

Evangelical Environmental Network

Despite opposition from conservatives, the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) has become a consistent advocate for environmental care among United States evangelicals, engendering the support of many prominent evangelical leaders and lobbying successfully against national anti-environmental legislation. One of four religious groups comprising the National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE), EEN is a ministry of Evangelicals for Social Action, a small but influential advocacy group that was founded by Ronald J. Sider to promote left-leaning politics from within a conservative theological framework. EEN was created in 1993 specifically to include evangelical representation on the NRPE.

The defining document of the EEN is the “Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation,” which affirms such characteristic evangelical tenets as the “full authority of Scriptures” and the need for evangelism while also rejecting nature worship and positing stewardship as the biblical rationale for environmental care. Human sinfulness caused a perversion of stewardship, resulting in seven “degradations of creation”: “1) land degradation; 2) deforestation; 3) species extinction; 4) water degradation; 5) global toxification; 6) the alteration of atmosphere; 7) human and cultural degradation.” Christ came to “heal and bring to wholeness not only persons but the entire created order.” Christians are to assist in this task by being “faithful stewards of God’s good garden, our earthly home.” Although attacked by conservatives minimizing environmental problems, the Declaration received the support of many mainstream evangelical leaders, who lent credibility to the EEN’s tacit claim to represent evangelical opinion.

Starting in 1994, as part of an NRPE plan to provide churches and synagogues with “environmental awareness kits,” the EEN mailed copies of *Let the Earth Be Glad: A Starter Kit for Evangelical Churches to Care for God’s Creation* to more than 30,000 congregations. This booklet detailed contemporary environmental threats, presented a theological justification for environmental concern, and suggested ways for churches to integrate environmental themes into worship.

Although primarily an educational outreach organization, in 1996 the EEN waged a successful campaign to prevent congressional Republicans from weakening the Endangered Species Act. At a press conference heavily covered by national media, EEN representatives called the Act the “Noah’s Ark of our day,” and charged, “Congress and special interests are trying to sink it.” Influential Republicans, who thought they could count on the support of evangelicals, were caught off guard and quickly distanced themselves from the proposed changes. The Sierra Club later acknowledged the EEN as instrumental in this fight. Such political activity raised the ire of prominent members of the Religious Right, who sought to counter the EEN and the NRPE by forming the Interfaith Council for Environmental Stewardship in 2000.

The EEN successfully weathered such criticisms and continues to promote evangelical environmentalism through its *Creation Care* magazine, its recycling programs, and its efforts to convince congregations to observe an annual, ecologically-oriented, “Creation Sunday.” It has formed partnerships with twenty-three moderate and progressive evangelical organizations, including InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Youth with a Mission, Habitat for Humanity, World Vision, and the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities. Attempting to capitalize on the conservative commitment to

“family values,” EEN launched a Healthy Families, Healthy Environment campaign in 2001.

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Further Reading

Larsen, David Kenneth. "God's Gardeners: American Protestant Evangelicals Confront Environmentalism, 1967-2000." Ph.D., University of Chicago, 2001.

Loorz, Victoria, and Ericka Albaugh. *Let the Earth Be Glad: A Starter Kit for Evangelical Churches to Care for God's Creation*. Wynnewood, PA: Evangelical Environmental Network, 1994.