

M/P Forum on Global Warming

Meeting notes 11/16/08 by G. Wiens

On Nov. 16, 2008, approximately 75 people participated in a presentation and discussion on the biblical reflections, scientific background, hindrances to addressing the problem of global warming, and finally some practical steps which we can all take now.

Mary Anne Isaac began with words from Genesis 1:24, and said that the "dominion" language used is God's mandate that humans should reign, before the fall, over creation with care and love, even as God does. But what about after the fall (now), when the created order has been broken and consequently all kinds of serious problems, including global warming, have beset the earth and its inhabitants? Some say that it is not that important to take care of this "old earth" since at the end of time God will create an entirely new earth. But Mary Anne called us to consider that God makes each of us a new creature (i.e. a new creation) in Christ when we accept and follow God's redemption and leading. May it also be the same for our earth--that it could be made "new" if we, as earth's caretakers, respond to what God's Spirit sensitizes and enlightens us to do?

Michael Kunz began by saying he felt a personal connection with the wildfires which had just been raging in Santa Barbara, since he had studied in the university there. He wondered if there was a relationship between those fires and global warming. He then briefly reviewed some scientific studies that have shown that extended drought *is* a climate change event, and that climate change does influence the number and severity of wildfires. He proposed that our individual views of climate change depend on how we are personally connected to the situation, and that the interpretation of this connection is virtually controlled by our level of affluence. Do we live in Santa Barbara (where many can afford to rebuild) or do we live in Africa!

Michael then explained several graphs taken from recent studies that illustrated how the anthropogenic effects far out-weighed all non-human causes for green-house gases related to global warming. He concluded that he didn't have a crystal ball, to know all the ramifications of how the changes in earth's climate would ultimately play out, but he did strongly state that, based upon the evidence, human action can make a difference!

Steve Ratzlaff began by stating firmly that "our progeny will experience a different planet" from what we currently know--and that suffering for many of earth's populations will be a result! He said that although the United Nations does have an appropriate format for discussing the problems of global warming, the current government in the United States has not been helpful. The "spirit of fundamentalism" has been a prevailing hindrance in our government as well as in our religions, as it continues to divide, exclude and marginalize over the significant issues of our time, including those of climate change and global warming. Steve said that to fight climate change will take a huge financial investment--of the scope and magnitude of our current national defense outlay of approximately \$1.5 trillion/year, that now "kills twice"-- taking the lives of people in war *and* denying the funding of humanitarian/development programs as well as the efforts to curb climate change, which negatively affect the lives of millions of people world-wide. If just one-half of our national defense amount were spent on energy conservation, it would make a significant difference in the reduction of green-house gases.

Ken Friesen began with a handout that showed the hugely disproportionate use of gasoline by consumers in the U.S.A. vs. the other countries of the world, and the comparison virtually screamed

disparity. Well, what are the ways, right now, that we Americans can cut down? Ken gave us several suggestions: Change how we eat by going partially "vegetarian". If our family and work conditions allow participate in car pooling, and reduce the size of our vehicle--to a small sedan from a large S.U.V. And, insulate our homes and business buildings, as well as a number of other very useful strategies mentioned in the handout. He also said that although the (then very high) price of energy can be painful to our pocketbooks, it does highlight and promote the single most influential factor that we energy consumers seem to respond to--the cost-price of energy!

Questions, responses and additional information took up about half of the Forum time:

[Q = question] [PR = panel response] [AR = audience response] [AI = audience information]

Q: What about other countries--they won't change (greenhouse gas production, conservation, etc.) why should we?

PR: Developing countries are indeed open to change because they are drowning in severe pollution.

Q: What about nuclear power plants?

PR: Most appropriate are other alternatives that do not have the attendant safety issues and high water usage (particularly here in our arid valley).

Q: What about our buildings?

PR: We need to encourage our architects, businesspeople and farmers, because building and heating/cooling our buildings using less energy is a bother -- the methods are different and new.

Q: Is veggie oil really "better" (it still produces carbon dioxide during combustion)?

PR: Yes, because it recycles plant-matter carbon that is already in the biosphere and would naturally decompose with attendant release of energy and carbon gases. Petroleum use introduces "new" carbon to the biosphere/atmosphere that had been previously stored for millions of years inside the earth.

AI: The Air Pollution Control Board of the Valley is now setting the standards for atmospheric pollution. A regional blue-print planning commission is involved, and a public vetting of the plan will take place in January '09 -- look for it! Also, look up "KILOWATT OURS" on the internet--has some good information.

Q: How do we address the conservative religious interpretation "the old earth must be destroyed to make way for the new earth"?

PR: The Evangelical Climate Initiative has a web site. It seems that in particular the young are increasingly prioritizing the care of the environment as an important part of their faith.

Q: "Mennonite Simple Living"--does this help us any now?

PR

& AI: Yes, but we will need to thoroughly examine what the idea "simple" should mean today. "Simple" and a "smaller carbon footprint" are not easily put together in a complex world that is interdependent. An extra effort, especially at first, is necessary to ensure that the rewards of environmental health and connectedness bring increased justice and richness in social relationship. Organic vegetable boxes are useful at local efforts. Doris Longacre has written an appropriate book

Living More with Less. The MB biblical Seminary plans to offer a course including this next summer, with the goal of combining theology and simple living.

Q: What can we promote to "engage the environmental proclivity of our youth"?

PR

& AI: Consumerism needs to diminish in our pursuits. Co-housing and shared-housing need to be supported as ways to conserve resources, as well as means to enrich relationships, both within communities, and also across cultures.

Q: How can we change the close connection between consumerism and employment?

PR

& AI: Encourage public investment in infrastructure--schools, clinics, trains, bridges and highways. Encourage and participate in "green" energy and construction (solar, biomass fuel conversion, etc.).

Q: How can we involve our local leaders?

AI: Our new Mayor Ashley Swearingen is a Christian. If you get a group together to address the topic of global warming and how it relates to her leadership and life in Fresno, and invite her, she will come.

Steve Penner thanked the panel and the audience for their participation and the spirited conversation (it was a good turn-out!). He brought the meeting to a close with "go in peace!"