



**OUR DAILY BREAD**  
Resources for Spiritual Questers

# *Sustaining and Healing God's Creation*

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If human beings were to be completely eradicated from the face of the Earth and all our cities wiped off the map, there would be an easy way for some alien visitors to figure out when the mid-20th century began: PLASTIC. Around the globe our annual Earth Day observance happened on Sunday, April 22. For several reasons I felt it important to wait until this morning to honor Earth Day with you. Perhaps you have heard that given the global natural environmental problems our world faces, among those who care about our Mother Earth we all are glad to say that every day is EARTH DAY!

The focus of this year's international Earth Day observance is: "End Plastic Pollution!". Did you know that from 1950 up until today, about 8.3 billion metric tons of plastic have been produced by humanity? This figure was discovered by two research projects from the University of Georgia and the University of California. 8.3 billion metric tons is equivalent to 1 billion elephants all heaped up together to give you a rough idea of how much that weighs. To put that figure into perspective, the Empire State Building weighs just 331,000 metric tons.

The global production of plastics has increased from 2 million metric tons in 1950 to over 400 million metric tons of plastic produced in 2015! And since plastic does not naturally degrade, the billions of tons of it sitting in our landfills, floating in and on top of our oceans, or piling up on our city streets and sidewalks will leave a convenient marker for any intelligent visitors from outer space one day, should they wish to classify our era. The plastic waste we produce will be with us for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years from now.

In short, plastic pollution is poisoning our oceans and land, injuring and killing marine life, and now it is affecting our health. Micro-particles of plastic chemicals are drawn out of the huge masses of landfill plastic waste we produce, called "Leachate," some of which bonds with the water molecules from the rain, which makes its way into the water table and our drinking water, as well as into the food chain, which makes its way into foods like tuna and other things we eat.

In a New York Times article written last year by Tatiana Schlossberg, she wrote that recent scientific findings from several major studies (named in her article) inform us, "Their findings suggest that staggering amounts of near-eternal litter is present in the environment--the oceans, landfills and freshwater and terrestrial ecosystems-- and the numbers are likely to increase, with 12 billion metric tons accumulating in landfills or the environment by 2050." She goes on to say in her article that "scientists estimate that five million to 13 million metric tons of plastic enter the ocean each year, according to previous studies."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Schlossberg, Tatiana. *Trillions of Plastic Bits, Swept up by Current, Are Littering Arctic Waters*. 2017 New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/19/climate/arctic-plastics-pollution.html>

The explosive increase in waste plastics production is primarily due to the increase in using it for packaging, such as for bottled water, deli meat and wrapping for stuff we buy. Most of the plastic produced to date is no longer in use-- roughly 6.3 metric tons of it. Only 12% of this amount has been incinerated, which is the only way to permanently get rid of it, but then it pollutes the air we breathe.

Plastic pollution is now one of our world's most pressing environmental problems. It impacts our environment, our health and our well-being. We have all contributed to this problem-- mostly unknowingly-- and it's now up to us to do something about it. The bottom line is, we must work now to reduce and eventually to eliminate plastic pollution. It all begins with education and becoming conscious about it, rather than burying our heads in the sand about it, pretending it doesn't matter.

On the flip side of the coin, I can easily say to myself, "But plastics are so useful to us all, aren't they? They provide airtight packaging for many perishable foods, I can carry my groceries from the store back home, and then use those bags for other things. Plastic helps me stay dry from the rain, and store my stuff away at home securely. Plastics are present in furniture, in my T.V. remote control and on my laptop computer. They are in my car, my appliances, my other electronics, and so many other things too. Why, plastics are everywhere!" And so they are.

So, why is all this mass production of plastic wrapping, plastic tape, plastic pens, plastic milk cartons and plastic bags and straws such a problem? Not only is it killing and contaminating the bodies of our ocean creatures, the very creatures God has made through the amazing process of evolution, but plastic is also leaching into our soil and water tables. After producing trillions of oil-based plastic items, the negative consequences are staggering.

In one publication I read this week it states, "Plastic pollution is now recognized as a hazard to public health and the human body. Chemicals leached from some plastics used in food and beverage storage are harmful to human health. Correlations have been shown between levels of some of these chemicals, and an increased risk of problems such as chromosomal and reproductive system abnormalities, impaired brain and neurological functions, cancer, cardiovascular system damage, adult-onset diabetes, early puberty, obesity and resistance to chemotherapy."<sup>2</sup>

One of the most difficult challenges we face with polluting our environment is this

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<sup>2</sup> *Plastic Pollution Primer and Action Toolkit*. Earth Day Network. 2018

tendency to think, “Well, polluting the environment won’t hurt me. It’ll just kill a few fish and strangle a few birds, but I’ll be okay.” The falsity of such thinking is in believing that each one of us is not intimately connected and woven into the fabric of our natural world. Think about it: all of the clothes you wear, the water and beverages you drink, the fruits, vegetables and meat you eat, all of the electricity you use (generated by power plants run by forces from the natural world), all of the air you breathe (generated from green plants that produce oxygen), the materials used to build your own house (even the plastics were made from oil and gas produced by trillions of tons of vegetation pressed down over millions of years since the dinosaurs roamed the earth), the very molecules and cells inside your body are all made and sustained from foods and animals raised on farms or caught in the wild-- everything we are physically and all we take in and use in life comes to us from Mother Earth!

So you see, the truth is, that all life on this beautiful, spinning globe we call Earth is dependent upon a healthy ecosystem and environment. Ultimately, our survival and the survival of future generations depends upon how humanity chooses or does not choose to peel back the blinders from off our eyes and look at the truth of our choices. But that isn’t the end of my message for you and me this morning. No, the next massive question is, will you and I care a lot about the millions of tons of toxic plastic being thrown into our landfills and into our oceans? In other words, will our Earth Day calling to reduce, refuse, re-use, recycle and remove plastics hit home inside of you this morning and cause that infamous “RED ALERT!” to go off inside? Or, will you let yourself respond in a lukewarm, dispassionate and non-emergency fashion?

When it comes to being lukewarm about crucial and vital needs and issues in life, Revelation 3 gives us ample warning about how God feels about us when we choose to be neither hot nor cold inside. We read that the Lord speaks to us as He spoke to the church congregation at Laodicea saying, “I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other. So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.” (Rev. 3: 16)

Our theology tells us that God spoke those words to those church people because they made choices that lacked the passionate conviction of love for the Lord and others. In my mind, at least, our current problem with plastics pollution is something so serious that it’s time we try to connect with other churches in our area and region and in the U.S. in order to first spread the news and spread the truth about the severity of the problem. The Earth Day Network has great educational resources anyone can use online. Their website helps you to first calculate your plastic pollution footprint, and then look at ways of lowering that prudently. Also, we need to put pressure on local, statewide and our national government to greatly reduce the mass production and use of plastics, especially in packaging materials. I

believe that how we choose to care about the environment and all of God's creatures big and small reveals directly to us how much we truly love our Lord and each other.

And what do we so proudly claim as New Church Christians to the whole world? That we are all about putting love into action wisely and prudently so that good will result. Are you ready to join with me in doing something about this problem? Let's do it together! "How many are your works, O LORD! In wisdom you made them all; the earth is full of your creatures."

Amen.

### **Suggested Readings:**

Psalm 104:1,14-24

Revelation 3:14-22

Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell* §106