



“Introduction: Religious Perspectives on Climate Change”

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Good morning. My name is Andy Hoffman, I’m a professor here at the University of Michigan and one of the co-organizers of this conference. I want to introduce the other members of the steering panel who will be running each of the sessions: Barry Rabe at the School of Public Policy, Rolf Bouma teaches at the Program in the Environment and is also the director at the Center for Faith and Scholarship, and Jim Crowfoot, Professor Emeritus and Dean Emeritus of SNRE. I would also like to acknowledge the sponsors for this event today. The Erb Institute for Global Sustainable Enterprise, the Ford School of Public Policy, The Association of Religious Counselors, The Program in the Environment, The Center for Faith and Scholarship, The Lord of Light Lutheran Campus Ministries, and The Religious Trust Fund. The list of sponsors is a very interesting one. You will notice that we have a business school connected with the Association of Religious Counselors and with the School of Public Policy. I can tell you that I’ve gotten some strange looks about this gathering – “You’re doing what?”, and “Boy, that’s really cool” or “Boy, that’s really strange.” Yet, because the issue of climate change is so multi-dimensional, I think that this kind of connection is important for the multi-disciplinary solution that is needed.

I want to set up the conference this morning by establishing a sense of what we really are trying to get at by organizing this conference. The following quote by Aldo Leopold (and those of you who care about the environment are all familiar with Aldo Leopold’s *A Sand County Almanac* written in 1949) directly addresses this question:

“No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions. The proof that conservation has not yet touched these foundations of conduct lies in the fact that philosophy and religion have not yet heard of it. In our attempt to make conservation easy, we have made it trivial.”

Is this sentiment still true today? There seems to be change afoot. The dimension of connecting religion to environment is definitely present, and what we want to do today is examine it in two pieces. The first piece is the issue of faith, and the second piece is the issue of action. And I just want to walk through those for a moment to give you a sense of where we’re trying to go here.



On the issue of faith, some of you may be here because you think that religious beliefs are a cause of environmental problems, a cause of climate change. Many people may agree with Lynn White in particular, whose original 1967 essay in *Science* magazine said that our interpretation of the Genesis mandate has gotten us into trouble. The notion that we are separate from nature, that we should dominate it, that we can do as we wish is the root of our environmental problems. There may be people in this room who want to examine that aspect as we think about the climate change issue. There may be others in the room who actually see a natural connection between care for the environment, care for climate change and core religious beliefs of prudence, humility, respect, selflessness, moderation, and this may resonate with you. Either way, I think it's important to start to examine these questions and start to think about this issue in a new light.

When we bring religion into the conversation, the conversation changes and I think that's an important thing to think about here. In his book *A Greener Faith* Roger Gottlieb points out that

“Often, religion helps us articulate the full measure of the pain we feel over the environmental crisis more effectively than the language of secular politics. As well as political, economic, and technological, our plight is spiritual: it involves our deepest concerns about what is of truly lasting importance in our lives.”

And if you think about it, he goes on,

“When the Evangelical Lutheran Church says that sin is one of the roots of the environmental crisis and that being made in the image of God is not a license to dominate or exploit, and calls environmental destruction the product of sins of a self-serving bias and an infinite greed rather than infinite need, something has changed.”

When we start to talk about right and wrong, morality, sin, something has changed. These topics make many of us uncomfortable, especially when it's used by some to condemn others. But I think when we start to think about this in the sense that we're all part of the problem, and as Roger Gottlieb says,

“When spoken with a self-reflective humility that includes the person speaking, it involves a kind of moral seriousness that seems particularly appropriate in this context. So unleash your faith, that's where we start.”

I think this is a very important piece to bring into the conversation. So, as you hear the different viewpoints on faith traditions, I hope you'll consider them on their merits and within your own tradition, consider how they fit together, and importantly, what are some of the differences.

Secondly, on the issue of action. E.O. Wilson in his recent book, *The Creation*, points out that

“Religion and science are the two most powerful forces in the world today, especially in the United States. If religion and science could be united on the common ground of biological conservation, the problem would soon be solved. If



there is any moral percept shared by people of all beliefs, it is that we owe ourselves and future generations a beautiful, rich and healthy environment.”

This is a big part of this conversation – future generations. And as we start to think about the morality of this issue, I think one of the more provocative aspects of the Nicholas Stern report is the question he asked: “Is it immoral to discount the future?” It’s an extremely provocative question and that brings in the issue of future generations as we start to think about this.

But at the core, as I think about this, we need to realize that we can motivate people to take action with a dollar, with money. Or, we can motivation with sanction. But if you connect this issue to people’s values, then you’re going to start to see some really serious action. People will be much more motivated to take action, independent action, much more passionate action to try and change the institutions in the world around them. Two institutions above all others can speak directly to our values: education and religion. And as environment connects into both of these worlds, serious social change is afoot. And this seems to be happening. In 2006, more than 100 prominent pastors, theologians, and college presidents signed the Ecumenical Climate Initiative, calling for action on climate change. In May 2007, more than 20 religious groups signed an open letter urging U.S. leaders to limit greenhouse gas emissions and invest in renewable energy systems. And in 2007 the Vatican hosted a conference on climate change. They have since announced that they will go carbon neutral and the Pope has promised that he will speak about climate change at the U.N. in 2008. I haven’t gotten confirmation on this or if it is rumors but there are suggestions that he will write it an encyclical letter on climate change.

This has implications for society and policy at large. Surveys by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Policy find fairly strong consensus across faith traditions on environmental policy. Conservative Christians and some minorities are not quite as supportive of environmental regulations as others, but this table shows that by a 2:1 margin, respondents back strong regulation to protect the environment, even if they cost jobs or result in higher prices.

**Percent favoring stronger environmental regulation
“even if they cost jobs or result in higher prices.”**

	% Population	% Agree	% No Opinion	% Disagree
ENTIRE SAMPLE	100	55	18	27
Evangelical Protestant	26	52	17	31
Mainline Protestant	16	61	19	20
Catholic	18	60	18	22
Jewish	2	67	13	20



Other Faiths	3	62	18	20
Agnostic, Atheist	3	66	23	11

Source: Fourth National Survey of Religion and Politics, Bliss Institute, University of Akron, March-May 2004

And this translates into voting. If you look at the priorities for American voters, you’ll see that environment ranks very strongly on the list of priorities. Surprisingly higher than core religious issues of abortion and gay marriage, as shown in this survey.

Priorities for Religious Voters

	All	Mainline Protestant	White Evangelical	White Catholic
The economy	76%	74%	70%	76%
Terrorism	74%	75%	77%	72%
Health Care	70%	69%	68%	67%
Education	69%	65%	64%	56%
Environment	53%	49%	48%	48%
Abortion	46%	33%	60%	38%
Gay marriage	33%	23%	52%	23%

Source: GOP the Environment-Friendly Party, Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, August 2004

So, those are the two prongs. I don’t think we should lose sight of the fact that this is a provocative mix that makes some people very uncomfortable. The late Jerry Falwell said that,

“[Global warming is] Satan's attempt to redirect the church's primary focus...I believe the church must quickly get serious about denouncing the accelerating effort to promote the alleged catastrophic of human-caused global warming.”

I don’t put this up as a joke. There are some serious issues underneath this mixing of religion and climate change. This isn’t all about the golden rule. There are some clerics who are very concerned that mixing environment and religion comes close in many instances to deifying the environment. Others are concerned about inverting the priority of nature and humans and who should take primacy. How do we balance this? In many religious traditions, humans are superior, humans are most important and I would challenge any of you to say who would put a



child beneath an endangered species? In that moral order, one is going to win and it's generally the human being.

A September 28th story in *The Wall Street Journal* highlighted the tensions within the Evangelical church over some arguing that we have a biblical mandate to be good stewards of God's creation while others argue that God is sovereign over His creation and no amount of coal-burning will alter His divine plan for the world. I will say no more on that. But it's part of what we're going to discuss here today. And this will be fodder for our discussion, so I encourage you to be serious and think this through; think about the deeper nuances of what we're trying to do.



Dr. Andrew (Andy) Hoffman is the Holcim (US) Professor of Sustainable Enterprise at the University of Michigan; a position that holds joint appointments at the Stephen M. Ross School of Business and the School of Natural Resources & Environment. Within this role, Andy also serves as Associate Director of the Frederick A. and Barbara M. Erb Institute for Global Sustainable Enterprise. Andy has published six books and over fifty articles/book chapters on environmental and social issues as they relate to business. Most recently, he published the report *Getting Ahead of the Curve: Corporate Strategies that Address Climate Change* with the Pew Center on Global Climate Change (October, 2006). He was awarded the 2003 Faculty Pioneer/Rising Star award from the World Resources Institute and the Aspen Institute. His book, *From Heresy to Dogma*, was awarded the 2001 Rachel Carson Prize from the Society for Social Studies of Science. He holds a Ph.D. from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, awarded jointly by the Sloan School of Management and the Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering. Andy serves on advisory boards of the Oakwood Healthcare System, University of Michigan Museum of Art, Earth Portal, Center for Environmental Innovation, and Canopy Partnership, as well as the editorial board of *Organization & Environment*.
