

A New MORAL AWAKENING

By Richard Cizik

Should caring for the environment be a major priority for people of faith? A few years ago, I would have blithely answered “no.”

Then Sir John Houghton, the first chair of the Scientific Assessment of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change – and an evangelical Christian – made a presentation on the impacts of global warming to the Oxford Conference of 2002. I realized I was violating the Biblical commands “to serve and to protect” creation (Genesis 2:15). The Hebrew words “avad” (to serve) and “shamar (to protect) mean we must be caretakers, not just takers. I had to repent.

The Lord did not turn the ownership of earth over to us. Pharaoh of Egypt learned this the hard way. The phrase, “the earth is the Lord’s” (Psalm 24:1), was first used by Moses as part of a dire warning to the arrogant, oppressive, and possessive ruler (Exodus 9:29). The Lord seems more patient with us, but time is running out. The natural world is imperiled by human activity, especially by our unsustainable burning of fossil fuels and our degradation of living systems.

Dr. E.O. Wilson, author of the recent book, *Creation*, says: “If current deterioration of the environment by human activity continues unabated, half of earth’s surviving species, plants, and animals will be extinguished or critically endangered by the end of the century. One quarter, it’s been estimated, could leave us in the next 50 years due to climate change alone.” Human health and life are particularly endangered, with the poor and disadvantaged at the greatest risk.

To address these threats, the National Association of Evangelicals convened 30 leading scientists and theologians to discuss how we could work together. At our meeting in Georgia in December, we discovered we agreed far more than we disagreed, shared a deep reverence for life on earth, and felt a sense of urgency about what humans are doing to creation. We pledged to do everything in our power to preserve this precious gift the Creator has given us, and to invite our colleagues (including some who may not fully agree with us) to join us in these efforts.

A signed statement entitled “An Urgent Call to

Action: Scientists and Evangelicals Unite to Protect Creation,” proclaimed, “We believe that the protection of life on earth is a profound moral imperative.” It requires a new moral awakening to a compelling demand, clearly articulated in Scripture and supported by science, that we must steward the natural world in order to preserve for ourselves and future generations a beautiful, rich, and healthy environment. For many of us, this is a religious obligation, rooted in our sense of gratitude for creation and reverence for its Creator.

Can we hear the voice of the prophet Ezekiel? “Is it not enough for you to drink the water? Must you also muddy the rest with your feet?” (Ezekiel 34:18). One of my mentors, Cal DeWitt, echoes this, “Is it not enough for you to enjoy a pleasant climate? Must you destroy it? Is it not enough for you to enjoy the myriad of creatures? Must you extinguish them?”

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public-policy solutions, but the following simple actions can make a huge difference. Replace incandescent bulbs with compact fluorescents. Though initially more expensive, an energy-efficient fluorescent bulb will save you \$28 to \$58 in your electric bill during its life and burn 500 pounds less coal to pollute the air. Recycle. Drive the speed limit with properly inflated tires and a tuned engine. Consider a hybrid car. Ask your energy company to do an energy audit of your house or church. You will make money and be giving to others at the same time. Support businesses that are creation-friendly. Vote and voice your concern to local and national government officials. Pray that our fellow citizens, congregations, and lawmakers will do what is wise to care for creation.

Protecting the environment is simply Biblical stewardship. We owe it to our children and grandchildren. This is neither a “red” (Republican Party), “blue” (Democratic Party), or even a “green” (Green Party) issue. Jesus’ first commandment, to love God with all our heart and soul and strength, means we honor and care for His creation. After all, when we die, God won’t ask us how He made this earth, but rather, what we did with what He made.



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