

The modern environmental movement in the United States was launched between the publication of Rachel Carson's groundbreaking book *Silent Spring* in 1962 and the first-ever Earth Day celebration in 1970. Endorsed by Supreme Court Justice William O. Douglas, *Silent Spring* documented the detrimental effects of pesticides and pollution on the environment. Carson's *Silent Spring* inspired widespread public environmental concern on a generation of young Americans known for their social protests.¹

Almost eight years later, United States Senator Gaylord Nelson of Wisconsin announced that there would be a nationwide grassroots protest to thrust the environment onto the national agenda. On April 22, 1970, twenty million Americans participated in the first annual Earth Day. Thousands of colleges and universities organized protests against the deterioration of the environment. Due to widespread environmental activism and environmental disasters during the 1960s, there was an unprecedented surge in environmental legislation in the 1970s.²

As more and more attention was being focused on environmental concerns in the secular arena, theologians in mainline Christian denominations were also taking up the issue of environmentalism. Joseph Sittler, a Lutheran and theology professor at the University of Chicago Divinity School, authored two influential books about the church's responsibility for the environment: *The Ecology of Faith* (1961) and *The Care of the Earth* (1964).³ Mainline Protestant denominations such as the United Methodist Church and The Episcopal Church began to adopt resolutions in support of ecological concerns. Mainline denominations also launched educational programs on the environment and emphasized legislative lobbying on behalf of certain environmental policies. Other Christian denominations particularly those within the evangelical world remained mostly apathetic towards environmental concerns.⁴

Baptists as a whole have a mixed track record when it comes to the environment. Some Baptist groups such as the American Baptist Churches USA as well as some moderate Southern

¹ Benjamin Kline, *First Along the River: A Brief History of the U.S. Environmental Movement* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007), 73-82.

² Ibid.

³ Robert Booth Fowler, *The Greening of Protestant Thought* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 13-17.

⁴ Ibid.

Baptists have been voicing their concern on environmental issues since the first Earth Day in 1970. Other Baptists, particularly those who are more evangelical and more theologically conservative, have only decided to join the conversation in recent years. After briefly discussing popular ethical approaches to the environment held by Baptists, this paper will survey the public positions and statements made by a wide variety of Baptist groups in America from across the theological spectrum.

Ethical Approaches Adopted by Baptists

Baptists in America have adopted a wide variety of ethical approaches towards environmental stewardship in recent decades. The most popular have been the “Anthropocentric Utilitarian” approach and the hybrid “Earthkeeper Stewardship” ethic. The “Anthropocentric Utilitarian” approach is premised upon the theological idea that land, air, water and non-human living creatures have worth only according to their utilitarian value for humans.⁵ Under this approach, Christians interpret the biblical command “to till and keep” the garden (Genesis 2:15) as meaning that Christians are “to cause the earth to serve man.” The “Anthropocentric Utilitarian” approach emphasizes the free-market and avoids government action that requires conservation. According to Baptist ethicists David Gushee and Glen Stassen, the “Anthropocentric Utilitarian” approach insists that Christians “should trust the market to tell us when we should conserve.”⁶ The “Anthropocentric Utilitarian” ethical approach is popular among theologically conservative and fundamentalist Baptists. It has been adopted by leaders within the current Southern Baptist Convention such as Richard Land and the Southern Baptist signatories to the Cornwall Alliance’s declaration titled “A Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection of the Poor: An Evangelical Response to Global Warming.”

The “Earthkeeper Stewardship” ethical approach has both anthropocentric and theocentric characteristics. This hybrid ethical approach is partly anthropocentric because the interests and responsibilities of humans are of central concern. According to Gushee and Stassen, “Because

⁵ Glen Harold Stassen and David Gushee, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (Westmont, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 435-441.

⁶ *Ibid.*

humans are intrinsically connected with the rest of the natural order, even anthropocentric approaches can be concerned about the ecological crisis because of its negative impact on humanity, especially the poor.”⁷ The “Earthkeeper Stewardship” ethic is partly theocentric because it affirms that humans are mandated by God to be stewards of creation. A theocentric ethical approach emphasizes that “God is the center of value” and “God’s creatures, including humans, have value only within God’s created community.” God is not disconnected from creation. Instead, God the Creator is “dynamically involved in caring for creation,. Thus, according to Gushee and Stassen, “worshipping God directly involves us in caring for the creation, as God is so involved in caring for the creation and for us as responsible parts of Creation.”⁸

Part anthropocentric and part theocentric, the “Earthkeeper Stewardship” ethic affirms the basic ecological tenet that there exists a symbiotic relationship between humans and earth’s ecosystems. While economic growth is necessary, there are indeed limits to economic growth and “the need for economic reorganization into a system that is sustainable and just.” In other words, the “Earthkeeper Stewardship” ethic desires that a balance be found so that the needs of the poor are met while also preserving the environment.⁹ American Baptists such as Tony Campolo and moderate Southern Baptists such as Henlee Barnette have been proponents of this “Earthkeeper Stewardship” ethic.

American Baptist Churches USA

The American Baptist Churches USA (ABC-USA) is a major Baptist denomination consisting of 1.4 million Baptists in approximately 5,800 Baptist churches. ABC-USA descended from the Triennial Convention of 1814 which was the first national Baptist denomination—primarily a foreign missions society—in the United States. ABC-USA was founded in 1907 as the Northern Baptist Convention.¹⁰ Over the past fifty years, ABC-USA has taken a public stand on a plethora of social issues including but not limited to affirmative action, arms reduction, the AIDS

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Bill J. Leonard, ed., *Dictionary of Baptists in America* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Christian Fellowship of the USA, 1994), 21-22. The Northern Baptist Convention became the American Baptist Convention in 1950 and changed its name to American Baptist Churches USA in 1972.

Crisis, capital punishment, civil rights, economic justice, gambling, hunger, homosexuality, immigration reform, peacekeeping and peacemaking, racial justice, tax policy and religious liberty. Since the modern environmental movement began nearly forty years ago, American Baptists have taken strong stands on a variety of environmental issues.¹¹

American Baptists first spoke out on environmental issues as a result of the Mideast Oil Crisis of the 1970's. In 1977, the General Board of the American Baptist Churches responded to the energy crisis by adopting a policy statement entitled "Energy," which called on American Baptists to exercise responsible stewardship of energy resources. The statement declared:

In the light of limited fossil fuels and while they are still relatively abundant, it is essential that we consider our stewardship of the earth's resources for present and future generations, the use of energy in our society, the needs of persons in the rest of the world and the options presently seen for the future generation of energy currently and in the future. The choices we make concerning energy in the next few years will greatly affect the future of people on this planet.¹²

The statement asked American Baptists to "conserve fossil fuels" and utilize renewable resources in order to avoid contributing to the "pollution of the environment and rape of the earth." The General Board urged that more attention and funding must be given to the research and development of technologies that use alternative forms of energy. After including a long discussion of the biblical and theological foundations of environmental stewardship, the statement concluded with an even longer list of public policy recommendations in addition to recommendations for individuals and local congregations.¹³

The General Board of the American Baptist Churches again waded into environmental waters three years later with a resolution on "The Disposal of Hazardous and Radioactive Wastes."¹⁴ This statement blended an anthropocentric ethic with a distinctly theocentric ethic by

¹¹ C. Douglas Weaver, *In Search of the New Testament Church: The Baptist Story* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2008), 270-271.

¹² American Baptist Churches USA, "American Baptist Policy Statement on Energy," <http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol/energy.htm> (accessed October 24, 2008). An official policy statement of ABC-USA has been adopted by a 3/4 majority vote of the General Board of American Baptist Churches. A policy statement represents the position of ABC-USA on a broad issue. See American Baptist Churches USA, "Official Policy Statements and Resolutions of American Baptist Churches in the USA," <http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol> (accessed October 24, 2008).

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ American Baptist Churches USA, "American Baptist Resolution on Hazardous, Toxic, and Radioactive Waste," <http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol/hazmat.htm> (accessed October 24, 2008). This statement passed by the slim margin of 88 to

focusing on the interests and rights of humans while also stressing the biblical responsibility of humans to God's creation. In the statement, the General Board reiterated that one human right is the "right to a secure and healthy environment, clean air, pure water and an earth that can nurture and support present and future generations." Citing biblical concerns for humanity and the earth, the General Board encouraged the government to pass legislation and find real solutions to the pressing problem of radioactive waste disposal.¹⁵

In 1983, the General Board also reaffirmed a short resolution adopted in 1970 which called upon American Baptist congregations and other Christian denominations to "take individual corrective measures to eliminate and reduce pollution in the environment in our homes, streets, parks and public places." The resolution entitled "On Environmental Concerns" also called on the government to pass legislation which would do the same.¹⁶ In a 1988 resolution, American Baptists again emphasized the importance of caring for the environment and reducing pollution through both individual and governmental efforts.¹⁷

During the summer of 1989, the General Board adopted an extensive policy statement on ecology. Convention leaders stressed that "the study of ecology has become a religious, social and political concern because every area of life is affected by careless use of our environment."

Consequently, "the Creation is in crisis."¹⁸ Sounding the trumpets, the statement declared:

Today the human race faces an unprecedented challenge to rediscover the role of steward in a time of extraordinary peril and promise. The explosive growth of population, the depletion of nonrenewable resources, tropical deforestation, the pollution of air, land and water, waste of precious materials and the general assault of God's creation springing from greed, arrogance and ignorance present the possibility of irreversible damage to the intricate, natural systems upon which life depends....The danger is real and great. Churches and

33 with 7 abstentions. According to the official American Baptist Churches USA website, resolutions must receive a 2/3 majority vote of the General Board and must be based on a previously passed policy statement. Resolutions represent the position of the ABC-USA on a specific issue. See "Official Policy Statements and Resolutions of American Baptist Churches in the USA."

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ American Baptist Churches USA, "American Baptist Resolution on Environmental Concerns," <http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol/environ.htm> (accessed October 24, 2008). A policy statement adopted the year before in 1982 by the General Board urged American Baptists to educate themselves and the public on the ecological concerns relating to nuclear power. See American Baptist Churches USA, "American Baptist Resolution on Nuclear Power: Seeking Rational Solutions," <http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol/nukepowr.htm> (accessed October 24, 2008).

¹⁷ "American Baptist Resolution on Environmental Concerns."

¹⁸ American Baptist Churches USA, "American Baptist Policy Statement on Ecology: An Ecological Situational Analysis," <http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol/ecology.htm> (accessed October 24, 2008).

individual Christians must take responsibility to God and neighbor seriously and respond (Eph. 2:10).¹⁹

Before concluding with a list of policy suggestions, the statement strongly emphasized that ecology and justice are inseparable. It further asserted that as Christians and faithful stewards, American Baptists have a duty to affirm and support programs, legislation and organizations that protect the environment as well as the poor.²⁰ American Baptists followed the lead of their General Board in 1990 and passed a resolution entitled "Individual Lifestyle for Ecological Responsibility" which called on American Baptists to reexamine their lifestyle and "live simply so that others may simply live." This plea to conserve and consume less also urged American Baptists to become educated on environmental issues.²¹

In 1991, American Baptist Churches became one of the first Christian denominations to address the issue of global warming. A resolution acknowledged that "increased levels of gases are gradually causing the earth's atmosphere and surface to become warmer." Much of the increase in levels of greenhouse gases were attributed directly to "human industrial activity." Quoting from a 1990 report from the Second World Climate Conference held in Geneva, the American Baptist resolution warned that "if the increase in greenhouse gas concentrations is not limited, then predicted climate change would place stresses on the natural and social systems unprecedented in the past 10,000 years."²² The resolution noted that consequences of global warming include the partial melting of polar ice caps and the rise in sea level. Such rises could "inundate land that is densely populated and totally submerge island nations in the South Pacific and elsewhere."²³

Citing the biblical commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself," the resolution put forth over a dozen different ways to "live in harmony with God's creation" and "address the causes and reverse the consequences of global warming." At the top of this list, American Baptists were

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ American Baptist Churches USA, "American Baptist Resolution on Individual Lifestyle for Ecological Responsibility," <http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol/indvlife.htm> (accessed October 24, 2008).

²² American Baptist Churches USA, "American Baptist Resolution on Global Warming," <http://www.abc-usa.org/resources/resol/globwarm.htm> (accessed October 24, 2008).

²³ Ibid.

urged to advocate the passage of legislation to reduce carbon dioxide output and to set reduction targets for other greenhouse gases. The support of mandatory higher fuel efficiency for new vehicles, greater support for public transportation, and an international treaty on global warming with specific targets for greenhouse gas reduction were also encouraged.²⁴ Collectively, American Baptist Churches USA has issued more resolutions and policy statements on environment-related issues than any Baptist body in America. By adopting the “Earthkeeper Stewardship” ethical approach, an approach that has been made popular by notable American Baptists such as Tony Campolo, ABC-USA resolutions and policy statements on the environment reflected a thorough integration of anthropocentric and theocentric focuses.

Ecumenical Environmental Statements

Over the past decade, Baptist leaders from mainline denominations have signed various ecumenical and interfaith statements to express their Christian commitment to pressing environmental causes. Shortly before leaving office, President Bill Clinton, a Baptist, was urged by the heads of twenty-eight Protestant and Orthodox Christian denominations to negotiate a strong international treaty that actually addressed the threat of global warming by reducing pollution caused by burning fossil fuels. These Christian leaders asserted that the 1997 Kyoto Protocol is an “important witness to God’s redemption of creation and to the importance of protecting God’s children and God’s creation, now and for future generations.” The Rev. William Shaw, President of the six-million member National Baptist Convention USA, affixed his signature to this letter.²⁵ The Kyoto Protocol, however, was never ratified by the United States.

In May 2001, Jewish and Christian leaders from across the United States signed a letter which described American foreign policy as a cause of global warming. These leaders proclaimed

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ National Council of Churches, “Religious Leaders Call for Action on Global Warming: U.S. Faith Groups, at The Hague Urge Clinton to Finish Global Warming Treaty,” November 20, 2000, <http://www.ncccusa.org/news/00news104.html> (accessed October 24, 2008). The Kyoto Protocol is an international agreement to commit industrialized nations to a reduction in emissions of greenhouse gases by 2010. Kyoto commits non-industrialized nations to a system of incentives to encourage sustainable development which does not produce greenhouse gases. Thus far, 181 countries have signed and ratified the Kyoto Protocol. However, the United States has refused to ratify the agreement because it feels that Kyoto is unfairly burdensome. Nonetheless, a number of large cities in the United States have chosen to become “Kyoto cities” and have voluntarily set standards for emissions reductions.

that the United States has a “moral responsibility to lead a transition to a new sustainable global energy system.” According to the letter, “preventing climate change is a preeminent expression of faithfulness to our Creator God.” Among the signatories were Baptists Dr. C. Mackey Daniel, President of the Progressive National Baptist Convention, Rev. Dr. Stan Hasteley, Executive-Director of the Alliance of Baptists and the Rev. Dr. Robert H. Roberts, Interim General Secretary of American Baptist Churches USA. Together, these three men represented organizations comprised of nearly four million Baptists.²⁶

In February, 2002, forty-five heads of Christian denominations such as the United Methodist Church, The Episcopal Church, and the American Baptist Churches joined America’s highest ranking Jewish leaders to lobby members of the United States Senate to turn their attention to the issues of energy conservation, fuel efficiency and alternative energy development.²⁷ The interfaith letter described energy conservation as an urgent moral and strategic priority. Rooting their argument in a fundamental theocentric concern for “God’s creation and God’s children,” the faith leaders expressed their distress about global climate change. They encouraged the Senate to “invest significantly more resources in renewable energy research,” “apply the strictest feasible energy efficiency standards to consumer products,” and “include carbon dioxide as a regulated pollutant from power plants.” The Baptist leaders who signed this Jewish-Christian letter included the Rev. Dr. Stan Hasteley and Rev. Roy Medley, General Secretary of the American Baptist Churches USA.²⁸

²⁶ National Council of Churches, “Jewish and Christian Leaders, Including Heads of the NCC and Many Member Communion, Sign ‘Open Letter’ on ‘Energy Conservation and God’s Creation,’” May 21, 2001, <http://www.nccusa.org/news/01news43a.html> (accessed October 24, 2008). The Alliance of Baptists is a fellowship of approximately 127 Baptist churches espousing moderate-to-liberal theological and social positions. The Alliance of Baptists was formed in 1987 as a result of the Fundamentalist Takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention. See Leonard 21-22. Formed in 1961 as a result of a split within the National Baptist Convention U.S.A., Inc., the Progressive National Baptist Convention (PNBC) is an African-American Baptist denomination comprised of 2.5 million members in 741 churches. PNBC has followed in the footsteps of their most prominent member, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., by becoming extremely involved in the struggle for civil rights and social justice issues. See Leonard 198-199. See also Weaver, 201-214.

²⁷ Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, “Jewish and Christian Leaders Join in Support of Bold Energy Conservation Plan,” February 26, 2002, http://www.coejl.org/news/20020226_senateenergy.php (accessed October 24, 2008). These ecumenical and interfaith statements were deeply rooted in a theocentric ethical approach because of their heavy emphasis on the biblical mandate by God to be stewards of creation.

²⁸ Ibid.

Progressive National Baptist Convention

African-American Baptists have never been at the forefront of the environmental movement. Environmental action has tended to be costly, and pastors have questioned encouraging poor congregations who cannot afford food or clothing for their children to purchase more expensive light bulbs and other costly yet more environment-friendly products. Known for their involvement in social justice issues, the Progressive National Baptist Convention finally took up the issue of environmental justice at their 2007 meeting in Washington D.C. Messengers to the PNBC passed a resolution calling on “Progressive Baptists to recognize the urgent need to reduce global warming pollution.” The resolution asked Progressive Baptists to consider proposals to “reduce CO2 and other greenhouse gas emissions to avoid the most catastrophic effects of global warming, to foster sustainable development around the world and to promote the development of innovative technologies.” The resolution issued a strong request to government officials to “ensure an appropriate balance between care for the environment, effects on economies, and impacts on the poor” when considering programs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Like other resolutions, individual efforts to reduce pollution and improve the environment were also emphasized. Dewitt Smith Jr., President of the PNBC, explained the denomination’s theocentric rationale for passing the resolution: “We were placed here by God to be caretakers, and therefore we are concerned about global warming and will do all that we can to help in the situation rather than hurt.”²⁹

Southern Baptist Convention

The Southern Baptist Convention, formed in 1845, became the largest Baptist (and Protestant) body in America. Practically any statement that it makes on social issues attracts public attention. At the 1970 annual meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention held in Denver, Colorado, messengers for the first time passed a resolution that dealt with the environment. The statement “On The Environment” acknowledged that “man has created a crisis by polluting the air, poisoning the streams, and ravaging the soil.” This historic resolution called on Christians and churches

²⁹ Congressman Emanuel Cleaver II, “Progressive Baptist Convention Passes Cleaver Resolution,” August 10, 2007, http://www.house.gov/list/press/mo05_cleaver/ProgressiveBaptistConventionResolution.html (accessed October 24, 2008).

everywhere to “practice stewardship of the environment and work with government, industry, and others to correct the ravaging of the earth.” The resolution also requested the Southern Baptist Convention’s Christian Life Commission to “encourage effective education and action to meet the environmental crisis.”³⁰

At the 1974 annual meeting, Southern Baptist messengers again addressed the environment with a resolution entitled “On Stewardship of God’s Creation.” This extremely theocentric resolution emphasized the biblical responsibility of Christians to God as stewards of God’s creation. By passing this particular resolution, Southern Baptist messengers were embracing a critical introspective analysis of their self-described “selfish and nearsighted” use of God’s creation. “On Stewardship of God’s Creation” resolved that Southern Baptists “ask the forgiveness of God...for the selfish use of God’s creation” and “assume our individual and corporate responsibilities as faithful stewards by establishing personal, family, business, civic, and church priorities in the conservation of our resources.” As in the previous resolution, “On Stewardship of God’s Creation” concluded with a general plea for Congress to take action. However, without giving any specific policy recommendations, it is incredibly difficult to understand what Southern Baptist messengers had in mind exactly when calling upon the government to take “aggressive action” on environmental issues.³¹

The 1980s was a decade of turmoil and perpetual conflict in the life of the Southern Baptist Convention.³² During this tumultuous time, Southern Baptist messengers took strong stands against abortion, homosexuality, and the ordination of women. However, the Convention failed to address any environmental issue. By 1990, the battle for the Southern Baptist Convention was over and a fundamentalist-led coalition of conservatives had gained complete control of the denomination.

³⁰ Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution On The Environment,” <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=452> (accessed October 25, 2008).

³¹ Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution On Stewardship of God’s Creation,” <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=453> (accessed October 25, 2008).

³² Barry Hankins, *Uneasy in Babylon: Southern Baptist Conservatives and American Culture* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The University of Alabama Press, 2002), 2-3. Described as a “Fundamentalist Takeover” by many observers or known as the “Conservative Resurgence” by those who claimed victory, this twentieth century Southern Baptist controversy was “one of the most contentious and significant denominational battles in American religious history” according to historian Barry Hankins.

With the power struggle over, resolutions adopted a decidedly more theological and political outlook.³³

At the 1990 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention, messengers addressed the environment for the first time since 1974. In a resolution entitled “On Environmental Stewardship,” messengers citing Genesis 2:15 proclaimed, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it.” Unlike the 1974 resolution on environmental stewardship, the 1990 resolution did not accept personal responsibility for the misuse of God’s creation. Before actually calling on Southern Baptists to be “faithful stewards” and “better stewards,” the resolution strongly warned that Christians are “forbidden to worship the creation.” Also unlike the two previous resolutions on the environment, “On Environmental Stewardship” did not urge any type of governmental action.³⁴ Clearly, Southern Baptists had adopted a more conservative approach to environmental issues and their place in a social agenda.

Evangelical Climate Initiative

In February 2006, an alliance of evangelical leaders called the Evangelical Climate Initiative released a declaration called “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call To Action.” Among the declaration’s eighty-six signatories were academics, megachurch pastors, and thirty nine presidents of evangelical colleges. Baptists accounted for twenty-four of the eighty-six signatories. Notable Baptist signatories included Rick Warren, pastor of Saddleback Church and author of the best seller “The Purpose-Driven Life,” and Timothy George, Founding Dean of Samford University’s Beeson Divinity School.³⁵ The signatures of presidents of Southern Baptist colleges located in Florida, Mississippi, Missouri, Tennessee and Texas were also included.³⁶ The principal author of the declaration was well-known Baptist ethicist David Gushee, then at Union University.³⁷

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Southern Baptist Convention, “Resolution on Environmental Stewardship,” <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=997> (accessed October 25, 2008).

³⁵ Evangelical Climate Initiative, “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action,” <http://christiansandclimate.org/learn/call-to-action/> (accessed October 25, 2008).

³⁶ Bob Allen, “Evangelicals Divide Over Global Warming,” *EthicsDaily.com*, February 9, 2006, http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=6949 (accessed October 25, 2008).

³⁷ David Gushee, *The Future of Faith in American Politics: The Public Witness of the Evangelical Center* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008), 175-179.

This controversial declaration which included anthropocentric and theocentric characteristics conceded that climate change (often called global warming) “has not been treated as a pressing issue or majority priority” by evangelical leaders. The declaration sadly noted that many of the signatories “required considerable convincing before becoming persuaded that climate change is a real problem” which should be taken seriously by the evangelical community. Now convinced of the threat of global warming to the environment, these evangelicals offered four “simple but urgent claims” for their “brothers and sisters in the Christian community” to consider. “Human-induced climate change is real,” and “evangelicals must engage this issue without any further lingering over the basic reality of the problem or humanity’s responsibility to address it.” Second, the statement claimed that “the consequences of climate change will be significant and will hit the poor the hardest.” The statement argued that even small rises in global temperatures increases “the likelihood of refugees from flooding or famine, violent conflicts, and international instability, which could lead to more security threats to our nation.” Consequently, “millions of people could die in this century because of climate change.”³⁸

Third, the statement claimed that “Christian moral convictions demand our response to the climate change problem.” Referencing a host of biblical passages, the statement concluded that “love of God, love of neighbor, and the demands of stewardship are more than enough reasons for evangelical Christians to respond to the climate change problem with moral passion and concrete action.” Fourth, the statement insisted that “the need to act now is urgent.” Government, churches, businesses, and individuals all have an immediate role to play in addressing climate change.³⁹

This “Call to Action” statement urged federal legislation that would require reductions in carbon dioxide emissions through “cost-effective, market-based mechanisms” – a phrase lifted from a 2005 bi-partisan United States Senate resolution authored by New Mexico Senators Pete V. Domenici, a Republican, and Jeff Bingaman, a Democrat. This U.S. Senate resolution called for regulatory environmental measures such as a cap and trade program, a system in which industries

³⁸ Evangelical Climate Initiative, “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action.”

³⁹ Ibid.

would buy or trade permits to emit greenhouse gases. The ECI's statement commended the Domenici-Bingaman resolution and encouraged other Senators to fulfill their pledge to enact legislation aimed to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. In conjunction with the release of this declaration, the Evangelical Climate Initiative launched a multi-state television and radio advertisement campaign in states with influential legislators. The Evangelical Climate Initiative also announced their intention to launch informational campaigns in evangelical churches and host educational events at Christian colleges.⁴⁰

The Cornwall Alliance

Just several months after the Evangelical Climate Initiative released its "Call to Action" declaration, an internal evangelical scrum erupted. An ecumenical group comprised of 113 evangelicals and nineteen non-evangelicals under the auspices of the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation issued a pointed attack on the Evangelical Climate Initiative's "Call to Action."⁴¹ This twenty-five page long anti-ECI declaration was entitled "A Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection of the Poor: An Evangelical Response to Global Warming."⁴²

Written primarily by Calvin Beisner, a long-time libertarian Christian advocate of the "Anthropocentric Utilitarian" approach and endorsed by prominent leaders from what is popularly known as the "Religious Right" such as Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council and Louis Sheldon of the Traditional Values Coalition, the "Call to Truth" declaration responded point-by-point to the ECI's four major claims and drew five major conclusions. These conclusions were completely at odds with the Evangelical Climate Initiative. First, "Call to Truth" asserted that global warming will not have catastrophic consequences for humanity, even the poor. Instead,

⁴⁰ Ibid. See also Laurie Goodstein, "Evangelical Leaders Join Global Warming Initiative," *The New York Times*, February 8, 2006, http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/08/national/08warm.htm?_r=3&oref=slogin&pagewanted=all (accessed October 24, 2008).

⁴¹ Tom Strode, "Coalition of more than 100 evangelicals presents alternative on global warming," *Baptist Press*, July 31, 2006, <http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?id=23708> (accessed October 25, 2008). See also Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation, "A Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection of the Poor: An Evangelical Response to Global Warming," <http://www.cornwallalliance.org/docs/a-call-to-truth-prudence-and-protection-of-the-poor.pdf> (accessed October 25, 2008). In November, 2005, the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance (ISA) was formed to take the principles of the Cornwall Declaration and apply them to specific public policy issues in the environmental dialogue. ISA changed its name to the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation in May, 2007 to more clearly reflect the tenants of its flagship document.

⁴² Ibid. See also Cornwall Alliance, "A Call to Truth."

global warming will have "moderate and mixed (not only harmful but also helpful) consequences in the foreseeable future. Second, the declaration concluded that natural causes likely account for a large part of global warming while human emissions of greenhouse gases are only "a minor and insignificant contributor to its causes." Third, "reducing carbon dioxide emissions would have at most an insignificant impact on the quantity and duration of global warming and would not significantly reduce alleged harmful effects." Fourth, according to the declaration, government-mandated carbon-dioxide emissions reductions "not only would not significantly curtail global warming or reduce its harmful effects but also would cause greater harm than good to humanity." In contrast to the ECI statement, "Call to Truth" found that legislation aimed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions would actually hurt the poor.⁴³

Fifth and finally, "Call to Truth" concluded that the "most prudent response is not to try (almost certainly unsuccessfully and at enormous cost) to prevent or reduce whatever slight warming might really occur." Instead, "Call to Truth" argued that society must "adapt by fostering means that will effectively protect humanity" and it accused environmentalists of hindering economic progress in developed and especially developing nations. By setting up what many have described as a "false dichotomy," the declaration ultimately concluded that economic priorities must always trump environmental priorities.⁴⁴ Such a conclusion is consistent with the "Anthropocentric Utilitarian" ethical approach which emphasizes the free-market over theocentric concerns. Other approaches such as the more theocentric "Earthkeeper Stewardship" ethic displayed in American Baptist resolutions emphasize finding the appropriate balance between economic growth and environmental justice.

Southern Baptist academics had a noticeable presence on the list of "Call to Truth" signatories. Most influential among the Southern Baptists giving their support to the anti-ECI declaration were Russell Moore, Dean of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary's School of Theology and Barrett Duke of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics & Religious Liberty

⁴³Cornwall Alliance, "A Call to Truth."

⁴⁴Ibid.

Commission.⁴⁵ Duke, a public policy specialist and advisory board member of the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation, spoke gushingly of the declaration: “the data reveals a much different picture of global warming than we are hearing from the popular media....By offering a much needed balance to the doomsday scenarios and their promoters, the authors have provided an invaluable service to those of us trying to find the truth in the midst of the hype.”⁴⁶

Southern Baptists Revisited

Sixteen years after their last resolution on the environment, Southern Baptist messengers revisited the issue. At the 2006 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention held in Greensboro, North Carolina, messengers passed “On Environmentalism and Evangelicals.” This resolution warned that environmentalism was “threatening to become a wedge issue to divide the evangelical community and further distract its members from the priority of the Great Commission.” In addition to making the accusation that “some in our culture” have “made environmentalism into a neo-pagan religion,” this harshly-worded resolution made the newsworthy assertion that “the scientific community is divided on the effects of mankind’s impact on the environment.” Clearly, both the accusation and assertion were aimed at the “green evangelicals” of the Evangelical Climate Initiative.⁴⁷ Reflecting on the resolution, Robert Parham of the Nashville-based Baptist Center for Ethics lamented, “Sadly, the Southern Baptist Convention adopted a resolution in Greensboro that slams thoughtful evangelicals who have committed themselves to working on global warming. The resolution rightly criticizes the worship of nature and wrongly ignores the worship of the American marketplace. It offers not a word of admonition about our materialistic culture and scientists who do the bidding of greed-driven corporations.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Cornwall Alliance For The Stewardship of Creation, “An Open Letter to the Signers of ‘Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action’ and Others Concerned About Global Warming,” <http://www.cornwallalliance.org/docs/an-open-letter-to-the-signers-of-climate-change-an-evangelical-call-to-action-and-others-concerned-about-global-warming.pdf> (accessed October 28, 2008).

⁴⁶ Strobe, “Coalition of more than 100 evangelicals presents alternative on global warming.”

⁴⁷ Southern Baptist Convention, “8. On Environmentalism and Evangelicals,” <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1159> (accessed October 25, 2008).

⁴⁸ Robert Parham, “Reading the Green Bible,” *EthicsDaily.com*, June 16, 2006, http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=7506 (accessed October 25, 2008).

The next summer at the 2007 meeting of the Southern Baptist Convention held in San Antonio, Texas, messengers passed a resolution titled “On Global Warming” which according to the Associated Press “questioned the prevailing scientific belief that humans are largely to blame for the phenomenon” of climate change.⁴⁹ A rather lengthy resolution, “On Global Warming” acknowledged a rise in global temperatures but rejected government-mandated limits on carbon-dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions as “very dangerous” because they could lead to “major economic hardships worldwide.” This skeptical resolution urged Southern Baptists to “proceed cautiously in the human-induced global warming debate in light of conflicting scientific research” and to only support public policies that ensure “an appropriate balance between care for the environment, effects on economies and impact on the poor.”⁵⁰ The continued skepticism of prevailing scientific views expressed by Southern Baptist messengers calls into question the authenticity of the messengers expressed commitment to “care for the environment.”

After “On Global Warming” passed, Wiley Drake, the Second Vice-President of the Southern Baptist Convention summarized the resolution’s message as, “We don’t believe in global warming.”⁵¹ “On Global Warming” was not without its critics. Baptist ethicist Robert Parham blasted the resolution and declared:

Southern Baptist fundamentalists are engaged in deception at two levels. First, they deliberately misrepresent the near scientific consensus on global warming. Second, they claim concern for the poor, who already suffer too much from climate change, when they are really acting as a religious shield for an economic system more committed to short-term profit than earth care. When Southern Baptists side with science-fiction writers and free-enterprise ideologues against the best scientists in the world, the SBC has disconnected itself from responsible moral reflection.⁵²

Less than a year after Southern Baptist messengers approved a resolution which questioned the near consensus scientific belief that humans are largely to blame for the climate change crisis, a

⁴⁹ Eric Gorski, “Baptists question human role in global warming,” *USA Today*, June 14, 2007, http://www.usatoday.com/weather/climate/globalwarming/2007-06-13-baptists-warming-vote_N.htm (accessed October 26, 2008). Barrett Duke who serves as Vice-President for Public Policy with the SBC’s Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission helped write this resolution. As noted above, Duke serves on the advisory board of the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation.

⁵⁰ Southern Baptist Convention, “5. On Global Warming,” <http://www.sbc.net/resolutions/amResolution.asp?ID=1171> (accessed October 26, 2008).

⁵¹ Bob Allen, “Southern Baptists Reject Scientific Consensus About Global Warming,” *EthicsDaily.com*, June 14, 2007, http://www.ethicsdaily.com/BB_PDFS/BB_june20_2007.pdf (accessed October 24, 2008).

⁵² *Ibid.*

group of prominent Southern Baptists released a theocentric statement on environmental stewardship entitled “A Southern Baptist Declaration on the Environment and Climate.” This declaration was spearheaded by Jonathan Merritt, a twenty-five year-old seminary student and son of former SBC president James Merritt, who also signed the document. Included among the forty-six original signatories were past and present presidents of the Southern Baptist Convention, presidents of Southern Baptist affiliated colleges, universities and state conventions, Southern Baptist megachurch pastors, and a president of a Southern Baptist seminary.⁵³

Emphasizing Southern Baptist “deep and lasting commitment” to opposing abortion rights and same-sex marriage, the declaration stressed that the Southern Baptist Convention is “not a single-issue body.” Consequently, this new statement lamented the fact that the Southern Baptist Convention’s previous engagement with environmental stewardship has been “too timid, failing to produce a unified moral voice.” The declaration continued, “Our cautious response to these issues in the face of mounting evidence may be seen by the world as uncaring, reckless and ill-informed. We can do better.”⁵⁴ However, while the declaration commended government action, it made no specific policy recommendations in contrast to the Evangelical Climate Initiative.

The declaration offered four main points. First, human beings have a responsibility to care for creation and acknowledge their participation in environmental degradation. “Human activity is mixed in its impact on creation – sometimes productive and caring, but often reckless, preventable and sinful.” Thus, the signatories pledged to “take an unwavering stand to preserve and protect” God’s creation. Second, the declaration declared that it is “prudent to address global climate change.” On the question of whether global warming or climate change is primarily human-induced, the signatories cautiously concluded that “If consensus means unanimity, there is not a consensus regarding the anthropogenic nature of climate change or the severity of the problem.”⁵⁵ However, they acknowledged that “there is a general agreement among those engaged with this issue in the

⁵³ “Southern Baptist group shifts position on climate,” *The Christian Century*, April 8, 2008, <http://www.christiancentury.org/article.lasso?id=4650> (accessed October 26, 2008). For a complete list of signatories, see <http://baptistcreationcare.org>.

⁵⁴ Southern Baptist Environment & Climate Initiative, “A Southern Baptist Declaration on the Environment and Climate Change,” <http://baptistcreationcare.org/node/1> (accessed October 26, 2008).

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

scientific community.” In light of this “general agreement,” the signatories concluded that while the “claims of science are neither infallible nor unanimous, they are substantial and cannot be dismissed out of hand on either scientific or theological grounds.” Consequently, the declaration asserted that proactive steps must be taken and responsibility assumed by humans for their contribution to climate change – “however great or small.” On the third point, the declaration stressed that stewardship of the earth is required by Christian and Southern Baptist beliefs. Fourth and finally, the declaration declared that the time for individuals, churches, communities and governments to act is now. The fourth point concluded:

We realize that simply affirming our God-given responsibility to care for the earth will likely produce no tangible or effective results. Therefore, we pledge to find ways to curb ecological degradation through promoting biblical stewardship habits and increasing awareness in our homes, businesses where we find influence, relationships with others and in our local churches. Many of our churches do not actively preach, promote or practice biblical creation care. We urge churches to begin doing so.⁵⁶

This grassroots statement avoided the “Anthropocentric Utilitarian” ethical approach traditionally adopted by conservative and fundamentalist Southern Baptists. Instead, the statement effectively adopted an ethic with both anthropocentric and theocentric characteristics represented by the “Earthkeeper Stewardship” ethic. However, this Southern Baptist statement was quite cautious compared to the aggressive positions taken by most “Earthkeeper Stewardship” proponents. Nonetheless, by avoiding the traditional utilitarian approach and adopting a more friendly position towards science, the statement ignited a firestorm in Southern Baptist life and the broader conservative evangelical community. The declaration’s widespread media coverage seemed to infuriate Southern Baptist leaders. The *New York Times*’ headline read: “Southern Baptists Back a Shift on Climate Change.” CNN’s headline reported: “Southern Baptist leaders shift position on Climate Change.” *The Tennessean*’s front-page story claimed: “Baptists convert on global warming.”⁵⁷ Almost immediately Baptist Press, the official news service of the Southern Baptist Convention, ran a headlined story entitled “Seminary student’s climate change project is not

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Robert Parham, “Headlines Mislead Public About SBC Shift on Global Warming,” *EthicsDaily.com*, March 11, 2008, http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=10198 (accessed October 28, 2008).

SBC's." The environmental initiative was described as merely a "student project" of a "25-year old student at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary."⁵⁸ According to Merritt, several individuals who had signed the statement asked to have their names removed before it was released.⁵⁹

Shortly after the declaration made headlines, Richard Land and the Ethics & Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention along with a group of conservative religious leaders unveiled a new campaign aimed at getting one million supporters behind a so-called "biblical" view of the environment that downplayed concerns about global warming.⁶⁰ The "We Get It!" campaign's press release stressed that "knee-jerk reactions with good intentions can harm more than help."⁶¹ In a statement Land cited a recent Barna poll which showed that less than one-third of evangelicals believe that global warming is a major problem.⁶²

Baptist ethicist Robert Parham offered a few critical words: "These Christian Right leaders neither 'get it' about climate change nor have a significant record of working to end global poverty. To oppose initiatives to address global warming on the grounds of their concern about global poverty is a disingenuous smokescreen. Moreover, their track record of authentic concern about the environment is questionable." Parham continued, "What is puzzling is why they refuse to hear the near-scientific consensus about climate change and to heed the biblical witness' call to care for the earth in real actions, rather than shallow words. They appear to be more committed to corporate greed than meeting human need - needs which already result from climate change."⁶³

One former president of the Southern Baptist Convention described the denomination's response to Merritt and the declaration as "a little heavy handed" and warned that if there is not room for a healthy debate in the SBC, younger Southern Baptists will ultimately leave.⁶⁴ Daniel

⁵⁸ "Seminary student's climate change project is not SBC's," *Baptist Press*, March 10, 2008, <http://baptistpress.net/printerfriendly.asp?ID=27582> (accessed October 28, 2008).

⁵⁹ Brian Kaylor, "Organizers Defend Environmental Statement," *EthicsDaily.com*, March 12, 2008, http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=10208 (accessed October 28, 2008).

⁶⁰ Bob Allen, "Christian Right Leaders Push Back Against Concern for Global Warming," *EthicsDaily.com*, May 16, 2008, http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=10493 (accessed October 28, 2008).

⁶¹ The Institute on Religion and Democracy, "'We Get It' Campaign Kicks Off Campaign for a Million Signatures," May 15, 2008, http://www.we-get-it.org/press/Press_Release_-_IRD.pdf (accessed October 28, 2008).

⁶² Allen, "Christian Right Leaders Push Back Against Concern for Global Warming."

⁶³ Allen, "Christian Right Leaders Push Back Against Concern for Global Warming."

⁶⁴ Joe Westbury, "Younger conservative leaders need a voice in SBC," *The Christian Index*, April 10, 2008, <http://www.christianindex.org/4329.article> (accessed October 28, 2008).

Akin, President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, also expressed surprise at the “over-reaction” of the declaration’s critics. He explained, “Some Christians have a problem separating conservative theology from conservative politics. The two are not always the same.”⁶⁵ Clearly, Southern Baptists are more conservative regarding environmental issues than in the past, but enough diversity of opinion exists to ensure future conflict over the place of environmentalism in any future Southern Baptist social agenda.

Cooperative Baptist Fellowship

In August 1990, a group of moderate Southern Baptists who felt disenfranchised due to the “Fundamentalist Takeover” of the SBC convened in Atlanta and formed the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship (CBF). Unlike the Southern Baptist Convention and the American Baptist Churches USA, the CBF has chosen not to pass traditional resolutions at their annual General Assembly.⁶⁶ For many in the CBF, the passing of resolutions elicited memories of coercive doctrinal statements.

In October 2006, the Coordinating Council of the CBF voted to endorse the United Nations Millennium Development Goals which aim to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, achieve universal primary education, promote gender equality, reduce child mortality, improve maternal health, decrease HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and create a global partnership for development.⁶⁷ To ensure environmental sustainability, the United Nations has selected four targets to meet that goal. First and foremost, immediate international action must be taken to contain rising greenhouse gas emissions in order to mitigate climate change. Second, steps must be taken to “reduce biodiversity loss” by 2010. This involves slowing deforestation, preserving marine areas, and protecting species threatened with extinction. Third, by 2015 the number of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation

⁶⁵ Joe Westbury, “Seminary president lauds student’s courage,” *The Christian Index*, April 10, 2008, <http://www.christianindex.org/4327.article> (accessed October 28, 2008).

⁶⁶ Leonard, 93-94. See Weaver, 193-194. Since 1990, the CBF has achieved steady but slow growth, with approximately 1,900 partnering churches.

⁶⁷ Carla Wynn Davis, “CBF demonstrates commitment to U.N. goals during General Assembly,” Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, June 20, 2008, <http://www.thefellowship.info/News/Archive/CBF-demonstrates-commitment-to-U-N--goals-during-G> (accessed October 26, 2008).

must be cut in half. Fourth, by 2020 these seven millennium goals aim to achieve a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers.⁶⁸

The following summer at the 2007 General Assembly of the CBF, delegates affirmed these eight Millennium Development Goals and committed themselves to “ensuring environmental sustainability” worldwide. At the General Assembly, the Coordinating Council also approved an official partnership with Micah Challenge USA, a Christian campaign whose aim is to challenge governmental leaders to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.⁶⁹

Less than a year after committing themselves to “ensuring environmental sustainability,” the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship took an additional step towards becoming a better steward of the environment. On February 27, 2008, the CBF headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia announced that it was “Going Green” by implementing several new environment-friendly, energy-saving practices in order to reduce their impact on the environment.⁷⁰ Several churches affiliated with the CBF have also taken newsworthy steps towards becoming more “earth-friendly.” Beacon Hill Baptist Church, a small congregation in Boston, Massachusetts, implemented a church-wide recycling program. Pastor David Draper suggested that larger churches establish “environmental committees” to determine how to become more “earth-friendly.”⁷¹

Another CBF-affiliated congregation, Peachtree Baptist Church of Atlanta, Georgia, has gained a national reputation for their commitment to environmental stewardship. The Sierra Club, the oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization in the United States, profiled Peachtree Baptist Church in their 2008 Faith Report. The church was commended by the Sierra Club for launching a “Faith and the Environment” ministry which provides educational programs, organizes community events and implements green practices. According to the ministry coordinator, environmental values are integrated into all aspects of Peachtree’s worship: the sermons, music,

⁶⁸ United Nations, “Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability,” <http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/environ.shtml> (accessed October 26, 2008).

⁶⁹ Davis, “CBF demonstrates commitment to U.N. goals during General Assembly.”

⁷⁰ Patricia Heys, “Going Green,” Cooperative Baptist Fellowship Portal, <http://cbfportal.wordpress.com/2008/02/27/going-green> (accessed October 28, 2008).

⁷¹ Molly Harper White, “Boston Congregation Works To Be Earth-Friendly,” *Associated Baptist Press*, October 11, 2006, http://www.abpnews.com/index2.php?option=com_content&do_pdf=1&id=1538 (accessed October 28, 2008).

prayers, children's sermon and weekly bible study. Peachtree Baptist is also a member congregation of Georgia Interfaith Power and Light, an organization that works with faith communities to find practical ways to conserve energy and become more responsible stewards.⁷²

Other CBF-affiliated churches such as Highland Baptist Church in Louisville, Kentucky have made efforts to increase awareness of global warming by hosting screenings of Al Gore's Academy Award Winning documentary on the climate crisis entitled "An Inconvenient Truth." According to Highland Baptist Pastor Joe Phelps, "The trickiest thing is how you present [An Inconvenient Truth] in a way so it doesn't look like a partisan political stand. [Climate Change] is a political issue, but it is not just a political issue. It is a moral issue as well."⁷³ Despite the "green" efforts of churches like Peachtree Baptist Church and the environmental activism of Highland Park Baptist Church, most CBF-affiliated Baptist churches appear to be apathetic to environmental issues. When asked about the environmental stewardship practices of Fellowship Baptists, one high-ranking CBF leader explained: "I've probably been in 100 Baptist churches over the past 26 months – and I can honestly say that not a single one of them has struck me as being particularly concerned about environmental issues. In that period of time, I've sipped hundreds of cups of coffee in pastors' offices out of styrofoam cups! And I've seen very little evidence of recycling in most churches."⁷⁴ This fact begs the question of how many CBF-affiliated churches actually practice what moderate Baptists have historically preached in terms of basic environmental stewardship?

Robert Parham and the Baptist Center for Ethics

Over the past twenty years, Robert Parham has been the strongest, loudest, and most aggressive advocate for the environment in moderate Baptist life. Almost two decades after renowned ethicist Henlee Barnette penned *The Church and The Ecological Crisis*, Robert Parham

⁷² Sierra Club, "Faith in Action: Communities of Faith Bring Hope For The Planet," <http://www.sierraclub.org/partnerships/faith/report2008/report2008.pdf> (accessed October 29, 2008).

⁷³ Kentucky Interfaith Power & Light, "Screening of 'Inconvenient Truth' at Highland Baptist Church," <http://www.kentuckyipl.org/HighlandBaptist.html> (accessed October 25, 2008).

⁷⁴ Interview with a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship employee, October 27, 2008. Highly regarded Baptist historian Walter Shurden noted that he had contacted twenty-five Baptist preachers in January, 2007 and asked if they could send him a "Green Sermon" for publication in the Baptist Studies Bulletin. Shurden soon discovered that not one of the twenty-five pastors had devoted a sermon to environmental issues within the past two years. Consequently, Shurden issued a challenge to all of his Baptist preacher friends to preach an entire sermon on "The Care of Creation." See <http://www.centerforbaptiststudies.org/bulletin/2007/january.htm>

became the second Southern Baptist (now former Southern Baptist) to write a book on the environment. According to Parham, the fact that only two books were written on the environment in two decades in the nation's largest Protestant denomination indicates that environmental stewardship was not a priority.⁷⁵ Despite Southern Baptist apathy towards environmental issues, Parham made the environment one of his top priorities in his career as a Baptist ethicist. His 1991 book, *Loving Neighbors Across Time: A Christian Guide to Protecting the Earth*, argued that Jesus' commandment to "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39) means loving neighbors across time. Thus, we must love future generations enough to "curb our greed and protect the earth on which they will live."⁷⁶ Parham's theocentric ethic is especially "Christ-centered." Parham's advocacy on environmental issues has been extremely critical of those who embrace the "Anthropocentric Utilitarian" approach fails to balance economic and environmental priorities in a "just" manner.

Parham has been fond of describing the Bible as "God's Green Book." In an editorial entitled "Reading the Green Bible," Parham wrote, "Even the red-lettered Bible, the one that has what Jesus said in red letters, is really a green Bible. In fact, Jesus' Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40) has green all over it....The Green Bible is an inconvenient truth for too many conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists." According to Parham, too many conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists "read Scripture through their preexisting ideological lenses – lenses of unfettered free-market capitalism as divinely sanctioned and blind exploitation of natural resources as fulfillment of the command to have dominion over creation."⁷⁷ In Parham's view, they inexplicably believe that Scripture validates "unrestrained consumerism" while negating "government regulation for the common good." Parham argues that Baptists must not buy into the false dichotomies created by Southern Baptist Convention resolutions. He emphasizes that "good theology refuses to engage in an either/or framework about missions and moral action." According

⁷⁵ Robert Parham, "Corporate America Goes Green, Will Pulpits Follow?" *EthicsDaily.com*, April 14, 2008, http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=10344 (accessed October 23, 2008).

⁷⁶ Robert Parham, *Loving Neighbors Across Time: A Christian Guide to Protecting the Earth* (Birmingham, Alabama: New Hope, 1991).

⁷⁷ Parham, "Reading the Green Bible."

to Parham, “good Baptist theology” values both the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) and Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40).” Christians should not be forced to face the false choice of choosing one over the other. Parham concludes that in order to be faithful to both the Great Commission and the Great Commandment, Christians must protect the Earth by loving our neighbors in time and across time.⁷⁸

In 2007, Parham penned an editorial whose title asked “Will Baptists Step Up to Take on Global Warming as a Moral Issue in 2007?” Turning his criticisms away from Southern Baptist conservatives and fundamentalists, Parham directed his righteous anger inward towards his fellow moderate Baptists. Writing with passion, Parham declared that moderate Baptists also have their own “global warming deniers.” He explained that “the problem for most moderate Baptists is not intellectual denial about the evidence. It is moral sloth, the lack of moral stewardship required to do earth care.” Parham then, as he has done on numerous occasions, challenged his Baptist readers to become better environmental stewards. He called on moderate Baptists to “put global warming on the agenda of every moderate Baptist state convention and fellowship meeting, beginning with Bible study.”⁷⁹

In April, 2008, Robert Parham as Executive-Director of the Baptist Center for Ethics wrote a letter calling on the United States Senate to pass climate-change legislation. Parham urged the Senate to “pass the strongest possible climate legislation that recognizes the needs and burdens of low-income and working families in the United States and around the world.” Parham's stated:

We are Baptist leaders who recognize the moral imperative to love our neighbors - neighbors today and those across time. We love our neighbors through acts of justice, stewardship of God's creation and advocacy for legislation related to climate change.⁸⁰

Applauding Senators John Warner (R-VA) and Joe Lieberman (ID-CT) for introducing a bi-partisan climate change bill, Parham called for legislation that “shields vulnerable populations from the disproportionate dangers resulting from planet warming, spreads the economic costs of changing

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Robert Parham, “Will Baptists Step Up to Take on Global Warming as Moral Issue in 2007?” *EthicsDaily.com*, January 8, 2007, http://www.ethicsdaily.com/article_detail.cfm?AID=8380 (accessed October 24, 2008).

⁸⁰ Baptist Center for Ethics, “Baptist Letter to United States Senate on Climate Change Legislation,” *EthicsDaily.com*, April 28, 2008, http://www.ethicsdaily.com/PDFViewer/PDFs/pdf_senate.pdf (accessed October 24, 2008).

our energy habits fairly and sustainably and limits the financial burdens that will be placed on low-income and working families." More than 140 Baptist leaders from 25 states and the District of Columbia endorsed the Baptist Center for Ethics letter. Signatories included denominational leaders from American Baptist Churches USA, Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, North American Baptist Fellowship and the Progressive National Baptist Convention.⁸¹

Al Gore and The New Baptist Covenant

Organized by mostly moderate Baptist leaders, including former United States President Jimmy Carter, President Bill Underwood of Mercer University and Rev. Jimmy Allen, the last moderate President of the Southern Baptist Convention (1978), the New Baptist Covenant is an informal alliance of thirty Baptist organizations representing over twenty million Baptists in North America.⁸² This informal alliance hosted an historic three-day celebration in January 2008 which attracted more than 15,000 Baptists and addressed issues such as poverty, immigration reform, race and racism, sex trafficking, HIV/AIDS pandemic, religious liberty, global warming and environmental stewardship.⁸³

At a "Stewardship of the Earth" luncheon attended by 2,500 Baptists during the New Baptist Covenant Celebration, Robert Parham honored former Vice President Al Gore as the 2007 Baptist of the Year.⁸⁴ Presenting Gore with a symbolic Bible with a green cover, Parham declared, "We have with us today a Baptist prophet who is so unacceptable that the Baptist establishment in his hometown of Nashville neither acknowledged his winning the Nobel Peace Prize nor honored with coverage his notable Nobel lecture....Prophets are unacceptable because their truth is

⁸¹ "Baptist Letter to United States Senate on Climate Change Legislation." A week before the release of the Senate letter, Baptist Center for Ethics announced the launch of TheGreenBible.org. The Green Bible website serves as a warehouse of information "on the biblical mandate to care for the environment and what people of faith can and should do." See <http://www.thegreenbible.org>.

⁸² Of the thirty participating organizations, seventeen can be described as "moderate Baptist" organizations or as organizations run by "moderate Baptists."

⁸³ See the Celebration of a New Baptist Covenant website at <http://www.newbaptistcelebration.com>.

⁸⁴ A long-time Southern Baptist, Al Gore no longer identifies himself as a Southern Baptist. Gore and his wife, Tipper, were baptized in Mt. Vernon Baptist Church in Arlington, Virginia, the Southern Baptist church they attended regularly since Gore was elected to Congress in 1976. Gore now attends New Salem Missionary Baptist Church in Carthage, Tennessee, a church not affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention. See David Waters, "Gore Goes Home," *BeliefNet*, <http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/2000/07/Gore-Goes-Home.aspx> (accessed October 24, 2008).

inconvenient.” Parham expressed his hope that Gore with his “green Bible and good science” will awaken and “activate goodwill Baptists to become active in caring for the earth.”⁸⁵

During his presentation, Gore explained that climate change is not a political issue. “It is a moral issue. It is an ethical issue. It is a spiritual issue,” said Gore.⁸⁶ He expressed his hope that “Creation Care” would become a major initiative of the new coalition of Baptists across North America. He noted, “I think that there is a distinct possibility that one of the messages coming out of this gathering and this new covenant is creation care...that we who are Baptists of like mind and attempting in our lives to the best of our abilities to glorify God, are not going to countenance the continued heaping of contempt on God’s creation.”⁸⁷ Gore challenged the group of Baptists to “reason together” and “tell one another the truth, inconvenient though it may be, about the crisis, including the opportunity that we now face.”⁸⁸ To a standing ovation, Gore concluded:

The evidence is there. The signal is on the mountain. The trumpet has blown. The scientists are screaming from the rooftops. The ice is melting. The land is parched. The seas are rising. The storms are getting stronger. Why do we not judge what is right? When did people of faith get so locked in to an ideological coalition that they got to go along with the wealthiest and most powerful who don’t want to see change of the kind that’s aimed at helping the people and protecting God’s green earth?...Don’t tell me we can’t solve this climate crisis. If we just had one week’s worth of the money spent on the war in Iraq, we’d be well down the road!⁸⁹

Concluding Thoughts

Since the advent of the modern environmental movement nearly forty years ago, Baptist denominations across America have chosen to publicly address issues related to the environment. However, these Baptist groups, American Baptist Churches USA excluded, typically have addressed environmental causes much less frequently than other pressing social concerns. In 1970, the moderate-led Southern Baptist Convention was the first Baptist body to acknowledge the

⁸⁵ Bob Allen, “Gore Urges New Covenant Baptists To Take Up Mantle of Creation Care,” *The Baptist Standard*, February 1, 2008, http://www.baptiststandard.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=7497&Itemid=136 (accessed October 26, 2008).

⁸⁶ David Roach, “Gore cites political will, claims scriptural mandate on environmental issues,” *Baptist Press*, <http://www.bpnews.net/BPnews.asp?ID=27293> (accessed October 24, 2008).

⁸⁷ Allen, “Gore Urges New Covenant Baptists To Take Up Mantle of Creation Care.”

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ Roach, “Gore cites political will, claims scriptural mandate on environmental issues.”

ecological crisis.⁹⁰ Southern Baptist messengers again called on their fellow Southern Baptists to practice environmental stewardship in a 1974 resolution.⁹¹ American Baptists entered the environmental scene in 1977 with a policy statement on the energy crisis.⁹² In 1989, an extensive policy statement on the environment was issued by the General Board of American Baptist Churches USA. Both policy statements urged American Baptists as well as other Christians to be responsible stewards of God's creation. Similarly, the Southern Baptist resolutions and American Baptist policy statements all urged governmental action on these environmental issues.

In 1990, the fundamentalist-led Southern Baptist Convention called on Southern Baptists to be "better stewards of all of the created order."⁹³ However, unlike with the previous resolutions in 1970 and 1974, the 1990 resolution did not urge governmental action. Clearly by 1990, the Southern Baptist Convention had abandoned the "Earthkeeper Stewardship" ethic of Henlee Barnette reflected in the 1970s resolutions on the environment and adopted the "Anthropocentric Utilitarian" approach towards the environment. As previously noted, this ethical approach almost always avoids government action that requires conservation.

Meanwhile, American Baptists Churches USA became one of the first Christian denominations to address the issue of human-induced global warming the following year in 1991. ABC-USA took the historic step of urging legislation with the purpose of reducing carbon dioxide output and reducing other greenhouse gases.⁹⁴ Though Baptist denominations generally refrained from making public pronouncements over the next decade, denominational executives were not so quiet. These denominational executives from mainline Baptist groups such as American Baptist Churches USA, National Baptist Convention USA and the Alliance of Baptists attached their signatures to various ecumenical and interfaith statements in order to express their Christian commitment to pressing environmental issues such as global warming.⁹⁵ Finally in 2007, the

⁹⁰ Southern Baptist Convention, "Resolution On The Environment."

⁹¹ Southern Baptist Convention, "Resolution On Stewardship of God's Creation."

⁹² American Baptist Churches USA, "American Baptist Policy Statement on Energy."

⁹³ Southern Baptist Convention, "Resolution on Environmental Stewardship."

⁹⁴ American Baptist Churches USA, "American Baptist Resolution on Global Warming."

⁹⁵ National Council of Churches, "Religious Leaders Call for Action on Global Warming." See National Council of Churches, "Jewish and Christian Leaders."

Progressive National Baptist Convention followed the lead of environmentally-conscious African-American Baptist leaders and passed a resolution calling on Progressive Baptists to take up the issue of environmental justice in the fight to “reduce global warming pollution.”⁹⁶

In 2006, a group of prominent theologically conservative evangelicals, including two-dozen Baptists, seemed to discover environmentalism for the first time. As part of the Evangelical Climate Initiative, this alliance of concerned evangelical leaders issued “An Evangelical Call to Action” which proclaimed that “evangelicals must engage [climate change] without any further lingering over the basic reality of the problem or humanity’s responsibility to address it.”⁹⁷ Government action to reduce carbon dioxide emissions through “cost-effective market-based mechanisms” was urged. To the surprise of no one, a different group of conservative evangelicals which also included quite a few Southern Baptist academics called the Cornwall Alliance issued a statement countering the efforts of the Evangelical Climate Initiative. Adopting the “Anthropocentric Utilitarian” ethical approach of its author, Calvin Beisner, the Cornwall Alliance’s statement accused evangelical environmentalists of “hindering economic progress in developed and especially developing nations.”⁹⁸

Messengers to the Southern Baptist Convention in both 2006 and 2007 passed harshly-worded resolutions which, according to the Associated Press, “questioned the prevailing scientific belief that humans are largely to blame for the phenomenon of climate change.” After warning that environmentalism was “threatening to become a wedge issue to divide the evangelical community,” in 2006, Southern Baptists in 2007 alleged that government mandated limits on carbon dioxide as urged by the Evangelical Climate Initiative, American Baptist Churches USA, Progressive National Baptist Convention, and a host of other Baptist leaders were “very dangerous” and could lead to “major economic hardships worldwide.”⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Congressman Emanuel Cleaver II, “Progressive Baptist Convention Passes Cleaver Resolution.”

⁹⁷ Evangelical Climate Initiative, “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action.”

⁹⁸ Cornwall Alliance, “A Call to Truth.”

⁹⁹ Southern Baptist Convention, “On Environmentalism and Evangelicals.” See Southern Baptist Convention, “On Global Warming.”

Why then has the Southern Baptist Convention responded so differently to environmental issues than other Baptist groups in America? Daniel Akin, President of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary suggests that some Southern Baptists have a difficult time separating their conservative theology from their conservative politics. The two surely do not always walk lock-step together. In 1994, evangelical historian Mark Noll opened his influential book *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* with the assertion that, “The scandal of the evangelical mind is that there is not much of an evangelical mind.” Noll asserted that the major indictment of fundamentalism has been its “intellectual sterility.”¹⁰⁰ This “intellectual sterility” has left fundamentalists and many evangelicals extremely skeptical of many prevailing scientific beliefs. The increased influence of fundamentalism within the Southern Baptist Convention over the past three decades has only made Southern Baptists more skeptical of popular scientific conclusions. Also, the presence of free-market ideologues who promote an anthropocentric utilitarian approach towards the environment help explain why the Southern Baptist Convention has been so quick in recent years to question the near-consensus belief that humans are largely to blame for the phenomenon of climate change. Until Southern Baptists free themselves from the bonds of fundamentalism, they will likely remain skeptics in the arena of environmental science.

Finally, the question begs: how effective have all of these resolutions and policy statements been in promoting environmental stewardship? Baptist ethicists Robert Parham of the Baptist Center for Ethics and William Tillman Jr. of Hardin-Simmons University offer few positive words on this “resolutionary Christianity.” Tillman asserts that historical review “demonstrates little motivation, persuasion, and implementation” regarding the issues addressed by resolutions. Tillman describes resolutionary Christianity as the tipping of the hat to social issues through non-binding resolutions. While believing that resolutions are “better than nothing,” Tillman concludes that “there have been too many statements and too few actions on the part of too many Baptists.” Recently, Robert Parham made a similar point in an editorial on racism.¹⁰¹ Parham explains,

¹⁰⁰ Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Leicester, England: Intervarsity Press, 1994), 1, 137.

¹⁰¹ See William M. Tillman, Jr., “Resolutionary Christianity: Part One,” *Light* (April 1985): 3-4.

The Baptist approach to racism is best described as “resolutionary,” at least within the dominant white community. Every time we face a racial problem, we resolve to do better. At annual meetings, we pass resolutions condemning racism and promise to combat it. Resolutions make us feel good without doing good.¹⁰²

Parham’s point applies to the Baptist approach towards environmental issues as well. A number of large Baptist groups have passed multiple resolutions commending environmental stewardship and urging governmental action in recent decades. While these resolutions undoubtedly left many of its supporters feeling good, what good have these resolutions actually accomplished? That is a near impossible question to answer. Further, what good is it to urge governmental action without making specific policy recommendations? Thankfully, as previously mentioned, several Baptist groups are at least now offering tangible solutions to the environmental crisis of the 21st century.

Baptist environmentalists must focus their attention and efforts not solely on passing resolutions and policy statements. Instead, Baptist environmentalists must focus on educating local Baptist congregations on how to be better stewards of God’s creation. Several churches affiliated with the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship have demonstrated that there are practical steps that both churches and church members can take to become more “green” or environment-friendly. In addition to educating local Baptist congregations, Baptist environmentalists must continue to urge governmental action with specific policy recommendations for local, state, and federal levels. Often these policy recommendations will be as basic and simple as recycling. If Baptists desire to speak with any sense of credibility on the subject of environmental stewardship, Baptists who have claimed through resolutions to care for God’s creation must start practicing what those resolutions preach. Baptists must make their words meaningful through concrete action.

¹⁰² Robert Parham, “Baylor Incidents Must Spark Baptist Honest About Racism,” November 11, 2008, http://www.ethicsdaily.com/print_popup.cfm?AID=11309.