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8/30/71

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Stanford University
Medical School
Palo Alto, California

Dear Dr. Lederberg,

I am writing to you to elicit an opinion concerning various Judaic precepts and rulings about the treatment of our environment. As you know, there have been numerous references in the press and other literature to destruction of the environment being rooted in Judeo-Christian philosophy. With regard to my letter, I wish only to discuss Jewish and not Christian philosophy.

Obviously, many ecologists have read Genesis 1:28 "... replenish the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea ..." and have zeroed in on "subdue it" without considering "replenish

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the earth" which in typical Jewish tradition textually has the "replenish" preceding the "subdue", the former therefore being of the greater importance. Obviously, as illustrated in the Talmud, a Biblical dictum may have several interpretations.

Copies of two articles pertinent to the subject are enclosed. In addition, the Sabbatical year for the land (Leviticus 25: 2-5) and the prohibition of destruction of trees during battle (Deuteronomy 20:19) are familiar. Further, in the Talmud, Baba 24B-25A, the establishment of a permanent threshing floor within 50 cubits of the city limits is prohibited because the chaff may be carried into the city by the wind and jeopardize the health of the residents.

So ecologists - in general - or rather to your knowledge, have ecologists considered

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these writings before making their statements about Judeo-Christian philosophy? And if they have, in light of these statements, how do they justify their argument?

I shall be most interested in reading your answers to these questions.

Very sincerely yours,
Laben M. Melnick