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Thy will be done on earth: Christian environmental activism

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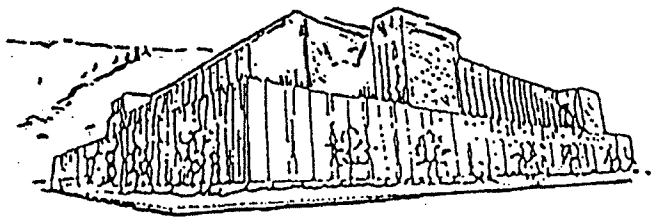

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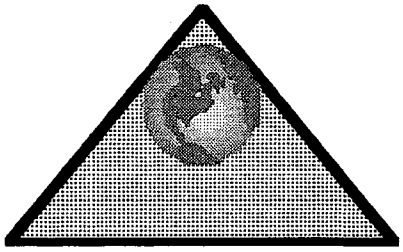

Thy Will Be Done On Earth:
Christian Environmental Activism

by

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Table of Contents

Bennett, James V. III, M.S., Dec. 1998 Environmental Studies

Thy will be Done On Earth: Christian Environmental Activism (163 pp.)

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Currently, Church involvement in the environmental movement is growing but is occurring on an independent track from existing environmental organizations. This is an unfortunate development not only because it limits the possibilities of coordinating the efforts of the interested churches and environmental groups, but also because the Churches have a historic involvement and credibility in the area of social justice which environmental groups lack. By seeking a better working relationship with interested churches environmental groups will not only gain increased networking opportunities, but also the moral authority and experience with social justice issues held by the churches. In order to do this they must learn to meet churches within their own worldview and be able to express environmental ideas in a language which is non-threatening and understandable to Christians.

Acknowledgments

On the long and, at times, bewildering path to the completion of this work, there were a number of people whose aid and inspiration made this fate possible. I owe a great debt of appreciation to Paul Dietrich, who acted as my mentor through my undergraduate and graduate career, introducing me to the interface between religion and ecology and Bill Chaloupka for his support during my at times excessive student activism, both of whose considerable understanding, flexibility, direction and editing were essential in producing this volume. In addition, I thank Ron Erickson for introducing me to environmental ethics and Tom Roy for riding herd on us and keeping our mischief constructive .

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Introduction: A Question of Faith

The religious dimension of the current environmental crisis has been attracting an increasing amount of interest among environmentalists during the last decade. The inquiry can be approached from a myriad of directions. Some have pursued the subject trying to understand how an exploitive worldview came to dominate in the West. Others sought a faith that would serve as a proper spiritual component for developing an environmentally conscious society.

While the approaches to this inquiry and the conclusions gained from it differ considerably, there is a general consensus that religious beliefs are important in forming peoples' attitudes toward the environment. Moreover, in recent years a number of prominent scientists and activists such as E.O. Wilson, David Brower and Carl Pope have spoken about the ethical and spiritual dimensions of the environmental crisis and asserted that the involvement of religious congregations will be vital to success of the environmental movement.[1] Yet, despite the developing recognition of the importance of religion, many environmentalists are skeptical of

[1] A discussion on E.O. Wilson's views of the role of religion in responding to the environmental crisis, as well as human evolution and ecological adaptability is contained in Max Oelschlaeger, Caring for Creation: an Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), pp. 33-37. David Brower addressed the importance of the moral authority churches can bring to the environmental movement at the 1993 Montana Environmental Information Center Rendezvous. Carl Pope, President of the Sierra Club issued "An Apology to the Churches" at the Symposium on Religion, Science and the Environment in November of 1997.

forming relationships with followers of one particular religion - Christianity.

The reluctance to see these churches as potential allies is based on a widespread belief among environmentalists that Christianity is a primary culprit in the development of an anthropocentric worldview in the West. This bias against Christianity found expression in Lynn White Jr.'s widely read essay, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis." White's analysis blaming Christian teachings for the exploitation of nature has led many environmentalists to see little use for Christianity, especially in light of an increased awareness of Christianity's role in exploiting and destroying indigenous cultures and its oppression of women.

The perception that Christianity is anti-environmental is compounded by the activity of the more conservative fundamentalist churches, which are frequently hostile to most progressive causes, including environmentalism. With the success of the Moral Majority (1980s) and the Christian Coalition (1990s), the fundamentalist interpretation of Christianity has become the most visible in the popular media. James Watt, Secretary of the Interior under President Reagan, became notorious for his claims of a Christian duty to exploit the environment. More recently, the use of Christian rhetoric by the anti-environmental "Wise Use" movement has confirmed the assumptions of many environmentalists about Christianity.

When the actions of a few self proclaimed Christians against environmental protection, justified with pronouncements of a God given duty to develop the natural world, are added to White's condemnation of Christianity, the idea of approaching churches on environmental issues seems ludicrous to a large number of environmentalists. Many in the environmental community who are interested in religious beliefs have turned to other traditions, often contrasting them with Christianity to demonstrate their suitability for environmentalism. Currently Buddhism, Native American traditions and forms of Goddess worship are particular favorites, but exploration ranges across the spiritual spectrum.

Interest in other religious traditions is certainly not a negative development. Nor is having an understanding of the ways in which Christianity contributed to an exploitive worldview. However, the assumption that Christianity is inherently anti-environmental has the negative effect of causing many environmentalists to remain largely ignorant about the Christian religion, and inducing a state of cognitive dissonance for some environmentalists who consider themselves Christians. This has the unfortunate consequences of leaving too many environmentalists unaware of the spectrum of Christian belief and activity, and unable to effectively communicate with Christians. It also means many Western environmentalists are unaware of biases they have inherited from

their own tradition.

This is particularly unfortunate because most of the environmentalists with the economic and political clout to effect policy were raised in the predominately Judaic and Christian cultures of Europe and North America.[2] Moreover, most of the people whose lifestyles are doing the most damage globally also happen to have been raised in these nations. Christianity also plays an influential role in many developing nations throughout South America, the South Pacific, and parts of Africa and Asia. In order to work with people in these nations to cultivate environmental awareness, it would be useful for environmentalists to be able to creatively engage in an environmental reinterpretation of Christianity, not just to critique it. Moreover, with a greater awareness of the Christian tradition, environmentalists might be able to find ways to work with churches as allies on environmental issues. At the present moment this possibility is not widely recognized.

Although largely unrecognized, many churches and individual Christians have been interested and involved in environmental issues for some time. Interestingly, Christian environmental concern has a close relationship to a historical Christian concern for social justice. By working with churches, environmentalists benefit not only from their credibility on

[2] Even those people raised in those cultures who do not consider themselves Christians or Jews are recipients of this heritage and have been deeply influenced by it.

social justice issues and the moral authority derived from it, but also their experience and insight. The beliefs that have lead to a "greening" of Christianity have also informed actions to advance the rights of women, fight racism and intolerance, and open dialogue with other religious faiths in some churches. Although all churches do not share exactly this same view of a just society, their concern for environmental issues is still tied to a belief in social justice. In fact, a concern for the environmental dimension of social justice issues appears to be where churches with very different visions of society and ultimate truth can find common ground. As such, this convergence of divergent beliefs raises hopes that environmental justice may be the basis for the articulation of an environmentally sustainable future which is comprehensible to a wide variety of constituencies. By understanding Christian involvement and engaging church activism, environmentalists may be able to open the door to involving new communities of people in forging a coherent vision of a sustainable society.

Some environmentalists may be skeptical that an alliance with environmentally concerned churches will result in wider and more effective support for environmental protection. However, in a time when existing environmental safeguards are under concerted attack, it behooves environmentalists to reach out to all potential allies. Few come with the

resources and authority of the churches.

Therefore, one focus of this discussion will be on the scope of church involvement in environmental issues. However, because working successfully with churches on environmental issues is greatly aided by understanding the beliefs and worldviews of Christianity, this study will go beyond simply detailing church environmental activities and seek to provide a contextual understanding of the Christian tradition in which they occur. Understanding the influence of Christianity in the stories and assumptions inherited growing up in the West is important for environmentalists not only in communicating effectively with the churches, but with many people throughout the world. A deeper knowledge of the Christian tradition can also aid environmentalists and Christians to better understand their own inherited biases, and find ways to see beyond them. The information contained in this inquiry is intended not only to assist environmental activists in cultivating working relationships with churches, but also to inform environmentally concerned Christians of opportunities to work through their own churches and with other interested churches.

Chapter One - The Ecology of Christianity

The belief that Christians are hostile to the environment unfortunately has extensive currency among environmentalists. That Christianity is a dominant belief system in a large portion of both the developed and the developing world is precisely the problem, many would argue. Environmentalists point to both the scholarly critiques of Christianity and to the behavior of certain vocal fundamentalist Christian churches and organizations to support this contention.

What many environmentalists and other members of the general public not associated with churches fail to recognize is that the Christians who have gained the most media attention are not the totality of Christianity, or even the majority. Nor are they representative of Christianity throughout its history. Christianity has been many different things in many different times and places. Moreover, currently the Christian faith encompasses a much wider spectrum of belief than what is often seen in the mass media. Within this spectrum are a large number of churches with beliefs that are compatible with environmental concern. Indeed, a large number of churches show an active interest in environmental issues. Although environmental interest is furthest developed among the ecumenical Protestant churches, a number of evangelical churches and the Catholic Church are also showing concern over environmental issues.

In the past ten years, there has been a proliferation of books and articles by Christian scholars on the subject of Christianity and the environment. While Lynn White Jr.'s article was flawed on some counts, it did cause many within the Christian community to seriously reexamine and re-evaluate their inherited tradition. In doing so, they have produced some intriguing explorations of environmentally positive teachings in the Christian tradition. Also, some equally lively discussions about Christianity's environmental shortcomings have come forward as well. More importantly, many churches have adopted policies recognizing environmental concerns as a vital part of their mission.

The Case Against Christianity

Nonetheless, the environmental critique of Christianity initiated by Lynn White Jr. has considerable weight in the environmental community. At the Symposium on Religion, Science and the Environment in late November 1997, Carl Pope, Sierra Club Executive Director, quoted Lynn White Jr. in his apology to the churches. To explain why the environmental movement had rejected the possibility of involvement from churches he pointed to the following passage:

"We shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve

man." [1]

While Carl Pope and other environmentalists[2] are recognizing the error of Christianity's assumed hostility to the environment, the belief that Christianity is one of the main culprits in creating the exploitive Western mindset is still widespread among environmentalists.

As identified by White in the preceding quote, the most troubling Christian doctrine for the environmentalist is that of human dominion over nature. This widely held belief can, in part, be traced to God giving humans dominion over the earth in the creation story of Genesis.[3] Combined with the anthropocentrism of the classical tradition and Renaissance thought, this biblical passage has been used as a directive to civilize and develop the wilderness. In the past century it has been used by many as an outright mandate to exploit nature. Indeed some members of the Christian right have gone as far as promoting what has been called "Dominion Theology", in which "Christians are entitled to dominion over the environment and the world's institutions as temporary 'regents' until the second coming of Christ."[4] While many Christians argue this is a distortion of the Judeo-Christian tradition, the belief that humans are

[1] Carl Pope "An Apology to the Churches," (Online) Distributed via EENet, Dec.1, 1997.
[2] Pope refers to a NRPE recently sponsored retreat for environmental leaders which he attended.
[3] I will return to Genesis 1:26 and 1:28, the passages containing the dominion language, later.
[4] Tom Hayden, The Lost Gospel of the Earth (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1996), p.61.

dominant, and therefore justified in extending their control over nature is a common assumption in the West.

The environmental critique extends the charge of anthropocentrism credited to the Christian tradition beyond the simple question of human dominion, however. It further indicts Christianity for teaching that humans are of a separate and higher nature than the rest of creation and for a wholesale deanimation of nature. At times a distinct dualism has infected Christianity, holding that humans are spiritual or rational beings along with God and the angels, while the rest of the world is strictly material, and frequently somewhat evil. To some Christians, the world is a place of temptation and spiritual peril inhabited by a fallen humanity. In the more dualistic strains of Christianity the world is viewed as a fallen domain ruled by the whims of Satan from which spiritual salvation through Christ is the only escape. Many environmentalists maintain that from these Christian teachings came the widespread belief in the West that the natural world is spiritually dead, inanimate, and therefore unimportant in itself.

They feel the deanimation of nature by Christianity has given rise to some unfortunate conclusions. One is an over emphasis on human salvation.[5] The belief that life on earth is a fallen state requiring salvation

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[5] The belief that Christianity is overemphasizing salvation and needs to balance it with a new emphasis on creation is shared by some Christians. Two of the more prominent voices are those of eco-logians Thomas Berry and Matthew Fox. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, Ecology and Life (Waco: Word Publishers, 1988), p. 47.

renders the world soulless, thereby removing it from humanity's ethical community. Being at best dead matter, it is viewed as unimportant in the spiritual realm. At worst, the worldly concerns ensnare and mislead the souls of humanity. Indeed the world is frequently seen as possessing a completely different nature from the true spiritual nature of humans.[6] Since the role of churches is to save human souls, it should follow that concern over the natural world would have no place in their mission.

Environmentalists contend that the Christian belief that the natural world is soulless, thus lacking any inherent worth and outside moral consideration, leads Christians to an inherently exploitive environmental outlook. Since humans are the only spiritually important beings on earth, it follows that the only real purpose that the rest of creation can have is to satisfy the material needs of humanity. Therefore, they believe Christianity teaches that nature only obtains value through its usefulness to people.

This understanding of Christianity's relationship with the environment is bolstered by statements to that effect by members of the "Wise Use

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[6] It is important to note that dualism and the belief that the true spiritual essence of humans is ensnared by the material world and requires salvation are not unique to Christianity. Having common roots with Christianity, Islam also contains very similar outlooks toward nature and humans. Hinduism and Buddhism also contain traditions which have a very dim view of the material world and consider it to be of a different nature than humanity. Taoism also contains an inherent dualism in its concepts of Yin and Yang. However, the division is not as absolute and the opposites participate in the same being.

Movement" who frequently use the language of Christian teachings to lend legitimacy to their anti-environmental rhetoric. Some have even articulated a "Doctrine of the Curse" in which a fallen world is redeemed by its use by man, and so humans have a duty to develop and improve it. Adherents of this view believe God cursed all creation in Genesis 3:17 and therefore, "nature untouched by human hands is not as good as it can and should be."[7]

The exploitive license given by a belief in a soulless natural world takes on truly pernicious dimensions when coupled with the Christian belief in an imminent Apocalypse. The final book of the Bible, Revelation, contains the somewhat confusing and image-laden tale of the world's proximate and cataclysmic end by God's judgment and the establishment of a new paradise. There have been Christians throughout the history of the faith who have fervently believed that the prophesied end is imminent and live in constant expectation of its occurrence. Today is no exception. Many Christians are convinced current world events are the foretold signs of the Apocalypse. Under this view of reality, preserving nature can seem absurd. After all, God is going to destroy it all and replace it, so why worry? Former Secretary of the Interior James Watt is the best known

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[7] Jeffrey Smith, "Evangelical Christians Preach a Green Gospel," High Country News, April 28, 1997, p.10. Smith quotes Calvin Biesner, professor of interdisciplinary studies at Covenant College in Lookout Mountain, Georgia.

public official to openly articulate this particular version of Christian thinking.

When testifying before Congress, Watt explained his understanding of his duties in the following way, "my responsibility is to follow the scriptures, which call upon us to occupy the land until Jesus returns, I don't know how many generations we can count on before the Lord returns."[8] Coupled with Watt's anti-environmental stance as Interior Secretary under President Reagan, many people took this to mean that he believed he had a Christian duty to use as up as many resources as possible before the Lord returned.

Although most Christians aren't as extreme as Mr. Watt and friends, Calvin DeWitt, an evangelical with a long interest in environmentalism, believed that Watt's statements had the effect of "keeping people complacent" by reinforcing an attitude among evangelicals that the imminent Second Coming made environmental concerns trivial. DeWitt describes this worldview which dominated the evangelical movement in its early years by quoting an old hymn, "The world is not my home, I'm just passing through."[9]

While not all Christians are quite so expectant of Christ's return, it is

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[8] Hayden, p. 60.
[9] Bill Broadway, "Tending God's Garden, Evangelical Group Embraces Environment," Washington Post, 17 February 1996, p. C9.

still fair to say the idea that humans are separate from and above nature is common in one form or another throughout Christianity. This underlying assumption has particularly colored a great deal of Western thinking since the Renaissance. From this train of thought has arisen the modern faith in utilitarian individualism and the myth of progress. Not all of the blame for developing this exploitive attitude toward the world can be laid upon Christianity, however. The schools of Greco-Roman philosophy, mystery religions, Gnostic sects, barbarian invaders, Renaissance and Enlightenment thinking, the Scientific and Industrial Revolutions, urbanization, and new technologies have all had their influence. Both Christianity and Western culture, in general, have been profoundly influenced by all these different traditions and events. A deeper study of any of the charges, such as anthropocentrism or dualism, can lead the inquirer to ancient sources like Neoplatonic philosophy and Manichaean doctrine. Moreover, the Enlightenment and the scientific revolution and the ensuing process of industrialization profoundly altered human attitudes toward nature, encouraging a utilitarian valuing of the environment. Different, sometimes competing, voices are transmitted through Western culture, and not all of those contributing to its anthropocentric outlook originate in Christianity.[10]

In the years since Lynn White Jr. first objected to the environmental

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[10] Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, Ecology and Life, p. 34.

consequences of human dominion, environmentalists have identified three more exploitive characteristics of Western culture that they believe originate in Christianity. These are an emphasis on a patriarchal and hierarchical social structure and a belief that Christianity possesses the absolute source of spiritual truth. While some environmentalists would argue that patriarchy, hierarchy and absolutism are only tangentially related to an derogatory view of nature, others, particularly eco-feminists, believe that they are directly related. The issue of hierarchy is tied to dualistic tendencies in Christianity, and patriarchy in turn finds it justification in a sacred ordering. Absolutism helps to cement the belief structure and stifle dissent.

Early in its history, Christian theologians began to articulate a hierarchy of being. Borrowing from the language of Greco-Roman philosophic schools, it placed God at the top and the rest of creation, while participating in the One, was ordered in a descending chain as increasingly diminished reflections of the divine essence. More dualistic versions influenced by Neoplatonism and Gnosticism divided the hierarchy into two classes: the rational beings, angels and men, who participated most directly in God's spiritual nature, and the essentially everything else: animals, plants, mountains and streams, which were corrupted by their base material nature.

At the same time Christianity was being influenced by another Greco-Roman tradition, patriarchy. Imperial Rome was a completely male dominated society, with fathers possessing the power of life and death over their families. While there are indications that women did occupy positions of authority in early churches, as Christianity became assimilated into Roman society, men came to dominate the Church. In time, women were placed with animals and children as irrational beings requiring the guidance of a man. The belief that women are less rational and spiritually inferior to men has continued on through the history of the West and Christianity as a justification of a patriarchal culture and religion. Indeed, God has been described almost exclusively in male terms in Christianity. This hierarchy with man placed closest to God continues to be used to justify the oppression of both women and nature.

Providing the capstone to this oppressive complex of beliefs in Christianity is the conviction that Christianity alone is the possessor of God's truth. Absolutism can lead to intolerance of other religious traditions and dissent within the Christian community. The conviction that one way is absolutely right and no other path can be creates a narrow and dangerous thought system. The resulting belief is that men are closer to God so they get to rule women, other creatures and the world in general. If someone disagrees, they must be a heretic. Again this is an extreme

version of an ingrained set of Christian beliefs, yet like the environmental critique, it does describe certain assumptions which tend to be present in varying degrees throughout Christianity.[11]

While some authors addressing the issue from the Christian side have pointed out that this critique is of a cartoon version or caricature of Christianity,[12] it is nonetheless important to discuss and correct, because that is the depth of misunderstanding many people have of the Christian tradition, including a number of practicing Christians. However, it is also important to recognize it is not an accurate representation of the true spectrum of Christian attitudes toward the environment. It misses both the environmentally positive teachings in the Christian tradition, as well as the recent responses to the environmental critique of Christianity by environmentally concerned Christians.

While Christianity may not be the ultimate villain in developing an exploitative view of nature in the West, it is certainly guilty of aiding and abetting the perpetration of the act. Yet, it also contains some important traditions which run counter to these assumptions and can help provide justification for a Christian duty toward the rest of creation.

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[11] A more developed discussion of hierarchy, patriarchy and absolutism in Christianity, which these paragraphs summarize, is presented in Primavesi's book. Ann Primavesi Apocalypse to Genesis: Ecology, Feminism and Christianity (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), pp. 85-133.

[12] Al Gore, Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit (New York: Plume, 1993), p. 243; Primavesi, p. 93.

Environmentalists who do see a role for Christianity in the environmental movement maintain that Christians must abandon beliefs of human dominion, patriarchy, hierarchy and absolutism and rediscover the teachings which will lead to a Creation-based faith.

Unbeknownst to many environmentalists, there are environmentally concerned Christians who have been working to articulate a belief in Christian responsibility to Creation. For them it has been less a case of abandoning the beliefs described in the environmental critique, than it has been about overcoming the obstacles created by these attitudes to creating a Christian environmental ethic. Moreover, despite the environmentally negative teachings attributed to Christianity, concern for the environment among Christians developed from genuinely Christian sources. To understand how Christian concern for the environment has developed it is useful to briefly examine the diversity of beliefs the Christian tradition encompasses.

The Nature of Christianity

In order to make sense of the relationship of Christianity to environmentalism it will be useful to consider the nature of Christianity. Christianity, like any religion, is a living, adapting belief system. What those beliefs are and how they are expressed depends greatly on the historical period and where on the planet the question is being directed.

Many cultures have adopted and adapted Christianity at various times. Therefore, to view a religion as a static set of beliefs is to do it an injustice. Moreover, viewing Christianity as a monolithic entity misses the rich complexity of the tradition and the diversity of belief among the churches that form the living body of Christianity. The following discussion is meant to review basic background information on the Christian tradition.

Christianity as an evolving faith.

Throughout its history, Christianity has proven itself to be a very adaptable religion. It was able to move out of its original cultural context and successfully adapt and prosper in the new cultures it encountered. This is a key characteristic of Christianity as a religion. It is a proselytizing religion, one which seeks to expand beyond the boundary of any one culture. Like Buddhism and Islam, Christianity spread rapidly from its culture of origin, and underwent significant development in other cultural matrices.

Christianity emerged as a reform religion among the Jewish people of Roman-occupied Judea. Relying heavily on the Jewish religious tradition, it was originally directed at a people who had long suffered oppression by a succession of foreign imperial powers. For a number of reasons, this reform of Judaism had less appeal among Jews, who had responded to their serial oppression by developing a strong cultural identity, than among the

other peoples whose traditional beliefs and communities had been disrupted by Imperial Rome. Therefore, it was among the gentiles that Christianity became a new religion.

The world of the first century of the Common Era in which Christianity had its origins was a time of great cultural upheaval. The Roman Empire had extended its reach throughout the Mediterranean world and had absorbed many disparate peoples. The uncertainty of the times lead to a proliferation of religious beliefs that would rival today's spiritual scene. The traditional tribal or ethnic belief systems of many peoples were unable to adapt quickly enough to the changing realities of their world. In an attempt to make sense of the events around them people began to turn to new and exotic religions. Among these was Christianity. In order to be intelligible to the peoples of the Roman Empire, Christianity began to express itself in the terms of the philosophic tradition of the Greco-Roman world. For reasons that could be endlessly examined, Christianity became immensely successful in its new context. It helped people of differing backgrounds find meaning in life. But just as importantly it helped them come together in new communities. It was particularly successful amongst the poor and disenfranchised.

As time went on, Christianity proved itself to be one of the strongest unifying forces in the Empire. This became increasingly important as the

Imperium itself became a less convincing unifying belief. Whether Constantine recognized this or not, his decision to make Christianity the new state religion revitalized the ailing Empire. In doing so, Christianity underwent a considerable transition from the protest religion of the downtrodden to the official guiding policy of the rulers. As such the organizational structure, practices and some beliefs became closely wedded to the Imperial government. This is a role that the Orthodox Church has continued to play throughout its history.

From the Roman Empire, Christianity spread even further with missionary zeal; eastward as far as India, south into Ethiopia, and northward into the tribes of Europe. As they encountered new peoples, these early Christian missionaries had to find ways to make their religion comprehensible. Frequently, this meant adapting some of the beliefs already held by these peoples to a Christian context. By acknowledging a local holiday or saint, the people could find the familiar as well as the new in Christianity. In this manner, the various offshoots of Christianity began to develop their distinct characteristics.

The fall of Rome in the Western Empire and the influx of Germanic tribes into Western Europe forced Christianity to once again adapt to a rapidly changing world. The various focal points of Christian activity found themselves isolated from one another and surrounded by hostile

aggressors for the first time in centuries. Not only did the Christians find themselves explaining their faith to new cultures, but they also found themselves preserving the culture of the Empire as well. While the invaders coveted the amenities and wealth of Rome, they didn't necessarily see the culture of Rome as all that desirable. Nonetheless, Christianity spread, finding new adherents among the new peoples. Meanwhile, Christianity in the East would face the challenge of Islam as it spread out of Arabia in the eighth century. Through it all Christianity adapted, until by the late Middle Ages, Christianity had become the unifying principle for a diverse set of nations in Europe.

Yet, even as it served as a unifying principle, Christianity continued to contain considerable diversity of belief. The rise of Islam isolated Coptic churches in Egypt and Northern Africa from the rest of Christendom, causing them to develop along an independent track. While the Latin church was able to bring the Celtic church into the fold, it experienced a serious split with Eastern Orthodox churches. Each of these churches had its own dates for important religious holidays, like Easter and Christmas, and, at times, very different views on the nature of Christ and the New Testament.

Even when the Roman Catholic Church held sway over the greater part of Western Christendom in a fairly monolithic manner, many different

expressions of the religion occurred within its embrace. The Church encompassed a spectrum that contained the survival of the Imperial ideal in its hierarchy and the social justice critique of that same order in figures like Saint Francis of Assisi. Saint Augustine and Saint Thomas Aquinas explored the reasoned, theological expressions of Christianity, while numerous other saints became the focus of devotional practices of the laity.

Through the chaos following the fall of Rome, Christianity succeeded in preserving itself and a great deal of the classical heritage. In the process, it also absorbed and disseminated various beliefs and practices from the peoples of late antiquity and early Middle Ages. During the High Middle Ages, these influences combined to create a vital and flourishing Christian culture in Europe. However, the Medieval flowering of Christendom was dampened by the trauma of the Black Death. Partially in response to the plague in the fourteenth century, Christianity began to turn from the creation-affirming beliefs of the previous period, and begin to view nature with more suspicion. As Europe recovered from the dark years of the plague, Christianity was withdrawing from the physical world.[13]

In the following centuries, Christianity would adapt to and participate in

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[13] I agree with Thomas Berry on the importance of the Black Plague on the beliefs of Christian Europe in the late Mediaeval period. In addition to the pandemic disease, Europe was experiencing a series of harsh climatic changes that tended to reinforce a hostile view toward nature. Thomas Berry, Dream of the Earth (San Francisco: Sierra Club Books, 1988), p. 125.

a number of cultural upheavals. The Protestant Churches split from the Roman Catholic Church and rejected the cult of the saints and other doctrines, while intellectuals began to question established beliefs and advocate the new discipline of Science. Moreover, new people and lands, never mentioned in the Bible, were encountered as Europeans began exploring the world. The changes in world view brought about by the exploration and expansion of Europeans into Asia and the Americas, the Renaissance and the Reformation profoundly altered Christianity. It brought it into contact with new cultural traditions, as well as reappraisals of their own tradition. As a result, Christianity became even more diverse in its expressions and interpretations as new denominations were established in nations and colonies throughout the world.

While more diverse in its expressions, the changes leading up to the modern age caused Christianity as a whole to become more focused on salvation and the soul, and less on creation. As the new discipline of science became more respected as an authority on the natural world and Renaissance scholarship brought long held beliefs into question, the churches retreated from questions involving the material world. Instead, it reserved the questions of spiritual and moral matters as its domain.

Christianity enters the present period of history as a robust world religion, present on every continent. In its encounter with new cultures

and new ideas, the Christian tradition has become a multivalent conduit of beliefs with diverse expression throughout the world. It is a period of unprecedented dialogue not only between these differing interpretations of the Christianity, but also between Christians and other religious and philosophic traditions. Christianity is also adjusting to the impact of new social, economic and political situations. In addition, Christianity is responding to the ongoing scientific revelations concerning the natural world and our place in it. By adapting to many different circumstances throughout the ages, Christianity has acquired a rich tradition of beliefs containing many voices. The importance of this is that Christianity is capable of responding to events taking place in the world and has a rich repository of memes on which to draw on to express that response.

Christianity and the Great Code

As the reader may gather from the preceding historical summary, Christianity is intrinsic to the development of civilization in the West. Indeed there are scholars who argue that, "the Bible is the Great Code apart from which the existence of Western culture becomes almost incomprehensible as implied in the oxymoron 'plotless story'."[14] Religion has functioned throughout history to provide societies with a conceptual

[14] Max Oelschlaeger, Caring for Creation: an Ecumenical Approach to the Environmental Crisis (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p. 9.

framework for making sense of the world. Christianity has functioned in just that manner for Western Civilization. While not all the beliefs that come down to us as the recipients of Western Civilization originate in the Christian tradition, Christianity has acted as a cultural vehicle which has propagated those beliefs. During the Dark Ages, the Church preserved not only a great deal of learning from Classical antiquity, but the stories and beliefs of the new cultures it was encountering, as well.[15] This fact can be seen by the multiple sets of symbols employed on Christian religious holidays which can be traced back to earlier traditions.[16]

In more recent centuries, numerous ideas have developed in the West outside of the direct involvement of churches, and not infrequently in opposition to Christian teachings. Nonetheless, most of these are built on premises based in Christianity. An especially important example of this is the widely held belief in the West that time is meaningful, and that it is going somewhere. Most of the scientific, political, and philosophical

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[15] The popular notion that Christianity spent most of its time destroying the beliefs of the other religions it encountered is not entirely accurate. While it is certainly true Christians destroyed their fair share of sacred groves (a practice they learned from the Romans, who had discovered destroying a conquered peoples' religion was an effective method of gaining control over them), Christians were not uniformly hostile to other traditions (Oelschlaeger, p. 179). In fact, many new converts used the education they gained through the church to preserve the stories and teachings of their native tradition. Because many of the cultures of Northern Europe were preliterate, a great deal of what we know about Celtic and Germanic culture comes to us from the writings of Christian priests and monks. Also, Christian religious orders were involved in preserving the little that is known of the Aztec and Inca cultures.

[16] For instance; why do we decorate trees on Christmas and what do bunnies have to do with Christ's resurrection?

thinking in Western culture is built upon this concept.[17] While this view of time seems so perfectly obvious to most people living in the West and has spread increasingly throughout the world, it is not universally held even at the present time, and was significantly less so in the ancient world.[18] In its day, the concept of meaningful directional time was a considerable innovation by the Jews.[19]

This simple idea has important ramifications. Arguably the concepts of evolution and environmental science would not have been possible without the idea of directional time. Therefore the impetus for environmentalism may not have developed without it. On the flip side, it also formed the basis for "the myth of progress", one of the more environmentally damaging beliefs in the West. Simply stated, this is the widely held belief that continued exploitation of the environment fueling increased technological innovation will inevitably lead us to a better life.[20] Any

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[17] Oelschlaeger, p. 87.

[18] Most of the cultures in the Mediterranean at the time, including the Greeks who were also developing the concept of history, had a cyclical view of time. Hinduism and Buddhism still have cyclical view of time which places us in an unenviable position. We are either in the Kali Yuga or in the Mappo respectively, both of which are times of the ascendancy of evil. In these views, there is no chance for improvement because things will just get worse until the age ends. While some may feel that does accurately address the current situation, it leaves little room for hope. This on the surface may appear to be the same as the heavily apocalyptic versions of Christianity. However, the apocalypse is a one time occurrence in the destiny of the universe, while the Kali Yuga and Mappo are part of an unending cycle that will continue through eternity.

[19] Oelschlaeger, p. 87.

[20] Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, The Universe Story (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1994), p. 218.

social and environmental sacrifice is justified under this view, and anyone who questions it is accused of being an obstructionist. It is not completely based on Christian teachings, yet there is no doubt that Christianity has contributed to its creation and given it sanction on many occasions. Fortunately, Christianity also contains teachings that counter this view as well.

As can be seen by the influence of the biblical narrative on the modern understanding of time, Christianity has made a significant contribution to the Western worldview. Beyond providing a concept of meaningful, directional time, Christianity has been a primary influence on Western beliefs regarding the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, and our responsibility as moral agents. As such, Christianity and the biblical narrative it transmits act as a legitimating narrative for Western culture.[21]

Therefore, an understanding of the beliefs contributed by Christianity to Western culture is extremely important to people working to overcome its exploitive direction. Because of the its extensive influence, an inability or unwillingness to engage with the Christian belief system risks making one's ideas largely unintelligible to people steeped in Western culture, even if they are not practicing Christians. Moreover, a faulty understanding of

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[21] Oelschlaeger, p. 63.

Christianity can create a potentially worse situation where an activist's messages are misunderstood, and hostility is unnecessarily created.

Christians and Creation.

Christians who have encountered the environmental critique of their religion often felt it unfairly characterized their faith. At the same time they acknowledge an element of truth to it. In the past decade, this critique has inspired a number of responses from the Christian community. These ranged from angry denials and hostility toward environmentalists to apologetic defenses of their religion. However, many were nuanced, and, at times, inspired reexaminations of the Christian tradition. Some of the ideas about a responsible Christian relationship with the environment have made their way into the teachings and practice in some Protestant churches and the Catholic Church. While discussion on this subject continues to grow and approaches the issue from differing theological points of view, a general consensus seems to be developing throughout the Christian community that there is a Christian responsibility toward nature. The following discussion is meant to familiarize the reader with some of the environmentally positive Christian teachings that are gaining wider acceptance.

While the quest to create an environmentally aware Christianity has used teachings inherited from past Christian traditions, the undertaking is a

modern endeavor. However sympathetic or reverent toward nature a particular teaching in Christianity or any other religion may seem, a true environmental ethic is a product of the present age. To seek a fully developed environmental religion in some past or existing tradition is to miss the point. The task for environmentally concerned theologians is to express new understandings with the power of inherited metaphors and beliefs, and to relate the realities of today with the enduring truths in their tradition. The history of Christianity is one of continuous adaptation to changing conditions, and concerned Christians are now taking up the challenge of today's environmental crisis.

The reexamination of the inherited tradition is important to this undertaking for a number of reasons. Although Christian faith is understood to be an ongoing revelation by God, new expressions must be grounded in traditional teachings due to the great importance Christianity places in the biblical canon and inherited doctrines. New approaches to the faith find connections with earlier teachings not only to acquire legitimacy, but also to use the shared language of those teachings to make new outlooks comprehensible to other Christians. By reexamining the assumed meaning of certain key concepts in the Christian tradition, room is created for a new understanding of what Christians' relationship to the rest of creation might be.

An important realization is how recently the key aspects of the exploitive Western view of nature developed. While some components predate Christianity, the anthropocentric/utilitarian view of nature common in the West has really only come together in the last few centuries.[22] Although Christianity was involved in creating and perpetuating the Western mindset, some of the most damaging beliefs have been found to originate outside the Christian tradition. Other environmentally exploitive beliefs attributed to Christianity can be traced to distortions of Christian beliefs through time and transmission into new social circumstances. Dualism, dominion and the deanimation of nature in Christianity demonstrate these processes.

As previously mentioned, dominion tends to be one of the most troublesome Christian beliefs for environmentalists. Contained in one of the oldest books of the Bible, the story of God giving man dominion over the earth would seem to create a hopelessly anthropocentric bias for the Jewish and Christian traditions. Clearly, Genesis 1:26 and 1:28 do contain these words:

> And God said, Let us make man in our own image , after our own likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the

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[22] Rene Descartes and Sir Francis Bacon are two of the key figures who articulated this developing outlook on nature. Descartes was instrumental in developing the idea of a mechanical world full of inanimate matter whose pattern could be discerned and mastered by the human intellect. Bacon added to this attitude by asserting that knowledge gained in this endeavor had no moral or religious significance. Gore, pp. 251-252.

> fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth...
>
> And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.[23]

Dominion places humans in an exalted status likened to that of a king in the opening book of the Bible. However, the modern understanding of kingship is considerably different than that of ancient peoples at the time of the writing of Genesis.

Our current understanding of kingship and dominion is colored by the absolutist monarchies of Europe in the period preceding the modern area. In ancient times the role of king was more of a ceremonial religious position in which the king "bears and mediates blessings for the realm" than one of absolute power.[24] While many kings combined this role with that of a tribal warchief, it was not uncommon for kings to be weaker than other political powers in their kingdom. Nonetheless, this part of the Bible has been widely misunderstood to mean that humans have a God given right to do as they please to the earth without fear of censure, essentially possession without consequence. However, when viewed in context with other parts of the Bible, it becomes even clearer that the dominion given to humans falls considerably short of a divine sanction to exploit.

Contained within the same book of the Bible that gives dominion to

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[23] All biblical quotes are from the King James translation.

[24] Clause Westerman, Creation (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), p. 52.

humans are other verses that ground this function in a reverence toward the natural world. Moreover, the entire context of the chapter places humans as part of a single, greater creation.[25] Throughout the first chapter of Genesis, as God creates various parts of creation, each day is ended with the statement, "and God saw that it was good." The recognition by God of the inherent goodness or worth of Creation begins before God brings humans onto the scene. In Genesis 1:22, God blesses all the creatures, and enjoins them to "Be fruitful, and multiply," before creating humans and giving them the same injunction. Although Genesis 1:29 does recognize and sanction the reality of humans making use of other aspects of Creation for survival, the next verse, Gen. 1:30, also recognizes and sanctions that same reality for other species.

The sense that all creation has significance to God is strengthened later in Genesis. In Gen 2:15, God places man in the garden of Eden to "dress it and keep it," suggesting a responsibility by man toward nature. After the Flood, God not only makes a covenant with Noah and his descendants, but with every living creature in Gen 9:9-17. At no time does the opening

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[25] The information in the following paragraphs is gleaned from three overlapping sources: Earth in the Balance by Vice President Al Gore, Caring for Creation by Max Oelschlaeger and Ecology and Life by Wesley Granburg-Michaelson. The chapter titled "Environmentalism and the Spirit" in Gore's book, pp. 238-265, is an excellent short discussion of a environmentally concerned Christianity from the view of a politically active Christian. Granburg-Michaelson's book is a more scholarly exploration of Christian teachings that could contribute to an environmental ethic, pp. 47-64. Oelschlaeger's book contains an examination of environmentally positive Christian teachings from differing positions within Christianity, concentrated in pp. 118-183.

book of the Bible suggest that the earth was created solely for humans. Rather creation is a greater whole in which humanity has a place, blessed in its own right.

The idea that God gave humanity a soulless earth to do with as they pleased is further undermined in later Books of the Bible. In Exodus 19:5 God proclaims, "All the Earth is mine." Moses instructs the people of Israel in Deuteronomy 10:14, "Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heaven is the Lord's thy God, the Earth also, with all that therein is." The 24th Psalm echoes this with the words, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein." These passages clearly envision creation as the domain of God.

While Christianity rejects the idea of numerous gods holding sway over nature, it does not teach, as some believe, an utterly otherworldly God and a dead material world. Rather, the Psalms contain poetic descriptions of a world animated by the spirit of God. In Psalm 96:11-12, an animated nature rejoices at the coming of the Lord, "Let the heavens rejoice, and the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fullness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice." Psalm 148 enjoins each part of creation to praise the Lord. Of particular interest is the stirring celebration of the natural world and God's active role in sustaining it which is contained in Psalm 104. Culminating with the

31st verse, "The glory of the Lord will endure for ever: the Lord shall rejoice in his works," the 104th Psalm not only speaks of God's presence sustaining the earth, but also of creation as the place of "God's own rejoicing."[26] These Psalms present a view of intimate connection between creation and its creator, with God expressing not only majesty and power through nature, but joy and celebration as well.[27]

The book of Job, 12: 7-10, further challenges the belief that the Judeo-Christian tradition teaches nature is a soulless possession of humanity.

> But ask now the beasts, and they shall teach thee;
> and the fowls of the air, and they shall tell thee:
> Or speak to the earth, and it shall teach thee;
> and the fishes of the sea shall declare unto thee.
> Who knoweth not in all these that the hand of the Lord
> hath wrought this?
> In whose hand is the soul of every living thing,
> and the breath of all mankind.

Like Psalm 24, this passage presents creation as God's. More striking, however, is the clear statement of every living thing having a soul, not just humans, and that those souls are in the hand of God. Not only does the earth and its creatures have importance to God in this passage, there is also a distinct suggestion that humans can learn about God from nature.

Just as the Old Testament envisioned a very close relationship between

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[26] Granberg-Michaelson, Ecology and Life , p.53.

[27] In Traces on the Rhodian Shore, Clarence Glacken contends that Psalm 104 has already had a major influence on the West and ultimately on modern ecology, p.427, cited by Oelschlaeger, p.137.

God and creation, so do the teachings of Jesus and his Apostles in the New Testament. In Romans 11:36, the belief that the earth is God's is reaffirmed in, "For of him, and through him, and to him are all things." As does the Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:10, "Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven."

Furthermore, contrary to the notion that Christianity teaches salvation to be a purely spiritual gift offered to humans while the earth is fated for destruction, the New Testament offers a vision of salvation for the entirety of creation. A frequently repeated biblical phrase John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son," expands God's love and Christ's mission to encompasses not just humanity, but the world when seen in this light.[28] The following verse John 3:17 continues in this vein, "For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved." In Colossians 1:20, Paul also voices an understanding of salvation including creation, "to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth or things in heaven."[29] In the Gospel, Christ has come not to condemn and destroy the earth but to renew it.[30]

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[28] Stan LeQuire of the Evangelical Environmental Network is quoted as offering this verse to counter questions about the Christian basis of his support for the Endangered Species Act.
Guy Gugliotta, "Spreading the Word on Preservation," Washington Post, February 27, 1996, p. A17

[29] Broadway, p. C8.

[30] Paul Santmire, The Travail of Nature (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 201.

These and other passages in the Bible would influence Christian belief, and helped to give rise to a reverence towards nature in Christianity. Many people, including Lynn White Jr., have pointed to Saint Francis of Assisi as an exemplar of a positive Christian relationship with nature. Saint Francis is not, however, a shining aberration from an otherwise bleak tradition. Rather he was part of a much larger tradition of wilderness loving saints, beginning with the early desert fathers and mothers. Many of the monastic traditions strived for a life of self-sufficiency and simplicity that honored the natural gifts from God. During the Middle Ages the concept of the Book of Nature was widespread among Christians. This tradition held that, like the scriptures, the natural world was a revelation of God's will. While Saint Francis may be the most eloquent and best known Christian figure to speak reverently about nature and kinship with other beings, he is not alone. Instead he is better understood as someone who "exemplifies a long tradition of humans who believe that God's spirit animates all creation."[31]

The dualistic view of the division between the spiritual and the material, and the separateness of man and nature common in the West, although present in Christianity, has it origins in Greco-Roman philosophy and Gnosticism. Manichaeism, a Gnostic sect popular in the early centuries of

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[31] Oelschlaeger, p. 137.

Christianity, taught that separate gods had created the material and spiritual worlds. The evil god of the physical plane had succeeded in imprisoning the divine souls of humans, created by the good god, in gross material bodies, tempted and tortured by nature. While Neoplatonism recognized only one purely spiritual One from which all things emanated, it placed the material world at a greater distance as a lesser emanation than spiritual beings. In their view the spiritual essence of humans had descended away from this One into the lower material regions of the divine hierarchy and become ensnared. While they differed in the extent of their hostility toward nature, Gnosticism and Neoplatonism agreed on the belief that the purpose of human life was to seek salvation by escaping or overcoming the influence of the material world.

Thus, in these belief systems the cosmic battle between the spiritual and the material world took place in humanity. Not only did this divide the worldly from the spiritual and human from nature, but it placed humanity in a pivotal position in the universe.[32] Since the Greco-Roman culture

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[32]Although the idea that pagan religions have a more reverent view of nature than later monotheistic religions has gained considerable currency in environmental circles, polytheistic religions can also have a decidedly utilitarian view towards nature. Prephilosophic Greek religion contained a level of hostility toward nature. In the Greek myths, the gods were often threatened by and at war with the earth goddess, Gaia. Moreover, it is important to recognize that the belief that gods and spirits inhabit nature does not necessarily equate a reverence for nature. The rituals of many polytheistic religions are deeply concerned with controlling nature. A modern example is the Shinto practice in Japan of essentially buying off the spirit of a place with a shrine to allow its development.

increasingly came to think of nature as inherently corrupt, the belief that it could only have value in its usefulness to humans became widespread.[33]

Another consequence was the over-identification of consciousness with rational thought. Since only rational beings had a spiritual nature in these worldviews, humans were the only earthbound creatures with souls. The unhealthy level of anthropocentrism that still plagues Western thought developed from these beliefs.[34]

As Christianity entered the Roman empire, it was increasingly expressed in terms that were sensible to people steeped in these traditions. Although Christianity exerted considerable effort to differentiate itself from these other traditions, some of their dualism permeated strains of Christian thought. One common distortion was to understand the Fall as descent and imprisonment of a spiritual essence in the gross material world. Another, probably more accurate understanding of the Fall, is that sin has disrupted the proper relationship between humans and creation. Introduced when Adam and Eve transgressed the limits set to live in harmony in Eden, "the

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[33] Interestingly, St. Augustine makes a powerful Christian argument against this view prevalent among the Manichaeans, a sect to which he belonged before converting to Christianity, "When the 'heretics' berate the creation by inquiring about the utility of frost, fire, wild beasts, frogs, and so on,... They do no consider how admirable these things are in their own places, how excellent in their own natures, how beautifully adjusted to the rest of creation and how much grace they contribute to the universe by their own contributions. Cited in Santmire, p.61-62.

[34] Arguably, any human view of the world is going to be anthropocentric simply by the virtue of it being an outlook from a human perspective. Anthropocentrism becomes a problem when it is viewed as the way things inherently are and ought to be, and used as a sanction for devaluing other creatures and the planet.

earthly result of human sin has been a perverted stewardship, a patchwork of garden and wasteland in which waste is increasing."[35] Rather than vilifying nature as the cause of suffering, this view places the responsibility on humans and calls upon them to seek a better understanding of creation.

Unfortunately, the dualistic view gained considerable currency after the Black Plague swept Europe. The trauma of these events left Europeans feeling betrayed and horrified by the natural processes of the world. Lacking the knowledge to understand what had happened they increasingly experienced nature as a hostile place full of pain and death. Christianity reacted by viewing the world as wicked and emphasizing religious redemption out of this life of suffering.[36]

Later, another cold period known as the Little Ice Age (1550-1850) caused Europeans to retreat indoors from the harsh climate. Gathered around fireplaces the people of Europe developed a desire to not just escape nature, but to control it.[37] As the ideas of Descartes and Bacon became popular, science would turn from its origins as a tool to read the book of nature to an instrument with which to torture the Earth for its secrets. Christianity responded by withdrawing from worldly affairs, and giving sanction to the developing sciences to reshape the Earth.

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[35] From "An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation" quoted in Broadway, p. C8.
[36] Thomas Berry, p. 125.
[37] Gore, pp. 66-68.

From the preceding discussion we see that the relationship envisioned by Christianity between humans and nature is more complex than it has been presented in the environmental critique. Not only is the belief that Christianity advocates a divine sanction for exploitation in error, but there is also a closer relationship between God, creation, and humans in the Judeo-Christian tradition than is commonly thought. By examining the development of Christian attitudes toward nature, a number of Christians and other scholars have challenged the common assumption that Christianity teaches that man is given absolute possession of an inanimate earth. The process of reexamination not only creates room for new understandings, but it also removes legitimacy from the myth of progress. In sifting through their tradition, environmentally concerned Christians have uncovered teachings that envision a relationship of mutual responsibility between humans, nature and God. While not a wholly sufficient environmental ethic in themselves, these teachings provide valuable material and inspiration for the creation of environmentally-responsible Christianity.

A central concept to Christian environmentalism is that of creation and it's relationship to God and humans. Within the beliefs attached to the Christian concept of creation are antidotes to both the dualistic and the anthropocentric trains of thought in Christianity. The word creation

evokes a recollection of God creating the world and all the creatures in it, including humans, in Genesis. As such it points to a common origin and relation for humans, other species and the Earth as a whole.[38] By reemphasizing the teachings of Christianity on creation as the primary miracle, and creation's relationship to God and humans, Christians can provide a context which can help correct the distortions of the concept of dominion. Conservative theologian Francis A. Schaeffer has used these teachings to assert that Christians have a duty to heal the division between humans and nature. Moreover, he argues that it is not sufficient to wait for the return of Christ for this healing. Rather, he has stated, that by God's grace, Christians can work towards healing here and now.[39] From a more radical Christian perspective Thomas Berry has argued that Christianity should put the teachings of redemption and salvation aside for the time being and focus instead on a creation-based theology.[40]

While approaching the issue from different points on the spectrum of Christian belief, these and other theologians agree that creation is blessed,

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[38] Contained in the EEN's "An evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation" is an interesting statement on this subject from a conservative Christian point of view:
"Men, women and children have a unique responsibility to the Creator; at the same time we
are *creatures*, shaped by the same processes and embedded in the same systems of physical,
chemical and biological interconnections which sustain other creatures." Broadway, p. C8.

[39] Francis A. Schaeffer, Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology, (Wheaton: Ill.: Tyndale House, 1970), p. 67, cited in Oelschlaeger, p.129.

[40] Berry, p. 129.

and humans have a duty to care for it. In this view nature has intrinsic value because God made it and it is God's, rather than just instrumental value to humans. Creation is not valued simply according to its uses to man, rather nature has importance as the outpouring of God's love and intention.

To express the role humans are called to play in this understanding of nature as creation, members of the environmentally-concerned Christian community are using the concept of stewardship. While the term stewardship has been used in conjunction with land management with a fairly utilitarian tone for some time, drawing upon biblical passages like Psalm 24, Christians have reinterpreted the concept. Adherents of this view believe "'dominion' does not mean that the earth belongs to humankind; on the contrary, whatever is done to the earth must be done with an awareness that it belongs to God."[41] Building upon Genesis 2:15, in which man is placed in the "garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it" and biblical passages identifying the earth as "the Lord's," the term stewardship is used to express a belief that dominion is instead a God given role to care for the rest of creation. Thus the intended purpose of our God-given, stewardly talents is "that we know, name, keep and delight in God's creatures;" Being created in God's image means humans "have a

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[41] Gore, p. 244.

unique responsibility for creation. Our actions should both sustain creation's fruitfulness and preserve creation's powerful testimony to its creator."[42] Therefore humans are placed in the role of the earth's caretaker, answerable to God for its abuse.[43]

However, partly due to its earlier use of the word by Pinchot that inspired resource conservationists, stewardship has been criticized as anthropocentric and inadequate for the formation of a true environmental ethic. Although critics will concede that it is better than placing humans as the lords of creation, they nonetheless feel that it still continues a bias in Christianity that elevates humans above nature. Defenders of that concept concede that is the case if it is being seen from an anthropocentric viewpoint, confusing the role of a steward with that of a regent who rules in place of an absent lord. However, instead of being an expression of an anthropocentric understanding of dominion, stewardship makes corrects that misunderstanding of dominion by emphasizing a theocentric orientation.[44] Therefore, the necessary view is a theocentric one which recognizes that the lord, in this case God, is very much present, and that humanity will have to answer for misdeeds not only at the end of time but also in the here and now. Therefore, it is important to recognize that a

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[42] Broadway, p. C8.
[43] Oelschlaeger, p. 130.
[44] Vincent Rossi, "Theocentrism: the Cornerstone of Christian Ecology" reprinted in Granberg-Michaelson, Ecology and Life, p.156-157.

steward is a servant of a household, beholden not only to the master of the house but to all its members. This view can take on added depth if one keeps in mind that the prefix eco has its origins in the Greek for word for household.

The Spectrum of Faith

Throughout its history, Christianity has been a religion with diverse expressions. Indeed, it would be fair to say that Christians never did have one single interpretation of the teachings given to them. Due to the adoption of an authoritative canonof scripture, and the establishment of some central doctrines by early Church councils, Christianity was able to retain a fairly high degree of cohesion of belief. Even so, early on there were significant differences in practice and belief among major Church centers as Christianity responded to very different cultures.

As we enter the second millennium, Christianity continues to be a diverse religious community. In order to understand the activity of churches it is important to remember this fact. The degree to which a given church holds the beliefs assigned to Christianity in the environmental critique of Western civilization varies considerably. While the complexity of Christian beliefs defies any definitive categorizing scheme, there are some terms which help make sense of the spectrum of Christian belief in the late twentieth century. At this point, the discussion will focus on the

Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches. One reason for this is they are currently the most robust strains of Christianity, comprising the vast majority of Christian membership and extensive distribution of believers. Another reason is they also have been more centrally involved in the development of Western culture.[45]

A useful way of describing the beliefs of Christians is in terms of their relation to two tendencies in viewing their religion: the degree to which they are fundamentalist or ecumenical in their outlook. While not quite mutually exclusive approaches, these two perspectives can be used to locate a given church within the spectrum of Christian belief. The placement of a given church in that spectrum has important ramifications for how that church can be approached on environmental and related social issues. Among the Protestant Churches, denominational differences frequently define a church's adherence to either of these expressions. The Roman Catholic Church, however, contains this spectrum within the body of its Church.

The fundamentalist approach to Christianity attempts to return to the

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[45] This is not to say the other branches of Christianity are not significant. The Orthodox churches in particular have considerable influence in the countries of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Interestingly, according to Granberg-Michaelson, that while the Orthodox church has a strong tradition of bringing the natural world into their liturgies, they have also been the first to voice concern over potentially syncretistic theology in World Council of Churches conferences on the Integrity of Creation. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, Redeeming the Creation (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1992), p. 55.

fundamentals of the faith. Frequently, they espouse a literal interpretation of the Bible as the basis for all Christian belief. Moreover, many of these churches also believe that they have exclusive possession of the true Christian teachings. While most are willing to accept other Christian churches as brethren, some remain suspicious of just how "Christian" other churches with differing views really are. By and large, fundamentalist churches are not willing to accept the beliefs of other religious traditions as valid revelations of the divine. In addition, many tend to be suspicious of scientific and secular ideas, rejecting the theory of evolution as an ungodly challenge to the truth of the Bible. It is the degree to which a church makes claims of exclusive possession of the truth which places it at the opposite end of the spectrum from churches approaching Christianity from the ecumenical point of view.

Believing that the Bible is the only source of truth and must be read literally, many evangelicals reject evolution vehemently and are distrustful of science and secular institutions. Some of the evangelical churches are so concerned about corrupting ideas that they are even distrustful of other denominations, let alone other religious traditions. This aspect of their theology limits their ability to work with outside groups and influences their organizational structure.

Not all evangelicals are this fundamentalist in their approach. Although

dismissive toward evolution and concerned about the influence of secular humanism, many evangelicals are quite open to scientific advances and are not actively hostile to secular institutions. Adherence to rigidly patriarchal family and church structures is not universal among evangelicals, despite a marked preference for envisioning God as male. Moreover, apocalyptic expectations have diminished for some evangelicals, and for many an increased interest in engaging in the social dialogue is developing. While saving souls is still extremely important, making the world a better place also merits their attention.

While the terms fundamentalist and evangelical are frequently used interchangeably, particularly in the media, they are not entirely synonymous. Some confusion can occur with this term because evangelical refers more to an approach to preaching the Gospel than interpreting it. To some degree all churches are evangelical in that they seek to make the Gospel known, and most have at one point in their history been actively involved in spreading the religion of Christianity. While usually used to describe Protestant churches, there are Catholics who identify themselves as evangelical as well. At the present time, Churches that identify with being evangelical are a fairly wide segment of the Christian spectrum. This segment of the spectrum reaches from the conservative end of

moderate fundamentalism to conservative ecumenical churches.[46]

Further confusing the use of the term is many Christians who hold the Bible as the incontrovertible word of God describe themselves and their churches as evangelical rather than fundamentalist. Frequently finding common ground on a conservative social agenda, these are the Christians most often associated with the Christian Coalition. However, the evangelical community is quite diverse, and not all of these Christians are as far to the right as Pat Robertson. Of the 30 to 50 million Americans who consider themselves to be evangelicals, only 1.7 million belong to the Christian Coalition.[47] To cut down on confusion, in this discussion the term fundamentalist will be used to describe theological beliefs, while evangelical will be used to refer to the Protestant churches which tend toward the conservative end of the Christian spectrum.[48]

The ecumenical approach to Christianity accepts differing approaches to the sacred, and seeks a community among all believers. Ecumenical churches tend to promote worldwide Christian cooperation and unity. In recent years, a number of churches have been extending their view of the

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[46] The Handbook of Denominations in the United States in its Appendix A lists fourteen different types of evangelicalism, ranging from the familiar Fundamentalist and Conservative versions to Black Consciousness. Frank S. Mead, Handbook of Denominations in the United States, 10h ed., revised by Samuel S. Hill (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995), pp. 304-305.

[47] Smith, p.10.

[48] Hence, the Evangelical Lutheran Church will be counted among the ecumenical rather than the evangelical churches in the following chapter, despite the Handbook listing Mainline and Progressive among the versions of evangelicalism. ibid.

spiritual community to include members of other religions. Rather than view the teachings of the Bible literally, they tend toward a contextual understanding of Christian teachings, taking into consideration the societal changes Christianity has experienced during its history. Although these churches represent a fairly wide spectrum in their outlook on social issues, they find differences in belief less problematic. They tend to focus their political advocacy through the National Council of Churches of Christ. Yet, some of the churches that are members of the NCC, and are quite ecumenical in their outlook on working with other Christians, would consider themselves evangelical in their approach to the scriptures.

In many of the ecumenical churches a reexamination of Christianity's role in the world has been occurring. Responding to questions about the role of women in the church, racism, social justice and the environment, they have been questioning some of the assumptions that have been dominant in recent centuries. Informed by modern scientific discoveries and theories, as well as a more complete historical knowledge of Christian beliefs and practice than has ever been previously available, ecumenical Christians have begun to reformulate some of their beliefs. In addition to increasing the participation of women in church leadership and opening interfaith dialogue, these churches have most actively responded to the environmental critique of Christianity. In many of the ecumenical churches

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The Catholic Church due to its size, theology, and international hierarchy, differs from Protestant churches in some important respects, despite similarities between evangelical Protestants and conservative Catholics, and ecumenical Protestants and liberal Catholics. In the case of conservative Catholics, they see the fundamentals of the official doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church as the revealed word of God, rather than a literal interpretation of the Bible.[49] Moreover, because of Pope John Paul's outreach to other faith communities even the conservative elements of the Catholic Church can also be seen as ecumenical. Although the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church regarding issues of population control and concerns of women are not favorable in the eyes of many environmentalists, strict adherence to the official teachings of the Catholic Church on other environmental issues, as expressed in Papal Statements over the past three decades, has desirable aspects. It is also important to note that there is considerable dissent among liberal and moderate Catholics toward the Pope's teachings on contraception, divorce and the role of

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[49] Oelschlaeger, p.132.

women in the church.

Unlike their conservative Protestant brethren, conservative Catholics are more accepting of scientific discoveries and theories. In particular, the official Catholic teaching on evolution is markedly different from that of fundamentalist Protestant churches. Building on Pope Pius XII's 1950 encyclical Humani Generis, which saw evolution as worthy of discussion and further study, Pope John Paul recently announced that "the theory of evolution is more than just a hypothesis," and that further reflection and new knowledge constitute "a significant argument in favor of this theory."[50]

In addition to differences in attitudes about the extent of the faith community and the reading of the Scriptures, fundamentalist and ecumenical approaches to Christianity also differ in their beliefs in other ways that are important to this discussion. Notably, the more fundamentalist a church's interpretation of Christianity, the more likely its beliefs match those ascribed to Christianity in the environmental critique of Western culture. While all Christian churches share in these beliefs to some degree, fundamentalist interpretation tends to be more apocalyptic

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[50] Laurie Goodstein, "Pope Backs Acceptance of Evolution," Washington Post, Oct. 25, 1996. p. A1.

and dualistic, and more focused on redemption.[51]

In their desire to limit women's access to abortion and contraception, under the rationale of preserving the sanctity of life and discouraging premarital sex, conservative Catholics and Protestants run afoul of not only environmental programs to limit human population growth, but also of some key concerns of women. In addition to the difference on the issue of reproductive choice, both the Catholic Church and the more fundamentalist Protestant churches espouse teachings that women's groups and many environmentalists find disagreeable. Pope John Paul II has vigorously opposed the ordination of women as priests and condemned attempts to feminize God.[52] Some Protestant churches go beyond this theological

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[51] Ironically, Christians are not the only members of our society that fall prey to the apocalyptic expectations contained in Western culture. Despite their protestation over Christianity's teachings, environmentalists have frequently used apocalyptic imagery and language to describe the horrific consequences of global environmental degradation. Among some environmentalists the expectation of an eco-lypse is very real. An interesting example of this overlap between the expectations of fundamentalist Christians and way-radical environmentalists has occurred around the Y2K bug. The Washington Post reported in late November that the year 2000 computer problem was being met with millennial expectations by some Christians. Notably Jerry Fawell was predicting "a possibility of a catastrophe," and suggesting Y2K could "start a revival that spreads [over] the Earth before the rapture of the Church." Coincidentally, the Fall issue of Earth Island Journal features articles on the Y2K glitch as well. In a guest editorial, Jim Lord writes, "Because of its embedded processor aspect, the Year 2000 Computer Crisis poses what is likely the greatest environmental threat in history." Amusingly, the feature article, intended to a more measured evaluation of the problem, sites the potential for environmental damage to wildlife and ecosystems by far right survivalists and millennial Christians heading for the hills in anticipation of social disruption. Caryle Murphy, "'Millennium Bug' A Matter of Faith," Washington Post, November 23, 1998, p. B1; Jim Lord, "Y2K and Environmentalism," and Chris Clark, "The Year 2000 Problem: An Environmental Impact Report," Earth Island Journal, Fall 1998, pp. 35 & 48.

[52] Hayden, p. 62.

hostility toward women and insist upon a male dominated family, as well as church. These teachings of a divinely commanded, patriarchal family system or church are unacceptably oppressive for many women.

As has been mentioned earlier, liberal Catholics and the more ecumenical Protest churches do not share these positions. While many of these Christians are uncomfortable with the practice of abortion, they are more uncomfortable with legislating this issue, preferring for it to be an issue of conscience for the women facing this choice.[53] Moreover, they do not feel compelled to dictate the contraceptive practices of couples or oppose efforts to reduce the rate of human population growth. Many of these churches have also reconsidered some of the patriarchal teachings of Christianity which were oppressive toward women. Moreover, they have responded by bringing women into leadership positions in their churches. Some have also undertaken including women's points of view into liturgical material and hymns. These churches are supportive of efforts to empower women and condone family planning.

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[53] Ecumenical Christians do oppose programs that involve forced abortion or sterilization in the name of family planning, such as those employed by China.

dominant in recent centuries. Informed by modern scientific discoveries and theories, as well as a more complete historical knowledge of Christian beliefs and practice than has ever been previously available, ecumenical Christians have begun to reformulate some of their beliefs. In addition to increasing the participation of women in church leadership and opening interfaith dialogue, these churches have most actively responded to the environmental critique of Christianity.

While the ecumenical churches have taken a more active interest in environmental issues thus far, concern for the environment is by no means their exclusive domain. In recent years, some of the more fundamentalist leaning churches have been joining in the quest for an understanding of the proper relationship between humans and creation. Moreover, one of the earliest attempts to articulate Christian environmental concern in response to Lynn White's charges was from the conservative end of this spectrum.[54] Nonetheless, environmentalists approaching Christians on environmental issues will discover that the differences in outlook between fundamentalist and ecumenical churches has important implications on how the issues can be discussed.

Conclusion

[54] Francis A. Schaeffer wrote his book in 1970, which probably makes it the first. Oelschlaeger, p.128.

As previously discussed, many environmentalists believe that Christianity must abandon teachings which support human dominion, patriarchy, absolutism in order to become environmentally concerned. Another teaching environmentalists find difficult to reconcile with the development of an environmental ethic is the vigorous rejection by some evangelical churches of evolution. Yet, as will be shown by the extent of church environmental activity in the next chapter, these teachings are not the inherent barriers to environmental concern they are assumed to be.

As has been already discussed, many Christians do not believe that human dominion is a teaching that has to be abandoned. Rather they believe it is a widely misunderstood teaching that must be corrected with the concept of responsible stewardship. Moreover, the creation in recent years of the Evangelical Environmental Network shows that even though a belief in Christian teachings as the only true revelation of God's will prevails among conservative Christians, it does not preclude a willingness to take an active interest on environmental matters. Nor, despite what the adherents of eco-feminism see as a direct relationship between the oppression and exploitation of nature and women in Western culture, have the conservative views on the roles of women of evangelical Christians and the Vatican impeded them from decrying environmental degradation. Likewise, the rejection of evolution has not stopped evangelicals from

expressing a belief that humans have a relationship with creation, and the obligation to preserve it.

Conversely, a significant portion of Christians have willingly grappled with these issues. The more liberal ecumenical Protestant churches and the Catholic Church have no trouble embracing the theory of evolution, and engaging in interfaith dialogue. Many of the Protestant churches, and some Catholic activists, are also engaged in women's issues and increasing their role in the church. However, it has been very important to these churches to reconcile these changes with biblical tradition. Therefore, it appears that churches have developed their environmental concern despite the obstacles these teachings are thought to present for the creation of a Christian environmental ethic. How this is possible and why it has occurred, may be somewhat puzzling questions for environmentalists who have accepted the environmental critique of Christianity as gospel.

Yet, within this quandary is an important lesson to environmentalists wishing to reach out to new constituencies. Simply stated, people do not need to agree on every point of belief to be able to find common ground. Individuals and groups possessing very different worldviews can share very similar concerns and find ways to work together to address them. The significance of the environmental concern by churches which do not fit the expected profile may be that environmental issues are a common

ground in which people who have some very different views of society can find ways to communicate and work together.

In order to effectively engage with the growing number of Christians expressing concern for the environment, it will be important for environmentalists to expand their understanding of the breadth and depth of Christian belief on the environment, and how an environmental ethic can be articulated from differing viewpoints in the Christian tradition. Moreover, it will be useful for environmentalists to understand how Christians became inspired to take action on environmental issues, and the extent of the activities they are focusing through their churches. This chapter has focused on the diversity of Christianity and the positive teachings toward creation it contains in order to show a Christian environmental ethic is possible. The next chapters will discuss how Christians have moved past simply formulating an environmental ethic to taking action on environmental issues, and what has motivated them to do so.

Chapter Two - Caring for Creation

Recent Activity

As Christians have become aware of the importance of environmental issues and considered their responsibilities in the face of them, they have moved from reflection about their faith to action through their churches. While the level of environmental involvement still varies between denominations and among individual churches, it has developed to an extent that many people unfamiliar with the idea would find surprising. Understanding the scope and extent of church involvement not only assists environmentalists in working with these churches, but also offers insight on how Christians have come to be concerned about the environment despite the troublesome teachings attributed to Christianity. Toward this end, this chapter will examine recent church activity on environmental issues.

Although interest and involvement in environmental issues has been developing among Christians for the past two decades, environmental activism became considerably more visible and organized in the early 1990s. In 1991, a number of religious leaders responded to an "Open Letter to the Religious Community" from thirty-four prominent scientists. The result was the convening of the Joint Appeal by Religion and Science for the Environment, a group of senior religious leaders, scientists, and members of Congress, that included Senator Al Gore. At this meeting

participants from the religious community discovered that interest in environmental issues was widespread among their churches and they began to discuss how to organize their efforts.[1]

That same year the U.S. Catholic Conference (USCC) approved their first pastoral letter on the environment and the National Council of Churches of Christ (NCC) established an office on environmental and economic justice.[2] Interest continued to build in 1992 with World Vision USA hosting a major conference for evangelical Christian leaders on the impact of environmental change on the poor.[3] The Jewish religious community also responded in 1992 when representatives from all four branches of American Judaism met to discuss a communal environmental program. Then in 1993, Vice President Al Gore brought together the NCC, the USCC and the newly formed Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) and Consultation on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) to form the National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE). The goal of the NRPE is to place issues of environmental justice at the heart of the nation's religious life.[4] Since its formation, the NRPE

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[1] National Religious Partnership for the Environment, History and Organizational background (New York: NRPE), factsheet, n.d., n.p.
[2] ibid.
[3] Joint Appeal by Religion and Science for the Environment, A Directory of Environmental Activities and Resources in the North American Religious Community, (New York: Joint Appeal by Religion and Science for the Environment, Summer 1992), p. 30-31.
[4] "Science - Religion Enviro Partners," Religious News Service, (Posted on Eco-net) Oct. 9, 1993.

has undertaken actions to make this goal manifest in actual advocacy on environmental issues. Among the issues that the groups forming the NRPE reached a consensus on pursuing were support for a strong Endangered Species Act, the Clean Water Act, and Western land use issues.[5] More recently, in February of 1997, the NRPE launched a three year initiative to fight pollution in poor and minority communities.[6] In the last few years, environmental concern has come to encompass a wide spectrum of Christian churches.

For each of the four groups comprising the NRPE, the path to environmental activism has differed. The constituent groups of the NRPE represent a wide segment of the spectrum of belief among Christians and Jews. Among the three representing Christians, their theological leanings do seem to have affected the development of environmental concern in their member churches. The earliest activity was among the ecumenical Protestant churches represented by the NCC and progressive members of the Catholic church belonging to the USCC. These churches had already moved from reflection to action on environmental issues beginning in the mid-1970's. Until 1990, overt environmental activity was mostly among the mainstream Protestant denominations, although Catholics also

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[5] Interview with Rabbi Daniel Swartz, Associate Director of the NRPE, in his office at Temple Shalom in Chevy Chase, November 27, 1995.
[6] Laurie Goodstein, "Religious Leaders Join Forces to Fight Pollution in Poor Areas," Washington Post, February 7, 1997, p. A3.

undertook early projects in sustainable agriculture and the Vatican had made some important environmental pronouncements. The evangelical churches have entered the fray more recently. The EEN was specifically created by World Vision and Evangelicals for Social Action in response to the Joint Appeal to undertake environmental campaigns and participate in the NRPE.[7]

Evangelical Protestants

Given the fundamentalist theological concerns of many of the evangelical churches, their late entry in the environmental movement is not surprising. Indeed, their focus on redemption frequently presented within a dramatic apocalyptic context, led many environmentalists, even those open to church involvement, to dismiss the possibility these churches would show any interest. Yet, in recent years there has been considerable enthusiasm within the evangelical community. Although the Christians involved in the EEN reject James Watt's apocalypse-based rational for exploitation as a misrepresentation of Christian belief, their desire to avoid worldly entanglements did slow recognition of the relation between environmental problems and their faith. They were also challenged by their literal interpretation of the scriptures, especially Genesis, and a corresponding rejection of evolution. Nonetheless, the churches

[7] Evangelical Environmental Network homepage (online) available at http://www.libertynet.org:80/~esa/een/index.html, Jan. 11, 1997.

comprising the EEN have felt so compelled to act on environmental issues that they surmounted these conceptual hurdles.

While they may not be moved by arguments about the need to preserve biodiversity for evolutionary reasons, EEN members are concerned about the despoiling of the earth and the death of species. Drawing upon the Bible and their spiritual teachings, Churches which have joined the EEC have concluded that as Christians they do have a duty to protect the environment. For these churches, the story of Noah and God's commandment to save all creatures is a powerful motivator to protect all species from extinction. According to Reverend McQuire of the EEN, "We are called as Christians to save them just because they are God's."[8]

Since its formation the EEN has distributed 35,000 "Let the Earth Be Glad" kits to Evangelical churches. Twelve hundred of these churches expressed an interest in becoming more involved.[9] They are also publishing a quarterly magazine for Evangelical Christians, Green Cross, which covers both theological and practical environmental matters.

Moving beyond organizing and informing, the EEN took up a political role in actively supporting the Endangered Species Act early in January of 1996. Spearheading a $1 million campaign in support of the Endangered Species Act, the EEN lobbied on Capitol Hill against an attempt by

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[8] Beth Baker, "Green Worship," Common Boundary, September/October 1996, p. 44.
[9] ibid., p. 45.

congressional conservatives to weaken the law.[10]

Involvement of these Christians in environmental issues seems to have been even more surprising to Congressional conservatives than to some environmentalists. Congressmen Young (R-Alaska) and Pombo (R-California), sponsors of a bill to weaken the Endangered Species Act, lashed out at EEN founders Reverend Stan LeQuire and Calvin B. DeWitt, accusing them of using the "pulpit to mislead the people."[11] Although somewhat puzzled by subsequent accusations made by the congressmen of being a front for Al Gore and of conflicts of interest, the EEN was pleased by the attention the campaign received.[12] In addition to raising the ire of a couple of conservative Congressmen, the EEN's campaign caught the media's attention as well. DeWitt told the Washington Post he could "hardly fathom" the intense interest and was receiving so many inquires he was having trouble finding time to eat. According to LeQuire the EEN was also interested in working on clean air, global warming and other issues.[13]

While the increasing interest in environmental activism among evangelical Christians is a recent phenomenon, some of its leaders have

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[10] Broadway, p. C8.
[11] Associated Press, "ESA Reformers Rap Cleric Critics," Helena Independent Record (Montana), Feb. 9, 1996, p. 5D.
[12] Gugliotta, p. A17.
[13] Broadway, p. C9.

been involved in environmental issues since the late 1970's. Although it didn't form until 1992, a number of the leading figures of the EEN had worked on environmental issues through earlier groups. Beginning in 1979, DeWitt had been director of Au Sable Institute in Michigan which had been reorganized around the goal of promoting environmental stewardship among evangelical Christians.[14] LeQuire started working on environmental issues through an earlier group, Evangelicals for Social Action (ESA), as part of its mission since 1978 to promote social justice in national social and economic policy. Both LeQuire and Ron Sider, the ESA's current president, were active in founding the EEN.[15] World Vision, another evangelical group which works more on the international level, came together with ESA to found the Network.[16] This connection between activism on issues of social justice and the environment is a pattern that also occurs in the ecumenical Protestant churches and the Catholic Church.

Ecumenical Protestant Churches

Like the churches forming the EEN, interest in environmental issues has risen significantly among ecumenical Protestant churches belonging to the

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[14] Randy Frame, "Greening of the Gospel?: Evangelical environmentalists press to add creation care to the church's mission," Christianity Today Online (online) available at AOL.com, January 31, 1997. p.1.
[15] Broadway, pp. C8 & 9.
[16] EEN Website.

National Council of Churches of Christ during the last decade. Following the meeting of religious leaders, scientists and congressmen at the Joint Appeal in 1991, there was a flurry of activity on environmental issues among ecumenical churches. In July, the Episcopal Church adopted a comprehensive environmental strategy report, The Episcopal Church in Communion with Creation: Policy and Action Plan for the Environment and Sustainable Development at its 1991 General Convention. In addition to establishing an environmental program inside the Episcopal Church, the General Conference also passed resolutions in support of reauthorization of the Endangered Species Act, Protection of the Alaska Arctic National Wildlife Reserve, endorsement of the Valdez Principles of corporate environmental responsibility and condemnation of toxic waste dumping in Third World Nations.[17] Later that fall, the United Church of Christ hosted an environmental summit for people of color.[18] The UCC General Synod also issued a pronouncement on Christian faith and an environmentally responsible lifestyle. Both churches voiced support for the 1992 UNCED Earth Summit and sent representatives to the Summit.[19]

By the end of 1991, a number of other churches had also issued environmental reports or policies. The Churchwide Assembly of the

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[17] Directory, p. 11 & NRPE factsheet.
[18] NRPE factsheet.
[19] Directory, p. 11 & 30.

Evangelical Lutheran Church passed a resolution calling for a church environmental strategy. Also In 1991, the Presbyterian Church's General Assembly strengthened their statement on environmental issues and social justice, adopted in 1990, with language addressing particular environmental problems: sustainable agriculture, water quality, protecting wildlife, reducing waste, global warming and ozone depletion. The General Board of the Church of the Brethren and the Mennonite Central Committee likewise issued environmental statements in 1991.[20]

As a result of the 1991 resolutions and pronouncements, these churches have undertaken a number of activities on behalf of the environment. They have all taken steps to disseminate environmental information to their membership, either through educational materials for member churches, seminary programs or conferences. The Evangelical Lutheran Church, Presbyterian Church and Episcopal Church have all started recycling projects, with the Episcopalians taking the additional step of reducing the amount of paper used in all Church activities and directing the use of recycled paper. Churches have also assigned organizational resources to environmental issues. While the Episcopal Church created a staff position specifically to coordinate environmental activities, the Presbyterian Church placed responsibility for environmental concerns with the already existing

[20] ibid., pp. 9, 12-13, 18, 22.

Church's Social Justice and Peacemaking (SJP) Unit. The UCC established a Network for Economic and Environmental Responsibility which coordinates the church's grassroots environmental activity. [21]

Also, in 1991 the NCC's established an office for environmental and economic justice to work with the already existent Eco-Justice Working Group, which had been formed in 1984 by churches belonging to the NCC.[22] Since the NCC joined with the NRPE in 1992, the Eco-Justice Working Group has continued to coordinate the growing interest among the ecumenical churches. Seven major denominations, the Evangelical Lutheran, Presbyterian, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, Church of the Brethren, Mennonite, and Episcopalian play a governance role for the group.[23] In addition, these churches have been joined by the American Baptist Church, African Methodist Episcopal Church, African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, Friends United Meeting (Quakers), National Baptist Convention, Reformed Church in America and Swedenborgian Church, as well as, the Antiochian Orthodox, Greek Orthodox and Orthodox Church in America.[24]

While the current prominence of environmental concern among

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[21] ibid., p.11-13, 22, 30.
[22] Wesley Granburg-Michaelson, Ecology and Life, p. 73.
[23] Rabbi Daniel Swartz, Ass. Director, NRPE, "Background on NRPE Public Policy Efforts", Memo to Pew, n.d.
[24] NCC Eco-Justice Working Group, "Working Group List" (online) available at http://www.webofcreation.org/wglist.html, April 4, 1998.

churches belonging to the National Council of Churches is a relatively recent phenomenon, the NCC had a well developed and widespread interest in environmental issues among its member churches on which to build its current involvement in the NRPE. A number of these ecumenical Protestant churches already had histories of environmental concern that began in the 70's and 80's.

Among the earliest of these was the United Methodist Church (UMC). The General Conference of the United Methodist Church began addressing environmental issues with a resolution on recycled paper in 1972. In 1980, the General Conference passed a resolution on a just economic order, with resolutions on human hunger and environmental stewardship following in 1984. Later, a Pastoral letter in 1986 from the Church's bishops on nuclear war included analysis of the environmental impacts. Then in 1988, the General Conference passed a number of resolutions on environmental matters including: nuclear safety, agriculture and rural communities in crisis, toxic waste and race, genetic science and environmental questions related to agriculture. To implement its environmental policies the UMC established a Ministry of God's Creation within its General board of Church and Society, which coordinates the UMC's activities with the NCC's Eco-Justice Working group, as well as INTERFAITH IMPACT for Justice and Peace and other issue-based coalitions. Thus far, the UMC's

environmental concern has involved it in actions on behalf of energy conservation, clean air, waste disposal, acid rain, pesticides and sustainable agriculture. The UMC has also produced a number of publications on the subject of Christian environmental concern.[25]

Another church that made an early foray into environmentalism was the American Baptist Church (ABC). In 1971, the American Baptist Churches (Northern Baptists) involved themselves in environmental issues surrounding copper mining in Puerto Rico. During the early 1980's, their General Board adopted resolutions on nuclear energy. Since then, the General Board has adopted resolutions and given local congregations guidance on personal and corporate ecological responsibilities. The ABC has also acted in support of the Clean Air Act and has sponsored events with the NCC's Eco-Justice working group.[26]

Later in the decade, The Disciples of Christ, also known as the Christian Church, (CC/DC) ventured into environmental issues. In 1977, their General Assembly approved a resolution calling for development of non-polluting, renewable sources of energy. This resolution also established a Church policy emphasizing that the Earth belongs to God, and humans have responsibilities to the rest of creation. The resolution gave rise to the formation of the CC/DC Task Force on Christian Lifestyle and Ecology in

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[25] Directory, p. 28.
[26] ibid., p. 6.

1979. Since then, the CC/DC General Assembly has passed resolutions on recycling, hazardous materials, and defining an ecologically responsible Christian lifestyle. In addition, the Church has had 3000 individuals sign the Task Force's Alverna Covenant, a pledge to adopt a simpler, more ecologically sound life.[27]

For the Episcopal Church, environmental concern also first took form during the late seventies, at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, and then spread rapidly throughout the rest of the Church in the early 1980's. The Cathedral's environmental activities are directed by the Rene Dubos Consortium for Sacred Ecology. Over the years, the Cathedral has been involved in a number of innovative activities on behalf of the environment. Home of Manhattan's first recycling center in 1979, the Cathedral also commissioned development of plans for rooftop gardens. Its Gaia Institute trains seminarians in environmental ministry and offers continuing education courses in restoration ecology. The Cathedral has taken a leadership role in assisting not only the Episcopal Church (USA) in developing environmental activism, but also the religious community as a whole by working closely with the Joint Appeal by Religion and Science for the Environment, and later the NRPE. The Cathedral's program for the environment continues to seek alliances with organizations working on

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[27] ibid., p. 8.

environmental, social justice, housing and other urban affairs.[28]

Following the Cathedral's lead, the Episcopal Church (USA) as a whole entered the environmental movement. In 1982, the General Convention included the first report from the Joint Commission on Peace which contained documentation of environmental threats. By the 1988 General Convention, a growing sense that the Episcopal Church needed to address environmental issues within its positions on social justice led to the passage of a resolution directing the Episcopal Executive Council to prepare a strategy for environmental action.

Although it didn't become environmentally active until the late 1980's, the United Church of Christ (UCC) made a significant contribution when it did. In 1987, the UCC's Commission For the Racial Justice released a report carefully documenting the siting of uncontrolled toxic waste dumps in African American, Hispanic and Native American communities. Since then, they have continued to work to call attention to the connection between toxic waste siting policy and racism. This concern lead to the aforementioned People of Color Environmental Summit in 1991.[29]

From its beginnings in the seventies, environmental concern among ecumenical churches has continued to grow. Since Christians belonging to these churches tend to be less apocalyptic and more accepting of evolution

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[28] ibid., p. 24.
[29] ibid., p. 30.

and other scientific and secular ideas, their involvement in the environmental movement may come as less of a surprise than that of the evangelical churches. Interestingly, the environmental interest of ecumenical churches, like the evangelicals, had its origins in the social justice activity of these churches. Many of these churches continue to house their environmental programs within the office or committee concerned with social justice issues.

Catholic Church

Although the Catholic Church differs in important ways from the Protestant churches, it has a similar history in regard to environmentalism as the ecumenical churches. While accepting evolution and other scientific and secular concepts, Catholic doctrine on contraception is quite troubling to many environmentalists. Nonetheless, when the UCC joined the NRPE in 1991, it was an expression of an interest that had been developing among Catholics since the 1970s. Again, social justice figures prominently in the development of environmental concern. At present, environmental concern on the part of Catholics is being expressed at all levels of the Church.

The Vatican

Building upon a tradition of addressing the economic and social ramifications of the industrialization of Western culture begun by Pope

Leo XIII's encyclical Rerum Novarum in 1891, Pope Paul VI extended Catholic teachings to environmental degradation and human responsibility to nature in an apostolic letter in 1971. In the last decade, Pope John Paul II has continued to address the implications of the environmental crisis for Catholics and all Christians. In 1987, His Holiness stated that biblical teachings showed that "when it comes to the natural world, we are subject not only to biological laws but also to moral ones, which cannot be violated with impunity." John Paul II has continued to flesh out a Catholic environmental teaching in subsequent writings.[30]

In his message for the World Peace Day in January 1990, Peace with God the Creator, Peace with All Creation, and in a statement from the Holy See before the Earth Summit in 1992, John Paul II expounded on the subject of Christian responsibility to the rest of creation in some detail. Tying Biblical teachings and Catholic doctrines to environmental damage caused by industrial pollutants, radical deforestation and exploitation of nonrenewable resources, he was particularly strident in his condemnation of consumerism as a source of many of the ills which plague the planet. In doing so, he pointed to the responsibility of industrialized nations to not displace the impacts of their excessive consumption onto developing nations, and to help the developing nations avoid the environmental errors

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[30] Oelschlaeger, p. 133.

they have committed. Moreover, he clearly connected social injustices to the injustice done to the environment.[31]

U.S. Catholic Church

Despite its hierarchical nature, the Catholic Church does hold a wide diversity of beliefs within its embrace. Among moderate and liberal Catholics, views which differ from the official position of the Vatican are not uncommon. By and large, American Catholicism is generally more moderate than much of the rest of the Church of Rome. Catholics in the United States are well known for their willingness to disagree with the Pope, particularly on the issue of contraception.[32] Yet, on the subject of environmental stewardship American Catholics are very much in step with the papal position, perhaps even more willing to integrate insights from secular environmentalism and ecological science. In 1991, a meeting of American Bishops resulted in the approval of a detailed statement on Catholic environmental responsibility. In particular, it affirmed the environmental movement's devotion to nature, recognition of limits and connections, and "urgent appeal for sustainable and ecologically sound policies."[33]

Moreover, the Bishop's statement echoes the Pope on the connection of

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[31] ibid., pp. 133 - 134.
[32] ibid., p. 138.
[33] ibid., p. 148.

environmental issues with those of social justice, thus forbidding the "choosing between people and the planet."[34] Yet, it also rejects an anthropocentric approach to environmental protection by teaching that humans are inseparable from Creation as a whole. It states, "The web of life is one. Our mistreatment of the natural world diminishes our own dignity and sacredness, not only because we are destroying resources that future generations of humans need, but because we are engaging in actions that contradict what it means to be human."[35]

Interchurch Organizations

In addition to the activity of those churches acting on environmental issues as a national body, a number of individual Christians and congregations have worked on environmental issues through church or religion based organizations. Starting in 1985, The North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology began hosting workshops on Christian responses to the environmental crisis.[36] Since the mid-1980's the North American Coalition on Religion and Ecology has worked with religious leaders to develop responses to environmental issues, and has reached beyond the Christian faith, to include members of other religious traditions. In the Spring of 1990, the NACRE launched its "Caring for

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[34] ibid., p. 148.
[35] ibid., p. 149.
[36] Directory, p. 21.

Creation Initiative," culminating in a series of conferences, leadership trainings and local meetings in 1994 to organize "Eco-Ministry Teams" in religious communities throughout North America. In addition, the NACRE acts as a clearing house for environmental activities and publications by churches and other religious organizations.[37]

Other religious groups have a more action based orientation. The Interfaith Coalition on Energy (ICE) has been advising congregations on energy consumption and related issues since 1980. The ICE has advised more than 4000 congregations on reducing energy use. Another group, INTERFAITH IMPACT for Justice and Peace, which focuses on the social justice concerns of legislation before Congress, has made environmental issues an area of primary concern. A coalition of thirty-eight national religious agencies, INTERFAITH IMPACT has been working on energy and sustainable agriculture issues.[38]

The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR), which assists religious organizations in making socially responsible investments, is working to improve corporate policies on community and justice concerns and environmental stewardship. Coordinating shareholder activities on behalf of the NCC and 275 Protestant denominations, Catholic Orders and

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[37] North American Coalition on Religion and Ecology, Caring for Creation, (Washington, D.C.: NACRE, 1994), factsheet, pp. 5 & 6.
[38] Directory, pp. 15 & 17.

other religious groups, the ICCR uses the clout of over $45 billion in religious investments to call for greater accountability by U.S. corporations, both at home and abroad. By sponsoring shareholder resolutions they seek to force corporations to confront environmental and social issues, like that at Intel regarding concerns over worker safety, excessive water use in the New Mexico desert, and unsafe use and disposal of chemicals.[39] More recently, they have taken on Exxon with a shareholder resolution to require an independent committee of outside directors to review the effect of climate change on Exxon's policies and practices. The ICCR plans to bring up the same resolution at the annual meetings of General Motors Corp. and Ford Motor Co.[40]

Local Activities

In addition to the pronouncements and programs of national church councils, bishops, the pope and interfaith organizations, churches at the local level have reflected concern with activities in their communities to benefit the environment. Churches, organizations, and religious orders have shown a deep interest in a number of environmental issues, including toxic waste, habitat restoration, wildland preservation, and sustainable agriculture. While employing differing approaches to engage the different

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[39] Trebbe Johnson, "Signs of the Covenant," e-Amicus (online) available at http://www.nrdc.org/nrdc/eamicus/clip01/tjsigns.html, April 15, 1998, p. 5.
[40] Martha M. Hamilton, "Shareholders Defy Exxon Over Global Warming Measure," Washington Post, April 30, 1998, p. D2.

issues faced by their members and communities, these Christians have come to see their actions as connected by a Christian duty to care for creation.

As in the case of a number of Baptist churches, many serving minority and poor populations, congregations have undertaken campaigns to address the problems their communities have experienced with toxic waste and waste disposal. In Collinsville, Alabama, Lebanon Baptist Church has been working to prevent the construction of a privately owned landfill in a community already polluted by three nearby landfills. Mount Olive Missionary Baptist Church in Augusta, Georgia has been working to establish liability, and aid health care and clean-up of the toxic chemical residue seeping into the ground from the former International Telephone and Telegraph Piedmont wood processing plant. In Brunswick, the most polluted zip code in Georgia, Rev. Zack Lyde of St. John Missionary Baptist Church founded Save the People, an organization to educate African American neighborhoods about health problems caused by local chemical plants and provide leadership training. Located one-quarter mile from a Superfund site, Bethany Bible Baptist Church in Michigan City, Indiana has protested the dredging, transporting and dumping of toxics in a local creek and the construction of riverboat casino that threatens to unearth buried toxins and led to the demolition of their historic church building in 1996. While still facing other toxic threats for industrial

pollutants and illegal dumping, the Forty-Sixth Street Baptist Church in Philadelphia was successful in its effort to halt construction of waste facilities in their South Philadelphia neighborhood. By speaking at public hearings, providing education and conducting marches and rallies, these churchfolk have actively engaged the toxic struggles of their communities.[41]

Other Protestant churches have engaged in struggles against pollution as well. St. John's Episcopal Church in Elizabeth, New Jersey has engaged in activities to ban the planned construction and current operation of incinerators and hazardous waste facilities in an area with high rates of asthma and cancer. In addition to working through public meetings, elected officials and demonstrations on behalf of the toxic facilities ban, the church has opposed the use of incinerator ash as a road paving material. In Southern California, United Methodists have formed a group called Environmental Ministries to coordinate religious voices to prevent Native American sacred land in the Ward Valley of the Mojave Desert from becoming a nuclear dump site, along with environmental and native groups. This proposal has the potential to affect the Colorado River, which is a source of drinking water for millions of people on both sides of the

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[41] National Religious Partnership for the Environment, Model Environmental Justice Projects (online) available at http://www.nrpe.org/Model%20Env%20Jus %20P.hmtl, pp. 1-10.

border.[42] As mentioned in the opening of the chapter, the NRPE and the NCC's eco-justice working group have initiated a $4 million initiative to assist the efforts of these churches and other poor and minority churches fight pollution in their communities.[43]

Other churches have engaged in environmental restoration projects. Community Mennonite Church in Harrisonburg, Virginia helped clean up Blacks Run and continues to gather biological data from fish to monitor the rivers pollution level.[44] In Sterling, Virginia, Community Lutheran Church created Hedgerow Habitat Trail on church property featuring over 300 plants native to the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. Landscaped to reduce pollution in the Bay and planted to support wildlife and avoid pesticide use, Hedgerow has been certified by the National Wildlife federation as a backyard habitat and is used to educate the public about sustainable land use, horticulture, and wildlife conservation.[45] At Monclair Presbyterian Church in Oakland, California, parishioners used their live Christmas trees to replant land denuded by fires in 1992.[46]

Another way some churches have expressed their concern for creation is by undertaking projects to promote environmentally sustainable

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[42] ibid., p. 2 & 8.
[43] Goodstein, p. A3.
[44] Caryle Murphy, "A Spiritual Lens On the Environment,", Washington Post, Feb. 3, 1998, p. A6.
[45] NRPE, Model Environmental Justice Projects, p.12.
[46] Johnson, p.1.

agriculture. Bethel Evangelical Lutheran Church in rural Frederick, Maryland runs Partners in Stewardship, a program that assists poor families in planting their own food gardens while practicing "responsible use of the Earth." In the six years since its inception it has grown from serving three families to 158.[47] Lutheran churches in Minnesota's Twin Cities are "creating a model for 'congregation-supported agriculture." Lutheran families invest in small organic farm operations, with some of the food being used for the churches hunger programs.[48] Sagemont Presbyterian Church in Houston, Texas is also working with sustainable agriculture to address hunger issues. Church members have used permaculture techniques to create a garden on the church grounds to grow hundreds of pounds of fresh produce for a local soup kitchen and food pantry, as well as church dinners. The congregation is also advocating the replacement of environmentally damaging lawns with self sustaining landscaping that is appropriate to local conditions.[49]

Projects undertaken by environmentally active Catholic churches and orders on the local level have tended to orient toward sustainable agriculture. One long standing example of Catholic environmental activity is the National Catholic Rural Life Conference (NCRLC). Begun nearly

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[47] Murphy, p. A6.
[48] Baker, p.45.
[49] NRPE, Model Environmental Justice Projects, p. 11.

seventy years ago to aid small farmers and rural communities, the NCRLC has developed a focus on sustainable agriculture over the years. By providing educational materials and engaging in advocacy efforts, often in coalition with other church and lay organizations, they have endeavored to assist local priests and parishioners to identify and organize around rural environmental issues and promote sustainable family farming.[50] More recently, they have initiated the Church Land Project along with Prairiefire Rural Action to help churches to become leaders in land stewardship and sustainable community development. This project seeks to use the substantial land base owned by religious institutions to promote sustainable agriculture and to engage the religious community in an effort to expand knowledge and utilization of sustainable agricultural practices.[51]

Another project undertaken by Catholics to assist the rural poor and promote environmentally sustainable agriculture is The Promised Land Network in Hereford, Texas. In addition to facilitating programs in sustainable agriculture and microenterprise development, the Network is organizing the El Hormiquero Project to build community organizing and leadership skills to Mexican-American families living in colonias, unincorporated agrarian villages where they live and work on five to ten acre plots. The project also seeks to preserve the participants indigenous

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[50] Directory, p. 19.
[51] ibid., p. 8.

agricultural knowledge while enhancing it with organic gardening techniques. As part of the project a community organic garden is tended and blessed on Christian Feast days.[52]

Working in a more urban setting the Hope Takes Root Project is working to bring organic gardening to inner-city Detroit. The project coordinated by the Sisters of the Immaculate Heart of Mary has turned a former crack house into a community organic garden tended by twenty-five families living in public housing. The garden and another nearby 120 lots were cleared and planted for the cultivation of trees, flowers and shrubs with the assistance of homeless people who were hired with a USCC grant and local donations.[53]

A number of other Catholic Religious orders have also become involved in actively using their resources to promote environmentally sound practices. Among the best known of these is the Genesis Farm in Blairstown, New Jersey affiliated with Sisters of Saint Dominic. Inspired by the work of Thomas Berry, Sister Miriam Therese MacGillis founded the learning center and bio-dynamic community garden on a old farmstead. In addition to growing food for 120 families that have bought shares in the farm, Genesis farm also offers workshops in natural foods cooking,

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[52] NRPE, Model Environmental Justice Projects, p. 11.
[53] ibid., p. 6.

sustainable agriculture, bio-dynamic gardening and Earth spirituality.[54]

Other orders are also have engaged in similar activities. The Sisters of Saint Francis in Oldenburg, Indiana are involved in reclaiming a 360 acre historic 1860's farm for organic food production, environmental education, and spiritual renewal. They have also become involved in sponsoring community recycling programs and advocacy in support of environmental legislation. The Sisters of Providence of St. Mary in the Wood in Indiana have engaged in a forest management program on 330 acres at their Motherhouse in conjunction with the State of Indiana's Classified Forest Program. They have also become involved with recycling efforts in conjunction with a college located on the same premises.[55] In Ohio, the Order of St. Dominic of Akron has turned its 130 acre grounds into an Ecology Learning Center.[56]

Catholic interest has not been confined to sustainable agriculture however. Like Protestant churches, they have addressed pollution issues as well. St. Mary's Church in Fairfield, Alabama has formed a Social Action Committee to work on industrial sites that require clean up, high lead levels and flooding that carries toxic substances into low-income

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[54] Miriam Therese MacGillis, "We Are Not Lost: Ecological Directions Through the Inner and Outer Landscape" Workshop presented at the Common Boundary Conference, Crystal City, Va., November 11, 1995.
[55] Directory, p. 47.
[56] Johnson, p. 1.

communities. The Minnesota Catholic Conference has embarked on a campaign to educate consumers and legislators of the emissions and waste storage issues brought by increased use of fossil fuel and nuclear power plants, as well as the effects of electric industry deregulation on the poor.[57] The Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana, through its Catholic Social Services office, successfully worked with local fishing families and the state government to implement a plan to restore and preserve the bays and bayous of coastal Louisiana.[58] Recently, the Bishops of Montana, Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Canada have joined together for a three year "theological reflection" on the Columbia river watershed.[59]

Interestingly, involvement by Montana churches in environmental issues is a microcosm of the larger movement. During the last twenty years, it has blossomed from the activities of a couple of interested ecumenical Protestants and Catholics to a growing movement encompassing the full spectrum of Christianity. In the early 1980s, Missoula was the location of the New Creation Institute established by Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, who later went on to head up the World Council of Churches environmental programs in Geneva, while he was a minister there.[60] John Hart, a professor in Theology at Carroll College in Helena has had a long

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[57] NRPE, Model Environmental Justice Projects, pp. 1 & 7.
[58] Johnson, p. 4.
[59] Murphy, p. A6.
[60] Granburg-Michaelson, Ecology and Life, p. 49.

standing interest in Catholic environmental responsibility. For the past 20 years, he has written about the subject and has been involved in Montana environmental groups. In 1997, he initiated an environmental studies program at Carroll College.[61] More recently, he joined with St. Paul's Methodist Church member Polly Holmes, to organize Interfaith Creation Watch, a network to keep Helena's religious communities informed on important environmental issues.[62] Also recently, the First Presbyterian Church and First Congregational Church in Great Falls, along with St. Luke the Evangelist Catholic Church, offered a five week series of workshops on faith and the environment during Lent of 1998.

The series was conceived and developed by some of the more religiously oriented members of the Island Range Chapter of the Montana Wilderness Association.[63] The most recent development was MWA featuring a presentation and discussion on "Faith-Based Environmental Advocacy" at their 40th annual convention.[64] In Bozeman, Yellowstone Coalition staff member Tim Stevens has been working with evangelical churches on

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[61] "Environmental Studies Program Begun," Carroll College Chronicle (Carroll College: Helena, Mt.), Fall 1997, pp. 11 & 12.

[62] Grant Sasek, "Environment and Faith," Helena Independent Record (Montana), Dec. 7, 1997, p. A1.

[63] Larry Winslow, "A Voice Crying for the Wilderness," Great Falls Tribune (Montana), Feb. 22, 1998, p. 1P.

[64] Montana Wilderness Association, The Wild, Wild East! Montana's Beartooths, Badlands & Prairies, Montana Wilderness Association's 40th Annual Convention, (Helena: MWA, December 4 & 5, 1998), flyer, inside fold.

environmental issues.[65]

International Environmental Christian Response

As might be expected Christian interest in environmental issues is not confined to the United States. In addition to the previously mentioned Papal statements on the environment, discussion of environmental problems on the international level has also been undertaken by Protestant churches. As in the United States, the ecumenical Protestant churches entered the international environmental arena early on, while evangelical churches are relative newcomers. Ecumenical churches expressed concern both as individual churches, like the Anglican - Episcopal Church which included preserving the integrity of creation in their world mission statements, and through the World Council of Churches.[66]

Beginning with their 1983 Sixth Assembly in Vancouver, the World Council of Churches included discussion of environmental concerns in their agenda within the framework of the Conciliar Process on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation. This interest intensified in 1990 when the WCC

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[65] Jeffrey Smith, "Evangelical Christians Preach a Green Gospel," High Country News, April 28,1997, p. 9.

[66] Rev. Randerson, Director of the Office of Social Responsibility of the Wellington Diocese of the Anglican Church in New Zealand, Personal Interview conducted by phone, April 1994.

held a World Convocation on Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation in Seoul.[67] In 1991, further discussion of environmental issues, particularly global warming and loss of biodiversity, occurred at the WCC's Seventh Assembly in Cambora, Australia. In response to the concerns of their member churches, the WCC instituted a program titled Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation and established an office for environmental matters at its Geneva headquarters.[68]

Regional and national interchurch associations have been quite active in their own right as well. The Pacific Conference of Churches and the New Zealand Council of Churches have both become active in environmental issues. For the churches represented by these associations, the consequences of testing nuclear weapons and the dumping of nuclear waste were the catalysts for the development of environmental awareness. While originally seen as issues of human health and social justice, churches in the South Pacific became increasingly aware of their effect on the ocean ecosystem, and in turn, their effect on the island peoples whose livelihood and well-being depended upon the sea. For New Zealand, the dangers of increased ultraviolet radiation from ozone depletion heightened awareness of environmental concerns.[69] Interestingly, throughout the South Pacific

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[67] Sign of Peril, Test of Faith: Accelerated Climate Change (Geneva: WCC, 1994) p. 36.
[68] Peter Salamansen, Director of the Pacific Conference of Churches, Personal Interview in his office in Suva, Fiji, April 1994.
[69] ibid.

Islands of Polynesia almost all environmental activism is connected to churches.

For evangelical Protest churches, World Vision, one of the organizations which founded the Evangelical Environmental Network in the United States, has became a principle international interchurch vehicle. Like many of their ecumenical Catholic and Protestant brethren, the evangelicals working through World Vision entered the environmental arena through their work with peoples in developing countries. They found these people suffered from the burdens of economic development centered on earning foreign capitol and the spending of limited resources on increasing militarization. In May of 1992, World Vision hosted a conference in Washington D.C. titled The Stewardship of Creation: The Impact of Environmental Change Upon the Poor.[70]

At the Rio Earth Summit, the Christian faith community was well represented, with the Vatican and World Council of Churches present, in addition to numerous individual churches, regional and national associations, and Christian-based aid organizations. While the Vatican participated in the UNCED summit as a member state of the United Nations, the WCC organized an ecumenical gathering in Rio de Janeiro, and along with NGO's lobbied participants of the summit.[71] Since then, the

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[70] Directory, p.31.
[71] Granberg-Michaelson, Redeeming the Creation, p.42.

WCC has continued to pursue action on the Rio Accords. In January of 1994, the World Council of Churches Central Committee approved a policy statement addressing global warming and climate change calling upon churches to "recognize the challenge to the life and witness of Christians that the crisis from accelerated climate change presents; to reinterpret Christian responsibility toward creation and respond in faith and action to the peril in their own situation" and "work in partnership with peoples of all living faiths and traditions, and with governments and non-governmental organizations, in concrete actions to build sustainable societies."[72] In conjunction with this statement, the WCC published and distributed to churches a study paper detailing the scientific, ethical and theological underpinnings of this stance titled, Sign of Peril, Test of Faith: Accelerated Climate Change. Since then, the WCC has distributed a petition on their World Wide Web page calling on governments to implement the promises made at the Rio Earth Summit to lower CO_2 levels.[73] Although it is not widely recognized, Christianity is currently one of the more active world religions in addressing environmental issues.

Conclusion

As can be seen by the preceding activities, Christian concern over and

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[72] Signs of Peril, Test of Faith, p. 42.
[73] WCC webpage (online) available at http//www .wcc-coc.org/oikumene.html, Jan. 3, 1997.

involvement in environmental issues has grown during the last two decades to encompass a large spectrum of churches from evangelical to ecumenical, both Catholic and Protestant. Moreover, this involvement has blossomed at all levels of church organization. Not only have the national hierarchies of these churches and their international associations issued pronouncements and instituted programs, but numerous local churches have undertaken activities as well. In fact, the degree of involvement by local churches is widespread enough to indicate support for environmental issues at the grassroots level among Christians. In addition, a number of religiously based organizations have come into being in the last decade to involve and assist churches with environmental issues.

The variety of issues which churches have undertaken also indicates a deep and widespread interest in environmental issues. While some churches have become involved by fighting environmental threats faced by their congregations and communities, others have engaged environmental issues on behalf of other communities and species as a duty they have been called to as Christians. In many cases, particularly with church involvement in issues surrounding toxic waste disposal, there is a close connection to social justice concerns. However, Christians have extended their desire for a just society to include the earth and its creatures. While some projects like organic gardening have a direct relation to human well-

being, churches have also worked on habitat restoration, preservation of wildlands, and on behalf of the Endangered Species Act.

Not only is its scope more extensive than realized by many environmentalists, but also the Christian interest has been developing for longer than they had assumed. As such, environmental concern among churches was developing before Christians had really articulated the creation-oriented faith many in the environmental community believed was necessary for their involvement. Indeed, as was discussed in the previous chapter many Christians still have not abandoned the beliefs many environmentalists believe are an inherent impediment to environmental concern. Instead, Christians have modified those teachings to reflect their already developing conviction.

Thus, it would appear that something other than an environmental epiphany leading them to abandon their old beliefs, has motivated churches to become involved to the extent they presently are. A possible cause for environmental concern can be glimpsed by reviewing the current activity by churches and its origins. While approached in different ways, a common thread of concern for social justice weaves throughout the various expressions of Christian environmental concern. The degree to which the entire spectrum of Christianity is active in environmental matters and connects them with social justice concerns suggests that creation-oriented

theology is perhaps less a motivating factor than a conviction on advancing social justice, and may be an outgrowth of this conviction.

The next chapter will explore the connection for Christians between environmental concerns and those of social justice. In particular, it will examine how environmental activism by churches grew out of an awareness, gained primarily through their work on social justice issues, of the suffering from environmental degradation experienced by the poor and disenfranchised. In addition, chapter three will discuss the importance of social justice and the churches' historic concern for it to the environmental movement.

Chapter Three - Eco-Justice For All

As shown in the previous chapter, concern over environmental issues is developing across the Christian spectrum, and has been since the early days of the environmental movement. Although the circumstances of the involvement by the churches represented differ, the motivation remains largely the same. The common thread which weaves through the involvement of all these churches in environmental activism is their relationship to social justice. Understanding this connection can give environmentalists insight into the genesis and motivation of Christian environmental concern. Moreover, it is an area where churches have already contributed to the environmental movement, and can contribute a great deal more. Because weakness in the area of social justice has been a source of continuing difficulty for environmentalists in public policy debates, understanding how Christian concern for creation flows out of concern for social justice is important for the environmental movement.

International experience and Christian environmentalism.

The environmental concern of churches in the United States has been influenced by the experiences of fellow churches in developing nations. Not only does the Catholic Church operate worldwide, but most of the Protestant denominations also have churches spread across the globe.

Through international church associations and missions in developing nations, many Christians in the United States have encountered the suffering of their brethren in developing countries due to inappropriate development strategies. From their experience with the effects of development on poor and indigenous peoples in many nations, churches became aware of the role environmental degradation played in the hardship experienced by these people. This connection between human suffering and environmental degradation became powerful motivation for Christians of all denominations.

For this reason, the growth of Christian involvement in the environmental movement at the international level has mirrored that of the United States. The first conversations linking environmental and social justice issues started to grow out of concerns over international development policies during the 1970's. At this point, the failures of economic development based on models developed by the more industrialized nations in the northern hemisphere were becoming apparent to the developing nations of the southern hemisphere. Although interest was growing in the concept of sustainable development, many of the developing nations were suspicious that environmentalism would be another excuse for the industrialized nations to keep a disproportionate share of the world's resources and wealth, while restricting developing

nations' access to industrial technology.

However, during the next two decades, attention shifted from specific environmental issues of a given locale to global ecological connections. As awareness grew about the relation between these global environmental threats and the social injustices of inappropriate development strategies, southern developing nations became more interested in participating in the environmental movement. The earlier assumption that environmental problems were simply an outgrowth of poverty and would be solved as soon as these nations became properly developed was turned on its head. Instead, poverty was increasingly seen as the result of the destruction of these cultures and the exploitation of their resources in the name of progress.

Armed with the knowledge of connection between economic and social justice and the degradation of the global environment, southern developing nations had important critiques of the practices of northern industrialized nations, as concern over global warming, loss of biodiversity, and the dangers of toxic waste increased. Rather than accept the blame for these ills, southern nations began to assert that over-consumption by northern nations, not overpopulation, was the source of not only many of the planet's environmental ills, but also the injustices that drove impoverished populations in the south to commit ecologically devastating acts, such as

deforestation for subsistence agriculture.[1]

From their experience ministering to the impoverished in these nations, churches became aware of the health and economic hardship experienced by people due to deforestation, desertification, and water and air pollution. As awareness of these problems and their causes grew during the eighties, churches began to speak out more forcefully about the connections between social justice and environmental issues as they related to development in developing nations. The environmental work of both Protestant and Catholic churches continues to be closely linked to their international hunger and development programs.[2]

Because Catholic environmentalism was informed by the experience of Catholic Churches throughout the developing nations, many of the papal statements on environmental matters tie them to the social justice concerns. Many of the world's Catholics live in the poorer southern nations, and these societies are the fastest growing segment of the Church. Therefore, the Catholic Church's environmental pronouncements frequently contain admonitions about the inequities of economic development experienced by these people. In addition to pronouncing that Christians have a moral duty to care for creation, Pope John Paul II has specifically addressed the responsibility of the richer industrialized nations for their role in

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[1] Granberg-Michaelson, Redeeming the Creation, pp. 8-11.
[2] Baker, p. 44.

ecological damage in developing nations, and asserted that they have an obligation to assist their poorer brethren in finding environmental solutions.[3]

Protestant churches have also voiced their concern over the connections between the social and economic injustice and the environmental degradation faced by their brethren in developing nations. They have encapsulated these concerns in their Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation program. At their JPIC world convocation in Seoul, South Korea, they produced interlocking covenants addressing four areas: global economic justice, militarism and peacemaking, preserving creation, and combating racial oppression.[4] At Earth Summit in Rio the WCC continued to point out how sustainable development is endangered by the resources drained from developing nations through militarism and the net transfer of over $50 billion a year from these poorer nations to the wealthier ones in the form of external debt. Moreover, the WCC called attention to the connection between racism and environmental degradation. Not only in the United States, but throughout the world, there is a pattern of disposing of toxic waste in areas with high populations of racially oppressed people.[5] These churches have also addressed the moral obligation of the

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[3] Oelschlaeger, pp. 133-135.
[4] Granberg-Michaelson, Redeeming the Creation, p. 31.
[5] ibid., pp. 41, 42 & 65.

industrialized nations to take responsibility for reducing their consumption and pollution, and assist poorer nations develop in a manner that is environmentally sustainable and promotes social justice.[6]

In seeking to minister to those suffering from social and economic injustice in developing nations, Catholics and Protestants have witnessed the suffering brought about by environmental degradation as well. Moreover, they have come to recognize how the two are intertwined, each feeding the other, increasing the misery of those people. It is hardly surprising that it was a concern over social justice which brought the churches into contact with environmental problems. Christianity has a long standing interest in social justice which has led churches to action on behalf of a number of causes.

Christianity and Social Justice

Throughout its history, Christianity has displayed a recurring commitment to social justice. From its beginnings in Roman occupied Judea, Christianity has repeatedly served as moral inspiration for oppressed peoples to seek justice, and as an avenue for gaining allies. Even during historical periods when the church hierarchy was the oppressor, dissent against the Church was inspired and legitimized by Christian teachings; as

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[6] ibid., pp. 82-85.

demonstrated by the popular movement of St. Francis of Assisi and the Protestant reformation.

Early in this century, the social agenda of many Protestant churches was informed by the Social Gospel movement, which taught that Christians "assign priority to the needs of the poor, the powerless, the sick and frail, the victims of discrimination and hatred, the forgotten human fodder chewed up by the cogs of industrial civilization."[7] Catholics, influenced by similar Church social teachings, beginning with Leo the XIII's encyclical Rerum Novarum and built upon by following popes, have also enjoined the struggle for economic justice.[8] During the Civil Rights Movement, African Americans, often organizing through their churches and using biblical imagery to describe their cause, found allies among white Christians. Many of these same churches had also assisted their struggle for freedom from slavery. Since then, Catholics and Protestants have been active in the human rights, racial justice, peace and anti-nuclear movements, as well as the struggle for women's rights.[9] These churches continue to lobby in support of programs for women, children and the poor.

In the past generation, both Catholics and Protestants have been

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[7] Gore, p. 246.
[8] Oelschlaeger, p. 133.
[9] Granberg-Michaelson, Ecology and Life, p. 28.

influenced by Liberation Theology. With its origins in the experiences of Catholics in the Third World, Liberation Theology builds upon the social teachings of the Catholic Church to address injustices faced by the lower classes in developing countries. Emphasizing the historical acts of God in liberating people from bondage, these doctrines set forth not only a Christian duty to seek peace and social justice, but also call upon the churches themselves to devote their authority and resources to liberate the oppressed. Confronting the political oppression, corruption, exploitation of people and natural resources concealed under the rubric of development in many Third World nations, churches adhering to these beliefs have sought to help the poor and disenfranchised.[10] In some of these nations, priests, ministers and lay church members have faced torture and death to further the cause of social justice.

The beliefs described in the Social Gospel and Liberation Theology have gained a wide following throughout the Christian world. Increasingly these beliefs are reflected in the stances of national and international church organizations. While the moral authority enjoyed by Christianity in some of its more fundamentalist versions, based on teachings of exclusivity and hierarchy, is precisely what bothers many environmentalists, it is this long history of concern for the welfare and dignity of human beings, along with

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[10] Granberg-Michaelson, Redeeming the Creation, p. 51.

the sacrifices made by clergy and lay Christians, that have earned Christianity much of its moral authority. Understanding the social justice aspect of church influence is important for environmentalists not only for working effectively with churches, but also in understanding how inattention to this area has limited their own influence, both in the United States and abroad.

Environmentalism and Social Justice

The environmental movement sorely needs credibility in the area of social justice. While the environmental movement has secured a degree of respect in modern society, weakness on social justice undermines it as a moral authority. It may come as a shock to some environmentalists that they are viewed as lacking in this area. Nonetheless, environmentalists have a poor record on social justice in word and deed. Blindsided by inherited assumptions about the separation of man from nature, environmentalists have too often ignored the human consequences of some of their environmental solutions. Although environmentalists bemoan the Western belief of humans having become separated from the natural world, this same assumption can frequently be seen in their rhetoric and the planning. It is a difficult assumption for those raised in Western culture to shake, and it comes back to haunt environmentalists in a variety of ways.

Many environmentalists accept the notion of a separation between humans and nature, but have inverted the traditional hierarchy. This has frequently been put into terms of a ecocentric view, in which all beings are seen to have inherent worth, versus an anthropocentric view, in which worth is assigned according to usefulness to humans. Instead of placing humans above nature, nature is seen as a higher or intrinsic good that should be treated separate from human values. Instead of the desire for human transcendence of nature, humans are in a fallen state because of their alienation from the good that is nature. From this comes a belief that the best, most natural environmental situation is the absence of human activity.[11]

This view is most strongly articulated by adherents of "deep ecology." One of the best known advocates of the Deep Ecology Movement, Earth First founder Dave Foreman, has stated "a realization that wilderness is the real world"[12] is necessary to address the environmental problems currently being faced by the world. The focus of deep ecologists tends to be the preservation of unspoiled wilderness and restoration of degraded areas to a

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[11] Ramachandra Guha, "Radical American Environmentalism and Wilderness Preservation: A Third World Critique," Environmental Ethics 11:71-83 (1989), reprinted in Susan J. Armstrong and Richard G. Botzler, ed., Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1993), p. 555.

[12] Dave Foreman, "Putting Earth First," Confessions of an Eco-warrior, (Harmony Books, 1991), pp. 25-36, reprinted in Susan J. Armstrong and Richard G. Botzler, ed., Environmental Ethics: Divergence and Convergence, (New York: McGraw Hill, 1993), p. 423.

more pristine condition to the neglect of other environmental issues.[13] While many environmentalists don't take this extreme stance, they do tend to accept a separation between the "natural world" and the "human world," particularly in the areas of wildland and species preservation.

Therefore, in approaching wildland and habitat issues, environmentalists have worked off a model of preservation through the exclusion of daily human activity. Although successful in North America, it has had disastrous human consequences when applied in other parts of the world. In some developing nations, the establishment of national parks and wildlife refuges has caused the dislocation of entire villages and deprived local peoples of food, medicinal plants and materials for cottage industry. According to Ramachandra Guha, Project Tiger in India was hailed as a success for the tiger, but also resulted in a transfer of resources from the poor peasants living in the area to a relatively rich conservation elite of declining Indian aristocracy and representatives of international agencies. The creation of the parks necessary for the project required the displacement of existing villages and the continued exclusion of the peasants and their livestock.[14]

While the actions undertaken in this approach to endangered species and ecosystems protection were well-intended, and in some cases necessary,

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[13] Guha, p. 554

[14] ibid., p. 555.

they have created hardship and deep resentment among local people. As in the case of the 1992 arson of a large portion of Nagarhole National Park in Karnataka, one of India's premier wildlife refuges, by displaced pastoralist "tribals," resentment over what is seen by locals as environmental imperialism can have catastrophic results. A dispute between park wardens and locals over grazing rights and poaching erupted into a series of arson attacks which burned thousands of acres of the park's forest to the ground. Recent guide books report some regrowth of trees, but speculate that it will be decades before animal numbers recover.[15] Given the continual use of global imagery and levels of analysis, it is important for environmentalists in the West to understand the limitations of their models when applied in developing societies.

Another way that these assumptions direct environmental policy is a stance taken by some activists that human needs should not be allowed to compete with the inherent worth of the natural world. This view has been expressed in the rhetoric of the Deep Ecology Movement in their criticism of what they perceive as shallow ecology practiced by the more mainstream

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[15] During my travels in India in '92, I followed this story in the Indian newspapers as it developed. The event which triggered the eruption of long simmering ill feelings into violence was the death of a local boy whose body was found hidden at the border of the park. Local tribals blamed the park wardens for the death. The wardens further escalated the situation by putting forth the defense that they are authorized to shoot trespassers on sight and wouldn't have bothered to hide the body if they had done it. As might be suspected, this only fueled charges of environmental imperialism among the locals and the fires began. For the current conditions in the park, I am using the 1996 edition of India the Rough Guide.

environmentalists. Deep Ecology frequently holds that the long-term health and biotic diversity and stability of the earth should be considered before the welfare of humans.[16] In a particularly blatant statement to this effect, Dave Foreman has written, "Human suffering resulting from drought and famine in Ethiopia is tragic, yes, but the destruction there of other creatures and habitat is even more tragic."[17] The view that nature has a worth independent of its utility to humans is one that should be advocated; however, too often environmentalists have ignored or refused to consider human needs. Even the more moderate "mainstream" environmentalists have too frequently treated environmental problems and human concerns as completely disconnected realms. Some have felt that even discussing human considerations invalidates a position recognizing the rights of nature. Some have simply not understood the close connection between human problems and environmental problems. Whatever the reason, the reluctance of environmentalists to engage in the human dimension of environmental issues has allowed their opponents to paint them as anti-human.

Further complicating environmentalists' record on social justice are the unintended consequences of efforts to stop projects involving the manufacture or disposal of toxic substances. In a number of cases,

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[16] Foreman, p. 422 and Guha, p. 554.
[17] Foreman, p. 422.

environmentalists and concerned citizens have successfully fought the placement of a toxic project in their community or neighborhood, only to see it sited in another place less able to fend off the proposal. It is no coincidence that studies have shown that facilities handling hazardous materials are disproportionately sited in minority and lower income neighborhoods.[18] Since those people with the political and economic power to fight a corporation over a proposal involving toxics are most often white and in the middle and upper income brackets, charges of environmental racism and elitism have been made. At an international level, the export of toxic waste from industrialized nations to developing nations has mirrored this pattern and led to the same charges from the recipients of this toxic trade.[19]

The "Wise Use" movement has made considerable use of a perception of

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[18] The previously discussed study, Toxic Waste and Race in the United States conducted by the United Church of Christ in 1987, was one of the earliest to document this trend.

[19] Granberg-Michaelson, Redeeming the Creation, p. 42. Also, during my travels in the South Pacific with my father, I encountered firsthand an interesting example of both the toxic export trade and how church involvement can help to combat it on the island of Tonga. A California company had proposed to import hazardous waste from the U.S. to burn in a cement kiln they would construct. Problems with the technology and the lack of laws to safeguard human and environmental health expertise for regulating the practice on the tiny island nation would be offset by the company's promise of income and the availability of cheap cement, which had gained the support of the King of Tonga's daughter. With the help of Green Peace, the Tongans organized through their churches and schools (which are all church schools) and were able to force the Princess of Tonga to withdraw her support of the project. Networking through churches and was extremely important fighting on this proposal would have been of great use at the Montana Legislature in opposing a similar project. Sister Marina Edith Tu'inukuafe, RSM, Commission for Justice and Development - Catholic Church of Tonga, Personal Interview in her office, Nuku'alofa, Tonga, March 1994.

environmentalists as "elitist" and "anti-human" to recruit ranchers, farmers, timber and mine workers as a grassroots front for their anti-environmental crusade. Growing out of the "Sagebrush Rebellion" of the late 1970's, the Wise Use movement formed an alliance of interests in the mid-1980's among those who opposed environmental safeguards. The avowed purpose of this well financed and organized movement is the systematic destruction of the environmental movement. Zeroing in on the weak record of the environmentalist in regard to human welfare, one of the Wise Use movement's founders, Ron Arnold, has asserted that the environmental movement is "polluted with a hatred of humans."[20]

Moreover, "Wise Use" activists have used the antipathy of many environmentalists to Christianity to further vilify them as religious fanatics of a nature cult. Charles Cushman has stated that "preservationists are like a new pagan religion, worshipping trees and animals and sacrificing people." Another activist, A. Grant Gerber has declared environmentalists are anti-Christian and practice "weird science and earth religions."[21] While these charges seem preposterous to most environmentalists, they nonetheless have gained considerable currency among people whose livelihood has been affected by efforts to preserve the environment.

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[20] Thomas A. Lewis, "Cloaked in a Wise Disguise,". National Wildlife, October 1992, p. 6.

[21] ibid., p. 7.

In response, environmentalists have been developing an increased awareness of the connections between social justice and environmental issues. Eco-feminists, in particular, have called attention between the exploitation of the environment and the oppression of people. A developing concern for environmental justice has lead to the implementation of new conservation models involving the local human inhabitants in developing nations. In the United States, environmentalists are seeking to form alliances with workers, women, low-income and minority groups to work on issues of mutual concern. Yet, while a majority of Americans support environmental laws, many still see the environmental movement as more concerned about some owl or wetland than people. Although efforts are being made, environmentalists still have work to do to gain credibility in the arena of social justice.

Genesis of Sustainability and Environmental Justice

Unfortunately, environmentalists still allow themselves to be baited into discussions of human interests versus the interests of other species or the environment as a whole by anti-environmental foes. Because the environmental concern of many churches is tied to their experiences of working with the poor in developing nations and in the U.S., it is possible for them to articulate an environmental ethic that incorporates the well-

being of people, not just in economic terms, but in terms of social justice. The ability to speak of the well-being of the environment, other species, and of the community and family as an integrated whole can sidestep many of the common arguments against environmental measures. Because of the moral authority churches bring to discussions of community and family, and the experience of the connections between environmental problems and the well-being of their communities, environmentally concerned churches can be a vital ally in creating this vision.

Indeed the churches have already made valuable contributions to the environmental movement. As seen in the previous chapter, the beginnings of Christian interest in environmental issues is contemporaneous with the beginnings of the environmental movement. The interest of churches and the origins of the environmental movement are more intertwined than is commonly known among environmentalists or most Christians. The terms sustainable development, which has been an important idea in environmental discussions since the 1970's, and environmental justice, which has gained considerable interest in the last decade, both have origins in church responses to environmental problems faced by the poor and disenfranchised.

After the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment at Stockholm in 1972, where the tensions over Western style development

became evident between industrialized nations and developing ones, churches addressed development concerns. Informed by discussions on the "limits of growth" in the seventies and their own experience in developing societies, churches began to discuss how the environmental degradation, caused by Western models of development based on perpetual growth through natural resource exploitation, perpetuated poverty and social injustice. In response, they embarked on articulating a vision of development which would preserve environmental integrity and human dignity. From these ecumenical discussions the initial definition and meaning were given to the concept and term of sustainability.[22]

In the mid-1970's, the WCC acted upon these discussions by initiating the "Just, Participatory and Sustainable Society" programme. Through this initiative, the WCC undertook to directly support the efforts of non-governmental groups and movements working for fundamental change in their societies on social justice and environmental issues. Although the JPSS programme came to a premature halt in 1979 due to theological disagreements over the role of churches in advocating radical political change, the WCC was successful in stimulating discussion around justice and sustainability on global development issues.[23]

Despite organized church efforts on the environment stalling in the late

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[22] Granberg-Michaelson, Redeeming the Creation, p. 58.
[23] ibid., p.47

1970's, many churches continued their activism and exploration of the connection between environmental issues and those of social justice. According to Bill Somplatsky-Jarman of the Presbyterian Church USA's Environmental Justice Office, these experiences of the linkage between social justice and environmental issues "led the religious community to coin the phrase 'eco-justice'."[24] The concept of environmental justice has gained considerable attention in the environmental community in recent years, and as is the case with vigorous new concepts, many people have contributed to its creation. Yet, earliest uses of the term arise from Christian sources in the later half of the 1980's in reference to the suffering of poor and disenfranchised from the effects of environmental degradation.[25]

Not only have churches experienced the connection between environmental degradation and social justice in developing nations, but also among poor and minority communities in the United States. As mentioned, one key catalyst of the attention on environmental justice was the 1987 study by the United Church of Christ titled Toxic Waste and Race in the United States, which carefully documented repeated siting of uncontrolled toxic waste sites in African American, Hispanic and Native American

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[24] Baker, p. 44

[25] The earliest article using the term eco-justice I was able to find listed in the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature was from the May 13, 1987 issue of Christian Century. The first mention of it in a "mainstream" environmental publication was when Audubon reported on the People of Color Environmental Summit hosted by the UCC in their January/February 1992 issue.

communities, regardless of socio-economic status.[26] As was previous mentioned, the UCC followed this study with a People of Color Environmental Summit in 1991 to bring the connections between toxic waste siting and racism to the attention of "mainstream" environmentalists, and involve people of color more fully in the environmental movement.[27] This has led to the NRPE recently pledging $4 million to involve their congregations in combating environmental racism in the form of pollution in poor and minority communities. As part of this effort they are forming a network of clergy and lay activists to advocate legislation to "reduce air pollution in inner cities, stop toxic waste dumping in minority neighborhoods and curtail the use of poisonous chemicals in the workplace."[28]

As church activity on environmental activity has again become more organized in recent years, environmental justice is playing a key role in informing their activism. The concerned churches and synagogues comprising the National Religious Partnership for the Environment are using environmental justice as the central organizing concept for their effort, as is the World Council of Churches' Peace, Justice and Integrity of Creation Program. Because church concern about environmental problems

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[26] Johnson, p. 6.
[27] Directory, p. 30.
[28] Goodstein, Religious Leaders, p. A3.

is closely related to their caring about social conditions, not only can they bring an important voice to the environmental movement, they already have.

Conclusion

As can be seen by the contribution of the concepts of sustainable development and environmental justice, and the activities of the churches and the interchurch bodies, Christianity's historic concern for social justice plays a significant role in Christian environmental activism. Indeed, church concern about the plight of the environment appears to be an outgrowth of their experiences in working to alleviate the plight of humanity. Environmental activism by churches was already underway in the early seventies, before most of Creation-oriented theology was formulated. Instead of church activism being a result of an environmental epiphany leading to a reexamination of their teachings, the development of environmental theology appears to be a process of articulating beliefs Christians were already acting upon.

However, some environmentalists may still remain skeptical about Christianity's ability to develop environmental concern or be of much value to the environmental movement. They would argue that Christianity's insistence in connecting social justice concerns to those of the

environment is proof it is hopelessly anthrocentric. Yet, it is the insight gained from concern for human suffering and oppression which is allowing Christians to envision a human relationship with the whole of creation which transcends the traditional Western separation of humans and nature, an assumption which has frequently confounded environmentalists. Because environmental plans, based on the premise that the best way to preserve nature is to exclude human activity, have gone awry in many developing nations, the insight churches gained by advocating social justice in these nations can be valuable to the environmental movement. Given the continual use by environmentalists of global images and levels of analysis, this insight is particularly important.

Rather than seeing humans and their concerns as separated from nature and its well-being, their work on social justice has led them to see that the well-being of humans and their environment are deeply intertwined. Moreover, churches have been constant critics of the consumerism of wealthy nations which drives the exploitation of the environment and people worldwide. While these insights are not unique, voices within the environmental community have made similar observations, churches hold a position of moral authority for society at large which the environmental movement lacks. Ironically, it is the reluctance to address social justice concerns which has limited the environmental movement's clout as a moral

authority.

Informed by the ongoing reexamination of the Christian faith in light of environmental concerns, church concern for social justice is evolving into a true environmental ethic. Moreover, as can be seen by church activity to date and conceptual contributions, Christians are already engaging with environmental issues and advocacy. Therefore, the opportunity exists for the environmental movement to move beyond the unwitting acceptance of conceptual contributions and engaging the active involvement of churches. This undertaking has significant benefits for the environmental movement. In addition to the credibility and insight on social justice, and the moral authority arising from it, churches have other significant resources to offer as well. The next chapter will explore the contributions the involvement of churches can make to the environmental movement and some of the considerations for making it happen.

Chapter Four - A Religious Awakening

When concerned ecumenical churches first organized to address environmental problems through the WCC's Just, Participatory, and Sustainable Society programme in the mid-1970s, the role of NGOs was relatively weak, particularly outside North America. At that time they undertook the task of stimulating and supporting fledgling groups and movements working for change in their societies and the world. In the time since this first attempt at organizing church environmental concern fell apart, there has been an explosive proliferation of NGOs worldwide. Because these NGOs now play the dominant role in advocating on behalf of the environment, the role of churches has changed from one of mobilizing movements and groups, to one of engaging their own congregations and resources in support of the environmental movement.[1] Nonetheless, churches have a great deal to offer and, as has been shown in the previous chapters, are again organizing their activity.

Even though Church environmental activity is increasing, until recently it had gone largely unnoticed not only by environmentalists, but by the general public as well. It isn't only that people aren't looking in that direction, but also because the churches involved are often a bit too quiet. Prior to the formation of the National Religious Partnership for the

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[1] Granberg-Michaelson, Redeeming the Creation, p. 47.

Environment, there was no concerted effort to bring the activities of churches involved in environmental causes to the attention of the press and the general public. Unfortunately, the lack of self-promotion has left many Americans thinking about evangelical churches involved in right-wing agendas when they think about Christian political activism. In reality, the beliefs of Christians encompass a much broader array of outlooks, even among evangelicals, than this caricature presents. Moreover, a large section of this spectrum holds beliefs in regard to the environment that are very supportive of the environmental movement as a whole. Thankfully, they are now speaking out on the subject, and in the last couple of years have gained more attention from the media and the environmental movement.

While the lack of recognition does not negate the fact that churches are becoming involved in environmental issues, it does limit the effectiveness and that of the environmental movement, as well. In order to address the challenges confronting us in developing a sustainable society, the environmental movement needs to develop a greater level of public involvement, understanding and support than currently exists. One important method for accomplishing this goal is working with groups possessing compatible interests. It is time for what may at first glance appear to be strange alliances. Speaking at a Montana Environmental

Information Center Rendezvous in 1993, David Brower told the assembled faithful of Montana's environmental community it was imperative to involve the churches in the environmental movement. Vice President Al Gore has also spoken of the importance of church involvement to the environmental movement and devoted a chapter on the subject in his book, Earth in the Balance. Yet, at the present time, the level of interaction between the environmental movement and the growing number of churches working on environmental issues is low. Although the chief executive officers of eleven major environmental organizations sent a letter of support to the Joint Appeal in 1991,[2] the National Partnership for Religion and the Environment reports that cooperative efforts have yet to really develop.[3] The NRPE has been working to change this, and the recent apology to the churches from Carl Pope, Sierra Club President, may be a sign they are making progress.

Despite this fact, it is in the interests of both environmentalists and environmentally-concerned Christians to form working partnerships. Arguably the churches interested in working on environmental issues are more aware of this fact than environmentalists. Therefore, it is necessary for environmentalists to understand the real benefits of allying themselves

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[2] NRPE, History and Organizational Background.

[3] Rabbi Daniel Swartz, Associate Director of the NRPE, Personal Interview, Nov. 27, 1995.

with interested churches. At a time when an increased participation by concerned citizens is very much needed on a number of environmental issues at all levels from local to global, Church engagement has a great deal to offer the environmental movement. Not only does their involvement offer access to new people, networking possibilities and resources, but churches also bring an important voice of moral authority into discussions about how we behave as a society.

Raising Our Voices Together

As already bemoaned, although many Christians have an active interest in the environment, meaningful cooperation between environmental groups and churches has yet to develop. However, this lack of communication and cooperation is not only due to the ignorance on the part of environmentalists. Another contributing factor is a distrust of environmentalists among some of the churches involved.[4] Questions by environmentalists about the proper ethical status of humans in regard to nature and discussion of the intrinsic spiritual value of nature have been misperceived by some Christians as anti-human and pantheistic. This is compounded by frequent references by these environmentalists about how their beliefs differ from those of Christianity. It is important to address

[4] Rabbi Swartz.

these apparent differences because the earlier organized effort by ecumenical churches to work with environmental NGO's through the JPSS programme floundered in significant part because of these misunderstandings.

Areas of potential misunderstanding

For the most part, the discomfort of some Christians is from the language being used to express the concepts -- language that may not be integral to the concepts themselves. If the intrinsic value of nature and ethical obligation toward it are explained in terms of Creation's worth as the outpouring of God's expression or our responsibility as stewards, they become agreeable for many Christians. Overcoming misperceptions which impede cooperation between churches and environmentalists is largely a matter of understanding Christian worldviews well enough to explain concepts in language that has meaning for them, although some differences are more easily avoided than others. Therefore, a knowledge of the Christian tradition beyond a critique of a caricature of Christianity would be invaluable in helping environmentalists avoid unnecessary misunderstandings.

The differing ways various Christians approach their religion has important ramifications for how they can be meaningfully communicated with on environmental issues. While broad terms like 'caring for creation'

or 'stewardship' find acceptance throughout the spectrum of Christian belief, effective discussion of the particulars of various environmental issues requires an understanding of how a given church views their belief and their world. The theological differences among the various branches of Christianity not only influence how to effectively communicate with churches on environmental issues, these differences also influence a church's approachability on a given environmental issue.

The differing attitudes of churches toward evolution are one very important example of this need. To many environmentalists the concept of evolution may seem so basic to environmental science that communicating with Christians that reject it may be perplexing. While many Christians find it completely compatible with their faith, others revile it as a rejection of God's truth. Therefore, for some of the more fundamentalist leaning evangelical Protestants, preserving biodiversity for the sake of evolution is not an argument that has much meaning. Yet, that doesn't mean that they are hostile to the idea of preserving species and uninterested in supporting measures to save them from extinction. The EEN's support of the Endangered Species Act clearly shows this is not the case.

In addition to evolution, another area where environmentalists and Christians miss each other is in discussions over the spiritual and philosophical status of nature. For many Christians, discussions advocating

ecocentrism and the inherent spiritual ethical worth of nature have been heard as pantheism, at best, if not outright pagan nature worship (indeed, the environmental movement does include an entertaining variety of unrepentant pantheists and neo-pagans). Ecocentric-based ethical arguments which appear to value the rights of nature over concerns about human welfare have also raised objections from Christians. On the other side, Christian teachings about God's transcendence and human dominion have been understood as proof among environmentalists that Christianity is hopelessly anthropocentric and dualistic. As was discussed earlier in Chapter One, this is a profound misunderstanding. It is particularly unfortunate because both are voicing objections to a belief rampant in the West that the Earth and its creatures are soulless resources to be valued only by their usefulness to man, and are attempting to re-infuse the natural world with the experience of the sacred. Moreover, both are working to overcome the dualistic and anthropocentric tendencies they inherited from the Western intellectual tradition.

God's transcendence is an important theological point for many Christians. However, this doesn't mean that they view God as completely separate from nature. Rather, Christianity envisions a God who is "intimately involved" with creation, "transcendent, while lovingly sustaining each creature; and immanent, while wholly other than creation

and not to be confused with it."[5] Moreover, the Christian concept of creation connotes a world that is very much alive and possessing intrinsic value because it is God's handiwork. Creation, "in all its beauty, wildness and life-giving bounty" is the work of God, who upholds "each thing in its freedom, and all things in relationships of intricate complexity."[6] By envisioning a nature pervaded by God's presence, Christianity offers a counter to the deanimation of nature by Western thought that can resonate deeply within Western culture.

There is no doubt that Christianity places a high value on human life, yet this does not mean that Christianity teaches that humans are preeminent and fulfillment of their desires outweighs the concerns of the rest of creation. Instead of being a divine sanction for anthropocentric exploitation, dominion is correctly understood as having a theocentric orientation, one which charges humans with the responsibility of stewardship.[7] Dominion is not to be confused with sovereignty or possession, as sovereignty is God's. Rather than setting us above nature, dominion refers to humanity's role as part of God's creation, that of stewards.[8] Not only does stewardship call upon humans to use the talents

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[5] EEN, "An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation," quoted in Broadway, p. C8..
[6] ibid.
[7] Rossi, reprinted in Granberg-Michaelson, Ecology and Life, p. 156-157.
[8] Oelschlaeger, p. 130.

given them to aid and sustain other creatures, but it emphasizes their connection to the rest of creation, rather than a separation. For Christians it is not an issue of the rights of nature versus those of humans, but rather one of human responsibilities to the rest of creation and to each other. By understanding these theological sticking points, environmentalists can avoid getting hung up over what are essentially non-issues and communicate more persuasively with Christians.

One area, however, where there is a real difference in outlooks between many environmentalists and a large number of Christians is that of population issues and women's issues. In their desire to limit women's access to abortion and contraception, under the rationale of preserving the sanctity of life and discouraging premarital sex, conservative Christians tend to be very uncomfortable with family planning programs. Opposition to abortion has been a central rallying point for the Christian Coalition among both conservative Protestants and conservative Catholics. In addition, the Pope's adamant opposition to all forms of contraception has been a significant obstacle to international family planning programs. Moreover, both the Vatican and the more fundamentalist Protestant espouse teachings of a divinely commanded, patriarchal family system or church that are unacceptably oppressive for many women.

Although liberal Catholics and the more ecumenical Protestants are

supportive of efforts to empower women and condone family planning, these issues are likely to be areas of contention with a significant number of Christians. In order to work with churches, environmentalists must decide on how to address this difficulty. Attempts to argue the point are futile and likely to result in continued alienation. Another approach would be to avoid the conflict altogether by working on environmental issues with only the ecumenical churches and liberal Catholics. This would be limiting because the evangelicals represent a large population in the U.S., as do Catholics obedient to the Vatican.[9] Moreover, Catholics who dissent from the Papal position lack the authority of the Church and can only convey their personal conviction. Yet, it may be necessary to do just that as far as population and women's issues are concerned. Acknowledging the

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[9] According to Oelschlaeger, 90% of Americans believe in God with almost two-thirds characterizing themselves as active in their congregation. Of the faithful, divided among 1,200 denominations with nearly 400,000 congregations, about 25% are Catholic; 24% are moderate Protestants; 16% are conservative Protestants, and liberal and black Protestants each representing 9%. However, in an article on Ralph Reed and the Christian Coalition, the Washington Post Magazine divides it differently with mainline Protestants accounting for only one-fifth of the population, while evangelicals and Catholics each claim a quarter. Its all depends on how one defines evangelical (see footnote 47, Chapter One). In any case, according to the 1991 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches, Catholics represent for about 57 million Americans and Protestants of all stripes account for over 79 million.

Oelschlaeger, p. 76; Dan Balz and Ronald Brownstein, "God's Fixer; Christian Coalition Leader Ralph Reed has a Strategy: Instead of Chasing Republican Politicians, He Wants the Party to Come to Him. It's Working," Washington Post Magazine, January 28, 1996, p. 12; and "Religious Population of U.S.," 1991 Yearbook of American and Canadian Churches, reprinted in North American Coalition on Religion and Ecology, Global Stewardship Survey - Completed Denominational Survey Forms (Washington, DC.: NACRE, January 1993), nd., np.

disagreement and not allowing it to derail alliances on other environmental issues is probably the best course of action. By first opening communication on issues where common ground already exists, the possibility for further dialogue may develop.

Theological/Organizational Considerations

Organizational differences also effect the manner in which contact with churches can be established. Among the various branches of Christianity, there is considerable variation in the level of centralized organization, structure and locus of the decision-making body, and relation to outside entities including not only secular ones, but churches of other denominations. A knowledge of how and by whom decisions are made, how information is disseminated and the level of receptivity to outside input is important for environmentalists to work effectively with various churches.

Evangelical Protestant churches present challenges for environmentalists wishing to connect with them due to their theological leanings and organizational structure. In addition to relative newness of evangelical interest in environmental issues, challenges are presented by both the fundamentalist theology and the relative lack of cohesive organizational structure.

The theology of the evangelical churches is socially conservative and the

most likely to resemble the Christianity decried by White. Among the churches at the far end of the fundamentalist range of the religious spectrum tendencies toward dualism, patriarchal hierarchy and an adherence to what is believed to be a literal interpretation of the Bible are strongest. For some evangelicals, the desire to avoid the corrupting influences of the world has lead to a focusing of their energy on a spiritual redemption from that world.[10] Coupled with the expectation of an imminent apocalypse, this outlook tends to make environmental issues appear as distractions from the true Christian path to these evangelicals. Their conservative teachings on the role of women in society and reproductive issues can also be troubling for environmentalists. Believing that the Bible is the only source of truth and must be read literally, many evangelicals are distrustful of the corrupting influence of science, particularly evolution, secular institutions, other religious traditions, and at times other denominations. Although, not all evangelicals are this fundamentalist in their approach, this aspect of their theology limits their ability to work with outside groups and influences their organizational structure.

While there are evangelical denominations that are organized into a

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[10] It is important to note that most of these churches recognize a distinction between the world as the natural creation of God and the "world" as the corrupting influences of ungodly societies. Granberg-Michaelson, Ecology and Life, p. 62.

national body, many evangelical churches are independent with their decisions made by the local congregation. While the absence of centralized authority to set evangelical doctrine may mean more openness to new ideas than might be expected, the dispersed, grassroots structure of evangelical churches doesn't allow for the quick transmittal of ideas or change in attitudes.[11] These churches are also less likely to belong to interchurch associations like the NCC. This is not to say they utterly lack an interest in working in association with other churches, but it tends to be done through outside religion based organizations like World Vision or Evangelicals for Social Action. For this reason, the environmental activity of these churches has been organized by the newly formed EEN rather than through a interchurch structure.

Ecumenical Protestant churches, on the other hand, possess theology and organizational structures contributing to their accessibility to interested environmentalists. Although these churches view redemption as an important part of Christian teachings, they also emphasize the role of the church as an instrument for societal change. While this has been directed toward issues of social justice and public morality in the past, increasingly these churches have been articulating the importance of caring for creation. Less apocalyptic, dualistic and patriarchal than their

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[11] Smith, p. 10.

fundamentalist brethren, they are also more open to sources of truth outside biblical teachings. This allows most of the ecumenical churches to acknowledge evolution and other sciences as valid and to engage in dialogue with other religions. In addition, many of these churches have been actively grappling with women's concerns and bringing them into the church leadership. Their openness on these matters has important consequences for their ability to organize. Because of their willingness to accept the validity of other faith traditions and secular worldviews, they are able to work with a larger variety of groups and individuals.

The ecumenical churches tend to be organized into national associations along denominational lines. While many decisions are in the hands of local congregations, these churches have national councils or synods where decisions are made for the church as a whole. Again, there is a fair amount of variation between churches in the level of central organization and the types of decisions made by the central body; some only discuss doctrinal matters, while others include organizational matters. Whatever the degree of centralized decision making, the existence of a national organization to disseminate information to member congregations is helpful to outreach efforts by environmentalists. Due to the greater willingness of ecumenical churches to work with other churches, many of these churches belong to or participate in projects with the NCC, an

association of thirty-two Protestant denominations in the United States.

Because environmental interest among ecumenical Protestant churches was well-established, these churches were able to join the NRPE through the NCC's pre-existing Eco-Justice Working Group. This creates an important organizational difference with the EEN. The NCC is an organization of national church organizations, while the EEN is a more diffuse organization of individual churches and individuals. This allows the churches in the NCC to organize through a well-developed network.

The Catholic Church shares a similar history on environmental matters as the ecumenical Protestant churches; however, there are some significant differences between them in terms of theology and organizational structure. Like Protestant churches, the Catholic Church contains fundamentalist and ecumenical elements. Unlike the Protestant churches, which tend to divide the more extreme of these positions between denominations, the Catholic Church holds the entire spectrum in its rather large embrace. Moreover, while moderate and liberal Catholics are very much like ecumenical Protestants in their outlook on a number of issues, the terms fundamentalist and ecumenical have a slightly different meaning for Catholics.

Despite some common ground on a conservative social agenda, fundamentalist or conservative Catholics have a different orientation to

religious authority than fundamentalist Protestants, believing the official doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church are the revealed word of God, rather than a literal interpretation of the Bible.[12] Yet, even the conservative elements of the Catholic Church are ecumenical to a certain extent because of Pope John Paul II's outreach to other faith communities. Although the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church regarding issues of population control and concerns of women are not favorable in the eyes of many environmentalists, conservative Catholics are more accepting of scientific discoveries and theories than their conservative Protestant brethren. In particular, the papal acknowledgment of evolution is markedly different from that of fundamentalist Protestant churches.[13] It is also important to note that there is considerable dissent among liberal and moderate Catholics toward the Pope's teachings on contraception, divorce and the role of women in the church.

The Roman Catholic Church also differs significantly from the Protestant Churches in its organizational structure. With over a billion adherents, the Roman Catholic Church is the world's largest religious organization. While the majority of Christians in the United States are Protestants, the Roman Catholic Church is the largest single church in the

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[12] Oelschlaeger, p.132.
[13] Goodstein, "Pope Backs Acceptance of Evolution," p. A1

United States, with over 57 million members.[14] Because of its huge size and history, the Roman Catholic Church has a very well developed hierarchical structure, with the decision and policy making authority residing in the hands of the Vatican and bishops. Indeed, with the amount of authority held by the papacy, the Catholic Church is inherently international, unlike Protestant churches. However, with the doctrinal support of Rome, bishops and lay leaders possess sufficient decision making powers to authorize activity with environmentalists. With the involvement of the U.S. Catholic Conference in the NRPE, the Roman Catholic Church in the United States is officially involved in environmental issues. This will make it easier for interested Catholics to get the support of their local church and parish. The structure of the Church may cause it to move slowly, but once moving, it does so with considerable momentum.

Church Offerings

Equipped with a knowledge of the organizational and theological particulars of the various branches of Christianity, environmentalists can better focus their outreach strategy to different churches, as well as avoid some of the misunderstandings and disagreements that have troubled interactions in the past. However, it is not just a matter of proselytizing to

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[14] David B. Barrett, "Adherents of All Religions by Seven Continental Areas", reprinted in North American Coalition on Religion and Ecology, Global Stewardship Survey - Completed Denominational Survey Forms, (Washington D.C.: NACRE, January 1993).

potential allies among Christians expressing environmental concern. Instead, as seen in Chapter Two, they have undertaken environmental projects in a variety of areas which demonstrate the substantial assets they can bring to the larger environmental community.

Property

The most tangible offerings the churches have to make are their physical assets. At the simplest level, most churches own a physical structure in which to meet. In some poorer and rural communities, local churches are among the few structures available that can accommodate a large gathering. They frequently have the addresses and phone numbers of parishioners, offices with phones and perhaps even a photocopier. These simple things can be vital to launching and sustaining small community grassroots efforts or organizations.

Some churches have economic clout, through financial resources and purchasing power, which can be brought to bear on environmental causes. As is shown by the $45 billion in stock that the ICCR wields to bring greater environmental accountability to corporations, churches and other religious organizations have considerable financial influence.[15] Another way a number of churches exert economic influence is through their procurement practices. Given the wide distribution and large number of

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[15] Johnson, p. 5.

churches, expanding this practice could provide a valuable boost to markets for recycled products, particularly paper, thus aiding recycling efforts. Conceivably, churches could also have the same role with alternative energy and other environmentally friendly products.

Along similar lines, many churches have initiated recycling programs, not only internally, but also for their communities. Saint John the Divine Cathedral played that role in Manhattan in the late 1970's.[16] In Grand Rapids, Michigan, Calvin College, operated by the Christian Reformed Church, initiated a successful community recycling program in 1976, which was subsequently taken over by Kent County.[17] Currently, churches have the greatest opportunity to assist recycling efforts in rural areas which are distant from established recycling markets. Since it is difficult to make a recycling project economically viable in these locations, it requires a pool of volunteer labor coordinated by a fairly stable organization of some sort. Churches could help extend recycling efforts by offering venues to recruit and organize volunteers and sites for collection that are regularly visited.[18]

The ownership of land by many churches provides an opportunity for them to practice and encourage environmentally sound land use practices.

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[16] Directory, pp. 24.
[17] Granberg-Michaelson, Ecology and Life, p. 66.
[18] I am drawing upon the knowledge gained on the challenges of establishing recycling programs from my experience working with the Student Action Center and MontPIRG to establish a recycling program at the University of Montana, and later coordinating that same program for the University.

As in the case of Community Lutheran Church, in Sterling, Virginia, some churches are encouraging the growth of native vegetation and preserving green space and habitat for animals. Others, like Bethel Evangelical Lutheran Church in rural Frederick, Maryland, Sagemont Presbyterian Church in Houston, Texas and the Genesis Farm in Blairstown, New Jersey affiliated with Sisters of Saint Dominic, have undertaken organic agriculture on church property, often using the produce to feed the hungry. These practices are not only important because they bring land into environmentally sound practices, but also for the potential market influences these actions can have.

A few churches also have access to media time to offer to environmental causes. While most of the big televangelists haven't shown much interest in the issue, some churches have local broadcast time that could be a vehicle for the dissemination of environmental information and environmentally positive Christian teachings.[19] Another possible outlet is Odyssey, a national faith and values network. Originally founded as the Vision Interfaith Satellite Network by the National Interfaith Cable Coalition, a coalition of Protestant, Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Eastern Orthodox groups, it became available to 30 million households when Liberty Media

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[19] Pat Robertson opposes the environmental movement as socialistic, however, Billy Graham has expressed an increasing concern for the environment, so perhaps there is hope. Smith, p. 10.

Corp. became a partner in 1995.[20]

In addition to the various assets detailed above, churches also have a community to help support these endeavors. The church community helps with environmental projects organized by the church like recycling, gardening, and environmental restoration. However, the members of the church can magnify the effect of these efforts by mirroring them in their household practices and purchasing. The members of the church community can also be a vital resource for effecting public policy as well.

Membership

One of the key assets churches have to offer the environmental movement is access to people. Undoubtedly there are already numerous Christians who are members of one or another of the mainstream environmental organizations, at least at the dues paying - write your Senator level. Some have even taken steps to involve their churches in environmental issues as demonstrated by the activities of members of the Montana Wilderness Association and the Yellowstone Coalition.

However, many of the churches working on environmental issues are doing so independent of any environmental organization. Paul Gorman with the NRPE has stated that, "We are not the environmental movement at prayer; we are not Greens in collars, we are religious people acting in a

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[20] Religious News Service, "Firms Invest in Network," Washington Post, July 4, 1998, p. B7.

distinctively religious response."[21] This statement suggests that many of the Christians getting involved are new to environmental activism and don't yet perceive themselves as part of the established environmental movement. Engaging them more fully would bring the environmental movement into contact with a new and often sympathetic audience, who are often not exposed to environmental issues beyond news sound bites or how those issues are connected to their church activities. Even if Christians prefer to work through their churches rather than join an established environmental organization, considering the number of people involved, it would add a valuable component to the environmental movement, nonetheless. These numbers become even more impressive when the fact that church members regularly congregate together in one place is taken into consideration.

Networking

Beyond exposure to new people, Church involvement can also increase participation in environmental causes by providing new networking and organizing possibilities. Churches have an important opportunity to exchange information and coordinate activity unavailable to most environmental groups; they meet as a community every week. This was an aspect Ralph Reed put to effective use in building the Christian Coalition to back a conservative political agenda. According to Reed, "The advantage

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[21] Baker, p. 42.

we have is that liberals and feminists don't generally go to church. They don't gather in one place three days before elections."[22] As uncomfortable as many in the environmental community may be with the agenda and the stealth tactics used by the Christian Coalition in local elections, they have demonstrated the networking potential of churches to build an effective electoral machine from the local level up to the national.[23]

Although environmental groups tend to be more focused on influencing public policy through the legislative and regulatory processes than on effecting the electoral process, networking with churches has the potential to aid these efforts as well. Frequently, environmental battles are long term struggles in a variety of venues. All too often, legislation benefiting the environment which was enacted with significant public support, is thwarted in subsequent sessions of congress or state legislatures when public attention has faded. The administration and enforcement of these laws through regulatory agencies is another arena where environmental laws are impeded. Therefore, the ability to sustain a long-term commitment and refocus the effort toward different venues of activity is necessary in order to make significant progress on many environmental

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[22] Balz and Brownstein, p. 15.

[23] Keeping in mind that despite the Christian Coalition's portrayal of itself as representing the evangelic community, only 1.2 million of the 30 to 50 million people who describe themselves as evangelicals consider themselves as members. This leaves a lot of people meeting on Sundays who don't necessarily agree with Pat Robertson. Smith, p. 8.

issues. While the renewal and refocusing of their membership is a continual challenge for well-established environmental organizations, it can be a fatal difficulty for local grassroots efforts. As was demonstrated by the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana in its successful work with local fishing families to implement a State plan to restore and preserve the bays and bayous of coastal Louisiana, the community provided by churches can play a vital role in nurturing and organizing long term efforts on behalf of the environment.[24]

Ironically, despite the long term nature of environmental struggles, another difficulty experienced by both established environmental groups and smaller grassroots efforts is how to mobilize their own membership and concerned members of the public on short notice. Public hearings on administrative decisions and important environmental legislation are often scheduled with notoriously little advance announcement, giving environmental groups very little time to effectively organize their grassroots.[25] While environmental groups use phone trees, direct mailings, e-mail and other methods to get the word out, these efforts are

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[24] Johnson, p.4 & 5.

[25] For instance, in a venue like the Montana Legislature which attends to the State's concerns with a ninety day session every two years, the action can move very quickly. During the 1995 Legislative Session, I worked in Helena as a lobbyist for MontPIRG. Our main environmental issue was legislation regulating the handling and disposal of hazardous waste in response to plans to burn hazardous waste in Montana cement kilns. However, a wholesale attack on environmental laws soon took our attention. It was not unusual to have twenty-four hours notice between introduction and the committee hearing of the bill.

difficult to organize quickly and uncertain in their results. The regularity and continuity in meeting practiced by churches could provide invaluable opportunities in getting the word out on pending environmental policy decisions, particularly on local and state level where are decision making processes are often short and newspapers negligent. While forming alliances with churches would particularly benefit grassroots environmental efforts, these efforts need not be confined to local and state levels. Because many churches belong to national and international denominational associations, and some coordinate activities through interdenominational associations, they have the organizational structure to funnel information to the individual churches, enabling those churches to engage in a wider range of issues.

Credibility

The credibility and access churches possess among segments of the population which are not already deeply involved in environmental politics can assist the environmental movement to expand beyond its largely white middle class membership. In recent years, environmental groups have become aware of the need to involve people of color and rural populations in their campaigns. Yet, environmentalists tend not to have a great deal of credibility with these segments of the public. While due in part to the poor record of environmentalists on social justice issues, it is also due to a lack

of contact. In some cases, this lack of contact has allowed an image of environmentalists as "elitist," "extremist" and "wacko" to flourish. On the other hand, churches have considerable involvement in the lives of these groups.

For many rural communities local churches are an important center for the community. Beyond the Sunday services and other spiritual gatherings, churches are involved in many of the community's social functions and services, as well as social life. Among African-American and Hispanic communities, churches also play an important role in maintaining their community and identity. For these and other people churches are places of solace and fellowship where they have experienced many important events like baptisms, weddings, and funerals. Also, churches often serve as a gathering place for community events and civic groups such as dances, fund-raisers, and scout and 4-H meetings. Because churches are familiar and comfortable places for many people the environmental movement wants to reach, approaching them in this venue could lead to their support on particular environmental issues, even among those wary of environmentalists.

In addition, churches have a tradition of acting as both a neutral ground for mediating disputes, and as a mediator of disputes. For this reason, churches can provide a setting for discussion of environmental issues with

constituencies which are suspicious of environmentalists. In the case of the Diocese of Houma-Thibodaux, Rob Gorman, Assistant Director of Catholic Social Services, was able to bring together fishing families, industrialists, environmentalists and homeowners together to collaborate on a solution to the environmental ills of Coastal Louisiana. He discovered that the church's role in initiating the meetings had the effect of setting a tone where people could put aside their differences. According to Gorman, "A conversation is different in a church than across a board table in a conference room."[26]

A Voice of Conscience

Beyond their access to people and resources, churches bring another asset of considerable worth to the environmental movement: moral authority. Christian churches represent moral conscience to a large segment of the population not only in the United States, but also in Latin America, New Zealand, Australia, the South Pacific, Canada, Britain and Europe. Christianity influences significant populations in Africa and Asia as well. Environmentalists have gained a degree of ethical clout in certain segments of the U.S. and world populations, but not of the same character and magnitude of Christian churches.

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[26] Johnson, p. 5.

Many people throughout the world regularly turn to religious authorities to help them define ethical behavior. Among the world's Christians, churches are frequently seen not only as arbiters of what moral behavior is, but also as the agents responsible for defining what issues require ethical consideration. Even people who do not primarily identify themselves as Christians still tend to view churches as important authorities on ethical matters in societies where Christianity has a significant presence. Throughout their history, churches have been able to refocus people's awareness on various issues that had previously been thought of as primarily economic or political problems, or even just matters of personal preference, leading to the inclusion of individuals in the sphere of moral consideration that had formally been conveniently excluded.

For many people, other species and the environment as a whole continue to be outside their ethical community. Environmental problems have been relegated to the realm of scientific discussion and political debate. While they may see the activities of environmentalists as praiseworthy, the idea of ethical consideration and moral obligation for non-human beings is still underdeveloped. Indeed, for many in the West, the subject of ethics is about human society, thus this idea seems to run counter to what they believe ethics is about. For this reason, the involvement of a moral agency, specifically the churches, can be immensely valuable in affecting public

opinion. Because so many people look to them for guidance on what is moral, churches have the ability to call upon the consciences of people who have never seen environmental issues as ethical matters.

Church activism has already contributed two terms in wide use among environmentalists: sustainability and environmental justice. As was discussed in chapter three, the objections raised by Christians to inverting the traditional Western hierarchy to place pristine nature as a higher good than human interests stems from Christianity's historic involvement in the struggle for social justice. The disagreement is not simply from a theological or ideological standpoint, but from direct experience of the interconnectedness of the plight of the downtrodden and that of the environment. The exclusion of human activity can work to preserve some areas, but for much of the planet human activity has been a reality for millennia. For these places, environmental advances must involve the human inhabitants and their concerns in order to succeed. Instead of being a refutation of the human responsibility to nature, the Christian objection to forms of ecocentrism are an insight into actual dynamics of the problem and as such are a needed reality check for some deep ecologists.

Moreover, the source of moral authority enjoyed by churches has important implications for the forging of new alliances between environmentalists and other constituencies. Because concern for social

justice is at the heart of both the churches' moral authority and developing environmental activism, they are able to avoid the common dichotomy of economic versus environmental in policy debates. To quote Rob Gorman again, "People often think you have to choose between nature and people. We came at this from a social justice perspective and found that you can't have justice without jobs, and you can't have jobs without the wetlands."[27] Because of their ability to connect human welfare with environmental well-being, and the moral authority they have gained from an historic role of advocating social justice, churches are able to speak to people who are suspicious of environmentalists.

Moreover, the involvement of churches across the Christian spectrum makes attempts by anti-environmental interests to paint environmentalism as a fringe cult of anti-Christian fanatics considerably more difficult. In addition, Christian discussion of human responsibility to the rest of creation severely undercuts the claim used by a number of environmental foes that the Judeo-Christian tradition supports and even mandates their exploitative practices. A Christian critique of this attitude can be scathing; they can condemn not only the distortion of Christian teachings, but also the pride and greed of the assertion.

Peter Illyn, formerly a Pentecostal minister and now Northwest

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[27] ibid.

regional director for Green cross, recounts an experience at a community meeting in the state of Washington. He had spoken in favor of the Endangered Species Act when a logger stood up and told him to, "Get your damn owls out of my damn trees." Illyn recognizing him as a conservative Christian opened his Bible and read some scripture, and then told him, " They're not my owls and they're not your trees. The Bible says they're God's owls and God's trees." To which the man sat down quietly and Illyn was able to join him in prayer.[28]

Finis

As presented in the beginning of this thesis, there is a pervasive perception that Christianity is hostile toward the environment and assumption that churches are uninterested in environmental issues. Not only is this perception inaccurate, it is counterproductive, alienating the environmental movement from a community which is concerned and has considerable resources to offer in many domains. Use of physical and financial resources for environmental campaigns, recycling, purchase of environmentally friendly products, organic farming and environmentally-sensitive management of wildlands on church property, are all actions already undertaken by churches to further the goal of creating a sustainable

[28] Smith, p.12.

society. As the largest voluntary group in the United States, churches offer the environmental movement significant opportunities for outreach to networking, new communities, and volunteers.[29] The effect of activities is further magnified when members of the congregation take on these practices in their homes.

Yet, the contribution Christianity can make to the environmental movement extends beyond the more tangible assets they bring. The credibility on social justice issues earned by churches could be invaluable in assisting environmentalists in overcoming the perception that they are unconcerned about human well-being. The accompanying moral authority enjoyed by churches has the potential to profoundly effect public policy discussions around environmental issues.[30] Perhaps even more important is the ability of the churches, due to these attributes, to provide neutral ground and act as facilitators for environmentalists with communities that distrust them. It may be possible with the assistance of the churches to be able to find common ground around particular actions to care for creation with groups that otherwise differ considerably in their outlooks. In doing so it may also be possible for these groups to come to a greater appreciation of their differences, and perhaps find more on which they can come to agreement.

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[29] Granberg-Michaelson, Ecology and Life, p. 27.
[30] Oelschlaeger, pp. 47-51.

Because of the width of the spectrum of Christian belief, there can be no single understanding of Christian environmentalism. Not only does the degree of interest in the environment vary between denominations, so does the openness and support for particular environmental issues. Due to this dynamic, alliances between environmental groups and churches are likely to be issue-specific and project-oriented. While larger political alliances are possible with some churches, this is tricky ground due to the tax-exempt status of churches and many environmental groups, as well as political and ideological differences, not only between the two groups, but also within each. Therefore an understanding of the organizational and theological orientation of the different churches, and the ramifications of that orientation on their receptivity to particular issues, will be vital for environmentalists to engage and inform the growing number of concerned Christians.

An ability to speak the language Christians are using to express their environmental concern is not only useful in avoiding areas which cause misunderstanding and hostility, but it can provide the environmental movement with a metaphorically rich language as well. Given the profound influence Christianity had on Western culture, ideas from this tradition can be rousing at a deep level for individuals raised in it. Overall, rather than being negative and oppressive toward nature,

Christianity's views have been reverent and celebratory. The matrix of Christian belief gave birth to the new concepts of sustainability and environmental justice, which were subsequently adopted by the environmental movement. Christianity can also offer a new outlook and emphasis on older words like stewardship and creation that resonate with potent metaphors.[31] Understanding Christianity's contribution to environmentalism allows environmentalists to reclaim the stories and metaphors of a tradition that profoundly influences our society and others, as well as understand some of our own inherited preconceptions and biases.

While some in the environmental movement might hold that these Christian ideas still amount to a shallow ecology, it is actually an invitation to a deeper type of community with other beings and the planet as a whole. Stewardship and creation denote a connectedness, a common origin and relation to God, which can contribute to the development of an environmental ethic which envisions humanity in community with nature, rather than separate and above or below it. Sustainability and environmental justice call for a human society which holds its economic and social needs in the context of that relationship. Moreover, these terms are metaphors which resonate deeply with people raised in Western culture, allowing the environmental movement to stir the popular

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[31] ibid., pp. 37-38.

imagination more forcefully.[32]

Yet, to be effective, the power of these metaphors must be informed by real environmental information. Because churches have often raised a cautionary voice about the social effects of scientific advances and the actual hostility to science by some conservative Christians, this is an area where environmentalists have more creditability than churches. Nor do interested churches always feel altogether knowledgeable about the scientific aspects of various environmental issues or the mechanics of organizing environmental campaigns. In order to be credible when approaching policy makers on behalf of the environment, Christians must be able to effectively express not only the theological and social justice underpinnings of their environmental concern, but be able to intelligently discuss the science involved and effectively organize their effort. Moreover, churches that have undertaken environmental projects can draw on the expertise of environmental groups already working in that area. Therefore the exchange is not one-sided. The ability for environmentalists to engage with Christians is important to helping churches gain the expertise on specific issues and in political matters they need to become a vital component of the environmental movement.

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[32] Recently this use of the word stewardship has begun to make its way into at least the public pronouncements of federal land use officials, notably Interior Secretary Babbit and Vice President Gore.

Given the growing interest and activity among churches and the nature affirming potential of the Christian tradition, it is a potent time for interaction between concerned Christians and the environmental movement at large. While concern about the environment is not yet universal among Christians, the current level of interest and activity is significant enough to merit the attention of the environmental movement. By interacting with churches, environmentalists stand not only to gain from the alliance with Christians, but also by learning to communicate from common ground with other groups which possess different worldviews.

With the help of churches the environmental movement will be able to continue to increase both the level of subscription to environmentalism by the general public, and the depth of their understanding of that commitment. It may even be possible to infuse an environmental ethic into the basic assumptions of our society. Whether a sustainable society is possible remains to be seen, but to obtain that goal environmentalists need new allies and new ways to communicate to the general public. At this time, with many churches standing ready to engage in the endeavor, it would be tragic if environmentalists failed to enlist them because of ignorance and unfounded bias.

While Christian concern for the environmental movement is likely to continue developing without direct contact with environmental groups, the

strength of the environmental movement as a whole would be increased by bringing these two forces together. To the churches' moral authority and networking potential, environmentalists bring scientific credibility and political experience. Both have financial and membership resources that can be directed in tandem on environmental issues, and both can reach segments of society less accessible to the other. Together they can be a more formidable force for social transformation than either could be alone.

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