forth—just looking at the whole thing as a system and reassembling it as a system, from the Spotted Owl, to the Marbled Murrelet, to the fish spawning in the stream. As an act of faith, we believed that in the end there would be room for humankind—that if this way of approaching the landscape is a reflection of a larger purpose, then we are a part of that purpose.

And that's what this "new look" is about. It isn't about creating more wilder-

ness areas, exclusively. We used to do that. That was an interesting view of Creation, but it wasn't perfect, because it didn't deal with *humanity's* place in Creation. We can't deal with Creation by "fencing off the back forty." We can't do that, because everything relates. Ultimately, we're driven

to look at the whole thing, to see it whole, and then to ask what the moral injunctions are upon *us* as a species, to live a little more lightly upon that landscape and to see it whole.

The second conclusion we've reached, in watching both the values and the science in our administration of the Endangered Species Act, is how to approach the Florida Everglades. Here was a National Park with a fence around it, and it was collapsing, desiccated, dead. The reason is that Creation isn't very susceptible of being partitioned into little squares while we say, "Well, here's a representative sample of God's Creation, and we're going to set it aside as we lay waste to the rest of it."

The problem wasn't in Everglades National Park; the Park Rangers had taken great care of it. The problem was two hundred miles away to the north, in Lake Okeechobee. The problem was the water supply: that artery of water had been severed by the Corps of Engineers, to drain the swamps to create a vast developed area of agriculture; and in the process, the *system* was collapsing. So we were driven, once again, to consider what the value issues are here. This forced us to bring in the State of Florida, the developers, agriculture, the Water Management District, sixteen different federal agencies, and others. This issue, ultimately, is about how we live on the landscape.

The ecosystem called Florida is all connected. Ultimately, our job of restoration and protection entered every facet of life in the whole community, and we had to find some way to stitch that hydrological system back together. We are on the road to getting that done, notwithstanding what's going on in Washington. People in Florida seem to have an intuitive appreciation for the rightness of this way of doing it.

I've got to say again and again that their sense of the rightness is a combination of my ability to persuade them that biodiversity is a valid scientific concept and, more importantly, of their own internal spiritual values. They understand and believe the injunction of Genesis. They understand that there is something beyond a utilitarian issue here. It isn't exclusively about short tons of sugar cane and tons of fish catch in Florida Bay. It's about a larger issue called "humility in front of God's Creation." How powerful an idea that it! It's not just an idea—it's a reality! And when that comes together with the scientific concepts, the possibilities are enormous.

This is the big realization that has confronted me, in terms of policy. I'm increasingly certain that the reason this law is such a flash-point is precisely because the people who are out to destroy all that we've created understand that this is "The Big One," because it is so laden with spiritual values. It drives them absolutely crazy.

I'll give just one example of that. A couple of weeks ago, a number of your

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Churches wrote letters to the Congress, making this point, in your respective ways, about values. Those letters were offered into the record of the House Natural Resources Committee. This is routinely done. They're always accepted. The Chairman of the Committee refused your letters. He would not allow them into the record.

That, to me, is a statement that the new leaders of Congress understand the power of the confluence of these two streams of science and religion, and of our place and our role—not regarding *our property*, but regarding *God's Creation*. And so I urge you to continue to find the places where the tributaries of science and religion flow together and create a mainstream. Ultimately, the political process is dominated by and determined by values.

Bruce Babbitt was the Governor of Arizona from 1977 till 1987. After practicing law for a number of years in the Washington, D.C., area, in 1993 he was appointed by President Bill Clinton to be the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, a position he holds today.

After graduating from the University of Notre Dame with a B.A. in geology, he earned an M.S. degree in geophysics from the University of Newcastle, England. He then turned to the study of law, earning an L.L.B. degree from Harvard Law School.

Secretary Babbitt's tenure as Secretary of the Interior is marked by important initiatives in administrative policy: large-scale, consensus-based environmental restoration projects with an awareness of ecosystem dynamics. He describes the evolution of this approach in his essay here, which he gave as the keynote address at a conference in November 1995. Entitled "Consumption, Population & the Environment: Religion & Science Envision Equity for an Altered Creation," the conference was presented by the Boston Theological Institute together with the American Association for the Advancement of Science.