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Religions and the Environment: Commitment High Until U.S. Population Issues Raised

by Roy Beck

The Earth is the Lord's, and people of faith must ensure that it is properly cared for — including curbing humankind's overpopulating ways, according to a powerful consensus that has emerged among America's religious leaders.

Officials from virtually every major faith and denomination in the country have been proclaiming in high-profile ways that protection and restoration of the natural environment is a top-priority spiritual mandate. Especially visible the last two years has been the new Joint Appeal By Religion And Science For The Environment (see boxes on pages 77 and 85). It has issued major statements that include population concerns and even the signatures of Catholic and Baptist representatives.

But an informal survey by *The Social Contract* discovered that despite the proclamations, the protection of natural resources within U.S. boundaries is not a top-priority action within religious leadership circles.

While sampling policies within the seven major U.S. religious groupings (see chart on page 79), *The Social Contract* failed to find a single denomination willing to preserve American eco-systems if it means tackling U.S. population growth.

True, large numbers of religious organizations and offices with paid staff have arisen to take some very specific actions that go far beyond merely avoiding styrofoam cups at church coffee hours. The rising tide of green religious groups forcefully advocates reducing per capita impact through the kinds of strict regulations and consumption cuts necessary if any industrial nation is to achieve sustainable, high environmental quality.

However, while many churches acknowledge population growth as a critical factor in the world's environment, few churches even have statements that specifically note population as a factor in the welfare of the United States. Religious green leaders

concentrate on reducing per capita impact while standing mute as the number of U.S. "capitas" soars. One begins to wonder if the strategy is to stop world population growth and world environmental degradation without any individual countries having to take action within their own borders.

RELIGIOUS GREENS UNFAZED BY 383 MILLION IN U.S.

Religious greens appear quite willing — whether unwittingly or intentionally — to allow the number of people impacting the U.S. environment to rise another 128 million to 383 million by 2050.

In fact, many of the religious offices — especially of the mainline Protestants, the historic peace churches, Jews, and Roman Catholics — have actively contributed to the fast-rising population through unswerving support of renewed mass immigration. Federal immigration policies will be responsible for almost all of the next 128 million people. (U.S. population would have peaked at 243 million in 2035 if not for post-1970 immigrants and their descendants, according to *The Social Contract* study prepared a year ago by demographer Leon Bouvier. Instead, immigration already has driven U.S. population to 255 million today and threatens to push it to 383 million by 2050, with no end in sight.)

Like the churches, few environmental groups have aggressively sought to limit U.S. population growth in recent years. But their actions have tended toward neutrality. Many church groups, though, aggressively *promote* rapid population growth, some doing so despite having U.S. population stability as an official goal. Through congressional testimony, teaching resources and media statements, faith groups consistently have supported higher immigration and refugee admissions while opposing most proposals to stop illegal immigration.

or rejected by the citizenry based on their perceptions not only of self-interest but of morality — a morality presumably guided in part by religious institutions.

To gain a solid indication of the attitudes and actions of American religious leaders about population and immigration issues that affect the environment, one or two of the most representative denominations were surveyed from each of the seven groupings.

The following section contains excerpts from documents and interviews within each of the groupings.

Orthodox (Christian)

"Probably we would side with that thinking that says we don't want to talk about curtailing any part of the population in any way because it is contrary to our theology," said Father Milton Efthimiou, head of the Greek Orthodox social issues department in New York City.

Although he signed the most recent Joint Appeal By Religion and Science For The Environment statement, which expressed concerns about population, Efthimiou said: "We (Greek Orthodox) really have not come out on the issue of population ... Curtailing population is not the answer to hunger and other problems."

He noted that the top leader of worldwide Orthodoxy issued an encyclical on ecology and the need to respect the environment. It did not have a population element, he said.

The Greek Orthodox Church is the largest of two dozen Orthodox denominations in this country, containing nearly half the U.S. Orthodox members. The 4.5 million U.S. Orthodox Christians retain heavy ethnic identities with their Eastern European and Middle East immigrant backgrounds, but Efthimiou said his denomination has no official stance on immigration and does not lobby for admissions.

"We leave immigration issues up to the government. It is not an ethical, ecclesiological issue as far as we are concerned," he said.

Islam

As with the Orthodox, population and immigration (and to some extent environmental) issues just aren't part of the U.S. Islamic agenda.

On the international level, however, Islamic leadership has begun to give serious consideration to population questions, particularly within countries where Muslims dominate. The Aceh Declaration was signed in February 1990 in Aceh, Indonesia by representatives of 24 Muslim nations and nine "ulamas of Islam." Rather than treating overpopulation as a global problem that must be solved by some ill-defined international community with questionable power, the Aceh Declaration seeks solutions by individual countries where governments already have the power to act. It urges all Muslim countries "to

SURVEYING THE SEVEN RELIGIONS OF AMERICA

Even in today's increasingly secularized American society, religious thought and conviction remain an important part of most political equations. Gallup polls have found that more than 90 percent of Americans consider themselves religious in some way. More than 60 percent of Americans routinely participate in religious events; and on any given weekend, 40 percent of Americans can be found at a religious service, according to Gallup polling. Americans are by far the most outwardly religious people of any industrialized nation.

The seven major religious groupings listed on the chart account for at least 157 million Americans. Most major public policy decisions ultimately are supported

formulate population policies," something the United States has yet to do. It also urges the eradication of illiteracy among women and the provision of accessible family planning, including safe contraceptives.

In a statement that may have relevance to the morality of Americans moving to protect their own eco-systems, the Muslim leaders recognized "the sovereign right of each country to establish in the context of Islam its own population policies and programs responding to country-specific needs while mindful that national action or inaction in population may have effects that extend beyond national boundaries."

The final declaration of the Aceh document:

- "emphasizes the responsibilities towards future generations, in particular in the field of population, where the decisions and actions of one generation influences to a significant degree the quality of life of future generations."

- "acknowledges that population, resources and the environment are inextricably linked and stresses our commitment to bringing about a balanced and sustainable relationship among them."

- "expresses concern that while some Muslim countries may afford to increase their population, for most countries, rapid population growth, unplanned migration and urbanization, increasing degradation of the environment threaten the process of their development and the welfare of their people."

But these remarkable declarations have not been adopted by the U.S. Islamic community as a guideline for public policy in this country.

"We have a term that means "only God knows," said Fareed Nu-man from the Washington, DC headquarters of the American Muslim Council. "We don't particularly worry about population. We believe it is in God's hands. If the population gets too big for the world to bear, the natural order will take care of it through famine, disease, etc."

In terms of individual behavior that affects population size, Nu-Man said Islamic teaching encourages American men to avoid having children if they can't care for them, but also that they shouldn't put their career ahead of family. Nu-Man said U.S. Muslims disagree among themselves about the appropriateness of contraceptives: "I believe it is necessary in some instances. If I have a very fertile wife and she is pregnant every year, that can be very harmful to her body."

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The estimated 5 million U.S. Muslims attend more than 800 mosques, many of which are affiliated either with the National Islamic Conference or the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) which have annual conventions that approve resolutions on social issues. "I've not heard anybody raise population issues at these conventions," said Abdallah Cheikh from the ISNA headquarters in Indianapolis.

Contrary to what might first be perceived, Islam is not as much an immigrant-based religion as Christian Orthodoxy. Some 42 percent of the 5 million U.S. Muslims are American blacks, most with long histories in this country. The next largest group is South Asians (24 percent), followed by Arabs (12 percent) and Africans (5 percent), according to a study by the American Muslim Council.

Cheikh said he is unaware of any official stance on immigration or population: "These are important issues, but they aren't priorities. There are more important things."

Mormon

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (Mormon) does not support population-control proposals.

"We feel those who propose such curbs would be wiser to devote their energies to strengthening home life and proven codes of moral conduct in order to disperse the clouds of uncertainty hanging so gloomily over the world," said Don LeFevre, spokesman for the church from the Salt Lake City headquarters.

Birth control is a matter for couples to decide under "inspiration from the Lord," and they are neither encouraged nor discouraged from having large families if they can afford them, LeFevre said.

Like the Muslims and Orthodox, the 4.3 million Mormons are not represented in Washington by leaders calling for particular immigration policies. But the Mormon approach is less neutral than those other two groups and is somewhat at odds with the assertion of immigration-advocacy religions which encourage immigration to this country as a right of economic justice.

"The church encourages its members to remain in their native lands to build up and strengthen the church there," LeFevre said. "Early in our church history, converts abroad were encouraged to come here and build up the church here. But no longer."

If Mormons in other countries decide to move to the United States, "they must follow legal procedures and obtain immigrant visas," LeFevre said. "Individual members of the church in the U.S. likely act as sponsors of immigrants on occasion, but they do so at their own volition, rather than at the encouragement of the church. There is a difference between immigrants and refugees. The church has, on

occasion, participated in the relocation of refugees."

Baptist/Evangelical/ Fundamentalist/Pentecostal

Few of the scores of denominations within this religious grouping have spoken out on population, immigration, or even the environment.

That is not particularly surprising; this second-largest bloc of religious Americans traditionally has included the least politically active of Americans. During much of U.S. history, significant portions of this group have questioned whether politics was too worldly to even bother with. That began to change among many black members during the Civil Rights movement and among larger numbers with the rise of the Religious Right during the 1970s.

Consisting of at least 46 million Christians, this religious grouping is the most ethnically diverse of all religious groups, including most of the historically black churches, fast-growing evangelical Asian congregations, and large numbers of immigrants from the booming Latin American Pentecostal movement. The range of theology among these Christians is fairly broad, but they generally subscribe to what most Americans would consider conservative theologies that emphasize conversion and personal experience

with God.

Evangelism, not social action, tends to be the top priority throughout these churches.

Such is the case for the rapidly-growing Assemblies of God, the second largest and most institutionalized of the Pentecostal denominations. "I don't believe we've ever made a statement on population or immigration," said the Rev. Joseph Flower, the church's general secretary, from the Springfield, Mo., headquarters.

But church leaders do have advice for Pentecostals around the world who express an interest in immigrating to the United States. Even though most come from economically poor groups in underdeveloped nations, the brother and sister Pentecostals are asked to bloom where they've been planted: "We encourage them to stay and be witnesses where they are," Flower said.

The Pentecostal/Evangelical denominations, along with the Roman Catholic Church, stand to benefit the most from immigration through new members. When that was mentioned to Flower as a reason why the Assemblies of God might also get involved in encouraging more open immigration rules, he replied, "We wouldn't consider that a worthy motive."

"Our general feeling is that as long as they are not suffering too much, they should stay and witness where they live. For example, we've had quite a few Russian immigrants in recent years before the changeover. We helped them because some were really political refugees. But we didn't encourage them. They can witness to Russians much better than missionaries can."

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The Southern Baptist Convention is the most likely of all denominations in this religious grouping to speak out on social issues. With more than 15 million members, it is the giant — larger than any other single American faith group except the Roman Catholic Church. Like the Catholics and liberal Protestants, Southern Baptists have their own political advocacy office in Washington DC.

Many members are not yet convinced that environmentalism isn't an anti-Christian philosophy since it includes so much idolatry in worshipping the creation instead of the Creator, explained Jim Smith, head of the Washington office. The denomination's social action agency has sponsored major activities and educational materials the last two years to help Southern Baptists embrace a God-centered ethic of stewardship for natural resources that avoids what many feel to be New Age theological underpinnings in popular environmentalism.

"As a denomination, we are still ambivalent about the specter of overpopulation, and there are many in the denomination who consider that to be a myth," said Ben Mitchell, ethicist in the social action agency office in Nashville. "We are not in any way opposed to methods of birth control that don't include abortifacients."

But Smith added that the membership is divided on family planning issues: "There are those who would be very sympathetic to environmental and population goals. Probably overall, though, most Southern Baptists would not feel that population is a crucial issue in the environmental framework. Our office gets criticism from members when we talk at all about family planning. They think it is anti-biblical."

Southern Baptists have no immigration policies and do not promote U.S. population growth by lobbying for high immigration.

Judaism

The religious Action Center of Reform Judaism recently helped found the 'Joint Appeal By Religion and Science For The Environment' organization to

coalesce a greater body of religious leaders behind environmental and population issues.

"The Jewish community has a many-thousand-year-old religious concern for protecting God's creation, so for us this is a religious obligation," said Rabbi David Saperstein, director of the Washington, D.C. center which represents approximately 850 Reform congregations with about 1.5 million members.

A spokeswoman at the center said America's Reform Jews have had official stances since 1965 about the world's exploding population and the goodness and importance of birth control and family planning.

But when asked if members support U.S. population stabilization if it means limiting immigration, she answered, "My general sense is that we feel the United States has a special responsibility for persecuted people and to open its arms."

Some 4 million of the 6 million ethnic Jews in the United States are affiliated with a synagogue. Like so many of the Orthodox Christians, Muslims and Catholics, they are tied to recent personal immigration histories and ethnic heritages. Because of Jewish refugee experiences for centuries (especially the Nazi era), refugee issues ring with a special resonance within Judaism and its "do not mistreat the alien, for you were once an alien" scriptural foundation. The ethnic experience remains fresh; although Jews account for less than 3 percent of the U.S. population, between a quarter and a third of all refugees settled in this country in recent years have been Jewish.

"On a worldwide scale, it is not clear that immigration hurts the environment," wrote Gary E. Rubin of the American Jewish Committee in a major paper about the ethics of immigration in 1991. He dismissed concerns about a single nation's population effect on specific eco-systems contained in specific estuaries, wetlands and forests in specific countries by saying: "More basically, environmental concerns are by their nature international; they cannot be addressed within the immigration or any other policy of one nation. Pollution, natural resource use and human migration all cross international borders."

Roman Catholic

No religious group wields more power on behalf of high immigration to the U.S. than the Catholic Church. Thanks to the 1880-1914 and 1970-present Great Waves of immigration consisting primarily of Catholics, the church towers over all other American religious groups. Its 59 million members give it immense financial, institutional and political clout, even though polls suggest the majority of its members probably don't agree with its pro-immigration stances. (See page 98ff for an in depth look at Catholic thought.)

At times, it can seem as though the church is

engaged in population competition. In a recent news story, Father Richard J. Ryscavage noted that immigration is the "growing edge of Catholicism in the United States." He is executive director of the Migration and Refugee Services of the U.S. Catholic Conference which resettles about 40 percent of all refugees into this country each year.

"We are in the middle of a huge wave of immigration ... and most of them are Catholics," Ryscavage said. "It's the key to our future and the key to why the Church is going to be very healthy in the 21st century."

There also are recurring signs that Catholic agencies aid illegal aliens in various communities. A notable example was the production in 1989 by the Archdiocese of New York of a "survival book" that offered tips to illegal Irish aliens on how to avoid federal immigration agents. In Southern California, many Catholic clergy are outspoken expounders about the immorality of laws that limit Latin Americans from crossing the U.S. border and taking up residence.

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Nonetheless, the church is not as pro-population growth as critics sometimes paint it to be. The U.S. Catholic bishops took a significant step toward elevating a theology of environmental stewardship with a paper in November 1991. "Even though it is possible to feed a growing population, the ecological costs of doing so ought to be taken into account. ... Our mistreatment of the natural world diminishes our own dignity and sacredness, not only because we are destroying resources that future generations of humans need, but because we are engaging in actions that contradict what it means to be human," the bishops said.

The bishops quoted Pope Paul VI: "It is true that too frequently an accelerated demographic increase adds its own difficulties to the problems of development: the size of population increases more rapidly than the available resources." And Pope John Paul II: "One cannot deny the existence, especially in the Southern Hemisphere, of a demographic problem which creates difficulties for development."

The bishops spoke glowingly of education, good nutrition, and health care for women and children that "promise to improve family welfare and contribute to stabilizing population."

However, they did not back away from the church's traditional teaching against the use of

artificial birth control and abortion to control population growth. Nor did they specifically acknowledge that each nation has a right or obligation to stabilize its own population.

Particularly encouraging was the bishops' statement that environmental responsibility included not only practical measures such as safeguarding endangered species and the ability of the land to feed a hungry world, but more aesthetic measures such as "to preserve remaining wilderness" and "to maintain landscapes in integrity."

Liberal Protestant

"Population policy is an integral aspect of social reform. (We urge) Congress to establish a national policy of stabilizing population size..." the Presbyterian General Assembly declared in 1972.

The policy is illustrative of the long history of leadership on population issues from the leaders of 34 million Christians in this large Protestant grouping. The preponderance of religious leadership on environment, population and immigration has come from the two dozen denominations in this grouping.

Most are known as mainline or oldline Protestants. They are least representative of America's mass immigration history. The ancestors of most of them immigrated somewhat gradually over a period of two and a half centuries. Mainline Protestants include most descendants of the Protestant Americans who created and totally dominated the society before mass immigration began in 1880.

This group often is referred to as "liberal Protestant" because the leadership of national agencies is forcefully liberal on social issues and its clergy tend toward more liberal theology. But polls find that the membership of the mainline Protestant denominations has continued to form the backbone of the Republican Party.

Also part of the liberal Protestant grouping are some half-million members of the so-called peace churches: Quakers, Brethren and Mennonites. Though small in number, they are like Jewish Americans in having a disproportionate impact on public policy discussion because of highly organized advocacy groups. The little peace churches have as many staff in Capitol Hill lobbying offices as the total of Washington staffs representing the 46-million Baptist/Evangelical/Pentecostal group of Americans.

The office for Quakers says they are "looking for a global community in which all people can choose freely where they wish to live and work... The long-range ideal is open borders."

In the short-term, the Quaker office says, there is a need for increasing immigration, admitting all refugees seeking asylum, and an end to deportations and employer sanctions.

As with their pacifism activities, the peace churches tend to occupy the far end of the political

spectrum on many issues. But they function as something of a conscience for mainline Protestant leaders who struggle between personal idealism and the conservatism of their constituencies.

Mainline Protestant leaders' advocacy for the environment and immigration reaches toward idealism on both but fails to reconcile where the two conflict. The Presbyterian Church may be the most striking example of this.

No other denomination appears to have been as eloquent and bold in pointing out the need for population stabilization as the Presbyterians:

● "[The Presbyterian Church] urges all agencies concerned with international cooperation, including the government of the United States, to be ready to assist countries who request help in the development of programs of voluntary planned parenthood as a practical and humane means of controlling fertility and population growth," the General Assembly stated in 1965.

● By 1971, it recognized the uncomfortable reality that reliance on private, voluntary decisions "will not be sufficient to provide the necessary limitation of population growth unless there is a radical and rapid change in the attitudes and desires. The church must commit itself to effecting this change. The assumption that couples have the freedom to have as many children as they can support should be challenged. We can no longer justify bringing into existence as many children as we desire. Our corporate responsibility to each other prohibits this. Given the population crisis we must recognize and teach, beginning with ourselves, that man has an obligation to limit the size of his family."

● In 1972, Presbyterians called on the civil community "to take such actions as will stabilize population size... We who are motivated by the urgency of over-population rather than the prospect of decimation would preserve the species by responding in faith: Do not multiply — the earth is filled!"

Such statements continue through to the present. But throughout the 1980s, Presbyterians also were taking strong stands on many immigration issues which would have, or have, led to increased U.S. population.

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Some statements recognized competing issues, although none addressed the population/environment

implications. The 1986 General Assembly, for example, recognized "the responsibility of governments, including ours, to regulate immigration into their territories." It also noted that governments would need to balance humanitarian concerns for potential immigrants with "the social and economic needs of its people."

During the last decade, Presbyterian leaders have taken the following actions which entail population growth as an effect:

- Favored increases in overall annual immigration to speed up "reunification of separated families."
- Opposed eliminating immigration preferences for brothers, sisters and adult children of earlier immigrants.
- Opposed an immigration ceiling that would include immediate relatives of U.S. residents.
- Actively campaigned to grant asylum to millions of people who illegally entered the country before 1982.
- Complained that illegal aliens who arrived during the rest of the '80s have not also been granted asylum.
- Advocated laws to allow for greater immigration from Mexico "whose people have special claims on U.S. society."
- Supported legislation suspending deportation of Nicaraguans, Salvadorans, Haitians and Guatemalans who entered the country illegally and were deemed ineligible for asylum.
- Expressed distress that asylum was not given to more Salvadorans, Afghans and Haitians.
- Protested interdiction of Haitian migrants at sea.
- Opposed efforts to deport Ethiopians.
- Called for expedited resettlement of 250,000 remaining refugees in Southeast Asian camps.
- Urged temporary or permanent resettlement of 1.5 million refugees in the Horn of Africa.
- Affirmed that the "best and most durable solution for most refugees remains voluntary repatriation when conditions permit safe return," but recognized "that resettlement often remains the only available solution adequate for the safety and survival of refugees." Urged congregations to "continue and increase refugee resettlement efforts."
- Opposed federal policies that placed more of the cost of refugee resettlement on the churches which are doing the settling.
- Opposed any policy that would guide where refugees are resettled.
- Opposed any increases in immigration fees to cover the cost of enforcement or monitoring.
- Affirmed efforts to provide assistance to illegal aliens and to help foreign citizens cross U.S. borders illegally.
- Opposed sanctions against employers who hire illegal aliens.
- Expressed concern about worker identification cards that would help employers turn away illegal

aliens without discriminating against legal residents who look or sound foreign.

- Sought to increase access for Mexicans to jobs in the United States.

The Presbyterian experience was repeated in various ways in other liberal Protestant denominations in which immigration has become the latest extension of the civil rights crusade waged so successfully by churches for three decades. Environmental consequences of immigration have had little opportunity to emerge in that milieu.

The United Methodist Board of Church and Society provides an illustration of that. It once devoted an entire department to population issues. The denomination long has been on record calling "on the United States government to develop a national population policy that would include the goal of stabilizing the United States population, and recommendations on population distribution and land and resource use."

The Washington advocacy office still distributes booklets that quote church policies:

- "Christians have no alternative to involvement in seeking solutions for the great and complex set of problems which faces the world today. All these issues are closely interrelated: hunger, poverty, denial of human rights, economic exploitation and overconsumption by the rich, technologies that are inadequate or inappropriate, depletion of resources, and rapid population growth."

- "Rapidly swelling numbers of humankind are making it increasingly difficult to solve the other interconnected problems ... clearly we do know there can be too many people."

- "...nations must be free to develop policies in keeping with their own needs and cultures."

- "The church should exert leadership in making possible the safe and legal availability of sterilization procedures for both men and women, and of abortion where appropriate."

- "...churches need to keep before people the moral reasons why we need to be concerned with the population problem."

Apparently the church has not kept those reasons all that visible, even before its leaders. The United Methodists no longer have a population department or specialist. Jaydee Hanson, executive of the environmental justice department, said United Methodist advocacy has continued calling strongly for sustainable development, primarily through reduced consumption by Americans and stressing the need for economic equity and justice to bring down fertility rates.

"Don't get me wrong, population is still an important factor in the United States," Hanson said. "But I have to be honest that it isn't where this department puts its main effort. Immigration is the

main cause of U.S. population growth. I don't think we've ever made statements on the numbers of immigrants... We've been criticized by some of the people from the population groups of 20 years ago for not working enough on population... If you want U.S. population not to increase, you have to get serious about development in Mexico and Central America."

Immigration stances of liberal Protestant denominations are driven not by their environmental experts and committees but primarily by their substantial refugee/immigration agencies.

IMMIGRATION IS MORAL PRIORITY OVER ENVIRONMENT

The survey found no example of any denomination wrestling with the contradictions of its stated top-priority support for improving the environment *and* for continued mass immigration and high U.S. population growth. But there currently is no question that the de facto — if not intentional — policy of the activist faith groups is to give priority to immigration any time it collides with environmental values.

Why? This article, and this issue of *The Social Contract*, represent an initial step in exploring U.S. religious thought and behavior on these issues. One can only guess how much change would occur if these contradictions began to be considered seriously by theologians, ethicists and other religious leaders. At this time, however, the following appear to be the primary reasons America's religious leaders are unwilling to protect the environment by confronting U.S. population growth:

(1) Matthew 25: 31-56. The Parable of the Last Judgment.

Spoken just before his trial and crucifixion, Jesus described a time in which the Son of Man would gather "all nations" before him and separate "the people" into the blessed and the damned. To those on his left, he will say, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me." The damned will ask when they ever had seen the Lord in those conditions, and the answer will be, "Whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me."

This is one of the bedrock scriptural bases for Christian living. Interestingly, the more liberal the Christian denomination, the more likely it is that officials will interpret this scripture in a literal and fundamentalist way. The great fear, as propounded in their teachings, is that any "stranger" prohibited from

crossing U.S. borders for permanent residency may in effect be Jesus. The literal interpretation would be that in turning away the stranger at the gate, Americans risk eternal damnation (see page 104 for how the scripture is used in Australia).

The United Methodist Council of Bishops pledged: "God comes in the form of the sojourner... we invite all those whose hearts are as ours to join hands with us in declaring our uncompromising intention to welcome the sojourners in our midst."

(2) Leviticus 19: 33-34. The "do not mistreat the alien, for you were once an alien" code.

Religious immigration advocates often marvel that in the midst of the narrow legalisms of the Levitical Code for the ancient Israelites, there is this call for universalism: "When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the Lord your God."

This law, which is attributed to God as spoken to Moses, is not explicit on whether the alien is to be treated as a native-born for the rest of his life or simply in some kind of temporary protected status, but immigration advocates tend to interpret it as requiring granting to strangers at the gate permanent residency in the United States with all rights of citizenship.

There is little evidence of attempts within the Jewish and Christian communities to reconcile these types of verses with other scriptural teachings that relate to preserving the creation, protecting health, and treating natural resources as a loan that can be passed down to future generations.

(3) Anti-abortion theology.

Although most liberal Protestant and Jewish leaders endorse full legal rights and availability of abortion, leaders of the majority of religious Americans strongly oppose abortion. They tend to see efforts to control population growth as necessarily including abortion. Thus, they either oppose population stabilization or stay out of the debate.

"The pro-population-stabilization churches...are among the loudest voices for high immigration which causes nearly all U.S. population growth."

The pro-life theology that dismisses various "practical" arguments for abortion, such as the inability of a mother or of society to properly provide for a child, commonly refers to the power of God to care for all human life no matter what the practical difficulties are. There is a tendency on population matters for the more conservative people of faith to

use the same reasoning to suggest that the limits of population size should be left to God, not humans. That adds another reason for them not to bother with the population issue, despite its impact on the environment.

A major irony is that some of the religious groups that are neutral or even oppose trying to stabilize the population in actuality are more helpful to U.S. population stabilization than are those denominations that favor stabilization. The anti-population-control churches don't lobby for high immigration, and some discourage foreign members from immigrating. The pro-population-stabilization churches, on the other hand, are among the loudest voices for the high immigration which causes nearly all U.S. population growth.

(4) White-affluent-American guilt.

Most denominational offices with leaders speaking out on population/immigration issues ascribe to a worldview in which the United States, through irresponsible military and economic actions, is to blame for a lot of the suffering in the world. Thus, it is unconscionable for the creator of misery to block victims from seeking better lives by moving to live in the eco-systems of the United States. Some religious leaders with this view acknowledge that the country would be better off without massive immigration, but suggest the numbers should not be cut artificially. They are willing to wait until U.S. efforts to help underdeveloped nations succeed in raising living conditions high enough there to shut off the desire for people to move to the United States.

The acceptance of historically unprecedented numbers of immigrants is considered by many to be a form of foreign aid that fulfills some of the country's moral debt to the rest of the world.

Within this worldview and theology is the belief of many religious environmentalists that it is selfish for Americans to place a priority on preserving the natural world within their own borders until environmental and economic conditions are brought closer to parity in the rest of the world. The environment is a priority goal as long as the means toward that end involve changes in Americans' resource-sinful lifestyles, and in a reduction in their fertility. Under this strain of thinking, it is not right to deny millions of poor aliens entry even if their presence leads to accelerated loss of bio-diversity and permanent damage to natural wonders.

When the population implications of massive immigration are raised, many liberal Protestant leaders suggest the remedy is for Americans to reduce their births by one more for each immigrant allowed entry. This also fits well within a multiculturalism philosophy that values increasing the numbers of ethnic minorities within the United States to give them more political control and to dilute the European-

descendent hegemony that has produced so many immoral international actions and the American patterns of overconsumption.

(5) Globalism

"As Christians, we recognize that the boundaries of God's kingdom are not the same as the boundaries of nations," the Presbyterian Church has stated. "Citizenship in this kingdom, which comes through faith in Jesus Christ, is based on a radically different standard than the nations of the world. In God's kingdom, national borders have no ultimacy."

Those lines were directed particularly at the responsibility of U.S. Christians to help people in other lands generously, but also to question U.S. laws limiting Mexican migration.

U.S. Catholic bishops have stated: "The right to migrate for work cannot be simply ignored in the exercise of a nation's sovereign right to control its own borders. In this regard, Catholic social teaching sets a higher ethical standard for guarding the rights of the

undocumented within our borders than does current U.S. law and policy."

(6) Ignorance/naivete.

It is difficult to judge the intention or depth of conviction behind most U.S. religious leaders' population beliefs because there does not appear to have been much careful and strenuous consideration of the issues. When questioned about population during this survey, religious leaders not heavily involved with environmental issues were surprised, citing Ben Wattenberg's late-1980s fears that the United States might soon suffer a declining population. And many of the religious environmentalists appeared to be unaware of the work of the Sierra Club and others concerning the limits of pollution improvements that can be gained through non-draconian lifestyle changes, and of the additional per capita cuts that will be required if U.S. population doubles. In fact, the concept of doubling-times and other mathematical factors seems scarcely to have been considered. Religious leaders do not appear to have given a thought to how the environmental quality of life will be changed for their children in 2050 as a result of current conditions that will have almost doubled the U.S. population from the 203 million that Earth Day 1970 leaders considered already too high.

LEADERSHIP AND LAITY DIFFER

Religious leaders apparently have yet to convince their grassroots members that environmental quality has a lower priority than mass immigration. The majority of religious Americans appear to put a priority on caring for the environment and restricting immigration despite the lack of a single national religious group taking that stance.

One strong indication of this is that a long series of opinion polls has found some two-thirds of Americans supporting immigration reductions. Because more than two-thirds of Americans are affiliated with religious bodies, the likelihood is that the majority of church, synagogue and mosque members favor more immigration restrictions instead of the neutrality or active immigration promotion of their religious leaders.

"More than two-thirds of Christians [polled by Gallup] objected to present mass immigration. Less than 5 percent of Christians supported the expansion of immigration..."

A Gallup poll taken in February, 1992 helped confirm that likelihood. It did not have a large enough sample of Jews, Muslims or individual Protestant

denominations to judge opinions reliably within each of those groups. But the sampling of all Christians and people who said they had no religion was statistically reliable. What Gallup found was that Christians were far more likely than non-religious Americans to oppose current mass immigration.

Furthermore, Gallup found no statistical difference between Catholics and Protestants, even though immigration for a century has consisted primarily of Catholics. More than two-thirds of Christians objected to present mass immigration. Less than 5 percent of Christians supported the expansion of immigration that would be the result of policies advocated by many liberal Protestant and Catholic groups.

One question commonly raised about polls is whether Americans would answer the same way if the issue were framed more in moral terms. This journalist participated in just such an experiment in 1983. The *United Methodist Reporter*, with a half-million subscribers nationwide, devoted 114 column inches to the competing issues. Articles were evenly divided between moral arguments made by proponents for generosity to the "stranger" in the immigration lines, and for stabilizing the U.S. population to protect the environment and low-wage Americans. Included was a list of questions that asked the reader to make the tough choices of balancing two conflicting "good" options, the kind of practical exercise that governments go through all the time.

Readers were asked: "Recognizing that a good case can be made for both basic positions on U.S. immigration policy, which do you believe should receive first-priority support among Christians?"

Only 18 percent of the responding United Methodists gave priority to "generous immigration," the priority of their top national leaders then and today. But 78 percent gave priority to "strict limits on immigration in order to stabilize U.S. population growth." An opinion pollster at Southern Methodist University judged the results significant in predicting the majority will of the 9 million United Methodists.

National church leaders appeared out of step even with the overall clergy, 59 percent of whom supported population stabilization over immigration when the two conflict. That choice garnered 78 percent of laywomen and 84 percent of laymen. Every age group of the laity gave priority to population/environment over immigration.

On another question, United Methodists by 73 percent to 17 percent gave first priority to the welfare of persons already in the United States over immigrants fleeing their homelands in search of a new life or reunion with family members.

William E. Gibson, senior editor of *The Egg: An Eco-Justice Quarterly*, noted that when a major environmental position paper was presented to the national Presbyterian governing body in 1990, the

grassroots representatives insisted on moving population references to near the top.

"I think that was a clue to the fact that within the laity, they are very concerned about population," he said.

All these survey results raise a question about whether the opinions and actions of religious leaders make any difference, since they so obviously have not swayed the majority of followers. But Jim Dorcy, senior government relations associate of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, says religious leaders wield great influence because immigration/population/environment decisions are made by elected officials, not popular vote. Every time choices have to be made, he says, religious leaders speak forcefully in Washington to provide the moral undergirding for decisions that increase immigration and U.S. population growth. Because of religious leaders' efforts, prioritizing high immigration over environmental concerns typically is seen as the moral high ground in the nation's capital, he said.

IT'S TIME TO DETAIL MORAL OPTIONS

It remains to be seen whether the moral high ground established by the activist Catholics, mainline Protestants, peace churches and Jews is mere moral symbolism or a guide that actually can bring about a moral reality. The religious leaders simply have not laid out in detail what Americans must do both to protect ecosystems and to keep the doors widely open for mass immigration.

They will move the moral debate along considerably by sharing their answers to these among other questions:

- In general, these religious activists have indicated their preference that Americans reduce their material lifestyles and their fertility to make room for immigrants. By how much? And what are all the ways?
- What are the calculations that determine how much Americans will have to give up to meet the religious leaders' various goals?
- How much do Americans need to reduce their fertility below replacement level to meet those goals?
- What incentives and disincentives should be used to persuade Americans to make those fertility changes, especially when recent fertility trends are upward? (Most denominations and faith groups have spoken against even mild forms of coercion such as tax incentives.)
- Will the denominations ask Americans to make fertility decisions that they do not now teach their own church members to do? (*The Social Contract* has yet to find a religious group with a program to teach its members to limit families to two children, let alone one that advocates a larger percentage of one-child families to make room for immigrants.)
- What are the social and psychological

implications for Americans of the impact of 383 million people on their access to parks and open spaces and additional restrictions on individual freedom that tend to be inevitable to protect domestic tranquility in more congested civilizations?

The environment/immigration debate would move to a much higher intellectual plain if the options were laid out as are the competing honest proposals to cut the federal budget deficit. The proposals for this have called on all parties to use the same economic assumptions and the same bottom line deficit figure and then show the combination of spending cuts and tax increases that would achieve that bottom line.

In this environmental debate, the bottom line should be an agreed upon target such as the total annual U.S. hydrocarbon emissions, energy consumption and water use. Then each proponent should list the annual fertility rate, immigration level and specific per capita consumption reductions that would reach those bottom lines.

Advocates of each combination of factors could make their case for the superior morality of their own proposal. In the end (and better soon than later), one option must be adopted by American society and the U.S. government if eco-systems are to be protected.

If the factors of immigration, fertility and consumption are allowed to continue to independently float without any accountability to their ecological impact, pronouncements about the spiritual mandate to protect and restore the natural environment are little more than moral posturing. ■

**Excerpts from the Joint Appeal
in Religion and Science
June 3, 1991**

"We believe a consensus now exists, at the highest level of leadership across a significant spectrum of religious traditions, that the cause of environmental integrity and justice must occupy a position of utmost priority for people of faith."

"...we declare here and now that steps must be taken toward...measures to protect continued biological diversity; and concerted efforts to slow the dramatic and dangerous growth in world population through empowering both women and men, encouraging economic self-sufficiency, and making family planning services available to all who may consider them on a strictly voluntary basis."

"No effort, however heroic, to deal with these global conditions and the interrelated issues of social justice can succeed unless we address the increasing population of the Earth..."

From "Statement of Religious Leaders at the Summit on Environment," signed by 24 people, notably including Father Drew Christiansen of the U.S. Catholic Conference, the national social issues organization totally controlled by the U.S. Catholic Bishops. Other signers included the Rev. Robert Schuller of the Crystal Cathedral, Chief Oren Lyons of the Turtle Clan of the Onondaga Nation, and leaders of the Rabbinical Council of America, the evangelical World Vision USA, and of the American Baptist, United Methodist, Greek Orthodox, Episcopal, Evangelical Lutheran, and National Baptist denominations.

**Excerpts from the Joint Appeal
in Religion and Science
May 12, 1992**

"We...call upon our government to change national policy so that the United States will begin to ease, not continue to increase, the burdens on our biosphere and their effect on the planet's people."

"...it seems clear that addressing this problem now rather than later makes economic as well as moral sense."

"We believe the poor and vulnerable workers in our own land should not be asked to bear disproportionate burdens."

"We commit ourselves to work together for a United States that will lead the world in...halting deforestation and slowing the decline in species diversity..."

"We believe there is a need for concerted efforts to stabilize world population by humane, responsible and voluntary means consistent with our differing values."

From "Declaration of the Mission to Washington," signed by 50 scientists and 50 religious leaders, the most notable additions to the 1991 signers being representatives of the Southern Baptist, Progressive Baptist, Unitarian-Universalist, United Church of Christ and Presbyterian denominations, as well as several more high officials of Jewish and Catholic institutions.