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Fall 11-13-2016

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#### Recommended Citation

Hokema, Chase, "Wheaton College Professor Speaks To GWU Students About The Role Environmentalism Plays In Christianity" (2016). *GWU-Today*. 374.

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# Wheaton College Professor Speaks to GWU Students About the Role Environmentalism Plays in Christianity



Photos by Chase Hockema

Story by Chase Hockema

To inform concerned Christians of their obligation to the world around them, a professor from Wheaton College in Illinois came to campus on Monday, November 7<sup>th</sup>.

Dr. Sandra Richter, a Harvard graduate and professor at many universities and seminars, spoke at an open meeting Monday night and at Dimensions the following morning. She shared her passion for environmentalism, God's plan for the earth, and the ways in which evangelicals have failed creation.

"This is one of the most misunderstand topics of social justice and holiness," Richter said. At Wheaton, Richter launched a course that took the natural sciences and integrated them with theology. When she introduced the course she asked her students why they were interested. They almost unanimously responded, "As a Christian, I



didn't think I was allowed to incorporate my love of nature into my spiritual life." In her course and lecture, Richter explained that Christians not only can, but should, have an interest in environmentalism.

According to Richter, the topic of environmentalism has been considered a taboo within the church for several reasons. First, the traditional political allies of the church are not the traditional political allies of the environmentalist movement. "If you are pro-life, supposedly you cannot also be pro-environment. In other words, are you a Democrat or a

Christian?" she humorously asked. Second, the church is largely sheltered from the impact of the environmental degradation. Third, many hold the theological belief that we should use our natural resources as aggressively as possible to obey God's sanctions.

"As a result, the church has actually distorted God's plan for our stewardship," Richter said. "God's original, perfect plan for nature was that Adam's care of Eden should mirror the character of God. When that failed, care for His creation fell to ancient Israel, and then to us. The land belongs to God, and we are just tenants. And tenants can be evicted."

Leviticus and Deuteronomy provide many of God's guidelines for using the land, including the ethical treatment of animals, how much should be set aside for the impoverished and the idea that we ought to reduce excessive consumerism. "These laws are not just for the Israelites," Richter said. "God commands us to wisely and kindly use the land." She stressed the importance of caring for the world around us, reminding the audience that they have future generations to think about, and that the earth can run out of resources. "Necessity no longer dictates our use of the land," she said. "Our societal norm is consumption with no boundaries. Every action is driven by greed. Excess is typical, and as a result, the world suffers."



According to Richter, evangelicals will be held accountable for their stewardship of the world. Richter encouraged the audience to actively get involved in conserving creation. She referenced personal changes such as recycling, writing letters, signing petitions, and not using products manufactured in unethical ways. "Above all else, get educated," she said. "You can't fix a problem if you don't know how."

For more information about environmentalism and Gardner-Webb's own efforts to conserve nature, contact the Department of Natural Sciences.