

# From Climate Control to Population Control: Troubling Background on the “Evangelical Climate Initiative”

*A Joint Paper of the Institute on Religion & Democracy and the  
Acton Institute for the Study of Religion & Liberty*

## Introduction

On February 8, 2006, the “Evangelical Climate Initiative” (ECI) was launched. Citing the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and other sources, the ECI was described by its organizers as a Bible-based response to global warming: “We are convinced that evangelicals must engage this issue without any further lingering over the basic reality of the problem or humanity’s responsibility to address it.”<sup>1</sup> The 86 signers argued that “this is God’s world and any damage that we do to God’s world is an offense against God Himself.” Moreover, they claimed that “most of the climate change problem is human induced” and makes predictions that that “millions of people could die in this century.” Their prescription is to “pass and implement national legislation requiring sufficient economy-wide reductions in carbon dioxide emissions....”<sup>2</sup>

ECI signers include megachurch pastor Rick Warren, *Christianity Today* editor David Neff, and former Vice President of Governmental Affairs for National Association of Evangelicals Robert P. Dugan. Since those who signed the ECI are respected evangelical leaders, their statement was widely reported and discussed. That discussion reached a crescendo when it was discovered that one of the largest funders of the effort was the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation. The Hewlett Foundation, which contributed \$475,000 to the ECI, is a major contributor to the causes of abortion and population control. Like many other groups, the Hewlett Foundation explicitly connects its interest in these causes to its views on the environment.

Why would a pro-abortion foundation want to fund an *evangelical* effort to fight global warming? Is there a connection between these efforts? There is. And that connection should trouble all evangelicals, especially those who endorsed the Evangelical Climate Initiative.

## From Global Warming to Abortion

Logically, one can care for the environment without supporting population control. But for many radical environmentalists, the route from global warming (and care for the environment generally) to population reduction seems irresistible: since people use up natural resources, release CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere and otherwise pollute the environment, the fewer people, the less global warming and less harm to the environment.<sup>3</sup> To help the environment, therefore, we must reduce the human population. Q.E.D.

This reasoning hovers in the background of current environmental debates. So how does the ECI statement respond to this background? It doesn't. It simply says that "climate change is happening and is being caused mainly by human activities, especially the burning of fossil fuels."<sup>4</sup> Actually, scientists still fiercely debate the causes, severity, and results of climate change while policymakers fiercely debate the relative costs and benefits of various proposed responses to climate change. But what is important here is that the ECI signers seem naively unaware that such dystopic interpretations of human activity are often tied to and derived from campaigns to reduce the human population.

This connection is not a coincidence. Population control is official doctrine for many environmental groups just as it is in certain circles of the UN. This reflects the historical views of prominent founders of the environmental movement. Consider these examples:

- "Man is always and everywhere a blight on the landscape."

John Muir, founder of the Sierra Club<sup>5</sup>

- "Given the total, absolute disappearance of Homo sapiens, then not only would the Earth's community of Life continue to exist, but in all probability, its well-being enhanced. Our presence, in short, is not needed."

Paul Taylor, author of *Respect for Nature, A Theory of Environmental Ethics*<sup>6</sup>

- "I got the impression that instead of going out to shoot birds, I should go out and shoot the kids who shoot birds."

Paul Watson, Founder of Greenpeace and Sea Shepard<sup>7</sup>

- "[W]e have no problem in principle with the humans reducing their numbers by killing one another. It's an excellent way of making the humans extinct."

Geophilus, spokesman for Gaia Liberation Front<sup>8</sup>

- "Human beings, as a species, have no more value than slugs."

John Davis, editor of the journal *Earth First!*<sup>9</sup>

Of course, not all environmentalists share such beliefs, but many do believe that the health of Earth's environment requires drastic reductions in the human population. For instance, Don Hinrichsen of the UN Population Fund and Bryant Robey, editor of *The Population Report* at Johns Hopkins University, have argued:

*Slowing the increase in population, especially in the face of rising per capita demand for natural resources, can take pressure off the environment and buy time to improve living standards on a sustainable basis. . . . If every country made a commitment to population stabilization and resource conservation, the world would be better able to meet the challenges of sustainable development.*<sup>10</sup>

The authors then specify what actions they believe should be pursued to attain “population stabilization”: “Family planning programs play a key role. When family planning information and services are widely available and accessible, couples are better able to achieve their fertility desires.”<sup>11</sup>

While this language may sound benign, phrases like “population stabilization,” “family planning,” and “sexual and reproductive rights” almost always include abortion-on-demand.

For instance, in 1996, several prominent UN groups<sup>12</sup> sponsored a symposium on “human rights,” and released the following recommendations:

- The right to freedom of movement could extend to the consideration of laws which prohibit women from traveling abroad to seek an abortion....
- The right to protection of privacy and the home could include consideration of women’s right to make their own decisions about pregnancy and abortion....
- The right to freedom of expression and to seek, receive and impart information protects the freedom of women of all ages to receive and impart information about health services, including contraception and abortion....<sup>13</sup>

Patrick Fagan of the Heritage Foundation notes that the UN has long sought to:

make abortion a “demand right” protected by national and international law, with unrestricted access for teenagers, and make the non-provision of abortion a crime in all cases, even for reasons of conscience. A report on Croatia, for example, finds “the refusal, by some hospitals, to provide abortions on the basis of conscientious objection of doctors... [constitutes] an infringement of women’s reproductive rights.”<sup>14</sup>

One finds similar support for this kind of “family planning” in important environmental documents such as the Earth Charter.<sup>15</sup> The preamble of the Earth Charter states:

The dominant patterns of production and consumption are causing environmental devastation, the depletion of resources, and a massive extinction of species. . . . an unprecedented rise in human population has overburdened ecological and social systems.<sup>16</sup>

The charter euphemistically supports “universal access to health care that fosters reproductive health and responsible reproduction,” under a section aptly entitled “Adopt patterns of production, consumption, and reproduction that safeguard Earth’s regenerative capacities, human rights, and community well-being.”<sup>17</sup>

The fundamental error in all of this is a one-sided and unbiblical view of human nature. Humans are seen merely as consumers and polluters of the Earth. The Bible describes human beings as fallen along with the rest of creation, yes; but it still describes us as image-bearers of God, who can exercise dominion, produce wealth, and cultivate creation. The Bible claims that the Earth was shaped by a benevolent Creator to be the habitat that sustains and enriches human life even as humans sustain and enrich the Earth through our creativity and industry. Thus the Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship affirms:

Men and women were created in the image of God, given a privileged place among creatures, and commanded to exercise stewardship over the earth. Human persons are moral agents for whom freedom is an essential condition of responsible action. Sound environmental stewardship must attend both to the demands of human well being and to a divine call for human beings to exercise caring dominion over the earth. It affirms that human well being and the integrity of creation are not only compatible but also dynamically interdependent realities.<sup>18</sup>

As part of our stewardship, God has blessed us and commanded us to be fruitful and multiply, and to fill the Earth (Gen. 1:28). Obviously there would be *some* Earthly limit to human population, since the Earth has a finite surface area. But there is little reason to think we will reach that limit, still less that we have already exceeded it.<sup>19</sup> Indeed, a worldwide study conducted by Conservation International found wilderness areas currently cover 46 percent of the earth's land surface, and intact wilderness sites on the planet occupy a land area equivalent to the six largest countries on Earth combined; or more than seven times the size of the U.S.<sup>20</sup>

Claims to the contrary are little more than misanthropic myths.<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, many organizations conform their environmental views to just these myths. One such organization is the Hewlett Foundation, the main funder of the Evangelical Climate Initiative.

## The Role of the Hewlett Foundation

The Hewlett Foundation funds *both* environmental and population control groups not by coincidence, but because it thinks that an increase in human population must degrade the environment. The Hewlett Foundation website states, for example, that “as populations have grown in size and affluence, so too has the negative impact on the environment caused by their greater fossil-fuel use.”<sup>22</sup> The foundation's population project is focused on “helping women and families choose the number and spacing of children, protecting against sexually transmitted infections, and eliminating unsafe abortion.”<sup>23</sup> Such language is a thinly veiled defense of abortion-on-demand, which the Hewlett Foundation supports generously.

The foundation aggressively seeks out groups that share its point of view. In the first two months of 2006, the Hewlett Foundation granted \$13.7 million towards population control efforts.<sup>24</sup> All but a few million of that went to organizations supporting women's “reproductive rights”—programs that almost always include the right of abortion. During the same period, the Foundation awarded \$12.1 million for its environmental program, of which \$8 million went to global warming and energy efforts. And \$475,000 of this money went to the National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE), which funneled the grant to the ECI.<sup>25</sup>

The NRPE bills itself as “an association of independent faith groups across a broad spectrum.” But in fact, it has consistently advocated radical environmental policies, from the misanthropy of James Lovelock to the atheism of Carl Sagan to various and sundry versions of New Age pantheism.<sup>26</sup>

Of course, evangelicals can make strategic alliances with diverse groups on issues of common concern.<sup>27</sup> The problem with the ECI is not that it has alliances and connections that go beyond the evangelical community,<sup>28</sup> but that it is supported by and as a result inadvertently

gives cover to population control and pro-abortion causes that evangelicals have historically opposed.

## Evangelicals and Population Control

The landscape is starting to change, unfortunately, since some evangelicals now link care for the environment to population control. For example, the foundational document of the Evangelical Environmental Network, a member organization of the NRPE, states that environmental “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.” Similarly, their “Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation” calls for the “thoughtful procreation of children.”<sup>29</sup>

While there is nothing necessarily wrong with the “thoughtful procreation of children,” the notion of some fixed “carrying capacity” of the entire Earth is highly speculative, since large portions of the Earth’s surface are currently uninhabited, most inhabitants are not using the best technologies available, and there’s no reason to assume that technological innovations have suddenly come to a halt. The problem is not population. It’s how to create just, peaceful, educated societies in which people can use and develop technologies to meet their needs.<sup>30</sup>

Yet in a May 2006 speech to the World Bank, Richard Cizik, Vice President for Governmental Affairs for the National Association of Evangelicals, reportedly told the audience, “I’d like to take on the population issue, but in my community global warming is the third rail issue. I’ve touched the third rail . . . but still have a job. And I’ll still have a job after my talk here today. But population is a much more dangerous issue to touch. . . We need to confront population control and we can—we’re not Roman Catholics after all—but it’s too hot to handle now.”<sup>31</sup>

Indeed. We doubt that this represents the opinion of most evangelicals, or of most signers of the Evangelical Climate Initiative. But any evangelical response to environmental issues should *resist* this fashionable but fundamentally anti-Christian ideology, not wait until a later date to address it.

Many environmentalists make a strong connection between climate change and population control. Some of the evangelicals calling for drastic measures to fight climate change, such as Richard Cizik and the Evangelical Environmental Network, are aware of the connection. But they evidently chose to leave it below the surface in the ECI statement.

Rather than dodging the issue, however, they need to confront it directly. If they are distinctly Christian and evangelical, they will have to state a position that puts them at odds with many of their environmentalist allies and their patrons at the Hewlett Foundation. If those allies choose to stick with them on this one issue, knowing their deeper philosophical differences, then all parties have shown integrity. But there’s no integrity in silence.

## Conclusions

For Christians, stewardship of God's creation is non-negotiable. Environmental issues deserve a well-informed and thoroughly Christian response that avoids the dangerous pitfalls of modern environmentalist ideology. Efforts are clearly underway to obtain endorsements from prominent evangelical leaders for a public relations agenda that, just under the surface, connects "creation care" to population control and abortion on demand.<sup>32</sup> Such efforts, if successful, would give anti-Christian ideologies unmerited moral and theological cover that they now lack.

Unfortunately, it appears that those associated with the Evangelical Climate Initiative are unwittingly doing just that. As a result we fear that these Evangelical leaders who in good faith associated themselves with the ECI are being exploited by organizations that not only deny their biblically-based value system, but hold such beliefs in contempt.

## Citations

---

<sup>1</sup> "Evangelical Climate Change Initiative," [www.christiansandclimate.org/statement](http://www.christiansandclimate.org/statement).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> The basic argument goes like this:

- 1) An increase in carbon dioxide in the air is causing catastrophic climate change.
- 2) That increase is the direct result of human activity, such as the burning of fossil fuels.
- 3) The more people alive on Earth who drive automobiles and use electricity, the more CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are produced, the greater climate change for the worse.
- 4) Population control will result in fewer people driving and using electricity and will decrease CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, thereby reducing the effect of global warming.
- 5) Therefore, to protect the environment, we must reduce the human population.

<sup>4</sup> "Evangelical Climate Change Initiative," [www.christiansandclimate.org/statement](http://www.christiansandclimate.org/statement).

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Chamber of Commerce, "The Environmentalist Little Green Book," <http://www.uschamber.com/issues/index/environment/greenbook.htm>.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Taylor, *Respect for Nature: A theory of Environmental Ethics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), p. 115.

<sup>7</sup> *Access To Energy* 10, no. 4 (December 1982). Quoted in U.S. Chamber of Commerce, "The Environmentalist Little Green Book," <http://www.uschamber.com/issues/index/environment/greenbook.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> *These Exit Times*, no. 2 (July 1992); quoted in "Genocide threats from Green Terrorists," <http://www.off-road.com/green/genocide.html>.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Chamber of Commerce, *The Environmentalist Little Green Book* (2000); quoted in James Sherk, "Responsible Creation Care I: Stewardship vs. Environmentalism," *Evangel Society* (August 2, 2005), <http://www.evangelistsociety.org/sherk/responsiblecreationcare1.html>.

<sup>10</sup> Don Hinrichsen and Bryant Robey, "Population and the Environment: The Global Challenge," *Population Reports* 28, no. 3 (Fall 2000), <http://www.infoforhealth.org/pr/m15edsum.shtml>; quoted in Hinrichsen and Robey, "Population and the Environment: The Global Challenge," [http://www.actionbioscience.org/environment/hinrichsen\\_robey.html](http://www.actionbioscience.org/environment/hinrichsen_robey.html)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> The groups were the United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, and the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women. The meeting was called the "Round Table of Human Rights Treaty Bodies on Human Rights Approaches to Women's Health, with a Focus on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights."

- 
- <sup>13</sup> United Nations Population Fund, the United Nations Commissioner for Human Rights, and the United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women sponsored the “Round Table of Human Rights Treaty Bodies on Human Rights Approaches to Women’s Health, with a Focus on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights” (December 9-11, 1996), pages 22, 23.
- <sup>14</sup> Patrick F. Fagan, “How U.N. Conventions On Women’s and Children’s Rights Undermine Family, Religion, and Sovereignty,” The Heritage Foundation, Backgrounder #1407 (February 5, 2001). <http://www.heritage.org/Research/InternationalOrganizations/BG1407.cfm>. Quoting Report of the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, 13th Sess., to the General Assembly of the United Nations, 53rd Sess. (1998), “Report on Croatia,” Document #A/53/38, Para. 109.
- <sup>15</sup> The genesis of the Earth Charter came in 1987 when the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development issued a call for the creation of a new charter that would, according to its official website, “set forth fundamental principles for sustainable development.” The Earth Charter Initiative, “Frequently Asked Questions,” [http://www.earthcharter.org/innerpg.cfm?id\\_menu=38](http://www.earthcharter.org/innerpg.cfm?id_menu=38). The drafting of the Earth Charter was part of the unfinished business of the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, but was ultimately finalized and unveiled at a United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) meeting in Paris in 2000.
- <sup>16</sup> The Earth Charter Initiative, “The Earth Charter,” <http://www.earthcharter.org/files/charter/charter.pdf>.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship, <http://www.stewards.net/CornwallDeclaration.htm>.
- <sup>19</sup> There is no reason to assume that human population will grow indefinitely. See, for instance, Julian L. Simon, *The Ultimate Resource 2* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996). In fact, in most highly industrialized countries today, populations have leveled off and some populations are even declining. Even the UN now speaks of world population peaks in the near future, not exponentially breeding humans. See, for instance, this recent UN press release: <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2005/pop918.doc.htm>.
- <sup>20</sup> “Study’s Authors Surprised to Find Nearly Half of Earth’s Wilderness Areas Intact,” by Marc Morano, CNSNews.com, December 6, 2002, <http://www.cnsnews.com/ViewCulture.asp?Page=%5CCulture%5Carchive%5C200212%5CCUL20021206b.html>
- <sup>21</sup> See Simon, *ibid.*, Part 2. Any well-informed attempt to link population control to the environment must take account of the evidence and arguments in Simon’s book.
- <sup>22</sup> Hewlett Foundation, “Energy,” <http://www.hewlett.org/Programs/Environment/Energy/>.
- <sup>23</sup> Hewlett Foundation, “Population,” <http://www.hewlett.org/Programs/Population/>.
- <sup>24</sup> One grantee, for instance, is the Sierra Club. The Sierra Club states in one of its publications that “population growth contributes to environmental degradation around the world ... [and] the ecological footprint of the growing global population has far-reaching environmental consequences.” [Sierra Club, “Global Gag Rule,” *Global Population and Environment*, [http://www.sierraclub.org/population/global\\_gag\\_rule/](http://www.sierraclub.org/population/global_gag_rule/).] No doubt because it connects environmental degradation to overpopulation, the Sierra Club recently received \$75,000 from the Hewlett Foundation for its population plan. [Hewlett Foundation, “Grants at The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation,” <http://www.hewlett.org/Grants/>.]
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> National Religious Partnership for the Environment, “Partners in Stewardship,” <http://www.nrpe.org>. The NRPE is a coalition of the U.S. Catholic Conference (now the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops), the National Council of Churches of Christ, the Evangelical Environmental Network, and the Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life. It claims to represent a grassroots membership of over 100 million and bills itself as “an association of independent faith groups across a broad spectrum.” The creation of the NRPE dates to an event at Oxford University in 1988 called the “Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders for Human Survival.” The keynote speaker at this event was James Lovelock, a renowned environmental leader and originator of the *Gaia Hypothesis*. This is the belief that the Earth is a living and even divine superorganism. On this view, human beings, as Lovelock puts it, “. . . are not special. We’re just another species.” (Transcript of online chat with James Lovelock, *The Guardian* (September 29, 2000), <http://books.guardian.co.uk/departments/scienceandnature/story/0,6000,375194,00.html>.)
- It was shortly after this event that the Very Reverend James P. Morton, President of the Temple of Understanding, approached astronomer Carl Sagan, an avowed atheist, to write an appeal to religious leaders to engage them on environmental issues. This letter garnered signatures from 32 scientists and was sent to the heads of over 300 denominations sounding an urgent plea to create “an uncommon marriage between science and religion.” Several more meetings ensued between religious leaders, scientists, and even some politicians

---

including former Vice President Al Gore and Clinton State Department's Under Secretary for Global Affairs, Timothy Wirth.

Ultimately the NRPE was founded in 1992 through a collaboration of the United Nations Global Forum of Spiritual and Parliamentary Leaders for Human Survival, and the Temple of Understanding in the Cathedral of Saint John the Divine in New York City to coordinate a program of action to involve religious leaders, including Evangelicals, in the environmental issue. (See Henry Lamb, "Green Religion and Public Policy," *Eco-Logic* Special Report (October 2001); Acton Institute for the Study of Religion and Liberty, "Organizations at a Glance: The National Religious Partnership for the Environment," *Environment and Stewardship Review*, p. 6; and Robert A. Sirico, "The Greening of American Faith," *National Review* (August 29, 1994), p. 47.)

The Global Forum itself was co-founded only four years earlier by a joint venture between the Temple of Understanding and the UN and Paul Gorman, the NRPE's Executive Director, was former Vice President of Public Affairs of the Cathedral of the Saint John the Divine, and Director of the Temple of Understanding's Joint Appeal. (Ibid. Also see Henry Lamb, "Churches Duped by Green Extremists," *Enter Stage Right* (April 1, 2001), <http://www.enterstageright.com/archive/articles/0402/0402nrpe.htm>.)

The Cathedral of St. John Divine has historically advanced what only can be described as radical environmental theology. Serving as the cathedral's dean, James P. Morton delivered sermons on topics such as the "Earth as God's Body" and held book parties for environmentalists such as James Lovelock, author of *The Gaia Hypothesis*. (Acton Institute, "Organizations at a Glance: The National Religious Partnership for the Environment," p. 6.) The cathedral has also housed several new age groups including the Temple of Understanding. (Anonymous, "Green Theology," *Catholic Culture* (n.d.).)

<sup>27</sup> In theory, evangelicals could work even with abortion advocates on issues other than abortion, so long as those issues did not contradict key Christian beliefs.

<sup>28</sup> Moreover, the problem here is not "guilt by association." We are not implying that those who signed the ECI are pro-abortion because one of the key funders of the initiative is pro-abortion. Quite the opposite. We assume that few of the ECI signers were aware of this funding, and that most if not all of the signers are pro-life.

<sup>29</sup> Evangelical Environmental Network, "On the Care of Creation: An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation," <http://www.creationcare.org/resources/declaration.php>.

<sup>30</sup> As it happens, population growth slows in more technologically advanced societies. So even if one wanted to slow population growth, the most humane way to do that would be to seek greater economic growth for poor nations.

<sup>31</sup> Myron Ebell, Personal e-mail (May 2, 2006). Ebell is Director, Energy and Global Warming Policy at the Competitive Enterprise Institute.

<sup>32</sup> In future months, we should expect to hear that "even the Evangelicals are on-board with global warming" as part of ongoing media efforts, mid-term election strategies, advocacy, and legislative proposals. The ECI will be held up as evidence and the signatories as advocates. Now that they have issued their statement, they will have a very difficult time preventing it from being used for causes they do not support.