

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

by

George P. Nassos

Why Some People Don't Respect the Environment

A few years ago, I was invited to speak at a large law firm in Chicago during a lunch-and-learn segment. The topic was a general discussion on the state of our environment and what needs to be done. There were about 15 people in attendance and another 10 or so on-line. At the end of my presentation during a Q&A period, I was asked when we will witness some of the negative consequences of the deteriorating environment, like when might climate change truly affect sea level increases. I told the person that it could be, perhaps, in 30 to 50 years. His response was, "What do I care. I won't be here." I tried to rip into him as gently as possible because of this attitude.

When speaking to people about the environment whether it is formally or on a casual basis, I find the negative responses to be in one of, perhaps, four different categories. The first, and simplest, category is that of people who do not believe that climate change exists, or that water quality and quantity are major concerns in this world, or that we are consuming more of the natural resources than the earth is able to regenerate. Since they don't believe, or don't want to believe, that any of these problems exist, there isn't any need to change their lifestyle or habits to offset the problem – because it doesn't exist.

Then you have the category of the person during my lunch-and-learn presentation. These are people that are self-centered and don't worry about anyone else, not even their children or grandchildren. As long as these detrimental environmental effects don't affect them, they really don't care.

There is a third category of people that feel market forces will resolve the problem. As climate change gets worse, they believe that the carbon emitters will be forced to cut back so much that climate change will be reversed. The problem with that belief is that it will most likely be too late to reverse climate change. Or if water shortages become so great, new technologies will be developed to produce all the water we need. They are either thinking of taking sea water and using a desalinization process to generate fresh water which is an existing technology but today not in major use, or they may be thinking of a process not yet developed like taking hydrogen and oxygen and combining them to produce water. But from where will the hydrogen come.

A fourth category is for the person that believes in the deterioration of the environment but also believes that s/he cannot have much of an impact in resolving the problem. They won't change their lifestyle, or inconvenience themselves, or spend more money, if they are the only

people trying to do something to help resolve the problem. They don't see enough people acting like them so that a positive impact on that problem can result. So why bother.

It is unfortunate that there are so many people in these four categories. I believe that what is lacking is the education of these people. But then again, everyone can be set in one of two knowledge categories. You have those people that know what they don't know, and then there are people who don't know what they don't know. Those in the first of these two categories will make the effort to learn more, but those in the second of these two categories have no reason to learn more. I can't help but think that most of the people in the four denial categories fit in this latter knowledge category.

I am still trying to figure out how to get to them so they will join the people working on protecting the environment and reversing the negative consequences. As you may recall from a previous article, I am also still trying to educate corporations, government agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) relative to protecting the environment.