

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

by
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The Role of Stewardship in Protecting Our Environment

“For favorable weather, an abundance of the fruits of the earth, and fro peaceful times, Let us pray to the Lord.” We hear this every Sunday at the morning liturgy of the Orthodox faithful. The Lord is reminding us that He created this environment for us and we should be thankful for it and commit to protect it. But have we really committed to protecting the environment.

In an earlier article (July 2004), I described a situation on St. Matthew Island where the population of a herd of reindeer overshot the carrying capacity of the island, and there was such a collapse that the eventual population decreased to a level considerably below the expected carrying capacity. This is an example of what could happen to the Earth. In the case of St. Matthew Island, the resources used by the reindeer were grasses, trees and shrubs, all renewable resources that can be replenished. Many of the resources necessary for human survival, however, are not renewable. There is only a finite source of resources such as minerals, oil and coal. We must be cognizant of the over utilization of both renewable and non-renewable resources.

Is this what God really wanted us to do? *And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."* It is our responsibility to look after the earth and all its resources, as He would care for it. But data show that it is not the case, as we have not accepted the responsibility that He has commanded us.

Although we are accustomed to the role of stewardship as tithing, time and talent, it is very critical that we add ecology. While we may not necessarily commit to a specific community in terms of protecting the environment, we must commit to humanity as a whole. Protecting the environment is not a local issue, but rather a global issue. If everyone commits to an ecological stewardship, there is a good chance that we may have a healthy environment for generations to come. We must provide a safe environment for our children as stated by David Brower, “We don't inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.”

Patriarch Bartholomew goes further when he states, “The Church teaches that it is the destiny of humankind to restore the proper relationship between God and the world, just as it was in the Garden of Eden. Through repentance, two landscapes, the one human and the other natural, can become the objects of a caring and creative effort.”

One of the most serious examples of desecrating the environment is the emission of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. There is a minority of people that believe either that global warming does not exist, or that if it does exist, it was not caused by human activity. Even if we are not sure of whether global warming exists or doesn't exist, we must take the necessary steps to rectify this situation. A great analogy was iterated by Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger of California when he said to Thomas Friedman: "If 98 doctors say my son is ill and needs medication and two say 'No, he doesn't, he is fine,' I will go with the 98. It's common sense – the same with global warming. We go with the majority, the large majority."

The current state of the environment is probably much more severe than is perceived by the average American. The only way that we have a chance for the environment to be able to support the human population is for every one of us to become a steward of the environment and treat it like a loved one. When there is an issue that affects the masses, people gather and take action to correct that issue. Unfortunately, here we don't have an issue that is currently affecting the world population. Most of the people affected by this issue have not yet been born.