

Environmental concerns are not the stepchild of social justice

Carol Meyer | Jan. 11, 2011 Eco Catholic

Most churches, Catholic or otherwise, place environmental concerns under the broader category of social justice. Like a young child in a big family, the environment vies for attention along with world hunger, peacemaking, the death penalty, and numerous other social issues. And realistically, even though justice pronouncements from on high abound, they aren't taken very seriously on the parish level. Care for the Earth hardly makes a blip on the radar screen of church priorities. To change this, we need to make stewardship of the Earth its own stand-alone reality.

It's time to move away from thinking of environmental concerns as one of many equally important and pressing social issues, and give it top billing.

Biblical scholar Diane Bergant says the integrity of creation is foundational, and that social justice flows out of that. Maybe the fact that the Bible starts with creation should tell us something. There is nothing without it. We've just taken nature for granted, but can no longer afford that luxury. The foundation is cracking, and we'd better get busy fixing it.

So let's pull Earth stewardship out of the pile of justice issues, dust it off, and put it in a place of prominence where we never lose sight of it. And we don't get off the hook by relegating it to a church committee who alone is zealous. Care for the Earth has to be a total parish priority. Here's how I look at it. If we don't have an Earth that sustains life, there goes our churches along with everything else. We tend to think the spiritual is superior to the material world, but that is not true. It cannot stand alone. Creation is the bedrock on which everything, social as well as spiritual, is built.

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God's whole earthly and spiritual enterprise is being threatened because we are trashing the planet. Surely that is enough to wake us up individually and collectively. And let's not make the tragic error of thinking that we can continue on as we have been and that God will magically fix the mess. (That will be the subject of another blog.) We can't continue on with business as usual in our churches. We need to commit time, energy, staff and money (ouch!) to the vital ministry of Earth care NOW. We can't wait to fix all the social justice ills before we tackle the environment. Let's get moving!

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