

A Perspective on Lent and Creation Care

The Lenten period affords Christians the opportunity to connect with the period when Jesus withdrew into the desert and fasted for 40 days and nights, and then resisted three temptations of the devil (Matt. 4: 1-11). It is a period of reflection, ideally at times in solitude, that might now include considering whether the devil is again testing people of faith.

The God-created world we inherited, including all life on earth, is being damaged by the effects of climate change. If we strive to live in harmony with biblical teachings, then we face a test: do we use our God-given intelligence to mitigate this crisis, or do we, individually, respond to the temptations available and take no ameliorating actions?

One perspective on how creation care/climate change is a religious, as well as scientific, issue stems from recalling that the earth's atmosphere profoundly affects the planet's climate. The carbon dioxide (CO₂) in that atmosphere plays a particularly crucial role: it reflects back to earth some of the heat that would normally vent into space. For centuries prior to the industrial revolution, the atmosphere contained about 275 molecules of CO₂ per million parts of dry air—abbreviated as 275 ppm (parts per million).

Since the industrial revolution, people have been adding CO₂ to the naturally occurring amount through the burning of fossil fuels, and the CO₂ now exceeds 400 ppm. That results in additional heat being reflected back to earth, which results in a change in the planet's climate.

That change in the climate produces numerous effects, which we read about almost daily, including tropical diseases now showing up in the Temperate Zone, a warming of the oceans, and an accelerating loss of species. Some of these effects are contrary to biblical teachings, and that is why creation care/climate change is a religious issue for Christians and Jews, as well as a scientific one.

A subsequent Lenten teaching will identify some of those effects and demonstrate how they violate biblical instructions.

Action: A religious practice offers us one way to live an examined life. Imagine that you will soon depart on a 40-day retreat and will be provided with ample food and water and pleasant accommodations. You may bring books and papers of your choosing, but no electronics (TV, cell phone, computers, etc.). How might you spend your time? What spiritual and secular issues might you reflect upon? What self-evaluation might you engage in? Consider this question at least twice during the Lenten season.