

"Where do the children play?"

By JIM HOLLINGWORTH
 "Oh, I know we've come a long way, but tell me where do the children play?" Cat Stevens first sang these lyrics many years ago. His words haunt and challenge me to look for answers to the environmental crisis which we now face.

Before I look for answers, I reflect on why we have collectively failed to be better stewards of planet earth. The reasons are many.

Our educators have failed to give us early and adequate warnings. Our politicians have ignored and denied the magnitude of the situation. Our industrialists have polluted and exploited the people, the soil, the waters and the air of the planet. Our physicians have failed to draw to our attention that which is fatal to the birds of the air and the fish of the waters is likely to be unhealthy for, if not ultimately fatal to humans.

Our religious teachers have failed to inform us of the interconnectedness and sacredness of all forms of creation. At this special time of year, I will focus on the role that the Christian church has played in allowing the earth to become so wounded.

And God said unto them, "Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth." This quotation, from the first book of Genesis, has given people of the Christian faith permission to exploit the earth and to perceive other forms of life as subservient to human life.

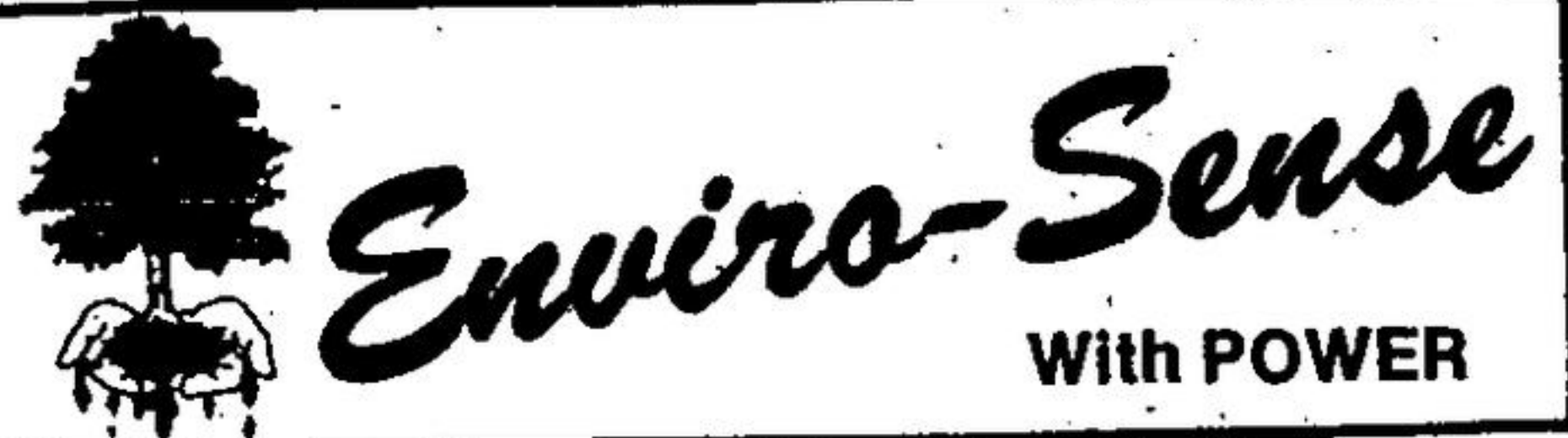
Since the industrial revolution, the Christian church in Europe and throughout the New World, has stood witness, silent for the most part, to the continued destruction of the planet and to the exploitation of its bounty.

This exploitation of the earth's resources is far in excess of the actual needs of its human inhabitants. We have been conditioned to demand far more than we actually need. We have failed to distinguish the difference between our needs and our desires. Our desires are predominantly material and insatiable in contemporary North American Society.

I once spent a day with Dr. Rollo May, one of America's most respected psychotherapists. When asked about the role of religion in contemporary society, he replied that the economy had become the Godhead.

If we can see that the economy is more valued in our society than spirituality, there is hope. The hope lies in our individual and collective confessions of our errant values and ways, followed by a re-embrace of a spirituality which honours and experiences the interconnectedness of all forms of life.

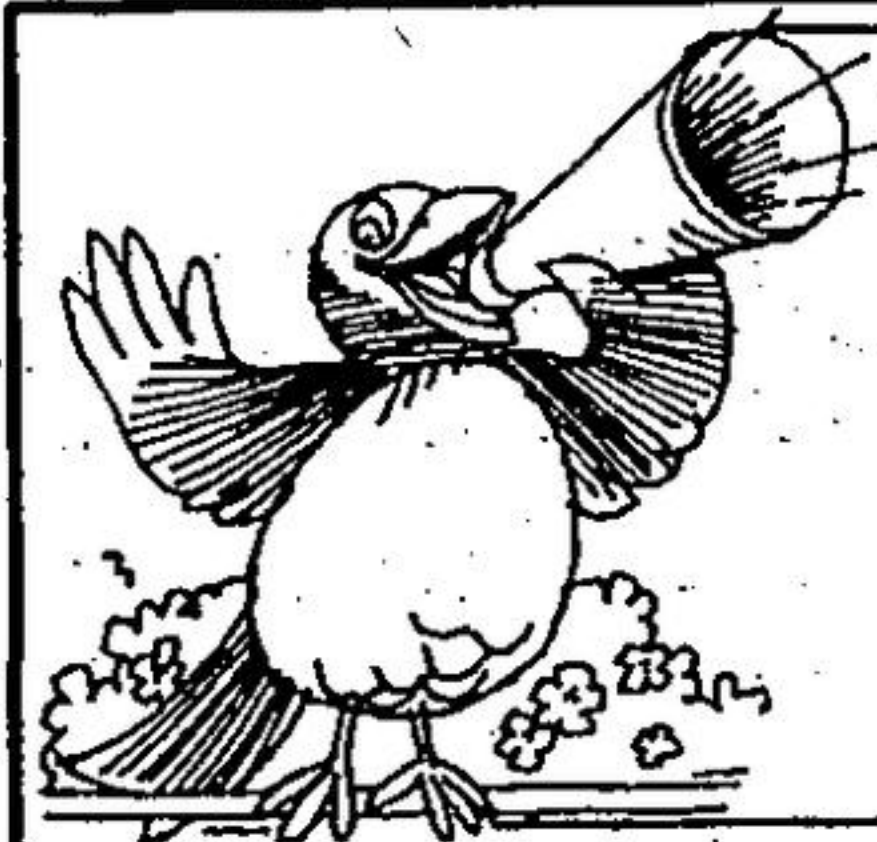
This hope is being felt by an ever increasing number. This hope is not new. It was alluded to long ago, by two great Christian



mystics. When Meister Eckhart said "All creatures are interdependent", and when Hildegard of Bingen said: "Everything that is in the heavens, on the earth and under the earth is penetrated with connectedness, penetrated with relatedness", they were il-

luminating a pathway to ecological salvation.

Kentucky farmer-poet Wendell Berry summoned it up in these simple words: "The ecological teaching of the Bible is inescapable. God made the world. He (she) thinks the world is good. He (she) loves it. It's his (her)



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world. He (she) never relinquished title to it. And he (she) has never revoked the conditions that oblige us to take excellent care of it."

As I attempt to answer Cat Stevens' question, I am reassured and joyous that an increasing number of people on this planet are experiencing their interconnectedness and interdependence with the whole of creation.

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