

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

by
George P. Nassos

Our Environment: From Creation to Today

This is the inaugural article on a subject very dear to me, and probably to many of the readers. I have become very concerned about our environment, what has happened to it, how we continue to exploit it, and what can we do to protect it and restore it. The earth is God's gift to civilization, and it's our obligation to protect this gift. Before we become involved with all these environmental issues, let's look at the current situation.

Very few people question the decline in the state of our environment, only the degree to which it has deteriorated or the rate at which it is continuing to deteriorate. Regardless of the current status of our environment, it is important to put in perspective what has happened to our earth. As suggested by David Brower, former Executive Director of the Sierra Club, let us compress the geologic time, from the initial formation of the earth until now, into the six days of biblical creation, say, from Monday through Saturday.

Using the compressed time scale, the earth was formed at midnight, the beginning of the first day, Monday. There is no life until Tuesday about 8:00 AM, and millions of species begin to appear and disappear throughout the week. Photosynthesis begins and it gets into high gear by Thursday morning, just after midnight. By Saturday, the sixth and last day of creation, there is sufficient oxygen in the atmosphere that amphibians can come onto land, and enough chlorophyll manufactured for the vegetation to begin to form coal deposits. The giant reptiles appear around four o'clock and primates show up at 10:00 PM on this last day, but homo sapiens don't appear until 11:59:54 – just six seconds ago. In other words, if we compress the age of the earth to six days, or 144 hours, "man" is not created until the last six seconds. A quarter of a second to midnight, Jesus Christ appears. One-fortieth of a second is the beginning of the industrial age, and one-eightieth of a second ago, we discover oil, thus accelerating the carbon blowout started by the industrial revolution.

Scientists have predicted that this 4.5 billion year old earth will be around for another "week". But look at the damage that has been done in just the past one-fortieth of a second. About 70% of the major fisheries have been depleted or are at their biological limit. It is estimated that the forest cover has been reduced by as much as 50% worldwide; 50% of the wetlands and more than 90% of the grasslands have been lost. Currently, almost 40% of the world's population is experiencing serious water shortages. The big question now is how long will we last, another one-fortieth of a second – about five generations? Or will be able to survive for another quarter of a second – about 2000 years. Or can we make a difference to extend a healthy world to some indefinite period of time? Or is it too late, and are we in the midst of a period of overshooting the carrying capacity of the earth, followed by a rapid collapse.