

## A Single Dandelion Is More Precious than Gold (A)

Sun Myung Moon

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*Photo date and location unknown*

The three greatest challenges of modern society are solving pollution problems, creating a consciousness for protecting the environment, and increasing food production. If any one of these is neglected, humanity will become extinct. The earth has already been damaged extensively. Endless greed for material possessions has brought about serious air and water pollution that is destroying nature, including the ozone layer that protects us. If present trends continue, humanity will find itself destroyed by the traps of material civilization.

For the past twenty years, I have been working to sustain and preserve Brazil's Pantanal region. The Pantanal - a region that lies in Brazil, Bolivia, and Paraguay - is the world's largest wetlands area. It is listed with UNESCO as a World Heritage Site. I am carrying on a global environmental movement to preserve the living creatures of the Pantanal in the pristine state in which God created them.

The Pantanal - where the sea, land, animals, and plants live in harmony - is a magnificent place. Simple words such as beautiful and fantastic cannot begin to describe its value. Photos of the area taken from the sky are so beautiful that a collection of these photos is one of the best-selling photo collections in the world. It is humanity's treasure trove, where rare species such as the white-throated capuchin, the red howler monkey, macaw, jaguar, anaconda, ostrich, and caiman live.

The flora and fauna of the Pantanal and the Amazon basin exist as they did at the time of Creation. The Pantanal is Edenic. Human beings have destroyed a great many beings that God created. Too many species of plants and animals have become extinct because of human greed. In the Pantanal, though, the original forms that God created still remain. I am working to establish a bird atrium and an insect preserve in the Pantanal to save these unique species from extinction.

In addition to being a habitat for many plants and animals, the Pantanal is also an important source of oxygen for the earth. It is the "lungs of the world" and "nature's sponge," producing more oxygen than any other area. It is also a storehouse of greenhouse gases. The Pantanal is changing rapidly, however, due to industrial development. If the Amazon region, which provides such a large amount of oxygen for the earth, is destroyed, the future of humanity will be dismal.

Some thirty-six hundred species of fish live in the Pantanal. One is a gold-colored fish called the dorado, which usually weighs more than forty pounds. When a dorado first took my hook, it felt like my body was being sucked into the river. As I was reeling in the line with all my strength, it jumped out of the water several times. After several jumps it still had plenty of strength left to fight. It was so strong it seemed

more like a bear or a tiger than a fish.

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No matter how many fish there are in the Pantanal, if people are given the freedom to fish there, the population is bound to decrease. To protect the fish we need to develop fish farms. Because the fish in the Pantanal are so precious, we need to develop many fish farms. Similar facilities to protect insects, birds, and mammals are also needed. Raising insects will help increase the bird population. The Pantanal provides a perfect environment for all these creatures, and by focusing on how to increase their population humankind can continue to enjoy them for centuries to come.

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People who advocate developing wetlands stress the economic benefits of such development. The Pantanal, however, provides plenty of economic benefit just as a wetland. The area has virgin forests of ebony pine, and the wood is hard with high density. Natives claim that a person could drive a spike into one of these trees and it would still live more than a hundred years. These trees are used to produce ebony, which does not rot and is said to last longer than iron. These trees are so large that a man cannot put his arms around them. Imagine what it looks like to have forests filled with such precious trees. I had some seedlings of these trees planted on four hundred hectares of land in the Pantanal. The trees our members planted have made the Pantanal even more beautiful.

It is human selfishness that is destroying nature. Human competition for the shortest route to economic success is the reason that the earth's environment has been damaged. We cannot allow the earth to be damaged any further. Religious people must lead the way in the effort to save nature. Nature is God's creation and His gift to humankind. We must work quickly to awaken people to the preciousness of nature and the urgent need to restore it to the rich and free state it enjoyed at the time of Creation.

Because it has become widely known that the Pantanal is a treasure trove, a struggle over its future has begun. The place that we should be protecting is about to become a battlefield for greedy humans. For the past ten years, I have been taking leaders from countries around the world to the Pantanal and sponsoring discussions on how to protect this region and the rest of the world's environment. I am gathering the world's environmental experts and scholars in order to encourage them to take an interest in preserving the Pantanal. I am working to stop the Pantanal from being destroyed by the merciless material desires of human beings.

As the environmental issues grow more serious, many environmental groups have sprung up. The best environmental movement, however, is the one that spreads love. People take care of things that belong to people they love. They do not, however, take care of or love the natural environment that God created. God gave this environment to humanity. It was His will that we use the environment to obtain food, to have it in abundance, and to experience the joy of living in the beauty of nature. Nature is not something to be used once and thrown away. Our descendants for many generations to come must be able to rely on it just as we have.

The shortcut to protecting nature is to develop a heart that loves nature. We must be able to shed a tear at the sight of even a blade of grass that we see as we walk along the road. We must be able to grab hold of a tree and weep. We must understand that God's breath is hidden inside a single boulder or a single gust of wind. To care for and love the environment is to love God. We must be able to see each creature created by God as an object of our love. With our spiritual eyes opened we could see that a single dandelion by the roadside is more valuable than the gold crowns of kings.