

# **A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift**

by  
George P. Nassos

## Finding Purpose

I recently had the opportunity to read a book titled “Finding Purpose” written by Andrew J. Hoffman. It is an outstanding book that should be read by everyone that has any interest in planet earth and its future. Let me just mention a few of the many concepts covered in the book.

The book starts out by presenting evidence that humans have done more harm to the environment in the past 50 years than in any other comparable period. It goes on to present data as to how the earth has deteriorated and supports this evidence with an outstanding list of sources. We have entered a period in time that geophysicists are calling the Anthropocene because of the impact on the environment by humans.

Being a professor at the University of Michigan, I give him much credit for being open about the role of university professors. He states that professors are measured by the number of academic papers that have been published and by the number of times those papers are cited. But what really needs to be assessed is what impact these papers have on the readers. He notes a letter published in 1963 where the author lamented that academic research had become a field of brick makers. Academic scholarship had focused on generating lots of pieces of knowledge, which he called bricks, and was not concerned about making something out of them. Professor Hoffman believes that the future of academic research will be measured, not by “bricks” but by the way the scholarly research changes the way people think and address problems.

In the corporate world, his focus is on being a sustainable company. Does that mean that the company will prosper for a long time, or does it mean that the focus is on protecting the environment? He talks about green companies and the different shades of green. What we are really seeing by many companies is how to minimize being unsustainable. That is not different from companies that claim to be sustainable because they have become more energy efficient. I really call that not being sustainable but rather being “less bad”. Hoffman is saying the same thing but his term is more general and refers to all aspects of sustainability, not just energy.

Hoffman later talks about “dark green” and “bright green”. He talks about “dark green” groups that seek radical social change to solve environmental problems which could lead to confrontations with corporations. The “bright green” groups, on the other hand, tend to collaborate with corporations to find ways to solve the environmental problem.

While the author distills an extensive amount of research, blogs, speeches, essays, and editorials which relate to individuals finding and defining a purpose for the care of creation, he does reflect on one of major environmental issues of our time. He presents extensive data as to why climate change is for real and why we must tend to it. He also presents arguments on how to demystify the issue and show how to argue against the deniers.

I was pleased that Hoffman called out the importance of religion in addressing our environmental problems and summarized the initiative of Pope Francis, whom he calls a messenger, and one that can have great impact in the world as he leads about 1.3 billion Roman Catholic Christians. The pope's message was delivered in June 2015 when he released his encyclical *Laudato Si*, or *On Care for Our Common Home*. Hoffman, however, neglected to mention how Pope Francis was inspired to write this encyclical, probably because he wasn't aware of it. In November 2014, Pope Francis met with Patriarch Bartholomew, the spiritual leader of about 300 million Eastern Orthodox Christians, in Constantinople, Turkey. Bartholomew has devoted the past 25 years to protect the environment by hosting ten international symposia and writing many books and essays. Consequently, he was given the name of the "Green Patriarch" by Al Gore. At that meeting with the pope, he convinced him to place the care of creation on his agenda. Bartholomew even offered some of his people to assist in the preparation of *Laudato Si*. It makes no difference how the effort initiates, as long as the pope and the patriarch are messengers of finding purpose. And since the encyclical's release, other messengers from the Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist faiths have stepped forward.

In summary, "Finding Purpose" is one of the best books I have read in a long time. If I were still teaching, this book would be required reading for every student. It is not just for students but for everyone who has had even the smallest interest in environmental issues. You may find additional information about the book at <http://www.greenleaf-publishing.com/finding-purpose>