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Catholics, Methodists unite to craft paper on Eucharist, ecology

Sharon Abercrombie | Apr. 27, 2012 Eco Catholic

Can you guess who crafted these poetic images about creation? "The pure in heart see all things full of God. They see Him in the firmament of heaven, in the moon. They see him making the clouds his chariots and walking upon the wings of the wind. They see him preparing rain for the earth, giving grass for the cattle and green herb for the use of man ... They see the Creator in all, wisely governing all." Meister Eckhart or Hildegard, perhaps? Nope.

John Wesley, 18th century English Methodist preacher and evangelist, is the author. Wesley's words appear in "Heaven and Earth Are Full of Your Glory: A United Methodist and Roman Catholic Statement on the Eucharist and Ecology." The new bilateral document, released April 22 in celebration of Earth Day, "calls upon both Methodists and Catholics to remember that the grain for bread and grapes for wine become part of salvation and that salvation itself is an act of God at work in all of creation," reports The Catholic Coalition on Climate Change.

"When we celebrate Eucharist, we offer thanks to the Father for the goodness of all the things that he has made, visible and invisible," the document states.

The two groups wrote their paper "to deepen our bonds of communion and to demonstrate how our churches can speak with a common voice about one of the great moral challenges of our age ... to move from justification to justice from the solid ground of our common baptismal faith to a prophetic witness that show our obedience to the Divine Creator."

Their document reports how Jesus chastised the Pharisees for being able to interpret the appearance of the skies while being unable to interpret the signs of the times: "In our time the appearance of the skies has become a sign of the times. The threat of climate destabilization, the destruction of the ozone layer, and the loss of bio-diversity point to a disordered relation between humankind, other living beings and the rest of earth. United Methodists and Roman Catholics have interpreted the signs of these times of ecological crisis as a summons to an ecumenical response."

Things matter and matter is not just a thing, it says. Quoting Popes John Paul II and Benedict XVI, the paper reminds us that dominion is not a license to exploit earth but to nurture and care for it, "even as God does."

"As God's royal representative, the human race is called and commissioned to serve as priests on behalf of all creation."

Priests on behalf of all creation, being pure of heart, are the opposite of what Wesley describes as "practical atheism." Practical atheism, Wesley says, is the vice that habitually closes the eyes of the heart to the presence of God in the other and is a sign of sinful blindness. The remedy for this malady is the study of natural philosophy as a first step, then "stirring the grace within us by engaging in virtuous actions."

The statement is the outcome of the seventh round of bilateral dialogue between the United Methodist and

Catholic churches in the United States. The authors were nominated by their respective ecclesial bodies to represent them in the dialogue, but the statement represents only the view of those scholars.

Serving as co-chairs were Catholic Bishop William S. Skylstad and United Methodist Bishop Timothy Whitaker.

Catholic members were Fr. Drew Christiansen, Dr. Angela Russell Christman, Msgr. Kevin Irwin, Dr. Connie Lasher and Fr. James Massa.

United Methodist members were Dr. Edgardo Colon-Emeric, Dr. Glen Alton Messer II, Dr. L. Edward Phillips, Dr. Kendall Soulen, Dr. Karen Westerfield-Tucker and Dr. Sondra Wheeler.

The entire document can be accessed [1] at the Catholic Coalition on Climate Change website.

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Links:
[1] http://catholicclimatecovenant.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/Heaven-and-Earth-are-Full-of-Your-Glory.pdf