



BEHIND THE WALL

American Religion and Global Climate Change

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The United States (US) remains the most religious developed nation in the world. Roughly three quarters of all Americans attend worship services fairly regularly; equal amounts believe in God. The country's largest Protestant denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, has as many members as the top twenty large national environmental groups combined.¹ Whether or not Jesus (or Moses, Mohammed, Buddha or Joseph Smith) would drive an SUV matters immensely in this most modern of nations that still announces 'In God We Trust.' How Americans with a religious faith have understood and acted upon the nation's largest environmental challenge - that of dangerous, anthropogenic global climate change - is the focus of this report.

It is no surprise then that most people are unaware that in recent times much climate change-related activity has been going on in the diverse, and often noisy, neighborhood of American religious belief and political activism.

It is important to note that most American religious activity and denominational actions take place, somewhat like Jewish life in Czarist times, beyond the pale, walled off from public policy or public news reporting. It is no surprise then that most people are unaware that in recent times much climate change-related activity has been going on in the diverse, and often noisy, neighborhood of

American religious belief and political activism. The nation's churches, synagogues and temples - and the religious bodies that represent them, are increasingly engaged in policy issues. Because the emergence of a climate 'movement' among religious Americans is a relatively new phenomenon, there is only sparse literature on the subject. While books on the science of climate change or its effect upon nature or international negotiations abound, there are only a few good background sources on general environmentalism and religion, such as Roger S. Gottlieb's *A Greener Faith*

As attention to global warming among self-identified religious people has been growing, religious organizations have forged links with secular environmental groups. In turn, environmental groups have relinquished their long-held antipathy toward religion as a major cause of environmental destruction.⁵

or Gary T. Gardner's *Inspiring Progress*.² This author has a section in his *Hope for a Heated Planet* specifically on religion and climate change.³ In addition there are a couple of anecdotal essay collections by practitioners.⁴ This chapter traces the arc of the emerging linkage of religion to political action on the environment, and the impact of this growing movement on American politics. It surveys the development of religious environmentalism within a variety of different mainstream Christian and Jewish denominations, its theological and social underpinnings, and the rise of both grassroots and organizational forms of religious concern about global climate change. Finally it assesses some of the impact on public policy and what are likely to be major efforts and policy concerns. As attention to global warming among self-identified religious people has been growing, religious organizations have forged links with secular environmental groups. In turn, environmental groups have relinquished their long-held antipathy toward religion as a major cause of environmental destruction.⁵ Instead they are reaching out to their faith-based members and to religious constituencies with the potential for faith-based environmental organizing.

RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENTALISM IN THE UNITED STATES

American religion is increasingly diverse, as the US undergoes its latest and largest influx of immigrants.⁶ However for the purpose of discussing religious environmentalism, most commentators have looked at the faiths that have historically shaped American life: Protestant Christianity, Roman Catholicism and Judaism. These have also been the most active in advocating for the environment. Other faiths, especially Buddhism and Islam, have environmental texts or traditions. And indigenous religions have some influence on environmental practice in the developing world. But given the numbers of practitioners, this chapter focuses on the three most active faiths in the US.

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Outside the US, religion mostly plays a far smaller role in public life in the developed world. This is especially true in Europe, which has paid far more attention to climate change. In contrast, religion may play a much larger role in autocratic, rapidly developing states, in Islamic states concerned with resisting Western cultural penetration, and in other developing countries.⁷

Within the US, Protestant Christianity represents the majority of religious Americans. It is, of course, divided further into well-established mainline denominations such as United Methodists, Baptists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Episcopalians, the United Church of Christ and so on, most of whom tend to be moderate to liberal in theology and politics. Protestant Evangelicals tend to be more conservative in their theology and politics. Finally, fundamentalist Christians, who are

also evangelical, believe in the literal interpretation of Scripture. Fundamentalists are generally conservative or ultra-conservative in theology and politics.⁸

Much of the recent emergence of religious participation in environmentalism has been initiated by mainline Protestants. This trend has its roots in the early twentieth century with the Social Gospel movement, which stressed good works, social justice and civic engagement. But perhaps more important was the general ascendance of Protestant ‘modernists’ who battled with fundamentalists over evolutionary theory, paving the way for wide acceptance of scientific theories that are not Biblically-based. After World War II, with the defeat of the racially and religiously-bigoted Nazis, mainline Protestants also became fairly strong supporters of ecumenism, internationalism, the United Nations, Christian and Jewish cooperation, and early civil rights efforts.⁹

EARLY MAINLINE PROTESTANT ENVIRONMENTALISM

It is against this background that mainline Protestant theologians and church leaders responded to the emerging environmental crisis as early as the 1960s and early 1970s, often spurred on by developments in broader society and the emerging environmental movement. One pioneer was Joseph Sittler, a Lutheran theology professor whose early environmental essays ‘A Theology of Earth’ (1954) and ‘Ecological Commitment as Theological Responsibility’ (1970) were quite influential. Also important was the Faith-Man-Nature Group, initiated and formed in association with the National Council of Churches in the mid-sixties, which created a liaison between its religious thinkers and scientists. By 1974, the group had made so much progress in spreading environmentalism in much of mainline Protestantism that it disbanded. In 1970, for instance, the American Lutheran Church at its General Convention adopted a lengthy statement on ‘The Environmental Crisis.’ It called for Christian stewardship, detailed environmental problems, and offered solutions. Similarly in 1971, the 183rd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church urged ‘environmental renewal.’ By the

mid-seventies the National Council of Churches (NCC) already had an agenda devoted to energy policy and the environment, and the Southern Baptist Convention's Christian Life Commission published 'The Energy Crisis and the Churches' in 1977.¹⁰

With the advent of the Reagan Administration, mainline American religious bodies put much of their concern into opposing the renewed threat of nuclear war, proxy wars in Central America, and escalating defense budgets. As the threat of nuclear war faded with the end of the Cold War,

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religious bodies turned their attention in the 1990s to new global threats, including toxic chemicals and, especially, global climate change. The severe heat waves, drought and fires of 1988 had given rise to major media attention to global warming. The threatened Earth itself adorned the 1989 cover of *Time* Magazine, as 'The Planet of the Year.' Senators Tim Wirth and Al Gore held major hearings on climate, in which NASA's Jim Hansen announced that climate change was real, was caused by human activity, especially the burning of fossil fuels, and was 99 per cent certain.¹¹ Although the dangers of global warming had been known for some time, such events and publicity led, in part, to the formation of the Intergovernmental Panel on Global Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988, to its first full report in 1990 that warned of dangerous global climate change, and to the 1992 Rio 'Earth Summit' Conference that produced the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. A new environmental crisis had been clearly identified and religious bodies responded.¹²

By 1991 the World Council of Churches issued a major pronouncement warning of global climate change. In the US, scientists who had been mobilized to oppose Star Wars by Carl Sagan, the

Union of Concerned Scientists, and others joined forces with leading religious figures to hold a science and religion summit. It became the genesis of long-term cooperation between scientists, environmentalists and the religious community. Sagan, Joan Campbell Brown, then the head of the National Council of Churches, David Saperstein of the Union of Reformed Hebrew Congregations, and others teamed with Paul Gorman, then working at the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, to form the National Religious Partnership for the Environment (NRPE). Gorman, who had been a brilliant young speech writer and press secretary for Eugene McCarthy's 1968 Presidential Campaign and had staff experience in the US Senate, became the founder and long-time Executive Director of NRPE. Gorman had developed close relations with Senator Al Gore, who also helped to create NRPE.¹³ Gore is a Baptist whose faith had been deepened when his son was nearly killed in an auto accident. His first book, *Earth in the Balance*, was influential and had a major chapter on the

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connections Gore drew between religious faith and environmentalism.¹⁴ Permission was granted, in effect, for policy makers and environmentalists to link the two previously walled-off concerns. Gorman and the NRPE helped stimulate, organize, raise funds, and create projects for the main partners in the group: the NCC, the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN), the U.S. Catholic Conference of Bishops, and the Coalition of Environmental Jewish Organizations. NRPE also joined the Green Group, the major informal environmental coalition of some 35 of the country's most influential environmental advocacy groups.¹⁵

THE RISE OF EVANGELICAL PROTESTANT ENVIRONMENTALISM

Evangelical Protestants, who now outnumber mainline ones, also have some tradition of care for creation or environmentalism, but the emergence of green evangelicals roughly coincided with the early 1990s global concerns of climate change and global warming. By the late 1980s, evangelicals had held a North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology and the conservative magazine *Christianity Today* regularly began to discuss diverging evangelical views over the environment. At this time ‘centers of practice’ on the environment began to emerge, such as Calvin DeWitt’s AuSable Institute, which continues to model environmental living, to train leaders, and to carry out education. By 1992 Robert A. Seiple, the President of World Vision, a major evangelical relief organization, convened a Washington Forum to discuss the environment and its impact on the poor. A number of leading evangelical groups attended and, shortly after, Dr.

By the late 1980s, evangelicals had held a North American Conference on Christianity and Ecology and the conservative magazine *Christianity Today* regularly began to discuss diverging evangelical views over the environment.

Ronald Sider, President of Evangelicals for Social Action, joined Seiple in calling for the creation of the Evangelical Environmental Network. The major African American denominations, which tend to be evangelical, although oriented toward social justice, also decided in 1992 to establish a ‘Black Church Environmental Justice Network.’ Included were the National Baptist Convention, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) church, the AME Zion Church, and others. Black evangelicals then held an environmental justice summit in December 1992.¹⁶ It called for care for God’s creation and for linking pollution, poverty, and racism. Mainline churches also helped to stimulate an environmental justice movement. The liberal United Church of Christ issued a seminal report on environmental racism in 1987 called *Toxic Wastes and Race in the United States*.¹⁷ Its Rev. Ben

Chavis, who had been a militant civil rights activist, became a leading spokesperson. The UCC report also stimulated further research and attention to environmental racism.¹⁸ This development, which had a strong, vocal grassroots component, especially in poor Southern areas that suffered disproportionately from pollution and toxic wastes, galvanized the movement and gained some serious media attention. Several environmental histories of the period saw it as the most promising new wave for the movement.¹⁹ But given its decentralized and militant tone, the reluctance of some secular organizations to change or reach out, and constant struggles over funding and leadership, the environmental justice movement peaked in the early 1990s.

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A final radical strain in religious environmentalism developed during the 1980s, with its roots in the feminist theology and communal movements of the 1970s. Usually called eco-feminism or deep ecology, the trend began with theologians like Rosemary Radford Reuther and others who rejected patriarchal versions of Christianity.²⁰ Their view critiqued an omnipotent male sky god, male clergy, hierarchy, emotional distance, reductionist science, and economic models for both capitalism and communism. Such beliefs and models promote not only dominion, but domination and oppression of women, other creatures, and the Earth. Given feminist understandings of the power of collective leadership, non-hierarchical organizations and emphasis on new ways of thinking and being, the eco-feminist movement is not identified with organizations, denominations, coalitions or political activities. Instead it is manifest in theological and academic circles, and in alternative community efforts. This approach has proved both strength and weakness. Eco-feminism has been

an important part of the broad trend to identify environmental solutions as lying in the realm of personal and spiritual change outside the current political and economic system. But, given this stance, eco-feminism continues to operate at the margins of political discourse. Nevertheless, with the continuing environmental crisis and worsening global climate change, various key religious and secular environmental writers have begun to embrace new forms of environmental economics and social values that offer increasingly persuasive critiques of capitalism. These analyses tend to stress reduced consumption and diminished consumerism, as well as decentralized, small scale, and local economic and environmental solutions.²¹

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC RESPONSE

Ecological themes have also been a strain in the Roman Catholic tradition from St. Francis forward (and to a lesser extent with St. Augustine). But, as with other faiths, concerns with peace, people, jobs, and justice often took precedence over environmental concerns. American Catholics had been energized and engaged in renewal and action against US support for counter-revolutionaries in Central America and the slaying of four nuns and Archbishop Oscar Romero in El Salvador. Across the Eastern and Midwestern “rustbelt,” where many European Roman Catholics had immigrated to manufacturing jobs, the Church also was active around issues of jobs and unemployment at a time when steel and other heavy industry began a steep decline. Decaying sites in states like Pennsylvania, Ohio and Michigan led to a concern for the interrelated nature of jobs, justice, and industrial pollution. In fact it was Bishop James Malone, Chair of the Domestic Policy Committee of the US Catholic Conference and Bishop of Youngstown, Ohio, who first said to NRPE’s Paul Gorman: ‘Paul, why don’t environmentalists ever show pictures of people?’²²

Partly in response to the rise of secular environmentalism, the first Earth Day in 1970, and the UN Stockholm Conference on the Environment, John Paul II, upon becoming Pope in 1978, moved the Roman Catholic Church decidedly toward environmental concerns. In 1979 he named St.

Francis the patron saint of those who would protect the environment. He also issued the encyclical *Redemptor hominis* which challenged unquestioned faith in science and technology that had led to the danger of destruction by nuclear weapons and to the mistreatment of nature. By World Peace Day in 1990, Pope John Paul II said ‘world peace is threatened not only by the arms race, regional conflicts and continued injustices among peoples and nations, but also by a lack of *due respect* for nature by the plundering of natural resources and by a progressive decline in the quality of life.’²³ John Paul’s successor, the more conservative Benedict XVI, surprised some by continuing the Vatican’s emphasis on care for creation and the linking of environmentalism with concerns for human well-being and social justice.²⁴ Recently, Pope Francis, named after St. Francis of Assisi, has continued such strong papal environmentalism.

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With the election of Bill Clinton and Al Gore in 1992, religious environmentalists, through Gorman and the NRPE, were welcomed in the White House for the first time. During the 1990s, NRPE gave rise to numerous conferences, statements, advocacy efforts and the spread of concern about climate change in a significant proportion of the nation’s religious groups. NRPE arranged spiritual retreats for the CEOs of the secular Green Group and for Gore and other White House environmental staff. By the time of the Kyoto Conference in 1997, religious representatives were active participants and met with Gore and other officials as a counterweight to industry lobbyists. A further boost to religious environmentalism was given in 1997, when Carl Pope, the Executive Director of the Sierra Club, one of the best-known and largest US groups, publically apologized for his and other mainstream environmentalists neglect of and even opposition to religion. Pope was addressing a religious environmental summit called by Bartholomew I, the head of the Eastern

Orthodox Church. He referred to environmentalists' wide embrace of an influential 1967 essay by UCLA historian Lynn White, Jr. White had put much of the blame for the rapaciousness of modern society and its despoiling of the environment squarely on the Judeo-Christian tradition. Pope noted, however, that Lynn had also pointed out strong minority strains of environmentalism and stewardship in the major faiths, including such trailblazers as St. Francis of Assisi. But instead, environmentalists over the years had chosen mistakenly to stick with stereotypes. Following the Sierra Club leader's apology for neglecting religious environmentalism, Paul Gorman put it more wittily, 'Pope Repents!'²⁵

JEWISH ENVIRONMENTAL ROOTS

Judaism has often been linked somewhat casually to Christianity as part of a 'Judeo-Christian' tradition, and has similarly been blamed for the environmental sins of industrialism and modern chronic consumerism. Jews have also been, especially in the US, overwhelmingly urban and focused in the period after World War II on the survival and security of Israel, non-discrimination,

The medieval collections of Midrash and treatises by Maimonides include his *Treatise on Asthma* that links the environment and health with proposed regulations for prevention.²⁶ By modern times, Jewish thought and literature was filled with love of the land, the beauty of the earth, and especially in the Zionist movement, the need to reconnect with nature and the land as restorative.

civil liberties, education, and broad charitable and humanistic causes. The issue for Jewish theologians, academics, and environmental advocates has been how to make the environment, and global warming in particular, an overriding Jewish concern. For theological underpinning, Jewish

environmentalists, like Christians, had to look afresh at sacred texts and at minority streams of care for creation. Rabbi Daniel Swartz has summarized this nicely for the Coalition for the Environment and Jewish Life (COEJL) in a review of Jewish environmental texts. In addition to well-known nature passages in the Psalms and the Song of Solomon, these texts have included a focus on stewardship and sustainability found in the celebration of seasons, the sabbatical year and Jubilee, and the sharing of rich produce from the land with the poor that are found in Leviticus. Similarly the principle from Deuteronomy of *baltashchit* (do not destroy), originally aimed at restricting scorched earth policies in warfare, is extended to avoiding any needless harm to the environment. The medieval collections of Midrash and treatises by Maimonides include his *Treatise on Asthma* that links the environment and health with proposed regulations for prevention.²⁶ By modern times, Jewish thought and literature was filled with love of the land, the beauty of the earth, and especially in the Zionist movement, the need to reconnect with nature and the land as restorative.

JEWISH ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM

As with other faiths, the early impetus for modern Jewish environmentalism grew out of late sixties anti-war and counter-cultural concerns, loosely linked with emerging environmentalism and critiques of consumer capitalism. The Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), a liberal think

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tank and advocacy haven for intellectuals and policy makers who had split with the Kennedy Administration's Cold War policies, is a telling example. Early Fellows at IPS included Murray Bookchin, whose anarchistic views were influential in the New Left and in early environmentalism. While Bookchin remained secular, IPS Fellow Arthur Waskow turned increasingly to his roots in

Judaism, eventually becoming a rabbi. Waskow was first interested in national security, nuclear disarmament, and preventing future Vietnams. This led quickly to published peace seders, a tree-planting project in Vietnam with Bella Abzug and Jewish Renewal leader Shlomo Carlebach, and to the founding of a Shalom Center, which was concerned with the destruction of the Earth through nuclear war. Linking concerns for the earth and its people, Waskow published in the 1980s a *TuB'Shvat* seder in his journal *Menorah*. Soon, ecologically-minded Jews and Jewish groups were forming networks nationwide.²⁷ More mainstream Jewish leaders and organizations were also becoming concerned. Rabbi Ismar Schorsch, history professor and Chancellor of the influential conservative Jewish Theological Seminary, gained national prominence through an appearance on a Bill Moyers broadcast on religion and the environment. Then, working with Al Gore and environmental Christian leaders, Schorsch helped create the NRPE and COEJL, one of NRPE's four main partners. COEJL brought a number of Jewish organizations to the table, including the Reform Action Center of the Union of Hebrew Congregations headed by Rabbi David Saperstein, who provided COEJL with a respected and savvy advocate in the nation's capital.²⁸

By the time of the Kyoto negotiations, religious environmentalists were well represented by NRPE and included a variety of denominations. But Kyoto proved to be the pinnacle of religious environmental policy for over a decade. Conservative opposition to the Protocol and to the science of climate change was coalescing at home; it triumphed in 2000 with the contested election over Al Gore of President George W. Bush, a self-professed conservative and born-again Christian. But, as I have argued elsewhere, the failure to ratify Kyoto, the defeat of Gore, and the rise of concerted executive branch opposition to tackling global warming proved a stimulus to the entire environmental movement, including faith-based efforts.²⁹

THE NEW RELIGIOUS CLIMATE MOVEMENT AND NATIONWIDE ACTIVISM

A number of nationwide, if not totally national, religious campaigns aimed at global climate change emerged outside the spotlight of the media during the Bush years. The Rev. Canon Sally Bingham of Grace Episcopal Church in San Francisco had started Interfaith Power and Light (IPL) as a local effort to engage her congregation and local Episcopalians in efforts to make climate change a central religious concern. IPL soon became California IPL and since has grown into a nationwide network of over 10000 congregations of varying denominations and faiths in 30 states. In 2007, IPL distributed DVDs and organized over 4000 viewings and discussions of Al Gore's Oscar-winning

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documentary, *An Inconvenient Truth*. IPL provides materials for congregations, discounts on energy-saving products for churches and synagogues, and maintains an e-activist policy network. They hold annual conferences for state leaders and activists and are a part of the US Climate Action Network (CAN), a long-standing grassroots-oriented coalition based in Washington, D.C.³⁰

With the election of an environment-leaning Democratic Congress in 2006 and the election in 2008 of President Barack Obama, an environmentalist progressive Christian, hopes soared in the religious climate change movement. Importantly, Obama set up a White House Council on Faith and Communities which has met regularly with religious environmentalists. The key groups and leaders even receive regular briefings on key climate policy developments from the President's Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ). In addition to IPL, key players include NRPE and

its partners. The National Council of Churches, as we have seen, was an early leader in religious environmentalism. By 1998, after Kyoto, the NCC, under its then President Rev. Bob Edgar, a former six-term member of Congress, launched a grassroots effort that included eighteen climate campaigns through state Councils of Churches. This effort identified and trained local leaders, held conferences and engaged in advocacy that gained some surprising victories. For example in 2004,

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MAINLINE PROTESTANT ACTIVISM

Mainline Protestant denominations have been active in the new climate movement, too. In the 1980s the Methodist Bishops had issued *In Defense of Creation*, a strong call for nuclear disarmament and opposition to programs like the MX missile and Star Wars, which were also seen as threatening the environment or God's creation. Since the 1990s Methodists have been well represented in the climate debate, with a presence at Kyoto and other negotiations, on Capitol Hill, and through a renewed, revised *In Defense of Creation* project begun by the Bishops in 2008. The new Bishops' approach, which offers guidance to some five million United Methodists, explicitly names global climate change and world poverty as important responsibilities for concern and action among Christians.³² Other mainline Protestant denominations also have been active in engaging their members and congregations in global climate change study, prayer, and action. The United

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Church of Christ, the Presbyterian Church USA, the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Episcopalians, and other smaller denominations, including the perennially active Unitarians and Quakers, have all included global warming among their major concerns. The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), the Washington Quaker lobby, has initiated a faith-based coalition focused for the first time exclusively on climate.³³ But the splintered and decentralized nature of mainline Protestantism — and its decline in numbers, funding, and influence — have made it difficult to have

its widespread efforts noticed. Since mainline Protestants are expected to be liberal, they are not considered newsworthy. That role has fallen to evangelical Christians who entered the rolodex of American reporters thanks to the Moral Majority and other politically active right-wing Christian groups. Given their numbers and reputation for conservatism, it was major news when evangelicals first spoke out about global warming.³⁴

EVANGELICAL CLIMATE ACTIVISM

Religion, especially evangelical religion linked to politics, became news with the narrow defeat in 2000 and 2004 of two liberal Christians, Al Gore and John Kerry, and with the ascent of the born-again George W. Bush. That is why the media was prepared to run with the story when Rev. Richard Cizik, the Vice President of the National Evangelical Association (NEA) and its Washington lobbyist, ran

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afoul of the NEA leadership when he became a vocal and visible proponent of preventing human-induced global climate change. As Cizik tells it, he was converted to the science of global warming around 2002 when he attended a climate conference and lobby day of evangelicals that had been promoted by the NRPE. A key speaker was Sir John Houghton, the British scientist who headed

the early IPCC assessments of global warming and had personally briefed Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher on its dangers during the 1980s. By 2002, Houghton, author of the leading textbook on climate science, had also begun to speak as an evangelical Christian. Cizik was moved, read up on the science, and with a flair for lobbying and media, began to have an impact. When he was told by his Board to desist, he resisted and made big news before eventually being fired and creating his own organization a few years later. Thus the media was also quite prepared to give further legs to the ad campaign put on by the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) in collaboration with the NRPE. It showed a gas-guzzling SUV and asked ‘What Would Jesus Drive?’³⁵

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Further attention was called to evangelical action on climate when, in February 2006, 86 national leaders of the evangelical movement initiated an Evangelical Climate Initiative. It was decried by some leaders of the Christian right such as James Dobson of Focus on the Family, but now has been signed by over 300 evangelical leaders. By the time of the BP oil rig disaster in 2010, evangelical leaders had toured the Gulf, activated their constituents and called for a national day of prayer.³⁶

THE SPREAD OF RELIGIOUS CLIMATE ACTIVISM

NCC Eco-Advocacy days now annually draw about a thousand Christian lobbyists to Washington for a major conference and for meetings with members of Congress. Religious environmental lobbies evidently have had some success with conservative Senators like Baptist Lindsey Graham (R-

SC), who has occasionally broken ranks with his party and sponsored or voted for clean energy and climate legislation. By 2008, following years of work by evangelicals concerned about climate and by Baptist liberals like Al Gore and Bill Moyers, the leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention, long an opponent of the science of climate change and of legislation to combat it, changed its position and declared that they had been wrong.³⁷

By 2007 the secular Earth Day Network (EDN), headed by Kathleen Rogers, a liberal Christian, organized Earth Day Sunday, assisting some 5000-7000 churches with sermon samples, religious background papers on climate change, and more. By 2008, over 12000 churches responded to the EDN call for Earth Day Sunday with sermons and activities. In 2009-2010 the EDN focused on Roman Catholic parishes, again sending materials to some 17000 of them.³⁷

Meanwhile the interactions between secular and religious environmentalists that had been going on since the 1990s led, during the Bush Administration, to efforts by major environmental groups to reach out to their own faith-based members and to partner with faith-based organizations. By 2007 the secular Earth Day Network (EDN), headed by Kathleen Rogers, a liberal Christian, organized Earth Day Sunday, assisting some 5000-7000 churches with sermon samples, religious background papers on climate change, and more. By 2008, over 12000 churches responded to the EDN call for Earth Day Sunday with sermons and activities. In 2009-2010 the EDN focused on Roman Catholic parishes, again sending materials to some 17000 of them.³⁸

In addition to papal pronouncements and the work of the U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) who work on the environment and climate change, Roman Catholics also now have a Catholic Climate Coalition of over 100 organizations which features a Catholic Climate Covenant

with an individual St. Francis pledge to take action.³⁹ Religious activism for the environment was further strengthened by the rise of Reverend Jim Wallis's Sojourners movement, based in a new kind of progressive evangelicalism with an emphasis on poverty, social justice, reverence for all life, and, increasingly, environmental issues including global warming. Based in Washington, but with a grassroots activist base over 1,000,000, the award-winning magazine *Sojourners*, and Wallis's popular books and speaking, the SoJo community is able to work effectively inside and out of the nation's capital. Wallis and David Saperstein of the COEJL together met with the influential Green Group of major national environmental organizations and urged closer collaboration with religious activists.⁴⁰

RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENTALISM AND POLICY

Religious environmentalists had reason to feel relatively hopeful about their influence and legislative progress as the House passed a cap and trade bill in 2009. However their support began to wane as energy and climate bills were regularly weakened in hopes of obtaining passage by a super majority of 60 votes in the Senate in the face of threatened Republican filibusters. As the Obama Administration and Democratic leaders on the Hill, especially in the Senate, continued to compromise in hopes of attracting sufficient Republican support, grassroots environmentalists, including religious ones, became increasingly disappointed, even disillusioned. This was no surprise, given the religious climate movement's emphasis on individual, community, and congregational action and some continuing skepticism of legislative and executive action. This distrust of pragmatic politics grows directly from the religious inclination to ask fundamental questions of belief and lifestyle, rather than ones of compromise and political action. But it left mainstream environmentalists without much of a long-awaited grassroots religious army that would, in effect, be seen and heard at the gates of the Capitol. Some groups, such as the OneSky campaign and the NRPE, tried to bridge the gap between passionate conviction and calculated compromise, between grassroots rigid principle and Washington wiliness. Ultimately the most organized and effective

religious organizations followed the lead of secular groups and Senators and lost. Meanwhile grassroots religious environmentalists mostly dropped out of the national scene, to the delight of increasingly conservative, anti-environmental, and aggressive Republicans who swept back into power and influence after the 2010 election.

The severe recession, unemployment, and the seemingly endless health care discussion all soon led to an ebbing of what had been a rising tide of public concern for clean energy and climate change. Religious environmentalists, of course, were not in a position to respond effectively to or counter renewed attacks on the science of climate change. Large secular environmental groups were outspent by their climate foes over 10-1.

The upshot is that Obama's religious task force in the White House was of limited influence at the highest White House levels. Similarly, although President Obama had staff at his Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ) maintain regular liaison with religious environmentalists like NRPE and IPL, there were frictions as the White House mainly sought support for its policies, whereas the activists sought bolder action. And, unlike during the Clinton years, religious environmentalists had little regular access to climate change higher ups.³⁸

The severe recession, unemployment, and the seemingly endless health care discussion all soon led to an ebbing of what had been a rising tide of public concern for clean energy and climate change. Religious environmentalists, of course, were not in a position to respond effectively to or counter renewed attacks on the science of climate change. Large secular environmental groups were outspent by their climate foes over 10-1. Perhaps most importantly, religious environmentalists were further hampered in the long mid-term election season of 2009-2010 by their lack of structural

mechanisms and their principled reluctance to engage in political action and electioneering. Over \$4 billion was spent on the 2010 off-year election, and the national debate and the airwaves were dominated by the election campaign.³⁹ Without a large, centralized religious environmental organization with a political action committee (PAC) or even a 501(c)(4) political advocacy arm, religious environmentalists were hamstrung during critical, biennial American elections.

...the religious climate movement will need in the coming years not only to inspire and arouse grassroots congregations, while offering a strong, prophetic critique of inaction. It will also need, through its organizational and policy branches, to stay the course of political action and Washington politics, no matter how difficult and disillusioning.

The religious climate movement has been undergoing a time of reevaluation, or soul searching, throughout the second term of the Obama Administration and with the approach of the 2016 Presidential election. The Administration had already signaled after the 2010 midterm election that strong climate and energy legislation was not likely, but rather it would seek more subtle, nuanced measures that might gain the support of Republicans. By 2014, the Administration was forced to rely primarily on climate-friendly, but limited executive branch action and Presidential directives. And the Obama energy policies stressed an “all of the above” strategy for energy supplies including increased production of fossil fuels through ocean drilling for oil, the use of Canadian oil produced from tar sands, and, especially, natural gas through hydraulic fracturing or “fracking.” A binding climate treaty, once the goal for Copenhagen, was not likely any time soon either. The movement responded with its own version of “all of the above,” with a varying mix of demonstrations, civil disobedience, and continued inside advocacy and lobbying.

But one of the strengths of the religious climate movement is that it can take the long view on social action and find hope in its Biblical and theological roots. As Rev. Martin Luther King intoned, drawing on the anti-slavery Unitarian minister Theodore Parker, ‘the moral arc of the universe bends long, but it bends toward justice.’⁴⁰ But to bend that arc further, the religious climate movement will need in the coming years not only to inspire and arouse grassroots congregations, while offering a strong, prophetic critique of inaction. It will also need, through its organizational and policy branches, to stay the course of political action and Washington politics, no matter how difficult and disillusioning. This will require many things: more, not less, of a Washington presence; greater ecumenical cooperation so that denominations and groups merge efforts rather than merely cooperate or coordinate; the development of strong, visible national leaders focused on climate; and action branches that finally engage directly in serious political and electoral efforts.

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ABOUT THE RACHEL CARSON COUNCIL

The Rachel Carson Council is the legacy organization envisioned by Rachel Carson and founded in 1965 by her closest friends and colleagues after her death from breast cancer. The Council works to promote the integrity of the environment and to prevent threats to the health, welfare and survival of all living organisms and biological systems.

The Council draws on the values, vision, and ethic of Rachel Carson, especially her integrated concern for scientific truth and credibility, for effective communication with the public, for bold witness and advocacy with policy makers, and for collaboration and cooperation locally, nationally, and globally with individuals and with environmental and environmental health organizations.

Rachel Carson believed that concern for the environment must rest not on scientific credibility alone, but also on a sense of wonder, awe, and imagination, on an emotional attachment, spiritual awareness, and deep feeling for nature and our fellow creatures that should be cultivated in children and the young.

To these ends, the Rachel Carson Council, a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt educational organization produces publications and provides information for youth and schools, as well as adults, on pesticides and other toxins in our food, air, and water; on the adverse effects of reliance on fossil fuels, including air and water pollution and global climate change. The Council has also initiated a national network of Rachel Carson Campuses that links and engages faculty, students, and administrators across disciplines, including the humanities, arts, and sciences, in effective civic engagement. The Council also convenes conferences and workshops for the public and the scientific community and presents testimony, provides information, and meets regularly with policy makers in the nation's capital.



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