
Environmentalists

Origins

The modern-day environmental movement began in the late 1960s and early 1970s. The book *Silent Spring* by Rachel Carson, an American biologist, warned of the dangers for humans and wildlife of using pesticides in agriculture. This led to an increase in public awareness of environmental issues and the creation of the United States Environmental Protection Agency in 1970, which later banned the use of the pesticide DDT in America. The photographs by Apollo astronauts of an apparently fragile earth was another important catalyst of environmentalism. In 1970 the first Earth Day was held, where people demonstrated about the environment. This took place on 22 April 1970, and is seen by some as marking the formal start of the modern environmental movement. In 1971, anti-war protestors set off for Amchitka Island, Alaska, in a fishing boat to protest against nuclear-weapons testing. They renamed the boat Greenpeace, and this event led to the formation of the Greenpeace environmental organisation, which focuses on the ability of the earth to nurture life. The Friends of the Earth organisation was also formed around this time, committed to the conservation, improvement and protection of the environment. In 1979, in the *Gaia Hypothesis*, James Lovelock argued that the earth should be seen as a single organism.

Today

Environmentalists today have a variety of concerns. For example, the Friends of Earth organisation covers a range of issues, including biodiversity, climate, corporates, the economy, energy, global trade, planning, real food and waste. Events such as Earth Hour, where lights around the world are switched off, are gaining popularity. Al Gore's film *An Inconvenient Truth* helped to publicise climate change. However, environmentalists have been accused by some of scaremongering and religious fervour.

What the mainstream says

- The planet should be kept healthy, and a good life for everyone on it should be ensured.
- Earth should be used with tomorrow in mind, living within the natural world's limits.
- Everyone, everywhere, now and tomorrow, deserves to have a good life.
- The economy should work for people and the environment.
- The natural world should be defended.
- The ability of the earth to nurture the diversity of life should be ensured.
- Climate change should be prevented by using less polluting fuels and promoting clean, renewable and efficient energy.
- The oceans and ancient forests should be protected.
- Toxic chemicals should be eliminated.
- Genetically modified organisms should not be released into nature.
- There should be nuclear disarmament and an end to nuclear contamination.

(Sources: <http://www.foe.co.uk/index.html>; <http://www.greenpeace.org.uk>)

Suggested initial Scriptural approach

The words "The earth is the LORD'S, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein" (Ps. 24:1) set the right perspective, showing that the earth does not belong to man. Environmentalists should be reassured that God will not allow the earth to be ruined by man, but rather, "He hath established it, He created it not in vain, He formed it to be inhabited" (Isa. 45:18). In the meantime, we must be like Abraham, who was a "friend of God" (Jas. 2:23), not a friend of the earth.