

# Climate's Salvation?

Why and How American Evangelicals Are Engaging with Climate Change

by Katharine K. Wilkinson



Current debates from Capitol Hill to Copenhagen suggest political will to tackle climate change is in short supply. The public engagement that might undergird it is also thin.<sup>1</sup> Yet action stirs in a seemingly unexpected realm: In November 2009, preceeding negotiations for a global agreement to succeed the Kyoto Protocol, two American evangelical pastors, Tri Robinson and Ken Wilson, traveled to the United Kingdom to launch an action plan to combat climate change. (See sidebar on this page) They were joined by leaders from different faith traditions around the world, all with similar commitments to action, who filled the grand halls of Windsor Castle with a colorful *mélange* of religious vestments and reverberations of prayer and song.<sup>2</sup> Co-hosting the interfaith gathering with Prince Philip,

Duke of Edinburgh, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon addressed the delegates: “The world’s faith communities occupy a unique position in discussions on the fate of our planet and accelerating impacts of climate change,” particularly given inescapable moral dimensions of the issue.<sup>3</sup> Noting stagnation among policymakers, he urged, “You can inspire, you can provoke, you can challenge your political leaders, through your wisdom, through your power, through your followers.”

Ban and Philip are two among a growing ensemble of scholars and practitioners who increasingly raise the prospect that religion could shift the debate and propel action on climate change; Robinson, Wilson, and their diverse compatriots are among the religious leaders heeding the call to engagement.<sup>4</sup> For them, the vantage

point of religion endows the issue with particular meaning, suggests specific courses of action in response, and animates their voices in the cacophonous, evolving chorus on climate change, of which they are an increasingly noteworthy but often little understood part.<sup>5</sup> In the United States, in particular, this religious climate advocacy is swelling, and American evangelical leaders are playing a central role.

In addition to giving American evangelicalism a presence at the Windsor gathering, Robinson and Wilson are both signatories to the Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI)—arguably the most substantive example of American evangelicals’ engagement with the issue to date.<sup>6</sup> In February 2006, a group of 86 senior evangelical leaders, including such high-profile individuals as megachurch pastor and author Rick Warren, launched the ECI with its defining statement, “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action.”<sup>7</sup> To the surprise of many, a full-page ad in *The New York Times* stated, “Our commitment to Jesus Christ compels us to solve the global warming crisis,” and headlines announced, “Evangelical leaders join global warming initiative.”<sup>8</sup> The ECI seeks to reframe the issue in evangelical terms, to spread its message in the public square, and to promote action to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change impacts.

Now more than 260 in number, signatories to the “Call to Action” wield significant public voice and political influence, serving as prominent leaders within a growing and mobilized religious community that comprises 25 to 30 percent of the U.S. population.<sup>9</sup> They are part of an expanding group of moderate evangelicals who are broadening the evangelical right’s agenda of “personal morality” issues to include social justice and creation care concerns, specifically climate change. (Like many religious adherents, these leaders employ language of “creation care” rather than “environmentalism” because it expresses the theological basis of their concern for the Earth as God’s creation.) In so doing, they are challenging that issue’s traditional secular and lib-

### Who Are American Evangelicals?

As used in this article, the term “evangelical” refers broadly to theologically conservative Protestants, including fundamentalists, evangelicals, Pentecostals, and charismatics.<sup>48</sup> “Conservative” in this case refers to a theological rather than a political orientation, as a full spectrum of political orientations exists among evangelicals. (See sidebar on page 49) American evangelicalism traces its roots back to the Protestant Reformation, but in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, its varied strains of influence—pietism, revivalism, Puritanism, and Wesleyanism—metamorphosed into a uniquely American religion during revivals of the Great Awakening and under the influence of Jonathan Edwards, John Wesley, and George Whitefield.<sup>49</sup>

Numerous scholars have sought to identify the factors that unite the diverse religious tradition that is evangelicalism, but D. W. Bebbington’s “quadrilateral of priorities” receives the most support. He outlines four pillars of evangelical belief: (1) *conversionism*, an emphasis on being “born again,” or having an individual life-changing experience of God’s grace; (2) *activism*, a requisite concern for sharing the “good news” and offering others a chance to be “saved”; (3) *biblicism*, the authoritative role given to scripture and paramount centrality of the Bible; and (4) *crucicentrism*, a stress on the crucifixion of Christ as the core of belief and sole source of salvation.<sup>50</sup> Historian Mark Noll notes, “These evangelical traits have never by themselves yielded cohesive, institutionally compact, or clearly demarcated groups of Christians. But they do serve to identify a large family of churches and religious enterprises.”<sup>51</sup> The multifaceted definitions of “evangelical” point to the tradition’s complexity and patchwork nature but also denote a phenomenon that contrasts with other traditions and communities.

eral boundaries. (See sidebar on page 49) Their voices might be persuasive among policymakers with whom other environmental advocates hold less sway and among a segment of the American public that mainstream environmentalism has historically failed to engage but nonetheless has contributions to make as consumers and citizens.<sup>10</sup> As such, the ECI signatories' potential to shift partisan divides and to engender political will and public engagement is considerable, meriting further exploration of evangelical climate care, including its historical evolution, advocacy, and challenges.

## A History of Evangelical Climate Care

The ECI did not arise suddenly or ex nihilo. Rather, it was born out of a 40-year evolution of American evangelicals' engagement with environmental issues.<sup>11</sup> Initial evangelical attention to environmental concerns began in the late 1960s as a response to Lynn White's influential and controversial article, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," which blamed environmental degradation on the biblical doctrine of "dominion"<sup>12</sup> drawn from Genesis 1:28:

*"God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'"*<sup>13</sup>

White's indictment prompted evangelicals to come to Christianity's defense, primarily by reinterpreting Genesis as a call to responsible stewardship. Rather than using God's creation profligately, human beings should tend it carefully, as Genesis 2:15 suggests: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it."<sup>14</sup> During the 1980s evangelical scholars extended this response, developing a robust body of ecotheology that laid foundations for subsequent engagement beyond the ivory tower.<sup>15</sup>

## American Evangelicals and Politics

In recent decades, of all the factions within American evangelicalism, the evangelical right has most visibly exerted its political power, particularly in partnership with the Republican Party. But we would be remiss to think all evangelical leaders deploy their influence to politically conservative ends—exclusively or at all. An evangelical left and center accompany and often counterpoise the evangelical right; increasingly, a growing group of "freestyle" evangelicals display "political bivocality."<sup>52</sup> They may continue to hold traditional evangelical stances, disapproving of abortion and homosexuality, but also advocate for conventionally progressive causes. Such evangelicals may have unique access to and sway with policymakers, and can bring fresh perspectives and advocacy to enduring issues, deploying their influence and resources in potentially transformative ways.

Evangelical leaders' influence is also intimately tied to their constituency—a robust and increasing body of believers. As with their leaders, the relationship of the evangelical public to the political right varies, and a full spectrum of political orientations exists among those who adhere to conservative theology. Recent Pew data indicates that among the evangelical public, 50 percent identify as or lean Republican, 9 percent identify as independent, and 34 percent identify as or lean Democratic; similarly, 52 percent describe themselves as conservative, 30 percent as moderate, and 11 percent as liberal.<sup>53</sup> (In both cases, 7 percent of respondents did not know or refused to answer.) While these numbers suggest that evangelicals trend more Republican and more conservative than their mainline Protestant and Catholic counterparts, they are by no means monolithic in their political beliefs.

Creation care leaders transformed these ecotheological precepts into advocacy in the early 1990s, founding the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) and establishing "An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation," which laid out a framework for and commitment to action.<sup>16</sup> The 1995–1996 Republican congressional assault on the Endangered Species Act thrust the burgeoning movement onto the national policy stage, as members worked to defend what they called "the Noah's Ark of our day."<sup>17</sup> As the decade came to a close, the group began to turn its focus to climate change. Simultaneously, creation care inched inward from the periphery of the evangelical agenda and gained traction in the center of the community.

In 2002, a forum at the University of Oxford facilitated conversations between preeminent climatologist and

British evangelical Sir John Houghton and then Vice President of Governmental Affairs for the United States-based National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) Richard Cizik. There, Cizik experienced what he calls a personal "conversion" on climate change.<sup>18</sup> Later that year, Jim Ball of the EEN conducted a high-profile "What Would Jesus Drive?" campaign, driving a hybrid car through the heart of the Bible Belt. The tour proved a resounding media success.

In 2004, capitalizing on energy derived from the Oxford gathering, the EEN and two flagship evangelical organizations, *Christianity Today* and the NAE, co-hosted a creation care conference for American evangelical leaders. Houghton again served as the key climate science messenger, and the resulting "Sandy Cove Covenant" included the goal of reaching a "consensus statement" on climate change



*The Evangelist Matthew Inspired by an Angel, by Rembrandt*



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

In the mid-1990's, creation care leaders sought to defend the Endangered Species Act on the national stage, calling the legislation "the Noah's Ark of our day." (Noah's Ark, oil on canvas painting by Edward Hicks, 1846).

in the next year.<sup>19</sup> Also in 2004, the NAE Board of Directors approved a statement, "For the Health of the Nation," which laid out an evangelical public policy agenda, including creation care.<sup>20</sup> This series of events that both heightened and mainstreamed the issue paved the way for the ECI.

With the Sandy Cove mandate in hand, a core group of organizers—Ball, Cizik, David Neff of *Christianity Today*, and David Gushee, currently a professor of Christian ethics at Mercer University in Atlanta—collaborated to develop the nascent ECI's "Call to Action" and to gather signatories by working through preexisting networks within American evangelicalism, including the NAE itself, the relief and development community, and evangelical higher education.<sup>21</sup> Signatories' names lend necessary

clout and credibility to the ECI in evangelicalism, a Christian tradition that, in contrast to Catholicism and mainline Protestantism, lacks institutional hierarchy.

In a process typical of American evangelicalism, the organizers drew on institutional connections, trusted interpersonal relationships, and leader-to-leader "witnessing" to cultivate a new evangelical climate network.<sup>22</sup> Much like Cizik, a number of ECI leaders describe their own conversion to the cause as an "epiphany," "conversion," or "spiritual awakening," elicited by such interactions and by complementary study of the social, scientific, and theological dimensions of the issue.<sup>23</sup> These leaders' accounts suggest they experienced not just a change of mind but also a change of heart on climate change, which for

them indicates a religious or transcendent dimension, expressed in evangelical terms. In other words, for them climate change intersects with their deepest beliefs and identity as Christians, both of which help the ECI network cohere.

## Constructing Climate Change

The ECI's "Call to Action" is the gravitational core of the group and illustrates its particular construction of climate change. A manifesto for action on the issue, the document weaves together science, theology, ethics, and policy to define the problem, touching on its anthropogenic causes, global consequences, normative dimensions, and appropriate responses. The four-

part argument of the “Call to Action” unfolds as follows:

- 1. Human-induced climate change is real.*
- 2. The consequences of climate change will be significant, and will hit the poor the hardest.*
- 3. Christian moral convictions demand our response to the climate change problem.*
- 4. The need to act now is urgent. Governments, businesses, churches, and individuals all have a role to play in addressing climate change—starting now.*

In fleshing out these statements, the document’s appeals to science and policy are conventional, drawing on consensus science from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and promoting cap-and-trade as the key legislative solution. Its unique contribution lies in the way it couches the material phenomenon of climate change in a religious framework and gives it meaning by drawing on biblical texts; although the argument begins with science, theology provides the fundamental grounding of the “Call to Action” and the ECI’s advocacy.

Three key themes run through this theology:

### **Creation Care**

Genesis 1 offers an account of the creation process and concludes with its maker’s assessment, in Genesis 1:31: “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” This passage suggests the Earth has intrinsic value as the created product of a creator God. According to Psalm 24:1, “The Earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it,” so damage to any aspect is an offense. On the other hand, these texts indicate that caring for creation and its inhabitants fulfills human beings’ God-given role as stewards and is an act of loving and honoring God. The message for evangelicals is that anthropogenic environmental degradation is sinful, and nature is more than a mere resource for human use.

### **Neighbor Care**

As asserted in the Gospel of Matthew, concerns about justice complement creation care. Prompted by a query, in Matthew 22:39 Jesus cites the second commandment: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Later in the Gospel, he goes on to express the gravity of this precept in Matthew 25:40: “I tell you in truth, whatever you did for the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” Caring for one’s neighbor—particularly the most vulnerable—is a central Christian responsibility and another key precept of evangelical ecotheology. Given the unjust effects of environmental degradation on the poor, the concept of neighbor care endows caring for creation with a humanitarian dimension; environmental concerns become part of a holistic Christian vision of the sanctity of life.

### **Eschatology**

Eschatology is theology concerned with “the last things” or end of the world. Though evangelicals agree about the general trajectory of the biblical narrative, they can hold quite different convictions about the “end times,” which shape their perspectives on the future and thus attribution of meaning to the present.<sup>24</sup> The Book of Revelation, the major biblical basis for these eschatological views, leaves open questions about how the Earth will fare in the end of days, with some passages depicting the destruction of creation and others suggesting its transformation from old to new. Drawing on the Book of Colossians and its emphasis on *all* things—“things in heaven and on earth”—as part of Christ’s redeeming work, the ECI’s theology advocates continuity rather than disjunction between the material present and the future.<sup>25</sup> This eschatology of renewal envisions the redemption of creation rather than its destruction, thereby giving the Earth another layer of value.

Through these theological concepts, the ECI engages contested questions of values and ethics, establishing a distinctive way of looking at climate change that is inseparable from those concerns.<sup>26</sup> By locating climate change within an ongoing religious narrative

of creation and its care, the “Call to Action” casts Christians as actors who have agency to write the next chapter through their actions. The biblical story casts engagement with climate change with deep import and purpose, and the religious context gives ECI leaders a sense of divine direction and hope as they pursue their advocacy. They talk about being “called” or “told” by God, fulfilling a divine “commission” or “mandate,” and finding a deep source of optimism in “doing God’s work” and knowing they are ultimately in partnership with God.<sup>27</sup> In their eyes, this theological dimension and the purpose and hope it provides distinguish evangelical creation care from secular environmentalism.<sup>28</sup> Their advocacy aims to go beyond arresting environmental degradation; they endeavor to further Christ’s redeeming work.

### **Negotiating the Evangelical Right**

The ECI’s emphasis on climate has roused pointed opposition from the evangelical right. Led by E. Calvin Beisner and the Cornwall Alliance, with support from James Dobson (of Focus on the Family), Richard Land (of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention), and others, this group has repeatedly attempted to censure Cizik, counter the ECI’s efforts to sway policymakers, and keep climate change off the evangelical agenda.<sup>29</sup> Echoing arguments of the secular, conservative anti-environmental countermovement, they dispute mainstream science, suggest that mitigation measures would inflict vast economic damage, and reject regulatory solutions, instead favoring unhampered free markets to fuel economic growth that could finance adaptation to “natural” climate change.<sup>30</sup> These leaders also maintain the dominionist theology rejected by the ECI.

Claims that climate change is dividing the evangelical community suggest that the underlying driver of these arguments might be political.<sup>31</sup> The ECI could irreparably undermine the political power of the evangelical right, which for three decades so successfully

purported itself as speaking for American evangelicalism in its entirety and wielded the weight of that constituency. Indeed, many of the ECI signatories aim to break away from the old guard evangelical right and its political collaborator, the GOP. They lament the evangelical–Republican alliance that they say has often trumped religious purpose and subordinated Christian responsibility to party politics.<sup>32</sup> These leaders hope to decouple evangelicalism from politics, taking a “biblical” approach instead.<sup>33</sup>

Climate change, then, is part of a new evangelical politics that is less partisan, extends beyond a narrow Christian agenda, and takes a more global view (see sidebar on page 49). This revised approach—a divergent trajectory of evangelical engagement in the public sphere—engenders different styles and modes of advocacy and makes ECI leaders more open to collaboration and alliance-building. They need not agree with their collaborators on all issues, but they can work constructively together on areas of mutual concern, in the interest of achieving a common purpose.<sup>34</sup> For example, Cizik, Wilson, and Joel Hunter, senior pastor of Northland Church near Orlando, Florida, have partnered with scientists at Harvard’s Center for Health and the Global Environment to establish joint advocacy ventures: Evangelicals and Scientists United to Protect Creation, Creation Care for Pastors, and the Friendship Collaborative among them. By breaking down the stereotypes and boundaries of what is and what is not “evangelical,” these leaders hope to renew the integrity of their religion and increase its credibility in broader society.<sup>35</sup>

Although climate change is a fault-line in contemporary evangelicalism, as the ECI’s advocacy proceeds, the evangelical right’s influence appears to be waning, as more leaders shift their stance on climate change. For instance, in 2006 Pat Robertson declared himself “a convert” on climate change on *The 700 Club* and in 2008 appeared in advertisements with liberal Baptist minister and civil rights activist Al Sharpton for Al Gore’s Alliance for Climate Protection.

## Engaging People in the Pews

Perhaps a more significant challenge that ECI leaders face is to genuinely engage the evangelical public in climate care and to spread the movement from a primarily grassroots phenomenon into the grassroots. Quantitative surveys indicate that evangelicals’ opinions about climate change echo those of the U.S. population as a whole—high awareness, low concern.<sup>36</sup> But the surveys also suggest that evangelicals’ belief in the reality and human cause of, concern regarding, and support for combating climate change lags behind that of the public at large.<sup>37</sup> Still, evangelicals are by no means monolithic in their opinions on the topic or a stridently opposed bloc; rather, they encompass a full spectrum of opinions.

Focus group data on evangelical churchgoers offers further insight into the opinion drivers at work and helps gauge acceptance of or resistance to the ECI.<sup>38</sup> Results show that the theological emphases on creation care and neighbor care generally resonated with participants. They widely consented to and often endorsed the notion of biblical calls to care for the Earth and for the poor. On the specific matter of climate change, however, a gulf between many churchgoers and the ECI signatories remained.

Three driving factors—(1) scientific skepticism, (2) conservative political ideology, and (3) individualism in concert with antistructuralism—have produced dissent and conflict on the issue.

First, with roots in the evolution–creation debate, a general culture of scientific skepticism exists in many evangelical circles and hangs heavy over evangelical discussions of climate change. Distrust of scientists and a “populist anti-science sentiment” transfer easily from the former issue to the latter.<sup>39</sup> In addition, many participants subscribed to the conservative political movement’s notion of the “non-problematicity” of climate change, arguing that “the evidentiary basis of global warming is weak and even wrong.”<sup>40</sup>

Second, and again echoing the conservative political movement, partici-

pants expressed skepticism about the role of regulation in and the economic damage that would result from climate mitigation. Concerns grounded in free-market ideology and distrust of government seemed further heightened by skepticism about Democratic support for climate change solutions.<sup>41</sup> Participants described attending to the issue as “political” and raised uncertainty about the agenda behind efforts to promote ameliorative action. For some, Gore epitomized the link between partisan politics and climate change and the liberal trappings of environmentalism.

Third, many churchgoers’ perspectives seem shaded by questions of scale. In general, participants expressed very different attitudes toward both problems and solutions that are direct, immediate, small-scale, or individualized and those that are indirect, distant, large-scale, or structural. As with evangelical perspectives on racism—seen as a problem “of individuals and individuals only”—theologically grounded (1) accountable freewill individualism, (2) relationalism, and (3) anti-structuralism worked against a systemic understanding of the complex causes and possible solutions to climate change.<sup>42</sup> These religious perspectives suggest that (1) individuals act independently of structures and institutions with personal accountability for their own actions; (2) immediate, interpersonal relationships are of utmost importance; and (3) emphasis on social structures undermines the individual and personal responsibility. Perspectives that resist structural thinking and emphasize individualism inhibit understanding of an immensely complex, multilevel problem like climate change.

In sum, despite resonance of creation care and neighbor care, among this portion of the American public, engagement with climate change is beleaguered by ongoing scientific uncertainty, partisan political baggage, and resistance to systemic thinking. (Interestingly, theological notions often blamed for Christian anti-environmentalism were absent from focus group discussions: eschatology, dominion readings of Genesis, and associations of environmentalism with paganism.)<sup>43</sup> These factors complicate and impede religion’s ability to foster public engagement on the issue.



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## Discussion

As an issue of concern, climate change has penetrated evangelical leadership among those on the left and in the center quite successfully, but it has not taken root among the evangelical public in the same way. While the ECI signatories clearly view climate change as a pressing matter, many of them express the concern that that the topic can be an obstacle to their efforts to engage churchgoers in creation care more generally.<sup>44</sup> Challenges to bringing this audience onboard and the evident baggage accompanying the issue present a key concern: whether focusing on climate change could retard efforts to integrate creation care into the fabric of American evangelical life.

Among the ECI's other target audience, American policymakers, the climate change discussion has never been more necessary, with both domestic legislation and an international treaty to succeed the Kyoto Protocol hanging in the balance. Debates within the United States and negotiations in the international community reveal that the tremendously politically charged nature of climate change persists. Given these circumstances, the voices of ECI signatories may be important. They have a growing capacity to speak across party lines – to both liberal and conservative policymakers – and perhaps to contribute to greater bipartisan support for climate legislation, or at the very least reduced opposition to it. In other words, the call to action on Capitol Hill is exigent.

In light of the urgency involved in efforts to ameliorate climate change, ECI leaders are grappling with the dual concerns of engendering political will and engaging the evangelical public. A grassroots constituency is necessary both to shore up evangelical leaders' impact on climate politics and to exert direct influence as citizens on elected officials. At the same time and paradoxically, generating necessary engagement among churchgoers could be impossible while maintaining an emphasis on climate change and regulatory solutions. Hence, the leaders face a strategic quandary that pits climate policy aims against broader creation care goals—a conflict between immediate impact and deeper but more distant shifts. Their human agency is running up against both biophysical and sociocultural reality, challenging what they can feasibly achieve.

Thus, the present moment is a dynamic one for evangelical climate advocacy. While the events of recent years indicate a sea change among evangelical leaders, the full extent of its impact remains to be seen, as engagement among churchgoing constituents lags and, consequently, advocacy approaches remain under development. How they decide to resolve strategic tensions will significantly shape the future of evangelical climate care. So, too, will the evolution of broader dynamics in American evangelicalism, particularly given younger evangelicals' increasing interest in creation care, and the growth of the evangelical center, which has creation care squarely within its agenda.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, while evangelical churchgoers are not a lynchpin of public support at present, that reality does not render efforts to engage them irrelevant. The path of climate change amelioration extends far beyond this congressional session and will likely be long and difficult. Greater engagement among this quarter or more of the U.S. public might be important to walking the path successfully, and creation care leaders persist in their commitment to stimulating public concern and action.

In any case, the ECI and its signatories bring a rather unique voice to evolving conversations about climate change, with their particular way of describing the issue—its causes, consequences, and



solutions. They reframe climate change with an evangelical lens and biblical language, giving it meaning as a matter of both private faith and public life with inescapably ethical dimensions. In so doing, the ECI leaders inject their theology and morality into the climate debates, which are typically dominated by the language of science and policy. Such constructions of climate change may prove essential to evangelical efforts to move policymakers and the public to ameliorative action.<sup>46</sup>

Secular practitioners, scientists, and scholars, especially those looking to coordinate or collaborate with evangelical efforts, would benefit from understanding creation care as an increasingly influential perspective and area of advocacy, where alliances are feasible, and where significant disagreements persist. Those outside the movement would do well to remember that beyond engendering action on climate change, the ultimate goal for ECI leaders and other

creation care advocates is being faithful to and serving God. Also of note to observers is the fact that evangelical attention to adaptation is growing. As an idea, leaders view it as a way to move past skepticism about the anthropogenic nature of climate change and uncertainty about strategies for mitigation, while resonating with evangelicals' more established history of engagement in relief and development work.<sup>47</sup> Evangelicals are likely to continue to play an important role in this area. Moreover, given the limited body of literature on the topic, opportunities for further research are significant.

## Conclusion

Ultimately, evangelical climate advocacy challenges existing binaries in thought and action related to environmental concerns. Pervasive dichotomous thinking restricts us to such categories as liberal/conservative, secular/

religious, human/environment, and material/spiritual, which limit the way we conceive of issues and respond to them. But, clearly, religion and environment are not inimical, nor are scientists and evangelicals or political liberals and theological conservatives on definitively opposing sides. Synergies between them are apparent and increasingly intersect on the issue of climate change. The very existence of evangelical climate care invites reconsideration of such binaries, lest they limit us to half-truths and half-solutions.

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**Katharine K. Wilkinson** is a Rhodes Scholar and doctoral candidate in Geography and the Environment at the University of Oxford, where she is affiliated with the Environmental Change Institute and the Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment. Her research explores climate change discourse, advocacy, and engagement among American evangelicals, and she is currently working on a book manuscript on the topic. She may be contacted at [katharine.wilkinson@trinity.ox.ac.uk](mailto:katharine.wilkinson@trinity.ox.ac.uk)



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1. For literature about public engagement on climate change, see: to see A. Leiserowitz, *Public Perception, Opinion, and Understanding of Climate Change: Current Patterns, Trends, and Limitations* (New York: United Nations Development Program, 2007), [http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2007-2008/papers/leiserowitz\\_anthony.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2007-2008/papers/leiserowitz_anthony.pdf) (accessed 30 November 2009); E. Maibach, C. Roser-Renouf, and A. Leiserowitz, *Global Warming's Six Americas 2009: An Audience Segmentation Analysis* (New Haven, CT and Fairfax, VA: Yale Project on Climate Change and the George Mason University Center for Climate Change Communication, 2009); M. C. Nisbet and T. Myers, "Trends: Twenty Years of Public Opinion about Global Warming," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (2007): 444–470.

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5. For a treatment of these "discordant voices," including religion, see M. Hulme, *Why We Disagree about Climate Change: Understanding Controversy, Inaction, and Opportunity* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

6. Bill McKibben has deemed the ECI perhaps "as important in the fight against global warming as any stack of studies and computer models." See B. McKibben, "The Gospel of Green: Will Evangelicals Help Save the Earth?" *OnEarth*, Fall 2006, 35.

7. Evangelical Climate Initiative, "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action," 2006, <http://preview.christiansandclimate.org/wp-content/>

[uploads/2008/05/eci-calltoaction-booklet.pdf](http://uploads/2008/05/eci-calltoaction-booklet.pdf) (accessed 30 November 2009). Hereafter this document is called the "Call to Action."

8. L. Goodstein, "Evangelical Leaders Join Global Warming Initiative," *The New York Times*, 8 February 2006. For a copy of this ad, see <http://preview.christiansandclimate.org/pubs/2006.pdf> (accessed 30 November 2009).

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10. J. C. Dermach, "Harnessing Individual Behavior to Address Climate Change: Options for Congress," *Virginia Environmental Law Journal* 26, no. 1 (2008): 107–156; G. E. Hitzhusen, "Judeo-Christian Theology and the Environment: Moving Beyond Skepticism to New Sources for Environmental Education in the United States," *Environmental Education Research* 13, no. 1 (2007): 55–74; S. C. Moser, "Toward a Deeper Engagement of the US Public on Climate Change: An Open Letter to the 44th President of the United States of America," *International Journal of Sustainability Communication* 3 (2008): 119–132.

11. C. B. DeWitt, "The Scientist and the Shepherd: The Emergence of Evangelical Environmentalism," in R. S. Gottlieb, ed., *The Oxford Handbook of Religion and Ecology*, (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2006), 568–587; D. Larsen, "God's Gardeners: American Protestant Evangelicals Confront Environmentalism, 1967–2000" (PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 2001).

12. L. White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203–1207. In addition to sparking debate among theologians, the White thesis also initiated a stream of social-scientific studies to investigate the relationship between religion—specifically American Christianity—and environmental concern. For a review of those studies and the current status of the debates, see Hitzhusen, note 10.

13. All Bible passages are from the New International Version.

14. Evangelical scholar Francis Schaeffer authored the most notable of these defenses. See F. A. Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House, 1970).

15. DeWitt, note 11; Larsen, note 11. For examples of this ecotheological literature, see: W. Granberg-Michaelson, ed., *Tending the Garden: Essays on the Gospel of the Earth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987); L. Wilkinson, ed., *Earthkeeping: Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1980). For a recent treatment of evangelical ecotheology, see S. Bouma-Prediger, *For the Beauty of the Earth: A Christian Vision for Creation Care* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2006).

16. R. J. Berry, *The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000); Larsen, note 11.

17. L. Kearns, "Noah's Ark Goes to Washington: A Profile of Evangelical Environmentalism," *Social Compass* 44, no. 3 (1997): 349–366; P. Steinfels, "Evangelical Group Defends Laws Protecting Endangered Species as a Modern 'Noah's Ark,'" *The New York Times*, 31 January 1996.

18. Richard Cizik, former vice president of governmental affairs, National Association of Evangelicals, in phone interview with the author, 25 September 2008. Cizik resigned from the NAE in 2008 following an interview on National Public Radio, but the NAE's president, Leith Anderson, has explicitly stated Cizik's comments on the environment were not the cause for his departure, and the organization maintains its commitment to creation care. See Leith

Anderson, interview by Sarah Pulliam, *Christianity Today*, 11 December 2008, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/decemberweb-only/150-41.0.html> (accessed 30 November 2009); Richard Cizik, interview by Terry Gross, *Fresh Air*, National Public Radio, 2 December 2008; S. Pulliam, "Richard Cizik Resigns from the National Association of Evangelicals," *Christianity Today*, 11 December 2008, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2008/decemberweb-only/150-42.0.html> (accessed 30 November 2009). Houghton led the IPCC's Scientific Assessment Working Group from 1988 to 2002. He embodies the marriage of devout evangelicalism and expert science and has been the key scientific messenger to American evangelical leaders.

19. "Sandy Cove Covenant and Invitation," 2004, [http://www.creationcare.org/conference/covenant\\_sandy\\_cove04.pdf](http://www.creationcare.org/conference/covenant_sandy_cove04.pdf) (accessed 30 November 2009).

20. National Association of Evangelicals, "For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility," 2004, [http://www.nae.net/images/content/For\\_The\\_Health\\_Of\\_The\\_Nation.pdf](http://www.nae.net/images/content/For_The_Health_Of_The_Nation.pdf) (accessed 30 November 2009).

21. Jim Ball, former president, current senior director of climate campaign, Evangelical Environmental Network, in interview with the author, Duluth, GA, 13 May 2009; Cizik, note 18; David Gushee, professor of Christian ethics, Mercer University, in interview with the author, Atlanta, GA, 23 September 2008; David Neff, editor-in-chief, *Christianity Today*, in interview with the author, Carol Stream, IL, 4 November 2008.

22. Ball, *ibid.*; Cizik, note 18; Alexei Laushkin, project manager, Evangelical Environmental Network, in interview with the author, Arlington, VA, 19 September 2008; Rusty Pritchard, former national director of outreach, Evangelical Environmental Network, current president, Flourish, in interview with the author, Atlanta, GA, 23 September 2008. See also D. M. Lindsay, "Evangelicals in the Power Elite: Elite Cohesion Advancing a Movement," *American Sociological Review* 73 (2008): 60–82.

23. Ball, note 21; Cizik, note 18; Tri Robinson, senior pastor, Boise Vineyard, in interview with the author, Duluth, GA, 14 May 2009; Ken Wilson, senior pastor, Ann Arbor Vineyard, Ann Arbor, MI, in phone interview with the author, 10 June 2009.

24. For more on eschatology and its relationship to environmental engagement, see J. M. Curry-Roper, "Contemporary Christian Eschatologies and Their Relation to Environmental Stewardship," *The Professional Geographer* 42, no. 2 (1990): 157–169; H. O. Maier, "Green Millennialism: American Evangelicals, Environmentalism, and the Book of Revelation," in D. G. Horrell, C. Hunt, C. Southgate, and F. Stavrakopoulou, eds., *Ecological Hermeneutics: Biblical, Historical, and Theological Perspectives* (London: T&T Clark, forthcoming).

25. Colossians 1:15–20. This view contrasts premillennial dispensationalism, an eschatological view many ECI leaders are consciously and actively working against. It divides history into distinct eras or dispensations and suggests that the present epoch will end when worldly apocalypse hastens a secret rapture of saved Christians from the earth, in advance of a seven year tribulation, subsequent second coming of Christ, and establishment of his millennial reign. Dispensationalism takes the arch of human history to be in decline, embraces deterioration as foretelling the rapture, and urges believers not to impede but to hasten that event. The prevalence of this belief and its impact on environmental concern have been overstated in recent years. According to John C. Green, director of the Bliss Institute, "The notion that an imminent Judgment Day absolves people of environmental responsibility is now a 'fringe' belief" (see Harden below). For more on dispensationalism,

see R. E. Olson, *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 170–173, 231–233, 243–244. For environmentalist critiques of this eschatology, see B. Moyers (acceptance remarks, Global Environmental Citizen Award, given by the Harvard University Center for Health and the Global Environment, New York, NY, 1 December 2004), <http://chge.med.harvard.edu/events/documents/Moyersstranscript.pdf> (accessed 30 November 2009); G. Scherer, “The Godly Must Be Crazy,” *Grist*, 27 October 2004, <http://www.grist.org/news/maindish/2004/10/27/scherer-christian/> (accessed 30 November 2009). For critiques of such arguments, see John C. Green quoted in B. Harden, “The Greening of Evangelicals: Christian Right Turns, Sometimes Warily, to Environmentalism,” *The Washington Post*, 6 February 2005; J. A. Simmons, “Evangelical Environmentalism: Oxymoron or Opportunity?” *Worldviews* 13, no. 1 (2009): 40–71.

26. Hulme, note 5, 142–177; M. C. Nisbet, “Communication Climate Change: Why Frames Matter for Public Engagement,” *Environment* 51, no. 2 (2009): 12–23.

27. Ball, note 21; Dan Boone, president, Trevecca Nazarene University, phone interview with the author, 8 January 2009; Cizik, note 18; Duane Litfin, president, Wheaton College, interview with the author, Wheaton, IL, 31 October 2008; Jo Ann Lyon, general superintendent, Wesleyan Church, founder, World Hope, in interview with the author, Duluth, GA, 14 May 2009; Robinson, note 23; Matthew Sleeth, executive director, Blessed Earth, in interview with the author, Duluth, GA, 14 May 2009.

28. Ball, note 21; Paul Corts, president, Council for Christian Colleges and Universities, interview with the author, Washington, DC, 18 September 2008; John Phelan, president and dean, North Park Theological Seminary, in interview with the author, Chicago, IL, 5 November 2008; Scott Sabin, executive director, Floresta USA, interview with the author, Duluth, GA, 14 May 2009.

29. D. P. Gushee, *The Future of Faith in American Politics: The Public Witness of the Evangelical Center* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 175–197; P. G. Heltzel, *Jesus and Justice: Evangelicals, Race, and American Politics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 127–159; B. McCamack, “Hot Damned America: Evangelicalism and the Climate Change Policy Debate,” *American Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2007): 645–668. On debates between the ECI and its opposition on the evangelical right, see also L. Kearns, “Cooking the Truth: Faith, Science, the Market, and Global Warming,” in L. Kearns and C. Keller, eds., *EcoSpirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 97–124; J. C. Nagle, “The Evangelical Debate Over Climate Change,” *University of St. Thomas Law Journal* 5, no. 1 (2008): 52–86; Simmons, note 25.

30. For the Cornwall perspective, see E. C. Beisner, P. K. Driessen, R. McKittrick, and R. W. Spencer, *A Call to Truth, Prudence, and Protection of the Poor: An Evangelical Response to Global Warming* (Burke, VA: Cornwall Alliance, 2006); E. C. Beisner, B. Duke, and S. Livesay, eds., *The Cornwall Stewardship Agenda* (Burke, VA: Cornwall Alliance, 2008); Cornwall Alliance, “The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship,” 2000, <http://www.cornwallalliance.org/docs/the-cornwall-declaration-on-environmental-stewardship.pdf> (accessed 30 November 2009). For treatments of the anti-environmental countermovement, see A. Austin, “Advancing Accumulation and Managing Its Discontents: The US Anti-Environmental Countermovement,” *Sociological Spectrum* 22, no. 1 (2002): 71–105; A. M. McCright and R. E. Dunlap, “Challenging Global Warming as a Social Problem: An Analysis of the Conservative Movement’s Counter-Claims,” *Social Problems* 47, no. 4 (2000): 499–522.

31. See letter from Dobson, Perkins, and others to the NAE Board (1 March 2007): <http://www.citizenlink.org/pdfs/NAEletterfinal.pdf> (accessed 30 November 2009).

32. Cizik, note 18; Lyon, note 27; Brian McLaren, former senior pastor, Cedar Ridge Community Church, Emergent leader, in interview with the author, Laurel, MD, 18 September 2008; Phelan, note 28; Sleeth, note 27.

33. Robinson, note 23.

34. Ball, note 21; Cizik, note 18; Gushee, note 21; Joel Hunter, senior pastor, Northland: A Church Distributed, phone interview with the author, 7 January 2009; Wilson, note 23.

35. Cizik, note 18; Litfin, note 27.

36. See note 1.

37. ABC News, Planet Green, and Stanford University, “Fuel Costs Boost Conservation Efforts; 7 in 10 Reducing ‘Carbon Footprint,’” 9 August 2008, <http://abcnews.go.com/images/PollingUnit/1067a1Environment2008.pdf> (accessed 30 November 2009); ABC News, *Time*, and Stanford University, “Intensity Spikes Concern on Warming; Many See a Change in Weather Patterns,” 25 March 2006, [http://woods.stanford.edu/docs/surveys/GW\\_Woods\\_ABC\\_Release\\_on\\_2006\\_GW\\_poll.pdf](http://woods.stanford.edu/docs/surveys/GW_Woods_ABC_Release_on_2006_GW_poll.pdf) (accessed 30 November 2009); Barna Group, “Born Again Christians Remain Skeptical, Divided about Global Warming,” 17 September 2007, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/20-donorscause/95-born-again-christians-remain-skeptical-divided-about-global-warming> (accessed 30 November 2009); Barna Group, “Evangelicals Go ‘Green’ with Caution,” 22 September 2008, <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/13-culture/23-evangelicals-go-greeneq-with-caution> (accessed 30 November 2009); Ellison Research, “Nationwide Survey Shows Concerns of Evangelical Christians over Global Warming,” 8 February 2006 (prepared for the EEN), <http://www.npr.org/documents/2006/feb/evangelical/newsrelease.pdf> (accessed 30 November 2009); Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research, “America’s Evangelicals Questionnaire,” 16 March–4 April 2004 (prepared for *Religion and Ethics Newsweekly*), <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/week733/questionnaire.pdf> (accessed 30 November 2009); Maibach et al., note 1, 27; Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, “Many Americans Uneasy with Mix of Religion and Politics,” 24 August 2006, <http://pewforum.org/publications/surveys/religion-politics-06.pdf> (accessed 30 November 2009); Pew Research Center for the People and the Press and Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, “Religious Groups’ Views on Global Warming,” 16 April 2009, <http://pewforum.org/docs/?DocID=238> (accessed 30 November 2009); Public Religion Research, “Key Religious Groups Want Government to Address Climate Change and Its Impact on World’s Poor,” 27 March 2009 (prepared for Faith in Public Life and Oxfam America), <http://www.faithinpubliclife.org/tools/polls/climate-change/> (accessed 30 November 2009).

38. The author conducted focus groups in nine predominantly white evangelical churches of different denominations in the southeastern United States, the region in which a majority of American evangelicals live, between July 2007 and January 2008. Churches were selected on the basis of denominational affiliation and self-identification as evangelical. (For more on standard methodology for researching evangelicals, see Hackett and Lindsay, note 9.) Focus groups averaged eight to ten volunteer participants with 82 participants in total. They were asked to read the “Call to Action,” which then served to ground, spur, and guide discussion. Maintaining anonymity, these discussions were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim, producing 55,000 words of transcripts for

analysis, in addition to written questionnaires.

39. A. Crouch, “Environmental Wager,” *Christianity Today*, 29 June 2005, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2005/august/22.66.html> (accessed 30 November 2009); D. P. Gushee, “Faith, Science, and Climate Change” (presented at the annual conference of the Christian Life Commission, Baptist General Convention of Texas, San Antonio, TX, 3–4 March 2008).

40. W. R. Freudenburg, “Social Constructions and Social Constrictions: Toward Analyzing the Social Construction of ‘the Naturalized’ as well as ‘the Natural,’” in G. Spaargaren, A. P. J. Mol, and F. H. Buttel, eds., *Environment and Global Modernity* (London: Sage, 2000), 103–119; McCright and Dunlap, note 30, 510.

41. R. E. Dunlap and A. M. McCright, “A Widening Gap: Republican and Democratic Views on Climate Change,” *Environment* 50, no. 5 (2008): 26–35.

42. M. O. Emerson and C. Smith, *Divided by Faith: Evangelical Religion and the Problem of Race in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 75.

43. See note 25.

44. Boone, note 27; Sabin, note 28; Sleeth, note 27.

45. See forthcoming research from LifeWay Research, Nashville, TN.

46. For more on the significance of environmental language and discourse, see L. R. Cass and M. E. Pettenger, “Conclusion: The Constructions of Climate Change,” in M. E. Pettenger, ed., *The Social Construction of Climate Change: Power, Knowledge, Norms, Discourses* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2007), 235–246; R. Cox, *Environmental Communication and the Public Sphere* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2006); M. A. Hajer, *The Politics of Environmental Discourse: Ecological Modernization and the Policy Process* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1995); S. C. Moser and L. Dilling, eds., *Creating a Climate for Change: Communicating Climate Change and Facilitating Social Change* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Nisbet, note 26.

47. Ball, note 21; Colwell, note 2, 136–137; Robinson, note 23; Wilson, note 23. A direct outgrowth of the ECI, a coalition of relief and development groups recently formed the Evangelical Collaboration for Climate Adaptation, which aims to influence U.S. adaptation policy. See <http://www.aerdo.net/innerloop/ClimateChangeStatementApril2009.pdf> (accessed 30 November 2009).

48. R. Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); M. A. Noll, *American Evangelical Christianity: An Introduction* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2001).

49. Noll, *ibid.*; Olson, note 25.

50. D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 1–19.

51. Noll, note 48, 13.

52. Gushee, note 29; D. M. Lindsay, “Ties that Bind and Divisions that Persist: Evangelical Faith and the Political Spectrum,” *American Quarterly* 59, no. 3 (2007): 883–909. John C. Green and Steve Waldman developed the term “freestyle” evangelicals to describe this growing trend, used in a variety of pieces published on <http://www.beliefnet.com>.

53. T. Miller, ed., *US Religious Landscape Survey 2008* (Washington, DC: Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, 2008).