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## **THE SCIENTIST AND THE SHEPHERD**

### **The Emergence of Evangelical Environmentalism**

*Calvin B. DeWitt*

Amidst sweeping corporate globalization and relentless pressing of Earth for resources, a shepherd cries, “Care for God’s Creation.” Another voice, muffled by powers-that-be, decries global warming and species extinctions. The first is a cry of the Shepherd, the second a cry of the Scientist.

As I write this wonderful morning on the great marsh, autumn is all ablaze, the cranes are bugling above layered ancient peats, geese are calling overhead as they wing their way toward the lake. Handel’s *Messiah* is playing in the background. A few minutes earlier I had walked outside to scan these magnificent wetlands with wondering eyes, walked back into the house, and wrote the words on top of this page: “The Scientist and the Shepherd.”

I am humming Handel’s tune as I write: “*For we like sheep have gone astray . . . have gone astraay . . . have gone astraay . . . We have turn-ed, we have turn-ed, every-one to his own way.*” As I write, the *Messiah* sinks in: “For we like sheep have gone astray.” “The Lord has laid on him the iniquities of us all.” It is an inspirational beginning for my writing today, yet sobering. Classical marsh; classical music—playing remarkably well in the mind’s eye and ear on autumn’s glorious morning. My prayer for forgiveness and blessing ascends from the great and vibrant wetlands whose peats reach back to times well before Christ’s sojourn on earth.

Why is evangelical environmentalism emerging in our day, we may ask? It has to do with sheep, the scientist, and the shepherd. But this question does not have a handy answer. Instead, the answer will progressively unfold as we trace the development of this movement. The full answer can come only at chapter’s end.

### **TWO GREAT NEEDS**

In building the movement called evangelical environmentalism,<sup>1</sup> there were two great needs, and both have been increasingly met over its twenty-five years of development: First, was the need to build a creation theology, and more specifically a creation-care theology. This had to be rooted in a thorough and scholarly biblical theology. Most importantly, it also had to be coherent with an integrated scientific understanding of the biosphere and the world. This was achieved by an academy of evangelical scientists, ethicists, and theologians who grew in numbers and publications from 1980 to the present and, becoming aware of itself as such, officially became the Academy of Evangelical Scientists and Ethicists in 2005.

Second, was the need to find ways to put this evangelical creation-care theology into practice. Already, many organizations were engaging the world in practical ways: World Vision and MAP International, for example. Needed beyond these practical evangelical agencies,

however, was that of networking evangelical practitioners around matters of creation-care. Various work to meet this need was attempted in the late 1980s and early 1990s, with the World Evangelical Fellowship creating the first evangelical environmental network—the International Evangelical Environmental Network (IEEN)—in 1992. This, in turn, led to the formation of the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) in 1993.

The formation and development of evangelical environmentalism has a complex history that has been thoroughly studied and reported by David Larsen in his scholarly two-volume dissertation “God’s Gardeners.” In addition to what Larsen presents in his thorough and comprehensive treatise is the important observation that the emergence of this movement, as with many other movements, was complex and complicated. The work of the gospel, by definition, is the work of self-giving and service. And what this movement continually found was that it was difficult both to be in control and simultaneously serve in Christ-like humility.

This problem of achieving power coupled with need to be humble servants, of course, is why Jesus is such a great model for the evangelical environmental movement. Jesus did not control by organizational hierarchy or by corporate power. Christ’s control came through the hearts of people who received his message of passion, compassion, love, and care, and all of these reside at the core of creation care. Temptations to grasp for power were overcome by the passion for caring—caring for each other and for the whole creation. The sometime attempts at human “grasp” were overcome by God’s “gift” (to use Walter Brueggemann’s terms),<sup>2</sup> even as the problem of power-seeking versus service-giving will likely surface periodically. The Lord’s beatitude, “The meek shall inherit the earth,” raised an important question for this movement: How does one make progress when meekness is the quality and behavior we seek? Evangelical environmentalism is attempting the difficult work of doing just that—to achieve power and influence, and yet do so through meekness. This essay is an early one in what hopefully will prove to be a continuing story of the power of meekness, love, and care.

## **A SWEEPING SECULARIZATION**

The twentieth century experienced a widespread secularization of American society. Many American colleges and universities severed or weakened their religious roots; many separated from the seminaries they once held in partnership; many churches diminished their community services as human needs were increasingly met by insurance policies, retirement plans, and government assistance. Toward the conclusion of the century many mainline denominations declined in membership and also in social and political influence, as graying congregations no longer held the youth that would have succeeded them. Biblical studies in colleges and universities during this period not only were diminished, extinguished, or signed over to seminaries and Bible colleges, but the Bible lost much of its credence in an increasingly secularized and urban America.

Yet there remained a significant population of Americans that continued to take the Bible seriously, maintaining that its study and exposition was vital and necessary for right living on earth and in society. These people and their worshiping congregations were not very much in touch with each other during most of the century. They found themselves pretty much at the fringe of American society, with little influence. Among them were many who in their relative isolation preferred “not joining hands with the world.” As the secular society, however, gained greater prominence—even as the Bible was diminished as a rule of faith and practice—these people, facing a common challenge to their biblical worldviews, formed organizations to address common needs and interests. While “agreeing to disagree” on many fundamentals of the Christian faith, they worked together, particularly in relief and development and in Christian higher education.

Faced with a common challenge of secularization and the common need to address major issues, they came together in various ways. Among the organizations they formed were the Association of Evangelical Relief and Development Organizations, and the Council of Christian Colleges and Universities. As these people became more visible within the wider society they came to be called evangelicals.

### **THE MEANING OF *EVANGELICAL* AND *EVANGELICALISM***

In 1974 evangelical scholar Carl F. H. Henry wrote that “evangelical Christians are thus marked by their devotion to the sure Word of the Bible; they are committed to the inspired scriptures as the divine rule of faith and practice. They affirm the fundamental doctrines of the Gospel, including the incarnation and virgin birth of Christ, His sinless life, substitutionary atonement, and bodily resurrection as the ground of God’s forgiveness of sinners, justification by faith alone, and the spiritual regeneration of all who trust in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ.”

Although evangelicals have not generally identified themselves as environmentalists nor or with environmentalism, their growing work on “caring for creation” has been given the designation *evangelical environmentalism* by Larsen and other observers of their emergence as a political and environmental force in American society. While they first were largely identified with personal and family ethical issues, their increasing identification with environmental issues makes it appropriate and important to address evangelical environmentalism as a present and future force in shaping environmental policy and the environmental movement.

The focus of evangelicals on the Bible, including extensive biblical teachings on caring for the earth and its creatures, is important in our assessment. As they hold firmly to the belief that the Bible and its sixty-six canonical books are vital for faith and practice and the authoritative source for defining how rightly to live on earth, evangelicals also believe that the good news of the Bible should not be selfishly kept. Instead, the good news must be proclaimed, with this belief reflecting the Greek derivation of “evangelical,” *euangelion*, from *eu* (“good”) and *angelos* (“a messenger or bearer of news”). This news is *good* and it is *good* for every creature. The reason for this news being good is because it brings restoration and reconciliation of all things, countering and undoing human-wrought degradation.

The personal harbinger of this good news is the lord of creation who brings “joy to the world” and “makes his blessings flow far as the curse is found.”<sup>4</sup> This is the biblical teaching in the New Testament canon as it asserts that the reach of this good news is as great and wide as is human-wrought degradation. Evangelicals “repeat the sounding joy” because the restorative reach of the second Adam (Jesus Christ) is as great and wide as the damaging reach of the first Adam (see 1 Cor. 15:45).

At the heart of this good news as proclaimed in evangelicalism is salvation. Salvation is a saving from degradation—a saving offered to those who are committed to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, the savior and reconciler of all things (*ta panta*). Believers of this good news bring joyful service to humanity, to every creature, and to all creation. Telling this good news is seen as a worthy service that works to fulfill the eager expectation of the whole creation for the coming of God’s children. Evangelicals then, are people who see themselves as bringers of good news in the footsteps of Jesus, are serious about honestly describing the way that things really are, and are visionary toward the way things ought to be. They are followers of Jesus who seek religiously to bring food and the means of its production to the hungry, compassionate care and the means of healing to the sick, and thoughtful restoration to a degraded creation. In doing this they join with other people who are committed to making things right in society and the creation.<sup>5</sup>

## EVANGELICAL RELATION TO HUMAN AUTHORITY

While largely identified with specific congregations, churches, and denominations, evangelicalism can be found in individuals, groups, and congregations in nearly every denomination across America, including mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics.

A distinctive feature of evangelicalism is that it widely distrusts human authority and ecclesiastical hierarchy. This distrust is reflected in congregational and institutional polity, with many congregations operating as independent entities and others but loosely organized into associations or joined together in denominations with limited hierarchy. Many in America are associated with the National Association of Evangelicals, but not all.

In evangelicalism there usually is no human “word from above” spoken by bishops or prelates. Instead there is *the* word—the Bible. The way this takes shape in practice is serious and continuing Bible study, individually and in fellowship with others. The purpose of Bible study extends beyond edification to discovering biblical teachings and applying these to personal lives, society, and the rest of creation.

Fear and mistrust of earthly authority sometimes have separated evangelicals from authoritative sources of knowledge: knowledge of biblical teachings on environmental stewardship and environmental degradation, knowledge of ecology and other natural sciences, and sometimes even knowledge of biblical material in their early Hebrew and Greek texts. As their knowledge and understanding of these subjects increases, however, through the growth and interconnections of their educational and relief and development institutions, evangelicals have become a powerful influence.

## EVANGELICAL SOURCES FOR KNOWLEDGE AND PRAXIS

Evangelical growth in knowledge and understanding is published and promoted by publications such as *Christianity Today* and by their numerous and growing evangelical colleges, universities, and seminaries that convey knowledge through professional and popular writing, educate pastors and teachers, and prepare social, scientific, medical, legal, business, and environmental professionals. Among evangelical colleges and universities, many have gained depth and influence in the study of creation and Christian environmental stewardship through partnership with the Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies, whose participating evangelical colleges and universities had grown to sixty in 2005.

Putting evangelical faith and belief into practice is expedited worldwide through evangelical organizations and agencies dedicated to medical services, disaster relief, development work, food production, environmental restoration, and word and deed ministries. The Association of Evangelical Relief and Development Organizations is a principal networking organization that develops knowledge and understanding of human and environmental needs around the world. In turn, the Association of Evangelical Relief and Development Organizations is linked with the EEN, which networks across institutions and agencies to mobilize and serve evangelical leaders, churches, and denominations in environmental stewardship and caring for creation (see list of EEN participants below). Among the accomplishments of the EEN was a successful effort in 1996 that prevented the U.S. Congress from weakening the Endangered Species Act and produced *An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation* that came to be highly regarded and later was supported with an authoritative book-length commentary.<sup>6</sup>

Evangelicalism’s commitment to taking the Bible seriously has important implications for its contributions to understanding God, abundant human life, and caring for creation. Since evangelicals measure their faith and practice against biblical standards and believe in continuous adjustment, correction, and conversion in response to their falling short of biblical requirements, their growing knowledge base and networks in education and responsible practice substantially

increase their strength for addressing care for creation, environmental degradation, and ecological sustainability.

## **TWO-BOOKS THEOLOGY AND *SOLA SCRIPTURA***

Contrary to what one might first expect, evangelical adherence to the centrality of the Bible, often identified with the phrase *sola Scriptura*, does not close the window on learning from society and creation. On the contrary, it is the window through which the world and God's creation are seen. This window is a biblical window—in the book of God's word—that opens the book of God's works—God's creation. More specifically, the biblical window is Romans 1:20, teaching that everyone is left without excuse from knowing God's divinity and everlasting power through the testimony of God's creation. This adherence both to the book of God's word and the book of God's works is sometimes referred to as two-books theology—a theology that reveals God both through the Bible and creation. The Confession of Faith of 1561, for example, presents The Means by Which we Know God" as follows:

We know him by two means:

First, by the creation, preservation, and government of the universe, since that universe is before our eyes like a beautiful book in which all creatures, great and small, are as letters [Lettres] to make us ponder the invisible things of God: his eternal power and his divinity, as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1:20.

All these things are enough to convict men and to leave them without excuse.

Second, he makes himself known to us more openly by his holy and divine Word, as much as we need in this life, for his glory and for the salvation of his own.<sup>7</sup>

The consequences of learning both from God's word and God's works are profound. It means, for example, that locating a village on the slope of a volcano does not prevent volcanic eruptions. Settling of human beings in river floodplains will not prevent floods. Neither will God render powerless in our bodies the poisons we design to kill other creatures, like pesticides. At base in evangelicalism, knowledge of God's word, accompanied by knowledge of God's works, leads to interfacing with the rest of creation wisely.<sup>8</sup> Both books must be read, and they must be read coherently. Failure to do so will disorient people physically, spiritually, and morally and will ultimately bring disaster; and it will diminish people's and the rest of creation's capacity to praise and worship God.

## **EVANGELICAL RELIGION: A PASSION TO LIVE RIGHTLY BEFORE GOD ON EARTH**

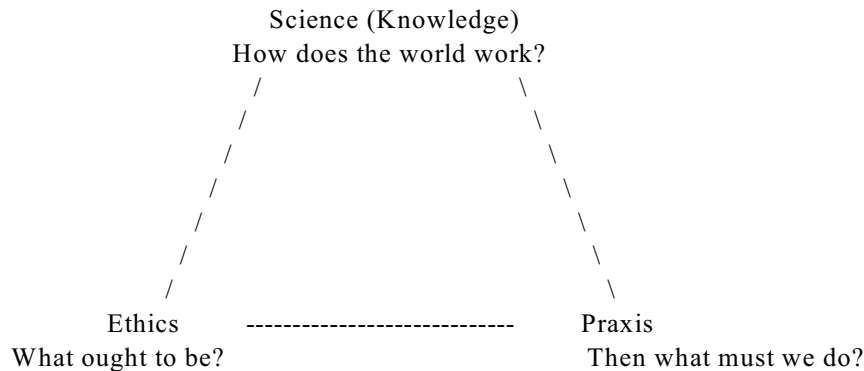
In setting forth the groundwork for understanding evangelical environmentalism as a significant religious, ethical, and political voice, it is important to reflect on the meaning of the word *religion* in ways that are consistent with a biblical understanding of the world and life. The definition of Wayne C. Booth comes the closest, I believe:

Religion is the passion, or the desire, both to live right—not just to live but to live right—and to spread right living, both desires conceived as responses to some sort of cosmic demand—that is, to a demand made to us by the way things are, by the way the world is, by the nature of Nature (as some would say) or by God himself (as explicitly religious people put it).<sup>9</sup>

For evangelicals this definition can be modified to read:

Religion is the passion, or the desire, both to live right—not just to live but to live right—and to spread right living, both desires conceived as responses to a cosmic demand made to us by the way things are created and ordained by God and as responses to God’s word and its expectation that we will, as image-bearers, image God’s love for the world in our caring for each other and the rest of creation.

This means, in more general terms, that understanding of both science and ethics is required for a proper understanding of living rightly in the world (praxis). Three things, then, need to be tied together: science, ethics, and praxis. These three need to be ligated to form a science-ethics-praxis triad, with each corner accompanied by a corresponding question, illustrated as follows:



Science, ethics, and praxis are tied together in this diagram by three ligaments. When any ligament is broken or torn, one or all corners are freed or distanced from the constraints and contributions of the others. Such brokenness may produce a science unconstrained by ethics that, for example, may degrade human relationships with the rest of creation. It may produce an ethics that is uninformed about the material world that, for example, might advocate removing dead wood from a forest, thereby denying the truth that death and decay of trees is necessary for forest soil-building. It may produce a praxis cut free from science and ethics that may, for example, allow residential and commercial developments on barrier islands, river floodplains, geological fault lines, or soil types defined by soil science as “liquid when wet.” All three—science, ethics, and praxis—need to be connected. Where the ligaments have been broken they need to be religated. Religation of science, ethics, and praxis, in this view, is necessary for right living on earth, and it would seem that a principal responsibility of religion and religious people is to keep these three bound together into a wholesome and fulfilling relationship.

Religating of science, ethics, and praxis has been a particularly compelling task for evangelical Christianity and is vital to the effectiveness of evangelical environmentalism. This religation—restoring and strengthening the connections among science, ethics, and praxis in caring for creation—is the principal reason for the emergence of an academic evangelical environmentalism.

### **PRE-1980 ROOTS OF ACADEMIC EVANGELICAL ENVIRONMENTALISM**

In 1967 medieval historian Lynn White Jr. wrote what has become the most frequently reprinted article in the journal *Science*: “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis.” In it he laid the blame for the environmental crisis largely on the Judeo-Christian religion, with this centered primarily on the dominion passage of Genesis 1:28, where he interpreted the word *dominion* as

meaning “domination.” White’s claim, and his failure to put this passage into its broader biblical stewardship context, generated an immediate and dramatic response, including articles and papers by evangelicals who advanced the biblical concept of stewardship as a better interpretation of this and other related biblical passages. Among these was evangelical Francis Schaeffer and his book *Pollution and the Death of Man*.<sup>10</sup> Its publication in 1970 coincided with the national environmental movement that swept across America, much of which stemmed from the response of the American public and the Congress to Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring*, published in 1962.<sup>11</sup>

Along with Schaeffer, evangelicals joined the environmental movement in America that created widespread environmental awareness and extensive national legislative work that in the 1970s produced the Clean Air Act, the Water Quality Improvement Act, the Water Pollution and Control Act Amendments, the Resource Recovery Act, the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, the Toxic Substances Control Act, the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the Federal Environmental Pesticide Control Act, the Endangered Species Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, and the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act. Early among these was the National Environmental Policy Act, signed into law on 1 January 1970, the same year that saw the first Earth Day. Its stated purposes were “to declare a national policy which will encourage productive and enjoyable harmony between man and his environment; to promote efforts which will prevent or eliminate damage to the environment and biosphere and stimulate the health and welfare of man; to enrich the understanding of the ecological systems and natural resources important to the Nation; and to establish a Council on Environmental Quality.” Evangelicals joined in, and the evangelical magazine *Christianity Today* published a stream of editorials and articles on the Christian role in caring for the environment.

As the decade progressed, American culture turned to other issues, and so did the evangelicals. Larsen writes, “Like the rest of the country, evangelicals were swept up into the outpouring of environmental concern that attended Earth Day 1970, though they often professed to be more concerned about ‘moral pollution’ and tended to proffer uniquely evangelical solutions, chiefly conversion. . . . Moreover, conservative evangelicals tended to disregard environmental threats either out of a preoccupation with the Second Coming or a belief that these threats were exaggerated.”<sup>12</sup>

## **DEVELOPMENT AND EMERGENCE OF ACADEMIC EVANGELICAL ENVIRONMENTALISM**

The year 1980 marked a number of events that make it a milestone for academic evangelical environmentalism. Principal among these was the publication of a multiauthored book, *Earthkeeping*, as a product of a full year of interdisciplinary study by a team of evangelical scholars.<sup>13</sup> The authors of *Earthkeeping* had been brought together in 1977 as the first group of fellows of the newly created Calvin Center for Christian Scholarship to work in a full year of discussion and study on the topic “Christian Stewardship and Natural Resources.” The center was established by Calvin College “to promote rigorous, creative, and articulately Christian scholarship which is addressed to the solution of important theoretical and practical issues” and that would be “focussed on areas of life and thought in which it is reasonable to expect that a distinctively Christian position can be worked out.”<sup>14</sup> The Calvin Center governing board selected the topic as one that would meet the objectives of the new center. This work, published in *Earthkeeping* and its revised edition of 1991, put into place much of the academic groundwork for evangelical environmentalism.

A second event extended the participants in the academy of scholars that grew out of the Calvin Center group, this being the first Au Sable Forum held in 1980. Three members of the Calvin Center fellows were joined by twenty-three other scholars, among them Wesley Granberg-Michaelson (who would organize the Au Sable Forum that produced *Tending the Garden* in 1989) and Orin Gelderloos (who would become chair of the Au Sable board of trustees). This

forum began what would become a long series of academic meetings, the Au Sable Fora, most of which produced books that contributed to the development of a creation-care theology. In the conclusion of the book produced from the first forum, Gelderloos wrote prophetically, “The growth of membership in the conservative churches and associated religious colleges may be a beginning which will lead to a significant influence of these institutions on environmental and societal affairs if the revival does not become a narcissistic movement.”

A third event established the program of environmental stewardship by the newly established Au Sable Institute, whose participating colleges grew in number to eighteen from 1980 to 1985 and in successive five-year milestones to twenty-seven, thirty-eight, forty-five, and sixty participating colleges in 2005, each college with a scientist member of their faculty as an official representative. These scientists then met annually for professional development in environmental stewardship and to guide and direct the institute’s academic program. During the same period, from 1980 to 2005, the institute faculty and fellows grew from twelve to seventy professors, sixty-eight of whom are scientists and two are ethicists, and thirty-five of which teach at the institute in any given year. Accompanying this growth, many of these scientists, joined by students returning to their colleges from Au Sable, formed environmental-studies programs at their home campuses, all with significant creation-care content.

In 2005 the academic evangelical environmentalism that had been growing steadily from its beginnings in 1980 formally organized into the Academy of Evangelical Scientists and Ethicists, made up of scientists and ethicists who have earned the highest degrees in their fields.<sup>15</sup> A statement that these academics hold in common is the following:

Together we believe we have the privilege and responsibility to care for God’s Creation, and to do so recognize in our academic work and our lives that we are following Jesus Christ by whom all things were created, and held together, and are reconciled to God in full accord with Colossians 1:15–20. Moreover, believing on Jesus and recognizing his love and work as a servant, we seek also to be servants of him, the triune God, and God’s whole Creation.

Our service in the academy, as evangelicals, ethicists, and responsible stewards includes a faith commitment to protect and care for the totality of God’s Creation. There is a richness, depth, and beauty in Creation that goes well beyond any of our abilities to express. There also is a richness, depth, and beauty in Christ’s work—from the foundations of Creation—also inexpressible. Yet it is from that richness that we have come to be God’s stewards with love, devotion, and dedication.

This richness in Creation and in Christ’s redeeming work is something to which we as evangelical scientists and ethicists can speak and about which we can teach and provide serving leadership. Beyond our ability to convey this richness, we also believe we must exercise that ability to the glory of God.<sup>6</sup>

## **DEVELOPMENT AND EMERGENCE OF THE EVANGELICAL ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK**

The IEEN had its origin in an International Consultation held on 26–31 August 1992 and cosponsored by Au Sable Institute as one of the Au Sable Fora. The World Evangelical Fellowship’s Unit on Ethics and Society had formed a Committee on Evangelical Christianity and the Environment that, in partnership with Au Sable, invited sixty people from eight countries and five continents to meet on the topic “Evangelicals and the Environment.”<sup>16</sup> This proved to be a seminal forum, with thirteen contributions coming from it that were published in the *Evangelical Review of Theology* in 1993<sup>17</sup> and with its decision to create the IEEN to “disseminate information” and “share insights and experiences among the worldwide evangelical family in the care for the creation.” The EEN is a fellowship of believers who . . .<sup>7</sup>

- Declare the lordship of Christ over all creation. He is the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created. All things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together (Col. 1:15b, 16a, c, 17). These believers . . .
- Deepen their walk with the Lord and the life of their churches through joy-filled worship, Bible study on the topics of creation's care, and prayer that God's will "be done on earth as it is in heaven" (Matt. 6:10).
- Show the compassion of Christ for people who suffer from creation's destruction (Prov. 14:31).
- Demolish strongholds of sin that tarnish the glory and integrity of God's good creation (2 Cor. 10:4–5).
- Build our Lord's kingdom by active service to restore and renew the works of his hands (Matt. 6:33; Eph. 2:10).
- Share the gospel with those who do not know that Jesus Christ is the ultimate hope for creation groaning under our sin and the only hope for our own souls (Rom. 8:19–21; Col. 1:20, 27).

The IEEN, formed well before the launch of the U.S. activity, led to formation of the EEN in America. It also resulted in the U.K. EEN and the *Creation Care* newsletter,<sup>18</sup> that later became the title of the EEN periodical published in the United States. In preparing the way, the World Evangelical Fellowship in its formation of the IEEN, concluded in its summarizing report that the Christian community "must dare to proclaim the full truth about the environmental crisis in the face of powerful persons, pressures and institutions which profit from concealing the truth."<sup>8</sup>

It also declared that "such recognition of hard truths is a first step toward the freedom for which creation waits." Of particular significance to the formation of both the IEEN and EEN was the World Evangelical Fellowship's conclusion that "Christians need to form and join environmental organizations that apply explicitly Christian principles to environmental problems."<sup>9</sup>

With its strong perspective on global environmental justice, the 1992 World Evangelical Fellowship/Au Sable Forum concluded that "the Christian community must be willing to identify and condemn social and institutionalized evil, especially when it becomes embedded in systems. It should propose solutions which both seek to reform and (if necessary) replace creation-harming institutions and practices."<sup>10</sup>

Addressing the appearance and programs of churches, the forum also concluded that "churches should seek to develop as creation-awareness centers in order to exemplify principles of stewardship for their members and communities, and to express both delight in and care for creation in their worship and celebration." And, "they should particularly aim to produce curricula and programs which encourage knowledge and care of creation." "In particular, Christian colleges and seminaries should provide teaching in this area. The church's goal should be the growth of earthkeepers, both in the habits of everyday life, and in the provision of leadership for the care of creation."<sup>11</sup>

The derivative EEN held its first meeting at Au Sable in the summer of 1993, soon after the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit. Subsequent to the Au Sable meeting, Loren Wilkinson prepared a draft entitled *Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation* that became basis for a daylong meeting of several American evangelical leaders, among them leading evangelical scholar Kenneth Kantzer and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship president Steve Hayner, that produced the final document.<sup>19</sup> The resulting declaration was published the following year in *Christianity Today*, a statement signed by hundreds of evangelical leaders as well as a statement that became the common confession of the many partners that make up the EEN (see list of EEN participants below).

The EEN works from the *Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation* to define and summarize the evangelical framework out of which creation care emanates and also demonstrates the depth and passion of the evangelical environmentalism that is emerging in America. “Because we await the time when even the groaning creation will be restored to wholeness, we commit ourselves to work vigorously to protect and heal that creation for the honor and glory of the Creator,” the declaration states with confident religious conviction.<sup>12</sup>

Being extremely careful to avoid pantheism or idolization of creation—both of which evangelicals see as highly problematic—they exercise “creation care” under God, who both transcends and is immanent in creation: “Our creating God is prior to and other than creation, yet intimately involved with it, upholding each thing in its freedom, and all things in relationships of intricate complexity. God is transcendent, while lovingly sustaining each creature; and immanent, while wholly other than creation and not to be confused with it.” They also boldly confess that degradation of creation by human society and their pursuit of gain is sinful: “The earthly result of human sin has been a perverted stewardship, a patchwork of garden and wasteland in which the waste is increasing.” They extend their concern for the creation to the poor and downgraded people of the earth, whom they see as fully part of God’s creation. Justice to creation and to people is intertwined, and “one consequence of our misuse of the earth is an unjust denial of God’s created bounty to other human beings, both now and in the future.”<sup>13</sup>

What is the purpose of the EEN? It is “God’s purpose,” and “God’s purpose in Christ is to heal and bring to wholeness not only persons but the entire created order.” Citing the great Christ hymn of Colossians (Col. 1:15–20), “for God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross,” those affirming the declaration follow their namesake in reconciliation and restoration of creation, including its poor and downtrodden.

A highly important development from the declaration was the work of R. J. “Sam” Berry of the University College–London to develop a commentary on the declaration by scientists, ethicists, and theologians from the United Kingdom and ~~from~~ elsewhere around the world. His book *The Care of Creation* puts the declaration to the test of highly competent scholars of great substance. Among the many affirmations of the declaration was that of prominent German theologian Jürgen Moltmann: “The *Declaration* gives a fresh perspective on the ecological problems of the modern world, by presenting them through the experience of the healing God. In Christ Jesus we experience not only the forgiveness of our sins but also the healing of our wounds. It is only logical to ‘extend Christ’s healing to the suffering creation.’” Moltmann added that we must “overcome the hedonism of the consumer society, lest we become blind and numb and careless.” In his affirmation of the declaration he observed that it “rightly calls for a rebirth of our relationship to God, to each other and to the community of all God’s creatures.”<sup>20</sup>

For evangelical environmental missions entrepreneur Peter Harris, the declaration compelled him to face “an uncomfortable paradox.” His conclusion is that he is “more and more convinced that the urgent task of changing the way we live as evangelical Christians has to begin with believing differently, and not simply obeying new rules. It is not that we need to adopt an updated legalistic code for the contemporary Christian life: thou shalt recycle thy toothpaste tube, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour’s bicycle, and thou shalt make sure everyone else notices that thy yoghurt is organic.” Harris writes that he is “puzzled over the causes for current (not historic, incidentally) evangelical indifference to creation as we have encountered it with A Rocha [his organization],” and he concludes that “it has become uncomfortably clear that its roots lie in biblical unbelief. It is not that evangelicals shrink from paying a price in lost comfort for a change of lifestyle. There are many wonderful examples of how the Christian church worldwide lives very sacrificially in the face of human need, and in many places it is a compelling stimulus for social change and redemption.” Instead, Harris finds that “the problem is that we do not extend

that commitment and concern to the wider creation, nor are we persuaded that God cares about it.”<sup>21</sup>

Affirming the declaration, Harris concludes that it gives us “a foundation for a better biblical understanding, and a guide to more biblical living.” It challenges “the careless or wilful adoption of human-centered thinking into the heart of the church” as the source of “Christian indifference to creation.” He adds that “in its extreme manifestation, salvation becomes a kind of fashion accessory in the main project of our individual self-fulfillment: Gucci for the body, the media for the mind, and Jesus for the soul. Grateful for the crumbs falling from the postmodern table, the church has been tempted to settle happily into the role of provider of ‘spiritual’ need. In denial of the force of the biblical argument, ‘spiritual’ becomes equated with ‘nonmaterial.’” Observing that “the foundational biblical affirmation about God is that he is the Creator, not only of the human race, but of all life and everything there is,” Harris finds that “this places us in a completely different relational context; no longer are we the starting point of our existence, but we are the creation of God, together with not only everyone else on the planet, but all of the universe.”<sup>22</sup> Berry, the editor of this important commentary on the *Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation*, concludes with two final points: “As Christians we can and should make common cause with others in the care of creation, not least because the Genesis commands to have dominion and to tend the garden were given to all human beings at our birth as men and women in God’s image.” Responding to critics who say that “stewardship is an unhelpful concept,” he notes that “stewarding is only part of our role; our God-given purpose is worship of the Creator in the company of all created beings (not merely as human beings sometimes meeting in church). God’s covenant is with us as creatures in his image; and not only that, but also ‘with every living creature’ (Gen. 9:10). We share our stewardship with our fellow human beings (whether or not they acknowledge the Creator); we add to their work a recognition and acknowledgment that our work is part of our commitment and worship of the one who made us in his own image, who is Creator of all, and who has reconciled ‘all things’ to himself through Christ’s death on the cross (Col. 1:20).”<sup>23</sup>

“This places the *Declaration* as indisputably ‘evangelical,’” writes Berry, “because it proclaims truly ‘good news.’ This is backed by John Stott’s definition of ‘evangelical’ as incorporating ‘the revealing initiative of God the Father, the redeeming work of God the Son, and the transforming ministry of God the Holy Spirit.’” “The secular world sees little more than decay when it views creation; Christians see the same failures, but for them there is also the confident hope that ‘the universe itself is to be freed from the shackles of mortality . . . to enter upon the glorious liberty of the children of God’ (Rom. 8:21 REB). Our part is to accept and rejoice in God’s work, and to be light for all the world as obedient stewards.”<sup>24</sup><sup>15</sup>

Highly respected evangelical theologian John Stott in his foreword to this commentary on the declaration affirms this by observing that “We human beings find our humanness not only in relation to the Earth . . . but in relation to God, whom we are to worship; not only to the creation, but especially in relation to the Creator... Only then, whatever we do, in word or deed, shall we be able to do it to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).”<sup>25</sup>

<b>EEN Partner Organizations</b>	
<b>Focus of Organizations</b>	<b>Organizations</b>
creation care and evangelical action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evangelicals for Social Action</li> <li>• Restoring Eden</li> <li>• Target Earth</li> </ul>
evangelical relief, health, and environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Association of Evangelical Relief and Development Organizations</li> <li>• Christian Reformed World Relief Committee</li> <li>• Floresta</li> <li>• Habitat for Humanity International</li> <li>• MAP International</li> <li>• Marah International</li> <li>• World Relief</li> <li>• World Vision</li> </ul>
denominational agencies and churches Bible and missions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baptist General Convention of Texas</li> <li>• Los Angeles Metropolitan Churches</li> <li>• International Bible Society</li> <li>• InterVarsity Christian Fellowship</li> <li>• Mission Society for United Methodists</li> </ul>
youth camps and youth missions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission Training International</li> <li>• Christian Camping International</li> <li>• Youth with a Mission</li> </ul>
science and higher education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• American Scientific Affiliation</li> <li>• Au Sable Institute of Environmental Studies</li> <li>• Council for Christian Colleges and Universities</li> <li>• Zhaniser Institute</li> </ul>

### **THE SCIENTIST AND THE SHEPHERD**

We began by asking, Why is evangelical environmentalism emerging in our day? We have seen the answer unfolding during the course of this chapter, and now we can firm it up. Evangelical environmentalism is elicited from the growing realization that human beings, including evangelicals, are coming to be numbered among those who, corporately and individually, have become destroyers of creation.

Earth is crying out—divested by us of its divine wonder. As the shepherd and scientist point to a larger economy whose workings run the whole world and all the life of the biosphere, we know it is an economy under assault. Its fabric of interrelated species is being torn, most of its fisheries have collapsed, microbialization of the oceans is rampant. Moreover, the great stores of carbon and heavy metals that the peatlands and coal swamps sequestered ages ago as troubling excesses from an earlier atmosphere are being opened. They are being forcibly removed from the great stores beneath earth’s surface and compelled by us to fuel the fires of progress and release that troubling excess of carbon and heavy metals back into the skies. Most regretfully not only have people reconceived creation as resources, but these are people all of whom are made in the image of God—image-bearers given the gift and capacity to image God’s love for the world. Human image-bearers—increasingly also reconceived as resources—are transformed by a lesser economy into consumers of the earth and its greater economy.

But there is the shepherd—announced in the book of God’s word—who is beckoning the sheep who have gone astray. As the shepherd seeks to lead, the scientist helps read the letters, helps the

image-bearers once again to behold and wonder, helping us to ponder the works of God, to understand the degradation and destruction, to understand creation care. And a few come forth, out of the great pool of human resources once again to sing the forgotten hymn, “Beautiful Savior, King of Creation.”

In concert with religious people around the globe, evangelicals are at the verge of refreshing their awe and wonder for creation, refusing to be consumers of the world, seeking first the kingdom of God, and committing themselves to imaging God’s love for creation. It is out of passion for the creator and the passion of the shepherd that evangelical environmentalism is emerging in our day.

As I write this dark autumn evening on the great marsh, its blazing color diminished by the softer light of the moon, a buck snorts angrily as he bolts from our glacial drumlin into the marsh; an owl hoots high in the oak, even as the giant puffballs in the yard glow an eerie white. The day has died in the west; the marsh has become a frightening mire. The *Messiah* is now playing, “Surely, surely he has borne our griefs. . . . *Surely* he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.” Is all well with the world? We all wait for the morning, expecting the sun to rise again.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The term *evangelical environmentalism* was coined by David K. Larsen in “God’s Gardeners: American Protestant Evangelicals Confront Environmentalism, 1967–2000” (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2001). It is not a term I really welcome, largely because evangelicalism works to see the creation whole; there is no “us” versus the environment. Rather, human beings are part and parcel of the creation even as they are made in the image of God, and the creative system is not separable into us and everything else.

<sup>2</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (2nd ed.; Overtures to Biblical Theology; Fortress, Minneapolis, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> These phrases are from the popular carol “Joy to the World” or “Joy to the Earth,” whose words were penned by Isaac Watts in 1719.

<sup>5</sup> An example of this joining to work toward creation’s integrity is the Noah Alliance ([www.noahalliance.org](http://www.noahalliance.org)), a cooperative venture formed by the Academy of Evangelical Scientists and Ethicists and scientists and rabbis from the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) to prevent weakening of the U.S. Endangered Species Act.

<sup>6</sup> See R. J. Berry, ed., *The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 2000), for a copy of the “Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation.” This entire book is devoted to an evangelical analysis of the declaration.

<sup>7</sup> Belgic Confession, art. II, from the *Psalter Hymnal* (Grand Rapids: CRC, 1988), 818.

<sup>8</sup> It is because of this development of wisdom that comes from a coherent reading within and across both of the two books, that my book subtitled “A Biblical Response to Environmental Issues” is

entitled *Earth-Wise* (Grand Rapids: CRC, 1994). This book was written for church discussion groups and may be consulted for a summary of creation care that is developed from both biblical and scientific understanding.

<sup>9</sup> This is Booth's restatement of Ernest Hocking: "If, to agree on a name we were to characterize the deepest impulse in us as a 'will to live,' religion also could be called a will to live, but with an accent on solicitude—an ambition to do one's living well. Or, more adequately, *religion is a passion for righteousness, and for the spread of righteousness, conceived as a cosmic demand.*" See W. C. Booth, "Systematic Wonder: The Rhetoric of Secular Religions," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53 (1984): 677–702. I am indebted to Peter Bakken for bringing Booth's work to my attention.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Schaeffer and U. Middelman, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1970).

<sup>11</sup> Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962).

<sup>12</sup> Larsen, "God's Gardeners," xi.

<sup>13</sup> Peter A. DeVos, C. B. DeWitt, Vernon Ehlers, Eugene Dykema, Dirk Perenboom, Aileen VanBeilen, and Loren Wilkinson, *Earthkeeping: Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, xii.

<sup>15</sup> The Merriam-Webster definitions of an academy include "a society of learned persons organized to advance art, science, or literature" and "a body of established opinion widely accepted as authoritative in a particular field." From 1980 to 2005, then, the academy had become the Academy.

<sup>16</sup> Chris Sugden, "Guest Editorial: Evangelicals and the Environment in Process," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 17.2 (1993): 119–21.

<sup>17</sup> J. Mark Thomas, ed., "Evangelicals and the Environment: Theological Foundations for Christian Environmental Stewardship," special issue of *Evangelical Review of Theology* 17.2 (1993): 241–86.

<sup>18</sup> In the first issue of the *Creation Care* newsletter, its publisher and writer, Bob Carling, wrote that this newsletter "aims to act as a communication vehicle for all who are concerned with environmental issues and wish to see a specifically Christian viewpoint developed. It is primarily for those involved in environmental concerns at a professional level and seeks to work with rather than duplicate the efforts of other more grassroots environmental organizations. Written from a biblical perspective, it includes news and views, summaries of reports in the media, occasional papers on specific issues (e.g., transcripts of key speeches by leading Christian environmentalists), notices of forthcoming meetings, reports of meetings, selected book reviews and some full-length articles on environmental issues."

<sup>19</sup> Loren Wilkinson, "The Making of the Declaration," in *The Care of Creation* (ed. R. J. Berry; Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 50–59.

<sup>20</sup> Peter Harris, "A New Look at Old Passages," in *The Care of Creation* (ed. R. J. Berry; Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 2000).

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> R. J. Berry, "Conclusions," in *The Care of Creation* (ed. R. J. Berry; Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 182.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 183.

<sup>25</sup> John Stott, "Foreword," in *The Care of Creation* (ed. R. J. Berry; Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 9.