

May 2012

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Recommended Citation

Hammink, Wouter (2012) "Mother Nature and the Heavenly Father: Christianity and the Environment in a Globalized World," *Macalester International*: Vol. 30, Article 9.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/macintl/vol30/iss1/9>

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Mother Nature and the Heavenly Father: Christianity and the Environment in a Globalized World

Wouter Hammink

I. Introduction

Since its conception, theology has been entwined with ecology. Major or minor, extinct or thriving, all religions give relevance to the meaning of the environment and the relationship of human beings with the Earth. The modern Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all revere the environment and recognize its significance within their respective religious texts. The presence of the Abrahamic religions is visible on every corner of the planet. However, within the status quo, Christianity is the dominant religion at the core of Immanuel Wallerstein's "World-system."¹ The prominence of Christianity within developed countries, meaning in this case countries that emit the largest percentages of carbon into the atmosphere, raises the question of modern Christianity's relationship with the environment.

The influence of Christianity within the environmental movement has been an especially fraught topic of debate between scholars, lawmakers, and religious leaders in the past. Practically, Christianity plays different roles in sustainable development depending on a region's adherence to biblical assertions. This adherence, however, is generally more difficult to find in practice than in the Bible itself. Whereas environmental politics may be very noticeable in certain countries or Christian denominations, they may be effectively invisible in others. In the United States, the conservative Republican Party and born-again evangelicals have made no noteworthy attempts to encourage environmentalism and have instead chosen to focus their efforts on issues of government deregulation and strict social conservatism.² Europe, on the other hand, has taken the issue of sustainability more seriously.³ For example, the conservative *Christendemocratisch Appèl* (Christian-Democratic Appeal, CDA) political party of the Netherlands has actively advocated and acted in favor of increased environmental sustainability.⁴ The Dutch multi-party political system requires cooperation between different political parties, meaning that these parties are forced to work with the majority to remain relevant. When issues of environmental ethics arise, the differences between the United States and Europe are obvious and worthy of discussion. These two developed and predominantly Christian spheres of the globe are the pivotal actors within almost every aspect of international development, economics, and energy politics.

The relationship between Christianity and the environment is inherently complex. Whereas the increasingly secular Western European powers have recognized the validity of climate change, Bible-trusting evangelicals refuse to take action to counter human damage to the Earth. However, a new group of academics, religious leaders, and political figures is embracing the overarching global view that climate change must be confronted. Their ideologies are increasingly common in Europe where the issue of environmental preservation is not highly politicized and where a growing pressure exists among both liberals and conservatives to pursue alternative energy sources. However, the two-party political system in the United States has resulted in the politicization of the environmental question and it has halted most pro-environmental policies.

Because supporting environmentalism in the United States is typically viewed as a part of the liberal Democratic Party's agenda, individuals who identify with the environmentalist movement but have otherwise conservative backgrounds must establish a non-liberal identity with which to raise awareness of their concerns to other evangelicals. These evangelical environmentalists embrace the idea of "Creation Care." Simply put, Creation Care is the recognition of humanity's relationship with God and the rest of God's creation by the expanding evangelical movement in the United States. These Creation Care evangelicals encourage environmentally responsible evangelism.

At this point, it is imperative to stress that this essay is not written from the viewpoint of any specific religion or political ideology. I am not a theologian, theorist, or philosopher. Instead, as an academic writer, I am at liberty to discuss the realities of the situation without constraint. Climate change is a pressing and immediate matter that is not being treated with urgency in the United States. All major religions value humankind's intrinsic bond with the environment. Nonetheless, Christians and Christian culture dominate the developed and major carbon-emitting areas in the world.⁵ My research focuses on Christianity for this reason and this reason alone. Although the views of Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and other religions are ultimately significant, the Christian population today has the largest overall global carbon footprint. Although the increasing environmental impact of non-Western spheres, such as China and India, is worrisome, I argue that the West (specifically the United States and Western Europe) can ultimately act as a global arbitrator for environmental sustainability under specific circumstances explained in this essay.

My research focuses mainly on the United States for two reasons: it has the largest carbon-polluting Christian population and it is the developed country that has the farthest to go in terms of creating a sustainable energy policy. For these reasons, Christianity in the United States is the factor that requires the most consideration. Researching other religions and countries is an obvious necessity, but broadening my research would diminish this particular case's severity and profound significance. I have therefore limited my research to the evangelical population of the United States, which I attest is preventing not only the United States from recognizing climate change as a severely problematic issue, but is also restraining the global environmental community from interacting in an ecologically responsible manner.

As a means of comparison, I use the example of environmentalism in the Netherlands to provide a parallel to the United States. Although the Dutch model cannot be used as a perfect mirror for the United States, it provides overarching themes relating to the political and theological spheres that affect the advancement of environmentally conscious decision-making. The United States is not a largely secularized country with multiple political parties and the Netherlands is increasingly influenced by Islamic beliefs. Because the political and religious influences at work in both the United States and the Netherlands are so different, resulting environmental movements also differ. However, I show that the United States does not need to become more like its European allies; instead, American citizens must recognize the institutionalized barriers preventing environmental action and must acknowledge the larger global importance of fostering ecological stewardship.

Analyzing and reflecting upon the views of a presiding member of the evangelical community is essential to the comprehension of the born-again population's control of American environmental politics. Reverend Richard Cizik is the emblematic American evangelical environmentalist. A Washington lobbyist, evangelical environmentalist, and in the vanguard of the New Evangelical Partnership for the Common Good, the reverend is one of the leading actors in the Creation Care movement.⁶ In a personal interview with the reverend, Cizik contended that

there are three distinct and major obstacles preventing evangelicals from embracing environmentalism. Cizik posits that political, scientific, and theological barriers have prevented the care of the environment from becoming a less partisan issue than it has in Europe.

The three barriers are heavily intertwined, with religious and political beliefs being markedly interconnected. This has led to a general mistrust of scientific, as well as political, beliefs that fall outside the comfort zones of the conventional evangelical conservative Republican American viewpoint. Cizik believes that the evangelical population's ties to the Republican Party and large corporations have prevented globally significant progress from being realized. The reverend also argues that the evangelical population has a theologically founded mistrust of scientific research, and consequentially uses flawed logic to negate major scientific findings regarding climate change. Lastly, eschatological views of the world are the overarching hindrances to evangelical ecological engagement as they serve as excuses to behave apathetically to climate change even if admitting to the phenomenon's existence.⁷

Cizik's belief in these barriers to evangelical environmentalism would be dramatically less significant, however, if they did not resonate with a larger audience. I will first identify the global relevance of the American evangelical population's unwillingness to embrace ecologically responsible behavior. Climate change is not a local phenomenon but must instead be considered on the global stage. Whereas evangelical Americans have prevented significant progress in U.S. environmental efforts, American hegemony has likewise prevented the global adoption of increased environmental responsibility. American hegemony resonates globally while other governments implement successful environmental policies. The next section will outline the Dutch environmental model and how it has succeeded. Although environmental policies in the Netherlands should be applauded, their global environmental impact is minimal when compared to the United States. Using parallel examples of politics, science, and theology, this next section will provide overarching models that can be used to reflect upon Cizik's barriers to American environmentalism. Following this, I will return to Cizik's main barriers to environmental involvement as well as highlight the progressive achievements the Creation Care movement has thus far undertaken.

II. Globalization, Power, Democracy, and Environmentalism

The United States has been the global hegemon for decades, with that hegemony being strengthened after the Cold War. The United States' hegemony is plainly visible in political and economic matters. The 2008 global economic collapse stands as a vivid example of the world's dependence on the current global leader. The financial crisis began following an era of risky American lending involving financial institutions that were "too big to fail." When the U.S. entered a recession in 2008, the rest of the world followed suit. America's hegemony is now often questioned, as Europe and China prove to be major global powers as well. Although these academic debates are legitimate, for the purpose of this analysis, it is important to recognize the United States' current position as a key global economic and political player. International relations experts focus on U.S. hegemony as the central motivator of global political workings; public figures in the rest of the core, as well as in the periphery and semi-periphery, expect political and economic assistance, assurance, and advice from the United States whenever globally significant questions arise.

The United States is, of course, the hegemonic leader of more than simply economic and political realms. Its position as the world's leading democracy has resulted in both positive and negative outcomes for the rest of the globe. In the 1960s, 1970s, and even into the 1980s, the

United States was a clear hegemonic leader regarding environmental policymaking. These efforts are visible in the country's actions to reduce the effects of chlorofluorocarbon pollution on the ozone. The United States' environmental actions were so quick, holistic, and drastic that policies would often be passed regardless of what outcomes might result in the economic or political realms within and beyond American borders. However, since the Reagan era, America's hegemony has taken a different shape regarding environmentalism.

There are two sides of globalization, both of which are controlled by the U.S. One side is positive, in which the global hegemon uses its power to enforce policy matters that need global action. The United States' actions regarding the ozone layer are an example of positive hegemonic action. Since the 1980s, however, the United States has been increasingly present in the other face of hegemonic power. Instead of using its influence as a means of enforcing the global good, it has used it as a means of self-beneficence. Despite earlier efforts by President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore, Republican presidents and legislative bodies have avoided stricter action on the reduction of carbon pollution.

These differences in United States' environmental action are a direct result of the American democratic election process. Whereas Republican presidents and congresses are more likely to rescind environmental regulations, an issue to be discussed below, a majority of Democrats in office have supported new environmental policies on both domestic and international levels. This situation has two negative outcomes. The first and most straightforward is that sustainable environmental policy objectives for the long term have not been developed successfully. The second undesired effect of the democratic process is inconsistency. Whereas a Democratic president may encourage sustainable development through international policymaking, a Republican that later takes the presidency may reverse those decisions. The United States' inability—between the presidencies of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush—to agree on the globally significant Kyoto Protocol is illustrative of the problems of political inconsistency.

Many scholars have insisted that the United States' position as a global hegemon alters its global environmental policymaking. Others argue that hegemony is only a political and economic phenomenon, and that environmentalism has therefore skirted issues of power relations. The ultimate question to answer is whether the United States' regression from its position as a global environmental leader can be attributed to hegemonic consequences or to a reformation of the American political agenda.

Robert Falkner, Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics, argues that the link between American hegemony and the environment should not be taken at face value.⁸ The professor posits that the United States' shift from being a global partner in environmental policymaking to being a slower unilateral actor must be viewed from a historical perspective. America's environmental record of accomplishment has been a unilateral effort masked only by larger-scale multilateral efforts:

Even though there is greater willingness in Washington 'to go it alone,' unilateralism has always been part and parcel of US environmental diplomacy. Ever since the first UN environmental conference in 1972, the United States has pursued a multitrack approach, which has included multilateral environmental policymaking as well as the use of unilateral threats and sanctions.⁹

Falkner goes on to argue that no simple conclusion can be made regarding its hegemonic influence and resulting international environmental action. Since the 1960s, the U.S. government has been an international participant on environmental issues. However, environmental policy

has never been a predominant issue for any global hegemon. Just as previous global powers have done, the United States has used its hegemonic prominence to foster its own economic and political agendas. This has led to a less than clear stance on environmental policy. Falkner notes that, “The U.S. government has used its economic strength and political influence to promote global environmental objectives. On other occasions, it has acted as a veto power, blocking progress towards multilateral policymaking.”¹⁰

Falkner correctly asserts that these arguments imply the influence not of international hegemonic power on environmental policy, but of domestic actors serving self-interests. Domestic factors are larger players in determining governmental action on international environmental diplomacy than international policymaking attempts. This is proof of a rather insignificant link between hegemonic power and environmental policy. Domestic influences consequently play a larger role in energy policy than hegemonic influences or multilateral efforts, regardless of the favorability of multilateral environmental cooperation.¹¹

It is clear, therefore, that hegemonic influences affecting American environmentalism are not directly at fault. The most publicized example of this was then-President Bush’s refusal to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. However, the representative incident of the Kyoto Protocol was an issue of domestic interests colliding with hegemonic necessities, not vice versa. Competing domestic interests have resulted in a lack of agreement over the handling of both domestic and international environmental policy agendas, idling significant progress in the face of increasing climate change and dependence on foreign oil.

Although America’s hegemony is not to blame for its lack of global environmental action, its lack of hegemonic action has global effects. The United States has no explicit energy strategy for the future. The American government’s lack of engagement with worldwide climate initiatives and organizations has also severely affected global sustainability movements. In the past few decades, the United States has chosen to focus on national economic interests and to ignore global environmental risks.¹² Economic interests have been the main force in the American government. However, shifting beliefs nationwide are perhaps changing this outlook.

As shown, the barriers to American environmentalism are not hegemonic. Instead, however, it appears that domestic structural economic and political occurrences have been the most significant phenomena preventing widespread climatic concern. It is certain that these interest groups do not exist nor act without external influences. One thematic argument in this essay is the overwhelming interconnectedness of complex political, economic, theological, and environmental issues. For several decades now, the Republican Party in the U.S. has had a political monopoly on the evangelical population. This stranglehold on voters’ political persuasion, however, does not happen by random occurrence.

III. Environmental Barriers Overcome: The Case of the Netherlands

Providing a model for the United States’ environmental policy is not as simple as recognizing the hegemonic influence of the American evangelical population. The U.S. is far from achieving major environmental reform. However, several European models can be applied to the United States. The Netherlands is one of the leading European nations in progressive environmental government action. The country’s environmental record serves as an excellent example to analyze and reformat American climate policies.

The Netherlands as a whole has largely accepted climate change as a problematic matter for future generations both in- and outside of the country. Whereas environmental concerns are not fully recognized as political or social issues in the United States, citizens and public officials in

the Netherlands have overwhelmingly expressed unease at the future of the global climate. This concern can be attributed to many factors, not the least of which is the secularization that has removed the religious predisposition to deny climate change. However, in order to use the Netherlands' success as a model for future American environmental involvement, it is important to look at the Christian population of the Netherlands.

The parliamentary system in the Netherlands currently has twelve representative political parties in either the First Chamber, the Second Chamber, or the European Parliament. The major green party, GroenLinks (GreenLeft) does not have an outwardly Christian agenda. However, the Christian Democratic Appeal, one of the Christian parties currently represented in Parliament, has successfully combined a religious and environmentalist agenda. The party's leader, Maxime Verhagen, has successfully passed legislation to more than triple the country's production of wind power by 2020.¹³ The political willingness of a major Christian political party to embrace an environmentalist agenda sends a strong symbolic message. Not only is this involvement environmentally beneficial, but it also embodies the larger political message that religious and political convictions need not necessarily conflict. The CDA's involvement with environmental progressivism promotes its Christian ideology; likewise, the party uses its Christian ideology to further promote ecologically safe practices. In a larger context with the full political Dutch system, by promoting a responsible environmental agenda, the CDA's willingness to cooperate with other political parties, such as GroenLinks, legitimizes both environmental stewardship and Christianity as defensible individual ideologies. Although the CDA recognizes humankind's impact on the global climate, the environment is still a topic of controversy.

Much like the Republican Party in the United States, the ultraconservative *Partij voor de Vrijheid* (Party for Freedom, PVV), led by the infamous Geert Wilders, does not recognize climate change as a fully proven fact.¹⁴ This encourages the assumption that conservative political viewpoints are more likely to dispute the validity of climate change. Although the examples of the PVV and the GOP support this thesis, the differences between the two political parties make such an assumption problematic. Although the two parties display many overlapping general principles, such as conservatism and economic neo-liberalism, the issues relevant to Wilders' party and the Republican Party vary; climate change is one of the only specific issues both European and North American polities recognize. Because of this, evangelical Republicans should look to Christian political parties like the Christian-Democratic Appeal, as opposed to the PVV. Instead of following the radical rightist route of the Party for Freedom, the Republican Party and American evangelicals can choose Dutch Christian environmentalism as a political model. By supporting an environmentally friendly political agenda, Christian conservatives can legitimate their broader ideology without sacrificing popular support.

A second issue to be discussed below is the conservative American evangelical lack of trust in science. Conservative American scientists have been urging prominent members of the Republican Party to address climate change.¹⁵ Regardless, Republican presidential candidates, such as Rick Santorum and Mitt Romney, have insisted that climate change is a hoax. In the Netherlands, however, the scientific likelihood of climate change is almost uncontested. Although the Second Chamber, the political equivalent of the U.S. House of Representatives, has at times expressed doubt over global climate change, public and governmental actions provide a common agreement that the human impact on the environment needs to be reduced.¹⁶ Because the politicians in the multi-party chambers are comparatively unattached to corporations, true scientific trust has not been overshadowed by governmental and commercial greed and corruption.¹⁷

As mentioned earlier, the increasing secularization of the Dutch population has made the establishment of the environment as a political issue less entangled with religious ideologies. In comparison to the United States, Christians in the Netherlands overwhelmingly recognize climate change as a genuine threat. As seen in the example of evolution versus creationism, religion has a large influence on popular scientific opinion in the United States. Secularization in the Netherlands, however, has decreased the contentiousness of scientific issues like climate change. In the Netherlands, the assessment that climate change is beyond dispute has a cyclical effect. Regardless of whether secularists initially conducted the push towards environmentalism, the converging opinions of secularists and religious individuals (in this case Christians) reinforce each other.

IV. American Barriers to Environmental Involvement

Whereas the Netherlands has mostly overcome political, scientific, and theological barriers to environmental involvement, the United States is empirically slow and often regressive in its environmental agenda. The American Republican Party and evangelical conservatives in the United States have been hesitant to adopt a more environmentally friendly policy approach. In a personal interview with Cizik, the reverend made the convincing argument that the monopoly that the GOP has on evangelical conservatives is largely political. However, that political power is tied to scientific and theological influences. Together, the three biasing controls of politics, science, and theology create the threatening triumvirate of the conservative evangelical agenda.

Another evangelical environmentalist, J. Aaron Simmons, agrees with Cizik's bold assertions. Simmons attempts to break evangelical norms by alleging that evangelical environmentalism is not an oxymoronic concept but instead an opportunity for both evangelical Christians and environmentalists.¹⁸ With a thorough analysis of different authors involved in the field and also outside of the field, Simmons delivers an argument that highlights the factors preventing evangelical Christians from joining the otherwise liberal participants in the Green movement. With the input of scholars including Bill Moyers, Calvin DeWitt, Steven Bouma-Prediger, and Richard Cizik, Simmons agrees that the threat of a slide to increasingly liberal politics and pantheism, along with the persistence of eschatological views, are the major roadblocks preventing a mass movement toward Creation Care.

A. Politics

The most complex and interconnected of Cizik's three barriers is political. The rise of evangelical conservatism in the Reagan era laid the groundwork for the increased politicization of environmental issues in the twenty-first century. Corporate support from energy sources such as Exxon Mobil has been tied to the American Republican Party for decades, and evangelical Christians have been equally tied to the GOP. Christians and corporations naturally joined in support of the Republican Party over time, increasingly swaying the opinions of millions of Americans. The views of the GOP, however, are manipulated by the influence of big oil companies in the political system. These companies are able to induce their evangelical base to prevent stringent energy policy reforms. Although 63 percent of American evangelicals believed in climate change in 2006, the voices of the majority are silenced by corporate greed.¹⁹

The ulterior motives of the GOP may share an equal or greater portion of culpability. Since the 1980s, the Republican Party's overlapping interests with the evangelical voting bloc and capitalistic financial and energy agencies have influenced American public policy.

Unfortunately, America's regression from earlier environmental involvement has negatively influenced global energy initiatives.

The Reagan era proved to be a time of great political shifting. The 1980s tied the knot between religion and politics in the United States. As Europe took the stage as a leader in sustainable development, the United States retreated from its initial environmental activism. The newfound power of the religious right may not have been born in the 1980s, but its influence during Reagan's presidency was uniquely unrivaled. The "religionization" of America's two-party political system has had an immeasurable impact on the country.

It is clear that economic interests have long played a leading role in American political decisions. This capitalism-driven ideology is indeed present in the Republican Party's interaction with major corporations. Of course, if environmentalism were to become equally profitable, political interests would quickly change. However, capitalism is not a desirable driver of political or social interests. Instead of using "eco-capitalism" as a means of addressing the issues of sustainability, social values and human needs should be prioritized.²⁰

Discussing the field of Republican contenders for the 2012 presidential election in an opinion article for the *Washington Post*, Cizik argues that the entwined relationship between the evangelicals and the Grand Old Party has damaged Americans' perceptions of family or moral values:

Social conservative leaders have shrewdly recalibrated for an election in which the economy is the top concern for voters. Baptizing as a 'moral agenda' tax cuts for the wealthy, steep budget cuts to programs that save lives and deregulation of Wall Street takes a lot of nerve. But the Family Research Council—which organized last month's Values Voter summit—and Christian conservative operatives advance a political agenda by suggesting that the priorities of corporations and the GOP fit snugly with the teachings of Jesus.²¹

Cizik links this argument with the issue of renewable energy and Creation Care. The politicization of religion has blinded evangelicals, allowing conservatives to collaborate with major corporate and religious powers and to eschew biblical values in favor of political interests. Cizik's argument is correct: many Republicans in the United States have successfully replaced true biblical practices, such as protecting the poor or saving God's creation, in exchange for corporate greed.

Cizik argues, however, that individual belief is not the root of the problem. In fact, Cizik argues that political polarization and media infiltration have created the ostracizing viewpoints of prominent members of the religious right:

Despite the media infatuation with the religious right, data from Public Religion Research Institute and other polls consistently show that a majority of Christians care about a broad set of moral priorities—protecting the poor from harmful budget cuts, comprehensive reform of immigration laws, supporting renewable energy and supporting family planning and other common-ground policies that prevent abortions. Such nuance is often lost in a political moment defined by polarization.²²

Individual ideologies, therefore, are not disparate from the moral principles of the Bible; the average conservative evangelical is not to blame. Instead, political polarization and greed have detached individuals from their true moralities in order to power the political agenda of the right.

Simmons' description of evangelicals' "fear of the liberal Other" is the most convincing of his arguments.²³ The association between environmentalism and liberalism is entirely engrained in American political thought. In the United States, the idea of environmentalism arouses mental images of liberalism; resulting thoughts of sexuality, abortion, and secularism are consequently associated with environmentalism. The association with left-leaning politics has been more than enough to prevent evangelicals of the United States from participating in the Green Movement. Simmons uses an excerpt from ultraconservative author Ann Coulter's *Godless: The Church of Liberalism*, in which she refers to environmentalists as liberal, baby-killing vegetarians that hate humankind, to emphasize the particular thinking that has so long prevented conservatives from becoming environmentalists.

B. Science

The debate over the validity of climate change has not ended. Whereas a large majority of the global population, including evangelical Americans, seem to trust scientifically founded evidence identifying the global risk of the natural phenomenon, Cizik states that many evangelicals link scientists to evolutionists. Evangelical belief does not allow for a belief in Darwinian evolution, resulting in a decrease in scientific trust. Evangelicals assert their collective disagreement with the scientific community, with illogical conclusions. Concerning global warming, evangelicals exercise a common belief that they have no reason to believe scientists. The majority of scientists support Darwin's theory of evolution, a viewpoint strictly against the moral fiber of the evangelical population.

The distrust of science adhered to by many evangelicals and other religious conservatives is noticeably evident in conservative American politics. The Republican candidates for the 2012 presidential election have almost all expressed their distrust of science and their skepticism of climate change. Jon Huntsman, a Mormon, former governor of Utah, and last hope for a candidate respectful of science, drew criticism from conservative mainstream media for statements expressing his belief in science via the social networking website Twitter: "To be clear, I believe in evolution and trust scientists on global warming. Call me crazy."²⁴ Huntsman also explained his faith in science to an ABC reporter:

When we take a position that isn't willing to embrace evolution, when we take a position that basically runs counter to what 98 of 100 climate scientists have said...about what is causing climate change and man's contribution to it, I think we find ourselves on the wrong side of science, and, therefore, in a losing position.²⁵

Neither Republican presidential candidates nor the media viewed Huntsman's comments favorably. In a display of the power of the Republican Party's influence on individuals' beliefs, Huntsman later retracted his controversial statements. He shifted back toward a more acceptably conservative position, asserting that the validity of the science of global warming is questionable and that scientists should be held accountable and be made to provide clearer evidence of a changing global climate.²⁶

C. Theology

Eschatology has long been an excuse for environmental degradation and the lack of sustainable development. Eschatology, which is the branch of theology concerned with death, the Last Judgment, and the Second Coming of Christ, presumes that God will eventually destroy the sum of his creation. Therefore, any attempt to reduce the impact of global climate change is ultimately futile.

Ron Elsdon, an expert on eschatological beliefs and curate assistant in Northern Ireland, explains the common train of thought regarding environmental stewardship among eschatological thinkers. He informs us that Christians involving themselves in sustainable development or other environmental issues are thought to be only delaying the Second Coming, the Last Judgment, and the destruction of creation.²⁷ In his chapter “Eschatology and Hope,” Elsdon urges evangelicals, especially younger generations, to look beyond this view.

Cizik believes the answer to converting eschatologically minded evangelicals into environmentally conscious citizens is not far from daily life. In our interview, Cizik recalled conversations he had with well-known writer and theologian Charles Ryrie. The professor and dispensationalist argues that taking care of the planet is much like taking care of one’s own body. Likening stewardship to pool exercises, Ryrie says that swimming daily, moderating his food intake, and taking care of his body equate to something much greater than personal health and well-being. As Cizik states, “[The human body] is the temple of the Holy Spirit and likewise we should take care of the Earth. I don’t disregard my body in the belief that the Second Coming is going to come, and just abuse it.”²⁸

Cizik identifies eschatological inflexibility as one of the many challenging viewpoints that evangelical Americans stubbornly exploit in order to avoid environmentally responsible action. However, eschatological beliefs are not the only theological barriers to environmental stewardship. Evangelical Christianity necessitates a strict observance of biblical content. Although the biblical quality of stewardship is often overridden by political influences, other biblical passages have been viewed in an overly literal sense.

Biblical excerpts and the views of dominant religious figures plague evangelical environmentalist efforts. In Genesis, particular emphasis is made on the role of human dominion over the earth:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.²⁹

This initial invocation of domination instead of preservation and respect cannot be accepted when viewing the Bible through a wider scope, however. As opposed to anti-environmentalists, Calvin DeWitt believes that Genesis 1:28 must be viewed beyond face value:

That this verse has been used in isolation from the rest of the Scriptures cannot be denied. But dominion as outright oppression is not advocated or condoned by the

Scriptures. First, the Genesis 1:28 passage gives the blessing and mandate to people before the fall. Second, this passage must be understood in the context of the rest of the Bible. If this is done, one must come to the conclusion that dominion means responsible stewardship, to which the biblical principles presented in this chapter attest. The Christian model for dominion is the example of Jesus Christ, who, given all dominion, and ‘Who, being in very nature God...made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant...[and] humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross’ (Phil. 2: 6–8).³⁰

Instead of focusing on superficial interpretations, DeWitt maintains that dominion cannot be an oppressive hierarchical system in which humans prevail, but one in which stewardship to the environment and therefore Creation is prioritized.

In order to emphasize further the significance of this theological roadblock, it is important to establish a set of ideologies that define the different perspectives of Christians and their relationships with the environment. Jim Ball, Executive Vice President for Policy and Climate Change at the Evangelical Environmental Network, argues that there are four identifiable ideologies related to humankind’s relationship with creation. Ball’s article on the evangelicals’ use of ecology utilizes a much more science- and theory-based approach than excerpts from the Bible or the opinions of evangelical environmentalists.

Ball highlights four views of evangelical stewardship that can explain the Bible’s use of the concept of dominion and its different interpretations: Wise Use, Anthropocentric Stewardship, Caring Management, and Servanthood Stewardship.³¹ The first type, Wise Use, represents a philosophy of thought in which God has left humans in charge of the rest of Creation.³² Wise Use exemplifies the most straightforward interpretation of the Genesis passage. This understanding of dominion is politically dangerous because it tends to align with the views of radically right-leaning political gossipmongers, including Rush Limbaugh and Ann Coulter.³³ Within the Wide Use principle, “God is indifferent to the rest of creation, and thus it has no moral status.”³⁴

Anthropocentric Stewardship, the second of the four types, represents the conviction of the majority of evangelicals.³⁵ This mode of thought views humans as dominant over the rest of Creation, but they are only meant to take what they need. They risk disobeying God if they do not meet God’s demands and leave resources for future generations.³⁶

Among evangelical environmentalists, the third view, Caring Management, has the most support.³⁷ At this level, humans are unique in that they have been created in God’s image, but are still responsible for the management of the rest of creation.³⁸ Ball characterizes this argument with a simple illustration: “Look, some of what the environmentalists are saying is true. Trust us; we have listened to them critically and we have weeded out all the crazy stuff. But the biblical message is that we cannot be anthropocentric. We’ve got to care for the rest of creation, too.”³⁹

Servanthood Stewardship, the least arrogant of the four paradigms and the one with which Ball agrees, provides a model in which humans are meant to serve the rest of Creation, not conversely.⁴⁰ Servanthood Stewardship emphasizes God’s desire for peace and balance among all Creation, not just humans.⁴¹ These four types of philosophical thought highlight the differences between varying schools of thought within evangelism. Though Ball fits into the fourth category, he believes that Caring Management provides the optimal opportunity for observable ecological change and protection to occur.⁴²

Despite opposition from conservative Christian Americans, significant progress has been made regarding environmental sustainability. However, it should be stressed again that the importance

is not on singular achievements, but on an overarching sense of support. Evangelicals constitute one of the largest voting blocs in the United States and are the group pivotal to global environmental action. Evangelical resistance to increased sustainability has been globally detrimental.

Regarding the three influences preventing the Christian right from trusting the rhetoric of global warming, climate change, and other environmental issues, Cizik says there is hope of moving forward. Although the Republican political agenda, the lack of trust in scientists, and eschatological views have hindered progress, the divorce of religious environmentalists from their party and an environmental policy more reminiscent of a European approach is imminent. This new brand of environmentally minded Christians, Cizik says, is the new evangelicals.

V. The Future of Creation Care

As per the title of this essay, the relationship between religion and the environment is interwoven and globally significant. Although countries such as the Netherlands have a significant function in shaping global environmental policies, the role of the conservative evangelical Christian American voting bloc is noteworthy as it holds the power to direct American environmental policy. With the United States' role as a global hegemon, paired with its ambivalent past on supranational and intergovernmental environmental efforts, the pressure to designate a path forward is greater than ever. Cizik believes that the ideologies of Creation Care and new evangelicals are gaining traction among conservative voters.

The Tea Party protests and the Occupy movements that began in Chicago and New York, respectively, provide insights into the difficulties and progress of Creation Care. In the interview, Reverend Cizik suggested that the deregulatory sentiments of the Tea Party and the work of democracy in practice at Occupy protests are emblematic of the current situation of evangelical environmentalists. Specifically referring to the Tea Party's stance on deregulation and the Occupy movement's grassroots positivism, Cizik summarizes his opinion of the two American political movements:

There is a new wind blowing. It is very encouraging. You see it reflected in the policies of Barack Obama. Fifty percent of the Tea Party is evangelical—we face stiff competition. Fortunately, in recent days, we have seen the Occupy movement...and I am pretty sympathetic to it. That is a lot of what we evangelicals should be doing.⁴³

Cizik goes on to argue that the Tea Party movement is inimical to Creation Care. Presidential candidates Rick Perry and Rick Santorum understand the significance of their declarations to deconstruct the Environmental Protection Agency and their dismissals of climate change. While presidential candidates and office holders use biblical references and rhetoric to appeal to evangelicals, their policies and those of the Tea Party movement overwhelmingly support continued and expanded poverty and inequality. Cizik asserts that true new evangelicals would support Creation Care and insist that God would not support the poverty perpetuating policies of the right. Evangelicals would instead call for a just and equal society. Cizik insists, “The Tea Party is creating a two-tier system of society: one for the rich and one for the poor. It’s an outrage.”⁴⁴

Unfortunately for the Green movement, the American two-party system inevitably leads to the polarization and politicization of any issue that can be labeled or monetized. Whereas the

Netherlands has multiple political parties combining their political influence to encourage environmental preservation and has agreed to increase preservation practices, two-party politics in the United States has stalled significant progress and has on several occasions resulted in environmental policy regression.⁴⁵

Fortunately, environmental evangelism in the United States has gained traction. Creation Care evangelicals in the United States are shying away from the negative rhetoric of anti-environmentalists and would-be killers of the Environmental Protection Agency in favor of a more globally beneficial environmental ethic. To meet this newfound environmentalism, conservative members of the House and Senate will be forced to realign their allegiances to a more moderate conservative base or risk diminishment. Likewise, new evangelicals joining the environmentalist movement will have a much broader appeal.

This shift in focus is not something only Republicans in Washington, D.C., should be looking at, however. Simmons highlights the power of the evangelical voting bloc in the United States. If evangelicals were to shift their influence from criminalizing abortion and denouncing same-sex marriage to promoting environmentalism instead, resulting shifts in policymaking would be swift and thunderous. In the world of ever-increasing energy consumption and use of nonrenewable resources, any person looking to future generations of global citizens should be concerned about the impact of America's largest religious voting group. International politics and relations today are significantly dependent on the United States. Due to the United States' hegemonic status, any environmental policy created or encouraged by the evangelical American population results in global consequences and outcomes. Combined with the active environmental political thought that is prevalent throughout the Netherlands and the rest of the European Union, evangelical environmentalism has the potential to globalize.

It is clear that the United States will require other means of achieving environmental policy outside of the politics of bipolarity. Several conservative evangelicals in the political spotlight have made recent efforts to disentangle their religious values from their political values. Cizik's campaign for the Creation Care movement of new evangelicals is gaining traction throughout the United States. For instance, Bill Moyers' documentary *Is God Green?* displays a variety of evangelical conservatives speaking up against the degradation of the Earth and the need for solidarity in the face of climate change.⁴⁶ The documentary highlights the effects that politically influenced environmental degradations have on otherwise right-wing or nonpolitical evangelicals.

In persuading the conservative American bloc to embrace environmentally friendly policies and practices, the challenge is to disentangle the knotted relationship between the Republican Party, voters, and interest groups. As stated earlier, however, political parties are already courting more monetarily supportive bodies, such as the big name partners of oil and coal producing corporations, their lobbyists, and countless other organizations, businesses, and individuals with vested political and economic interests. In fiscal year 2006, Republican senators and representatives in Washington received \$14 million in campaign contributions from oil companies like Exxon, Valero, and Chevron.⁴⁷ One of the largest recipients of the oil industry's contributions is Republican frontrunner in the presidential election, Rick Santorum, who received almost \$200,000 in 2006.⁴⁸ This entanglement is no simple dalliance. A shift in the conservative viewpoint from climate change denial to prevention would spell trouble for several of the Republican Party's supporters.

An indicator of progress would be a newfound recognition of the relationships between faith, politics, and corporate influence. Citizens with a particular faith may have an inherent relationship with a certain political party. However, no individual has a similarly inherent

relationship with oil exporters or retail monopolies. Political parties in the United States create artificial relationships between citizen voters and capitalist corporations as a means of bridging a gap between needed monetary support and the equally needed support of voters. As a result, the GOP, large American corporations, and evangelicals are seemingly forever embroiled. However, Democrats and lobbyists are equally guilty in this wanton relationship; the two-sided battle for party dominance has led to highly unfavorable consequences.

The most significant argument Simmons has in regard to the scaremongering and politicization of environmentalism is the impact evangelical environmentalism could have in the future. Simmons argues that instead of continuing the stereotypes of liberals and conservatives, evangelicals have a great new opportunity:

Rather than continue to perpetuate unhelpful stereotypes of liberal environmentalists, and simultaneously contribute to the stereotype that evangelicals are crazy “Jesus freaks” who are entirely detached from productive society, evangelicals are currently faced with the remarkable opportunity to neither retreat from the public square in isolationist self-protective theology (as did so many fundamentalists throughout the middle of the twentieth century), nor to combat fire with fire as have so many politicized leaders of the Religious Right, but to stand as models of clear thinking and invitational humility.⁴⁹

If evangelicals were to embrace the environmental movement with the same fervor that they embrace their pro-life stance on abortion, national and global perceptions of oil dependence and pollution could rapidly progress and significant environmental policies could arise.

Evangelical environmentalists argue that a genuine evangelical—one who truly believes the Bible is God’s word—should consider himself or herself an environmentalist. The common view that environmentalists are worshippers of Creation, but not the Creator, is not a legitimate constraint to stop evangelicals from working with others in order to achieve increased sustainability. Given the power of evangelicals in American politics in recent decades, and the increasing impact of human involvement with the natural world, evangelical environmentalism’s place in Christian thought is more significant than ever before. A changing evangelical perspective promises good news for Americans, the Dutch, and the rest of the globe. Everyone interested in the future of the planet should anticipate the imminent involvement of the new evangelicals in creating a sustainable Earth.

Acknowledgments

I must thank both Macalester College and the Maastricht University Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences for making the seminar, essay, and symposium possible. I cannot underestimate the support and assistance I received from Ezequiel Jimenez and the seven other Macalester students at Maastricht University in Fall 2011. Without their feedback, as well as the editing assistance of University of Pennsylvania student Stacy Burkhalter, this research project would have suffered from a lack of various perspectives. Assistance in the drafting process can be warmly credited to Professor Joop de Jong at Maastricht University. His colleague, Professor Wiebe Nauta, served not only as my advisor during the semester, but also challenged the development of my work and never hesitated to critique any aspect of previous drafts. I would also like to extend my appreciation to Macalester Professor Ahmed Samatar, who made “Perspectives on

Globalization” possible. I would not be where I am today without his assistance both in and outside of the classroom. Lastly, I am indebted to the Reverend Richard Cizik for his interview. His convictions and progressive conservatism served as the ultimate inspiration and resource for the essay.

Notes

1. For an introduction to the core/semi-periphery/periphery relationship and Wallerstein’s world-system theory, see Immanuel Wallerstein, *Historical Capitalism and Capitalist Civilization* (1966), Chapter 2. See also Immanuel Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (2004).
2. Deregulation and social conservatism are not exclusive to the Republican Party nor are they the Party’s sole agenda. Equally, the Grand Old Party consists of a relatively diverse subsection of the American population, not only evangelical Christians. Though the two American political parties are broadly based, overgeneralizations about the two should not be accepted uncritically. However, this essay will use generalizations of both political parties, as well as Christianity and various Christian denominations, for the sake of practicality and occasionally to parallel the generalizations often reproduced by the media and the public. They should not be seen as attempts to stereotype or belittle any organizations or individuals.
3. In this context, Europe is used to identify the member states of the European Union. This paper will use the terms “Europe” and “European Union” synonymously unless otherwise identified.
4. For an official summary (in Dutch) of the CDA’s positions on environmental policies, visit its *Stad, Land & Milieu* page: cda.nl/Waar_staan_we_voor/Thema_s/Stad_land___milieu.aspx.
5. The difference between Christianity and Christian culture is easily visible when contrasting the United States and secularizing European countries. The United States is dominated by the influence of Christians and Christianity, whereas secularized or secularizing European powers are not necessarily under direct Christian influence, but with a culture that has been shaped by past Christian presence.
6. It is important to note that Cizik was once the Vice President of the National Association of Evangelicals, but was forced to resign his position in 2008 after making unconventional yet evangelically correct statements regarding same-sex civil unions and environmental stewardship.
7. Eschatology is the branch of theology pertaining to the Last Judgment and the Second Coming of Christ. Eschatological views allow evangelicals to both recognize climate change and yet not sympathize with the concerns of environmentalists.
8. Robert Falkner, “American Hegemony and the Global Environment,” *International Studies Review* (2005): 586.
9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.
11. Ibid.
12. Falkner 2005, pp. 585–599.
13. J. Aaron Simmons, “Evangelical Environmentalism: Oxymoron or Opportunity?,” *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture, and Ecology* 13, no. 1 (2009): 32.
14. Inge Lengton and Edwin van der Schoot, “Ruim Baan Voor Windmolens,” *De Telegraaf* (2011).
15. Monique Riphagen, Rinie van Est, Jeroen van der Sluijs, and Arjan Wardekker, “De Verwetenschappelijking van de Klimaatpolitiek,” *Rathenau Instituut* (2011): 29.
16. Katherine Bagley, “GOP Not Listening to Its Own Scientists on Climate Change,” *InsideClimate News* (2012).
17. Arjen Dijkgraaf, “Klimaatverandering, Geloof Het Nou Maar,” *C2W* (2010).
18. In this case, corporate-political interaction is limited compared to the United States. The multi-party system encourages a system of political cooperation, as opposed to the American two-party system which encourages a system of cooperation with corporations with vested political interests. The relationship between corporations and the American political system is elaborated in Section IV.
19. Ron Sellers, “Nationwide Study Shows Concerns of Evangelical Christians over Global Warming,” *NPR* (2006).
20. When discussing environmental justice and protection, the role of capitalism is highly contested. Eco-capitalism supports a *blue-green* ideology, in which environmental goals are accomplished through the free market. The opposing view, eco-socialism (or eco-Marxism) supports a *red-green* ideology, in which anti-capitalist views conjoin with green politics. For an exhaustive discourse of the debate, see Saral Sarkar, “Eco-Socialism or Eco-Capitalism?” (1999). For a more critical discussion of eco-capitalism and the transgression to eco-socialism, see Joel Kovel, “The Enemy of Nature: The End of Capitalism or the End of the World?” (2007).
21. Richard Cizik, “The Values Debate We’re Not Having,” *The Washington Post* (2011).
22. Ibid.
23. Simmons 2009, p. 58.
24. Intiyaz Delawala, “Jon Huntsman Comes Out Swinging against GOP Rivals,” *ABC News* (2011).

25. Ibid.
26. Alexandra Petri, “Jon Huntsman’s Climate Flop?,” *The Washington Post* (2011).
27. Ron Elsdon, “Eschatology and Hope,” *The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000, pp. 161–166.
28. Cizik interview.
29. King James Edition of the Bible, Genesis 1: 27–29.
30. Calvin DeWitt, “Creations’ Environmental Challenge to Evangelical Christianity,” *The Care of Creation: Focusing Concern and Action*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000, pp. 70–71.
31. Ibid., fig. 1.
32. Ibid., para. 4.
33. Ibid.
34. Ibid., para. 5.
35. Ibid., para. 6.
36. Ibid., fig. 1.
37. Ibid., para. 7.
38. Ibid.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid., fig. 1, para. 8.
41. Ibid., para. 8.
42. Ibid., para. 7.
43. Cizik interview.
44. Ibid.
45. Michael McAuliff and Lucia Graves, “War On the EPA: Republican Bills Would Erase Decades Of Protection,” *The Huffington Post* (2011).
46. Bill Moyers and Tom Casciato, “Is God Green?,” *Public Broadcasting Service* (2006).

47. Jim Jubak, “Big Oil’s 10 Favorite Members of Congress,” *MSN* (2006).

48. *Ibid.*

49. Simmons 2009, p. 61.

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