

The planet you save may not be yours

A Native American proverb says, “We don’t inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.” As we approach the 40th anniversary of Earth Day next week, those are wise words.

Formerly the sole bastion of hippies and tree huggers, care for the environment has gone mainstream. The Toyota Prius and other hybrid vehicles are top sellers and motorists eagerly await affordable, everyday electric cars.

Scout troops used to sponsor newspaper and aluminum can drives to raise funds. Now that doesn’t bring in much revenue, but folks recycle because it’s the right thing to do. Communities everywhere have recycling collected alongside regular trash, and sometimes the recycling bins are fuller than the trash cans.

Kermit the Frog once sang, “It’s not easy being green,” and he’s right, it’s not always easy to be green, that is, environmentally responsible. But it’s getting easier.

Take, for example, solar panels, which once were exorbitant, and now are merely expensive. The return on investment for installing solar power generation for a home or business can be less than a decade, even six or seven years, which is pretty good in this economy.

The Vatican has even caught the solar flare, with the installation of a large solar-power generator on top of the Paul VI audience hall, providing 300,000 kilowatt hours per year. Plans there also include a large solar farm on property the Vatican owns on the outskirts of Rome. As a result, according to one UN energy policy official who visited last year, the Vatican could become the first state in the world to be powered by renewable energy and be carbon-neutral.

It’s hard for us to think about “global warming” when we’re coming off the winter we just faced, record snowfalls and all. In reality, we’re concerned with “climate change,” and that’s undeniable. Part of the changes the earth is experiencing may be the result of decades-long climatic cycles, the ebb and flow of the planet’s heating

and cooling over time. However, we cannot help but notice that something's wrong.

When the president of Maldives and his cabinet met underwater (wearing scuba gear) to emphasize the probability that their island nation will be swallowed up as sea levels rise, and when the residents of Tuvalu start looking en masse for a new homeland in New Zealand, these are dire times. When major earthquakes rock Haiti and Chile and Sumatra all in a matter of months, perhaps we ought to be getting the impression that the earth is angry. No, we're not anthropomorphizing the planet; neither are we suggesting a literal "earth goddess" or "Mother Nature" stirring the pot. But, things on the planet are clearly askew.

This is not merely a geological question; the ecology is a question of respect for life. Speaking at the UN climate summit in Copenhagen in December, Archbishop Celestino Migliore said the church has much to say about the environment. According to Catholic News Service, he noted that Pope Benedict XVI "does not speak of the environment but of creation" and he also speaks of the urgency to safeguard it instead of defending it.

The use of the word creation "places the question in the correct perspective," the archbishop said, "reminding everyone that the environment is a gift of God. Therefore it is not a matter of defending it from an enemy who is usually identified as man, but of safeguarding it because God himself desired to entrust creation to mankind."

You've been entrusted with part of the planet, with taking care of God's creation. What are you doing to help keep it green? What will you do to help celebrate Earth Day at 40?

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