

Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation *and* The Sandy Cove Covenant

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“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.”
(Colossians 1:19-20, NIV)

An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation

History:

In June 1994, the Evangelical Environmental Network, publisher of *Creation Care Magazine*, held a conference for prominent Evangelical leaders. These leaders met on the Chesapeake Bay to examine the responsibility of Christians to care for the world that God created. As a result of the conference, almost 500 leaders signed *On the Care of Creation: An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation*.

The Declaration:

On the Care of Creation: An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation (1994)

“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 honor 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 honor 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 insure thoughtful procreation of children and their nurture to the glory of God.

We recognize 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:

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 toward the earth need to proceed from the center 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.

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 civilization in love, creativity and obedience to God; and that we offer creation and civilization 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 acknowledgment 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" (II 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 in 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 centers 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.

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 all 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 recognize 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 organizations--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.

For a list of the original signers of the Declaration in 1994, see www.creationcare.org/resources/signatores.php.

The Sandy Cove Covenant and Invitation

History:

June 28-30, 2004, evangelical leaders gathered at Sandy Cove Christian Conference Center located in North East, Maryland at the headwaters of the Chesapeake Bay for a conference sponsored by members of Christianity Today, National Association of Evangelicals, and the Evangelical Environmental Network. The purpose of this gathering was to examine how to care for all of God's creation. The result of this historic conference was the writing of *The Sandy Cove Covenant*.

For more information about the conference, visit the Evangelical Environmental Network's website www.creationcare.org/conference. Their site contains the text of the Covenant and a list of signers, text of presentations, speakers' brief biographies, Scriptures, photos, and the fall 2004 issue of *Creation Care Magazine*, which was devoted to the Sandy Cove conference.

The Covenant:

The Sandy Cove Covenant and Invitation (June 28-30, 2004)

We are a gathering of evangelical Christians who provide institutional, pastoral, and intellectual leadership in a wide variety of life settings. We have come together at Sandy Cove, Maryland in order to pray, reflect, and learn together about our role as stewards of God's creation. We are convinced that God has moved among us in our time together over these three days.

We represent a variety of perspectives and varying levels of expertise about environmental issues. Some of us have given our entire lives to caring for all of God's creation, while for others the issue is a new one. For all of us, this meeting has resulted in a deepening of our concern about God's creation, a joyful sense of community, and a desire to work together on these issues in days ahead.

In reflecting on Scripture and on the pressing environmental problems that beset our world, we are persuaded that we must not evade our responsibility to care for God's creation. We recognize that there is much more we need to learn, and much more praying we need to do, but that we know enough to know that there is no turning back from engaging the threats to God's creation.

We feel called of God to covenant together to move the work of creation-care ahead in a variety of ways.

Therefore:

We covenant together to make creation-care a permanent dimension of our Christian discipleship and to deepen our theological and biblical understanding of the issues involved.

We covenant together to draw upon the very best and most trustworthy resources that can help us understand the particular environmental challenges we face today, as well as promising solutions, as fully and accurately as possible.

We covenant together to share our growing knowledge and concern about these issues with other members of our constituencies.

We invite our brothers and sisters in Christ to engage with us the most pressing environmental questions of our day, such as health threats to families and the unborn, the negative effects of environmental degradation on the poor, God's endangered creatures, and the important current debate about human-induced climate change. We covenant together to engage the evangelical community in a discussion about the question of climate change with the goal of reaching a consensus statement on the subject in twelve months.

Our continuing goal is to motivate the evangelical community to fully engage environmental issues in a biblically faithful and humble manner, collaborating with those who share these concerns, that we might take our appropriate place in the healing of God's creation, and thus the advance of God's reign.

For a list of the original signers of the *The Sandy Cove Covenant and Invitation*, visit www.creationcare.org/conference/.

Resources

The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action. Edited by R. J. Berry. Foreward by John Stott. InterVarsity Press, 2000.
[book]

An examination of the concepts expressed in the Evangelical Declaration for the Care of Creation, this book is a compilation of comments written by prominent theologians and scientists. The contributors examine our responsibility to care for God's creation and include a call for an ethical and religious response to the current global environmental crisis.

Creation Care Websites

[online resource guide]

Available online at earthcareonline.org.

This EarthCare resource guide lists links to creation care websites, position statements, and environmental science programs at colleges and universities. Included are general evangelical creation care sites, as well as denominational sites.

Evangelical Climate Initiative

christiansandclimate.org

[website]

Through the Evangelical Climate Initiative, participants respond to responsibilities expressed in the Declaration and Sandy Cove Covenant. Their statement entitled *Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action* calls Christians to address the current crisis of global warming. ECI's website offers a wide variety of climate change resources, including: text of the Climate Change statement, principles for federal policies, prayer guide, and information on the science of global warming.

Evangelical Environmental Network

creationcare.org

[website]

On their site, EEN provides full text of *Creation Care Magazine*, resources for *Creation Sunday*, fact sheets, *Creation Sunday* resources, print resources for sale, and text and information about the *Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation and The Sandy Cove Covenant* (2004).

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EarthCare
Caring for God's Creation

"The earth is the LORD's, and the fulness thereof; the world, and they that dwell therein."
(Psalm 24:1, KJV)