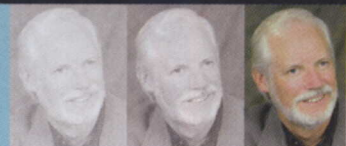


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SENTINEL WATCH:

EARTH DAY: A CALL TO PRAYER

FOR MANY PEOPLE, human impact on the environment is a foregone conclusion, and for some, the degree of that impact is debatable. But it would be absurd to argue that we don't have a *relationship* to our environment, and events like Earth Day (observed on April 22) provide opportunities to evaluate the nature of that relationship.

I received an invitation to attend the International Conference on Global Warming and Climate Change to be held in London this summer. What is intriguing to me about this invitation is that it stems from talks I give on the impact of prayer on the environment. To me, the decision to include speakers with different perspectives symbolizes a growing awareness that spirituality, in the best sense of the word, can have a major impact on changes of attitude and action relating to the planet.

In fact, many churches around the globe have taken up the issue of environmental responsibility as a moral imperative. Mary Baker Eddy, the founder of this publication, commented on this in her landmark work, *Science and Health with Key the Scriptures*. Giving her sense of the spiritual interpretation of Gen 1:29 and 30 (a passage that directly relates to our interaction with the environment) she wrote: "God gives the lesser idea of Himself for a link to the greater, and in return, the higher always protects the lower. . . . All the varied expressions of God reflect health, holiness, immortality—infinite Life, Truth, and Love" (p. 518).

As I've looked over the conference's focus questions—"What do we know?" and "What can we do?"—I've realized that they provide a useful context for shaping my prayers on this topic. For instance, a little different slant on "what do we know" can include *how* we know the natural world around us. Seen from a spiritual perspective, the environment is not an aggregate of physical entities, but a complex expression of spiritual ideas that, in reality, express the nature of God in "health, holiness, and immortality." These spiritual ideas, therefore, are not as vulnerable as we might believe, because their might, continuity, and existence come from their divine Source, infinite Life, Truth, and Love. The more that one can appreciate the environment as spiritual expression, the more they'll find it providing a "link" to a deeper understanding of themselves, and to God.

The challenge to this kind of knowing is gathering understanding from divine facts instead of from material circumstances. Often, the divine facts are just the opposite of what we see with our eyes. But the more we focus on the spiritual reality as the scientific fact, the more we'll see the spiritual nature of God's creation manifested. This fundamental concept is the basis for the larger context of healing.

That all *sounds* great, we might say. But is it realistic to expect that prayer can effect real environmental change? That brings me to the second focus question from the conference, "What can we do?"

It's possible to move from debate over scientific evidence to bringing healing to the world around us. Engaging with our environment through a more prayerful stance does initiate and sustain progress. If we understand human existence as a relative concept, determined by thought, then what we hold on to as our sense of reality comes to light through prayer. Constructive solutions to the most entrenched problems flourish. And often, healing happens in our own lives.

A small business owner I know was skeptical about concerns of climate change and resisted taking any action to adjust his operating practices. However, as he prayed about his attitude, he saw more clearly that the oneness of all Life, the spiritual sense of the ecosystem, was independent of any societal debate. He began to find ways to run his business in a more environmentally friendly fashion, which not only satisfied his moral concerns, but gained him stature in his community and brought financial improvement.

Seen from a spiritual point of view, all creation teaches us about the integrity of the one divine Source. We can love what a deeper knowledge of the spiritual nature of our environment brings. What better way to celebrate Earth Day than in taking to heart a humbling passage from the Bible's book of Job: "But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee; and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee: or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee: and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee. Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord hath wrought this?" (Job 12:7-9). **icss**

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