

United Nations Environmental Program
Archive of E-Articles
2004

August 9, 2004

Posted on Mon, Aug. 09, 2004

“Face The Heat: No More Excuses”

By FLAVIA COLGAN

WHAT WOULD Jesus drive? That's the question posed by the Evangelical Environmental Network to get Americans to think in moral and ethical terms about their use of energy and its contribution to global warming.

Whether it's George W. Bush invoking the name of Jesus at campaign rallies, TV talking heads theorizing about who's responsible for Abu Ghraib, or appraisals of the motives behind the Enron scandal, we are constantly bombarded with questions about our nation's morals and ethics. And yet, in response to the Evangelical Environmental Network's question, a good number of Americans insisted that Jesus probably would have ushered his Apostles around in an SUV.

It's not that Americans don't understand what Jesus taught. It's not that we don't know how to examine things in a moral and ethical light. It's a lack of understanding about the implications of global warming that keeps us from considering the ethics of our national policy on the issue.

Frankly, it's not surprising that people don't see global warming as a problem - let alone a moral one - when our own government refuses to acknowledge the severity of the situation.

Since the late '80s, the United States has consistently used two excuses for its unwillingness to commit to international efforts to get the emission of greenhouse gases under control. First, scientific uncertainty about exactly how and when global warming will affect the global environment is touted by right-wing ideologues across the board. Second, they cite the negative impact on the economy of any international agreement by which the United States would take responsibility for its share of the problem - roughly a third of the carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere by human activity.

Another American excuse has been the idea that the Kyoto Protocol doesn't cover some developing countries, as if Trinidad and Tobago bear the same responsibility for the potential problems that our 50 states do.

Well, gee, if the government says there's scientific bickering, and it's not worth the money to fix, it probably isn't all that much of a problem, is it? Why take it seriously? But what if you knew that almost all scientists agree that there already are changes in the world's climate, that some of it is close to irreversible, and that the rest of the world can't act until we do? That might change things. It might make morality more important than money.

And therein lies, not the problem, but the solution, for a change. Americans have always shown the capacity to see important issues in their ethical context, even from the very beginning. Slavery was an issue in the Revolutionary War, long before the Civil War tore us apart. It took time for our government to catch up with the moral judgment of the people, but it eventually happened.

But how long will it take for us to see global warming in the same way? To realize that our foot-dragging on international treaties and our failure to take a leading role worldwide will have a real effect on hundreds of thousands of the world's most vulnerable citizens?

The World Health Organization estimates that 160,000 people die every year from side-effects of global warming ranging from malaria to malnutrition. And what's worse, scientists say those numbers could almost double by 2020, children and the elderly being most at risk.

Do we really need scientific precision about the numbers to convince ourselves we to act? Surely even a tenth, or a hundredth of this number is unacceptable to America's traditional moral sensibilities.

It's time for us to follow the lead of a few- in the churches, in the scientific community, in the environmental movement - and begin to look at global warming in the ethical terms the problem brings into play. Global warming knows no boundaries or frontiers. Borders will not protect anyone from pollution, heatwaves, weather patterns, flooding or disease. It's time for us as a nation to look the science behind global warming squarely in the face, and stop making excuses to cooperate with the international community.

American business feels threatened, because there will undoubtedly be a cost for containing global warming. But the cost of doing nothing now, and paying later, will be far greater, to all of us.

Flavia Colgan is an MSNBC commentator.

“Protecting environment a spiritual pursuit; Many Oregonians see a strong link between environmentalism and religion”

BETH CASPER
Statesman Journal

When Eric Canon saw the bumper sticker "What would Jesus drive?" he knew the answer was not a sport utility vehicle. "The reason (Jesus) walked was that it gave him so much time to contemplate and reflect and pray," said Canon, a member of Forest Grove United Church of Christ. "It brought him into contact with other people. I like to hold that image -- he wouldn't have changed so much. But certainly he wouldn't be driving an SUV."

For more and more congregation leaders and members, the connection between worshipping God and protecting the environment is obvious. For these rabbis, bishops and pastors, the pulpit

is the place to preach a pro-environment gospel. "In Genesis, there is a phrase 'have dominion over the Earth,'" said Rev. Kent Harrop, pastor of First Baptist Church in McMinnville. "Some people have historically seen that as permission to take and take. I would say that is a poor interpretation. We are to be stewards of the environment--protect it, value it so we can pass along this God-given gift to the next generation."

People with such beliefs are taking actions beyond volunteering at food banks or raising money for the homeless. Their actions are more political than individual congregation members setting up recycling bins, calling on other members to write letters to legislators and offering options for saving energy.

In the past four months:

A faith leader has been asked to join Gov. Ted Kulongoski's global-warming committee. Religious groups have pushed for a debate about the Climate Change Act in the U.S. Senate. Churchgoers are collecting signatures opposing the Bush administration's new roadless-area policy for forests.

Faith leaders have organized a forum about water issues in the Klamath Basin in August.

"I think we bring an important moral and ethical voice to the conversation; a lot of times we get caught up in policies and sciences, and we really need to know why we are getting involved in the environment," said Jenny Holmes, program director for the Interfaith Network for Earth Concerns, a program of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. "The religious community can help bring that sense of sacred creation we have responsibility for."

Holmes helped to organize the upcoming forum about Klamath Basin water rights as a way to air widespread concerns. Water in this area is precious and farmers, environmentalists and industry have fought about it in the past. The faith community provides a good way to problem solve in a supportive arena, Holmes said. "We need to be involved because these are practical issues that impact our day-to-day quality of life," said David Leslie, executive director of Ecumenical Ministries of Oregon. "We also know that environmental issues produce great levels of controversy and conflict --They line up people on each side. The religious community has a unique role. In many congregations, you will find all the stakeholders in those pews."

Leslie was asked in April to serve on the governor's global-warming committee, which is developing a strategy to reduce Oregon's greenhouse gas emissions. Leslie said that his appointment to the committee is partly a recognition that the religious communities of Oregon can make substantive contributions, even though the numbers of people in the state affiliated with a religious organization is low compared with other states.

In a survey released in 2000, Oregonians had the lowest church affiliation--with 31 percent of the state's population reported belonging to a congregation. Overall at that time, 50.2 percent of the nation's population declared membership in a local religious organization.

Still, even with a smaller percentage of people of faith, religious leaders know they can make changes.

"In a state that has tens of thousands of congregations, what if everyone used more energy-efficient light bulbs or hybrid electric vehicles?" Leslie asked. He also noted that Oregonians are deeply spiritual, even though they might not attend religious institutions as much as people in other states.

Harrop, who organized a kayak trip last week for congregation members to learn about environmental protection of the lower Columbia River, said that Oregonians' faith is reflected in the environment.

"It is very much consistent for the Pacific Northwest, with the beauty of nature and just this incredible place we call home, to have a theology that reflects that," Harrop said. "I think our theology mirrors the beauty of this area."

That might be why faith leaders have come together to prevent more roads being built in areas without them now. In a letter to members of Congress last month, rabbis, pastors and other faith leaders said, "(T)he religious community has supported a strong Roadless Rule for a long time ? We believe we are called by God to care for creation and feel that protecting some of the few remaining wild areas is part of this calling."

Input from religious leaders on such major issues is drawing nothing but praise from environmentalists.

"I definitely think religious organizations and the faith community has a big role to play in advocating for environmental protection," said Ivan Maluski, grassroots coordinator for the Oregon chapter of the Sierra Club. "Whenever you get nontraditional voices speaking for the environment, it shows that the issue is bigger than this or that environmental group taking on an environmental issue."

bcasper@StatesmanJournal.com or (503) 589-6994

August 26, 2004

“Our ecological contempt is a spiritual problem”

The Star
Peter Mikelic
Opinion

"Multiply the individual choices that affect our environment (six) billion times and we contribute to the stress of the planet in ways that are cumulatively dangerous." wrote retired Canadian ambassador James George in his 1995 book Asking For The Earth: Waking Up To The Spiritual/Ecological Crisis.

Consider the global pollution responsible for 3 million deaths from respiratory disease annually.

That same pollution decreases the fragile ozone layer, prevents sunlight from re-entering space, traps atmospheric carbon dioxide raising Earth's temperature, melts glaciers and reduces vital rainfall.

In fact, global warming is not only cited as the cause for the recent drought in Sudan and flooding in Canada, but is the reason for the substantial disruption of entire climate systems which, left unchecked, will trigger a worldwide cataclysm.

Then factor in the human element: Of the world's 6 billion people, at least 1.1 billion have no sources of clean drinking water, a number the United Nations says will mushroom to 5 billion within two decades. As well, 2.2 million people in developing countries, most of them children, die every year from diseases associated with lack of access to safe drinking water, inadequate sanitation and poor hygiene.

The plight is particularly grim in Africa, which has the world's highest rate of deforestation, as poor people clear trees for firewood and farmland.

With millions of Africans fleeing civil war and abandoning rural villages for urban shantytowns, pollution and poverty have accelerated, while foreign aid has declined. Many earn less than a dollar a day and 12.8 million are on the precipice of famine.

A 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, addressed the protection of the environment without expense to the world's poor.

Only a few major targets and timetables were reached in the summit's 70-page implementation report: reduce by half the number of people living in poverty and without adequate of sanitation, and restore depleted fish stocks — all by 2015.

Unfortunately, the major summit challenges to the wealthy nations of the world went largely unheeded: Compel their governments to act upon their environmental pledges, in particular the 1997 Kyoto Accord; triple the amount of foreign aid; and reduce rich internal agricultural subsidies, so African farmers can compete on world markets.

Happily, the Kyoto Accord was ratified by the former Chrétien government on Dec. 16, 2002. (Kyoto requires Canada to reduce its green-house gas emissions 6 per cent from 1990 levels no later than 2012.)

In fact, a Canadian coalition of 50 health associations and 2,000 doctors insist that the Kyoto agreement can save some 16,000 lives annually, including 1,700 Torontonians, from smog-related deaths.

"These premature deaths are preventable," said Barbara Yaffe, Toronto's acting medical officer of health, when she released the city's report on air pollution last month.

Compared with 27 other global cities, Toronto ranks around the middle of the list for most pollutants. But when it comes to nitrogen dioxide, which increases with vehicular use, Toronto ranks fourth highest, just behind Los Angeles, Hong Kong and New York.

What's desperately needed, Yaffe said, is more funding for public transit expansion; increased public awareness that the long-term costs of health far outweigh the price of reducing pollution; promote energy conservation and renewable sources; implement current land use planning and transportation throughout the GTA to reduce urban sprawl.

In a fictional speech delivered by Chief Seattle in a 1972 ecology film, the 18th century Squamish leader says: "The Earth is precious to God and to harm it is to heap contempt on its Creator. ... Continue to defile (Earth) and you will suffocate in your own waste."

When we ruthlessly interrupt the spiritual integrity and balance of the ecological system and eliminate species at ten thousand times the normal rate, we create an ever-widening abyss into which the entitled choices of surplus for the few tumble into a nightmare of no choices and scarcity for all.

Peter Mikelic is a Lutheran clergyman and a writer specializing in religion.

September 13, 2004

The New York Times

September 13, 2004 Monday

Late Edition - Final

SECTION: Section A; Column 3; Foreign Desk; Pg. 9

HEADLINE: U.N. Envoy Seeks to Enlist The Clergy to Ease Conflicts

BYLINE: By WARREN HOGE

John C. Danforth, the American ambassador to the United Nations, says he is actively trying to create a new forum for leaders of the world's faiths to involve themselves in resolving the conflicts in a world of terror.

"The focus of the U.N. has been to discuss issues between nations, whereas a lot of the conflict in the world today is not between nations but between nations and people who feel they are commanded by God to shoot children and blow up buses," Mr. Danforth, 68, an Episcopal minister and a former United States senator who took up his present post on July 1, said in an interview on Friday.

In the interview, Mr. Danforth said he was deeply troubled by the silence from religious leaders in the face of acts like the school siege in Russia last week in which hostage takers attacked students trying to flee.

"If there are people who believe that God commands them to shoot children in the back and if we start with that kind of belief, is there any voice against it and if so, where is that voice?" Mr. Danforth said. "Is there any place in the world to deal with this point of view? I don't see it."

He said there was nowhere to bring forward religious grievances and have them publicly discussed and, possibly, reconciled. "What is needed," he said, "is a much stronger voice from the faith community, some kind of place or forum for mediating religious conflict and involving the participation of people of faith."

Mr. Danforth, who has become known for blunt-spoken directness in a place where evasively stated disagreement is the norm, said the time had come for people of faith to move beyond writing letters to members of Congress and participating in conferences on tolerance -- which he described as "good-feeling gabfests about how nice we should be to each other."

As for his fellow members of the clergy, he said, "I am concerned that most of them are either finessing the issue or ignoring the issue, just getting people to come through their doors and passing the collection plate."

Mr. Danforth, an imposing 6-foot-3-inch presence with a sonorous baritone that millions of people came to know in June when he officiated at the Washington funeral for President Ronald Reagan, has been known to keep his political and ecclesiastical lives apart since receiving separate degrees from Yale's schools of divinity and law on the same day in 1963. In his 18 years in the Senate, he regularly preached at Tuesday morning services at St. Alban's parish church at the National Cathedral.

He said the actual form his proposal would take was still vague, but he envisaged a center for "a small but skilled group of people who are expert in various faiths and in conflict resolution."

While he acknowledged that his proposal would be a new activity for the United Nations, he thought the world organization was the best site for the effort, and said he was determined to pull it off. "This is absolutely at the forefront of what I think about every day, and it just happens now that I am in this job and have this place," he said.

Among the concerns he said a new forum should address were, "What is the relation between government and religion, to what extent is government an arm of religion and, in those countries where it is, to what extent do they provide for the rights of religious minorities?"

He said he thought the times called for a readjustment of religious commitment to solving world conflicts. "A lot of people think religion is the answer," he said. "But right now, religion is the problem."

September 15, 2004

Tierramerica

"Faith, Too, Affects the Environment"

By Francesca Colombo

Theologians and academics say the world's major religions have failed to provide leadership in defending nature.

MILAN - Religion can play a key role in sustainable development, either encouraging or thwarting it, said experts meeting last week in Italy, re-igniting the old debate on faith as an alienating or liberating force. It is clear that "religions did not do enough in the past, and that they failed to urge humankind to defend nature," Antje Heider-Rottwilm, a pastor with the German Evangelical Church (EKD), told Tierramérica.

"Religions and Cultures: The Courage of a New Humanism" was the theme of the meeting held Sep. 5-7 in the northern Italian city of Milan, which drew Heider-Rottwilm and other religious leaders and academics. Says Andrea Masullo, environment director of the Italian branch of the World Wildlife Fund, there is no doubt that "religions play a fundamental role in introducing ethical principles for lifestyles and the scientific and political decisions that can carry humanity towards sustainable development."

Community development depends on integrated action that not only takes into account access to basic services, but also the environment and ethics, commented Daniele Bassi, professor at the University of Milan and participant in the roundtable discussion, "Religion and social and environmental degradation".

Degradation is reached "when we lack educated people to conceive of reality as a relationship and not as an appropriation," he said. But that relationship with the environment can also become harmful when extreme conservationist positions are held, such as rejecting technology so as not to alter nature, agreed some of the panel participants.

Such positions emerge from a logic of the elite and in exclusive circles of the "neo-Malthusian" ideology, which denies disadvantaged peoples access to well being, said Bassi. Thomas Malthus (1766-1834) put forth the theory that the global population should not surpass a certain number, determined by the availability of the means for survival, such as natural resources. Bassi believes "it is better to return to the Judeo-Christian tradition of the prophesy of Abraham," who was promised to be "father of a multitude of peoples", with offspring as numerous as the stars. Jews and Christians see the environment as "a home for human beings," while some conservationists "reduce the question, treating it as if nature should defend itself from humans," he said. But Lynn White, a professor from the U.S. University of California, wrote in her book "The Historic Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" that the Western world, based on the Judeo-Christian culture, sees Earth as something created only for the benefit of humans, and thus separates us from nature.

In contrast, religions like Buddhism treat humans as part of nature, while still others believe that every tree or mountain has a spirit, and should therefore be respected.

According to Islam, which has an integral view of matter and spirit, preserving natural resources is "the duty of the community, on the national and global scale," but that is not enough, because above all "we must promote development and a better life for all," professor Nadia Mahmoud Mostafa, of the University of Cairo, told Tierramérica.

The Hindu religion says humans must not try to dominate nature or take advantage of it, but rather maintain themselves in unity with their surroundings. But it is difficult to achieve this in India because of the social and economic troubles, said Swami Amaranandaji, president of the Ramakrishna Vedane center for social and religious studies.

For hundreds of years, the colonial powers of the West "did not respect anything and tried to destroy our culture. Then, the question for us was survival. And since independence (1947) we have been trying to find our roots," said Amaranandaji.

One way to recuperate harmony with nature is the "feast of the forest," a religious ceremony that entails planting trees and flowers, he added. In the different religions, the final choice is "to change our lifestyles and be contented with what nature gives us, or to become even bigger consumers and destroy creation," said the German pastor Heider-Rottwilm.

Francesca Colombo is a Tierramérica contributor.

September 17, 2004

“The Ethics of Water. Our planet's next big moral question: who gets fresh water?”

By Michael Levitin

Reprinted with permission from the September 2004 issue of Science and Theology News

BARCELONA, Spain --Access to clean drinking water is a basic human right, declared scientists, diplomats and water-rights activists, at a conference entitled "Water for Life and Security," in Barcelona this summer. The conference resulted in a written set of principles for a Global Convention on the Right to Water, which will eventually go before the United Nations for approval.

Former Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev who headlined the event stated that "water is the number one problem in Africa and Asia," and called for a "global perestroika" to restructure the world's economies in a way that fulfills mankind's most basic needs.

More than 1.5 billion people lack access to drinking water and 2.5 billion live without sanitation. In addition, 5 million people--2 million of them children--die each year from water-related diseases, such as polio and diphtheria.

However, the issue is not about water scarcity but about governance, the experts said. It will take an additional \$30 billion to \$40 billion of yearly investment in water development--on top of the current \$80 billion--to achieve the Millennium Development Goals of 2000. These guidelines drawn up by the United Nations General Assembly aim to cut in half the number of people without access to drinking water by 2015, said Andras Szollosi-Nagy, UNESCO's deputy assistant director-general of natural sciences.

"It sounds big, but not when you think that it's only 2 percent of global annual military spending," Szollosi-Nagy said. "Then, it's peanuts."

Rich and poor countries have an equal stake in a world in which two-thirds of the population under 25 has no access to drinking water. In fact, the potential economic gains are great: for every dollar invested in water development, the return is estimated at between \$3 or \$4, or a total of \$84 billion per year, he added.

The "new water culture" movement has been growing since activists called for universal access to clean water in the Montreal Charter of 1990. Grassroots leaders attracted U.N. General Assembly support before launching the World Water Forum in Marrakech, Morocco, in 1997, when scientists, politicians, farmers, teachers and unions met for the first time to discuss the state of the world's water. The forum convened in The Hague in 2000 and again last year in Kyoto, where 25,000 participants and a quarter of a million visitors witnessed the release of a Declaration of Water Rights.

"Water is the crisis of the century, a war that must be waged in our towns and cities" where 900 million people, or 43 percent of the developing world, lives, Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, director of U.N. Habitat, said at the Barcelona gathering. Opening trade barriers and relieving poor countries of vast levels of foreign debt would be an appropriate place for Western countries to start, she said.

Drafted by the citizen groups International Secretariat for Water and the World Assembly of Water Wisdom, the Global Convention on the Right to Water seeks to define water security, safety, sovereignty, sustainability, financing and other issues related to the "fundamental right of access to water and sanitation" as a universal, inalienable right.

According to others at the conference, water is not only a basic human right but also a part of our cultural heritage. "You can't treat water as though it were gasoline or Coca-Cola," said Henri Smets of The Water Academy in France, an institute critical of the policies the developed world has forced developing countries to adopt, resulting in the privatization of water systems worldwide. "One has to give water to those who can't pay for it. It's proportional to population--it's not like meat, where the poorer you are, the less you eat."

In the words of the U.N. Environment Program's executive director, Klaus Toepfer, "sustainable development is nothing less than the peace policy for the future, and disarmament comes by bringing water to the people."

Michael Levitin is a freelance writer living in Barcelona, Spain

Reprinted with permission from the September 2004 issue of *Science and Theology News*.

September 24, 2004

UNEP NEWS RELEASE

With Splashes of Colour, Children Urged To Express Their Fears and Hopes for World's Cities

“International Children's Painting Competition on the Environment – 2004”

NAIROBI, 24 September 2004 - The majesty and misery of the world's cities will be at the heart of this year's International Children's Painting Competition on the Environment, sponsored by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the Japan-based Foundation for Global Peace and Environment (FGPE) and Bayer AG, a German-based chemical and health-care company. The painting competition, the 14th of its kind, has been held since 1990 and has received over 160,000 entries from children in more than 150 countries.

The 2004-2005 competition will focus on the theme "Green Cities". For the first time, the competition will begin in each region of the world with participants being asked to submit their entries to the nearest UNEP Regional Office - in Thailand, Switzerland, Mexico, the United States, Bahrain or Kenya. Paintings may be submitted as hard copies or through the internet at <http://www.unep.org/tunza>. The Painting Competition opens today, 24 September 2004. All paintings should be submitted to UNEP's Regional Offices before 31 January 2005.

Prize winners in each region will be announced on Earth Day, 22 April 2005 and the first-prizewinner, and their parent or guardian, will be funded to travel to San Francisco where the main international celebrations for World Environment Day will be held on 5 June 2005.

The winning paintings will be shown in exhibitions in a number of countries, including Japan, as well as being exhibited on the Internet. In addition, selected paintings will be used for posters, post cards, calendars, and publications. The regional and global winners will receive cash prizes of \$1,000 and 2,000 respectively, and 100 commended entries in each region will receive certificates, plaques and other special prizes such as drawing kits and environmental stationery.

After the competition, all paintings submitted to the global competition will be stored in the National Museum of Ethnology in Osaka, Japan.

This year's competition is supported by the National Museum of Ethnology (Japan), Japanese Ministries of the Environment, Foreign Affairs, Education, Forestry & Fisheries and the Japan-Arab Association.

In the past and on a continuing basis, UNEP has forged several partnerships and activities as part of its long-term strategy for engaging children and youth, called "Tunza".

From 26 to 29 July 2005, UNEP and the Aichi Prefectural Government of Japan will host the first Children's World Summit for the Environment in Toyohashi and Toyota cities, Japan. The Summit will bring together up to 1,000 children, aged 10 to 14 years, and adult chaperones to review the implications of environmental problems to their livelihood.

The Summit will endeavour to increase children's understanding of environmental issues through the sharing of experiences and opinions and will provide an opportunity for them to collectively voice their concerns for the environment. It will also inspire them to initiate and implement community environmental projects and to remove ethnic barriers while creating new relationships that will last well beyond the Summit.

For more information on the Summit, please visit the website www.children-summit.jp

UNEP and Volvo have launched the 3rd "Volvo-UNEP Adventure for Young People". Young people between the ages of 10 and 16 years are being invited to participate in an exciting environmental educational programme. The Volvo Adventure is an environmental award that acknowledges environmental action taken by young people. It provides them with the chance of gaining international recognition for their local environmental projects and helps support environmental education in schools and local communities.

The criteria for entry into this competition is the submission of a write-up of the environmental project in which they are involved. Representatives of projects that are short-listed will be invited to a conference at Volvo headquarters in Gothenburg, Sweden when a jury will select the best entrants. The three top entrants will receive grants of \$10,000, 6,000 and 4,000 respectively to continue their environmental projects and will be invited to participate in UNEP's annual conference for children or youth. The cooperation between UNEP and Volvo began earlier this year. In May, they played host to their first joint event.

More information is available at www.volvoadventure.org

A third programme is the recently announced partnership between UNEP and Bayer to support youth and environment activities. These include support for the development and distribution of UNEP's flagship magazine for and by youth "Tunza", the organization of the Tunza International Youth Conference in Bangalore, India in October 2005, the International Children's Painting Competition on the Environment, the Bayer Young Environmental Envoys Programme and sub-regional youth networks in Asia and the Pacific, such as South Asia's Youth Environment Network, see www.sayen.org.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

For the current rules for the International Painting Competition on the Environment, please visit: www.unep.org/Tunza/paintcomp. To learn more about the competition, please contact Ms. Tomoko Yano, Secretary-General, Foundation for Global Peace and Environment, tel: +81-3-5442-3161; fax: +81-3-5442-3431; email: fgpe@chilyu-e.com

In Nairobi, please contact: Eric Falt, UNEP Spokesperson and Director of the Division of Communications and Public Information: Tel.: +254-20-62-3292, Mobile: +254-733-682656, E-mail: eric.falt@unep.org, or Nick Nuttall, UNEP Head of Media, on Tel: +254-20-62-3084, Mobile: +254-733-632755, E-mail: nick.nuttall@unep.org; or Theodore Oben, Head of UNEP's Children & Youth/Sport & Environment Unit, on Tel: +254-20-62-3262, Fax: +254-20-62-4350/3927, E-mail: children.youth@unep.org

Or at Bayer, please contact: Mr. Steffen Kurzawa, Corporate Policy and Media Relations, steffen.kurzawa.sk@bayer-ag.de

For more information on UNEP's youth and children's activities, please visit www.unep.org/tunza

UNEP News Release 2004/45

September 30, 2004

E MAGAZINE

29-9-04--Green Living: Money Matters

“Having Faith: Socially Responsible Investing Finds Religion”

by Roddy Scheer

With the recent surge in faith-based environmentalism, it's no wonder that religious entities are using their substantial financial clout to push for green changes in corporate business-as-usual. As a member of a congregation, you can have an impact by helping determine how endowments are being invested, and by suggesting shareholder resolutions to hold corporate entities accountable to ethical standards.

Making an Impact

When parishioner Jennifer Griffith took over as Chair of the Investment Committee at the Unitarian Universalist First Parish Church of Cambridge, Massachusetts, she inherited oversight of the church's endowment. Her personal experience investing through the Domini Social Equity Fund led her to recommend that the congregation follow similar socially and environmentally responsible criteria for investing its endowment funds.

Griffith also wanted to get the congregation involved in voting on and even proposing shareholder resolutions, whereby a group of investors suggests that a given corporation put a vote before all shareholders regarding a specific action or policy change. With the heartfelt approval of the congregation, First Parish switched to a money management firm experienced in socially responsible investing (SRI), and has never looked back.

"Our church now has the opportunity to act proactively and develop our own issue focus and shareholder resolutions," says Griffith. "This is up to the church as a whole and we are just beginning the process of educating the congregation." Griffith reports happily that returns on the endowment's investments are better than ever today.

Calling Dow to Task

When the nuns at Detroit's Sisters of Mercy chapter discovered that pesticides produced by one of their endowment's stock portfolio companies, Dow Chemical, were causing health problems in children, they decided to use their position as shareholders to call attention to the issue. "They must be held accountable for this chemical trespass," says Sister Valerie Heinonen.

Heinonen and the other sisters filed a resolution asking for a vote by Dow's shareholders on whether the company should phase out production and sale of the harmful pesticides. After some legal wrangling, Dow agreed to put the proposal up for a vote. In the end, thousands of Dow shareholders, representing about five percent of the company's outstanding shares, voted for the Sisters' proposal. While they lost the vote, Heinonen feels confident that this shareholder advocacy enlightened even dissenters as to the size of the problem. And the sisters hope that through similar efforts moving forward, they can eventually convince Dow to stop spreading toxins domestically and beyond.

Going Institutional

The epicenter of the faith-based SRI movement is the nonprofit Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR), a membership organization made up of 275 faith-based institutional investors with a combined portfolio value estimated at \$110 billion. Each year, ICCR member groups sponsor more than 100 shareholder resolutions on major social and environmental issues.

Leslie Lowe, ICCR's environment program director, is particularly excited about progress the organization has made on the global warming front. "Five of the largest carbon dioxide (CO₂) emitters in the country have agreed to provide the reports we asked them for regarding the competitive, regulatory and reputation-based pressures they are facing as a result of global warming," says Lowe. "As investors, we have a right to know how these companies are positioned to deal with challenges coming their way as a result of global warming, from the potential reintroduction of the McCain-Lieberman climate change legislation to the decision by Vermont to off-set emissions that could create a Day After Tomorrow scenario."

While Lowe is encouraged by ICCR's success in extracting corporate reports, she acknowledges that it is only a small part of the equation. ICCR is also working on its portfolio companies to behave proactively by reducing CO₂ emissions to sustainable levels.

Lowe also reports that shareholder advocacy by ICCR and its members helped spur the retreat by Monsanto on the production and distribution of genetically engineered (GE) foods. "We have been putting out information for years on the risks from the company's GE products," she explains, citing Monsanto's retreat as a sign of the growing power of shareholders bent on doing the right thing.

Getting started in faith-based SRI investing is as simple as finding out how congregational funds are being invested and then advocating for improvements. The national denomination offices can

be helpful in suggesting resources and providing social responsibility guidelines. Indeed, with so many examples and resources at their fingertips, now's the time to help steer congregational investments in the right direction.

RODDY SCHEER is an E contributing writer based in Seattle.

October 8, 2004

STATEMENT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE UNITED NATIONS
ENVIRONMENT

PROGRAMME REGARDING THE AWARD OF THE NOBEL PEACE PRIZE TO
PROFESSOR WANGARI

MAATHAI

8 October 2004

Understanding is growing throughout the world of the close links between environmental protection and global security, so it is most fitting that the Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded this year to Africa's staunchest defender of the environment, Professor Wangari Maathai, for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy and peace.

This award marks the culmination of a lifelong and passionate fight for the environment. Professor Wangari Maathai is a leader whose example should inspire us all, especially the women and children of Africa, who shoulder so much of Africa's burden of poverty, conflict and environmental degradation, and who so much deserve role models to show them the way to a better future.

Professor Maathai is just such a role model. For decades she has been a fearless opponent of the grabbing of public land and the destruction of forests, and a vigorous advocate for democracy and environmental protection. She founded the Green Belt Movement in Kenya, which has planted more than 20 million trees throughout Africa, and was recognized with a UNEP Global 500 award in 1987.

In a recent interview for a UNEP documentary, Professor Maathai said: "I love the trees, I love the colour. To me they represent life, and they represent hope. I think it is the green colour. I tell people I think heaven is green."

This Prize goes alongside the many accolades Professor Maathai has received over the years, including the Goldman Environment Prize and the Sophie Prize, which she received in March 2004 "for her fearless fight for the protection of the environment, human rights and promotion of democratic governance in Kenya." Professor Maathai is also a long-standing jury member of the UNEP Sasakawa Environment Prize.

In December 2002 Professor Maathai was elected to Kenya's parliament with an overwhelming majority and appointed as Deputy Minister for Environment and Natural Resources, testament to the respect she commands from the people of Kenya.

UNEP congratulates Professor Maathai for being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. By this award, the Nobel Prize Committee is honouring Professor Maathai and the global environment on which we all depend for a peaceful and secure future.

“Mongolia's Monks Take Up New Cause: Saving Giant Salmon Anglers Persuade Buddhists To Preach Preservation; One Fish Equals 999 Souls”

By PETER WONACOTT

Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

October 8, 2004; Page A1

ALONG THE UUR RIVER, Mongolia -- Here in the glacial-blue waters of this wild and remote river, the elusive Siberian salmon, known as the taimen, is in danger of vanishing forever.

Scientists and American sport fishermen working to save the taimen have drafted an unlikely ally: a 26-year-old Buddhist monk who wears a mustard-colored robe and uses a single name, Gantulga.

Their plan calls for Gantulga and his fellow monks to use their moral authority to persuade the locals to stamp out poaching and habitat destruction. The wealthy fly fishermen must do their part by pumping money into the local economy. The hope: These disparate partners can persuade Mongolians to protect their wildlife.

But in a country where Buddhism is the predominant religion, making the unusual partnership work is proving to be a delicate cultural matter. Buddhists are taught not to harm any living things. Scientists need to tag fish. Fly fishermen like to catch them. Monks like Gantulga have had to bend some of their core beliefs.

Among sport fishermen, the taimen are legendary. They can reach six feet in length and weigh 200 pounds, twice the size of Alaska's king salmon. They have been known to burst out of the water to swallow baby ducks and squirrels.

Tourists such as U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor have paid thousands of dollars to catch and release the giant fish here, a spot famous among a global fraternity of fly fishermen. American companies like Sweetwater Travel Co. of Livingston, Mont., a participant in the conservation project, charge tourists about \$5,000 each for a week of fishing.

But poachers and gold miners exploring the river valley and nearby mountains are threatening the fish. Losing the taimen would be a blow to this poor country, because sport fishermen provide one of its few significant sources of foreign currency.

The International Finance Corp., the private lending arm of the World Bank, is leading the funding of the \$2.3 million conservation project. It aims to train additional rangers to police

against poaching, and to help the Mongolian government develop a land-leasing system under which tourist operators will funnel money back into local communities. For all this to work, planners say, locals must see value in protecting the fish.

That's where the monks come in. Mongolia's brand of Buddhism is tinged with the shamanistic worship of nature. References to sacred mountains, rivers and animals dot local Buddhist scriptures, or sutras.

To win over the monks, project supporters had to explain the nuances of catch-and-release fishing, and sell them on the benefits of allowing Western anglers to hook the giant fish over and over again.

"We realize [Buddhists] may have a real problem with putting a hook in a fish's mouth and dragging it around," says Jeffrey Liebert, the investment officer at the International Finance Corp. responsible for the project. "But it's a choice between no fish and fish."

To help the monks overcome their aversion to the sport, project organizers offered an attractive incentive: help in restoring a local monastery destroyed nearly 70 years ago in a government purge. Buddhism was banned by Mongolia's communist government until 1990. Now, the nation's monks are eager to rebuild their ranks.

So now they are combing ancient texts, many written in Tibetan, to find statements that promote environmental virtues, but don't preclude catch-and-release fishing. Gantulga, who grew up near the taimen's waters and went on to study at the national monastery, is one of a younger generation of Mongolians more open to blending traditional beliefs with contemporary tastes.

He is among the few who can translate the area's ancient sutras into modern Mongolian. He carries prayer beads, meditates, and fasts. He also carries a cellphone, and on a recent plane flight, had no problem recognizing a Mongolian techno-music boy band seated behind him.

Until a decade ago, taimen poaching wasn't much of a problem. Northern Europeans could find the taimen in their own rivers easily enough. Mongolians traditionally don't eat fish, and the rivers where the giant Siberian salmon swim were difficult to reach.

But these days, Mongolian urbanites are developing a taste for taimen, which are sold illegally in some markets in Ulaanbaatar, the capital, and more people are reaching the river by four-wheel-drive vehicle. In the winter, European and Chinese poachers cut holes in the ice to spear or net the taimen.

Fish and game poachers aren't meeting much resistance. They have binoculars, guns and jeeps. Rangers are unarmed and on foot.

In a recent meeting with ranger trainees, Gantulga learned of one place where few Mongolians hunt. If a Mongolian kills any animal in the Baby God Mountains, it is believed that his family members could die in divine retribution.

"Maybe we can point out the other sacred sites, and tell them the spirits of Baby God Mountains protect the taimen's rivers and the valleys," Gantulga muses.

One of Gantulga's colleagues recently located a long-lost sutra which warns that for every fish killed, 999 human souls will suffer. According to a popular taboo, people who mistreat rivers, such as by urinating or washing dirty dishes in them, risk the wrath of temperamental water spirits known as Lus. Their punishment: flood, famine and skin infections.

"Mongolians believe there are spirits in the river and that the fish belong to them," says Gantulga. "We try to leave the fish where they are."

Although the monks remain uneasy with the concept of sport fishing, Gantulga and others have come to recognize that fly-fishing tour operators have something valuable to offer.

Last month, Bill Dehoff, a veterinarian from Columbus, Ohio, was fly-fishing in a lagoon off the Uur. A fish struck, and after a 15-minute fight, Mr. Dehoff and his buddies landed a 54-inch taimen. They posed for pictures, and then released it.

After returning to Ohio, another member of Mr. Dehoff's fishing party pledged \$25,000 for the monastery rebuilding, bringing the total raised in recent months to \$35,000.

In June, the taimen conservation fund helped pay for the erection of a small Buddhist shrine where the destroyed monastery had stood. A few local families expressed hope that their sons might become monks at the monastery once it is restored.

Gantulga says he has come to believe that catch-and-release fishing is "acceptable" and serves his religion's larger goals. "The project's work may last several years, but it's doable," he says. "Mine will last a lifetime."

October 18, 2004

PRESS CONFERENCE ON MICAH CHALLENGE UNHQ, 15 OCTOBER

Answering the call of the prophet Micah to "act justly, love kindness and walk humbly with God", the Micah Challenge sought to galvanize Christians around the world to hold governments accountable to attaining the Millennium Development Goals, correspondents were told at a Headquarters press conference this afternoon.

Stressing the Christian's divine mandate to make a better life for all, Archbishop Njongonkulu Ndungane of Cape Town, South Africa, said that Jesus Christ had come so that all people might have life in all its abundance. God created the world and made people stewards of his creation. "The generosity of our God demands a response, a response that we reflect his compassion and mercy in this world."

It was sinful, immoral and unacceptable that, in a world in surplus, 800 million people went hungry every day, he said. It was also unacceptable that in the information age, some 116 million children were not able to go to school. Those issues must be addressed in a world in which trillions of dollars were spent on armaments when four and a half days of that spending could guarantee universal education. Politicians were good at making decisions, but it was the household of faith that had both the moral responsibility and authority to ensure that the Millennium Goals were realized.

The Micah Challenge was a global campaign of the World Evangelical Alliance and the Micah Network, said Steve Bradbury, Co-Chair of the Micah Challenge and Director of TEAR Australia. The campaign found its inspiration in the person of Jesus Christ, who clearly had such a heart for the poor. Jesus was inextricably drawn to the neglected and the marginalized, just as they were drawn to him. The Micah Challenge was about being a voice for and with the poor around the globe.

Comprising some 267 organizations, the Micah Network was a comparatively new alliance of those groups, he said. The World Evangelical Alliance represented a large number of Christians, with some 3 million member churches around the world through 123 national alliances. One of the aims of the Micah Challenge was to galvanize Christians around the world -- through a massive grass-roots campaign-- to pressure and encourage governments to deliver on the promises they had made by signing the Millennium Declaration. Another goal was to encourage Christians, both rich and poor, to demonstrate, through their own priorities and programmes, something of God's heart for the poor. In Australia, a broad coalition of churches had endorsed the Micah call across the theological spectrum.

Salil Shetty, Director of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Millennium Development Goals Campaign, said it was appropriate that the press conference was being held in the building where 189 heads of State and government had signed the Millennium Declaration some four years ago. Citizens had the responsibility of keeping their governments accountable. The moral pressure that organizations like the Micah Challenge brought to the process was irreplaceable.

Progress had been achieved since the signing of the Millennium Declaration in 2000, with many of the poorest countries starting to show that the Goals could be achieved even in the most adverse circumstances, he said. Significant achievements had been made in the areas of primary education, health care and reversing the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Achieving the Goals did not require more than \$100 billion a year, which, in global terms, was small change. The real issue was a set of political constraints. The Millennium Declaration was, after all, a compact. Poor countries had promised to get their own houses in order, while rich nations had promised to do their share by ensuring there was more aid and debt relief. Africa paid out more each year in debt servicing than it received in aid. As for trade, there had been a breakthrough in July at the Doha negotiations, with the recognition that agricultural subsidies would have to end. That had been unthinkable just six months ago.

Gary Edmonds, Co-Chair of the Micah Challenge and General Secretary of the World Evangelical Alliance, said he was often asked why the Alliance had engaged in the Micah

Challenge. The word "evangelical" meant "good news" and in addressing the Millennium Development Goals, the people of Jesus Christ must be committed to creating communities of life. Jesus came to bring life and to deliver people from a culture of death. Poverty would not be addressed by passing declarations; action was needed at the local level to keep governments accountable. It was a question of obedience to Jesus, his model and his actions. Poverty could only be addressed if all people acted together.

Asked if the group was advocating a multilateral framework within the United Nations to end poverty and if the United States was living up to its commitments, Mr. Edmonds replied that the World Evangelical Alliance advocated that each nation respond in a manner appropriate to that nation. It did not recommend employing uniform strategies or tactics. It also believed that governments were given by God and had a moral responsibility to create an environment of peace and justice. Churches ought to hold their governments to moral responsibility in a way that honoured both the political process and the truth of God.

Mr. Shetty added that the Millennium Declaration had laid out the principles by which the Goals were to be achieved. The United States was not in any way different from any of the other signatories. There had been agreement not to prescribe how each country should play its role in meeting the Goals.

The campaign would take a different shape in each country, Mr. Bradbury noted. Democratically elected governments were employees and needed to be reminded that they had signed the Millennium Declaration on behalf of their people.

October 20, 2004

SPIRITUALITY-WATER Oct-14-2004 (540 words)

“Experts say politics, science not enough to solve world's water woes”

By Sarah Delaney

Catholic News Service

VATICAN CITY (CNS) -- Conflicts over fresh water sources are likely to increase in coming years, but political and scientific approaches are not sufficient to resolve them, said participants in a workshop at the Vatican.

Spirituality, ethics and a strong commitment to justice must be part of the solution, agreed the water experts gathered at the Pontifical Academy of Sciences Oct. 14.

"The survival of humanity and of all other species on earth depends upon the fate of water. Where water is absent, life is absent," said Bishop Marcelo Sanchez Sorondo, chancellor of the academy.

People have fought over dominance of water sources for thousands of years, said Peter Gleick, one of the organizers of the workshop titled "Water Conflicts and Spiritual Transformation: A Dialogue."

But the need to share the precious resource has generated a surprising amount of cooperation over the centuries as well, he said.

"It seems clear that there is a spiritual or religious dimension that can connect people when it comes to water," said Gleick, director of the Oakland-based Pacific Institute, which researches water-related environmental and developmental issues.

"Technological, economic and scientific solutions are not enough," he said. "Water is different than other resources, such as oil. People of different religious and scientific backgrounds treat water in a special way.

"We are coming together to foster that, to prevent the risk of conflict. We want to figure out how to move from conflict to cooperation," he said.

Several religions and many countries were represented by the workshop's 25 participants, who included scientists, scholars, government officials, aid workers and religious leaders.

The sometimes lofty discussion was brought down to earth by Bishop Sanchez.

"There must be two approaches to the problem. Scientists must work to conserve, locate and even produce sources of fresh water. And the social sciences, including religions, must try to ensure justice in the distribution of water. Water must be available to everyone," the bishop said.

Water, which is "valued and respected in all religions and cultures," has become a "symbol of social equity," Bishop Sanchez said. The lack of water in many parts of the world is not a question of actual scarcity, but of the distribution. One of the biggest threats to equitable water rights is the trend toward privatization, he said.

Bishop Sanchez said he hoped the workshop would result in the resolution of a fundamental agreement among religions to work toward justice in water supplies for all populations.

Mary Evelyn Tucker, professor of religion at Bucknell University, Lewisburg, Pa., said: "There's the realization that scientific and political approaches are needed, but they are not sufficient. A spiritual and ethical approach is needed as well."

She added: "There is nothing abstract about it. Water is life; without it there is no life."

As co-director of a Harvard Divinity School project studying ecology and the role of religions of the world, Tucker said that a religious approach to the environment is relatively new.

"But all religions value water," making religions natural advocates of the need to protect it, Tucker said.

"And ethics have been the missing link in the environmental discussion," she added. "We need another dimension."

October 28, 2004

“The Godly Must Be Crazy: Christian-right views are swaying politicians and threatening the environment”

By Glenn Scherer

27 Oct 2004

Grist Magazine

A kind of secular apocalyptic sensibility pervades much contemporary writing about our current world. Many books about environmental dangers, whether it be the ozone layer, or global warming or pollution of the air or water, or population explosion, are cast in an apocalyptic mold.

- Historian Paul Boyer

When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to the earth as the fig tree sheds its winter fruit when shaken by a gale; the sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place ...

- Revelation 6:12-14

Abortion. Same-sex marriage. Stem-cell research.

U.S. legislators backed by the Christian right vote against these issues with near-perfect consistency. That probably doesn't surprise you, but this might: Those same legislators are equally united and unswerving in their opposition to environmental protection.

Forty-five senators and 186 representatives in 2003 earned 80- to 100-percent approval ratings from the nation's three most influential Christian right advocacy groups -- the Christian Coalition, Eagle Forum, and Family Resource Council. Many of those same lawmakers also got flunking grades -- less than 10 percent, on average -- from the League of Conservation Voters last year.

These statistics are puzzling at first. Opposing abortion and stem-cell research is consistent with the religious right's belief that life begins at the moment of conception. Opposing gay marriage is consistent with its claim that homosexual activity is proscribed by the Bible. Both beliefs are a familiar staple of today's political discourse. But a scripture-based justification for anti-environmentalism?

Many Christian fundamentalists feel that concern for the future of our planet is irrelevant, because it has no future. They believe we are living in the End Time, when the son of God will return, the righteous will enter heaven, and sinners will be condemned to eternal hellfire. They may also believe, along with millions of other Christian fundamentalists, that environmental destruction is not only to be disregarded but actually welcomed -- even hastened -- as a sign of the coming Apocalypse.

We are not talking about a handful of fringe lawmakers who hold or are beholden to these beliefs. The 231 legislators (all but five of them Republicans) who received an average 80 percent approval rating or higher from the leading religious-right organizations make up more than 40 percent of the U.S. Congress. (The only Democrat to score 100 percent with the Christian Coalition was Sen. Zell Miller of Georgia, who earlier this year quoted from the Book of Amos on the Senate floor: "The days will come, sayeth the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land. Not a famine of bread or of thirst for water, but of hearing the word of the Lord!") These politicians include some of the most powerful figures in the U.S. government, as well as key environmental decision makers: Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.), Senate Majority Whip Mitch McConnell (R-Ky.), Senate Republican Conference Chair Rick Santorum (R-Penn.), Senate Republican Policy Chair Jon Kyl (R-Ariz.), House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-Ill.), House Majority Whip Roy Blunt (R-Mo.), U.S. Attorney General John Ashcroft, and quite possibly President Bush. (Earlier this month, a cover story by Ron Suskind in The New York Times Magazine described how Bush's faith-based governance has led to, among other things, a disastrous "crusade" in the Middle East and has laid the groundwork for "a battle between modernists and fundamentalists, pragmatists and true believers, reason and religion.")

And those politicians are just the powerful tip of the iceberg. A 2002 Time/CNN poll found that 59 percent of Americans believe that the prophecies found in the Book of Revelation are going to come true. Nearly one-quarter think the Bible predicted the 9/11 attacks.

Like it or not, faith in the Apocalypse is a powerful driving force in modern American politics. In the 2000 election, the Christian right cast at least 15 million votes, or about 30 percent of those that propelled Bush into the presidency. And there's no doubt that arch-conservative Christians will be just as crucial in the coming election: GOP political strategist Karl Rove hopes to mobilize 20 million fundamentalist voters to help sweep Bush back into office on Nov. 2 and to maintain a Republican majority in Congress, says Joan Bokaer, director of Theocracy Watch, a project of the Center for Religion, Ethics, and Social Policy at Cornell University.

Because of its power as a voting bloc, the Christian right has the ear, if not the souls, of much of the nation's leadership. Some of those leaders are End-Time believers themselves. Others are not. Either way, their votes are heavily swayed by an electoral base that accepts the Bible as literal truth and eagerly awaits the looming Apocalypse. And that, in turn, is sobering news for those who hope for the protection of the earth, not its destruction.

Once Upon End Time

Ever since the dawn of Christianity, groups of believers have searched the scriptures for signs of the End Time and the Second Coming. Today, most of the roughly 50 million right-wing fundamentalist Christians in the United States believe in some form of End-Time theology.

Those 50 million believers make up only a subset of the estimated 100 million born-again evangelicals in the United States, who are by no means uniformly right-wing anti-environmentalists. In fact, the political stances of evangelicals on the environment and other issues range widely; the Evangelical Environmental Network, for example, has melded its biblical interpretation with good environmental science to justify and promote stewardship of the

earth. But the political and cultural impact of the extreme Christian right is difficult to overestimate.

It is also difficult to understand without grasping the complex belief systems underlying and driving it. While there are many divergent End-Time theologies and sects, the most politically influential are the dispensationalists and reconstructionists.

Tune in to any of America's 2,000 Christian radio stations or 250 Christian TV stations and you're likely to get a heady dose of dispensationalism, an End-Time doctrine invented in the 19th century by the Irish-Anglo theologian John Nelson Darby. Dispensationalists espouse a "literal" interpretation of the Bible that offers a detailed chronology of the impending end of the world. (Many mainstream theologians dispute that literality, arguing that Darby misinterprets and distorts biblical passages.) Believers link that chronology to current events -- four hurricanes hitting Florida, gay marriages in San Francisco, the 9/11 attacks -- as proof that the world is spinning out of control and that we are what dispensationalist writer Hal Lindsey calls "the terminal generation." The social and environmental crises of our times, dispensationalists say, are portents of the Rapture, when born-again Christians, living and dead, will be taken up into heaven.

"All over the earth, graves will explode as the occupants soar into the heavens," preaches dispensationalist pastor John Hagee, of the Cornerstone Church in San Antonio, Texas. On the heels of that Rapture, nonbelievers left behind on earth will endure seven years of unspeakable suffering called the Great Tribulation, which will culminate in the rise of the Antichrist and the final battle of Armageddon between God and Satan. Upon winning that battle, Christ will send all unbelievers into the pits of hellfire, re-green the planet, and reign on earth in peace with His followers for a millennium.

Dispensationalists haven't cornered the market on End-Time interpretation. The reconstructionists (also known as dominionists), a smaller but politically influential sect, put the onus for the Lord's return not in the hands of biblical prophecy but in political activism. They believe that Christ will only make his Second Coming when the world has prepared a place for Him, and that the first step in readying His arrival is to Christianize America.

"Christian politics has as its primary intent the conquest of the land -- of men, families, institutions, bureaucracies, courts, and governments for the Kingdom of Christ," writes reconstructionist George Grant. Christian dominion will be achieved by ending the separation of church and state, replacing U.S. democracy with a theocracy ruled by Old Testament law, and cutting all government social programs, instead turning that work over to Christian churches. Reconstructionists also would abolish government regulatory agencies, such as the U.S. EPA, because they are a distraction from their goal of Christianizing America, and subsequently, the rest of the world. "World conquest. That's what Christ has commissioned us to accomplish," says Grant. "We must win the world with the power of the Gospel. And we must never settle for anything less." Only when that conquest is complete can the Lord return.

Don't Worry, Be Happy

People under the spell of such potent prophecies cannot be expected to worry about the environment. Why care about the earth when the droughts, floods, and pestilence brought by ecological collapse are signs of the Apocalypse foretold in the Bible? Why care about global climate change when you and yours will be rescued in the Rapture? And why care about converting from oil to solar when the same God who performed the miracle of the loaves and fishes can whip up a few billion barrels of light crude with a Word?

Many End-Timers believe that until Jesus' return, the Lord will provide. In America's Providential History, a popular reconstructionist high-school history textbook, authors Mark Beliles and Stephen McDowell tell us that: "The secular or socialist has a limited resource mentality and views the world as a pie ... that needs to be cut up so everyone can get a piece." However, "the Christian knows that the potential in God is unlimited and that there is no shortage of resources in God's Earth. The resources are waiting to be tapped." In another passage, the writers explain: "While many secularists view the world as overpopulated, Christians know that God has made the earth sufficiently large with plenty of resources to accommodate all of the people."

Natural-resource depletion and overpopulation, then, are not concerns for End-Timers -- and nor are other ecological catastrophes, which are viewed by dispensationalists as presaging the Great Tribulation. Support for this view comes from an 11-word passage in Matthew 24:7: "[T]here shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places." Other End-Timers see suggestions of ecological meltdown in Revelation's four horsemen of the Apocalypse -- War, Famine, Pestilence, and Death -- and they cite a verse mentioning costly wheat, barley, and oil as foretelling food and fossil-fuel shortages. During the End Time, the four horsemen shall be "given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth." Some End-Timers note that Revelation 8:8-11 predicts a fiery mountain falling into the sea and causing great destruction, followed by a blazing star plummeting from the sky. This star is called "Wormwood," which dispensationalists say translates loosely in Ukrainian as "Chernobyl."

A plethora of End-Time preachers, tracts, films, and websites hawk environmental cataclysm as Good News -- a harbinger of the imminent Second Coming. Hal Lindsey's 1970 End-Time "non-fiction" work, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, is the classic of the genre; the movie version pummels viewers with stock footage of nuclear blasts, polluting smokestacks, raging floods, and killer bees. Likewise, dispensationalist author Tim LaHaye's "Left Behind" novels -- at one point selling 1.5 million copies per month -- weave ecological disaster into an action-adventure account of prophesy.

At RaptureReady.com, the "Rapture Index" tracks all the latest news in relation to biblical prophecy. Among its leading environmental indicators of Apocalypse are oil supply and price, famine, drought, plagues, wild weather, floods, and climate. RaptureReady webmaster Todd Strandberg writes to explain why climate change made the list: "I used to think there was no real need for Christians to monitor the changes related to greenhouse gases. If it was going to take a couple hundred years for things to get serious, I assumed the nearness of the End Times would overshadow this problem. With the speed of climate change now seen as moving much faster, global warming could very well be a major factor in the plagues of the tribulation."

Another prophecy index points to acts of nature (drought in Ethiopia, famine in South Africa, floods in Russia, fires in Arizona, heat waves in India, and the breakup of the Antarctic ice shelf) as proof of the approaching doomsday, noting that "When these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke 21:28).

According to a chart on the End-Time website ApocalypseSoon.org, we are at "the beginning of sorrows" (Matthew 24:3-8) marking the Great Tribulation. The site links to a BBC News article on infectious diseases and a chronicle of extreme weather events on Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Ross Gelbspan's climate-change website as evidence of those unfolding sorrows. However, it adds a stern disclaimer regarding these external links: "We do not, by any means, approve or recommend some of the sites that this page links to. They were chosen simply because they document literally what the Word of God prophesies for the End Days."

If I Had a Hammer

To understand how the Christian right worldview is shaping and even fueling congressional anti-environmentalism, consider two influential born-again lawmakers: House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas) and Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Chair James Inhofe (R-Okla.).

DeLay, who has considerable control over the agenda in the House, has called for "march[ing] forward with a Biblical worldview" in U.S. politics, reports Peter Perl in *The Washington Post Magazine*. DeLay wants to convert America into a "God centered" nation whose government promotes prayer, worship, and the teaching of Christian values.

Inhofe, the Senate's most outspoken environmental critic, is also unwavering in his wish to remake America as a Christian state. Speaking at the Christian Coalition's Road to Victory rally just before the GOP sweep of the 2002 midterm elections, he promised the faithful, "When we win this revolution in November, you'll be doing the Lord's work, and He will richly bless you for it!"

Neither DeLay nor Inhofe include environmental protection in "the Lord's work." Both have ranted against the EPA, calling it "the Gestapo." DeLay has fought to gut the Clean Air and Endangered Species acts. Last year, Inhofe invited a stacked-deck of fossil fuel-funded climate-change skeptics to testify at a Senate hearing that climaxed with him calling global warming "the greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people."

DeLay has said bluntly that he intends to smite the "socialist" worldview of "secular humanists," whom, he argues, control the U.S. political system, media, public schools, and universities. He called the 2000 presidential election an apocalyptic "battle for souls," a fight to the death against the forces of liberalism, feminism, and environmentalism that are corrupting America. The utopian dreams of such movements are doomed, argues the majority leader, because they do not stem from God.

"DeLay is motivated more than anything by power," says Jan Reid, coauthor with Lou Dubose of *The Hammer*, a just-published biography of DeLay. "But he also believes in the power of the coming Millennium [of Jesus Christ], and it helps shape his vision on government and the world." This may explain why DeLay's Capitol office furnishings include a marble replica of the Ten Commandments and a wall poster that reads: "This Could Be The Day" -- meaning Judgment Day.

DeLay is also a self-declared member of the Christian Zionists, an End-Time faction numbering 20 million Americans. Christian Zionists believe that the 1948 creation of the state of Israel marked the first event in what author Hal Lindsey calls the "countdown to Armageddon" and they are committed to making that doomsday clock tick faster, speeding Christ's return.

In 2002, DeLay visited pastor John Hagee's Cornerstone Church. Hagee preached a fiery message as simple as it was horrifying: "The war between America and Iraq is the gateway to the Apocalypse!" he said, urging his followers to support the war, perhaps in order to bring about the Second Coming. After Hagee finished, DeLay rose to second the motion. "Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "what has been spoken here tonight is the truth from God."

With those words -- broadcast to 225 Christian TV and radio stations -- DeLay placed himself squarely inside the End-Time camp, a faction willing to force the Apocalypse upon the rest of the world. In part, DeLay may embrace Hagee and others like him in a calculated attempt to win fundamentalist votes -- but he was also raised a Southern Baptist, steeped in a literal interpretation of the Bible and End-Time dogma. Biographer Dubose says that the majority leader probably doesn't grasp the complexities of dispensationalist and reconstructionist theology, but "I am convinced that he believes [in] it." For DeLay, Dubose told me, "If John Hagee says it, then it is true."

Onward Christian Senators

James Inhofe might be an environmentalist's worst nightmare. The Oklahoma senator makes major policy decisions based on heavy corporate and theological influences, flawed science, and probably an apocalyptic worldview -- and he chairs the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee.

That committee's links to corporate funders are both easier to trace and more infamous than its ties to religious fundamentalism, and it's true that the influence of money can scarcely be overstated. From 1999 to 2004, Inhofe received more than \$588,000 from the fossil-fuel industry, electric utilities, mining, and other natural-resource interests, according to the Center for Responsive Politics. Eight of the nine other Republican members of Inhofe's committee received an average of \$408,000 per senator from the energy and natural resource sector over the same period. By contrast, the eight committee Democrats and one Independent came away with an average of just \$132,000 per senator from that same sector since 1999.

But the influence of theology, although less discussed, is no less significant. Inhofe, like DeLay, is a Christian Zionist. While the senator has not overtly expressed his religious views in his environmental committee, he has when speaking on other issues. In a Senate foreign-policy

speech, Inhofe argued that the U.S. should ally itself unconditionally with Israel "because God said so." Quoting the Bible as the divine Word of God, Inhofe cited Genesis 13:14-17 -- "for all the land which you see, to you will I give it, and to your seed forever" -- as justification for permanent Israeli occupation of the West Bank and for escalating aggression against the Palestinians.

Inhofe also openly supports dispensationalist Pat Robertson, who touts every tornado, hurricane, plague, and suicide bombing as a sure sign of God's return; who accused both Jimmy Carter and George Bush Sr. of being followers of Lucifer; and who makes no secret of the efforts of his Christian Coalition to control the Republican Party, according to Theocracy Watch.

A good fundamentalist, Inhofe scored a perfect 100 percent rating in 2003 from all three major Christian-right advocacy groups, while earning a 5 percent from the League of Conservation Voters (and a string of zeroes from 1997 to 2002). Likewise, eight of the nine other Republicans on the Environment and Public Works Committee earned an average 94 percent approval rating in 2003 from the Christian right, while scoring a dismal 4 percent average environmental approval rating. The one exception proves the rule: Moderate Lincoln Chafee (R.-R.I.) last year earned a 79 percent LCV rating and just 41 percent from the religious right.

As committee chair, Inhofe has subtly chosen scripture over science. The origins of his 2003 Senate speech attacking the science behind global climate change, for example, reveal his two masters: the speech is traceable to fossil fuel industry think tanks and petrochemical dollars -- but also to the pseudo-science of Christian right websites. In that two-hour diatribe, Inhofe dismissed global warming by comparing it to a 1970s scientific scare that suggested the planet was cooling -- a hypothesis, he fails to note, held by only a minority of climatologists at the time. Inhofe's apparent source on global cooling was the Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, a Christian-right and free-market economics think tank. In an editorial on that site called "Global Warming or Globaloney? The Forgotten Case for Global Cooling," we hear echoes of Inhofe's position. The article calls climate change "a shrewdly planned campaign to inflict a lot of socialistic restriction on our cherished freedoms. Environmentalism, in short, is the last refuge of socialism." Inhofe's views can be heard in the words of dispensationalist Jerry Falwell as well, who said on CNN, "It was global cooling 30 years ago ... and it's global warming now. ... The fact is there is no global warming."

Inhofe's views are also closely tied to the Interfaith Council for Environmental Stewardship, a radical-right Christian organization founded by radio evangelist James Dobson, dispensationalist Rev. D. James Kennedy of Coral Ridge Ministries, Jerry Falwell, and Robert Sirico, a Catholic priest who has been editing Vatican texts to align the Catholic Church's historical teachings with his free-market philosophy, according to E Magazine.

The ICES environmental view is shaped by the Book of Genesis: "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the seas, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on this earth." The group says this passage proves that "man" is superior to nature and gives the go-ahead to unchecked population growth and unrestrained resource use. Such beliefs fly in the face of ecology, which shows humankind to be an equal and interdependent participant in the natural web.

Inhofe's staff defends his backward scientific positions, no matter how at odds they are with mainstream scientists. "How do you define 'mainstream'?" asked a miffed staffer. "Scientists who accept the so-called consensus about global warming? Galileo was not mainstream." But Inhofe is no Galileo. In fact, his use of lawsuits to try to suppress the peer-reviewed science of the National Assessment on Climate Change -- which predicts major extinctions and threats to coastal regions -- arguably puts him on the side of Galileo's oppressors, the perpetrators of the Christian Inquisition, writes Chris Mooney in *The American Prospect*.

"I trust God with my legislative goals and the issues that are important to my constituents," Inhofe has told *Pentecostal Evangel* magazine. "I don't believe there is a single issue we deal with in government that hasn't been dealt with in the Scriptures." But Inhofe stayed silent in that interview as to which passages he applies to the environment, and he remained so when I asked him if End-Time beliefs influence his leadership of the most powerful environmental committee in the country.

And the Cow Jumped Over the Moon

So weird have the attempts to hasten the End Time become that a group of ultra-Christian Texas ranchers recently helped fundamentalist Israeli Jews breed a pure red heifer, a genetically rare beast that must be sacrificed to fulfill an apocalyptic prophecy found in the biblical Book of Numbers. (The beast will be ready for sacrifice by 2005, according to *The National Review*.)

It can be difficult for environmentalists, many of whom cut their teeth on peer-reviewed science, to fathom how anyone could believe that a rust-colored calf could bring about the end of the world, or how anyone could make a coherent End-Time story (let alone national policy) out of the poetic symbolism of the Book of Revelation. But there are millions of such people in America today -- including 231 U.S. legislators who either believe dispensationalist or reconstructionist doctrine or, for political expediency, are happy to align themselves with those who do.

That's troubling, because the beliefs in question are antithetical to environmentalism. For starters, any environmental science that contradicts the End-Timer's interpretation of Holy Writ is automatically suspect. This explains the disregard for environmental science so prevalent among Christian fundamentalist lawmakers: the denial of global warming, of the damaged ozone layer, and of the poisoning caused by industrial arsenic and mercury.

More important, End-Time beliefs make such problems inconsequential. Faith in Christ's impending return causes End-Timers to be interested only in short-term political-theological outcomes, not long-term solutions. Unfortunately, nearly every environmental issue, from the conservation of endangered species to the curbing of climate change, requires belief in and commitment to an enduring earth. And yet, no amount of scientific evidence will likely shake fundamentalists of their End-Time faith or bring them over to the cause of saving the environment.

"It's like half this country wants to guide our ship of state by compass -- a compass, something that works by science and rationality, and empirical wisdom," quipped comedian Bill Maher on Larry King Live. "And half this country wants to kill a chicken and read the entrails like they used to do in the old Roman Empire."

Those who doubt the dangers of such faith-based guidance need only recall the 9/11 hijackers, who devoutly believed that 72 black-eyed virgins awaited them as their reward in paradise.

In the past, it was not deemed politically correct to ask probing questions about a lawmaker's intimate religious beliefs. But when those beliefs play a crucial role in shaping public policy, it becomes necessary for the people to know and understand them. It sounds startling, but the great unasked questions that need to be posed to the 231 U.S. legislators backed by the Christian right, and to President Bush himself, are not the kind of softballs about faith lobbed at the candidates during the recent presidential debates. They are, instead, tough, specific inquiries about the details of that faith: Do you believe we are in the End Time? Are the governmental policies you support based on your faith in the imminent Second Coming of Christ? It's not an exaggeration to say that the fate of our planet depends on our asking these questions, and on our ability to reshape environmental strategy in light of the answers.

Many years ago, a friend of mine introduced me to his "religious grandparents," who, whenever they were asked about the future, proclaimed, "Armageddon's comin'!" And they believed it. Christ was due back any day, so they never bothered to paint or shingle their house. What was the point? Over the years, I drove by their place and watched the protective layers of paint peel, the bare clapboards weather, the sills and roof rot. Eventually, the house fell into ruin and had to be torn down, leaving my friend's grandparents destitute.

In a way, their prediction had proven right. But this humble apocalypse, a house divided against itself, was no work of God, but of man. This is a parable for the 231 Christian right-backed legislators of the 108th Congress. Their constituency's cherished beliefs may lead to the most dangerous and destructive self-fulfilling prophecy of all time.

*[Correction, 04 Feb 2005: The asterisked section of the article, above, originally read:

But a scripture-based justification for anti-environmentalism -- when was the last time you heard a conservative politician talk about that?

Odds are it was in 1981, when President Reagan's first secretary of the interior, James Watt, told the U.S. Congress that protecting natural resources was unimportant in light of the imminent return of Jesus Christ. "God gave us these things to use. After the last tree is felled, Christ will come back," Watt said in public testimony that helped get him fired.

Today's Christian fundamentalist politicians are more politically savvy than Reagan's interior secretary was; you're unlikely to catch them overtly attributing public-policy decisions to private religious views. But their words and actions suggest that many share Watt's beliefs. Like him,

many Christian fundamentalists feel that concern for the future of our planet is irrelevant, because it has no future.

In fact, Watt did not make such a statement to Congress. The quotation is attributed to Watt in the book *Setting the Captives Free* by Austin Miles, but Miles does not write that it was made before Congress. Grist regrets this reporting error and is aggressively looking into the accuracy of this quotation.]

[Update, 11 Feb 2005: Grist has been unable to substantiate that Watt made this statement. We would like to extend our sincere apologies to Watt and to our readers for this error.]

November 1, 2004

From Yemen Observer
yobserver.com

Environment

“Water conservation as a religious duty(Ministry of Environment)”

By Observer Staff

Oct 30, 2004, 13:21

"Do not the Unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one unit of creation), before we clove them asunder? We made from water every living thing. Will they not then believe? (Al-Anbia' 21:30)".

The Qur'an mentions "ma'a", the Arabic word for water, 63 times, and it is discussed literally hundreds of times in the documented life of the Prophet Mohammed (peace be upon him).

It is incontrovertible that without water, there would be no living organism on this planet. The dominance of water is clear to us if we just know that it makes up 72% of the globe. We in Yemen need more than ever before to ensure that we are safely tapping this fundamental resource.

It is a matter of life and death for this and the coming generations. The abundance of water never justifies its abuse.

Because we in Yemen don't have mainland rivers and lakes and we endure a shortage of rains, we need to ensure that consumption of this life-sustaining substance is highly controlled.

We also face the fundamental problem of water pollution, which often makes the little we have unsafe for drinking.

Mosque preachers have a moral obligation to raise the awareness of people about the preservation of water. They should encourage people to avoid extravagant consumption and misuse of water.

Unfortunately, mosques themselves are the places where the extravagant consumption of water in ablution is even worse than in homes. People waste too much water in mosque bathrooms where they wash up and observe the mandatory rite of ablution before prayers.

This happens in stark violation of the teachings of Islam.

Narrated by Abdullah Ibn Amr: The Messenger of Allah passed by his companion Saad while he was performing ablution and said: "What is this extravagance, Saad?"

Saad asked in return, "Can there be extravagance in ablution?" The Prophet replied: "Yes, even if you were at a flowing river."

Narrated by Abdullah Ibn Mughaffal, the Prophet also once predicted: "There will be a people amongst this Ummah (Nation) who will transgress in their supplication and ablution."

In mosques, people are often seen letting water gush from dozens of taps with sleeves rolled up--before they apply any water to any part of the body.

One important suggestion in dealing with this problem is that taps of mosques be designed to allow water to flow slowly. The overall amount used per day should also be regulated. People also need to be motivated to be aware of the need to economize the consumption of water in mosques, homes, shopping centers and all other places where the use of water is not monitored or free.

Water management projects in Yemen are more likely to be sustainable if Islamic teachings are taken into account and the influence of faith is extended to include the development of water conservation policies or international development projects.

New principles like preservation of water and the right of the environment to a minimum amount of water are strenuously supported in Islam.

Even leaders of the two major denominations of Islam, Sunni and Shi'ite, are unanimous on all key questions of water preservation, even if the details for implementing specific relevant measures differ slightly.

Water is a vital social good, and access to safe drinking water is a fundamental human right in Islam, as water conservation was explicitly encouraged by the last messenger of Allah.

In Islam, the priority purposes of water allocation are the quenching of thirst of humans and animals and other organisms that depend on it. Islam also sets punishments for the misuse of water whether by excessive use or pollution.

Islam allows the reuse of wastewater but provided that water is treated sufficiently to render it safe for its intended use. This means that wastewater used to irrigate vegetables grown on or in

the ground and eaten raw would require more treatment than wastewater used to irrigate cooked vegetables or tree-borne fruit, which can be poured on the roots of trees.

Although it is a social good owned by the community, water, in Islam, cannot be sold and costs of its supply can be recovered by its providers.

Animals, plants and humans all depend on water for the continuation of their lives. Allah says in the Qur'an: "Verily...in rains which Allah sends down from heaven, hence to revive life of earth after its death...".

In another verse of the Qur'an, He says "We send down pure water from heaven, thereby to bring to life a dead land and quench the thirst of that which We have created?cattle and men in multitudes."

Urging humankind to appreciate the value of water as a fundamental source of life, Allah says: "Have you noticed the water that you drink? Was it thee who sent it down from the rain cloud, or did We send it? Were it Our will, We could have made it bitter; why then do you not give thanks?"

Again, there is no doubt that the conservation of this vital element is fundamental to the preservation and continuation of life in its various forms, plant, animal, and human.

Due to the importance of water as the basis of life, God has made its use a common right of all living beings and all human beings. All are entitled to use it without monopoly, usurpation, despoilment, wastage, or abuse.

The lengthy experience of Islamic jurists in allocation of water rights in arid lands has given rise to an outstanding example of the sustainable use of a scarce resource; an increasingly relevant example in a world where resources which were once abundant are becoming progressively more scarce.

© Copyright 2003-2004, Yemen Observer

November 16, 2004

“Undoing the Damage To Sacred Banks: Interfaith Effort Plans Revival of the Anacostia River, Replenishment of Its Neighborhoods”

By Bill Broadway Washington Post Staff Writer

Saturday, October 30, 2004; Page B09

Just above Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium near a tributary leading to Kenilworth Aquatic Gardens, Doug Siglin points to a blue-crested bird rising above the Anacostia River.

"That's a belted kingfisher, really beautiful," he says while doing one of the things he loves most: giving first-time visitors a boat tour of the river.

Back at the dock, 2,000 yards from the Capitol and several hundred feet from the left-field fence of the proposed baseball stadium in Southeast, a dead bullhead catfish lies on the pier. Siglin isn't sure how the bottom feeder got there, but he does know one thing: The Anacostia's brown bullheads have the highest cancer rate found in any fish variety in the country.

The beautiful and the ugly go hand in hand in and near the Anacostia River, whose eight-mile stretch between Fort McNair and Bladensburg once was one of the richest wetlands areas in the world.

"The Creator created this river as a healthy system. It had been in balance," said Siglin, director of the Anacostia River Initiative, a program of the Chesapeake Bay Foundation. But generations in the District and Maryland, he says, have "re-created a very polluted river . . . with only a fraction of the biology it once had."

A Methodist-turned-Episcopalian, Siglin, 48, believes the Creator has given people of faith -- Christians and non-Christians -- the responsibility of being stewards of the Earth. And people of faith in the Washington area, he says, "should be outraged" at the putrid state of their God-given river and should work to "undo the damage."

Such thinking was the basis of the new Religious Partnership for the Anacostia River, a consortium of interfaith clergy and laity that hosted its first community meeting recently in Southeast Washington. The goal of the partnership is "to contribute to the restoration of the Anacostia River and to tangibly assist the residents of the neighborhoods around it," according to its mission statement.

Spearheading the effort are Siglin, the Rev. Clark Lobenstine of the InterFaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington and Bob Nixon, chairman of the board of Earth Conservation Corps.

Formation of the partnership was good news for the Rev. Rodger Reed Sr., 65, pastor of Campbell AME Church in Southeast and one of the speakers at that first gathering, at Matthews Memorial Baptist Church on Martin Luther King Jr. Avenue.

"Anacostia once was a proud place," Reed said of the neighborhoods whose identities and character are entwined with the river. Generations of "misuse," such as the construction of pollution-contributing industries and housing developments, brought the area down, he said.

"The whole community has devolved to a sense of nothingness, gone to seed," Reed said. What's more, he said, the District continues "to pour pollution into the river where children can't go wading."

Reed was referring to one of the most unsettling aspects of Anacostia River pollution: the pouring of raw sewage into the river during heavy rains -- about 75 to 80 times a year, according to various studies.

Much of the District's wastewater system is more than a century old and combines sewage and storm drainage into a single channel that takes both wastes to the water treatment plant. During

heavy rains, the system overflows and sends the combined waste directly into the Anacostia, the Potomac River and Rock Creek, with the greatest volume going into the Anacostia, Siglin said.

The presence of human fecal matter, the source of disease in many undeveloped countries, creates unhealthy conditions for waders, boaters, fishermen and anyone else in contact with the river water, according to a report by the Chesapeake Bay Foundation.

Combined with other pollutants, including industrial wastes and fertilizer chemicals, fecal bacteria has led to the river's health rating of 17 out of a possible 100, according to "The Anacostia River: a Health Index," to be released Monday.

The condition of the river has improved in recent years because of volunteer efforts by environmental groups and such nonprofit organizations as Earth Conservation Corps, which hires young people >from Anacostia neighborhoods to clean up debris, build river walks and plant trees, shrubs and aquatic vegetation.

Individual congregations have been involved in cleanup efforts, and the environmental committee of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington has made the Anacostia a priority, said Siglin, who serves on the panel. But no interfaith effort has been made on the level of that envisioned for the Religious Partnership for the Anacostia -- one that hopes to enlist houses of worship throughout the river's watershed area, including Montgomery and Prince George's counties, he said.

About 150 people of different faiths attended the September meeting at Matthews Memorial. Speakers included the Rev. Susan Newman, senior advisor for religious affairs to D.C. Mayor Anthony A. Williams; Rabbi Warren Stone of Temple Emanuel in Bethesda; Imam Ghayth Nur Kashif, of Majidush-Shura in Southeast; and the Rev. John Bryson Chane, bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Washington.

"The challenge before us is to reconnect the secular and utilitarian with the sacred," Chane said in his talk, "Searching for a Theology of Ecology."

"This is essential if we are to reclaim our role as God's stewards," the bishop said. "With this reclamation must come the realization that there is no such thing as a morally neutral choice when it comes to making decisions about how we treat the environment and its creatures. There are only good and bad choices. Not making a choice is in fact making a choice to do nothing."

Doing something about the Anacostia means starting with practical actions to stop the flow of sewage into the river, states a brochure available through the coalition's Web site, www.religiouspartnership.org. "Restorative Landscaping: Real Ways to Help Save the Anacostia" encourages homeowners, businesses, government offices and houses of worship throughout the Anacostia River watershed -- 176 square miles, 85 percent of which is in Maryland -- to reduce the amount of rainwater going into storm drains.

Suggestions include directing downspouts so water flows to a "buffer garden" with shrubs and other plants; capturing rainwater in barrels and using it to water flowers; creating parking areas

with gravel or porous masonry blocks; and creating roof gardens consisting of layers of soil, drainage material and succulent plants on a waterproof membrane.

On a policy level, the partnership will ask members to support the Chesapeake Bay Foundation's efforts to persuade Congress to replace the city's antiquated sewage system. Congress, which has oversight of the District, has allocated \$85 million to begin the improvements, which ultimately could cost \$2 billion, Siglin said.

David Smith, 30, who grew up near the Anacostia and who is program director for Earth Conservation Corps, said it's important to "understand the bigger picture" of what pollutes the Anacostia while taking such small steps as improving access for boaters and replanting vegetation on river banks and in the water.

As the Anacostia's official "riverkeeper," Smith keeps another universal view in mind as he regularly drives his motorized skiff up and down the river to check on the corps's restoration efforts, including more than a dozen eagles the group released on the river that have created nests.

Every time he goes on the river, "I can feel the presence of God," said Smith, who attends St. John's Baptist Church in Marshall Heights. Despite the pollution, despite human efforts to control the water flow, the river refuses to be defeated and somehow finds a way to support some wildlife and vegetation.

"That's a testament to just how powerful God is in creation," he said.
