

## Living With the Land

Theologian, scholar, and Cherokee descendant Randy Woodley describes the difference between the attitude of early North American settlers and the Indigenous people who were already present on the land. He writes:

The very land itself meant something quite different to the newcomer than it did to the host people. Something was missing. The difficulty, as the Natives saw it, was with the settlers themselves and their failure to tread lightly, with humility and respect, on the land. The settlers wanted to live on the land, but the host people lived with the land. Living on the land means objectifying the land and natural resources and being shortsighted concerning the future. Living with the land means respecting the natural balance.

To Indigenous peoples, the problems of a Western worldview are obvious. The way of life demonstrated by Western peoples leads to alienation from the Earth, from others, and from all of creation. This lifestyle creates a false bubble called "Western civilization," which people in the West think will protect them from future calamity. This false hope is detached from all experience and reality.

The problem is that the Western system itself is what brings the calamity. There is little doubt that much of what we are experiencing today as so-called natural disasters have their origin in human carelessness.

How do we avoid the impending disaster brought on by a settler lifestyle of living on the land and against nature? The answer is simple: we learn to live with nature. [1]

In 1990, Indigenous leaders spoke at a global conference on the environment, and provided a hopeful vision for the future:

We have jeopardized the future of our coming generation with our greed and lust for power. The warnings are clear and time is now a factor. . . . We speak of our children, yet we savage the spawning beds of the salmon and herring, and kill the whale in his home. We advance through the forests of the earth felling our rooted brothers indiscriminately, leaving no seeds for the future. We exploit the land and resources of the poor and indigenous peoples of the world. We have become giants, giants of destruction. . . . We must return to the spiritual values that are the foundation of life. We must love and respect all living things, have compassion for the poor and the sick, respect and understanding for women and female life on this earth who bear the sacred gift of life. We must return to the prayers, ceremonies, meditations, rituals, and celebrations of thanksgiving which link us with the spiritual powers that sustain us and, by example, teach our children to respect. [2]