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AN EVANGELICAL DECLARATION ON THE CARE OF CREATION

The *Bulletin* will from time to time continue to publish significant documents of contemporary evangelical theology. The 'Declaration on the Care of Creation' which is presented here had its origins in the USA, where it was endorsed by an impressive number and range of evangelical leaders. Its launch onto the UK scene in June 1996 was co-ordinated by Professor Iain Berry, Professor of Genetics in University College, London, and former President of the British Ecological Society, under the auspices of the UK Evangelical Environmental Network, Creation Care. This can be contacted c/o Christian Impact, St Peter's Church, Vere Street, London W1M 9HP.

At a time when creation concerns threaten to become the special corner of New Ageism, inspired not a little by a romanticised reading of Celtic spirituality, the balance and maturity of this Declaration are most welcome. Many Christians feel a sense of impotence in the face of the massiveness of environmental deterioration, but it can only help if we get our thinking and our teaching straight to start with.

The Editor.

AN EVANGELICAL DECLARATION ON THE CARE OF CREATION

The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof. Psalm 24:1

As followers of Jesus Christ, committed to the full authority of the Scriptures, and aware of the ways we have degraded creation, we believe that biblical faith is essential to the solution of our ecological problems.

- Because we worship and honour the Creator, we seek to cherish and care for the creation.
- Because we have sinned, we have failed in our stewardship of creation. Therefore we repent of the way we have polluted, distorted, or destroyed so much of the Creator's work.
- Because in Christ God has healed our alienation from God and extended to us the first fruits of the reconciliation of all things, we commit ourselves to working in the power of the Holy Spirit to share the Good News of Christ in word and deed, to work for the reconciliation of all people in Christ, and to extend Christ's healing to suffering creation.
- Because we await the time when even the groaning creation will be restored to wholeness, we commit ourselves to work vigorously to protect and heal that creation for the honour and glory of the Creator - whom we know dimly through creation, but meet fully through Scripture and in Christ.

We and our children face a growing crisis in the health of the creation in which we are embedded, and through which, by God's grace, we are sustained. Yet we continue to degrade that creation.

- These degradations of creation can be summed up as: 1 land degradation; 2 deforestation; 3 species extinction; 4 water degradation; 5 global toxification; 6 the alteration of atmosphere; 7 human and cultural degradation.
- Many of these degradations are signs that we are pressing against the finite limits God has set for creation. With continued population growth, these degradations will become more severe. Our responsibility is not only to bear and nurture children, but to nurture their home on earth. We respect the institution of marriage as the way God has given to ensure thoughtful procreation of children and their nurture to the glory of God.
- We recognise that human poverty is both a cause and a consequence of environmental degradation.

Many concerned people, convinced that environmental problems are more spiritual than technological, are exploring the world's ideologies and religions in search of non-Christian spiritual resources for the healing of the earth. As followers of Jesus Christ, we believe that the Bible calls us to respond in four ways:

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- First, God calls us to confess and repent of attitudes which devalue creation, and which twist or ignore biblical revelation to support our misuse of it. Forgetting that 'the earth is the Lord's', we have often simply used creation and forgotten our responsibility to care for it.
- Second, our actions and attitudes towards the earth need to proceed from the centre of our faith, and be rooted in the fullness of God's revelation in Christ and the Scriptures. We resist both ideologies which would presume the Gospel has nothing to do with the care of non-human creation and also ideologies which would reduce the Gospel to nothing more than the care of that creation.
- Third, we seek carefully to learn all that the Bible tells us about the Creator, creation, and the human task. In our life and words we declare that full good news for all creation which is still waiting 'with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God' (Rom. 8:19).
- Fourth, we seek to understand what creation reveals about God's divinity, sustaining presence, and everlasting power, and what creation teaches us of its God-given order and the principles by which it works.

Thus we call on all those who are committed to the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to affirm the following principles of biblical faith, and to seek ways of living out these principles in our personal lives, our churches, and society:

- The cosmos, in all its beauty, wildness, and life-giving bounty, is the work of our personal and loving Creator.
- Our creating God is prior to and other than creation, yet intimately involved with it, upholding each thing in its freedom, and all things in relationships of intricate complexity. God is transcendent, while lovingly sustaining each creature; and immanent, while wholly other than creation and not to be confused with it.
- God the Creator is relational in very nature, revealed as three persons in One. Likewise, the creation which God intended is a symphony of individual creatures in harmonious relationship.
- The Creator's concern is for all creatures. God declares all creation 'good' (Gen. 1:31); promises care in a covenant with all creatures (Gen. 9:9-17); delights in creatures which have no human apparent usefulness (Job 39-41); and wills, in Christ, 'to reconcile all things to himself' (Col. 1:20).
- Men, women and children, have a unique responsibility to the Creator; at the same time we are *creatures*, shaped by the same processes and embedded in the same systems of physical, chemical, and biological interconnections which sustain other creatures.
- Men, women and children, created in God's image, also have a unique responsibility for creation. Our actions should both sustain creation's fruitfulness and preserve creation's powerful testimony to its Creator.

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- Our God-given, stewardly talents have often been warped from their intended purpose: that we know, name, keep and delight in God's creatures; that we nourish civilisation in love, creativity and obedience to God; and that we offer creation and civilisation back in praise to the Creator. We have ignored our creaturely limits and have used the earth with greed, rather than care.

- The earthly result of human sin has been a perverted stewardship, a patchwork of garden and wasteland in which the waste is increasing. 'There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgement of God in the land.... Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away' (Hosea 4:1,3). Thus, one consequence of our misuse of the earth is an unjust denial of God's created bounty to other human beings, both now and in the future.

- God's purpose in Christ is to heal and bring to wholeness not only persons but the entire created order. 'For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross' (Col. 1:19-20).

- In Jesus Christ, believers are forgiven, transformed and brought into God's kingdom. 'If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation' (2 Cor. 5:17). The presence of the kingdom of God is marked not only by renewed fellowship with God, but also by renewed harmony and justice between people, and by renewed harmony and justice between people and the rest of the created world. 'You will go out with joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills will burst into song before you, and all the trees of the field will clap their hands' (Isa. 55:12).

We believe that in Christ there is hope, not only for men, women and children, but also for the rest of creation which is suffering from the consequences of human sin.

- Therefore we call upon all Christians to reaffirm that all creation is God's; that God created it good; and that God is renewing it in Christ.

- We encourage deeper reflection on the substantial biblical and theological teaching which speaks of God's work of redemption in terms of the renewal and completion of God's purpose in creation.

- We seek a deeper reflection on the wonders of God's creation and the principles by which creation works. We also urge a careful consideration of how our corporate and individual actions respect and comply with God's ordinances for creation.

- We encourage Christians to incorporate the extravagant creativity of God into their lives by increasing the nurturing role of beauty and the arts in their personal, ecclesiastical, and social patterns.

- We urge individual Christians and churches to be centres of creation's care and renewal, both delighting in creation as God's gift, and enjoying it as God's provision, in ways which sustain and heal the damaged fabric of the creation which God has entrusted to us.

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- We recall Jesus' words that our lives do not consist in the abundance of our possessions, and therefore we urge followers of Jesus to resist the allure of wastefulness and overconsumption by making personal lifestyle choices that express humility, forbearance, self restraint and frugality.
- We call on Christians to work for godly, just, and sustainable economies which reflect God's sovereign economy and enable men, women and children to flourish along with all the diversity of creation. We recognise that poverty forces people to degrade creation in order to survive; therefore we support the development of just, free economies which empower the poor and create abundance without diminishing creation's bounty.
- We commit ourselves to work for responsible public policies which embody the principles of biblical stewardship of creation.
- We invite Christians – individuals, congregations and organisations – to join with us in this evangelical declaration on the environment, becoming a covenant people in an ever-widening circle of biblical care for creation.
- We call upon Christians to listen to and work with all those who are concerned about the healing of creation, with an eagerness both to learn from them and also to share with them our conviction that the God whom all people sense in creation (Acts 17:27) is known fully only in the Word made flesh in Christ the living God, who made and sustains all things.
- We make this declaration knowing that until Christ returns to reconcile all things, we are called to be faithful stewards of God's good garden, our earthly home.