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## The Greening of the Papacy

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### Protestant Responses to Roman Catholic Environmental Thought

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#### Introduction

As is wont to occur, this paper underwent some development since I first chose the title. My initial idea was to see how Protestants were responding to Pope Benedict XVI's environmental imperatives, especially the connection between ecology and justice, in his address on world peace. I discovered fairly quickly, however, that there is very little in the way of direct response or commentary. Moreover, I had assumed that in his World Youth Day message in 2009, Benedict XVI has taken the lead in correlating the direct connection between justice, peace, and creation. However, I soon discovered that in doing so he was repeating the connection made between these three as early as 1987, when the World Council of Churches (composed primarily of Protestant and Orthodox communities, with Roman Catholic observers) announced a summit entitled "Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation." The summit met in 1990 in Seoul, Korea and, as a result, a Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation Commission was established as a working arm of the WCC.

So, my research took on a new form, away from responses to the new Roman Catholic imperative and toward an examination of what Protestant churches have already said in this regard. There is, to my mind, striking similarities in the affirmation of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation in previous Protestant thought and subsequent papal declarations. Moreover, I wanted to look at the broad strokes, what Protestant denominations were doing as a whole, instead of the works by individual Protestant thinkers. However, the task of speaking for all Protestants is daunting, to say the least. So, my focus is on the statements of the mainline Protestant denominations concerning environmentalism in the United States (i.e., The Episcopal Church-USA, the Presbyterian Church-USA, the United Methodist Church, and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America). I also include developments among certain Anabaptist and Evangelical communities that are notably progressive and, especially concerning the latter, could be said to stand in contrast to the majority of their cohort. Often criticized as demonstrating exactly the kind of attitude that Lynn White, Jr. so pointedly criticized in 1967, we have seen a growth in the positive articulation of environmental concern from some Evangelicals. One document in particular stands out for its frank admission of guilt in this regard and emphatic declaration of the theological values that inform their activities. Finally, throughout the paper and again at the conclusion, I will say a word about the polity of the various Protestant denominations, as that will help put into context the relative activity (or lack of activity) in some communities. I conclude that, in general, there is a great deal of similarity in the theological and biblical arguments made in favor of a more conscientious awareness to the crisis facing the environment, both among Protestants and between Protestants and Roman Catholics.

Before beginning, let me offer something I was hoping could be in the final version of this essay but has yet to appear. I wanted to see if there were areas where Protestants and Roman Catholics were working together on environmental responsibility from a theological perspective. The surprising answer came when I heard about the latest round (Round Seven) of Methodist-Roman Catholic bilateral dialogue in the United States, led by co-chairs Roman Catholic Bishop William Skylstad of Spokane, WA, and United Methodist Bishop Timothy Whitaker of Lakeland, FL. The document had just been released with the title, “Heaven and Earth are Full of Your Glory” (United Methodist Church 2012). Unfortunately, it was not released in time for its content to be included in this paper. Nevertheless, it is important to note that there is a significant ecumenical dimension to the progress being made.

### **The Efforts of Mainline Protestant Denominations**

The first group I will examine are those within mainline Protestant denominations that are quite active and vocal in expressing environmental concerns and yet who have not articulated a specific theological motivation for doing so. These are the Episcopal Church, the Presbyterian Church-USA, and the United Methodist Church. The denomination that is least conscientiously articulate of specific biblical or theological motivations for their environmental activities within their institutional documents is the Episcopal Church. However tempting it might be to insert a joke here about the unbearable lightness of Anglican doctrinal content, it is important to put the following observation into the polity and decision making process of the Episcopal Church (and here I will anticipate some of what I will say of other denominations mentioned in this paper). The decisions of the

triennial conventions of the EC-USA and the resolutions of the Executive Committee are fundamentally administrative in nature. Its purpose is to not generate theological reflection or argument. Rather, the convention expresses the will of the assembly as a result of such reflection after a diocese (which often seems to have already adopted a particular action) makes the recommendation to the entire convention of delegates. Thus, these decisions read exactly as resolutions and not as theological treatises. It is up to the seminaries and individual bishops within a diocese to articulate the theological vision and liturgical action. A study of each diocese is not feasible here, but it is worth noting that the most active sponsors of environmental resolutions at the general conventions are from the Northwest (including California), Minnesota, and New England. A list of environmental recommendations and their sponsoring diocese is posted on the Episcopal Ecological Network website (2011).

To a second point about the context of a particular denomination, one should note that Anglicanism today is more diverse and theologically contentious than at no other time since the theological struggles of sixteenth century (from Henry VIII to the Elizabethan solution of the so-called “third way”). Today, the rift is along the progressive-conservative divide, with environmentalism wrapped within the debate concerning the ordination of women to the office of bishop and openly gay and lesbian clergy. Thus, I suspect the straightforward language of their resolutions (free of specific theological argument) is an effort to move people to specific action around a pressing, practical crisis and avoid the distraction of theological controversy.

The earliest action of the Executive Committee of EC-USA concerning the environment was in 1973, when the church condemned strip mining and supported legislation to ban its practice (see Episcopal Church for the full list of resolutions). In 1989, the Committee passed a resolution in favor of the Clean Air and Environmental Protection Act. In 2001, the Committee also issued a statement urging Episcopalians to take Global Warming seriously and to become active in counter measures. In 1979, the triennial General Convention passed its first environmentally conscious resolution, in which it calls for theological leaders to develop educational resources to educate congregations about energy use and environmental action (I could not tell if and when such materials were actually developed). The next big event occurred in 1991, when the General Convention was asked to implement the Lambeth Resolution #040 (from the immediately preceding conference of the Anglican world communion). This resolution outlined four areas “in which misuse of people and resources poses a threat to the life systems of the planet” (1). It specifically names “the unequal distribution of the world’s wealth, social injustice within nations, the rise of militarism, and the irreversible damage done to the environment” (2). This resolution failed to pass at the 1991 Convention and failed again when it was reintroduced in 1997. A specific reason for this failure is unclear.

In 1995, the Executive Committee made two significant steps. First, it mandated that the offices of the EC-USA (and strongly encouraged all diocese, schools, and affiliated institutions) have clearly designated places for recycling, take steps toward paper reduction and use of color copies, and replace ceramic or glass for all polystyrene cups and utensils. More substantial, the Committee also formed the Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Commission (JPIC), to create within the EC-USA what had already occurred within the World Council of Church. However, the first proposed work of this commission, an in-

depth study of ecological concerns and Christian stewardship, failed to receive funding when it was proposed to the General Convention in 1997. While the Commission remains an active representative of the EC-USA in environmental concerns, it has not been equipped or funded to create a specifically “Episcopalian” environmental statement (as other denominations have done).

In more recent years, the General Convention has produced mixed results towards environmental action. In 2003, the Convention accepted a proposal from the Diocese of Minnesota concerning the “Spirituality of Food Production,” which was already operating policy within the diocese when submitted to the Convention. The resolution encourages each individual diocese to inform congregations and lobby public officials about the environmental benefits of locally and organically grown food, biodiversity, issues related to genetic engineering as well as the ownership of land and distribution of food. Yet, in 2009, when a more concrete, liturgical action with some historic roots was introduced (namely, Resolution D001, calling for the revival of Rogation Days in the octave of the Pentecost season – from the Feast of St. Francis to Advent), it was solidly rejected (Episcopal Ecological Network 2009b). However, at that same 2009 convention, another concrete proposal from the Executive Committee was accepted. Called The Genesis Covenant, the resolution publically commits “the Church to work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from every facility it maintains by a minimum of 50% within ten years” (Episcopal Ecological Network 2009a). When the Rogation Days proposal (“Propers for the Honoring of God in Creation,” A053) was presented again for consideration at the 2012 General Convention, the House of Bishops rejected it and referred the matter back to the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music.

Turning briefly to the two other mainline denominations that lack specific environmental reflection from an institutional/ecclesiastical perspective, we will consider the Presbyterian Church and the United Methodist Church. From what I can tell, the Presbyterian Church offers us the first specifically environmentally conscience declaration. In 1954, the national convention offered the following brief statement on “Natural Resources”: “Great natural resources have been entrusted to our nation by Almighty God. We call upon the Christian conscience to recognize that our stewardship of the earth and water involves both a land-use program which recognizes the interdependence of soil, water and man and the development of a responsible public policy which will resist the exploitation of land, water, and other natural resources, including forests, for selfish purposes and maintain intelligent conservation for the sustenance of all living creatures through future generations” (n.d.). This is the extent of the content for this resolution.

As in the Episcopal Church, the conventions of the Presbyterian Church are more administrative and less deliberative. The greatest power, and source for theological reflection, is within each presbytery, the equivalent of a diocese. Thus, the resolutions of the convention reflect the general will of the convention but are not meant to be theological summaries or overly programmatic. Instead, general values are articulated which the individual presbyteries will implement as they see best. That said, the Presbyterian Church (and its predecessor bodies) were quite active in advocating for environmental protection and renewal. In a 1971 statement, “Christian Responsibility for Environmental Renewal,” the convention outlined four principles: the right to life (and quality of life) over property

rights; technology as a servant, not a master of humanity; call for a “new ethical lifestyle” of less consumerism; and new modes of corporate decision making calling for corporations to be held accountable for their actions and reflecting a healthy skepticism of the strength of government oversight (n.d.). A 1981 statement, “The Power to Speak Truth to Power,” demands as one of its concerns excessive energy consumption by the rich nations at the environmental expense of the poor. And, in 1990, reflecting the developments within the World Council of Churches, the Presbyterian Church-USA drafted a resolution entitled *Restoring Creation for Ecology and Justice* (see also the resources and reflections for the twentieth anniversary of the statement, 2010). The lengthy document affirms:

1. Earth-keeping today means insisting on sustainability – the ongoing capacity of natural and social systems to thrive together – which requires human beings to practice wise, humble, responsible stewardship, after the model of servanthood that we have in Jesus.
2. Justice today requires participation, the inclusion of all members of the human family in obtaining and enjoying the Creator’s gifts for sustenance.
3. Justice also means sufficiency, a standard upholding the claim of all to have enough – to be met through equitable sharing and organized efforts to achieve that end.
4. Community in our time requires the nurture of solidarity, leading to steadfastness in standing with companions, victims, and allies, and to the realization of the church’s potential as a community of support for adventurous faithfulness.

The document then reflects on seven concrete areas in which we can enact the above principles in relation to the environment. The PC-USA continues these themes and encourages their application through study and preaching guides. Most recently, the PC-USA produced a document entitled *A Life of Abundance: Energy and Ethics* for use on Earth Day Sunday 2012.

Within the United Methodist Church, the first resolution specifically related to the environment appeared in 1984. The statement, entitled “Environmental Stewardship,” is noteworthy for its brief theological preamble, which affirms:

In the Bible, a steward is one given responsibility for what belongs to another. The Greek word we translate as steward is *oikonomos*, one who cares for the household or acts as its trustee. The word *oikos*, meaning household, is used to describe the world as God’s household. Christians, then, are to be stewards of the whole household (creation) of God. *Oikonomia*, “stewardship,” is also the root of our word “economics.” *Oikos*, moreover, is the root of our modern word, “ecology.” Thus in a broad sense, stewardship, economics, and ecology are, and should be, related.

The United Methodist Church has since produced subsequent statements similar to those we have already seen in other denominations.

For our purposes here, I want to draw attention to three things unique to the United Methodists. The first is their ability to draw upon their founder John Wesley’s concern for and later historical emphasis upon temperance, abstinence, and the connection between

physical health and spiritual maturity to argue for access to land, water, and food free of pollution (Section II). Second, unlike other mainline Protestant communions in the United States, the decisions of the quadrennial General Conference of the United Methodist Church reflect a global perspective; that is, governance of the UMC is not divided along national boundaries, such as the PC-USA or ELCA. This means that, third, the decisions reached here become part of the globally binding doctrine and discipline of that denomination. For an example of why this is significant, we can note that in 2008, the *Book of Discipline* (the official teaching documents of the UMC) was amended to add paragraph 160, which reads: “Science and theology are complementary rather than mutually incompatible. We therefore encourage dialogue between the scientific and theological communities and seek the kind of participation that will enable humanity to sustain life on earth and, by God’s grace, increase the quality of our common lives together.” That is, no one can be a conscientious and faithful United Methodist and deny or ignore the scientific warnings about climate change!

Of the mainline Protestant denominations, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America offers the most comprehensive theological articulation of environmental concern (1993). The ELCA provides a single substantial statement about environmental care; it also does so from a comprehensive biblical and theological basis – that is, the denomination makes explicit the theological basis for their convictions. This document, then, is a primary source for all other declarations and initiatives related to the environment within the ELCA. There are some realities about the polity of the ELCA that make this so. First, Lutherans are a notoriously doctrine-centered folk. The theological heart of Lutheranism is found in the daunting *Book of Concord*. When Lutherans have split amongst themselves it is usually over failure to craft a commonly agreed upon statement. When joining with other groups, there is usually a highly detailed articulation of just what is being agreed upon (e.g., the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification* is quite comprehensive in scope).

The second reason has to do with the unique polity of the ELCA. Formed by joining two previously independent Lutheran bodies (one with a congregational polity and the other with an episcopal one), the ELCA reflects a hybrid of decision-making at the biennial Churchwide Assembly (these arrangements are outlined in 2011). The executive office of the Presiding Bishop has several commissions that offer a more centralized and, when it comes to forming such theological statements, a top-down approach governed by bishops, seminary faculty, and select lay theologians (in this way, similar to the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops). Yet, the Churchwide Assembly is truly a deliberative body. Proposed statements, such as on Abortion, the Environment, Genetic Engineering, etc., while drafted exclusively by experts, are made available to synods and congregations before the Assembly meets. Every delegate – lay and clergy – may adapt, adopt, or reject the statement, and a two-thirds-majority of the delegates is necessary for it to be rejected by the Assembly. Thus, similar to the UMC, these ecclesial statements reflect (in theory) the collective will and mind of the ELCA and are to be taken as official positions and guiding directives, not recommendations. Like the Episcopalian and Presbyterian churches, the ELCA has an Office of Environmental Advocacy, which is actually a lobbying group with offices in Washington, D.C. but whose funding has been sharply curtailed in recent years.

The 1993 Churchwide Assembly passed a social statement entitled “Caring for Creation: Vision, Hope, and Justice,” echoing the language connecting justice, peace, and

environmentalism. The document is fairly lengthy and rich in biblical citations (the only non-biblical source quoted is the Nicene Creed). I will be able to highlight only a few things here.

The document begins with the following Trinitarian perspective: “Christian concern for the environment is shaped by the Word of God spoken at creation, the Love of God hanging on the cross, and the Breath of God daily renewing the face of creation.” The document then notes that its purpose is to “affirm a vision of God’s intention for creation and for humanity as creation’s caregivers; acknowledges sin; recognizes the severity of the crisis; and expresses hope in God’s restorative power to call us to justice and communal action.”

The document unfolds with the following affirmations from Scripture (Section B): the Earth and everything therein belongs to the Lord (Psalm 24:1), thus, humans do not truly own anything. Moreover, all of creation is very good (Genesis 1:31) and this goodness stands apart from any utility or benefit to humanity (Psalm 104:30; Job 38:26; Matthew 6:26-30). God’s redemptive act in Christ not only restored humanity but all of creation itself (Romans 8).

Thus, humanity’s place is alongside and in relation to (not above and apart from) the rest of the cosmos (Genesis 2:7, 9, 19; Job 38-39; Psalm. 104). We are called to sing to God with all of creation; we are part of the cosmic chorus that reflects God’s majesty. While we are created in God’s image, this does not separate us from the rest of creation. In His Image, we must act as God acts with sustaining love for creation; care, not dominion; stewardship, not exploitation (Genesis 2:15; Numbers 6:24-26; Hosea 2:18; Jeremiah 33:20). It is because of our sin (not something inherent in nature) that we sometimes experience nature as hostile or as an instrument of God’s wrath (Deuteronomy 11:13-17 and Jeremiah 4:23-28). A disrupted and disruptive nature reflects our bad stewardship (e.g., mudslides, dust bowls, dead rivers, etc.) (Section II, B).

The document then names two primary problems driving environmental degradation: excessive consumption by wealthy nations and a growing human population overall (Section II, B). Perhaps most controversially, the ELCA in contrast to other Protestant denominations and the Roman Catholic Church, specifically names giving women access to contraception, education, and equal rights as several necessary parts of a solution to the environmental crisis. (Section II, B, 2). The document moves towards a plan of action by noting that, under the Cross, we are “slaves to hope” in God’s transformative power (Zechariah 9:11-12; Colossians 1:15-20; 2 Peter 3:13) (Section III, A). We are called to act with justice in four specific areas: active participation; solidarity/subsidiarity; the principle of sufficiency (that basic needs of all should be met before wants); and sustainability. Among several potential solutions, the ELCA specifically appeals to an understanding of vocation (one shared by Luther and Ignatius of Loyola) that all virtuous disciplines and professions give glory to God; that is, the laity in all of their vocations (scientists, lawyers, government officials, parents) are called to use their talents to find creative, actionable solutions. The document also calls upon clergy to emphasize the seasonal nature of the liturgical calendar (that same year, Rogation Days were reintroduced).

The document concludes with one of three standard Eucharistic Offertory Prayers introduced 15 years earlier in the *Lutheran Book of Worship*:

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, maker of all things. Through your goodness you have blessed us with these gifts. With them we offer ourselves to your service and dedicate our lives to the care and redemption of all you have made, for the sake of him who gave himself for us, Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

It should be noted that the second largest Lutheran body in the United States, the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod (LC-MS), was not a part of these deliberations. Differences of theological temperament and ecclesial polity contribute to differences between the two denominations. The LC-MS has a congregational polity and such national, binding statements would not be within the scope of the LC-MS structure or self-understanding. Generally, the LC-MS has been critical of the environmental movement and the embrace of many of these elements within the ELCA. Like Evangelical Protestants, however, there are glimpses of a growing appreciation for the theological impulse toward environmentalism. In June 2007, the magazine of the LC-MS, *The Lutheran Witness*, had a cover story “Is God Green?” and featured an article by South Dakota Pastor Matthew Nelson. Therein, he laments that the LC-MS has unjustly dismissed this issue as too liberal or beneath our consideration, “yet, giving voice to a solid biblical framework for considering our relationship to and treatment of the non-human creation is something we are well-positioned to do.”

Nelson’s concerns were addressed in 2010, when the LC-MS published educational resources for congregations to address this issue theologically. The document, *Together with All Creation*, was produced by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations within the LC-MS.<sup>1</sup> It is an official document of the LC-MS, but not a binding statement that can claim to represent or hold authority over the congregations of the LC-MS. Nonetheless, the document is striking for its embrace of positions typically criticized by more conservative or “Evangelical” elements within the LC-MS. The document begins by asserting both “our *common* creatureliness as well as our *distinctive* creatureliness” (2). The next section reviews the biblical testimony, affirming God as creator of all that is, the redeemer of a broken and sinful world through his embrace of human nature and full participation in the created order, and the promise of his return and completed renewal of all that is (3-6). As redeemed creatures and appointed stewards, we are called to “care for [God’s] living earth” (8). In these sections, the authors quote many of the biblical passages we have seen elsewhere. The document pointedly states “God has not only called us to care for His earth, but He has called us to care for it as creatures among fellow creatures. We care for the earth not as ‘outsiders’ but as ‘insiders’” (9) and “we are neither separated from creation nor indistinguishable from creation” (10). The document continues with a strong emphasis on the anti-Gnostic emphasis within the tradition of our “embodiedness” and physical bonds with other

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<sup>1</sup> The title is taken from Luther’s *Small Catechism*, in which he offers the explanation of the first article of the Apostles Creed: “I believe that God has created me together with all that exists.” The inside cover states: “This document was prepared by the Commission on Theology and Church Relations (CTCR) of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod in response to a request ‘to develop a biblical and confessional report on responsible Christian stewardship of the environment’ (2007 Res. 3-06). At its April 2010 meeting the CTCR adopted this document (CPH item 09-2621) and also a longer, expanded version of the same (CPH item 09-2622).” The larger, expanded version includes discussion and study guides for classroom and/or small group use.

creatures created and redeemed by God (13-16). After this theological excursus, the document concludes with several concrete suggestions. Under the section “Our Bodies: Food and Drink” among the suggestions is to learn about how food is produced, to buy local food, and “when you eat, pause and reflect on where food comes from and how long it took to grow. Give thanks” (22). In the section “House and Home,” the document recommends buying recycled items, purchasing fewer but higher quality items that last longer, and learning about ways we might be unsuspectingly putting pharmaceuticals, detergents, and chemicals into the water supply (23). In the section entitled “Church and School,” the document encourages activities and liturgies identical to those of the ELCA and other denominations, including: incorporating creation themes into prayers, hymns, and sermons; reintroducing Rogation Days; and celebrating Earth Day (25).

There is an interesting dichotomy presented by this document. The theologians of the institution have presented a fairly frank assessment of the biblical tradition and the current environmental crisis consonant with the documents produced by other denominations. Yet, a survey of material produced on LC-MS blogs and responses to such articles (e.g., posted responses to the Nelson article mentioned earlier on *The Lutheran Witness* website) reflect a much deeper skepticism (anecdotal as such information is). Yet, it seems more LC-MS pastors and theologians are beginning to more openly address environmentalism (and our responsibilities as Christians to recycle and manage creation’s resources) through biblical principles, though from a decidedly wary, defensive, or apologetic stance. For an example, see the following video of a dialogue on this topic between Prof. Charles Arand of Concordia Seminary (one of the few LC-MS theologians actively engaged in this question) and Pastor John Brunette of Faith Lutheran Church in St. Louis, MO.

### **A Short Discussion of Some Anabaptist and Progressive Evangelical Christians**

Within the Anabaptist movements, especially the Church of the Brethren and the Mennonites, there has been a strong pacifist, communal, and agrarian tone. Perhaps because of their agricultural milieu, these churches were some of the first to produce comprehensive statements on the environment. In 1991, the Church of the Brethren issued a statement entitled “Creation: Called to Care.” Therein, it anticipates many of the exact same biblical references mentioned in the ELCA document two years later. In particular, the Brethren emphasized, “Anabaptist theology does not separate God’s purpose for humanity from God’s purpose for the rest of creation” (II, c). Moreover, the document is more intentional about reviving/re-emphasizing the notion found quite strongly in the Hebrew Scriptures/Old Testament that the land is itself sacred because it belongs to God. Therefore, the Brethren also affirm, “Nature has the right to exist unconnected to human interest” (II, f). Further, the principles of this document seem to have borne fruit, as from 1993-1996, a resolution developed and was accepted by the 1996 Annual Conference committing members of the church to seek “A Simple Life.”

Precedent for this attitude can also be seen in the Shakertown Pledge of 1973. The Shaker Movement (United Society of Believer’s in Christ’s Second Coming) invited its remaining members and those sympathetic to their values to pledge their awareness as a world citizen and to live an ecologically sound life. Moreover, the Mennonites have a Green initiative called “100 Shades of Green,” in which congregations pledge to commit to

sustainable behaviors and share these ideas within the network. To date, a little under a third of all Mennonite congregations have made the pledge.

Perhaps the most maligned group of Christians for their lack of environmental concern, Evangelical Christians are the *bête noir* of the scientific and theologically committed community to this issue. Anecdotal evidence abounds, such as bumper stickers that read “Forget Saving Earth – How About Your Soul?” or “The Earth Will Die When Jesus Returns – Will You?” There is also the 2009 case of Illinois Republican Representative John Shimkus, a self-avowed Evangelical, who in a public hearing intentionally inserted into the record a denial of climate change, especially the concern over rising sea levels, because of a literal interpretation of God’s promise to Noah after the Flood (Genesis 8:21-22).

However, I want to highlight the work done by a growing number of Evangelicals who are theologically motivated to become environmentally engaged. Among these Evangelicals, there are many websites dedicated to this issue.<sup>2</sup> Many of these websites offer networks for Evangelicals to affirm the theological validity of environmental concerns. Perhaps the most famous is entitled “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action,” championed by Rick Warren. Earlier documents are the Au Sable Statement of 1987, which arose out of the work of Evangelical scientist Cal DeWitt at Taylor University, one of the oldest Evangelical colleges. Many of the points made in this document echo the biblical (especially from the Hebrew Scriptures) narrative we have already discussed in other documents.

I would like to conclude by drawing attention to a 1992 document of the World Evangelical Fellowship, with which Wheaton College (Illinois) is associated, *Evangelical Christianity and the Environment*. The document is composed of theological convictions, some of which specifically address the criticisms of Lynn White, Jr., even acknowledging and repenting of where Evangelicals contributed to such a flawed Christian view of the world. Later, scientific evidence in the form of footnote references to leading articles was added, giving the clear indication that Evangelicals could not afford to ignore or deny scientific evidence.

The main thrust of the document is to clarify what it sees as the worst of secular or hyper-spiritual environmentalism (philosophical materialism or Ageism) while articulating that the correction and true Christian response is not exactly in the directly opposite affirmation. The four most important theological convictions are:

§1.1: “God is distinct from creation (no Gaia, pane theism, or ‘earth as God’s body’). Yet, God is deeply involved in the world – God is not so distinct from creation that humans may use it merely for exploitation or honor God in how we treat the gifts of creation.”

§1.2: “We affirm the value of the Gaia hypothesis (viz., that earth is a living creature forming an interconnected system of life) while rejecting the idea that earth itself is divine. Yet, we acknowledge the appeal of the idea is

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<sup>2</sup> For examples, see Christian Ecology (<http://www.christianecology.org/Stewardship.html>); Blessed Earth (<http://www.blessed-earth.org>); Evangelical Environmental Network (<http://www.creationcare.org>); and Target Earth (<http://www.targetearth.org>).

rooted in the failure of the Church to speak of the Triune God as reflected in and active through the created realm.”

§1.3: “Acknowledge the critique of excessive and even exclusive use of masculine images for God. While we did not discuss specific constructive responses to the criticism, we recognize their importance. We also affirm the adequate imagery for expressing God’s ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ characteristics are found in Scripture and that the Bible’s main concern in this area is to communicate that God is personal.”

§1.6: “God’s purpose for creation include the development of urban areas. Such should not compete with but include and enhance the development of healthy urban areas.”

### Conclusion

In this none-too-brief but by no means exhaustive examination of the theological convictions of the mainline Protestant denominations as well as the Anabaptist and progressive Evangelical movements, we have observed a striking commitment to environmental concerns. Much of the articulated theological resources are similar, given the shared commitment to reviving a biblical worldview. As such, we are witness to a truly ecumenical concern among all Christians. While only one denomination has an authoritative and binding theological framework for an environmental concern and action (the ELCA), nearly every denomination we examined demonstrates an active engagement with the question of environmental degradation in light of the biblical understanding of creation and “stewardship.” Many of the differences we highlighted here were less about theological commitment to these issues and even less attributable to alternative biblical/theological perspectives. Instead, the different tone and actions taken among these denominations are often most attributable to their ecclesial polity and self-understanding as “the body of Christ.”

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