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A Heretic's View of the Seventh Principle
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Those of you who know me, and who noted the title of today's sermon, I am sure expect me to claim that the 7th principle is baloney and that it's emphasis on the environment is out of whack.

Well, I guess I'll surprise you. I'm going to argue that the only thing wrong with the 7th principle is that it is misnumbered (it ought to be #1), and that it sets too high a standard to follow in one's life, and maybe should be dropped. I came to that conclusion as I tried to apply it to our greatest environmental challenge-probably of all time-global warming and overpopulation.

We started our service today with the hymn "Touch the Earth, Reach the Sky, and will conclude with "Come sing a song with me". These are pretty songs that emphasize joining together in hope and love. They make us feel good, and do empower us. But joining together is surprisingly hard to do in the face of bad news, like considering a difficult future of global warming. This will not be an easy sermon to give, nor to hear.

What do we do when someone bring us bad news? Most of us know better, but we still end up to some extent blaming the messenger. Indeed, if the message has a moral or religious context, we YELL "heretic", and start piling up the kindling. The closer the unwelcome message hits home in our soul, the more resistant to change we become.

I am reminded of my own reaction to a diagnosis of prostate cancer several years ago. Probably like many of you just now, I recoiled from the news, and immediately asked about false positives. But I learned to live with the diagnosis. It turns out that I am one of the "lucky" ones--it seems to be slow growing, so each year I have to have a very unpleasant biopsy. So long as the really bad things stay in the future, then I am left in the same situation as with my conclusions about global warming: The knowledge that we have gained is painful to get, and is painful to hold and think about. But in real terms, it has done us no good at all. The future is still going to happen, and seems largely out of our control. The challenge is not just to cope with the knowledge, but to incorporate it as productively as we can into our lives.

In any case, when I am done, you can decide who is the heretic--me, you, or them...

You will remember that UU ism originated in heresy (remember--UNITarianism, as opposed to TRINITarianism). We usually express ourselves as proud of our tradition of open-mindedness, yes, even of accepting (if not encouraging) heretical ideas. Of course,

human nature being what it is, it is always easy to be proud and accepting of heretical ideas if those ideas occurred a long ago time, or on a subject of no direct concern to ourselves.

Another thing, just because you are heretical, doesn't mean you are correct--heresy does not correlate with being right, or even rational. Was Martin Luther "right" when he challenged Catholic dogma of the time? He was calling people to what he thought was a higher standard, and he clearly triggered the spilling of much blood. But was he right?

Well, I advertised a heretic's look at the seventh principle. Just so you won't have to sneak a look at the back of the program to remind yourself, I will read the 7th principle:

Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

I spent a lot of thought parsing the principle, but today will focus only on the key word: "respect". Notice: The principle does **not** say that we must prevent all change or even damage to an interdependency. It **does** say that we must respect, i.e., pay attention to, give some weight in our lives, to interdependence and how our actions may affect the rest of the existence. We'll take a look at that idea, and see where it goes.

But let's be very clear, this is not a principle about the environment, or rather, the environment is only a part of it. If you really look at the principle, contrary to what some may think, it does not force a judgment that a single coal fired power plant be shut down even if it destroys the air, it provides no opposition to drilling in Anwar, and provides no particular basis for a vegetarian diet. It **does** say we need to think about what we are doing, and try to be honest about what we are doing or not doing. As far as P7 is concerned, we can kill all the spotted owls we want, or at least feel the need to, so long as we consider carefully and honestly what is involved.

As Jeff last week quoted in his sermon of Henry David Thoreau: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to confront only the essential facts of life, and see if I could learn what it had to teach.." In other words, we should live with care, deliberately, purposefully.

The people who wrote this principle were, in fact, pretty crafty! It looks at first glance as though they took no position at all, but as we shall see, sincerely following P7 is VERY hard!

So, how actually do we do this? How do we show respect?

It seems to me we show respect by spending whatever effort that is needed to identify, clarify, and understand the inter-dependencies. Big issues, with big consequences, demand a lot of understanding. And after understanding, we must **then** make our judgments as to how important the various interdependencies are, for our decisions will affect them differently.

To **understand** the interdependencies, we must bring to bear those very qualities that make us as humans unique, i.e., to apply our minds and our intellects to the challenge of achieving this understanding.. Yes, to no one's surprise who know me, I mean the scientific method and scientific inquiry which is the most trustworthy means we have to understand the effect of what we do on other interests in the universe, and of what is done to us. We must treat the best science we can do as in fact the best that we can do, and deal with whatever it tells us, like it or not.

Meg spotted a recent quote in Time magazine, by none other than Henry Kissinger! Speaking in praise of a friend who had died, he said that "service to the country requires confronting certain realities, that you cannot use one truth as an alibi to neglect another".

But even if we know what the interdependencies are, how can we judge their relative importance? How do we balance the different impacts? And how do we accommodate the inevitable uncertainties in our knowledge?

Just as respect demands understanding, it also demands **judgment**: it demands that we **choose** among our values.

This is not easy: difficult questions are facing us all the time! Is it more important to protect the Smallpox virus from being made extinct, vs. keeping it alive but with a tiny probability of the virus escaping from the lab freezer? Is it more important to preserve a given tree, than to cut it down for bluebird houses? Or even tougher, should we use downed wood for the bird house, or leave it for the fungus and termites that otherwise will starve? Are we not playing the role of god without her power and wisdom?

It seems that we are the only species that even claims to follow the 7th principle. Indeed, we UUs who might really try to do so are a tiny minority within that species. Other religions talk in various ways about the need to fit into existence. But UUism is, I think, the only religion that incorporates so deeply the ideas of the 7th principle, even if we don't or can't always follow it! We should be proud.

So, we have P7 urging us to think about and study what we are doing, and then to make honest judgments according to our professed values. Sounds good, let's see how it works.

In fact, let's see how this works as we look at what is, in my view, the over-riding environmental and moral challenge of our generation: Global Warming (GW). This is a test not only of understanding the interdependencies (a hard enough job), but of deciding what to do about them.

After many years of my own skepticism about the evidence for climate change, I am now convinced that it has become clear and persuasive. GW is coming, indeed is already here, and the only question we have is whether we will take steps that significantly reduce the adverse effects in the future. In the lifetime of our children, global warming may well be changing the world in ways that are ever more obvious, but if so, it will then be too late then to do anything much about it. There is perhaps one generation, 25 years,

to make major dent. That's not opinion--it is the best prediction our science can offer. As Tom Friedman recently wrote "our kids are going to be **very** angry with us..".

In the 30 years since the early warnings, mankind has, I am afraid, mostly just talked. Driven more by increased costs than any 7th principle concerns, individuals and business around the world have responded, not unreasonably, by picking the easy, cheap things to do. We have made marginal changes, but not fundamental ones. So emissions continue to rise, as population and economic growth easily overwhelm the marginal improvements.

There seem to be two approaches.

There are those who assert that Global Warming will be stopped if we all just buy Priuses, change our light bulbs, trim the temperatures, add more ethanol and wind and solar and conservation, and that will be enough. I'll give you a hint: it won't. These are all desirable and necessary things to do, but all marginal: they will not change the outcome.

Others beg the question by blaming ourselves, i.e., it is the profligate, consuming life style of the US and western Europe that is at fault. But while our western consumption has been a factor, and while we have certainly benefited by using so much carbon, so has the rest of the world. Being blunt about it, the standard of health and living in the rest of the world has improved as a result of the very technology we love to criticize. This is an example of an interdependency--if you took away Western economic activity, you also take away medical advance, the green revolution, improved efficiency via higher technology. Ying and Yang, good and bad. This doesn't mean our course has been wise, only that it has been complex.

But in a very real sense, we humans chose this path to "now" some 10,000 years ago when we began to cultivate crops and domesticate animals. We quickly used these technologies to increase our population past the several people per square mile that is sustainable with very low impacts on the environment. We now approach 200 persons per square mile of land: there is no way this could have been achieved or continued without intensive, progressing technology and energy use.

We **do** need more intensive, progressive technology, but that alone will not solve the problem. There are just way too many people. And as living standards rise even to minimal levels, way too much consumption. The vast number of people times slight increases in standards of living will wipe out any gains, marginal or otherwise, that we can make. Wishing the problem to go away, wishing the facts were different, does not make it so.

Recently Time magazine had a series of articles about the very real problems caused by the rather minor population decreases in certain parts of the world, and how countries are working to correct these trends and reestablish positive growth rates. But not a word about the world population excess, or those many countries where nearly half the

population are under 15! It seems that overpopulation is just not on our radar screen, even though it is a major part of the GW problem.

But maybe it is, a little. By chance, on May 16, I saw Glenn Beck interview William Shatner of Star Trek fame--not an interview you'd expect would show much insight. But Shatner identified overpopulation as THE major issue for us and our kids, and refused to be diverted by Beck's irrelevancies. In fact, at the end, Shatner said to Beck "your education is lacking in certain areas".

In fact, only one country in the world has taken on the population issue: China. Their "one child policy" is rife with human tragedy and unfairness, yet China could not have eliminated famine if they had not taken this step. As much as I dislike much of what China does and stands for, their action is one of the few in the past generation that shows a willingness to take big steps to deal with big problems. Facing similar problems, would we in the US been ready to do that? More to the point, would UUs, even with the 7th principle, been ready to support it?

As I studied this subject in preparation for today, I was shocked by the coming impact of the combination of GW and over-population.

A few numbers: To get a sense of the scale of wealth, US citizens have 20x the gross domestic product as do Chinese and Indian, who make up a 1/3 of the world population. Even so, the world is now probably generating about 4x the carbon dioxide than is sustainable. Even if the US TOTALLY eliminated carbon energy usage, the rest of the world would still generate gases enough to keep global warming going with no noticeable change. And if the rest of the world rise only 1/3 of the way to **our** present standard of living, there would be some 10-20x as much greenhouse gas generated as now--not 10% too much, a 1000% too much. And that's assuming that population suddenly stops increasing.

In the face of such numbers, there just is no possibility that things can be made better by marginal changes. Does anyone think that the whole world can really reduce fossil energy use and other practices to 1/20 th of the present level?

Of course, we will not get to 20x the carbon emission because there simply isn't that much fuel available. But the numbers show the degree to which overpopulation will forever trap the vast majority in poverty, and they show the terrible effects on global warming and environment that even a small rise in living standards will bring.

Of course, there may be a solution: if we keep the rest of the world at least as poor and no more numerous as they are, and if the developed world cuts emissions by at least x10, then we might barely get GW under control. But I suspect even this is only barely possible: we would have to convert wholesale to nuclear power, conservation, implement all the various so-called green energy sources, and convert almost totally away from meat diets. But the rest of the world would still be poor. If so, how does keeping the world

poor fit into Principle#1--worth and dignity? Or #2, justice and equity? Or #6, world community?

Wow, you are thinking--what a downer! Menke is off the deep end, even more than usual! Well, if you think I am pessimistic, take a look at Hymn# 1174 in our own hymnal. Even I couldn't deal with this one. It refers to "...starvation stalking though hungry lands while some die hourly in the street..", and worse. But it does conclude "...if we are to keep our race alive, the choice is ours..".

The 7th principle is important: if we take it seriously, it forces us to look at the real world. But we may not like what we see. Are any of us, even individually, really ready for this level of challenge to apply our professed principles? Are we really ready to take seriously our responsibility, unfer our principles, to respond to what we can see is coming?

Even a cancer diagnosis is not this hard. And biopsies are not this painful.

I don't know about you, but I, for one, am not yet ready to dedicate the rest of my life to this issue that P7 has highlighted. But if we are not, then I would argue that we ARE being heretical (or at least hypocritical), for we are refusing to live the very principles we claim to honor. It is not just the 7th. How about principle#4: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning. In which "responsibly" must include paying attention to the truth we find, and then living it, whether we like it or not.

That's a pretty tough conclusion: are we really this bad, this unprincipled? After all, most of us are trying very conscientiously to do the right thing most of the time. But the seventh principle and the others set a really tough standard. I very much doubt whether even Uuism is willing to embrace the unpalatable actions needed (vegetarianism, electric economy, nuclear power, population reduction measures, etc.) just to address the one issue of global warming..

Maybe the 7th principle sets too high a standard for mere mortals. So maybe we should let it go. If so, suggesting that is just a different kind of heresy.

But if we are going to keep the 7th principle, we at least ought to renumber it as #1! If we take the 7th principle seriously, it surely implies and encompasses "worth and dignity" and "justice".

The 7th principle is powerful because it is about relationships--that they should be thoughtful, purposeful, respectful, and consistent with our values. The relationships and connections are with all parts of "existence"--other people, other living things, the inanimate universe, and even with our own history . It is not a strait jacket that says we need to avoid hurting or stretching or even violating any given relationship--but that we should avoid knee jerk, mindless actions and instead act deliberately, thoughtfully, and purposefully as we commit our actions. It is also not an excuse for inaction--for literally,

an inaction or a refusal to decide on a course of events is itself an action, with consequences, and will affect interdependencies.

When I started writing this sermon, I was proud to be standing in the UU tradition of heresy. Now I don't know where I am. I am chagrined that it looks like I am actually non-heretic, arguing for an even stronger life commitment to our principles, and to following the truth wherever it takes us.

I invite you to stay after the end of the service so we can discuss other aspects of this sermon.

Abigail last winter used the example of the little crocus flower that bravely sticks its head up through the snow and slush, willing to stand out, and make a statement that violates what "everyone" knows-- trying to get the hibernating world to wake up. Was the crocus a heretic--or merely politically incorrect?

Maybe we could take at least one step: consider with Global Warming our UU symbol on the wall behind me and the petroleum-fed flame in our chalice: maybe we should start by replacing those with --a crocus.

Notes on A Heretic's View of the Seventh Principle
Aug. 17, 2008

No one that I have seen has treated the combination of global warming and population as I have suggested the 7th principle compels us to do. Most analyses of GW leave out the implications of rising standards of living, and sidestep population influences. Even at this, most GW analyses "pull their punches" so the scenarios don't look worse. Even worse, many people like Amory Lovins peddle feel good, facile outlines of what can/should be done promising essentially painless ways to solve these problems. While, for example, most of what Lovins advocates does in fact need to be done, it will be far more difficult than he says even to do what he says (he says we'll save money), it will be less effective than he says, and even if it weren't, will still fall woefully short of what is needed to avert the worst of GW.

I have found no web site that gives particularly good information on the issues I have outlined here--information (and misinformation) is scattered all around. However, one good book is "6 Degrees", by Mark Lynas. While it does not discuss most of the issues I dealt with here, it at least does discuss the consequences to us of the 6 deg. of global warming that is likely to come. It is not happy. For a little relief, check out the Shatner-Beck interview on Fox for a fascinating look at an unlikely spokesman for rationality!

If we take the 7th principle as really the core value in our lives, what should we be doing? Should we turn off all our lights, and go back to a hunter-gather existence? Should we give all our assets to the poor?

I don't think so, for however virtuous such actions might make us feel, we will not be using our assets in the best way to solve the problem.

On a global scale, I am very pessimistic that humankind will take the necessary steps. How will even the US show leadership in such a difficult, subtle arena, when we can't even set up a mortgage system that works. We remain paralyzed by our own debate: witness the continuing debate on nuclear power after 30 years. We will continue to have a plethora of smart, smooth talking folks like Amory Lovins, who will put a veneer of science on sloppy thinking while providing words that people want to hear. How will most citizens, much less the government, ever sort out these voices?

And even if we did, do you really think that Saudi Arabia and the other oil containing countries will not continue to use and sell their cheap energy (remember, oil that costs \$120 still only cost 15-20 to get out of the ground and refine). And do we really think that the Chinas and Indias and Nigerias of this world will do anything that will make more difficult their immediate struggles for better living standards vs what is only a possible long run benefit. Or that the Russias of this world, who will likely see global warming as a benefit for Siberia, will they really work to limit global warming?

On the other hand, if we don't start, we will never know. We can do little things like switching lightbulbs and turning down thermostats, but those steps do nothing to change

the course of history. However, actions that multiply our individual efforts CAN have a substantial effect:

- Political involvement **would**, since that is the source of organized policy change that we have in this country, and that will surely be needed. But voting for a GW candidate is again only an individual act, but working in a campaign is not.
- We can also consider more public acts that actually help build public awareness and support to deal with the whole problem. For example, we could take a page from the peace demonstrators, and march every month advocating better GW policies.
- We can support planning for radically improved resource use, yes, including biting the bullet and actively support trash incinerators, nuclear plants, and new high voltage lines like the one proposed for near UUCF which will be needed everywhere to move wind and solar power around, (did I say this would be easy?).
- Ultimately, do you really think that 50 years from now we will each be driving our separate cars 10-20 miles multiple times a week to UUCF vs establishing local fellowships, virtual meetings, and other means to make more efficient use of resources?
- We can push UUA similarly to bite some bullets, and educate itself to the broad questions, and follow the 7th principle. UUA tends not to take aggressive difficult positions--maybe it should.

Summary of Outlook

China/India (C/I) population is x8 US

US is x25 C/I GDP/person, is x8 carbon/person, is 1/4 carbon/GDP--US "more efficient"!

Rest of world in between

Carbon emission is now about x4 sustainable without serious Global Warming

If whole world at US GDP/person and US carbon/GDP, carbon will be x50 sustainable

If whole world 1/3 our GDP/person and proportional eff, carbon will be x20 sustainable

If whole world down to "Other" GDP/person and eff, carbon will be x10 sustainable.

If eliminate all US carbon, half of Other, keep C/I same still have x2 sustainable

A little spreadsheet I did to "model" these issues:

	population	GDP	Carbon	gdp/person	carbon/person	carbon/gdp		carbonmod0	Carbon Mod1	Carbon Mod2	carbonmod3
US	0.3	14.0	6.0	46.7	20.0	0.4		0.6	6.0	6.0	7.1
China/India	2.4	4.2	6.3	1.8	2.6	1.5		6.3	160.0	53.3	56.6
Other	3.7	35.8	14.7	9.7	4.0	0.4		11.0	246.7	107.9	14.7
World	6.4	54.0	27.0	8.4	4.2	0.5		17.9	412.7	167.3	78.3
		Goal	8			Ratio x Goal		2.2	51.6	20.9	9.8

partial transcript from fascinating William Shatner-Glenn Beck Interview. May 16, 2008.
Link:

<http://williamshatner.com/index.php?name=PNphpBB2&file=viewtopic&p=464972&sid=9485a12f4ee9fdc2b5534621e6d193f5#464972>

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SHATNER: I buy that the world is falling apart.

BECK: Mm-hmm.

SHATNER: In every -- in every way. The main cause of it is overpopulation. Not the main. The cause of the world's destruction is there are too many people.

BECK: No, I think there are too many stupid people.

SHATNER: No. There are too many stupid and intelligent people. They're so close together you can't tell them apart.

BECK: Right.

SHATNER: All right? They're pressed together, defecating into the ocean, and it's all -- it's just too much. The planet can't take it.

BECK: I've never -- defecate -- I don't know anybody that's defecated in the ocean.

SHATNER: Everybody defecates into the ocean. You defecate here, it goes into the ocean.

BECK: Oh, well, that's New York. Anyway, go ahead.

SHATNER: Also -- every -- everything ends up in the ocean, OK.

BECK: OK. Right. Remind me not to go have seafood now.

SHATNER: No. Exactly.

BECK: Yes.

SHATNER: You're -- you're trembling on the edge of toxic food and toxic air and toxic water all the time.

BECK: Sure. Got it.

SHATNER: We're trying to find ways to avoid that all the time.

BECK: See, now you're scaring me. You're calling me Chicken Little?

SHATNER: No. I'm saying I subscribe to that.

BECK: Yes.

SHATNER: And I'm -- I'm in the area of losing faith that there's anything we can do about it, because people continue to propagate.

BECK: Yes.

SHATNER: And so where 6 billion becomes -- you know, we're going to reach 7 billion.

BECK: Yes.

SHATNER: And the more there are, even though you lessen the number, the more they get.

BECK: It's like a Harvard endowment.

SHATNER: Yes, compound interest.

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SHATNER: I think so, too. I think that if you realize -- you've got children?

BECK: Yes, I've got four.

SHATNER: OK. Your four children, not you...

BECK: Part of the overpopulation.

SHATNER: No, yes. But your four children are going to be in dire straits in 25 years.

BECK: Yes, I know that.

SHATNER: I mean, really bad.

BECK: Who's the scare...

SHATNER: Apocalyptic.

BECK: Who's the scare-monger? Who's the chicken -- hang on, zip. We're taking a break. We'll be back. We'll find out which one is the scare-monger, the fear monger right here. Right here.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

BECK: Let me -- let me -- let me -- let me switch gears here., Mr. Fear- Monger.

SHATNER: Fearful father.

BECK: No. You know what? We were just talking in the break.

SHATNER: Fearful citizen.

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GLENN: Wow. If I only knew what an oratorio was. I wasn't listening when they taught me Shakespeare.

SHATNER: Well, you would enjoy this. You would enjoy this, I'm sure. But Glenn, your education is lacking in certain areas.