

Climate Change: A Moral Question?

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By now, for most people in this country, the issue of climate change (less accurately referred to as “global warming”) has become an accepted reality. Despite the sometimes virulent dismissals by some whose extreme views or vested interests would deny that we humans are causing significant change to our global environment by our activities and lifestyle, the greater majority of people acknowledge that we are faced with the issue of climate change. No longer are there just the few environmentalists calling for awareness, but the scientific community, the United Nations, and governments everywhere are calling for practical solutions to this urgent problem that faces all who claim Earth as home.

What varies in addressing this complex issue is both the degree of urgency felt, along with the commitment to taking measures to halt and reverse this human headlong plunge toward self destruction. For many of us, the science is more complex than we have imagined, and what we – and the scientists – lack is data on just how these changes are occurring and what the on-going impact will be. Hints from glaciers and ocean levels, animal migration patterns and botanical variations, as well as the toxins that continue to pour into our life systems, all point to our unsustainable human activity.

As Christians joining with all people of faith, we have a growing understanding of environmental issues as moral issues. From Pope Benedict XVI to young evangelical leaders, there has been a call to affirm that “the Lord’s is the Earth and all upon it.” Our biblical faith reminds us of the obligation we have from the beginning to “have dominion” – not as greedy dominators, but as God has dominion – as careful, nurturing stewards.

Other spiritual traditions call us to recognize our “creatureliness” and dependence upon the whole fabric of life for our well-being: we are all connected. What I do in my own backyard does have an impact both physically and spiritually on the rest of the globe. Our choices for good or ill do matter. As people of faith, we are being called upon to take leadership where previously we may have held back, seeing climate change as a matter separate from our call to love God and neighbor. What could be more loving than to take seriously our call as co-Creators with God in extending that loving dominion to our beloved planet? What could be more loving to our neighbor across the backyard or across the world than to wake up to the reality around us, limit our excesses, and even consciously conserve and cut back on a lifestyle that takes far more than our share of Earth’s goods? It is a moral choice.

The measures we can take are numerous: each time we walk instead of ride, regulate the thermostat, cook a meal, re-use instead of buying new, support and vote for energy regulation, practice simple living and teach the next generation to do so, it is a moral choice. It becomes the greater good of lessening the need for more oil spills in the Gulf, more

mountain destruction in Appalachia, more Amazon destruction in the South. We are all connected. We can do something, and our faith calls us to this as a moral imperative.

For practical ways to limit our personal and corporate impact, our “footprint on the planet,” try calculating your own “carbon footprint.” Go to one of the many websites that offer tools and contain a great deal of practical information from taking the bus to drying your clothes outdoors. These are particularly good:

www.350.org

www.nature.org/initiatives/climatechange/calculator (Nature Conservancy)

www.epa.gov/climatechange/wycd/actionsteps.html (Environmental Protection Agency)