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“It’s Not About the Polar Bears”: Evangelical Christian Arguments for Environmentalism

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Honors Thesis
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Table of Contents

<i>Abstract</i>	3
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	4
<i>Introduction</i>	5
<i>Part I: Creation Care</i>	8
1. God Granted People Stewardship Over the Earth	10
2. The Earth Belongs to God	13
3. God Values All of his Creations	15
4. One Can Discover God Through Nature	17
5. Caring for the Less Fortunate by Caring for the Environment.....	18
6. Eschatological Reasoning.....	21
<i>Part II: Further Crafting an Evangelical Argument</i>	30
7. Affirming Conservative Identities	32
8. References to Conservatives.....	39
9. Pro-Life Arguments	43
11. Capitalist Arguments.....	51
12. Materialism and One’s Relationship with God	56
13. A Change in Mindset	67
14. Accepting the Reality of Climate Change for Oneself.....	70
15. Opportunities for Activism	72
16. Personal Stories	81
17. Conversion Experiences.....	85
<i>Conclusion</i>	92
<i>Works Cited</i>	96

Abstract

In recent history, white conservative evangelical Christians have formed an influential voting bloc of the Republican party in United States politics. Historically, conservatives have often denied the reality of human-induced climate change and have opposed climate change action and many environmental regulations. However, a number of conservative evangelical Christians have split from their traditionally conservative political views and have accepted the reality of climate change, becoming strong advocates for climate change action. This paper examines the arguments often presented by such advocates. I argue that evangelical environmental advocates craft specific arguments to convince fellow evangelicals to care for the environment and/or support climate change action by framing climate change as a logical extension of evangelicals' faith and values. The first part of the paper examines the biblical interpretations that evangelicals use to develop their idea of creation care, and the second part of the paper examines further arguments and techniques used by advocates to help strengthen their arguments to their evangelical audience. This paper explores the diversity and nuances of evangelical leaders' arguments for environmentalism while finding common themes rooted in evangelicals' faith.

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Introduction

Sitting out on a butte in Idaho, Tri Robinson, founding pastor of the Vineyard Boise Church, faced a monumental decision. As he stared out at the Mojave Desert in the same place where he first became an evangelical Christian, Robinson considered a sermon he planned on giving and an accompanying ministry he wanted to create at his church. Though it was an issue he believed in and one he felt compelled by God to act on, he was afraid. Never before had he considered something “that could be so potentially polarizing to the congregation or detrimental” to his position.¹ Robinson truly worried that this decision could alienate him from his church and ruin his reputation. The issue that was causing him so much conflict? Climate change.

An evangelical Christian supporting climate change action may seem surprising and even contradictory to many familiar with evangelicals and politics in the United States. This is because many white evangelicals identify as conservative. In the last 45 years, white evangelical Christians have become very active in politics and have formed an influential voting bloc for the Republican party. In the 2020 presidential election, white evangelicals made up 19% of all voters.² In addition, 84% of white evangelical voters cast ballots for former President Donald Trump, up from 77% in 2016.³ Many conservatives do not accept the reality of human-caused climate change and oppose climate change action, such as former President Trump who withdrew the United States from the 2016 Paris Climate Accords and eliminated many environmental protection measures. This lack of acceptance of climate change and opposition to

¹ Tri Robinson and Jason Chatraw, *Saving God's Green Earth* (Boise, ID: Ampelon Publishing, 2006), 11.

² Ruth Igielnik, Scott Keeter, and Hannah Hartig, “Behind Biden's 2020 Victory,” Pew Research Center, June 30, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/06/30/behind-bidens-2020-victory/#voting-patterns-in-the-2020-election>.

³ Gregory A Smith, “More White Americans Adopted than Shed Evangelical Label During Trump Presidency, Especially His Supporters,” Pew Research Center, September 15, 2021, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/09/15/more-white-americans-adopted-than-shed-evangelical-label-during-trump-presidency-especially-his-supporters/>.

climate change action extends to many conservative evangelicals as well. However, there is a growing number of evangelical Christians like Tri Robinson who identify as conservative but deviate from their usual political affiliation on the issue of climate change.

Those evangelicals and organizations of evangelicals who advocate for the care of the environment or climate change action will be referred to as “evangelical environmental advocates” in this paper. By “evangelical Christian,” this paper appeals to the commonly used definition of evangelical offered by British historian David W. Bebbington. Bebbington’s definition contains four main beliefs of evangelicals: conversion, an emphasis on a life-changing conversion experience often described as being “born again;” activism, an emphasis on demonstrating and sharing the gospel; biblicism, an emphasis on the Bible as the ultimate source of authority; and crucicentrism, an emphasis on the salvation of Jesus’ crucifixion as atonement for people’s sins.⁴

This paper argues that evangelical environmental advocates craft specific arguments to convince fellow evangelicals to care for the environment and/or support climate change action by framing climate change as a logical extension of evangelicals’ faith and values. Important throughout this paper will be the specific word choices made by the advocates, such as using “caring about the environment” versus “climate change.” As we will see, advocates sometimes avoid terms such as “environmentalism” or “climate change” because of negative connotations associated with these terms among evangelicals. Instead, advocates will use terms such as “environmental stewardship” or “creation care.” In the first part of the paper, I examine the biblical interpretations that evangelicals use to develop their idea of creation care. “Creation care” refers to the idea that because someone loves and respects God, they must care for his

⁴ David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to The 1980s* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1989), 16.

creations.⁵ Using a variety of biblical texts, advocates present arguments for caring for the environment that are deeply rooted in the Bible as an appeal to evangelicals' emphasis on the Bible. In the second part of the paper, I examine other arguments and techniques used by advocates, such as conservative appeals, material-related arguments, opportunities for activism, and conversion experiences, to help strengthen their argument to their evangelical audience. Using such arguments, evangelical environmental advocates present climate change and caring for the environment as a deeply personal and relevant issue for evangelicals.

This paper will therefore offer an analysis of the arguments presented by evangelical environmental advocates for their evangelical audience. To do this, I focus on several evangelical environmental advocates whose works serve as an effective representation of the arguments often offered regarding caring for the environment and climate change. The advocates considered include Tri Robinson (founding pastor of the Vineyard Boise Church, ID), J. Matthew Sleeth (former doctor turned author and advocate for the environment), Mitchell Hescox (President/CEO of the Evangelical Environmental Network), Paul Douglas (meteorologist and entrepreneur), Katharine Hayhoe (climate scientist and professor of political science at Texas Tech University), Andrew Farley (Pastor of the Grace Church, TX), Bill McKibben (author and professor at Middlebury College), the Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI), and the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN).⁶

⁵ Throughout this paper I will be using he/him/his pronouns in reference to God. This decision reflects the pronouns used in the sources considered in this paper. However, it is important to note that there is debate in the field regarding which pronouns are most appropriate when referencing God.

⁶ In a footnote of her book *Between God and Green: How Evangelicals Are Cultivating a Middle Ground on Climate Change*, Katharine Wilkinson explains there are three common ways scholars identify evangelicals: affiliation (being affiliated with historically evangelical organizations), self-identification (those who call themselves evangelical), and subscription (those who follow a set of defined evangelical beliefs) (see Wilkinson pp. 8-9). With the exception of Bill McKibben, I use the self-identification method to identify evangelicals considered in this paper. Though McKibben never explicitly identifies as evangelical in the works I considered by him, because of his affiliation with other evangelicals considered, McKibben is considered to be an evangelical environmental advocate in this paper.

These individuals and organizations were identified as influential leaders within the evangelical environmental movement.⁷ They also offer a variety of arguments and come from a variety of backgrounds, ranging from pastors to professors to scientists to doctors. In addition, these advocates focus their arguments on church leaders and congregants, rather than legislators or governmental environmental regulators that other evangelical environmental advocates focus their arguments on. This distinction between focusing on the personal versus structural is an important issue among evangelicals, which will be seen throughout this paper and revisited more thoroughly in the conclusion. To conduct this project, I considered various publications from the advocates mentioned and identified major arguments and techniques used, consulting Katharine Wilkinson's book *Between God and Green: How Evangelicals Are Cultivating a Middle Ground on Climate Change* as a supporting resource.

Though the idea of conservative white evangelicals splitting from their usual affiliation with the Republican party and supporting climate change action may seem unlikely to many familiar with United States politics, the advocates considered present a logical connection between caring for the environment and being an evangelical. To do this, evangelical environmental advocates often start with the Bible.

Part I: Creation Care

As Bebbington's definition of evangelical suggests, evangelical Christians emphasize the ultimate authority of the Bible. For example, Tri Robinson explains "to me, being an Evangelical Christian is a Bible believing Christian. Somebody who believes that the Bible's it. And it's the

⁷ The influence of the advocates considered was based on the high number of references to them in initial research of the movement.

way to life. It's the truth. It's absolute truth.”⁸ However, despite this emphasis on the Bible, there is no specific, agreed upon interpretation of the Bible among evangelicals because they are a decentralized group. While there are influential leaders among evangelicals, there is no structural leadership or Pope-like figure. Instead, evangelicalism is a very personal faith and each person is able to interpret the Bible for themselves. Because of evangelicals' strong emphasis on the Bible and differing interpretations of it, evangelical environmental advocates rely heavily on the Bible in their arguments. The advocates will constantly refer to the Bible and offer thorough analyses of the passages in order to thoroughly convince their audience to care for the environment.

In particular, the concept of creation care, which is the main argument presented by many evangelical environmental advocates and serves as the basis on which many of their additional arguments rest, is rooted in the Bible. Essentially, creation care refers to the idea that people have a responsibility to care for God's creations. Implied in this term is therefore the idea that people must care for the environment, since it is a part of God's creation. As will be discussed throughout this paper, terms such as “creation care” are intentionally used because they help frame the environmental movement as a moral, religious issue by using language that evangelical Christians would already be familiar with. This term also does not alienate any audience members who may be wary of the environmental movement or do not yet accept the reality of climate change. While creation care arguments are generally accepted by many evangelicals once they are presented with the argument, further arguments for climate change action are needed to convince many evangelicals. Such additional arguments are considered in the second half of this paper. The following sections will focus on how evangelical environmental advocates develop the idea of creation care using the Bible. In doing so, evangelical environmental

⁸ Bill Moyers, *Is God Green?* PBS, 2006, <http://www.pbs.org/moyers/moyersonamerica/green/index.html>.

advocates attempt to convince their evangelical audience to care about the environment and climate change by demonstrating how it comes from the same place as their evangelical faith—that is, the Bible.

1. God Granted People Stewardship Over the Earth

One of the most obvious and most widely cited passages from the Bible in arguments for environmentalism and the development of creation care is Genesis 1:28, where God grants people stewardship over the earth. In the story in Genesis 1, God creates the universe. After creating humans in his image, God grants humans dominion over the rest of his creations.

Genesis 1:26-28 states:

Then God said, ‘Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.’

So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.

God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth’⁹

Because God grants humans dominion over every living thing on earth, most evangelicals logically believe that people thus have power over the rest of creation. However, what this power looks like varies greatly depending on the interpreter of the text.

To many, dominion means that humans can treat the environment however they see fit,

⁹ Unless referenced within a quote from another author, all biblical quotes in this paper come from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) translation of the Bible. Though the King James Version (KJV) is typically regarded as the standard translation and is popular among most evangelicals, the sources consulted for this paper used a variety of translations including the NRSV, KJV, New King James Version, New American Standard Bible, or New International Version among others.

without regard for its well-being or the impact of their actions. Because of this interpretation, Mitchell Hescox argues that Genesis 1:26-28 is “one of the most widely misunderstood verses in the Bible.”¹⁰ This is because no matter how the word “dominion” is translated, “whether we use *subdue*, *dominate*, *rule*, or any of a host of English words, it conjures mental images of the right to do as we please without regard [italics original].”¹¹ To others, such as the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE), dominion is instead “a sacred responsibility to steward the earth and not a license to abuse the creation of which we are a part.”¹²

Robinson explains that environmental stewardship is the “idea that we should care for, manage, and nurture what we have been given.”¹³ To convince readers that the dominion in Genesis 1:28 is actually a call for stewardship, people use both other biblical citations and real-world analogies. For example, J. Matthew Sleeth notes that in the Garden of Eden story, “God’s first commandment to mankind was to tend and keep the earth” in reference to Genesis 2:15 where “the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.”¹⁴ When combined with the dominion granted in Genesis 1:28, Sleeth builds his interpretation of stewardship.

As a useful analogy to further argue that dominion is not justification for the destruction of the environment, Sleeth proposes that having dominion is similar to a teacher’s responsibility in a kindergarten classroom. Parents entrust the teacher to help teach and support their children, helping them grow. Similarly, according to Sleeth, God entrusted humans to care for and support

¹⁰ Mitchell Hescox and Paul Douglas, *Caring for Creation: The Evangelical's Guide to Climate Change and a Healthy Environment*, (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House Publishers, 2016), 85.

¹¹ Hescox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 85.

¹² “For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility,” National Association of Evangelicals, 2004, <https://www.forthethehealth.net/>.

¹³ Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 19.

¹⁴ J. Matthew Sleeth, *The Gospel According to the Earth: Why the Good Book is a Green Book* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2010), 2.

his creations. Thus, Sleeth logically argues that people must care for the environment.

Sleeth recognizes that some people may object to his analogy because they view children, and humans more generally, as more important than plants and animals. This is a common objection among evangelicals when disagreeing with arguments for climate change, as they often associate those who care for the environment with those who value the environment more than humans. Such associations come along with many others, such as thinking that many environmentalists worship the earth rather than God. The second half of this paper will further discuss how evangelical environmental advocates work to change the connotations that come from being involved in the environmental movement. In this example, Sleeth argues that caring for the environment does not mean that one is placing the environment above humans. Instead, he explains that “being pro-stewardship is not a case of valuing forests more than people; rather, it means valuing human possessions less, and God’s world more.”¹⁵ The idea of deemphasizing human possessions is another important concept to be explored in the second half of this paper.

Sleeth explains that by caring for the environment, people value God’s creation and thus honor God. A second analogy that Sleeth uses to argue for a stewardship-focused interpretation of Genesis 1:28 describes lending someone a car. If a person were to let their friend borrow their car for the day, or give their friend dominion over their car for the day, the person would reasonably expect for the car to come back to them in the same condition in which they loaned it. Similarly, Sleeth explains that God granted people dominion over the earth as a person would grant someone dominion over their car. Dominion is not an invitation to crash the car, or destroy the earth, but to care for the belonging because the person cares for the owner.

In a somewhat similar analogy, Hescoc asks his readers if someone were to break their

¹⁵ J. Matthew Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet: A Christian Call to Action* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2006), 21.

phone when they let them borrow it, would the reader still want to be friends with that person if they did not apologize or promise to not do it again. Hescox alludes to the idea that people can damage their relationship with God when they destroy the environment (which belongs to God) and have no thought of reconciliation or change in behavior. The use of such analogies by Hescox and Sleeth has several consequences. By using subjects like children, a person's car, or a reader's phone, the advocates make stewardship a personal issue for the reader. Just as one cares about how their children are raised or how their possessions are treated, God too cares about how people treat his creation. In addition, the idea of stewardship may seem abstract or difficult for some people to understand. By giving real life, modern-day examples, the advocates help people better understand the concept of stewardship by describing it in a way they are already familiar with.

Sleeth puts the meaning of these analogies succinctly: "God created the earth, and if we do not respect the earth and all of its creatures, we disrespect God."¹⁶ A key feature of these analogies is that the earth belongs to God. The next section will discuss the biblical passages evangelical environmental advocates use to demonstrate how the earth belongs to God.

2. The Earth Belongs to God

As part of creation care, evangelical environmental advocates argue that because God created the world, people must care for his creations in order to respect and honor him. In order to strengthen this argument and emphasize that the earth belongs to God, evangelical advocates use several biblical citations in addition to the Genesis creation stories. For many advocates, Psalm 24:1 is the most obvious place to start: "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it."

¹⁶ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 22.

The Evangelical Environmental Network's (EEN's) founding document, "On the Care of Creation: An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation" starts by quoting Psalm 24:1. In the document, the authors tell readers that "forgetting that 'the earth is the Lord's,' we have often simply used creation and forgotten our responsibility to care for it."¹⁷ As another example, consider the 2004 public policy guide "For the Health of the Nation: An Evangelical Call to Civic Responsibility" for the NAE. The organization combines the use of Psalm 24:1 with Genesis 2:15 to argue for the care of creation:

We are not the owners of creation; rather, 'the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it' (Psalm 24:1). Christians acknowledge creation care as an act of discipleship; we are stewards of the earth, summoned by God to 'work it and take care of it' (Genesis 2:15). Our uses of the earth must be designed to conserve and renew it rather than to deplete or destroy it.¹⁸

Organizations like the EEN and NAE emphasize that the earth is God's by referring to Psalm 24:1 and Genesis 2:15 in order for readers to understand the connection between their impacts on the environment and their relationship with God. According to many evangelical environmental advocates, caring for God's creation is a way of caring for God. The EEN explains that "because we worship and honor the Creator, we seek to cherish and care for the creation."¹⁹

To convey a similar message, the Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI) uses Colossians 1:16. In their defining declaration, "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action," the ECI uses the familiar argument that people must care for the earth because it is God's. However, by using Colossians 1:16, the ECI also brings Jesus to mind. They state that,

Christians must care about climate change because we love God the Creator and Jesus our Lord, through whom and for whom the creation was made. This is God's world, and

¹⁷ "Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation," Evangelical Environmental Network, 1994, <https://creationcare.org/what-we-do/an-evangelical-declaration-on-the-care-of-creation.html>.

¹⁸ National Association of Evangelicals. "For the Health of the Nation."

¹⁹ Evangelical Environmental Network, "Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation."

any damage that we do to God's world is an offense against God Himself.²⁰

In their reference to Jesus, "through whom and for whom the creation was made," the ECI refers to Colossians 1:16, which states "for in him [Christ] all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him." The salvation brought from Jesus' sacrifice will be an important topic discussed in a later section. The ECI's use of Jesus brings up yet another reason for readers to care about the treatment of the environment. Not only does the world belong to God, but the world was created through Jesus and for him. In order for people to show their love for Jesus, they must take care of what is his.

Sleeth offers a different biblical citation from the NAE, EEN, or ECI in his demonstration that the earth belongs to God. Sleeth argues that people can never really own any part of the earth because of humans' short lifespans. How can someone really own any land if they will eventually die and the land will go on living? In support of such an idea, Sleeth cites Leviticus 25:23, where God tells Moses "the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; with me you are but aliens and tenants." In this quote, Moses is told that it is God who owns the land and that he, and all other people, are just guests. Because of this idea, Sleeth attempts to convince the reader that since they are not the true owners of this world, they cannot just do with it as they wish. Thus, Sleeth further establishes that people must care for the earth since it belongs to God.

3. God Values All of his Creations

As seen with Sleeth, the EEN, NAE, and ECI, many evangelical environmental advocates

²⁰ "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action," Evangelical Climate Initiative, 2006, <http://www.christiansandclimate.org/statement/>.

will emphasize that the earth is God's so that people can start to understand that they cannot mistreat the earth without mistreating God. To strengthen this argument, advocates will often describe how much God cares for and loves all of his creations.

Many advocates point out that God deems all creation "very good" in Genesis 1:31. Sleeth even points out that God places aesthetic value on trees in the Garden of Eden story, noting in Genesis 2:9 "out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food." By taking the time to note that trees are pleasant to look at, one notes God's love for his creations. Continuing on in Genesis, many advocates will note that when God forms his covenant with Noah in Genesis 9, he also forms it with all living things. He tells Noah and his sons in Genesis 9:9-10 "I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you." By including all creation within his covenant, God demonstrates his concern for all creation.

While redemption and further eschatological arguments will be further explored in a later section, it is important to note that advocates will often incorporate how God's salvation will apply to all creations in order to demonstrate God's concern for all creation. In their declaration, the EEN notes:

God's purpose in Christ is to heal and bring to wholeness not only persons but the entire created order. 'For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross' (Col. 1:19-20).²¹

Key in Colossians 1:20 is that all things will be reconciled through Christ, not just people. The NAE makes a similar argument by referencing Romans 8:18-23. In Romans 8:19, Paul explains "the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God," and in Romans 8:22, he describes "that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains." By highlighting

²¹ Evangelical Environmental Network, "Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation."

God's love and concern for all of his creations, the authors strengthen their argument that a person must care for God's creations in order to care for God.

4. One Can Discover God Through Nature

To further develop the concept of creation care, many evangelical environmental advocates will use the Bible to demonstrate that a person can discover God through nature. To provide evidence of this argument, evangelical environmental advocates often cite Romans 1:20: "Ever since the creation of the world his [God's] eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things he has made. So they are without excuse." This passage conveys that God and his "eternal power and divine nature" can be understood through nature. Further, a person is even without excuse for not knowing God because he can always be found in nature.

The discovery of God is an essential aspect of evangelical Christians' faith. Recall that one of the four qualities of evangelicals defined by Bebbington included a conversion experience, where a person is "born again" and accepts Jesus as their personal savior. By arguing that nature can assist in these conversion experiences as it allows one to discover God, the evangelical environmental advocates appeal to an essential aspect of evangelicals' faith. As will be discussed in the second half of this paper, evangelical environmental advocates often explain how they came to care for the environment in terms of a conversion experience. Often, these conversion experiences take place in nature, further demonstrating the connection between nature and discovering God.

Sleeth also highlights how one can find God in nature. A former emergency room doctor, Sleeth noticed while treating patients that it appeared that those who worked outside the most, such as farmers or fishermen, were the ones who loved their work the most. He gave an example

of a patient who worked out on the ocean, who observed:

You don't know what it's like to be out there. When you kill your lights and engine, you're along with God Almighty. The seals come alongside, and you can see clouds of plankton lit up by the phosphorus they make. The whole Milky Way pops out at you. When you turn your head, you're looking down the center of our galaxy! I'd do anything not to lose my chance of being out there with God.²²

To Sleeth and his patient, being out in nature is a way to connect with God. Sleeth humorously comments that it is no real surprise then that Jesus' first disciples were fishermen.²³

As an argument for creation care, the idea that one can discover God through nature makes a compelling case for the advocates' evangelical audience to care about how they treat the environment. Because conversion experiences are an essential part of evangelicalism, evangelicals would want to ensure that they do nothing to hinder the conversions of potential future evangelicals. As will be further discussed in the second part of this paper, evangelicals are also devoted to sharing their faith with others. By connecting discovering God with experiencing nature, evangelical environmental advocates subtly imply that the chance for more people to discover God is at risk if the environment is destroyed. By destroying the environment, people also destroy people's access to God. The threat that people could have a more difficult time discovering God because of the destruction and pollution of the environment would be an alarming suggestion for the advocates' evangelical audience. Thus, by describing how one can discover God through nature, evangelical authors advocate for the care of the environment.

5. Caring for the Less Fortunate by Caring for the Environment

Another important component of evangelicalism is activism, which is an aspect of Bebbington's four-part definition. Activism refers to living one's life according to their faith.

²² Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 40.

²³ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 40.

One of the most common ways evangelical Christians do so is by caring for their neighbors and the poor, which is one of the commandments given by Jesus in the Bible. As a part of creation care, evangelical environmental advocates argue that in order for people to care for the poor, people must care about the environment and climate change.

Evangelicals' emphasis on caring for the less fortunate is rooted in the Bible. The Gospel of Matthew is an important biblical book in the formation of such beliefs. Often cited by advocates is Matthew 25:31-46. In this story, Jesus tells his followers that those who will be let into heaven are those who took care of the least among them. He explains that such people fed him when he was hungry, gave him a drink when he was thirsty, welcomed him when he was a stranger, clothed him when he was naked, cared for him when he was sick, and visited him when he was imprisoned.²⁴ When his followers ask when it was that people did this, in Matthew 25:40 Jesus replies "truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." Jesus teaches how people treat others reflects how they treat him, and only those who care for the less fortunate will be let into heaven, revealing one of the lessons why evangelical Christians emphasize caring for those in need.

Another important part of Matthew that is often cited is Matthew 22:34-40. In the story, Jesus gives his two greatest commandments. He tells his followers in Matthew 22:37-39 "'you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" Putting these passages together, Hayhoe and Farley summarize "love God, love others, and remember the poor: this was the unwavering mandate of the early church

²⁴ Matthew 25:35-36.

more than two thousand years ago” that still extends to today.²⁵ Sleeth summarizes these commandments as “the life-giving aspects of religion.”²⁶ Loving God and loving one’s neighbors are thus essential parts of evangelicals’ faith.

Another common biblical text cited is the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37. In Luke 10:27, a lawyer is reminded by Jesus that in order to gain eternal life in heaven, he must “love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself,” echoing the greatest commandments given in Matthew 22:37-39. When he asks who his neighbor is, Jesus tells the story of the good Samaritan. In the story, a Samaritan man stops to help a man who had been attacked by robbers and had been looked over by a priest and a Levite who had passed by without helping the man in need. Unlike the men who ignored the injured man, the Samaritan cleaned and dressed the injured man’s wounds and paid for him to stay in an inn. Jesus thus teaches the lawyer that a good neighbor is someone who helps those in need.

Evangelical environmental advocates often reference and allude to biblical passages like Matthew 25, Matthew 22, and Luke 10 and connect them to caring for the environment and taking action against climate change. To make such a connection, advocates argue that climate change disproportionately affects the most disadvantaged places and people. For example, married couple Katharine Hayhoe and Andrew Farley explain that around 10% of the world’s population live in low-level coastal areas at risk from rising sea levels.²⁷ They continue on to explain that “most of these cities are in developing nations, where few resources are available to hold back the rising tides,” and provide perspective by describing “it’s estimated that, on average,

²⁵ Katharine Hayhoe and Andrew Farley, *A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions* (FaithWords, 2009), 127.

²⁶ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 49.

²⁷ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, 103.

for every one person at risk from coastal flooding in industrialized nations, such as the United States, there are thirty people at risk in developing countries.”²⁸ As another example, Hayhoe and Farley explain how rising temperatures will most greatly threaten “the poor, the disadvantaged, the elderly, and our children.”²⁹

Authors like Hayhoe and Farley thus connect caring for the environment with caring for the poor. They explain “the only sensible response to climate change is to minister to the hurting, loving our global neighbors as ourselves, just as the Good Samaritan did to the man lying in the road.”³⁰ The ECI’s “Call to Action” summarizes the argument succinctly:

Christians must care about climate change because we are called to love our neighbors, to do unto others as we would have them do unto us, and to protect and care for the least of these as though each was Jesus Christ himself.³¹

Alluding to lessons from Matthew and Luke, evangelical environmental advocates thus appeal to the desire of evangelicals to help the less fortunate in order to argue that they must therefore care about the environment and climate change.

6. Eschatological Reasoning

The previous sections of this paper offered the generally accepted and commonly used theology of creation care among evangelical environmental advocates. This section will discuss how eschatological related arguments are deployed by advocates in their arguments for caring for the environment. These arguments are not as widely accepted across evangelicals and include more variation compared to the previous arguments. However, evangelical environmental advocates still call upon these less obvious biblical passages in order to strengthen their

²⁸ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, 103.

²⁹ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, 126.

³⁰ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, 128.

³¹ Evangelical Climate Initiative, “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action.”

argument for creation care.

A crucial element in evangelicalism is concern for the second coming of Jesus. In general, evangelicals believe that Jesus' second coming will mark a period of great change; however, there is no one consensus among evangelicals about what will happen. Wilkinson summarizes that,

While orthodox theology perceives a four-part plotline of history—the Creation, the Fall, redemption, and consummation/restoration—beyond these pillars of the biblical narrative, evangelicals can hold very different eschatological convictions, which shape perspectives on the future and thus the attribution of meaning to the present.³²

For example, premillennialists believe that Jesus will return and bring peace after a period of unrest on earth, while postmillennialists believe that Jesus will return after a period of peace. Some people believe that at the end of time God will destroy everything on earth and take those worthy to heaven, while others believe that God will redeem everything on earth to make his kingdom on earth. Regardless of what they believe might happen, the end of time is important to evangelicals. As such, many evangelical environment advocates use eschatological reasoning in their appeals to people to care for the environment.

Often, advocates will begin their eschatological related arguments by discussing the current suffering of the world and comparing it to the suffering of humans. For example, Hayhoe and Farley argue that the Fall in the Garden of Eden story applied to all creation, not just humans. They argue that,

One of the first things we learn about Adam and Eve is that through their actions, they altered the fate of the entire planet. In Romans 8:20-21, Paul tells us, 'Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse' (NLT). When Adam sinned, it wasn't just humans who fell. It was the planet as well.³³

Romans 8:22-23 goes on to say, "we know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor

³² Katharine K. Wilkinson, *Between God and Green: How Evangelicals Are Cultivating a Middle Ground on Climate Change* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2012), 58.

³³ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, 65.

pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.” By citing Romans 20, Hayhoe and Farley demonstrate that just as humans have suffered since the Fall, so has creation. In fact, Hayhoe and Farley argue specifically that the climate crisis would never have happened if it were not for the Fall.

Like Hayhoe and Farley, other evangelical environmental advocates often use environmental degradation and climate change as examples of the suffering of creation. Two other biblical texts often used to make such comparisons and highlight the suffering of creation are Isaiah 24 and Hosea 4. Though the advocates note that the biblical texts do not specifically discuss climate change, they argue that the descriptions of the suffering and defilement of the land in these books serve as a warning to people in the present day. For example, Bill McKibben proposes:

If you have spent a good deal of time studying the greenhouse effect, it is not comfortable to read the warning in the twenty fourth chapter of Isaiah: ‘Behold, the Lord will lay waste the earth and make it desolate, and he will twist its surface and scatter its inhabitants.... the earth warms and withers, the world languishes and withers; the heavens languish together with the earth.... Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched.... All joy has reached its eventide; the gladness of the earth is banished.’ This is not a farfetched vision. It is a reasonably accurate description of what we are accomplishing in the space of a few short decades.³⁴

In this section, McKibben references Isaiah 24:1-11. Hescoc also quotes this passage when considering the issues of “overfishing, coral destruction, and other pollution,” which cause food scarcity and “directly leads to increased levels of poverty, forced migration, and armed conflict.”³⁵ Hescoc warns of the same issues described in Isaiah 24, including scattered people and desolate land. In addition, both Hescoc and the author of Isaiah 24 blame such consequences

³⁴ Bill McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1994), 21.

³⁵ Hescoc and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 47.

on the actions of people. While Isaiah 24 warns of people's sinful nature, Hescocox offers a warning of human-caused climate change. Thus, both Hescocox and McKibben read Isaiah 24 through the perspective of the climate crisis, suggesting that the texts foretold such problems in the present day.

A second often-used biblical text where people use climate change as a present-day example of the suffering of the earth is Hosea 4. In Hosea 4:3, because of the sins of the inhabitants of Israel, "the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing." Similarly to McKibben and Hescocox's use of Isaiah 24, the EEN's declaration uses Hosea 4 not as biblical evidence of climate change, but as a warning of the consequences of people's current actions. The authors explain:

The earthly result of human sin has been a perverted stewardship, a patchwork of garden and wasteland in which the waste is increasing. 'There is no faithfulness, no love, no acknowledgment of God in the land...Because of this the land mourns, and all who live in it waste away' (Hosea 4:1, 3).³⁶

In the context of the creation care, where one disrespects God by mistreating his creations, destroying the environment becomes one of the moral corruptions that can result in the destruction of the land, which Isaiah 24 and Hosea 4 exemplify.

By using texts such as Romans 8, Isaiah 24, and Hosea 4, evangelical environmental advocates demonstrate the suffering of the world as the result of people's actions, whether that be because of the Fall or present-day environmental degradation. In doing so, the advocates illustrate that the earth suffers just as humans suffer. Some advocates will use this idea to further argue that God's redemption will apply to all creation, as discussed in the previous section about how God values all of his creations. The idea that all of creation will be redeemed is one of the

³⁶ Evangelical Environmental Network, "Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation."

various eschatological beliefs that evangelicals hold. Many evangelical environmental advocates believe in a “eschatology of renewal,” where at the end of time, God will save and redeem the earth in order to create his kingdom.

Hescox is one such advocate. He argues that “the whole of creation is to be healed through and by Jesus Christ. It's not escaping the earth into heaven but heaven coming to earth and the return to the beauty of the created order.”³⁷ Another such advocate is Jim Ball, who emphasizes that “it’s about Christ. It’s about his blood being shed on the cross, which is at the emotional heart of my faith—that he died for my sins.... not just mine. He died to reconcile all things.”³⁸ The key to his argument is that *all* things are reconciled by Jesus’ sacrifice. Ball’s comments allude to Colossians 1:20, which states “through him [Christ] God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.” Both Hescox and Ball’s comments also appeal to evangelical Christians’ emphasis on crucicentrism, or an emphasis on the salvation received from Jesus’ crucifixion as atonement for people’s sins, which is one of the four parts of Bebbington’s definition of evangelicalism. By focusing his argument on the atonement of Jesus’ crucifixion, Hescox and Ball appeal to an essential part of evangelicals’ faith.

Often, advocates using a renewal argument encourage their audience to care for the environment as a way to assist in the ushering in of the period of redemption and the building of God's kingdom on earth. For example, the EEN argues that “because we await the time when even the groaning creation will be restored to wholeness, we commit ourselves to work vigorously to protect and heal that creation for the honor and glory of the Creator,” referencing

³⁷ Hescox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 75.

³⁸ Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 60.

Romans 8:22 by mentioning “the groaning of creation.”³⁹ The EEN directs their audience to help “protect and heal” the environment as they wait for it to be restored, appealing to the eschatological argument of redemption.

In his appeal for people to care for the environment in order to help build the kingdom of heaven on earth, Hescocox offers a unique proposal. He suggests that people be “Easter people,” as opposed to “Good Friday people.” Hescocox uses the account of Jesus’ resurrection in John 20 to create this idea. In the account, Mary finds Jesus’ tomb empty, and Jesus appears before her. Mary tries to cling to him, but he brushes her away. Hescocox explains that “Mary wanted to cling to the past and not move into a new creation, the kingdom of God. So many of us are just like Mary. We don’t want to change; we want to live in the past, or at least live where we are comfortable.”⁴⁰ The people who want to cling to the past, who like the idea that Jesus died for their sins and now have a clean slate, are what Hescocox considers Good Friday Christians. They do not wish to live their lives differently. Instead, they wait for the end of the world to escape into heaven. Hescocox counters that Easter Christians, who all evangelicals should strive to be, instead “want to have a complete relationship with and follow our risen Lord Jesus,” meaning they wish to help build the new kingdom of God on earth.⁴¹ These Easter Christians would thus care about the environment to help restore and protect God’s creations.

Both the EEN and Hescocox use their eschatological renewal belief to argue that people should protect the environment. However, not all evangelicals believe that God will renew the earth. Alternatively, dispensationalists believe in a more apocalyptic eschatological view, where God will destroy the earth and its inhabitants and create something brand new. Note that both

³⁹ Evangelical Environmental Network, “Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation.”

⁴⁰ Hescocox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 76.

⁴¹ Hescocox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 77.

premillennialists and postmillennialists could be considered dispensationalists. Wilkinson summarizes in a more premillennialist-view that “dispensationalism takes the arc of human history to be in decline, embraces societal and environmental deterioration as foretelling the rapture, and urges believers not to impede but to hasten that event. The only real hope is in Christ’s return.”⁴² Thus, some people think there is no reason for people to care about how the environment is treated since it will be destroyed in the end anyways. For those believing in the rapture, where God will take true believers to heaven, Hescoc warns of the dangers of such “escapism theology.” He criticizes people who ignore the challenges of the world and solely focus on making it to heaven. He uses a quote from Rick Warren, one of the most prominent figures in evangelicalism, who asked “Have you ever wondered why God doesn’t just immediately take us to heaven the moment we accept his grace? Why does he leave us in a fallen world? He leaves us here to fulfill his purposes.”⁴³ According to Hescoc and many others, one of those purposes is to care for God’s creation.

Because not all evangelicals believe in the renewal theory that evangelical environmental advocates such as the EEN and Hescoc use, not all advocates use such eschatological arguments. One example comes from Hayhoe and Farley. The couple believes that nothing on earth will remain at the end of times and think that everything on earth will be replaced by a heavenly version, using 1 Corinthians 15:35-49 in their justification. 1 Corinthians 15:40 explains that there are “there are both heavenly bodies and earthly bodies,” which Hayhoe and Farley take to mean that there will be new, heavenly forms of everything in the end. Unlike the previous sources examined, Hayhoe and Farley argue that “redemption here is not a ‘fixing’ but a total

⁴² Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 59.

⁴³ Hescoc and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 79.

replacement.”⁴⁴ Hayhoe and Farley summarize:

We shouldn't expect God to redeem the current earth nor are we intended to 'help' Him redeem it. This earth is going away permanently someday. But for now, it's all we have. And, as we'll see next, there are better reasons to act than out of a sense of obligation to help God redeem the earth—as if he needed our help.⁴⁵

Hayhoe and Farley have clear disdain for other advocates' arguments that people should care for the environment to help redeem the earth, which they take to mean that those advocates doubt God's power. However, Hayhoe and Farley still encourage people to care for the environment by using a different argument related to the end of times.

Hayhoe and Farley do not see their belief in the destruction of the world as reason to not care for the environment. Instead, they propose that people should still care for the environment despite its looming destruction for the same reasons they do anything in life. Hayhoe and Farley explain that despite the idea that everything will be destroyed in the end, “every day, Christians go about the business of taking out our trash, cleaning our houses, paying our taxes, and being kind to our neighbors.”⁴⁶ They further explain that “we do these things because they seem right, and they line up with what Scripture teaches us about love and responsibility.”⁴⁷ According to Hayhoe and Farley, taking care of the environment is the right thing to do as it aligns with what scripture teaches people, referring to other creation care appeals that argue the Bible teaches people to care for the environment. Therefore, despite their dismissal of the renewal eschatological arguments offered by other advocates and their belief that everything will be destroyed in the end anyways, Hayhoe and Farley still argue that people should care for the environment since it is the right thing to do as instructed by the Bible.

⁴⁴ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, 134.

⁴⁵ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, 135.

⁴⁶ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, 136.

⁴⁷ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, 136.

In his book *Serve God, Save the Planet: a Christian Call to Action*, Sleeth offers a similar argument to Hayhoe and Farley. While he does not explicitly define his own beliefs about what happens at the end of time, Sleeth does respond directly to the claim that people “don’t need to worry about nature” since “everything will be renewed after the rapture.”⁴⁸ Sleeth references Mark 13:32, where Jesus explains that no one but God knows when the end is coming: “about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.” Sleeth goes on to summarize that Jesus instead “cautions us to conduct our lives in a way we would not be ashamed of if the world ended today.”⁴⁹

In his typical fashion, Sleeth offers an analogy to help explain his point. He asks his audience to consider what they would do if they knew a fiery meteor was coming to destroy the earth. Sleeth argues that the news should not be taken as permission to ignore God’s commandments and start rioting or stealing. Instead, Sleeth proposes that “knowledge of an end time reminds believers to double their efforts to do the will of God.”⁵⁰ By using this analogy, Sleeth helps his audience understand that though their beliefs about what happens at the end of the world may negate whatever action they take now in order to protect the planet, their actions still matter. Similar to what Hayhoe and Farley argue and Jesus teaches, Sleeth explains that though people may know there is an end, they must nevertheless live their lives according to the Bible, which he and other advocates argue instructs people to care for the environment using the idea of creation care.

Though Sleeth is directly responding to the argument that “everything will be renewed after the rapture,” and Hayhoe and Farley argue that everything will be destroyed and given new

⁴⁸ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 23.

⁴⁹ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 23.

⁵⁰ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 23.

form, both authors use similar arguments to convince their audience to still care for the environment since they still must live their lives according to the Bible.⁵¹ This is a particularly effective argument because it can apply to a wide range of eschatological beliefs. No matter what a person may believe about the end of times, Sleeth, Hayhoe, and Farley's arguments can still encourage people to care for the environment.

Because the sacrifice of Jesus and the end of times are such important topics for evangelicals, by relating caring for the environment to the concepts, the evangelical environmental advocates continue to frame caring for the environment as an issue that evangelicals need to care about. The same technique is used throughout advocates' creation care arguments, such as how advocates often reference the ability to discover God through nature (and thus the conversion potential of nature), or how caring for the less fortunate connects to caring for the environment. All of these creation care arguments are firmly rooted in the Bible, as the advocates constantly reference and allude to various biblical passages. Because the Bible is seen as the ultimate source of authority for evangelicals, by grounding their arguments for the care of creation in the Bible, the advocates build the legitimacy of their arguments and strengthen their appeals to their evangelical audiences. As the second part of this paper demonstrates, advocates use similar techniques and appeals to evangelicals in their arguments that move beyond creation care.

Part II: Further Crafting an Evangelical Argument

The previous sections discuss the biblical basis for creation care, which is generally accepted by many evangelicals when they are presented with the argument. In her book *Between*

⁵¹ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 23.

God and Green: How Evangelicals Are Cultivating a Middle Ground on Climate Change,

Katharine Wilkinson describes that in general, the evangelicals she talked with “widely consented to and frequently endorsed the notion of a biblical call to care for the Earth.”⁵²

Wilkinson hosted small group discussions in numerous evangelical churches throughout the southeastern United States using the ECI’s “Call to Action” as the starting point for discussions.

Citing the creation stories in Genesis, many evangelicals in the discussions agree that “God constructed a relationship of trust and duty with his human creations,” explaining that humans have a responsibility to God to care for the environment that he created.⁵³

However, despite these general agreements about the basics of creation care, climate change action remains a contentious issue among evangelicals. In her small group discussions, Wilkinson found many examples of this persisting hesitancy on climate change. One member explained that “as Christians, we’re supposed to be stewards of what God’s given us. I agree completely with that. But I see climate change as a different thing.”⁵⁴ Wilkinson summarizes that,

For the majority, a gulf remained between concepts of creation care and neighbor care, on the one hand, and a willingness to accept climate change as an issue demanding action, on the other. Some churchgoers actively rejected a link between the two.⁵⁵

As the following sections demonstrate, there are many possible reasons for the disconnect between caring for creation and acting on climate change among evangelicals, ranging from a skepticism of the politics involved to a disbelief in the ability for any meaningful change to occur.

Because creation care itself does not appear to be sufficient in convincing their audiences

⁵² Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 86.

⁵³ Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 87.

⁵⁴ Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 88.

⁵⁵ Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 88.

to take action on climate change, evangelical environmental advocates deploy many different techniques to strengthen the effectiveness of their appeals. The additional arguments that advocates utilize continue to frame climate change as a specifically evangelical issue by appealing to essential beliefs and experiences of evangelicals. These essential aspects of evangelicalism include the four introduced by Bebbington—that is, an emphasis on conversion experiences, activism, the Bible, and crucicentrism. Along with these qualities, an alignment with conservative political values and a concern regarding excess are also often common and important evangelical issues. Advocates weave these elements of what it means to be an evangelical into their arguments in order to strengthen their appeals to their evangelical audiences.

This second part of the paper will discuss additional arguments deployed by evangelical environmental advocates and analyze how these arguments frame climate change action as an evangelical issue. The first several sections will explain how evangelical environmental advocates align their care for the environment with their conservative identity, such as by connecting climate change to important conservative issues like abortion, national security, and capitalism. The later sections consider other arguments that advocates use that only appear tangentially related to climate change and make caring for the environment a personal issue for their audience.

7. Affirming Conservative Identities

Despite some of their careful wording and arguments, by advocating for the protection of the environment and action against climate change, evangelical environmental advocates are inevitably concerned with being associated with environmentalists and liberal politics. As mentioned, white conservative evangelicals have been one of the biggest voting blocs of the

Republican party in recent history. From issues such as abortion to gay marriage to free market economic policies, evangelicals have aligned with conservative politics. However, traditionally, climate change and protecting the environment is an issue supported by liberals and dismissed by conservatives. Many conservative politicians, such as President Donald Trump as an obvious example, do not accept the reality of climate change and oppose action on any related issues.

Because of this context, when a conservative evangelical Christian accepts the reality of climate change and advocates for the protection of the environment, they break away from their traditional political platform. Opponents of evangelical environmental advocates will see the association between liberals, scientists, and climate change as reason to dismiss the issue, with Hayhoe and Foley rhetorically asking how can “those whose voices have so often been raised against us on fundamental issues like family and the sanctity of life... have anything worthwhile to say about the environment?”⁵⁶ Because liberals tend to disagree with many essential issues that are important to evangelicals, evangelicals can be hesitant to agree with or work with them on other issues, such as climate change. In addition, Wilkinson describes that “a general culture of scientific skepticism exists in many evangelical circles,” which in part likely stems from the evolution-creation debate.⁵⁷ Since evangelical Christians have run into conflict with scientists in the past, they may be wary of the science regarding climate change in the present.

Evangelical Christians also often question the faith of liberals and scientists. Some evangelicals may think that such groups tend to be either inauthentic Christians or atheists. Further, regarding environmentalists, words like “tree hugger” or “nature-lover” have negative connotations for evangelical Christians. In part, such negative views come from the fear mentioned earlier in this paper of worshiping the earth in place of worshiping God. From

⁵⁶ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, xv.

⁵⁷ Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 95.

Romans 1:25, Christians believe that one must worship the creator, God, and not his creations. Many evangelicals associate those who care about the environment with those who worship nature rather than God. As such, because of the questions about the faith of environmentalists and liberals, evangelical Christians can be reluctant to partner with them on any issue.

Robinson summarizes “many Christian leaders, myself included, have been fearful of what might happen if we actually advocate something that has been decisively tagged as a value that belongs to those who oppose many Christian values.”⁵⁸ For this reason, evangelical environmental advocates attempt to make the issue of caring for the environment an evangelical issue while also firmly reaffirming their evangelical and conservative identity. Often, advocates will essentially put disclaimers at the start of their books that emphasize their evangelical and conservative identities despite that they will be arguing for the care of the environment and action on climate change.

For example, consider Paul Douglas and Mitchell Hescox’s book *Caring for Creation: The Evangelical's Guide to Climate Change and a Healthy Environment*. In the introduction, Douglas includes this paragraph:

I’m a Christian, serial entrepreneur, meteorologist, Eagle Scout, and staunch Republican. My youngest son graduated from the Naval Academy and flies helicopters in the Pacific, so we’re a military family too. And I acknowledge that colorless, odorless carbon pollution—the waste of gas progress—is spiking the storms I’m tacking on my maps, representing a legitimate risk, one we should pay close attention to. All of which— together—makes me the rough equivalent of an albino unicorn. Pray for me.⁵⁹

Notice that Douglas does not say “climate change,” but does hint at its concern. Though he does use the term later in the book, because climate change is a controversial and polarizing issue among evangelicals, Douglas avoids the specific word “climate change” in his introduction so as

⁵⁸ Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 24.

⁵⁹ Hescox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 13.

to not yet alienate any members of his audience. By instead discussing pollution and the destruction of the environment, evangelical environmental advocates can still argue for the care of the environment (and therefore subtly advocate for action against climate change) without relying on their audience accepting the reality of climate change.

Also notice Douglas' use of humor in his statement. Often, evangelical environmental advocates will use humor and light-hearted comments as an important rhetorical tool in their arguments. As will be further explained, many people find climate change an overwhelming and frightening issue. In addition, evangelicals often find that arguments surrounding environmentalism capitalize on people's fear. For example, Hescox observes "fear has been used way too often by environmental groups and deniers alike."⁶⁰ Instead, evangelical environmental advocates will often use humor. This choice both offers a break from the intimidation of climate change, and also differentiates the arguments presented by the advocates from those presented by others that use fear and guilt. By setting themselves apart from other, more typical arguments, the advocates make their movement more appealing to those in their evangelical audience who are still concerned about the associations of joining the environmental movement.

Returning to Douglas' disclaimer, Douglas emphasizes his Christian and conservative identity. His faith, political affiliation with the Republican party, fact that he is from a military family, and participation in American capitalism as an entrepreneur all help affirm his identity before he attempts to begin thoroughly discussing the environment. He also includes in the introduction that it was not his intention to get involved with this issue. He explains "I didn't set out to talk about climate change. It wasn't on my radar. I was just doing my job, tracking daily weather, attempting to connect the dots and make sense of the atmosphere."⁶¹ For Douglas, it

⁶⁰ Hescox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 100.

⁶¹ Hescox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 11.

was inevitable for him to start caring about his issue. The inevitability and time taken to reach the conclusion of climate change among evangelical environmental advocates will be discussed further in this paper.

Other evangelical environmental advocates make similar efforts to Douglas as to reaffirm their evangelical and Christian identities. Before doing so, Hayhoe and Farley in their book *A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions* acknowledge the assumptions people make about them because of their work on the environment. In the preface, they state: “Bike to work. Hug a tree. Eat granola. Live off the grid. Wear hemp. Bathe in a steam. And worship the earth. We often find ourselves labeled—just because we think global warming is a serious problem people should know about.”⁶² However, the partners object to these characterizations. Instead, they explain:

But here’s who we really are. We’re Christians. We don’t worship the earth. We worship the Creator of the universe. We believe that God spoke the world into existence and sustains it by His power. We believe that Jesus Christ is the way to eternal life, that the Bible is God’s Word, and that nothing compares to the importance of the gospel message... we don’t believe that life came from nothing or that humans evolved from apes. We don’t believe in the government running our lives or in destroying the economy to save the earth... Yes, we live in a house with air-conditioning. We drive cars. We don’t have solar panels on our roof (too expensive), and we’re not vegetarians (meat is just too tasty).⁶³

Hayhoe and Farley touch upon the concerns that evangelicals may have about joining the environmental movement and the assumptions that people may make about them because of their work. They mention that they do not worship creation, only the creator. They reaffirm their evangelical faith with their emphasis on the gospel. They acknowledge the shaky history that evangelical Christians have had when it comes to scientists because of the evolution-creation debate and imply that one can still believe in creation and accept the reality of climate change.

⁶² Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, xi.

⁶³ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, xi.

They also emphasize their conservative identity with their disagreement with a large government or government intervention in the economy, implying their capitalistic and free market stances. At the end of the statement, they also object to other common assumptions people may make about those who care for the environment, such as not having air conditioning or being vegetarians. They demonstrate that one does not need to drastically change their lives or lose their identity in order to care about the environment.

As another example, in the PBS documentary *Is God Green?* by Bill Moyer, Robinson discusses his environmental ministry at his church. However, before going into Robinson's work, the people interviewed first describe Robinson's conservative identity. They specify Robinson is a horseman, hunter, rancher, Bush supporter, creationist, and is also pro-life and against gay marriage in order to demonstrate how Robinson has not caved on his conservative identity just because he cares about the environment.⁶⁴

In the documentary and his books, Robinson conveys the time, thought, and effort that went into introducing his environmental ministry to his church. This is a common theme among evangelical environmental advocates because it demonstrates the consideration that went into caring about the environment, building the legitimacy of their stance and the importance of their work. It took six months for Robinson to plan his first sermon on the environment, as he had never before taken up an issue "that could be so potentially polarizing to the congregation or detrimental to my position in ministry."⁶⁵ He was hesitant because he was wary of the connotations that come with being seen as an environmentalist. He describes:

For years, I was always afraid to use the word 'environment' because I didn't want to be labeled as a 'liberal.' In the political landscape of the United States, environmentalism has always connected with a liberal perspective on the world. If you were a liberal, you were also supposedly for many other things that I simply could not accept or attach

⁶⁴ Moyers, *Is God Green?*

⁶⁵ Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 11.

myself to.⁶⁶

So, Robinson took time to develop his message to his church. He wanted to present an argument that was firmly rooted in the Bible and spent six months developing it. He explains his sermon “was not just a random message thrown together on a whim. This was six months of cultivation and a lifetime in germination.”⁶⁷ Robinson’s work paid off. He gave his sermon on the care of God’s creation in February 2005 and received a standing ovation from his church for his message.

Hescox shares a similar message of the time and consideration it took for him and Douglas to start their work on caring for the environment. In his introduction he describes “our interest in stewarding the earth was no overnight epiphany. Our conviction built gradually; a slow-motion realization that the threat was real and people of faith have a moral obligation to step up.”⁶⁸ The ECI’s “Call to Action” includes a similar, more detailed statement. The authors state:

Over the last several years many of us have engaged in study, reflection, and prayer related to the issue of climate change (often called ‘global warming’). For most of us, until recently this has not been treated as a pressing issue or major priority. Indeed, many of us have required considerable convincing before becoming persuaded that climate change is a real problem and that it ought to matter to us as Christians. But now we have seen and heard enough to offer the following moral argument related to the matter of human-induced climate change.⁶⁹

The authors explain that it was not an easy or simple decision to accept the reality of climate change and that it took thorough convincing. They also acknowledge that in the past climate change was not an urgent issue for them, demonstrating to their audience that they too were once skeptical of climate change and required persuasion. The authors are also sure to specify that

⁶⁶ Robinson, *Saving God’s Green Earth*, 16.

⁶⁷ Robinson, *Saving God’s Green Earth*, 12.

⁶⁸ Hescox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 16.

⁶⁹ Evangelical Climate Initiative, “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action.”

they were not only convinced by scientific study, but also by reflection and prayer, further making climate change a spiritual and moral issue rather than merely political or scientific.

By including such statements, evangelical environmental advocates demonstrate that their action on the environment is not just a whim but is a deeply intentional and personal decision. They acknowledge that there are assumptions often made about people who care about the environment and climate change because of associations with liberals and environmentalists. However, by reaffirming their evangelical and conservative identities, the advocates provide examples to their audience of how one can still be a conservative evangelical and care about climate change. The advocates validate their audiences' concerns and assumptions, and then attempt to demonstrate how those assumptions are not necessarily true. The advocates also give credibility to their cause by describing the time, thought, and effort that has gone into it, helping build their legitimacy.

8. References to Conservatives

Another way that evangelical environmental advocates balance their work regarding the environment with their conservative evangelical identity is by justifying the scientific resources they cite and referencing conservative politicians who agree with caring for the environment. When it comes to the science used in evangelical environmental advocates' arguments, whether that be regarding climate change or the destruction of the environment, advocates urge people to approach the evidence with common sense and logic. For example, Douglas humorously comments on a question he is often asked in debates about climate change. He writes "*how can the atmosphere be warming if I'm cold, Paul?*" There's a word for this: winter."⁷⁰ The authors

⁷⁰ Hescocox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 24.

urge people to think critically about what is presented to them and to accept the reality of the situation as it is. Douglas explains that he comes “to Christ through evidence and faith, but *with climate change no faith is required*. The evidence—what we can observe, test, and track—is compelling. And growing daily.”⁷¹ He urges his audience to think logically about the evidence of climate change and to “listen to real experts and not look for conspiracy theories under every rock.”⁷² To both help their evangelical audience trust in the science of climate change and also help further justify their conservative identities with their concern for the environment, evangelical environmental advocates will reference people and organizations who their audience likely support and trust.

For example, Douglas and Hescox’s book is full of references to conservative politicians who support the reality of climate change. Douglas describes a time he had dinner with Senator John McCain, who he called one of his heroes. He asked Senator McCain if people were making too big of a deal of climate change or if it could be a coincidence. The Senator “rolled his eyes” at Douglas and replied, “Paul, I’m seeing the changes in my home state of Arizona. I just got back from a trip to the Yukon, where a village elder presented me with a four-thousand-year-old tomahawk that had just melted out of the permafrost. No, this isn’t a coincidence.”⁷³ Senator McCain’s comments are reminiscent of those evangelical environmental advocates like Douglas who encourage their audience to observe evidence of climate change in their own lives, which will be discussed in a future section of this paper. This story also provides an example of a popular conservative politician who believed in climate change. For those evangelical Christians who supported Senator McCain, learning how he felt about climate change could be very

⁷¹ Hescox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 90.

⁷² Hescox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 61.

⁷³ Hescox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 58.

convincing for them to also accept its reality.

As further examples, Douglas later in the book describes the conservation and environmental efforts of Republican Presidents Theodore Roosevelt, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan, and George H.W. Bush to explain the connection between conservative and conservation. He provides a quote from President Reagan in which he asks:

What is a conservative after all but one who conserves, one who is committed to protecting and holding close the things by which we live... And we want to protect and conserve that land on which we live—our countryside, our rivers and mountains, our plains and meadows and forest. This is our patrimony. This is what we leave to our children. And our great moral responsibility is to leave it to them either as we found it or better than we found it.⁷⁴

By including this quote, Douglas attempts to convince his audience that conservation and caring for the environment are issues that conservatives, like President Reagan, care about. Because conservatives care about the “things by which we live,” they must care for the land. President Reagan’s description of leaving a better world for children also further supports the pro-life arguments around environmentalism to be discussed in the next section, again aligning caring for environment with conservative issues.

Douglas also works to establish trust between evangelical Christians and scientists with his references. For example, he explains that it was President Abraham Lincoln who established the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), which is “a private, nonprofit organization charged with providing independent, objective advice to the nation on matters related to science and technology,” because President Lincoln was concerned with faulty military inventions and equipment during the Civil War.⁷⁵ The same organization created by a Republican president for the safety of the military published a report in 2014 that says “it is now more certain than ever,

⁷⁴ Hescox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 92.

⁷⁵ Hescox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 58.

based on many lines of evidence, that humans are changing Earth's climate."⁷⁶ By referencing the NAS and explaining its origins, Douglas seeks to build the credibility of the scientists' findings of humans-caused climate change for his evangelical audience.

In her analysis of the ECI's "Call to Action," Wilkinson also identifies references that the authors provide to help break down the distrust evangelical Christians have of scientists and break down the liberal versus conservative divide of the issue. When providing evidence for the reality of human-induced climate change, the authors reference findings from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), which they call "the world's most authoritative body of scientists and policy experts on the issue of global warming."⁷⁷ The authors specifically mention that the organization was chaired by Sir John Houghton from 1988-2002, who they call "a devout evangelical Christian."⁷⁸ By explaining that the authoritative scientific body on global warming was chaired by a respected evangelical Christian, the ECI builds the credibility of the organization's findings for their evangelical audience. As another piece of supporting evidence, the authors cite "in a 2004 report, and at the 2005 G8 summit, the Bush Administration has also acknowledged the reality of climate change and the likelihood that human activity is the cause of at least some of it."⁷⁹ The authors thus refer to a popular Republican leader who acknowledges climate change to serve as an example for their evangelical audience.

By including such references, evangelical environmental advocates both add credibility to their arguments and show their audience examples of those whom the audience already likely admires in order to inspire them to also care about the environment. In addition, such references

⁷⁶ Hescocx and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 58.

⁷⁷ Evangelical Climate Initiative, "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action."

⁷⁸ Evangelical Climate Initiative, "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action."

⁷⁹ Evangelical Climate Initiative, "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action."

also reaffirm the advocates' conservative identities. In case audience members were still doubting whether one could be both conservative and care for the environment, the advocates provide examples of people whose conservative identities cannot be questioned. And in case audience members were distrusting of scientists, the authors refer to sources created or led by trustworthy people, such as a conservative politician or a devout evangelical Christian.

To further construct caring for the environment as an issue that evangelicals should care about, and to continue to justify their care for the environment with their conservative evangelical identities, evangelical environmental advocates will connect climate change to conservative issues that are important to evangelicals. Such issues include abortion, national security, and capitalism.

9. Pro-Life Arguments

Evangelical environmental advocates often relate the issue of climate change to important issues for evangelicals that may appear unconnected at first glance. As a small example, Sleeth claims that “nothing is worse for the environment than a broken family.”⁸⁰ One may read Sleeth's claim and ask, what does divorce have to do with the environment? Historically, family values are some of the most important issues to evangelicals, and therefore preserving the family unit is very important to them. Sleeth explains that when a couple divorces, they now need two of everything they used to share. Where they used to have one home, they now have two; where there used to be one washer and dryer, there are now two; and so on. Such duplicates, according to Sleeth, drastically increase the energy needed and pollution created. Thus, Sleeth connects the important but seemingly irrelevant issue of divorce, which many evangelicals care about, to

⁸⁰ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 101.

caring for creation. A second, much more common issue that evangelical environmental advocates connect the issue of climate change to is abortion.

One of the most important political issues to evangelical Christians is abortion. Evangelical Christians tend to be overwhelmingly pro-life and vote for candidates who share their strong stance. A study conducted by the Pew Research Center found that 76% of conservative evangelicals think that abortion should be illegal in all or most cases.⁸¹ In their public policy guide “For the Health of the Nation,” the NAE lists “safeguarding the nature and sanctity of human life” as their second principle of Christian political engagement behind the first principle of protecting religious freedom. Because of the importance of this issue, evangelical environmental advocates will frame the issue of climate change in terms of being pro-life in order to compel their audience to support climate change action. One of the most vocal advocates using such arguments is Hescox in his position as president and CEO of the EEN.

Hescox acknowledges that many people may not care about climate change because they view it as too big of an issue that is too far away to matter. People thus distance themselves from climate change. He explains that “the perception of distance with respect to climate impacts allows climate change to be disregarded as irrelevant to one’s family or to one’s immediate concerns.”⁸² Because of people’s busy lives and the abundance of other issues in the world to worry about, people do not see climate change as an immediate enough problem to address. He uses an analogy of a seesaw to make his point, explaining:

Most people live lives as a seesaw, trying to balance work, family, values, and faith.

⁸¹ “Political Ideology Among Evangelical Protestants,” part of *The U.S. Religious Landscape Study*, Pew Research Center, 2014, <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/religious-landscape-study/religious-tradition/evangelical-protestant/political-ideology/>.

⁸² Mitchell Hescox, “Caring for Creation: The Evangelical’s Guide,” in *Health of People, Health of Planet and Our Responsibility: Climate Change, Air Pollution and Health*, ed. Wael K. Al-Delaimy, Veerabhadran Ramanathan, and Marcelo Sánchez Sorondo (Springer, 2020), 276.

Individuals change only when everyday life balance and values are impacted in such a way as to upset that tipping point; only as issues touch the center of our being and who we care most about are changes initiated and actions taken.⁸³

In order to make climate change a personal issue that immediately affects those of whom evangelical Christians care for most, Hescox frames climate change as a moral issue by relating it to evangelical's pro-life stance. He thus reframes "climate change and clean energy within an existing moral framework" for evangelical Christians, making his argument much more compelling.⁸⁴

In order to make climate change a pro-life issue, Hescox first reaffirms that evangelical's pro-life stance encompasses "the womb to the tomb." He explains that "without doubt, prolife should be about not ending pregnancy, but it must also be about assuring the right to have the opportunity for abundant life."⁸⁵ It is not enough for evangelicals to ensure that a child is born, but that child must also have access to a good quality of life. This idea of pro-life being "womb to tomb" is shared by the NAE. They explain:

Christians must be committed to a consistent ethic of life that safeguards the essential nature of human life at all stages, with a special concern to protect the lives of the most vulnerable. The unborn, the very young, the aged, those living in poverty, the chronically or terminally ill, those with disabilities and those with genetic diseases deserve our particular care and protection.⁸⁶

The NAE encourages evangelicals to care for people at all stages of life, from their conception all the way to their death, and calls upon evangelicals' desire to care for the least fortunate and most disadvantaged.

In the development of their pro-life stance, the NAE refers to two crucial passages in the Bible. First, they refer to Genesis 1:27, which states "God created humans in his image." The

⁸³ Hescox, "Caring for Creation: The Evangelical's Guide," 276.

⁸⁴ Hescox, "Caring for Creation: The Evangelical's Guide," 275.

⁸⁵ Hescox, "Caring for Creation: The Evangelical's Guide," 277.

⁸⁶ National Association of Evangelicals. "For the Health of the Nation."

group explains that “because God created human beings in his image, every human life from conception to death bears the image of God and has inestimable worth,” thus again emphasizing that being pro-life relates to the entirety of someone’s life.⁸⁷ This is an essential biblical passage for evangelical’s pro-life stance because it affirms the value of all human life, since all humans thus take after God. The NAE also often mentions Psalm 139:13 in their pro-life arguments. In this Psalm, the author describes God’s reach and his love for people, explaining “for it was you [God] who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother’s womb.” The NAE explains that this passage “reveals God’s calling and care for persons before they are born,” since God is the one who creates fetuses in the womb.⁸⁸ Returning to Hescox’s reaffirming of pro-life stances including caring about all stages of life, Hescox refers to John 10:10. In this biblical passage, Jesus states “I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.” By considering the idea that Jesus came so that people could have life abundantly, Hescox asks his readers “how can Christians not be concerned about quality of life? Who would not pray for our children or grandchildren to have a high quality of life?”⁸⁹

Once Hescox reminds his readers of the all-encompassing stance of being pro-life, his connection between climate change and being pro-life is much clearer. He explains “as prolife Evangelicals, we want children to be born healthy, unhindered by the ravages of pollution even before they take their first breath.”⁹⁰ Children must be born healthy and have a good quality of life, which pollution threatens. Hescox provides many examples of how pollution has had negative effects on the health of both unborn and born children. He explains that the toxins that pregnant women are exposed to can have harmful effects on their fetus. He cites many scientific

⁸⁷ National Association of Evangelicals. “For the Health of the Nation.”

⁸⁸ National Association of Evangelicals. “For the Health of the Nation.”

⁸⁹ Hescox, “Caring for Creation: The Evangelical’s Guide,” 277.

⁹⁰ Hescox, “Caring for Creation: The Evangelical’s Guide,” 277.

studies to make his argument, such as one at the Colorado School of Public Health that linked methane production and birth defects. Hescoc explains how the toxins that fetuses are exposed to can,

Accumulate in the brain, causing developmental disabilities and brain damage, resulting in lowered intelligence and learning problems. One study found that ‘the resulting loss of intelligence causes diminished economic productivity that persists over the entire lifetime of these children.’⁹¹

Recall that in their explanation of evangelicals’ pro-life stance, the NAE referred to the “inestimable worth” and potential to bless “our society in extraordinary ways” that every child is born with.⁹² When Hescoc explains how learning problems can be developed and intelligence can be lost because of the effects of pollution, he uses this idea to compel evangelicals into action by demonstrating how climate change can damage the economic earning potential of children. Just as evangelicals adamantly oppose abortion for this reason, they must also support action against climate change.

Hescoc in fact attempts to quantify the economic effects of such damage to children’s health. On numerous occasions, Hescoc has testified to various committees of the United States House of Representatives regarding environmental concerns. For example, in February 2020 Hescoc testified in front of the subcommittee on environment of the House Committee on Oversight and Reform to oppose former President Trump’s proposed changes to the Mercury Air Toxics Standards (MATS) of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Hescoc began his testimony by quoting President Trump at the 2020 March for Life, where President Trump said, “we are here for a very simple reason: to defend the right of every child, born and unborn, to

⁹¹ Hescoc, “Caring for Creation: The Evangelical’s Guide,” 277.

⁹² National Association of Evangelicals. “For the Health of the Nation.”

fulfill their God-given potential.”⁹³ Hescoc goes on to comment,

While many in our community applaud the President’s actions in certain areas of being pro-life, his administration’s efforts to eliminate over 95 environmental standards questions the sincerity of his commitment to be completely pro-life.⁹⁴

He goes on to explain how unsafe mercury levels can cause neurological development impairments and lower IQ levels of children, and therefore threaten “every child’s right to fulfill their God given potential.”⁹⁵ Hescoc attempts to quantify this damage, explaining that before MATS were introduced, “in 2008 the IQ loss caused by methylmercury toxicity costs society an average of \$5.1 billion (\$3.2 of \$8.4 billion).”⁹⁶ This statistic comes from a study published in *Environmental Health Perspectives* in 2005 that examined the decreased economic productivity of children with mercury levels associated with a lowering of IQ. In other references, Hescoc also considers studies that estimate the healthcare costs of chronic medical problems in children due to environmental factors, such as exposures to toxins.

By supplying such information, Hescoc attempts to quantify the economic loss due to pollution, such as by referring to the decreased earning potential of children, in order to better conceptualize the issue for his audience. Rather than just saying that children are negatively impacted by toxins from pollution, Hescoc assigns a number to the issue so that people can better understand its impact. In addition, by focusing on the potential economic productivity of children, Hescoc deploys a very capitalistic way of thinking. As capitalism is an essential part of conservative politics, the economic loss may be a compelling factor for conservative evangelicals. It is quite jarring to think of children in this way, and Hescoc uses such jarring

⁹³ “Testimony of the Rev. Mitchell C. Hescoc,” The United States House of Representatives: House Oversight and Reform Committee: Subcommittee on Environment, February 6, 2020, <https://www.congress.gov/116/meeting/house/110455/witnesses/HHRG-116-GO28-Wstate-HescocM-20200206.pdf>.

⁹⁴ “Testimony of the Rev. Mitchell C. Hescoc.”

⁹⁵ “Testimony of the Rev. Mitchell C. Hescoc.”

⁹⁶ “Testimony of the Rev. Mitchell C. Hescoc.”

concepts to push his audience into action.

By making climate change a pro-life issue, Hescoc makes climate change a deeply personal issue for evangelical Christians. Because their pro-life stance is such a large part of their values, when climate change is framed as a pro-life issue, evangelicals are much more likely to support climate change action. Already mentioned is how Hescoc, and many other evangelical environmental advocates, think that climate change seems like too distant an issue for many people to take seriously and care about. In their criticism of traditional environmentalist appeals, these advocates often express frustration with others' impersonal arguments and their focus on the effects of climate change on plants and animals. Hescoc offers a quote from Rachel Gutter, who worked as a part of the US Green Building Council and founded their center for green schools, who said "it's not about our [bleeping] polar bears; it's about our children" [censorship by Hescoc].⁹⁷ In their book, Hescoc and Douglas take this idea to heart and work to frame climate change as an issue about people, especially those most at risk like children and the poor. Returning to his often-used seesaw analogy, Hescoc explains "understanding the need to defend our kids' health, provide pure air and water, and provide a good economic future challenges the integral struggle that may tip the seesaw for climate action."⁹⁸

10. National Security Arguments

A second conservative issue that evangelical environmental advocates often connect

⁹⁷ Hescoc and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 37.

Note that Amanda J. Baugh's book *God and the Green Divide: Religious Environmentalism in Black and White* also discusses the idea of "people not polar bears." Baugh considers the phrase's use in environmentalism movements among urban African Americans. Baugh provides a quote from Faith in Place, an environmental justice non-profit based in Chicago, which on the topic of environmental ministries tells people "it's about people, not polar bears... By all means, love nature, take your kids outside, and make interaction with the natural world part of your spiritual life. But when it comes to environmental issues in church, talk about people and where people live" (pp. 29).

⁹⁸ Hescoc and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 37.

caring about climate change to is national security. Again appealing to evangelicals' conservative identities, national security related arguments could be compelling because conservatives are often concerned with the security of the country. For example, advocates will often refer to the inevitable refugee crises that will be created because of the increased frequency and severity of natural disasters and the fact that parts of the world will become uninhabitable because of climate change. In addition, advocates argue that people will become displaced because of increased conflicts arising from resource shortages.

For instance, ECI's "Call to Action" comments on the increase in "the likelihood of refugees from flooding or famine, violent conflicts, and international instability, which could lead to more security threats to our nation."⁹⁹ Hayhoe and Farley refer to "a recent report commissioned by the Pentagon concluded that abrupt changes in climate may be the greatest security threat we face in the twenty-first century."¹⁰⁰ Hescoc similarly refers to the Quadrennial Defense Review by the US Department of Defense that identifies the many risks of climate change, one of which includes an increased risk of terrorism because of the resulting social, political, and economic burdens and instability from climate change.¹⁰¹ Hescoc further explains:

Our military is concerned. They see climate change as a threat multiplier. I've sat in a room with retired generals and admirals from all branches of service and listened while, with moisture forming in their eyes, they shared their great fear of our nation committing our young men and women into conflict as more and more nations destabilize.¹⁰²

Though likely a bit dramatized, Hescoc demonstrates to his audience that military officials are also concerned about climate change and what it means for the security of the country—so much so they were moved to tears.

⁹⁹ Evangelical Climate Initiative, "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action."

¹⁰⁰ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, xv.

¹⁰¹ Hescoc and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 49.

¹⁰² Hescoc and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 49.

Hescox thus also appeals to the audience's concern for the military, which is another important issue to conservative evangelicals. Other appeals to supporting the military mentioned in previous sections of this paper were presented by Douglas, who specifies that he is from a military family and explains how the NAS was first created out of concern for the military during the Civil War. Such references by Douglas help reconcile his conservative identity with supporting climate change action, since caring about the military is an important issue for conservative evangelicals. By referring to the young men and women who would be fighting, Hescox reminds the audience of the consequences of such conflicts and expresses concern for the military. Using national security threats created by climate change, evangelical environmental advocates again connect climate change to essential issues that evangelical Christians often care about because of their conservative identities.

11. Capitalist Arguments

A third important topic to conservative evangelicals that evangelical environmental advocates often appeal to is capitalism. Such appeals include references to businesses, the free market, and the economic opportunities presented by climate change. Among their references in their writing, evangelical environment advocates often praise companies who they have felt have made efforts in caring about the environment. For example, the ECI's "Call to Action" explains:

We also applaud the steps taken by such companies as BP, Shell, General Electric, Cinergy, Duke Energy, and DuPont, all of which have moved ahead of the pace of government action through innovative measures implemented within their companies in the U.S. and around the world. In so doing they have offered timely leadership.¹⁰³

Hescox and Douglas offer praise for similar companies, describing the efforts of "ten of the world's largest energy companies—including BP, Royal Dutch Shell, and Total" in limiting the

¹⁰³ Evangelical Climate Initiative, "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action."

rise in average global temperature.¹⁰⁴ Douglas points out that missing from those companies were noticeable American energy companies, such as ExxonMobil or Chevron. However, he does point out that both of these companies have elsewhere recognized the reality of climate change. He also quotes a statement where ExxonMobil even said “we recognize that our past participation in broad coalitions that opposed ineffective climate policies subjects us to criticism by climate activist groups. We will continue to advocate for policies that reduce emissions while enabling economic growth.”¹⁰⁵

It may seem confusing that evangelical environmental advocates would compliment the energy companies that many would blame as some of the biggest perpetrators of the environmental crisis. Who would think to call these companies leaders in the environmental movement when their work often destroys the environment? However, by doing so, the advocates set up their capitalist arguments and do not participate in the “blame game” of climate change. Advocates will often criticize those who only seek to place the blame for climate change and guilt people into action. Instead, these advocates do not condemn anybody for their role in climate change and instead focus on solutions, which their praise of big energy companies demonstrate. What better way to show that they do not use fear and guilt arguments around climate change than to use the most often criticized companies as examples of efforts that people can take.

By referencing the efforts on climate change that such companies make, the evangelical environmental advocates also demonstrate that caring about the environment does not have to come at the cost of the economy. Because of their conservative identities, many evangelical Christians are very pro-capitalism and thus free markets. As such, many evangelicals are wary of

¹⁰⁴ Hescox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 109.

¹⁰⁵ Hescox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 110.

environmental protections that would increase government intervention and regulation in the economy. For example, one study found 59% of conservative evangelicals believe “stricter environmental laws and regulations cost too many jobs and hurt the economy.”¹⁰⁶ As another example, consider the end of ExxonMobil's statement quoted above. They end by stating they “will continue to advocate for policies that reduce emissions while enabling economic growth.”¹⁰⁷ As ExxonMobil demonstrates, capitalists tend to be hesitant of environmental regulations that could limit markets and thus specify that any regulations must not harm economic growth. Because of this hesitation, evangelical environmental advocates suggest free market solutions to climate change.

For example, some advocates suggest cap-and-trade measures, where “the government sets a ‘cap’ limiting what total emissions are allowed to be. Individual companies then reduce their emissions, and anyone who reduces below a required level can then sell or trade those credits to other companies who have not.”¹⁰⁸ The ECI's “Call to Action” supports such a measure, using it as an example of “cost-effective, market-based mechanisms” that helps “economy-wide reductions in carbon dioxide emissions.”¹⁰⁹ The authors also mention how many companies have stated that “this method is best both for the environment and for business.”¹¹⁰ By using examples of actions that can be taken on climate change that do not harm the economy that businesses actually support, evangelical environmental advocates demonstrate to their audience that capitalism and climate change action are not incompatible.

Another strategy for climate change action often suggested by advocates is switching to

¹⁰⁶ Pew Research Center, “Political Ideology Among Evangelical Protestants.”

¹⁰⁷ Hescox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 110.

¹⁰⁸ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, 51.

¹⁰⁹ Evangelical Climate Initiative, “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action.”

¹¹⁰ Evangelical Climate Initiative, “Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action.”

alternative, renewable energy sources. Arguments for this strategy include limiting government intervention, opportunities for entrepreneurship and American ingenuity, and decreasing the country's reliance on foreign oil. Douglas and Hescoc argue that more people have not turned to renewable energy sources because of the government subsidization of energy companies.

Because of subsidies of traditional energy sources, Hescoc argues consumers do not see the true cost of the energy they use, and thus do not see renewable energy as a cheaper alternative.

Hescoc argues "as market-based fiscal conservatives, Paul [Douglas] and I believe it's past time for governments to get out of the energy subsidy business."¹¹¹ Hescoc and Douglas believe that if people were able to see the true cost of different types of energy, there could be more competition between traditional and renewable energy sources and people would be more informed about true prices. This would both allow for a freer market and also limit government intervention in the energy industry, both of which conservatives would likely support.

Hescoc further argues that "a national energy policy (that we don't have) and knowing true costs would have inspired American entrepreneurship long ago."¹¹² Hescoc explains that the need for alternative energy sources inspires more entrepreneurship. The opportunity for entrepreneurship and innovation that the climate crisis has created is often used by evangelical environment advocates to convince their audience of the economic opportunity presented by caring for the environment. Advocates will also often frame this as an opportunity for the United States to demonstrate their leadership in the world. For instance, Hayhoe and Farley argue that "we are faced with a significant opportunity to surge ahead in technological innovation."¹¹³

Hescoc and Douglas also appeal to American exceptionalism, arguing:

The America I know doesn't do things because they're easy. We have a reputation of

¹¹¹ Hescoc and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 115.

¹¹² Hescoc and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 116.

¹¹³ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, 155.

engineering and innovating our way around seemingly insurmountable obstacles. The United States is uniquely positioned to address this problem and do what we do: lead the way, exporting the best practices and new technologies to the rest of the world.¹¹⁴

Advocates thus see climate change solutions, such as renewable energy, as an economic opportunity and a way to assert American dominance. The creativity and ingenuity required to solve the climate crisis is something that advocates argue Americans are uniquely suited for because of the country's superiority. This would be an appealing argument to conservatives who have not considered such advantages to supporting climate change action and share a love for America and the promise of the American dream. It also focuses on the solutions that Americans can offer, rather than making people feel guilty for the inaction of the past.

Another benefit to switching energy sources is limiting reliance on foreign oil. Many evangelical environmental advocates will express concern about the United States' dependency on other country's oil. For example, Sleeth questions why the United States would give money to a country who "officially forbids religious freedom" and "declares democracy a capital crime," which he claims one major supplier of US oil does.¹¹⁵ Since the United States was founded on religious freedom and democracy, Sleeth refers to the idea that the United States needs to reflect those principles when deciding with whom they do business, similar to how evangelicals live their lives according to their beliefs. There is also a national security question raised when discussing reliance on foreign oil. Hescox and Douglas question "why is the United States the 24/7 on-call police force for the planet, ensuring the safety of supertankers and oil supply chains snaking around the world?"¹¹⁶ Because of the country's reliance on foreign oil, the US could be pulled into more conflicts in order to protect their investments. Instead, renewable energy

¹¹⁴ Hescox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 136.

¹¹⁵ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 8.

¹¹⁶ Hescox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 133.

sources are presented as a solution to these problems.

By using capitalist arguments and connecting climate change action to issues such as national security and abortion, evangelical environmental advocates appeal to their evangelical audiences' conservative identities. Because conservative politics are an important part of many evangelicals' identities, and because many evangelicals may be wary of caring for the environment because of associations of environmentalists and liberal politics, such arguments are effective because the advocates demonstrate how caring about climate change does not mean one sacrifices their conservative identity. Instead, the advocates argue that caring about the environment is a logical extension of important conservative issues that their evangelical audience are likely already interested in.

12. Materialism and One's Relationship with God

As seen with the arguments related to conservative politics, in order to convince their audience to take action on climate change, some evangelical environmental advocates deploy arguments that appear only tangentially related to the environment at first. While the previous sections examined arguments related to conservative politics, the following section focuses on arguments related to consumerism and materialism. In this appeal, advocates attempt to change the way that people think about the world and what they need in their lives. Looking at sources from McKibben, Sleeth, and Robinson as examples, this section will examine how advocates use the Bible to change people's perspectives on materialism.

In his book *The Comforting Whirlwind: God, Job, and the Scale of Creation*, McKibben relies on the Book of Job to convince readers to stop believing that more is always better, referring to a material driven mindset that McKibben argues people have developed. On the surface, this may appear to be a strange choice in an argument for people to care about the

environment. What do Job and consumerism have to do with convincing people to care about climate change? What do Job, consumerism, and the environment even have to do with each other? In the story of Job, Satan makes a bet with God that his devoted followers, such as Job, would lose their faith in God if they ever suffered. God agrees to Satan's challenge, and allows Satan to punish Job to test his faith. Satan kills Job's livestock, servants, and ten children, and also gives him painful skin sores. Three of Job's friends come to visit him in his mourning, and they determine that Job must have done something wrong against God in order to be receiving such punishments. However, as the reader knows, Job did nothing wrong. His suffering is instead the result of a challenge between Satan and God. Job insists on his innocence to his friends, and has a crisis over why God allows faithful people to suffer and sinful people to prosper. God eventually interrupts the conversation by calling down from a whirlwind, and sarcastically asks Job a series of rhetorical questions about creation in order to demonstrate how little it is that Job and his friends actually know.

Clearly, consumerism and the environment are not featured in the story, and yet McKibben still relies on it to convince his audience to care about climate change. McKibben instead uses Job to teach his readers how to challenge commonly held beliefs in their society. McKibben argues that both the story of Job and the present-day climate crisis rest on people's ability to go against the "conventional wisdom" of their time. In Job, the conventional wisdom was that only unfaithful people suffered and good people prospered. When Job's own experiences challenge that very idea—that he, a faithful servant of God, could experience extreme suffering—Job stops believing in the conventional wisdom despite opposition from his friends. McKibben thus frames the story as:

The immediately familiar and very modern story of a frustrated man, up against an orthodoxy that he no longer can believe in, but surrounded by a society that continues to

insist that its accustomed interpretation is the only truth.¹¹⁷

McKibben goes on to argue that people today are in a similar position as Job. However, instead of questioning the suffering of good people, the current conventional wisdom is the belief that more is always better.

McKibben argues that people have placed an extreme emphasis on consumerism and the idea that it is always better to have more of everything, whether that be more wealth, more belongings, more food, more relationships, or more of really anything. For example, McKibben describes how despite the polarization of politics, one common ground that can always be found among politicians is that economic growth is a good thing. McKibben discusses that in the media, “increased wealth is such a given that it’s assumed that no other side exists—that any objective viewer would agree, only a crank would think otherwise,” further explaining that “there is no question that growth seems desirable to us—it seems obviously, intuitively right. More is better. It fits with our understanding of the world—more means easier, more comfortable, more secure.”¹¹⁸ Just as Job’s friends mindlessly believed and accepted that only the bad can suffer, McKibben argues that people today mindlessly accept that it is always better to have more things.

McKibben threatens this present-day conventional wisdom of consumerism by posing questions to his audience, similar to how Job questions his friends or God questions Job. In reference to always having more, McKibben asks his reader: “Have you noticed that it doesn’t make you happy?”¹¹⁹ He claims this is as “explosive of a question” as those posed by Job.¹²⁰ In Job 21, Job questions his friends about the conventional wisdom that only the unfaithful suffer,

¹¹⁷ McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind*, 1.

¹¹⁸ McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind*, 9 and 10.

¹¹⁹ McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind*, 28.

¹²⁰ McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind*, 28.

asking how then unfaithful people can still prosper. In Job 21:7–10, he asks:

Why do the wicked live on, reach old age, and grow mighty in power? Their children are established in their presence, and their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear, and no rod of God is upon them. Their bull breeds without fail; their cow calves and never miscarries.

These questions break down the conventional wisdom that only the good prosper for Job.

Similarly, McKibben expects that by asking if having more actually makes people happier, people will realize that it does not and therefore change their way of thinking.

This concept that people's lives are less happy because of an abundance of material wealth is also used in arguments by both Sleeth and Robinson. Sleeth uses his friend, a fellow doctor, as a dramatic example.¹²¹ After deciding their current house was too small, his friend and his wife decided to build a bigger house on the water. Once completed, they realized they needed more furniture to furnish the bigger house, and also decided they should get a boat to enjoy the water. However, they found their car was too small to tow the new boat, so they then bought a new, bigger car. Then, their new car could not fit in their new garage, so they rebuilt the garage even bigger. Sleeth comments on how burdened and stressed his friend became, having to deal with so many challenges that came from his materialistic mindset. Sleeth declares “on no subject is Jesus more clear than on materialism: a life focused on possessions is a poor and misguided life.”¹²² Sleeth uses Matthew 6:19-20 to make his argument, where Jesus teaches:

Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Rather than being concerned with possessions on earth, Sleeth uses Jesus' lesson that people should instead be concerned with spiritual and heavenly matters. Sleeth later refers to John 2:13-

¹²¹ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 65.

¹²² Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 68.

16 to justify his disdain for shopping. In this story, Jesus becomes irate by people using a temple as a selling place and throws everyone out. Sleeth summarizes “the one time Jesus displayed anger and indignation concerns shopping,” comically demonstrating to his readers that they should be wary of consumerism.¹²³

Robinson also discusses how difficult people’s lives become when burdened by possessions. He starts with the example of his friends Greg and Sharon, a married couple who attend his church. He summarizes that though Greg is a devoted Christian and has a wonderfully full life with a loving family and successful career, he has lately “been restless and unsettled; he has wanted to do more with his life.”¹²⁴ Robinson argues that this is because “Greg’s life has become too complex and encumbered to give him the freedom to do more than he was doing for Christ,” explaining that Greg had become burdened by debt and financial obligations.¹²⁵ Robinson thus challenged Greg to make a plan to achieve financial freedom and “downsize his life so that they [Greg and Sharon] could upsize their effectiveness in the world they so desired to impact.”¹²⁶ Robinson summarizes that “most Americans have too much stuff; stuff that often weighs them down and ultimately keeps them from a more simplified, freeing life.”¹²⁷ Robinson saw that people’s lives had become too complex because of their attachments, and argued that by simplifying their lives, people could have more time to devote themselves to God.

In order to further develop his argument that people are less happy when they focus on their material belongings, Robinson uses several passages from the Bible. Robinson quotes Luke 16:13, which states “you cannot serve God and wealth,” to further argue that one cannot both

¹²³ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 85.

¹²⁴ Tri Robinson, *Small Footprint, Big Handprint: How to Live Simply and Love Extravagantly* (Boise, ID: Ampelon Publishing, 2008), 12.

¹²⁵ Robinson, *Small Footprint, Big Handprint*, 12.

¹²⁶ Robinson, *Small Footprint, Big Handprint*, 12.

¹²⁷ Robinson, *Small Footprint, Big Handprint*, 13.

fully devote their lives to God and still be preoccupied with money and financial obligations, as his friend Greg exemplified. Similar to what McKibben describes, Robinson argues that people will be unhappy if they are always seeking more money and belongings. Robinson calls upon examples from King Solomon in Ecclesiastes to support this point. In Ecclesiastes 2, the extremely rich Solomon discusses how he had every luxury he could ever want, explaining in Ecclesiastes 2:10 “whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them; I kept my heart from no pleasure.” However, in the next verse Solomon realizes that “all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.” In a similar sense, in Ecclesiastes 5:10 Solomon declares: “the lover of money will not be satisfied with money; nor the lover of wealth, with gain.” King Solomon had everything he desired but was still discontent with his life. He realizes that there is nothing on earth, no material items or wealth, that will make him happy. Robinson thus uses these two passages to further demonstrate how people will never be fully satisfied with their wealth and belongings, no matter how many they acquire.

In addition to describing the burdens of material-driven lives and offering examples from the Bible, both Sleeth and Robinson speak to the personal benefits they experienced by simplifying their own lives. Sleeth significantly downsized his family’s lives, explaining how they moved to a new house that was the same size as their old house’s garage, purged most of their belongings, and no longer even have common appliances such as “a clothes dryer, garbage disposal, dishwasher, or lawn mower.”¹²⁸ Sleeth acknowledges the environmental impacts of these decisions, describing “we use less than one-third of the fossil fuels and one-quarter of the electricity we once used.”¹²⁹ However, his greater focus is on the benefits to his faith that he has experienced. He explains that “because of these changes, we have more time for God. Spiritual

¹²⁸ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 4.

¹²⁹ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 4.

concerns have filled the void left by material ones. Owning fewer things has resulted in things no longer owning us.”¹³⁰ Similar to how Matthew 6:19-20 described, Sleeth and his family turned to spiritual matters rather than material things and found a better relationship with God because of it. As a further example, Sleeth also describes how he has started to observe a strict sabbath day, where he does not work, go shopping, or perform any chores. He describes “I found God on my Saturday afternoons, perhaps it simply got quiet enough for me to hear him once again.”¹³¹ By simplifying his life, Sleeth found that he developed a better relationship with God.

Robinson echoes the spiritual benefits described by Sleeth that he also found by simplifying his life. Already alluded to by the example of his friend Greg, Robinson saw that by simplifying one’s life, a person could create more time to devote to God. Using such logic, Robinson developed his “small footprint, large handprint” concept. He argues that “our desire should be to leave a small human footprint but a large and lasting handprint of God.”¹³² By small footprint, Robinson means that people should live a life of simplicity rather than being burdened by their belongings or overly complicated lives. The idea of a footprint is also a play on a person’s carbon footprint. By large handprint, Robinson means that people must live their lives according to God. In order to further develop this idea, Robinson uses Luke 5:1-11. In the story, after having not been able to catch any fish, Jesus allows Peter to catch a large amount and directs him to fish for other people. Afterwards, Peter and the other men drop everything and follow Jesus. Robinson explains that the story “shows the essence of discipleship—and the heart behind small footprint, big handprint,” as “these men left everything (small footprint) so they could follow Jesus (big handprint).”¹³³ Robinson thus encourages people to leave behind their

¹³⁰ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 4.

¹³¹ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 85.

¹³² Robinson, *Small Footprint, Big Handprint*, 13.

¹³³ Robinson, *Small Footprint, Big Handprint*, 61.

complicated lives, burdened by possessions and material matters, and instead focus on living their lives for God.

Like Sleeth, Robinson discusses how he has personally benefited from simplifying his life and following his small footprint, big handprint philosophy. Early in his marriage, Robinson and his wife lived at a family ranch with no electricity and little belongings. Robinson describes that “in the solitude and simplicity of Robinson Canyon Ranch we discovered an authentic relationship with Christ.”¹³⁴ Later in life, Robinson and his family (by then having children and had moved to a city) ultimately decided to move to a quiet house settled in some hills. By leaving the hustle of the city and simplifying their lives, Robinson felt that he was able to create more time for God. He explains:

Every morning I found myself sitting on the deck watching the first light of day cast its rays on a distant butte, feeling a cool morning breeze as I drank black coffee and embraced the lost luxury of unhindered silence.... Once I moved back to the mountains, spending time with the Lord became something I began to look forward to every morning and was no longer a scheduled discipline.¹³⁵

Notice that Robinson’s strengthened relationship with God came both from simplifying his life and also spending time outside observing nature, appealing to the element of creation care discussed in the first part of this paper about how one can discover God through nature. It was this new time that Robinson had for his faith by simplifying his life that inspired him to begin an environmental ministry at his church. Calling upon his small footprint, big handprint concept, Robinson argues that when he began “to live simply thus leaving a smaller footprint,” he was able to “begin to love extravagantly, thus making a bigger handprint.”¹³⁶

Though they use vastly different biblical stories, McKibben, Sleeth, and Robinson all

¹³⁴ Robinson, *Small Footprint, Big Handprint*, 19.

¹³⁵ Robinson, *Small Footprint, Big Handprint*, 23.

¹³⁶ Robinson, *Small Footprint, Big Handprint*, 25.

address how a “more is better” attitude when it comes to material desires burdens and complicates a person’s life. The advocates argue that a person can never be truly happy when they are preoccupied by wealth and material belongings and therefore encourage their audiences to simplify their lives. While the environmental benefits of such changes are mentioned, the greater emphasis is placed on the spiritual benefits. Such arguments do not actually rely on the environment or require the reader to accept the reality of human-induced climate change at all. Instead, one’s relationship with God is at the center of the argument. As mentioned earlier, some evangelicals question the faith of people typically associated with the environmental movement, such as liberals and scientists. So, evangelical environmental advocates bring God to the center of their arguments.

Many of their arguments, such as those related to materialism, rest on a person wanting to improve their relationship with God. Since evangelicalism emphasizes personal experiences of faith and a personal relationship with God, such arguments would be compelling. For instance, recall how advocates provide anecdotes such as a friend borrowing one’s car in order to demonstrate how God granted people stewardship over the earth. Such analogies are effective because they focus on a person’s relationship with God. Just as a friend lets another friend borrow their car, for instance, God has left people to take care of his creations. Because people want to have a good relationship with God, they therefore must care for the environment he created. So, when authors like Sleeth and Robinson focus instead on the spiritual benefits of simplifying one’s life, they use the idea that evangelicals want to improve their relationship with God.

Arguments such as the materialism related examples presented by McKibben, Sleeth and Robinson are particularly effective because they never require the audience to actually accept the

reality of climate change but nonetheless encourage people to take action that benefits the environment. While caring for the environment is not the focus of their argument, it is a subtle consequence. For example, people buying fewer things means fewer resources are used and less pollution emitted in order to create and transport the products. Further, when someone simplifies their lives and devotes themselves to God, it is implied that they would care about his creations in order to do so. Already having laid the groundwork of their creation care theology, where one shows their love and respect for God by caring for what he has created, living one's life according to God implies that one would care for the environment. Regardless of one's acceptance of climate change, they can still be persuaded by these advocates' appeals about the unhappiness of burdened lives and the opportunity to improve their relationship with God.

One might notice that such arguments urging people to live less materialistic lifestyles may conflict with the importance of capitalism to many evangelicals. Having fewer belongings and buying fewer items might seem at odds with the importance of having a thriving economy, which logically requires people to buy and sell things. Instead of appealing to some evangelicals' emphasis on capitalism as some evangelical environmental advocates do, arguments related to consumption appeal to other evangelicals' concern with having excess. In the broader study of evangelicals, there are many conversations regarding disagreement among evangelicals about consumption and free enterprise. For example, in a book chapter titled "'Where Your Treasure Is': Popular Evangelical Views of Work, Money and Materialism," Marsha G. Witten examines evangelical publications from the 1980s and early 1990s regarding "work, money, and possessions."¹³⁷ While many evangelical authors focus on one's attitudes towards their wealth

¹³⁷ Marsha G. Witten, "'Where Your Treasure Is': Popular Evangelical Views of Work, Money and Materialism," in *Rethinking Materialism: Perspectives on the Spiritual Dimension of Economic Behavior*, ed. Robert Wuthnow (Grand Rapids, MI: William. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 118.

and possessions rather than the quantity of them, some authors warn of risks associated with the accumulation of wealth and belongings. Witten summarizes:

For one thing, the wealthy are more likely than the poor to make an idol of their money and possessions and to develop the un-Christian character traits of arrogance and self-reliance (Nash 1986, 166). In addition, the accumulation of goods can lead to a vicious cycle of increasing one's effort to acquire still more, thus cutting into the time one dedicates to one's family and one's spiritual life and leading to psychological problems of anxiety (Caywood 1989, 80). And finally, one author explains, the efforts to acquire mundane material possessions are misplaced 'investments' of labor and time, because these goods are useless in eternity (Alcorn 1989, 303).¹³⁸

Looking at the arguments against materialism presented by Sleeth and Robinson, including how they have experienced spiritual benefits by simplifying their lives, one can clearly find traces of the broader concerns surrounding abundance among evangelicals.

It is also important to note the simplistic lifestyles described by Sleeth and Robinson, such as how Sleeth does not own some common household appliances, may help further enforce the associations that evangelicals often have regarding environmentalists, which other advocates try to disprove. Recall how Hayhoe and Farley in their preface emphasized "yes, we live in a house with air-conditioning. We drive cars. We don't have solar panels on our roof (too expensive), and we're not vegetarians (meat is just too tasty)."¹³⁹ Hayhoe and Farley provided such statements because they do not want audience members to not take action on climate change because they think it requires drastic life changes. Instead, they suggest smaller changes that people can make in their lives. However, while Sleeth and Robinson demonstrate drastic changes in most people's lives, they seem aware of this issue and therefore also suggest smaller steps in their books.

¹³⁸ Witten, "Where Your Treasure Is," 133.

¹³⁹ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, xi.

13. A Change in Mindset

As demonstrated in the previous section, often evangelical environmental advocates are tasked with trying to convince their audience to change the way they think about the world, such as urging them to buy less. To help with this momentous task, advocates rely on the Bible to help provide inspiration and comfort for their audience. For instance, Robinson references Romans 12:2, which states: “Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect.” Robinson uses this passage to teach people that they should not model their behavior based on what they see in the world, but instead based on what God would want. Because the Bible is the ultimate source of authority for evangelicals, using biblical stories in order to convince people to change the way they think is a compelling appeal for the advocates’ evangelical audience.

Robinson applies this to changing the materialistic way people view the world, explaining “when God changes the way we think, he reverses the ideals valued by our culture that don’t align with his World—ideals like the more you have, the happier you’ll be.”¹⁴⁰ As McKibben phrases it, a “more is better” attitude is a conventional wisdom of the present day, meaning that it is ingrained into people’s beliefs and is challenging to change. McKibben uses the story of Job to inspire his readers to make that change. Job notices his experiences do not fit with the conventional wisdom that only the bad suffer and is not afraid to question and challenge such a societal belief. McKibben argues that “we too live in the grip of conventional wisdoms that no longer fit easily with the observable facts,” and warns “a new fact in the world is a powerful thing. If it is a large enough fact, it can explode even the most patiently built-up and

¹⁴⁰ Robinson, *Small Footprint, Big Handprint*, 31.

jealously guarded orthodoxy.”¹⁴¹ McKibben acknowledges that people may be nervous to admit something as big as the fact their actions are destroying the earth. Climate change is an incredibly politicized issue, and for evangelicals who historically have supported the Republican party, accepting the reality of climate change, or even just accepting that their materialistic attitudes are damaging to their relationship with God, can seem intimidating. Therefore, evangelical environmental advocates like Robinson and McKibben reference biblical stories to provide inspiration and comfort in the face of great change.

As another example, Hescoc discusses the use of fear in arguments surrounding climate change. He explains how,

Fear has worked well for those who wish for inaction and keeping the status quo on fossil fuel uses. It's much easier to tap into our basic fear of change, the government, and taking money from our pockets. Our role as evangelicals requires us to overcome fears and the amplification of them by those wishing to ignore the realities for their benefit. Fear comes from trusting in ourselves instead of placing trust in the Creator.¹⁴²

Hescoc argues that there is no need to be afraid of change if one trusts God. Hescoc then walks readers through the story of the twelve spies in Numbers 13. In the story, the Israelites are awaiting their promised land following the Exodus story, and Moses sends twelve spies out to explore the land of Canaan, which is the land promised to the Israelites by God. However, in Numbers 13:32, ten of the twelve men brought back “an unfavorable report of the land that they had spied out, saying, ‘The land that we have gone through as spies is a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people that we saw in it are of great size.’” These men misrepresented the land to their people out of fear and doubt and used their misleading report to convince other people to be afraid too. Hescoc thus uses the story to convey that people must not act out of fear of change or be persuaded by those who do. He reminds his readers of Isaiah 41:10, where God

¹⁴¹ McKibben, *The Comforting Whirlwind*, 8.

¹⁴² Hescoc and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 101.

tells his people “fear not, for I am with you.”

Hayhoe and Farley also provide biblical examples of people who act on truth rather than fear. They refer to the “heroes of faith” list in Hebrews 11, describing that “most were people who stood up, looked an unpleasant truth in the eye, and then set about doing what they felt was necessary. They did not sit around and think of every possible reason in the world why that truth might instead be false.”¹⁴³ Similar to how McKibben describes Job challenged the conventional wisdom of his time, Hayhoe and Farley call on other examples of people who also took on unpleasant truths. In their reference to those who “sit around and think of every possible reason in the world why that truth might instead be false,” Hayhoe and Farley also refer to those who refuse to take any action against climate change because they still question the science behind it.¹⁴⁴ In an argument that appears reminiscent of President Ronald Reagan’s “trust, but verify,” Hayhoe and Farley explain that while it is important for people to understand and accept the science of climate change for themselves (which their book lays out for readers), people must trust the scientific consensus of climate change.

Hayhoe and Farley refer to the story of Gideon in Judges 6 as an example of this concept, who is listed in the “heroes of faith” in Hebrews 11. In the story, God instructs Gideon to save Israelites from Midian. Gideon doubts his ability to win the battle, but God insists that he will be with him and that Gideon will win. Gideon asks God to show a sign that he will truly help by asking him to dampen a fleece, but not the floor, with dew as proof. God does so, and then Gideon asks for a second sign by asking God to dampen the floor and not the fleece, which God again does. Gideon ultimately believes that God will help him and is able to conquer the Midianites. Relating this story to accepting the reality of climate change, Hayhoe and Farley

¹⁴³ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, 22.

¹⁴⁴ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, 22.

declare “the fleece has been marked. Our actions are inadvertently affecting the world’s climate.”¹⁴⁵ Hayhoe and Farley thus seek to convince their readers that the time for verifying is over. Just as Gideon verified his truth and then took action despite being initially scared, Hayhoe and Farley call upon their readers to take action against climate change.

14. Accepting the Reality of Climate Change for Oneself

Like Hayhoe and Farley, other evangelical environmental advocates urge their audience to accept the reality of climate change, or at least the reality of the destruction of the environment, for themselves. Some advocates argue that this can be done by considering the world around oneself in addition to considering the science of the issue. For example, Douglas in his work as a meteorologist noticed that once-in-a-lifetime storms were no longer happening once in a lifetime. He noticed that storms were becoming more intense and more frequent, which eventually led him to accept the reality of climate change. He asks people to consider the news and the world around them and notice how it has drastically changed in their lifetimes in order to demonstrate the signs of climate change as he saw them.

As another example, Sleeth noticed in his work as a doctor that cancer rates were increasing, which led him to notice the increase in pollution and toxins in the world. Sleeth comments that he did not reach his conclusions “because I was a biologist or ecologist, but simply based on my observations.”¹⁴⁶ He observes:

There are no more elm trees on Elm Street, no more chestnuts on Chestnut Lane, no Caribou in Caribou, Maine, no more blue pike in the Great Lakes... the fields and fence rows in which I came of age have been bulldozed, plowed, and planted with houses. Many people like me have returned to the places of our youth only to find that they have vanished. When Nancy and I tried to find the ford where I had proposed to her, we could

¹⁴⁵ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, 26.

¹⁴⁶ Sleeth, *The Gospel According to the Earth*, ix.

not even find the stream. It had been buried under a subdivision.¹⁴⁷

Sleeth thus encourages his audience to consider the world around them and notice how things in their environment have changed. From people's own personal experiences, Sleeth and Douglas believe that people can start to notice changes in their world. Notice that Sleeth does not point to change in weather or climate, but instead changes in one's environment. This subtle difference in phrasing centers his argument on the environment, not climate change. This word choice crafts his argument as to not alienate any readers who may not yet accept climate change. It is not that Sleeth encourages his audience to notice climate change specifically, but at least notice the degradation and pollution of their environment.

Note that not all evangelical environmental advocates believe that it is effective for people to search for evidence in their own lives when it comes to climate change specifically. In their book, Hayhoe and Farley present the science of climate change to their Christian audience so that people can understand the science and accept it. They explain: "This book is not about short, slick arguments that can be presented in thirty-second sound bites. It's about taking a long, hard look at the evidence and making up our own minds, based on what God's other 'book'—the natural world—tells us."¹⁴⁸ Hayhoe and Farley actually disagree with the approach of other evangelical environmental advocates who encourage their audience to seek evidence of climate change in their own lives. When they refer to looking for evidence in the natural world, they are referring to the history of the earth, data that cannot be observed in one's lifetime. Since climate change is about long term patterns rather than just day-to-day trends like weather, Hayhoe and Farley do not think it would be effective for people to just consider their own lives to accept climate change. They argue:

¹⁴⁷ Sleeth, *The Gospel According to the Earth*, x.

¹⁴⁸ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, 35.

To really be able to judge for ourselves whether climate change is real or not, we've got to focus on the long-term records around the globe... we can't conclude something from our own intuition, personal observations, or memories of weather in our neck of the woods.¹⁴⁹

They still encourage their audience to judge for themselves the reality of climate change, but they instead ask them to judge the science of it, which they thoroughly present as indisputably in favor of climate change.

15. Opportunities for Activism

Discussed throughout previous sections have been examples of arguments presented by evangelical environmental advocates that appear to only tangentially relate to climate change. Robinson's book from 2008 titled *Small Footprint, Big Handprint: How to Live Simply and Love Extravagantly* serves as an excellent example. Published almost three years after Robinson first started his environmental ministry at his church, the Vineyard Christian Fellowship of Boise, Idaho, this book rarely mentions the environment and does not specifically mention human-caused climate change (though does mention global warming). Robinson briefly discusses elements of creation care, such as the common misinterpretations of Genesis 1:28 regarding stewardship and how one can find God in nature. Robinson also includes "environmental degradation" on a list of the seven current global crises in his conclusion. However, in the majority of the book, Robinson instead primarily focuses on teaching people how to simplify their lives to have more time to dedicate to God. In contrast, Robinson's earlier book published in 2006, *Saving God's Green Earth: Rediscovering the Church's Responsibility to Environmental Stewardship*, explicitly focuses on the environment. In this book, Robinson discusses environmental stewardship and the environmental ministry he created at his church. As

¹⁴⁹ Hayhoe and Farley, *A Climate for Change*, 59.

discussed in the section on confirming conservative identities, Robinson explains he was hesitant to start the ministry because he was worried how it would be received by his congregation. Throughout his book, Robinson presents how his church's environmental ministry has actually created opportunities for more evangelicalism, or the spreading of their Christian faith. This switch in messaging between the two books likely serves to strengthen Robinson's appeal to different audiences.

On Robinson's personal website, there is a summary about the work he has done on the environment. The passage summarizes that Robinson's book *Saving God's Green Earth* is "written as an encouragement and exhortation for Christian leaders to embrace this critical issue."¹⁵⁰ In contrast, *Small Footprint, Big Handprint* is meant for a more general audience. The passage explains that the *Small Footprint, Big Handprint* book:

Communicated a message to readers that they could make a difference by simplifying their lifestyles. It inspired people to take a responsible approach in their way of living; to downsize their personal footprint on the earth so they might enlarge their handprint, or impact, on the greater humanity.¹⁵¹

While *Saving God's Green Earth* is intended for church leaders, *Small Footprint, Big Handprint* is for anyone. This difference in audience serves as a potential reason for Robinson's change in appeal between the two books.

Since *Saving God's Green Earth* is meant for church leaders, Robinson attempts to convince the leaders to create similar ministries as his own. Therefore, Robinson discusses how he was initially nervous to start such a program, his theology of creation care, and the benefits of his ministry. By discussing his experiences, he hopes to inspire others to do the same at their churches. Robinson specifically addresses climate change and global warming because he is

¹⁵⁰ "Environment," TriRobinson.com, <http://triobinson.org/>.

¹⁵¹ "Environment," TriRobinson.com.

trying to convince church leaders to act on this specific issue. In contrast, in *Small Footprint, Big Handprint*, Robinson appeals to a more general audience and does not focus specifically on climate change. It is not necessary for this audience to fully accept the reality of climate change in order for them to be convinced of his argument for a change in lifestyle. As such, Robinson does not risk losing some readers who are skeptical of climate change by making his argument rely on their acceptance. Interestingly, in *Saving God's Green Earth*, Robinson still does not go as far to explicitly say that global warming is human caused. Instead, he generalizes “no matter what has caused the earth’s temperature to elevate, the result is hurting creation and devastating people’s lives.”¹⁵² Again, Robinson tries to appeal to the largest number of people as possible by not resting his arguments on his readers fully accepting the reality of human-caused climate change. However, Robinson does have to ensure that church leaders at least acknowledge climate change, regardless of the reason behind it, since he is attempting to convince church leaders to create ministries that care for the environment and take climate change action.

One of the ways that Robinson tries to convince church leaders to take up the issue of environmentalism is by discussing the opportunities for evangelicalism that it presents. Robinson summarizes how he has “found that upholding the value of stewardship of God’s creation in your community can also create unsuspecting opportunities for evangelicalism.”¹⁵³ Worth tangentially noting is that rather than using terms like “environmentalism” or “climate change action,” Robinson evokes creation care by mentioning the “stewardship of God’s creation.” It is not that Robinson argues one should act on climate change, but one should act as stewards of creation. By using such word choices, Robinson helps contribute to the creation of a specifically evangelical environmental argument. Returning to Robinson’s argument, Robinson thus seeks to

¹⁵² Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 79.

¹⁵³ Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 73.

demonstrate how creating ministries around caring for the environment creates opportunities for evangelical Christians to share their faith, an essential part of evangelicalism. Recall that in the popular definition of evangelicalism created by Bebbington, one of the four main beliefs of evangelicalism is activism. Bebbington describes this concept as “the expression of the gospel in effort.”¹⁵⁴ This includes both living one’s life according to the gospel and also sharing the gospel with others. Wilkinson describes evangelicals’ “concern for sharing the ‘good news’ and offering others a chance to be ‘saved.’”¹⁵⁵ Evangelicals often demonstrate and share their faith by completing mission trips and projects that assist others and often have a proselytizing element.

Robinson discusses this urge to share his faith with others. He describes “after experiencing a transformation in my own soul, I was compelled to tell others. It’s a God-given desire that wells up within all of us. It’s intrinsic to our faith,” further explaining “the Kingdom of God is not something to be admired from afar. It’s something that must be lived—and shared.”¹⁵⁶ Like most evangelicals, Robinson saw the sharing of his faith as an essential part of his religion. He provides simple “practical demonstrations” as examples of sharing his love of Christ, such as feeding the poor or helping repair someone’s home, as well as more complicated methods such as mission trips that often have an environmental element.¹⁵⁷ Throughout his book, Robinson argues that caring for the environment is an excellent opportunity for activism and a great way of sharing one’s faith with others.

Before starting his environmental ministry at his church, Robinson and his wife went on a mission trip to the border of Burma (now Myanmar) and Thailand to bring aid to the Karen Hill tribe. Robinson describes how he struggled reaching people because they appeared scared of him

¹⁵⁴ Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 16.

¹⁵⁵ Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 5.

¹⁵⁶ Robinson, *Saving God’s Green Earth*, 56.

¹⁵⁷ Robinson, *Saving God’s Green Earth*, 73.

and had a vastly different concept of God. Robinson explains:

They didn't believe in God as a person. They simply believed that everything—rocks, trees, water, etc.—had a spirit. They worshiped animals. They worshiped nature. At the time, I struggled to understand how I could share with them about a God they couldn't conceptualize who loved them so much.¹⁵⁸

Since members of the tribe did not believe in the concept of God as Robinson did, he struggled sharing the gospel with them because there was no clear basis between the two beliefs. It was not until later Robinson realized had he “been able to overlay the truth of the Gospel with God’s heart for His creation, the Gospel would have been contextualized” for the people he was working with.¹⁵⁹ It was not that Robinson saw a similarity between the Karen Hill people’s belief in the spirituality of nature and his own beliefs. If he had suggested such a comparison, Robinson would have encroached on the concern among many evangelicals about worshiping creation rather than the creator if they were to care about the environment. Instead, Robinson saw that God’s love for nature could have served as an effective basis to start teaching the Karen Hill people about God, since they both care for nature. He explains “if we could take them past what was created to the One who created it, we would have been able to show them the truth.”¹⁶⁰ Starting with the common ground of loving creation, one could teach another person about God the creator. Robinson therefore discovered that creation care could serve as an effective tool to help share the gospel with people of different faiths.

Robinson does not only argue that environmentalism presents excellent opportunities for evangelicalism by discussing its proselytizing potential. He further considers the benefits experienced from his church’s environmental ministry. One of the projects that the ministry organized was assisting in the cleanup of New Orleans after hurricane Katrina. They did not

¹⁵⁸ Robinson, *Saving God’s Green Earth*, 54.

¹⁵⁹ Robinson, *Saving God’s Green Earth*, 55.

¹⁶⁰ Robinson, *Saving God’s Green Earth*, 55.

initially have the means to do so, so the church organized a collection drive of old cell phones to help raise funds. Members went throughout the area and hung a paper bag on people's front doors with a message about their collection and articles about the church's "approach to environmental stewardship and why this was such an important value."¹⁶¹ The members then came back to collect the bags in which people donated old phones, which the group then donated to a recycling/refurbishing company for money they put towards sending people to assist with the hurricane clean up.

Robinson describes the unexpected benefits experienced from this project, explaining how,

People weren't simply handing over their phones—they had questions, such as why would a church care about the environment so much. It gave our members opportunities to share the reality of their faith, explaining that it wasn't simply something they believed but something they lived... allowing others to participate in what we were doing stimulated the best responses we've ever had.¹⁶²

While the project helped care for the environment by recycling old phones that otherwise may have been left in a landfill and by helping clean the destruction in New Orleans, it more importantly spread awareness for their church and their environmental mission. When people saw information about the program, it made them ask questions and start thinking about the connection between Christianity and the environment which attracted people to Robinson's church. Robinson uses stories of such successful projects from his environmental ministry in order to convince church leaders of the opportunities for evangelical activism that environmental stewardship presents.

Discussed in the first part of this paper regarding creation care was the connection between caring for the poor and caring for the environment. As caring for the less fortunate is an

¹⁶¹ Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 74.

¹⁶² Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 74.

important part of evangelicals' faith, Robinson uses this connection in his argument of how evangelicals can make a greater impact in caring for the poor when they consider environmentally focused mission trips. For example, concerned about the issue of unsanitary water in developing nations, Robinson's ministry organized trips to the Philippines to dig new wells with solar pumps to make the water safer and more accessible for the people in the area. Robinson comments that "sending mission team after mission team to help sick people in areas that have no clean water is one way the church has chosen to approach the problem."¹⁶³ Instead, Robinson encourages people to tackle the root of the issue by creating new, safe wells and addressing the issues that made the water contaminated in the first place, rather than only focusing on those who have become sick because of the water.

Robinson provides the example of Ed Brown, who served as the CEO of the Au Sable Institute, an evangelical environmental organization that focuses on education, who reached the same conclusion. Brown explains:

I realized that the missionary task in its most complete sense could not be carried out without including environmental issues as part of a strategic agenda... many, if not most, of the problems being experienced in the developing world today are fundamentally caused by environmental abuses. If the damage done to the environment is not addressed as part of our relief efforts, we will not succeed in ministering to those in need, no matter how sincere our efforts.¹⁶⁴

Robinson and Brown both realized that if a church is going to conduct mission trips to help people, they should also be addressing the root of the problems, which inevitably leads them to address issues related to the environment. If evangelical Christians could address the problems that are causing people to suffer and become sick, they would be making a much greater impact on those in need by permanently fixing the source of the problem so that no one else would be

¹⁶³ Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 76.

¹⁶⁴ Robinson, *Saving God's Green Earth*, 63.

affected. It is for such reasons that Robinson claims that “caring for the environment can become one of the most powerful tools for evangelicalism in the 21st Century,” explaining “we can—and should—care for the sick as much as possible. But there will be far fewer sick people to help when the environment becomes more livable.”¹⁶⁵

Robinson therefore explains the many ways that environmental stewardship can benefit and strengthen evangelical activism. It can create new ways and opportunities for evangelicals to share their faith with other people, and also improve mission trips to help reach even more people by fixing the root of the problem rather than just its effects. Because activism is such a crucial part of evangelical Christians’ faith, highlighting the benefits to activism from environmental stewardship makes a compelling argument, especially to the intended audience of church leaders who usually organize such ministries.

Robinson is not the only evangelical environmental advocate who uses the opportunities for activism in their appeals to evangelicals. Different advocates will use this appeal in different ways. For example, rather than focusing on creating an environmental ministry, Hescoc suggests that churches make their buildings more environmentally friendly, such as by improving their insulation so they can use less heat. He explains that while churches can help save the environment by becoming more energy efficient, they can also use the money they save on future projects and ministries or donate it, summarizing “you can save energy, lower operating costs, and become better caretakers.”¹⁶⁶ Hescoc provides an example of one group that gives their saved money to an organization called New Vision Renewable Energy, which both teaches congregations how to become more sustainable and donates solar lights to orphanages and

¹⁶⁵ Robinson, *Saving God’s Green Earth*, 76.

¹⁶⁶ Hescoc and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 148.

different humanitarian places around the world.¹⁶⁷ Hescocox is not necessarily compelling his readers to create their own environmentally focused ministries. Instead, he encourages them to use the saved money from making their congregations more environmentally friendly on their own missions or already existing organizations that care for the environment.

In Hescocox's discussion of making congregations more energy efficient, he emphasizes how such changes model behavior that can be replicated by church members. He explains:

Modeling energy efficiency educates members and their local communities on the possibilities, and it also allows the saved energy resources to be directed into new ministries. Many churches struggle for finances; what could be a better way to model discipleship than saving scarce resources and turning them into other opportunities?¹⁶⁸

This idea of church leaders modeling behavior to be replicated is an important part of evangelical environmental appeals, such as how both Sleeth and Robinson described the spiritual benefits from simplifying their own lives discussed in a previous section. By modeling behavior that is beneficial to the environment, advocates hope to lead by example and encourage their audience to do so too. In addition, the advocates' arguments about caring for the environment are strengthened when they support their stance with their actions. When explaining this idea of practicing what one preaches, Sleeth summarizes:

You can make films of people saying the right theology. Whether or not they do it is the most powerful sermon that they'll give. If I were to give a sermon about having a good marriage and you knew I was getting divorced, it kind of discounts what I say. So the sermon becomes your life.¹⁶⁹

Just as evangelicals live their lives according to their beliefs, advocates for the environment must put their beliefs into practice in their lives. As such, when church leaders advocate for caring for the environment, they must ensure that they are modeling behavior that is consistent with such beliefs.

¹⁶⁷ Hescocox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 148.

¹⁶⁸ Hescocox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 148.

¹⁶⁹ Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 38.

The changes that advocates like Robinson, Sleeth, and Hescoc make in their lives and in their congregations both model behavior for congregations and other church leaders. Wilkinson suggests that by having “high-profile pastors” like Robinson also serves “as models for other pastors, giving them ‘courage to step out and preach.’”¹⁷⁰ In an interview with Wilkinson, Robinson suggested “the need for people to see that a ‘normal’ pastor is ‘making it.’”¹⁷¹ Robinson explains “I’ve got a legitimate, discipling, Bible-believing church that’s not getting fanatical or weird but that’s balancing all this ministry... I think that’s a big piece of it—having the prototype.”¹⁷² The assumption that people who support caring for the environment are “fanatical” or “weird” and the implication that they are not “legitimate, discipling, [or] Bible-believing,” alludes to assumptions that evangelicals tend to have regarding environmentalists, as discussed in previous sections. Similar to how evangelical environmental advocates work to reaffirm their conservative identity when they argue for climate change action, advocates also seek to demonstrate how one can still be a respected evangelical church leader and care for the environment without those assumptions. By having well-respected pastors successfully preaching about creation care, other church leaders can be inspired to do so too.

16. Personal Stories

Similar to how advocates often connect climate change to issues that conservative evangelicals often care about, evangelical environmental advocates also connect climate change action to evangelicals' emphasis on activism. In order to strengthen their arguments regarding the opportunities for activism presented by caring for the environment, advocates supply real life

¹⁷⁰ Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 55.

¹⁷¹ Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 55.

¹⁷² Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 55.

stories of those most impacted by the pollution of the environment and climate change. In doing so, the advocates continue to frame climate change as a personal issue for evangelicals.

Sleeth explains he first began to acknowledge the irrevocable pollution to the environment caused by humans while he was working as a doctor and noticed an increase in the rates of chronic illnesses and cancers among his patients. Sleeth saw that this increase was due to an increase in toxins from pollution. In order to make his readers aware of such observations, in his book *Serve God, Save the Planet: A Christian Call to Action* Sleeth provides many examples of real patients he treated as an emergency room doctor who were harmed by the pollution of the environment.

Before giving one example, Sleeth cites a study conducted by the Harvard School of Health that looked at the impact of a power plant in Massachusetts. The study found the plant “caused 1,200 ER visits, 3,000 asthma attacks, and 110 deaths annually,” and Sleeth explains nationally, “the soot from power plants will precipitate more than six hundred thousand asthma attacks.”¹⁷³ But, Sleeth acknowledges that these are “just numbers” to many people without any real meaning.¹⁷⁴ Sleeth “boils down” the numbers for his readers to an eight-year-old girl named Etta. On a “triple ‘H’ day,” referring to “hazy, hot, and humid,” Etta was playing outside in the sprinklers with her brother when she suffered a sudden asthma attack.¹⁷⁵ Sleeth explains “as Etta exerted herself, her airways began reacting to the smog.”¹⁷⁶ Etta was rushed to Sleeth’s hospital, where the unit set up for asthma cases had almost double the number of patients as beds because of the hazy day. Describing Etta’s frightened face and green bathing suit picturing a smiling whale, Sleeth explains that the doctors tried everything they could but were not able to save Etta.

¹⁷³ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 52 and 53.

¹⁷⁴ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 53.

¹⁷⁵ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 53.

¹⁷⁶ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 53.

According to Sleeth, “Etta died of air pollution on that summer day.”¹⁷⁷

Sleeth uses Etta to assign a face and name to the studies cited about pollution in order to make the issue more real to readers. Providing the moving and heartbreaking story of Etta urges the audience to care about the issue of pollution. Sleeth goes on to argue that people have the ability to save children like Etta, describing “by changing light bulbs, hanging clothing on the line, taking fewer trips to the mall, carpooling, and owning more modest homes, Christians can save lives—not statistical lives, but little children like Etta.”¹⁷⁸ Somewhat similar to Hescoc’s pro-life arguments, Sleeth subtly appeals to evangelicals’ desire to protect children. In addition, Sleeth attempts to convince his readers that they have the capability to make a difference. Often, people may feel that the small actions they can take for the environment do not actually make a difference or make it worth the hassle of doing so. To counter this notion, Sleeth again refers to children like Etta who people could save by taking such measures, no matter how small they may seem.

Throughout his book, Sleeth uses numerous stories like Etta’s to make climate change a more personal issue. As a second heartbreaking example, Sleeth tells the story of Sally, a young woman who died of breast cancer and left behind her husband and four-year-old daughter. Sleeth adds small, personal details to the story to make it more moving to the audience, such as how the daughter had held a “get well” picture while he delivered the news that Sally had died.¹⁷⁹ Sleeth explains that many diseases, such as potentially Sally’s cancer, can be linked to exposure to toxic red dyes that are common in many places. He goes on to trace all the different ways that Sally could have been repeatedly exposed, such as through her birthday cake as a child, her hair dye as

¹⁷⁷ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 55.

¹⁷⁸ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 55.

¹⁷⁹ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 12.

a teen, the napkins in her college dining hall, or a bridesmaid dress.¹⁸⁰ Sleeth thus provides every day, normal sources that people would not think could be toxic. By boiling down a huge issue of climate change to the individual level with Sally as an example, Sleeth makes the issue much more urgent to his audience.

Like Sleeth's use of the story of Etta, the personal stories that evangelical environmental advocates use often appeal to an evangelical's desire to care for those most at risk, such as children, the poor, or the elderly. Hescox and Douglas in their book make use of such appeals. For example, Hescox describes a young girl in Malawi who had to walk 12 miles a day to get water for her family because they had no access to safe, clean water anywhere closer to them because of environmental degradation. He explains more generally that "in many rural cultures, women are responsible for water, fuel, farming, and child rearing. As women search farther and longer for fuel and water, violence potential increases, including rape, abduction, and even murder."¹⁸¹ By connecting environmental degradation to caring for a young girl at risk of violence, Hescox directly appeals to evangelicals' desire to care for the most vulnerable. In fact, Hescox suggests "the violence is perhaps why the family selected the young girl, as she was considered the 'least valuable,'" specifically describing her as most at risk.¹⁸² Inspired by the young girl, Hescox and the EEN organized a Creation Care Walk in 2010, where participants walked over 300 miles from West Virginia to Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. to raise awareness for creation care and the environment.

Note that while Hescox says in his book *Caring for Creation* the young girl who inspired the Creation Care Walk was from Malawi, an article in *The Christian Post* about the event

¹⁸⁰ Sleeth, *Serve God, Save the Planet*, 14.

¹⁸¹ Hescox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 79.

¹⁸² Hescox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 79.

mentions Hescox said the girl was from Tanzania.¹⁸³ This change in country could be a simple mistake, or it could potentially suggest Hescox created the story in order to make the event more compelling by giving an example of a young girl who is affected by climate change. This story about a young African girl at risk of violence in her “rural culture” could also be an appeal to a sense of white saviorism to compel Hescox’s audience to action.

In another story, Hescox describes an elderly man who became dehydrated during a heatwave and collapsed out of his wheelchair at home alone. It took an entire day of the man stuck on the ground before a neighbor came to check on him and rescued him.¹⁸⁴ Rather than simply describing how global warming causes hotter temperatures and more frequent and more severe heat waves, Hescox provides an example of a man who suffers because of such changes. Again, Hescox connects climate change to caring about the wellbeing of a specific man. Rather than just explaining the problem of accessing clean water or the threats presented by an increase in the frequency and severity of heatwaves, Hescox supplies specific examples of those most affected in order to make the issue more relevant to his audience.

In their respective books, Sleeth provides examples of people who could easily be the reader or their family members, and Hescox provides examples of people whom evangelicals would most like to help. By providing individual examples, the evangelical environmental advocates reframe climate change as a deeply personal issue for evangelicals.

17. Conversion Experiences

An additional way that evangelical environmental advocates try to frame climate change

¹⁸³ Michelle A. Vu, “Evangelical Groups to Walk 300 Miles for Creation,” *The Christian Post*, May 8, 2010, <https://www.christianpost.com/news/evangelical-groups-to-walk-300-miles-for-creation-care.html>.

¹⁸⁴ Hescox and Douglas, *Caring for Creation*, 150.

as a personal issue for their evangelical audience is by describing how they came to be a part of the movement. Often, advocates refer to a very specific moment where they had a “conversion” to caring for the environment, as Wilkinson discusses in her book *Between God and Green: How Evangelicals Are Cultivating a Middle Ground on Climate Change*. Using such descriptions are compelling to their evangelical audience because converting, or being born-again, is an essential part of becoming an evangelical. Recall that in Bebbington’s definition of evangelical, one of the four characteristics is having a born-again conversion experience where one accepts God and Jesus as their personal saviors. These conversions are life-altering for evangelical Christians and are seen as one of the most important moments in their lives. When evangelical environmental advocates use conversion language to describe how they came to care about the environment, they use language that is familiar to their evangelical audience, which frames the topic as a moral issue that evangelicals must care about. In addition, Wilkinson explains that such descriptions demonstrate “the gravity and significance of the experience,” since the experiences can compare to that of accepting God into one’s life.¹⁸⁵

For Robinson, his conversion to caring about the environment occurred in the same location where he first found God and Jesus. Robinson describes how he has often turned to nature when having questions of faith. As a young 16-year-old boy, he first found God while sitting on a butte in the Mojave Desert in Idaho. He later accepted Jesus as his personal savior on the same mountain top as a young father. Later in life once he was a minister, he again returned to that butte and had his conversion moment to caring for the environment, where he “felt the stirrings of creation care” and thus realized that people had an obligation to protect God’s creation.¹⁸⁶ Robinson then spent six months planning his introduction of creation care to his

¹⁸⁵ Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 50.

¹⁸⁶ Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 48.

church and the creation of their environmental ministry.

As a second example, Sleeth had his conversion moment after a conversation while on a vacation. Unique about Sleeth's story from the others considered in this section is that he was already concerned for the environment before he became a Christian. While still working as an emergency room doctor, Sleeth and his wife, Nancy, went on a trip with their family to an island off of Florida. Sitting out on a balcony, Nancy asked Sleeth "what is the biggest problem facing the world today?"¹⁸⁷ Sleeth responded that "the world is dying," and so Nancy asked him "what are you going to do about it?"¹⁸⁸ Sleeth had no answer and returned to his life unsettled for several weeks. After reading through numerous religious texts, he found his answers in the Bible. He accepted Jesus as his personal savior and became an evangelical Christian. Sleeth felt "called" by God to take action, and eventually left medicine in order to "work on the greatest global health crisis humanity has ever faced: the health of our planet."¹⁸⁹ Shortly after his conversion to Christianity, he read the Bible cover to cover and underlined everything he thought that had to do with "with nature, God's revealing himself through creation, and stewardship of the Earth."¹⁹⁰ He describes when he finished reading what he "ended up with was an underlined Bible."¹⁹¹ This exercise changed Sleeth's life, and he committed himself to environmental stewardship.

Similar to Sleeth's exercise underlining the Bible, Jim Ball also experienced his conversion moment while reading the Bible. Jim Ball is the former director of the EEN and an influential leader in the evangelical environmental movement, helping draft the ECI's "Call to

¹⁸⁷ Sleeth, *The Gospel According to the Earth*, ix.

¹⁸⁸ Sleeth, *The Gospel According to the Earth*, ix.

¹⁸⁹ Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 49 and Sleeth, *The Gospel According to the Earth*, viii.

¹⁹⁰ Sleeth, *The Gospel According to the Earth*, viii.

¹⁹¹ Sleeth, *The Gospel According to the Earth*, viii.

Action.” For Ball, while in graduate school, a classmate “challenged him to read the Bible with an eye toward environmental concern.”¹⁹² Similar to Sleeth, Ball was “totally turned around” and “totally convinced” of the message of caring for God’s creation after reading the Bible with such a point of view.¹⁹³ Wilkinson describes “Ball’s faith gave him a new, zealous sense of vision and mission—the precursor to his advocacy on creation care and public policy.”¹⁹⁴

As another example, Richard Cizik describes his conversion to caring for the environment as similarly life-altering in an interview with NPR’s *Rough Translation*. Cizik worked for the NAE as the Vice President for Governmental Affairs. In this position, Cizik played a crucial role in expanding the evangelical political agenda beyond family matters, such as abortion or gay marriage. For example, he invited President Ronald Reagan to come speak to the NAE in March of 1983 about the threat of nuclear war during the Cold War, which Cizik saw as an issue that evangelicals should care about. President Reagan framed the Cold War as a moral issue in his speech, calling the Soviet Union an “evil empire.”¹⁹⁵ Afterwards, it became common for Cizik to be approached by people and asked to support various political issues.

One such invitation came in 2002 from Sir John Houghton, the climate scientist and evangelical Christian mentioned in the ECI’s “Call to Action,” for a conference at Oxford University on global warming. Cizik attended and spent four days listening to scientists about global warming. He describes “something had happened that had never happened to me in my life. I came away from that event convinced that God had done something there.”¹⁹⁶ Towards the end of the conference, he was invited by Sir Houghton for a walk, during which he had his

¹⁹² Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 48.

¹⁹³ Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 49.

¹⁹⁴ Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 49.

¹⁹⁵ Gregory Warner, “What Would Jesus Drive?” *Rough Translation*, produced by Jess Jiang on National Public Radio, July 24, 2019, www.npr.org/2019/07/18/743118522/what-would-jesus-drive.

¹⁹⁶ Warner, “What Would Jesus Drive?”

second conversion experience, this time converting to caring about God’s creation. He describes this event “as significant of a change in my life as my first change,” referring to his first conversion to evangelicalism.¹⁹⁷ Cizik then returned home to the United States and started working on the care of creation. Similar to Sleeth, Cizik felt as though God was the one calling him to such a stance, and similar to Ball, Cizik saw this moment as life-altering.

In the interview, Cizik further explains to the interviewer “you don’t have a genuine conversion without repentance.”¹⁹⁸ He elaborates that his “conversion was a repentance for all the disbelief and wrong-headed attitudes I had. It’s a repentance that says, ‘I have disobeyed God’s very commands about what I am to do and be.’”¹⁹⁹ Cizik thus views his conversion to caring for God’s creation as authentic as his conversion to Christianity. He also sees his work on caring for the environment as a command from God. As another example, Ken Wilson, a pastor at Ann Arbor Vineyard in Michigan, evokes the Holy Spirit when describing his conversion. While hearing environmentalist James Gustave “Gus” Speth speak, Wilson explains “the Holy Spirit came upon me... I felt a chill over my body, the hair on my arms went up, and I had that fullness in my throat and water behind my eyes. That’s when I had my awakening to environmental concern.”²⁰⁰ Wilson’s conversion was not just a simple change of mind, but an entire full body experience. Inspired to take action, Wilson then started working with the organization Evangelicals and Scientists United to Protect Creation.²⁰¹

When evangelical environmental advocates describe their conversions—using language such as how they felt called by God, experienced life altering realizations, had their discoveries

¹⁹⁷ Warner, “What Would Jesus Drive?”

¹⁹⁸ Warner, “What Would Jesus Drive?”

¹⁹⁹ Warner, “What Would Jesus Drive?”

²⁰⁰ Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 49.

²⁰¹ Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 49.

rooted in the Bible, felt they had to repent, and experienced the Holy Spirit—they use language very familiar to an evangelical audience, reminding them of their own conversions to Christianity. These descriptions validate the advocates' experiences and authenticate their cause as a moral and spiritual issue. If it were just a matter of science or politics, then these advocates would not have had such transformative moments when they turned to the issue. Instead, their lives were forever changed and they felt directed by God to care for the environment. Such descriptions thus make caring for the environment more personal for evangelicals by framing it as an issue that directly relates to their faith.

An important feature of many evangelical environmental advocates' conversion descriptions is that global warming and climate change are actually rarely mentioned. Instead, their conversions are to variations of terms such as “creation care,” “environmental stewardship,” “environmental concern,” or “caring about the environment.” As mentioned throughout this paper, this choice could be to avoid alienating anyone who does not yet accept the reality of climate change or is wary of the term climate change. In addition, this intentional choice in wording could be another way the advocates attempt to make caring for the environment an evangelical issue. The advocates do not just care about the single topic of climate change as such wording could potentially suggest, but instead they care for all of God's creations as a whole. By using words like “creation” or “stewardship,” they subtly reinforce their argument that caring for the environment is an evangelical issue, since such vocabulary comes from the Bible and is already familiar to evangelicals. Their word choice again frames their work as a moral issue, not political or scientific.

Another important observation to note is how evangelical environmental advocates take action after they have their conversion experiences. Robinson starts his church's environmental

ministry, and Sleeth, Cizik, Ball, and Wilson all become strong advocates and start working with organizations dedicated to creation care. As discussed in previous sections, activism is an essential part of evangelicals' faith. Robinson explains "I have never believed the Christian life was something to be lived out in passivity. I have always considered it to be a 'verb,' something that was meant to show action as a state of being."²⁰² By taking action after their conversion to environmentalism, evangelical environmental advocates thus further demonstrate how caring for the environment is an evangelical issue. These advocates do not just accept the necessity of caring about the environment and stop there. They take action and get involved in the issue, living their lives according to what they believe, just as evangelicals do with their faith. Though climate change may seem like a polarizing issue, when these advocates use such arguments, they make it seem like a logical extension of evangelicals' faith.

An additional interesting thing to note about the conversion experiences of evangelical environmental advocates is that many occur while the person is in nature. Robinson came to his realization while sitting on a butte in Idaho, Cizik while walking outside, and Sleeth while sitting out on a balcony on an island. Recall from an earlier section of this paper that part of creation care is the idea that one can discover God through nature. By describing their conversion experiences out in nature, though it may not have been the explicit intention of all the advocates, the advocates subtly demonstrate the importance of nature to their faith. By being out in nature, they were able to recognize God's creation and their responsibility to protect it. As previously mentioned, this idea itself could be a very compelling reason for evangelicals to care about the environment, since conversions are an essential aspect of their faith and nature assists those moments.

²⁰² Robinson, *Small Footprint, Big Handprint*, 11.

Conclusion

In their arguments, evangelical environmental advocates frame caring about the environment and climate change as a logical extension of evangelicals' faith and values. In United States politics, white conservative evangelicals have become strongly associated with the Republican party and thus often do not accept the reality of climate change. For those familiar with evangelicals and United States politics, the evangelical environmental movement may seem surprising because of the strong association between conservative evangelicals and the Republican party. Richard Cizik comments on this potential contradiction, explaining "to be biblically consistent means you have to, at times, be politically inconsistent."²⁰³ Therefore, evangelical environmental advocates offer logical and thorough arguments that explain that caring for the environment is in fact a necessity of evangelicals' faith and values. Just as evangelicalism is a much more diverse faith than people often realize, the beliefs of this subsection of conservative evangelicals suggests more diversity than many people may assume.

As this paper has examined, many of the arguments presented by evangelical environmental advocates rest on the Bible, as it is seen as the ultimate source of authority for evangelicals. Using the Bible, advocates develop the idea of creation care, which argues that people must care for God's creations, including the environment, because they care for God. Using ideas from the Bible such as how God granted people stewardship over the earth, the earth belongs to God, and that God values all of his creations, advocates connect demonstrating one's love and respect for God by loving and respecting what he created. Creation care also refers to the idea that in order to best care for one's neighbor or the poor, one must also care for the environment. Robinson, for instance, uses this idea and connects it to evangelicals' emphasis on

²⁰³ Moyers, *Is God Green?*

activism, or the demonstration and sharing of the gospel. Robinson explains that environmental ministries present opportunities for the sharing of one's faith and to improve the effectiveness of mission trips geared towards caring for the less fortunate. In addition, creation care arguments also appeal to the importance of conversions to evangelicals, as they argue one can discover God through nature. Advocates further appeal to evangelicals' emphasis on conversions by describing their realization of the care of the environment as a conversion experience. Creation care arguments also appeal to evangelicals' emphasis on the salvation attained through Jesus by using eschatological arguments that urge people to care for the environment no matter their belief in what happens at the end of time.

In addition to creation care, this paper has explored other arguments and techniques used by evangelical environmental advocates to further convince their evangelical audience of their cause. Advocates will often attempt to reconcile their acceptance of climate change and their conservative identities by connecting climate change to other important conservative issues, such as abortion, national security, or capitalism. Another important argument offered by advocates urges people to live less material-driven lives. Such arguments appeal to the concern among many evangelicals regarding excess and appear only tangentially related to the environment. Because the environment is not the focus of the argument, people who have not yet accepted the reality of climate change can be reached. Specific choices in wording throughout advocates' arguments are also intentionally made so as to reach a wider audience.

I would also suggest that the evangelical environmental movement has a strong potential to help further climate change action in the United States. As activism is an essential part of evangelicalism, when evangelicals take up the issue of climate change they often feel compelled into action, which the work done by the advocates considered reveals. As such, evangelicals who

support climate change action would likely feel compelled to both make changes in their own lives to become more environmentally friendly and also work to convince others to do so too, perhaps through politics. Conservative evangelicals hold strong political influence in the United States (recall from the introduction that in the 2020 election white evangelicals made up 19% of voters).²⁰⁴ If evangelicals were to consider climate change as important of an issue to them when voting as they do other issues like abortion, Republican candidates, who conservative evangelicals often vote for, could be influenced to start supporting climate change action.

The difference between making personal changes in one's own life and seeking systematic changes through the government relates to the issue of the personal versus the structural among evangelicals. In the study of evangelicalism, the distinction between the personal versus systemic is an important conversation. For instance, in Michael Emerson and Christian Smith's book *Divided by Faith*, the authors argue that evangelical Christians are unable to contribute meaningful change to the racial divide in the United States because of their emphasis on individualism (the authors in fact argue that evangelicals have contributed to the perpetuation of the racial divide). The authors explain that evangelicals focus on their personal experiences with race and relationships with those of other races and fail to recognize the existence of systematic racism. In her book, Wilkinson comments that many evangelical environmental advocates seem aware of this issue and even see parallels between the civil rights movement and climate change, including former NAE president Ted Haggard, who suggests "the environmental crisis is the new civil rights issue of our day."²⁰⁵ Evangelical environmental advocates thus perhaps see climate change as an opportunity to learn from previous regrets regarding the civil rights movement, presenting potential further inquiry for a future project.

²⁰⁴ Igielnik, Keeter, and Hartig, "Behind Biden's 2020 Victory."

²⁰⁵ Wilkinson, *Between God and Green*, 80.

In this paper I consider advocates who focus their arguments on church leaders and congregants rather than legislators, or personal arguments rather than structural. Within the evangelical environmental movement, there are debates over which strategy is most effective—whether it is best to appeal to people to make changes in their own lives, or whether it is best to appeal to those making the regulations relating to climate change (perhaps the existence of this debate even further demonstrates climate change as an evangelical issue). However, I would suggest that evangelical environmental advocates do not actually need a precise answer. Personal and structural appeals reach more people and create more action, whether that be a church changing to energy-efficient light bulbs or a new member of Congress supporting the Green New Deal. Regardless of which action is more effective, they both at least make an effort to help fight climate change. And since climate change is likely the most threatening issue of our time, every little bit can help.

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