

VILLAGE VIEW

ANDREA LEONARD

Some of my best friends like to tease me. I suppose it's that they know they'll get a rise from me. Especially do they needle me (gently and kindly) because they know I'm a conservationist and believe we have responsibilities to leave this world in as good condition as, or even better condition than, we found it. In fact, I'm as willing to be taxed to protect or improve the environment as I am to defend our nation against foreign aggression.

To me, environmental degradation is as serious a threat to future generations as a Red Menace or a Yellow Devil or a terrorist bent on destroying Democracy. In my view, the destruction of this planet's environment constitutes a greater threat because, although governments may fall, the idea and the ideals of freedom live on in the hearts and minds of men, but if the planet, itself, is despoiled to the extent it can no longer sustain plant or animal life, the viability of our natural support system, with all its intricate interdependencies, grinds to a halt.

Nuclear war on a global level would achieve the same tragic result.

In spite of my belief in conservation and environmental principles, however, in recent years I've become disenchanted with the large number of organizations that formed to protect the very ecology that I, too, want to preserve. Every small group has had its own axe to grind, its own headquarters, its own staff and officers, its own fund-raising campaigns, its own public relations department. My mailbox has been over-stuffed with appeals for money to protect everything from the snail darter to the cetaceans, from the lovely valley of the St. John's River to the ocean's floor off the Gallapagos Islands,

and from the rain forests of equatorial regions to the ice-bound wastes of the Poles.

As requests for financial support multiplied, my enthusiasm waned even for those groups I respect and recognize as essential to achieving the goals I believe are vital to preserving life on earth. If I were to support financially each organization soliciting help, I wouldn't be able to support myself financially! As a result, I withdrew monetary support from them all.

In doing so, however, I have fought against the deluge of paper by responding to requests with refusals to contribute dollars to any of them and have told each my reason. "I cannot support all groups such as yours even though I believe in the cause. Please get together and stop bickering amongst yourselves; you are all dedicating your efforts to the same ends, but asking the public to fund dozens of environmental organizations. We cannot afford to do that in these times of inflation and high taxes."

Perhaps other people have reacted similarly; certainly one small voice (mine), crying in the wilderness, cannot have had any important effect. Maybe others have sent the same resistant message. In any event, the message has reached enough people who are running the various organizations to bring them to a reasoned decision.

Forty-nine organizations concerned with the environment, with population control, with conservation and preservation of natural resources, have united to form the Global Tomorrow Coalition. Taken together, these organizations claim a membership of more than five million. It must be recognized that some members probably belong to more than one organization, but there must still be tremendous numbers of people involved now in the united group. Furthermore, people like me, who believe the concerns of these organizations are well-founded, will welcome an opportunity to support financially a single entity that can represent all of us rather than 49 different ones pulling in different directions.

May 26, the day that Global Tomorrow Coalition announced its formation and its goal, "to create public awareness of the worldwide impact of population growth, resource consumption, and environmental degradation upon individual well-being, and national and global security," should become a world-wide annual holiday.

Among the charter members of the coalition are organizations of international influence. Their names are familiar to conservationists, environmentalists, and ecologists every where in this country, if not yet on a global scale. Can a single reader of this column honestly report never having heard of any of the following?

- American Farm Foundation
- American Institute for Biological Sciences
- American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
- Defenders of Wildlife
- Environmental Defense Fund
- Friends of the Earth
- National Audubon Society
- Sierra Club
- Wilderness Society
- World Population Society
- Zero Population Growth

All are members of The Global Tomorrow Coalition! And there are 38 others, the identity of which I don't yet know. The chairman of the new group, Russell W. Peterson, said, in referring to its formation, "The Coalition grew out of concern that vital issues affecting our own lives as well as planetary survival were not being adequately addressed by either governmental leaders or the private sector."

As I mentioned, my friends like to tease me, just to hear me sputter. One, a dear gentleman I enjoy and respect, told me he "didn't care about ecology" because he was nearly 80 years old and didn't expect to be around long enough to witness the end. And my response was probably just what he was fishing for; I rose to his bait with a spirited, "Probably I shouldn't care either. At 'pushing 60', I've no children nor grandchildren to be concerned about; but you have, and they're the ones I feel sorry for because, conceivably, they could live long enough to experience the end."

This discussion (and others like it) make me feel a bit like those fellows we see in cartoons, wearing long white robes, flowing beards, and sandwich boards, with the warning, "Prepare yourself. The world is coming to an end." Doubtless such people believe as firmly in the truth of their forecast of doom as I do in the possibility that life can be wiped off the Earth if mankind doesn't stop over-populating it, and cease trashing it with industrial, chemical, and nuclear wastes.

The Global Coalition gives me new hope. Perhaps now, all the splinter groups can be drawn together to form a single body strong enough to make itself heard and felt, and effective enough to prevent the world's end.

"United we stand; divided we fall" is a motto coined long before any of us came into this world; it's as true today as when George Pope Morris (1802-1864) wrote those words in his poem, "The Flag of Our Union."