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MEDIA ADVISORY

JEROME RINGO, FREDERICK FERRÉ & STUART KAUFFMAN JOIN INTERDENOMINATIONAL THEOLOGICAL CENTER(ITC) FACULTY & ENVIRONMENTALISTS FRAMING “*TheoEcology*”^(sm)



(top, l-r) Jerome Ringo, Frederick Ferre, Stuart Kauffman, Na'Taki Osborne
(bottom l-r) Paula Gordon, Edward Wimberly, Sam Candler, Joseph Roberts

(Atlanta, GA, February 25, 2007) “*TheoEcology*^(sm)” – the Interdenominational Theological Center’s visionary strategic goal (below), focused on being the spiritual and physical embodiment of a new “Eden” where all the world’s people are welcome -- launches Friday and Saturday, March 9 & 10, 2007. Renowned theologians, scholars and environmentalists from across the US and beyond join representatives of the entire ITC community for the first of two high level brainstorming sessions termed “*TheoEcology*” *Charettes*. (Abbreviated participant bios below.) The schedule includes a reception on campus, Friday evening, 5:30-7:00 p.m. It is open to the media and interested members of the larger public. The ITC is located in the heart of downtown Atlanta and is one of the five Historically Black Institutions in the Atlanta University Center.

“Not only is *TheoEcology* essential for ITC, but for the Church Universal,” says Dr. Michael A. Battle, the Center’s President. “ITC is simply the logical place for it to begin. The fundamental nature of ecumenism with which this institution was founded almost 50 years ago, creating a Center of preparation for leadership in the Church, makes it incumbent upon ITC to become an ‘*axis mundi*’ if you will, leading people, especially



those in the faith community, forward to a genuine respect for and involvement in preserving our environment.”

“ITC alumni pastor congregations and give leadership in ministries around the globe. There is no better place than ITC to originate and grow the message of restoring our planet to its original beauty and usefulness,” Dr. Battle says. “We know that we cannot go back. We also know it will take the faith, hope and love in which our own tradition is grounded, working with people of all traditions, to create a new Eden.” With underwriting from an anonymous and generous donor, this first charette officially begins ITC’s exploration of “TheoEcology”, creating the processes by which “TheoEcology” will be grounded in the ITC’s curriculum and shared with the world. Another session later in March will address the ITC’s physical realities, including buildings and grounds, and will create processes by which to shape a campus-wide transformation, a coordinated vision in which the ITC will come to embody a new “Eden” in both word and deed.

This message of hope is becoming crystal clear on the campus of the world’s premier ecumenical academy for Christian theological study. It comes as environmentalists worldwide are picking up steam, their time-sensitive pronouncements about the calamitous plight of the earth, beginning to be heard and heeded. Their good news is too. Immediate and common-sensible efforts can push back against human folly, preserve and create a better quality of life for all life on earth, especially those who suffer first from environmental degradation and injustice -- “the Least of These” who have a central place in the ministries of those attending the ITC.

“TheoEcology” was fueled by the passion of ITC Board Member Paula Gordon, host of “The Paula Gordon Show: Conversations with People at the Leading Edge”^(sm), heard for many years on CNN. President Battle welcomed the environmental concerns Ms. Gordon voiced. Their conversations, which drew in others from the campus community, led to a heightened recognition of the importance of taking a closer look at environmental issues closer to home, on the ITC campus. Consequently, on behalf of the Center, Dr. Battle coined the term, “*TheoEcology*” -- the blending of faith and environment, offering the earth people a vision of a new “Eden” and creating tools it will take to create it, inspiring all, particularly “the Least of These”, to become active participants.

ITC implemented a ten-year Strategic Plan in 2004, designed to draw focus and action to developing and/or enhancing critical areas of the academy’s operation through 2014. In April 2006, the Board of Trustees unanimously affirmed that “*TheoEcology*” is essential to the ITC’s Strategic Plan, and approved it as the ninth Strategic Goal in these words:

TheoEcology is to be the living embodiment, spiritually and physically, of *TheoEcology* for the world, healing humanity’s prime estrangement, our divorce from nature. Thus, transform The ITC and the world it serves informed by *TheoEcology* and guided by a vision of “Eden”; Generate *TheoEcology*’s theological foundation and embed it in all curricula; Live within a *TheoEcology* ethos, institutionally and personally; and Ground



all decisions—people-related, physical and capital—in *TheoEcology* (“Is this consistent with ‘Eden’?”)

In recent months, renovations and upgrades to the campus have appropriated the “*TheoEcology*” approach in the selection of vendors and the materials used, i.e. carpet by Interface, Inc., the world’s leading environmentally-responsible carpet manufacturer; non-toxic paint and finishes; and low-energy approaches campus-wide, including lighting fixtures, instruments and design.

The ITC’s Provost, Dr. Edward P. Wimberly and Trustee Paula Gordon will serve as co-facilitators of both charettes. Two members of the ITC faculty will be central to both: Drs. Jacquelyn Grant, Callaway Professor of Systematic Theology and Dr. Edward Smith, Associate Professor of Theology and Ethics. Also, among the august group of panelists who will wrestle with the issue in this first charette are:

Mr. Jerome Ringo, Chair of the National Wildlife Federation, the first-ever African-American to hold such a post with a major national conservation organization and President of the Apollo Alliance, a broad coalition of business, labor, and environmental organizations that seeks to ensure good stewardship of both the economy and our natural environment. A dedicated champion of environmental justice and a vocal advocate of clean energy, he worked for more than 20 years in Louisiana’s petrochemical industry. Mr. Ringo has a clear understanding of the impacts of poor environmental practices.

Dr. Frederick Ferré, Research Professor Emeritus of Philosophy, The University of Georgia. Former Chair of the Department of Philosophy and Religion at Dickinson College, he led the creation of a pioneering interdisciplinary course in Environmental Studies, linking the scientific and human issues shaping Earth’s natural ecology. Head of the University of Georgia Department of Philosophy and Religion from 1980 until he retired in 1998, he founded the Faculty of Environmental Ethics there and designed the interdisciplinary Environmental Ethics Certificate Program. His ten books include *Shaping the Future: Spiritual Resources for the Postmodern World*, *Philosophy of Technology*, and a seminal trilogy focused on Value

Dr. Stuart Kauffman, Director of the Institute for Biocomplexity and Informatics (IBI) at the University of Calgary. With a shared appointment as Professor of biological sciences, physics and astronomy, Dr. Kauffman was one of the first MacArthur Fellows. He conducts leading-edge interdisciplinary research in systems biology, is an emeritus professor of biochemistry at the University of Pennsylvania, and is an external professor at the prestigious Santa Fe Institute, which he co-founded. He is author of *At Home in the Universe* and a forthcoming book tentatively titled *Science and the Sacred*.

OTHERS EXTERNAL EXPERTS include:

The Rev. Woody Bartlett, an ordained a priest in the Episcopal Church and founder of Georgia Interfaith Power & Light;

Bill Bolling, founder and Executive Director of the Atlanta Community Food Bank;



The Very Reverend Sam Candler, Dean of the Cathedral of St. Philip;
Dr. Robert J. Hill, Associate Professor in the Department of Lifelong Education,
Administration, and Policy, Program of Adult Education at the University of Georgia,
Athens, GA.;

Na'Taki Osborne, the National Wildlife Federation's Manager for Community and
Leadership Development Programs;

Dr. Joseph Roberts pastor emeritus of the Historic Ebenezer Baptist church in Atlanta,
Georgia, and Thomas Taylor, a construction professional turned sustainability consultant
with Vertegy.

TheoEcology Charette Number One begins at noon on Friday, March 9, 2007 and ends
Saturday, March 10, 2007. A reception for media and others interested in meeting
Charette participants is planned for Friday, March 9, from 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. in ITC's
Costen Center, 700 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, SW, Atlanta, GA. The second charette
takes place March 30-31, 2007. For additional information, call 404-527-7718 or 527-
7761.

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