

POTTSTOWN CITIZENS FOR Enlightened LEADERSHIP

Champions of protecting earth

Last week saw the deaths of two international icons: Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who helped bring racial equality to South Africa; and Edward O. Wilson, a Harvard biologist and author who was widely acknowledged as the modern era's greatest exponent of evolution.

Unlike Tutu, Wilson did not believe in God.

"I was raised in Alabama and Florida a Southern Baptist," he wrote, "a lad given simple answers to profound questions.



Commentary by
Tom Hylton

"At the same time I came to love science, which seeks profound answers to simple questions. Over the years this mixed background has caused me to think a great deal about the relation of religion to science, and what they jointly express about the human condition.

"I have moved back and forth across the line between the two domains, and here is what I think I found.

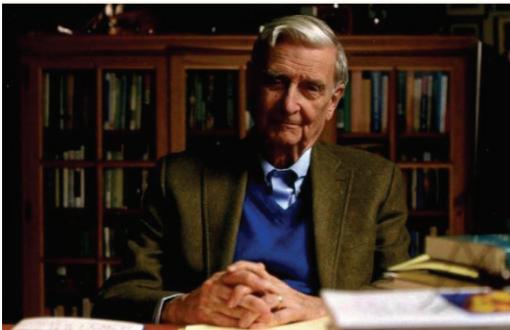
"It seems to me that traditional religious conviction is the nuclear reactor of human motivation.

"It was vital to human survival for tens of thousands of years. Its assumptions, however, do not stand up well under the scrutiny of scientific investigation.

In Wilson's view, "the supernatural did not create biology. Rather, biology created religion."

But evolution, Wilson conceded, "gives little purpose to life unless enriched by religion, or, more precisely, the deep emotions summoned by religion."

Both Tutu and Wilson shared the conviction that, divinely inspired or



Edward O. Wilson

not, humanity's greatest challenge is to protect the environment.

"Future generations are going to forgive us our horrible genocidal wars," Wilson said, "because it'll pass too far in history.

"They will forgive us all of the earlier generations' follies and harm.

"But they will not forgive us having so carelessly thrown away a large part of the rest of life on our watch."

In a 2016 book, "Half Earth: Our Planet's Fight for Life," Wilson proposed that the only way to avoid mass extinction was to turn half the earth into nature preserves.

Tutu was equally passionate about climate change.



Desmond Tutu

"Never before in history have human beings been called on to act collectively in defense of the Earth. As a species, we have endured world wars, epidemics, famine, slavery, apartheid and many other

hideous consequences of religious, class, race, gender and ideological intolerance. People are extraordinarily resilient. The Earth has proven pretty resilient, too. It's managed to absorb most of what's been thrown at it since the industrial revolution and the invention of the internal combustion engine.

"Until now, that is. Because the science is clear: If we don't limit global warming we are doomed to a period of unprecedented instability, insecurity and loss of species.

"But on climate change, it has run up against governments and leaders of industry who have until now put short-term economic and political goals ahead of our collective long-term survival.

"We can no longer tinker about the edges. We can no longer continue feeding our addiction to fossil fuels as if there were no tomorrow. For there will be no tomorrow."

Can believers and non-believers alike come together to address the most critical issue in the history of civilization?

It's 2022, and the clock is ticking.

