

Paying attention: Time to take action

by [John Buchanan](#) in the [November 14, 2006](#) issue

I was fascinated to learn that New Testament scholar [Barbara Rossing](#) was first drawn to studying the book of Revelation because of her interest in environmental issues. Many of us are not much interested in apocalyptic literature, especially not as represented by the Left Behind novels. And yet we have a potential apocalypse on our hands in the form of the environmental crisis.

Americans constitute 4 percent of the world's population and produce 25 percent of the world's greenhouse gases. We continue to manufacture and market automobiles that are not fuel efficient, and we resist even modest efforts to improve. Every time I see a Hummer in the narrow streets of my urban neighborhood I recall Bill McKibben's quip: when he sees the vehicles in a supermarket parking lot in suburban Boston, he concludes that the shoppers must have driven through a jungle, forded flooded rivers and climbed uncharted canyons to get there.

"Global warming is the real deal and human activity has been causing it," says *Time* magazine (April 3). We used to think we had a lot of time—perhaps decades—to remedy the situation. "What few people reckoned on," notes *Time*, "was that global climate systems are booby-trapped with tipping points and feedback loops, thresholds past which the slow creep of environmental decay gives way to sudden collapse."

So it's time to pay attention—time for people of faith who take seriously the creation theology of the Bible, to recognize what is happening to the creation, to demand that politicians act responsibly, and to make personal changes in the way we live. Who needs another virtually indestructible plastic bag?

I recall attending a camp at which we were instructed to take our devotional guide and Bible to an isolated spot for a period of silent devotions. I pretty much hated it. But on one occasion I lay back on the ground and looked up into the tree whose trunk I had been leaning against. The majesty I saw in the spreading branches of that tall tree stunned me. Try it sometime.

Wendell Berry found words to capture the experience in one of his "Sabbath" poems: "Great trees, outspreading and upright, / Apostles of the living light. / Patient as stars, they build in air / Tier after tier, a timbered choir, / Stout beams upholding weightless grace / Of song, a blessing on this place."