

**Preserving and Cherishing the Earth:  
An Appeal for Joint Commitment in  
Science and Religion**

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The Earth is the birthplace of our species and, so far as we know, our only home. When our numbers were small and our technology feeble, we were powerless to influence the environment of our world. But today, suddenly, almost without anyone noticing, our numbers have become immense; and our technology has achieved vast, even awesome, powers. Intentionally, or inadvertently, we are now able to make devastating changes in the global environment-an environment to which we and all the other beings with which we share the Earth are meticulously and exquisitely adapted.

We are now threatened by self-inflicted, swiftly moving environmental alterations about whose long-term biological and ecological consequences we are still painfully ignorant-depletion of the protective ozone layer; a global warming unprecedented in the last 150 millennia; the obliteration of an acre of forest every second; the rapid-fire extinction of species; and the prospect of a global nuclear war which would put at risk most of the population of the Earth. There may well be other such dangers of which, in our ignorance, we are still unaware. Individually and cumulatively they represent a trap being set for the human species, a trap we are setting for ourselves. However principled and lofty (or naïve and shortsighted) the justifications may have been for the activities that brought forth these dangers, separately and together they now imperil our species and many others. We are close to committing-many would argue we are already committing-what in religious language is sometimes called Crimes against Creation.

By their very nature these assaults on the environment were not caused by one political group or any one generation. Intrinsicly, they are transnational, transgenerational, and transideological. So are all conceivable solutions. To escape these traps requires a perspective that embraces the peoples of the planet and all the generations yet to come.

Problems of such magnitude, and solutions demanding so broad a perspective must be recognized from the outset as having a religious as well as a scientific dimension. Mindful of our common responsibility, we scientists-many of us long engaged in combating the environmental crisis-urgently appeal to the world religious community to commit, in word and deed, and as boldly as is required, to preserve the environment of the Earth.

Some of the short-term mitigations of these dangers-such as greater energy efficiency, rapid banning of chlorofluorocarbons or modest reductions in the nuclear arsenals-are comparatively easy and at some level are already underway. But other, more far-reaching, more long-term, more effective approaches will encounter widespread inertia, denial, and resistance. In this category are conversion from fossil fuels to a nonpolluting energy economy, a continuing swift

reversal of the nuclear arms race, and a voluntary halt to world population growth-without which many of the other approaches to preserve the environment will be nullified.

As on issues of peace, human rights, and social justice, religious institutions can here too be a strong force encouraging national and international initiatives in both the private and public sectors, and in the diverse worlds of commerce, education, culture, and mass communication.

The environmental crisis requires radical changes not only in public policy, but in individual behavior. The historical record makes clear that religious teaching, example, and leadership are powerfully able to influence personal conduct and commitment.

As scientists, many of us have had profound experiences of awe and reverence before the universe. We understand that what is regarded as sacred is more likely to be treated with care and respect. Our planetary home should be so regarded. Efforts to safeguard and cherish the environment need to be infused with a vision of the sacred. At the same time, a much wider and deeper understanding of science and technology is needed. If we do not understand the problem, it is unlikely we will be able to fix it. Thus, there is a vital role for religion and science.

We know that the well-being of our planetary environment is already a source of profound concern in your councils and congregations. We hope this Appeal will encourage a spirit of common cause and joint action to help preserve the Earth.

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