

THE RHETORICAL DIVIDE BETWEEN AMERICAN
EVANGELICALS ON CLIMATE CHANGE

by

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This thesis uses rhetorical analysis to compare and contrast American Evangelical rhetoric from two mutually opposed Evangelical climate change interest groups. Specifically, the rhetorical analysis ranks and investigates four sources from each group, Creation Care and Climate Denialist Evangelicals, to explore the impact of rhetoric surrounding the quality and permanence of the planet. Rhetoric surrounding the quality and permanence of the planet within the Evangelical context stems from three biblical streams: Stewardship, Eco-Justice, and the Rapture. This thesis explores how these two divergent Evangelical groups mobilize these three themes as commonplaces of understanding to build rapport with their parishioners, listeners, and believers and mobilize them to act politically. Evangelicalism presents a fascinating window into how religion, specifically Christianity, plays a role in political mobilization surrounding climate change because of the divergences within the denomination itself. Due to the growing necessity for climate action, it is crucial to understand how rhetoric plays a role in how different groups comprehend and conceptualize the politics of climate change. Thus, more research on this subject is necessary to inform how interpretation of biblical themes and rhetoric cooperate to impact politics, specifically within the realm of climate change.

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Introduction

I started this thesis during springtime and found myself doing a tremendous amount of work sitting outside on the grass under an oak tree. I preface this because the importance of climate change and political action is so deeply ingrained in our shared human experience of enjoying the planet collectively. For the first three weeks, I struggled with what made this thesis necessary despite the obvious answers: the inevitability of climate change and the power of the Evangelical voting bloc. When I started, I undeniably favored one side of the Evangelical debate, or at least I favored the opinion of Creation Care activists and was puzzled by the perspectives of Climate Denialist Evangelicals.

I was raised outdoors; I ran through every grassy field barefoot and unapologetically picked daisy crowns of asters during long summers spent in the sun. Connecting with the planet and nature has been an undeniably integral part of my experience on this planet. My parents instilled unrelenting respect and worship of nature in every essence of my tiny being, and thus, protecting the beauty that I have always felt so unbelievably lucky to exist in has always been second nature for me.

I am prefacing this thesis with a window into my experience not because I intend to write a diary but to acknowledge that just like the people I am studying, I have deeply ingrained values, beliefs, and processes that incentivize certain narratives and actions. By acknowledging my own positionality, I am outlining what Arlie Russell Hochschild writes about and calls “Empathy Walls” in their best-selling book "Strangers in Their Own Land." Russel Hochschild states, "an empathy wall is an obstacle to deep understanding of another person, one that can make us feel indifferent or even hostile to those that hold different beliefs, or whose childhood is rooted in different circumstances." (Russell Hochschild 5). There are empathy walls

around all of us, and they often are the strongest surrounding political beliefs, especially with the growth of polarization in America. The only way to break down empathy walls and understand each other is to listen, read, and sit with the information we gain, regardless of whether it aligns with our principles (Russel Hochschild 5). Writing all of this without acknowledging that I am biased on environmental protection because of the inherency of my own experience would be disingenuous. It would not force me to face my empathy wall. It would insult the academia I intend to pursue in this project. However, this project also gave me tremendous perspective regarding people with differing beliefs. It has allowed me to try to break down Russell's empathy walls and work to understand truly. Although I disagree with many of the people I am studying, I have been better able to contextualize that people do not believe things because they are bad people but instead because the values, experiences, and beliefs that inform them; I could never presume to understand. Simply because I was raised to look at the Earth as a magnificent collection of beauty and natural wonder does not devalue the person who was raised to understand the planet as a sinking ship of sin that they will inevitably depart from. My positionality, and this research has helped me to understand that how a person conceptualizes the planet, whether permanent, impermanent, good, or bad, is integral to how motivated they are to protect that Earth.

American Evangelicals are often an unconsidered element of the political topography; however, they comprise around 25% of the American population, and have deep ties to influential political groups (Veldman et al.). Evangelical density spans the United States with a specifically focused concentration in the southern states (PRRI). While many would expect an interest group with the same theological foundation to vote in a bloc, especially surrounding an issue as decisive as climate change, Evangelicals do not (Wilkinson).

There is a complex history surrounding climate change beliefs and actions among American Evangelicals. For example, Evangelical Protestants were among the first Christians in the United States to push for climate action (Wilkinson). However, they are also foundational to groups like the Cornwall Alliance, central to the popularization of Climate Denialism in all Christian American communities (Veldman et al.). So, I pose the following question: Why do we see such a divergence among American Evangelicals surrounding a belief in Climate Change and action to reduce it? I plan to solve this puzzle by explaining how divergences in Evangelical discourse throughout time have shaped two entirely separate cultures of understanding on the issue of Environmental Stewardship regarding human-induced climate change. To readjust the scope of this issue and frame the specific route I am choosing to explore this quandary I present a narrower question: If so, how does the role of rhetoric surrounding the permanence and quality of the planet inform the divergence between American Evangelicals on Climate Change?

To answer these questions, I plan to take a multifaceted approach, first with a historical investigation and then with a discourse analysis. This two-pronged approach will allow me to use history to set the stage for American Evangelical dialogue surrounding climate change and the emergence of different strains of permanence rhetoric. Permanence rhetoric refers to ways in which Evangelicals draw from biblical principles to construct a specific understanding of the world, and a specific value assigned to the world. For example, Creation Care Evangelicals interpret the book of Genesis to mean that the earth is god's creation and thus it is inherently good, while Climate Denialist Evangelicals interpret that passage differently. My aim is that with this two-pronged approach, I will be able to do an informed exploration of how and if permanence and quality rhetoric impact the political motives and actions of Creation Care and Climate Denialist Evangelicals.

History

The rise of Evangelicals to prominence in America can be traced to the first and second great awakenings (Wilkinson). While Evangelicals have maintained prominence in America, the size of their membership was threatened by an emergence of liberal Protestant Postmillennialist rhetoric in the 1900's (Wilkinson). Postmillennialist rhetoric vastly differed from Evangelical rhetoric which asserted that the Rapture or the second coming of Christ, and thus the end of the world would occur within the millennia and that social ills and issues need not be addressed because of its imminency (Wilkinson). Instead, liberal Protestant Postmillennialist rhetoric suggested that the second coming was further out in the future leaving room for social advancement (Wilkinson). Wilkinson describes the Evangelical Premillennial view in her book *Between God And Green*, stating, "This premillennial view takes the arc of human history to be in decline, embracing cultural deterioration as foretelling the rapture and urging believers not to impede but to hasten that event." (Wilkinson). Evangelicals' loss of influence forced them into a much more privatized and individualistic sphere (Wilkinson). In the mid-1970s, Evangelicalism again gained prominence in America and began building solid ties with the Christian right (Wilkinson). As Evangelicals regained prominence within the American sphere and with the Christian right their insular and individualist strategies began to shift. The growth of Evangelicalism continued through the 1980s; however, in the 1990s, divides specifically on how private evangelical practice should be and the place of Evangelicals in solving social problems also began to grow (Wilkinson).

The story of Evangelicals and climate change can be traced back to the 1960s; however, the deeply intertwined development of Climate Denialism and Creation Care began in the 1990s (Veldman et al.). In the 1960s, the foundation of Creation Care was built, and its

foundation was the book of Genesis, specifically Genesis 1:28 (Wilkinson). Genesis 1:28 concerns man's God-given dominion over nature and the Earth, and in the 1960s, Creation Care Evangelicals began to understand this as a responsibility to protect and tend the Earth (Wilkinson). Creation Care Scholars in the 1960s further supported this assertion with language from Genesis 2:15, which emphasized the importance of the Earth as God's creation and human's duty to preserve it (Wilkinson). The initial divisions between Evangelicals on climate change can be loosely tied to the divisions that began forming in the 1990s surrounding Evangelicals' place in social issues (Wilkinson). In the early 1990s, the "Creation Care" movement was composed primarily of a left-leaning evangelical minority; however, throughout the decade, the movement gained popularity, and in 1996, the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) emerged (Veldman et al.). The surges in popularity of Creation Care activism and climate activism can be linked to widespread American concern about the ozone hole and the Exxon Valdez oil spill in the early 1990s (Wilkinson).

In 1996, the EEN thrust itself on the national stage by challenging Republican congressional backlash to the 1973 Endangered Species Act (Wilkinson). The failure of Republicans to harm the 1973 ESA bolstered public recognition of Evangelicals and the EEN as a potential force on the environmental protection stage (Wilkinson). Before this surge in liberal climate idealism among Evangelicals, Republicans almost entirely claimed the Evangelical voting bloc, which continues today.

Evangelical Protestants make up roughly one-fourth of the American population, and in 2012, 40% of the Republican voting bloc was comprised of white Evangelicals (Veldman et al.). This is a crucial point in the story of Evangelical rhetoric about climate change because Climate Denialism, while not historically unimportant to the Right, was not central until the emergence

and growth of Creation Care (Veldman et Al.). Undoubtedly, Republican values of limited regulation, free markets, and industrial growth often stand at odds with climate change science and regulation of climate change (Bjork James 339) . However, Climate Denialism itself did not emerge dominantly until the 2000's (Veldman et al.).

In the 2000s, the emergence of notions of global climate change and the stakes not only emboldened Creation Care activists but also largely legitimized their cause (Wilkinson). The ideological stream of Eco-Justice emerged within the Creation Care care agenda in the 2000s; suddenly, global warming was not simply about the planet or stewardship but also about people (Wilkinson). Climate Care's leaders moved away from the insular premillennial views of Evangelicalism that had caused them to lose popularity in the past, allowing them to become leaders in the 2000s (Wilkinson). In 2002, Creation Care activists led the charge in releasing the "Oxford Declaration on Global Warming," a document that urged participants to deem climate change a moral issue (Wilkinson)—the year 2002 continued to be marked by Creation Care activism, as the EEN also released a campaign titled "What Would Jesus Drive?" along with hybrid car tours throughout the southern states (Wilkinson). As Creation Care activism gained traction on a national scale, more conservative evangelicals prepared to respond, as they felt they were protecting their religion and believers from liberal temptations (Veldman et al.). In correspondence with the Christian right, Conservative Evangelicals responded in the early 2000s with their declarations that climate change was not a Christian issue or that climate denial was the Christian way (Veldman et al.) The primary catalyst for dominant Climate Dnnialist rhetoric among Evangelicals and the Christian Right was in 2006 when the EEN released the Environmental Call to Action and Southern Baptists released a 2008 document' titled "A Southern Baptist Environment and Climate Initiative" (Veldman et al.). The initiative released by

Southern Baptists was much more moderate than that of the EEN. Nonetheless, both signaled to the Christian right that they may be losing control over the Evangelical voting bloc (Veldman et al.).

In response to the growing popularity of different forms of "Creation Care," the Christian Right and Right-wing Evangelicals created what is now known as the Cornwall Alliance (Veldman et al.). The Cornwall Alliance served many purposes, but the primary purpose was to solidify the relationship between Evangelicals and the Christian right, thus guaranteeing the Christian right's control of Evangelicals (Veldman et al.). The Cornwall Alliance is "a network of evangelical Christian scholars—mostly natural scientists, economists, policy experts, theologians, philosophers, and religious leaders—dedicated to educating the public and policymakers about Biblical earth stewardship" (Cornwall Alliance). To stop the quickening spread of Creation Care sentiment in 2008, the Cornwall Alliance worked intently on spreading the rhetoric of Climate Denialism (Veldman et al.). What made the Christian Right and Evangelical leaders aligned with the Christian Right so successful was the willing support of conservative media and money (Veldman et al.); because Evangelicals were so crucial to Republican success and Republican campaigns were dependent upon climate denial, many Republicans funded actively Climate Denialist Evangelical groups (Veldman et al.)

The emergence of environmentally focused theological rhetoric and the dominance of climate-indifferent rhetoric within the American Evangelical community coevolved (Veldman et al.). The fractured ideological and rhetorical differences within the American Evangelical base continue today. The story of how Evangelicals developed such divergent rhetoric is crucial to understanding its power and longevity. This co-evolution can help to explain how we see that in

2022, the Pew Research Center reported that 34% of Evangelical Protestants felt that climate change was a severe problem, and 38% felt that it was not a serious problem (Pew).

The Christian Right

The role of the Christian Right is undoubtedly present within the story of Evangelical rhetoric and climate change. Thus, it is imperative to grasp who they are and their role in American Politics. Scholars debate the exact origin of the Christian Right; however, most agree that it has been active for at least the last 40 years (Conger). The morality-based politics historically tied to the Christian right can be seen in the Protestant fundamentalism of the early 20th century, anti-abortion movements in the 1960s, and opposition to LGBTQIA rights beginning in the 1970s (Conger). The Ideology of the Christian Right largely centers around a moral focus on the Conservative values of Protestant or Evangelical Christians; however, the Christian Right as a group does not encompass all Evangelicals or Solely Evangelicals (Conger). Protestant Fundamentalism does differ from the Christian right in that the Christian Right's agenda focuses on injecting its narratives into the American political sphere, while Protestant Fundamentalism surrounds a retreat into Christian communities and out of the American public at large (Conger). In her discussion of the Christian Right, Kimberly Conger states, "The Christian Right seeks to change society as a whole and has used political tactics in addition to group consciousness-raising and parallel institution building in its attempts to create change." (Conger). This view helps to explain how integral rhetoric and morality-based politics are to the Christian Right's agenda and how it diverges from traditional Protestantism. The widespread net of relationships constructed by the Christian Right has also been critical to their success in disseminating their agenda (Conger).

Demographics

Evangelicals have a significant impact on United States policy, and they are part of powerful interest groups like the Christian Right; however, to understand their rhetoric and why it is so impactful, it is also vital to learn who they are. In 2020, most Evangelical Protestants were over the age of 50, with only 7% of Evangelical Protestants under the age of 29 (PRRI). Evangelical Protestants represent the oldest religious group in the United States, with a median age of 56 compared to the national average of 47 (PRRI). 40% of White Evangelical Protestants have a high school diploma or less education, and 29% have graduated from college or graduate school. These proportions are similar among black protestants as well (PRRI).

Within the context of race, in 2020, 35% of African American respondents identified as Evangelical Protestant, while 23 % of White respondents reported being Evangelical (PRRI). Also noteworthy were the 28% of Native Americans who identified as Evangelical Protestants and 23 % of people who identified as multicultural (PRRI). Asian and Hispanic Americans reported the lowest preference for Evangelical Protestantism, with 10% and 14% affiliation (PRRI). Another critical demographic to understanding the story of Evangelical rhetoric is party affiliation. 29% of Christian Republicans are White Evangelical Protestants, while only 9% of White Evangelical Protestants fall into the democratic category (PRRI). Among Black Evangelicals, only 2% identify as Republican, while they make up 13% of the Christian Democrat constituency (PRRI). It is essential to understand the diversity of beliefs, races, ages, and locations when thinking about Evangelical Rhetoric and its impact on the actions of differing evangelical groups.

Not only is the American Evangelical Protestant membership quite diverse, but their beliefs and affiliations differ, as do their locations and power. White Evangelical Protestants

comprise a tremendous amount of the population in southern and lower midwestern states; however, they are more sparsely spread throughout the Pacific Northwest (PRRI). While the Black protestant and Evangelical population is still located in the South, it is more focused in the South and Southeast, particularly in Mississippi and Alabama (PRRI).

American Evangelical Permanence Rhetoric

Overview

Now that we have laid the foundational history of how these different environmental rhetorical streams emerged within the American Evangelical denomination, we must understand how these theological ideations developed and fortified themselves into the polarizing rhetoric we see today. Undoubtedly, many different narratives stem from Climate Denialism, Indifference, and Creation Care. However, for this project, I intend to focus on rhetoric that can be tied directly to how a group evaluates the quality and permanence of the planet. Within that specific rhetoric are three notable and dominant streams that are incredibly different depending on the group disseminating them.

Stewardship and Eco-Justice represent narratives used by both Creation Care Evangelicals and Climate Denialist Evangelicals. Stewardship is related to man's responsibility to care for the planet, as this responsibility stems from the dominion over nature that man was granted by God (Lowry). Eco-Justice is rooted in how climate change will impact the less fortunate and Jesus's emphasis on caring for people experiencing poverty and caring for our neighbors (Lowry).

The Rapture represents a narrative primarily used by Climate Indifferent and Denialist Groups, and it is founded on the primary argument that since the Rapture is coming, there is no need to worry about climate change (Nagle 70). In a survey of Christians and Evangelicals in the United States, "a 2010 Pew Research Center report observed that 41 percent of all respondents expressed the belief that the Second Coming "probably" or "definitely" will happen by 2050" (Barker and Bearce).

Eco Justice

The Eco-Justice rhetorical narrative maintains a steadfast focus on people and the impacts of climate change on both believers and non-believers (Lowry). These narratives gain traction within a few central Evangelical Christian values, but most centrally, it aligns with the Evangelical value of human life. Elizabeth Lowry studied the EEN's 2006 "Call To Action" document released by "Eco Evangelicals." The "Call to Action" was primarily filled with Eco-Justice rhetoric that called attention to the importance of climate change as a function of Evangelicals' duty to help the less fortunate (Lowry). Eco-Justice rhetoric has also attempted to co-opt Evangelical Pro-Life values in pursuing climate action (Bjork-James 338). This narrative allows for Creation Care activists to draw from Pro-Life values, including the protection of children or future generations and the advocacy for those who cannot advocate for themselves. For example, The Evangelical Environmental Network asserted in one of their campaigns that the battle against mercury pollution was a Pro-Life issue because mercury pollution killed innocent people (Bjork-James 338). Other narratives fall within the Eco-Justice rhetoric category in terms of Evangelical dialect. One of these Narratives is the need to protect the safe and healthy futures for future generations and children growing up today (Nagle 68). The future generations' stream of Eco-Justice rhetoric leaves room for an inevitable rapture that destroys the world. However, it asserts that it is impossible to know how many generations will live before that time, and thus, their futures must be protected first (Nagle 70). Each Eco-Justice narrative stems from an assertion that the Earth is at least permanent enough to save future generations and that God's creations, Earth, and the people on it are worth saving.

Climate Indifferent Evangelicals mobilize Eco Justice to fuel Climate Denialism by asserting that there are more Christian issues than climate change (Veldman et al). They often

present issues that align with Eco Justice like Pro Life Issues or protecting people from threats that are not climate change related (Bjork-James 338). This also widely aligns with missionary work because Climate Indifferent Eco Justice operates from a belief that humans are not inherently good but can be redeemed through conversion. This view does not look to the earth as permanent, instead it hopes to address the ills of today without looking towards the ills of an impermanent tomorrow.

Stewardship

Stewardship is deeply rooted in the Book of Genesis and the designation of Earth as God's creation; in the Creation Care sense this rhetorical stream is reliant on the idea that the Earth is undoubtedly good and at least semi-permanent. When speaking about stewardship, Katherine K. Wilkinson summarizes the belief, saying that Creation Care is "Reinterpreting the dominion passage as a call to stewardship, it exhorts Christians to recognize the sinfulness implicit in environmental destruction and the intrinsic value of divinely created nature beyond utilitarian assessments. Challenging an otherworldly religious orientation that focuses its gaze vertically to heaven at the expense of taking in a horizontal earthly view, it urges believers to move beyond a singular focus on individual salvation and to reject a material-spiritual binary that implicitly devalues the physical world." (Wilkinson). These narratives can be clearly seen in the EEN's effort to halt 1996 congressional efforts to destroy the 1973 ESA when Creation Care Activist leaders urged that the 1973 ESA was a modern-day Noah's Arch (Wilkinson). This view looks beyond the Rapture and instead uses biblical narratives to tell a story of earthy value and the value of all earthy things.

Climate Indifferent and Denialist Evangelicals have repurposed the Creation Care calls for Stewardship to serve the Denialist agenda. In the Climate Denialist context humans are

called to be stewards of the earth, however stewardship is reliant upon human production on the earth. In their view by advancing liberty, agriculture, and industry Christians are being good stewards because it is human production that makes the earth good. Climate Indifferent Evangelicals do not look to the earth as inherently good but instead only good within the context of human advancement. This conception clearly lacks the inherent goodness and permanence of the planet that Creation Care Evangelicals Stewardship rhetoric maintains.

The Rapture

It is important to note that the Rapture is central to all Evangelical belief systems; however, different conceptions of the second coming of Christ allow for the solubility of other narratives. The Rapture surrounds some apocalypse; however, a belief that the apocalypse will remake the Earth itself, associated with younger and Creation Care Evangelicals, leaves room for Creation Care narratives (Bjork-James 332). By contrast, the story of the Rapture, most associated with Climate Denialist Evangelicals, stems from the belief that the apocalypse is inevitable, that the Earth will be destroyed and the "saved" will be taken to heaven (Bjork-James 332). This conception is also based on the notion that the Earth is a place of sin that is contrasted with holy and pure heaven (Bjork-James 332).

Barker and Bearce two prominent scholars discuss how rhetoric surrounding end times impacts the incentive for Evangelicals and other Christian believers to join large-scale political and environmental campaigns. Scholars argue that the "American Paradox" is essentially the conundrum that while people who live in more developed and economically stable countries should have environmental concerns, Americans do not, and this is caused by "doctrinal beliefs regarding the end of the world" (Barker, Bearce). However, they find that evangelicals and other Christians with this belief are as likely to engage in private stewardship acts of environmental

protection, i.e., recycling, but are more apathetic to large-scale political environmentalism (Barker, Bearce).

Many Evangelicals believe earthly conditions will continually deteriorate before Christ's Rapture or second coming (Barker, Bearce). These expectations of earthy deterioration as an indicator of end times signal some Christians to welcome environmental degradation rather than work to battle it (Barker, Bearce). Barker and Bearce argue that costly political climate change action is less incentivized for Christians who subscribe to end-times beliefs because their concept of time disincentivizes policies with immediate costs and benefits that are extended far into the future (Barker, Bearce). This is associated with a conception of the planet's life expectancy that is relatively much shorter than that of people without end times beliefs (Barker, Bearce).

Churches and Social Movements

We live in a democratic society that insists that there exists a separation of church and state; however, religion often significantly impacts the decisions that many Americans make, whether it be in the world or in the voting booth. It is essential within this project's scope to demonstrate and investigate how impactful churches are on the solubility of American social movements, especially within the context of environmental protection. As the earlier sections of this thesis make clear, Evangelicals, specifically and their rhetoric have at least some level of impact on movements surrounding climate change and their solubility within those communities.

Whether that be Creation Care activists' success in mobilizing the more liberal Evangelical minority to act, or Climate Denialist Evangelicals pushing for the erasure of climate care. However, highlighting the impacts that churches, whatever the denomination, have had on the success or failure of social movements is critical to understanding the importance of Evangelical rhetoric within the American climate change debate. Mark Morrison et al. discuss

this critical connection in their article titled "Religion Does Matter for Climate Change Attitudes and Behaviors." Morrison discovered that compared to other religious groups in Australia and the US, Christians were the least likely to be active in social action against climate change (Morrison et al.). Morrison concluded that in order to get Christians engaged in climate change, there would need to be some moral element to the rhetoric calling for action (Morrison et al.). This study demonstrates how integral rhetoric is to engaging Evangelicals and other Christian denominations alike, as well as impacting what issues they engage in.

What makes churches so impactful when they get involved with social issues is their ability to mobilize and connect a broad range of people. Churches act as social divining rods within communities and are an essential place for mobilization and agenda setting (Miller Hesed et al.) Christine D. Miller Hesed et al. conducted a study that organized environmental protection of rural coastal ecosystems around churches in those areas. Using the church's already existing central social network and its agenda-setting power, Miller et al. successfully mobilized a much broader scope of the rural populations to help protect their coastal ecosystems through collaborative learning (Miller Hesed et al.). While this study remains one of only a few, it demonstrates the incredible potentiality of churches within ecological movements and the ability to harness that power. Knowing the potential that these institutions have in the context of environmental protection helps highlight the importance of understanding the rhetoric that powerful majority religious groups use surrounding climate change and the divergences within those narratives.

Discourse Analysis Methods

To understand the significance of rhetoric surrounding the quality and permanence of the planet within the debate among American Evangelicals surrounding climate change, I will do a discourse analysis of primary sources from both sides of the debate. For this project, I have been defining rhetoric as; intentional language targeted towards mobilizing a specific group of people to act in some way. This can be understood through the specific bible verses that a group or organization intentionally pulls out and interprets to suit their actionable goal, or it can reference original ideas and campaigns championed by Evangelical leaders. What makes rhetoric a key factor is that it indicates not only the dominant narratives and values but also the continued use of those narratives illuminates what specific rhetorical avenues have been most successful in mobilization.

In this case, rhetoric is used to appeal to the specific values surrounding the permanence and the quality of the planet that evangelicals have; however, it is used differently by different interest groups and those interpretations impact political decision-making.

Rhetorical Analysis is defined as "instead of going straight for the relationship between functions, values or symbols. It is... a way, among others, of considering "structures of signification" (Meynet 9). For this research project, there will be three primary "structures of signification" (Meynet 9) surrounding the quality and permanence of the planet that are essential; Stewardship, Eco-Justice, and the Rapture. The presence or absence of these "structures of signification" (Meynet 9) will be rated on a scale from one to four, indicating the reliance on each specific narrative to promote action. A one on the scale would indicate that the primary source has no references to Stewardship, Eco-Justice, or the Rapture and relies entirely on other rhetorical narratives to persuade action. A two on the scale would indicate a passing reference to

these “structures of signification” but still a heavy reliance on other narratives as tools of persuasion. A primary source with Eco-Justice, Stewardship, and the Rapture as central narratives to a push for action, but still some reliance and reference to other narratives would score a three on the scale. A four on this scale would indicate that Stewardship, Eco-Justice, or the Rapture is the driving narrative behind persuading action and that the primary source does not rely on other rhetorical narratives.

In this project, I intend to look at four primary sources from both Creation Care groups and Climate Denialist groups, specifically the EEN and the Cornwall Alliance, along with sermons from prominent Evangelical pastors. I will do a thorough content and rhetorical analysis of these sources to determine the reliance and content regarding the three "structures of signification" (Meynet 9) identified above, then add both a discussion and a rating on the previously mentioned rhetorical scale. I intend to investigate how crucial interpretations of these “structures of signification” surrounding the quality and permanence of the planet are to the rhetoric and calls to action of these Evangelical groups.

Limitations

Experience

Discourse analysis is an incredibly interpretative form of research, and I am an undergraduate researcher doing it for the first time. While I have had impeccable advisors to guide me through, I am still limited in my personal skill and resources as a researcher. Thus, while this project is still reflective of a large culmination of work and research, it is limited by my position as an unexperienced undergraduate.

Time

This project, all the research had to be fit into a relatively small amount of time, around two and a half years. During those years, I have been a full-time student, along with doing internships and working jobs. This had a largest impact on the number of sources used for the discourse analysis. Had I been less limited by time I would have wanted to use a larger sample size, so that the project could be more widely applicable. My sample size and quality were also limited by the amount of I was able to find primary sources. Thus, the Cornwall Alliance sources, many of them share the same creator, had I had more time I would have wanted a more diverse perspective.

Literature Resources

There were limited secondary sources that exist regarding this niche topic. While research surrounding the rhetoric of American Evangelicals surrounding climate change does exist, it is limited in extent. Most of the research is in a dissertation or scholarly journal context, and there are few books. While these sources proved to be incredibly impactful regarding history, and contextual understanding of biblical rhetoric, they limited my pre rhetoric analysis understanding of Evangelical rhetoric surrounding climate change.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research, while it can be impactful and offers new windows of understanding into the ways that politics happen. It is incredibly interpretative which can be limiting regarding legitimacy. I worked to remedy this by solely focusing on rating each source on a scale in my rhetoric analysis and saving in depth discussion for the discussion section. While this was tremendously helpful in keeping myself in check as a researcher and working to not infuse these ratings and opinions with my own, undoubtably they are my interpretation of

these sources. Despite my research being deeply observational, and interpretative, it does not negate the connections and power of how my research shapes the description of how politics happen in the American Evangelical climate realm.

Rhetoric Analysis

Creation Care

Source 1) "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action"

An Evangelical Call to Action was published in 2006. This source is integral to the foundation of the Creation Care movement among Evangelicals because it's one of the first documents to gain substantial traction on a national scale (Veldman et al.). When looking through this source's content I expected a heavy presence of Stewardship and Eco-Justice rhetoric calling for Evangelical believers and Christians alike to act. While this was primarily true, there is also an undeniable scientific and evidentiary foundation to the content and rhetoric of this document. In "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action," the authors used a two-pronged approach, first appealing and persuading their readers with scientific evidence, the logos of the document, then they followed up with Pathos arguments that appealed to morality, such as Stewardship and Eco-Justice. Because of the evident and apparent influence of science-based narratives, I rated this source a three out of four on the rhetorical scale. The presence of scientific arguments explains the three, but a moral rhetorical focus on Stewardship and Eco-Justice and no reference to any other rhetorical narrative outside of the quality and permanence of the planet supports a high rating.

Source 2) Recent Articles from the Evangelical Environmental Network's Website

These two articles, "EEN Applauds Cancellation of Oil and Gas Leases in Arctic Refuge," and "46,979 Pro-Life Christians Support Cleaner, Safer Vehicles" were published in 2023 on the EEN newsroom website. Both articles relied on scientific statistics to enhance the

urgency and validity of their claims. However, "EEN Applauds Cancellation of Oil and Gas Leases in Arctic Refuge," maintained a steadfast reliance on Eco Justice and Stewardship as its's sole sources of moral legitimacy and urgency. Similarly, "46,979 Pro-Life Christians Support Cleaner, Safer Vehicles" while relying on scientific statistics also solely leaned on Eco Justice for moral mobilization. The scientific elements of these articles, paired with the sole moral reliance on Eco Justice, and Stewardship, or permanence rhetoric places them at a three out of four on the rhetorical scale. Primarily because science was never used as a mobilizer to act in these sources, that role was maintained by Eco Justice and Stewardship, it was simply used as evidence of a problem.

Source 3) What Would Jesus Drive? Commercial run by the Evangelical Environmental Network.

What Would Jesus Drive? A commercial that was aired in the 2000's and accompanied an electric car tour through the southern states (Wilkinson) ranks a four on the rhetorical scale. This ranking is largely reliant the lack of even scientific narratives to support action on this cause when compared to other Creation Care sources. This source not only lacked scientific rhetoric, but also any other sources of legitimacy excluding permanence rhetoric. The only mobilizing elements utilized by What Would Jesus Drive are Eco Justice and Stewardship, earning it a four on the rhetorical scale.

Source 4) Evangelicals and Creation Care - Presentation at the Denver Seminary by Dr. Douglas Moo

The presentation by Dr Douglas Moo ranks a three on the rhetorical scale because while it is reliant on rhetoric surrounding the quality and permanence of the planet, there is an undeniable presence of scientific evidence. The primary call to action is championed by Stewardship as a central moral framework, and Eco-Justice as a secondary call to act, and the Rapture feels as though it is presented as a refutation of a counterargument. While the scientific evidence alone is not presented as a claim of necessity, it is still an undeniable function of the argument's legitimacy. Thus this source is not entirely reliant upon permanence rhetoric, but undoubtedly shaped and motivated by it.

Climate Denialist

Source 1) The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship

The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship ranks a three on the rhetorical scale due to the explicit reliance on Permanence Rhetoric, like Stewardship and Eco-Justice. However, there is an evident reliance on classical liberal principles which is deeply impactful and engrained in American conservative culture. Classical Liberal rhetoric is integrated into Stewardship almost as a supportive prong, where the classical liberalism and biblical roots of Stewardship together motivate parishioners to act. If classical liberalism was not intentionally integrated, the source might have ranked higher; however, it undoubtedly derives all moral legitimacy from Stewardship. I had hypothesized that Climate Denialist sources would focus primarily on the Rapture, instead this source illuminated that Climate Denialists instead have their own unique conception of Stewardship that they rely on to mobilize people to act.

Source 2) Two articles from the Cornwall Alliance's web page

"Your Tax Dollars at Work - Stealing Your Child's Mind" written in 2012 and "Newly Released Survey Revealing Evangelicals Most Skeptical About "Climate Change" released in 2022 two articles from the Cornwall Alliance's newsroom website offer fascinating alternatives to the use of Permanence and Quality rhetoric. Your Tax Dollars at Work - Stealing Your Child's Mind" ranks a two on the rhetorical scale primarily because while there is mention of Stewardship, the source is much more heavily reliant on anti-secular and anti-evolution rhetoric. Even though the structure indicates the anti-secular nature of this article, it presents a stark contrast to any academic or secular paper in its form, asserting its difference. The brunt of the argument relies on a denial of evolutionary teaching in schools and a combative tone regarding climate change and climate science. The only reason that this source is not ranked a one is because of the apparent reference to Stewardship and Genesis 1:28.

"Newly Released Survey Revealing Evangelicals Most Skeptical About "Climate Change" ranks a one regarding the rhetorical scale discussed in the methods section. There is barely any reference to the quality and permanence of streams of rhetoric. The only mention is a discussion of the Cornwall Alliances' impact and methods to achieve that impact, including their conceptions of Eco-Justice and Stewardship. However, this reference is not impactful enough to raise the ranking to two. The article is incredibly reliant on scientific method rhetoric, which starkly contrasts the prior newsroom article that had no scientific elements at all. If anything, this article is indicative of the shift of climate denialists from anti-science to pro-using scientific thinking against climate change.

Source 3) John MacArthur on Global Warming and Environmentalism 2009

John MacArthur's talk on Global Warming and Environmentalism was published in 2009 and ranks a three out of four on the rhetoric scale. because the primary driving moral argument behind MacArthur's calls for climate skepticism are the Rapture and Eco-Justice. These two frameworks come into play in nearly every segment of MacArthur's speech, and they often draw the most response from the audience. However, MacArthur maintains key supporting rhetorical strategy like that of scientific method, epideictic speech, and finally exordium. In the entire speech, these rhetorical strategies are simply a supporting beam to sturdy the central and encompassing floor of permanence and quality rhetoric. In many ways, the exordium; a jocular and mocking tone is used to prime the audience for MacArthur's central narratives, like the praise and blame dynamics brought throughout. The reliance upon scientific methods and anti-evolution feels more like an appeal to the audience to establish legitimacy. However, once that legitimacy has been established and the audience has been primed, the central calls to skepticism are assertions that the planet is disposable and that to help the less fortunate, we, as God-fearing citizens, must use it up.

Source 4) Episode one of "Resisting the Great Green Dragon" " The False World View of the Green Movement"

Episode one of Resisting the Great Green Dragon, a video series released by the Cornwall Alliance to enhance climate skepticism in 2010 ranks a three ouof four on the rhetoric scale. This rating is primarily based on reliance upon Eco Justice, and Stewardship as sources of moral superiority. However, there is little reliance on the Rapture. The reliance upon anti secularism is what makes this source not fully rooted within quality and permanence rhetoric, however its use felt like more of a priming technique rather than a central driving mechanism.

The primary anti-environmental message is rooted in a view of Stewardship that insists on the diminished quality and permanence of the planet, and a view of Eco Justice that is reliant upon the Earths destruction and exploitation.

Discussion Section

Many scholars have investigated the relationship between Evangelical belief and Climate Denial. However, in their investigations Creation Care and Climate Denialist Evangelicals are examined separately, or at least as separate entities. When the two groups are mentioned concurrently, many authors use the existence of Creation Care Evangelicals to negate the impact of Climate Denialist rhetoric (Gall-Maynard 129). The study of Climate Denialist rhetoric has been specifically separated from the existence of Creation Care, as much of it focuses on how the Rapture makes Evangelicals disinvest in solutions for an uncertain future on Earth (Gall-Maynard 129). The conclusions that other researchers have drawn from Evangelical rhetoric and its impacts on climate change, were undoubtedly crucial to informing my understanding. However, in some ways they failed to look at Climate Denialist, and Creation Care Evangelicals as co evolved groups, thus missing the ways in which their rhetoric is similar.

In the beginning of my rhetoric analysis, I hypothesized that rhetoric surrounding the quality and permanence of the planet would be integral to both Climate Denialist and Creation Care activists' call to action. However, because of the framing of my secondary sources, I expected that the Rapture would be the central moral foundation for the earth's impermanence and diminished quality, thus it would be favored by Climate Denialists. I further assumed that Eco-Justice and Stewardship would dominate only Creation Care sources as evidence of the earth's good quality and permanence. While doing my rhetorical analysis, I discovered that the role of permanence rhetoric within the context of this specific issue, is much more complex.

I discovered that there was no clear delineation of what rhetoric was associated or favored by what group. Instead, there was a fundamental divergence surrounding the understanding of Stewardship and its use to motivate climate action or denial. Both Climate

Denialists and Creation Care Evangelicals relied upon Eco-Justice, Stewardship, and the Rapture as commonplaces of understanding for their parishioners, readers, and audiences. However, the two groups channeled the energy from those shared commonplaces in mutually exclusive directions.

The three commonplaces of understanding that I identified, were congruent with the three streams of permanence rhetoric that I initially outlined in the beginning of my research. Eco Justice, Stewardship, and the Rapture served as moral roots, for Evangelical leaders regardless of their group. However, while the groups used the same biblical passages to channel and utilize these three commonplaces, they interpreted them differently to serve their specific rhetorical agendas. Most fundamentally Stewardship while both groups used the book of Genesis to cite its biblical legitimacy, they interpreted it in completely opposed terms. Stewardship, and a groups picture of its biblical meaning, set the tone of their interpretation of any other permanence rhetoric stream. Whether it was Creation Care Evangelicals who interpreted Stewardship as respect and protection of God's good creation. Or Climate Denialist calls to exercise biblical dominion over the earth and cultivate it with their human activity to make it good. Stewardship, and the fundamental disagreement of what it means within the context of the earth, good, bad, permanent or impermanent, helped to shape the narrative of both Climate Denialists and Creation Care Evangelicals on climate change.

To highlight the complex but critical elements of Evangelical rhetorical divergence surrounding climate change, it is critical to do an in-depth discussion of the sources that shaped my conclusions, as well as the sources and rhetoric that stemmed away from solely permanence and quality. In this discussion, I investigate these three commonplace appeals to

biblical themes and how they are channeled differently by Creation Care and Climate Denialist Evangelicals.

Creation Care Sources

Source 1

Creation Care activists interpret Stewardship within the Book of Genesis as God's call for humans to care for and protect the Earth. This was evident in each Creation Care source but most notably in source 1: "Climate Change: an Evangelical Call to Action." The Evangelical Call to Action released by the Evangelical Environmental Network in 2006 is split into five parts as if it were an academic paper. The document begins with a preamble. The preamble's content surrounds an issue discussed briefly in the history, the place of Evangelicals within public discourse, and the history of Evangelicals preaching their beliefs publicly. However, this section asserts that Evangelicals and their beliefs have entered the public sphere, and now they must ensure that Climate Change is seen as an issue for Christians and non-Christians alike.

The preamble is followed by Claim 1, titled "Human-Induced Climate Change Is Real." this section maintains a heavy rhetorical focus on logos-based argumentation by presenting three separate sources that provide evidentiary support for the reality of human-induced climate change. Firstly, they quote the documentation of the rise in global temperature documented by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and their determination that climate change is not only worsening but mainly caused by human activity, and the G8 concurrence with those determinations. The Evangelical Call to Action authors also interestingly cited the 2005 Bush administration's acknowledgment of climate change and admission that it was likely at least partly the result of human activity. The citation of a Republican President's

recognition was likely an appeal and acknowledgment that many of the people they targeted with this Call to Action are members of the Republican Party.

Claim 2, titled "The Consequences of Climate Change Will Be Significant, and Will Hit the Poor the Hardest," is an Eco-Justice argument. This claim is centered around the Eco-Justice commonplace, arguing that climate change will most immediately and intensely affect people experiencing poverty; thus, it is an issue that Evangelicals should worry about because it is their Christian duty to help those less fortunate. However, this claim does not exclude the importance of Stewardship as it includes a side note concerning the negative impact of climate change on "God's other creatures," clearly referencing the importance of Stewardship over non-human creatures. This section is straightforward and maintains the same structure as it presents scientific evidence suggesting the effects climate change will have on the poor, for example, flooding and natural disasters, followed by the moral duty of Christians to protect those people. This claim finishes with critical Biblical evidence, citing Mark 12:31, Jesus Said: "Love your neighbor as yourself." This is a common biblical anchor point for the Creation Care use of Eco-Justice (Wilkinson).

The third claim, "Christian Moral Convictions Demand Our Response to the Climate Change Problem," uses biblical references to Stewardship and Eco-Justice. This section is integral because it provides a simultaneous Logos and Pathos approach to advancing Creation Care; it presents a moral argument and logical evidence to support that Creation Care is congruent with God's wishes. The first passage pulls from Genesis 1, Psalms 24, and Colossians 1:16; it discusses how damage to God's planet is damage to God himself. This specific rhetoric is congruent mainly with Creation Care Stewardship and the necessity to protect God's creation because it is inherently good. The second passage extends the use of Eco-Justice presented in the

previous claim; it continues the narrative of one's duty to one's neighbor. The last selected passage is from the Book of Genesis, arguably the central text of the Creation Care movement. These passages from Genesis 1:26-28 surround the duty of man to be stewards of God's creation, whether it be the Earth or the non-human creatures that inhabit it.

The final claim is titled "The Need to Act Now Is Urgent. Governments, Businesses, Churches, and Individuals All Have a Role to Play in Addressing Climate Change—Starting Now." In this section, the authors highlight the issue's urgency from a scientific and moral standpoint. Initially, they present the scientific reality of climate change's effect on the planet, the necessity to decrease greenhouse gas emissions, and the companies and the efforts they are currently making. This claim is completed with Eco-Justice and Stewardship assertions that Christians, Evangelicals, and Senators must act because of their duty as stewards and to people experiencing poverty.

The conclusion begins with a pledge from the Evangelical leaders signing on to this document to teach and follow the truths cited throughout this declaration and an urge for anyone who reads it to pledge alongside them. A citation of Colossians 1:16: "For by him (Christ) all things were created: things in heaven and on earth," which is a clear nod to Stewardship and the Creation Care conception of it.

"Climate Change: an Evangelical Call to Action" rated a three out of four in my rhetoric analysis because it maintained a heavy presence of permanence rhetoric but also used scientific evidence to substantiate climate change claims. Stewardship and Eco-Justice appeared tactfully in each section of the Call to Action and were used as commonplaces that compelled people to sign the document and act. The concept of Stewardship within this document is the

most notable and critical element. In "Climate Change: an Evangelical Call to Action," Stewardship is the preservation and conservation of something inherently and biblically good.

Source 2

These two articles from the Evangelical Environmental Network's website maintain Stewardship as an integral commonplace of understanding and a source of legitimacy for Creation Care Evangelicals. The first source, "EEN Applauds Cancellation of Oil and Gas Leases in Arctic Refuge," uses Stewardship and Eco-Justice to discuss the current political decisions about the Arctic Refuge (Moerman). The Second article, "46,979 Pro-Life Christians Support Cleaner, Safer Vehicles," primarily uses Eco-Justice rhetoric to co-opt pro-life values to support environmental protection.

"EEN Applauds Cancellation of Oil and Gas Leases in Arctic Refuge" was written by the President of the Evangelical Environmental Network, Rev. Dr. Jessica Moerman, and it is primarily structured like a review. The newsletter article begins by presenting the issue of President Biden canceling the oil and gas leases in the Arctic Refuge. She then discusses the feelings of Pro-Life Christians surrounding this issue, stating, "Over 58,000 pro-life Christians" (Moerman), along with the EEN, have supported the protection of the Arctic Refuge. This immediately pulls from Eco-Justice because it cues that Evangelicals should see the protection of the planet and the human and non-human creatures on it as a Pro-Life issue. This paragraph continues onto the subject of Stewardship and the duty of Christians to be "good stewards of his majestic creation and be good neighbors to the people who call it home." (Moerman). Moerman uses statistics surrounding the creatures and people indigenous to the Arctic Refuge to highlight the necessity for Stewardship. This clearly connects to "Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to

Action," as both documents maintain Logos and Pathos elements. Then, they support that moral foundation with scientific statistics surrounding the specific issue.

"46,979 Pro-Life Christians Support Cleaner, Safer Vehicles" is written by EEN newsroom writer Lindsey Garcia. This document reads much like a blog post working to sell people on a specific issue. The structure is like that of "EEN Applauds Cancellation of Oil and Gas Leases in Arctic Refuge" as it begins with the issue surrounding pro-life support for cleaner vehicles, then shifts to statistics and discussion of morality and moral duty. This issue differs because it is not a discussion of a bill or decision actively being made surrounding the environment but, instead, an assertion that Evangelicals and Pro-Life Christians care about climate change. Like the Evangelical Call to Action and the Article discussed above, this article maintains the same statistical and scientific persuasion techniques while staying loyal to Stewardship and Eco-Justice as the central driving narratives. The presentation of climate change as a Pro-Life issue is much more present and dominant in the more recent sources when compared to the Evangelical Call to Action. This narrative is still a rhetorical stream of the central Eco-Justice narrative, as it presents that Creation Care is integral to protecting living children and future generations, implying that the Earth and the humans inhabiting it are inherently worthy of being saved and are good and somewhat permanent. This stream of Eco-Justice is a critical narrative to align with more conservative Evangelicals; it counteracts the perception that Creation Care is a liberal issue.

Both articles from the EEN Newsroom maintained scores of three in the rhetoric analysis because both primarily emphasized Eco-Justice and Stewardship. Pro-Life as a stream of Eco-Justice rhetoric is critical in these articles as it draws on the inherent value of the Earth and life on Earth. In these sources, the authors equate the innocence, goodness, and permanence

of the Earth and future generations to that of the fetuses that Pro-Life Christians seek to protect. Eco-Justice and Stewardship are critical mobilizing elements of these two sources, and they lay the foundation for an understanding of the Earth as inherently good and permanent.

Source 3

Source 3: "What would Jesus Drive" is a cleverly crafted attempt by the Evangelical Environmental Network to try and requisition more Christian Southern voters to be interested in the issue of climate change (Wilkinson). The 32-second commercial begins with an assertive and elderly-sounding man, a narrator whose voice resembles God's in many fictional movies, voicing over an image of silver-lined clouds with Jesus superimposed over them. While initially seeming silly, this commercial does have some wildly convincing elements, and it largely resembles that of a campaign ad. The commercial contains no acted-out scenarios, just imagery and the "godlike" masculine voice-over. "Love thy Neighbor as thy Self" is the initial message within the ad, along with a discussion of God's love for humanity and Earth. These narratives stem from Stewardship and Eco-Justice, repeatedly referenced throughout the EEN newsroom articles and the "Evangelical Call to Action." The repeated use of "Love thy Neighbor" in all the Creation Care sources indicates how central it is to the Eco-Justice Narrative. Time and time again, these sources use that specific biblical reference as though it is a pillar of Creation Care and Christianity as they know it.

The ad continues with a discussion that many Christians "choose" to drive SUVs and trucks that enhance climate change, damage our environment, and damage human health. The emphasis on choice in this specific source is fascinating as it appeals to the individuality of Evangelicalism (Veldman et al.). By asserting that each person driving a non-sustainable car is

making an individual choice against God's creation and Jesus's wishes, the issue becomes less collective and potentially more soluble within such an individualized religion.

An undeniably critical element to this commercial is mentioning "especially the health of our children." This specific mention is critical because it helps to illuminate a vital stream of Eco-Justice rhetoric that works to align itself with Pro-Life Christians, as was seen in the EEN newsroom articles. The voice-over discusses the danger of harmful polluting vehicles to children's lives, and simultaneously, the ad shifts to depicting a young girl using an inhaler. Other authors have placed this specific narrative about children and future generations within the Eco-Justice realm because it seeks to assert that all human life is valuable and that the Earth is permanent enough to try to protect its future inhabitants (Bjork James 338). An appeal to Pro-Life Christians is also integral because it helps to separate Creation Care from the Liberal agenda. Instead, the rhetoric used by this source aligns itself with the values of the general population while simultaneously seeking to align Creation Care with those values.

One of the narratives missing from this source that has been consistent in Other Creation Care and EEN sources is the presence of scientific supportive evidence to strengthen the moral Eco-Justice and Stewardship rhetoric. While this source asserts what is happening because of the pollution from inefficient vehicles, it does not back it up with scientific evidence or statistics. This may be the case because mainstream Christian Conservative society is often at odds with science as it is generally aligned with Liberal politics (Bjork James 339). The exclusion of scientific evidence could be an attempt to correct the common distaste for climate change policies fueled by the secular Christian divide (Bjork James 339).

The commercial finishes with an assertion that "if we love our neighbor" and "if we cherish God's creation," then we would ask, "What would Jesus Drive?". These

proclamations once again instill the foundation of individual choice rather than collective action, aligning themselves with Evangelical values and practices. Eco-Justice maintains itself as the driving rhetorical narrative; Stewardship also subtly adds to the importance of this cause.

"What Would Jesus Drive?" while today's viewers may find it silly and outdated, it is a crafty piece of rhetoric framing viewers' understanding of the Earth and Stewardship. In this source, excellent and godly Stewardship is explicitly painted as a choice to drive cleaner vehicles. While Eco-Justice maintains itself as the central driving force behind action, Stewardship is the only solution. Stewardship and being a good steward of God's creation is once again centered around protecting the goodness and permanence of both Earth and life on Earth, ensuring the safety of our neighbors and our children.

Source 4

Dr. Moo's presentation to the Denver Seminary about Creation Care follows a very academic structure. It begins with three points and presents them with an organized PowerPoint adorned with well-summarized bullet points and topical photographs. Dr. Moo begins by detailing the book he wrote with his son about Evangelicals and Creation Care. He then overviews his three main topics for the presentation: A renewed mind, wisdom, and love.

A renewed mind, the first topic showcases a series of biblical citations and verses that help to illuminate the inherency of Creation Care within the Bible. Moo explains that this section is about establishing a renewed perspective on the congruency of climate change action and Evangelical beliefs and the ability to see connections between conservation and textual biblical references (Moo). This recentering begins with retelling the biblical story, the Book of Genesis. He begins with biblical citations surrounding Stewardship rooted in the Book of Genesis and restructures the biblical story around Old Testament assertions of the Earth's goodness. The fall,

or the curse, tied to many climate denialist assertions, is inherently within the creation story that Moo dictates. However, Moo uses Biblical citations to tell the story in the context of "we are fallen stewards in God's good world." This is crucial because it links Stewardship to redemption and separates the Earth from humanity's curse. Moo also cites many references to the goodness of biodiversity lining the Old Testament, highlighting the beauty of God's human gifts.

After the Creation Story has been reframed, Moo shifts to the New Testament, specifically the second coming of Christ or what is referred to by Climate Denialist Evangelicals as the Rapture. Here, Moo outlines a "renewed" interpretation of the Rapture that insists that the second coming, instead of a destruction by fire, is a renewal of all good in the world and an addition of new creation. Moo uses biblical references and citations to highlight the validity of these claims and the Earth's permanence. This section finishes with an assertion that "our destiny is a new heaven and a new earth" and that a new earth will be made in our image. This was the first discussion of the Rapture present in any Creation Care source. While this does present a divergence from sole Stewardship and Eco-Justice, it maintains its position within the context of the rhetoric surrounding the quality and permanence of the planet.

Wisdom is the next section Moo tackles; for him, this wisdom is tangible scientific evidence of climate change and its impacts. Moo presents a series of scientific facts highlighting the impacts on "creation," non-human and human alike. For example, Moo discusses the loss of wildlife in the wildfires caused by climate change and the general science surrounding greenhouse gasses and climate change. This section was largely congruent with the rhetorical makeup of other Creation Care sources in that each presented a moral argument backed up by biblical references along with a scientific aspect dictating what is happening and the impacts that it will have on "creation."

In the last section, Moo addresses the last and final point, love, specifically "Love God" by being a good steward of his creation and "Love Others" by ensuring a healthy life for them and their children. Moo asserts the importance of caring for others within different spaces and times. He uses his grandchildren as an example of loving others throughout time, both defined and undefined; then, he presents the people of Bangladesh as an example of others in another space. These two assertions of love are critical extensions of both Stewardship and Eco-Justice. Moo's call to "Love God" by being a good steward outlines one of the base foundations of the rhetorical structure of Stewardship, and it perfectly places itself within the biblical framework. The call to "love others" stems from the biblical principle of "loving thy Neighbor," an Eco-Justice rhetorical function evident in every Creation Care source analyzed in this project.

Dr. Douglas Moo's presentation to the Denver Seminary offers essential insights into the shape of the rhetoric surrounding climate change within the Creation Care movement. In the rhetoric analysis, the presentation ranked a three out of four because of its tactical use of scientific evidence to highlight the urgency and scope of climate change. However, Moo maintains a sole moral reliance on the commonplaces of Stewardship, The Rapture, and Eco-Justice that highlight the planet's goodness, permanence, and beauty.

Climate Denialist Source Discussion

Source 1

The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship is structured in four parts; the first is a small introduction discussing the issue at hand, Environmental Stewardship, science, and the environmental threat. It is then split into three more structured parts: Our Concerns, Beliefs, and Aspirations. The section titled "Our Concerns" gives an overview of the issues related to the environment that the Cornwall Alliance feels are valid, as well as ones that they

feel are disproportionately represented and blown out of proportion. "Our Beliefs" cites the general topography of the Cornwall Alliance's beliefs. Lastly, "Our Aspirations" details the Cornwall Alliance's hopes for the future and how they hope to be the Earth's stewards. Each section illustrates the Cornwall Alliance and Climate Denialist Evangelicals' stance on Environmental Stewardship.

Our Concerns begins by discussing "Human understanding and control of natural processes" and how it is incredibly beneficial and dangerous. In their view, misconceptions of theology, with the added erroneous contributions of science, have created misunderstandings that must be addressed. The Cornwall Alliance identifies three misunderstandings, the first being that human activity is viewed as a detriment to the environment. Instead, they believe that human activity and advancement are critical to the betterment of the Earth and are themselves acts of Stewardship. This conception of Stewardship is critically different from that of Creation Care activists because it insists that the Earth is only good when humans improve it; however, Creation Care activists insist that it is inherently good without any human intervention. The second critical misunderstanding is that "nature knows best." In their view "nature knows best" removes any incentive or purpose for human Stewardship, which, in their view, is the human betterment of the planet. The final concern is that while some founded environmental concerns exist, Climate Change, especially "manmade global warming," overpopulation, and mass species extinction, are not viable concerns. The Cornwall Alliance identifies health problems caused by inadequate sanitation or mishandling of toxic waste along with primitive use of biomass for fuel and primitive agriculture and commercial practices as valid environmental concerns. They list five reasons why their concerns are valid while others are not, including the use of speculative and not fully understood facts, the widespread nature of climate change, concern in developing

countries compared to wealthy environmentalists, low and hypothetical risks, and cost-ineffective solutions. This section finishes with an assertion that focusing on issues like climate change is detrimental to all, but most specifically, people experiencing poverty. This is a clear line of Eco-Justice rhetoric.

The following section, titled "Our Beliefs," presents a list of seven core beliefs that make up the foundation of Environmental Stewardship in the eyes of the Cornwall Alliance and other Climate Indifferent and Denialist Evangelicals. First, God is the penultimate ruler and deserves love and admiration. This is an interesting passage because it is also a belief proclaimed by Creation Care Evangelicals in numerous sources. The second belief surrounds the Earth and the Cosmos as God's creations that he alone governs. They follow this by asserting that men and women, created in God's image, are the Earth's stewards. However, unlike the beliefs of Creation Care Evangelicals, this passage states that humans need freedom, and Godly Stewardship balances the needs of Humans with the divine calls of Stewardship. The Cornwall Alliance continues this list of beliefs by stating that God's law is peace at its core, and no prejudices may come before that. They then discuss human sin that brought a curse on Earth and their tendency to harm the Earth and ignore the creator. The discussion of the curse as one on Earth rather than humans bears a critical contrast to the discussion of the curse that Dr. Moo describes. However, in the sixth belief, the Cornwall alliance leaves room for the sinful people to be restored to grace through Stewardship. Lastly, the seventh and final rule details that human development is intertwined with Stewardship, meaning the best way to be stewards is to further human beings' moral, intellectual, and economic development. This overview of the Cornwall Alliance's beliefs has clear elements of Stewardship and Eco-Justice. However, they are rhetorically entirely different conceptions from the Creation Care sources. Instead of seeing Stewardship as

prioritizing love and the Earth's goodness, there is an intentional focus on human advancement and economic advancement. There is also a clear difference in the belief and use of science and scientific facts. The Cornwall Alliance uses no scientific evidence to support its claims and does not claim to believe in science, climate, or otherwise.

The final section, "Our Aspirations," contains a list of seven aspirations that the Cornwall Alliance has regarding climate change and the future of an ever-changing world. The first aspiration surrounds human beings finding their rightful place as wise stewards to all creation. Following is a hope that all people and Stewardship are guided by "objective moral principles" in place of the scientific method. They hope for a world where liberty is placed above governmental regulation of the environment and where Stewardship and private property have equal importance. Lastly, they hope for a world with widespread economic freedom and advancements in "agriculture, industry, and commerce" that decrease pollution and improve the world's economic conditions. These aspirations have clear ties to classical liberalism and its emphasis on limited government and economic freedom. However, they also have a clear focus on their definition of Stewardship, which for Climate Denialist Evangelicals is rooted in human advancement, both economic and moral.

The Cornwall Declaration on Environmental Stewardship is an incredibly critical source text when understanding Climate Denialist's rhetoric surrounding climate change. This source ranked a three out of four in the rhetoric analysis due to its rhetorical ties to classical liberal principles like free markets, and free economic development. However, it was clear that Eco-Justice and Stewardship maintained the central mobilizing role within the document. The Cornwall Alliance painted Stewardship as a means of human activity that rejuvenated a cursed planet. They asserted that the interference of that human activity would harm others, thus

mobilizing Eco-Justice to pursue their Stewardship ideal. This source relied upon a conception of Stewardship that enshrines the planet as inferior to human beings, with no inherent goodness.

Source 3

This source is a video of a lecture given to an audience of engaged listeners by John MacArthur. The audience can even be seen making enthusiastic responses to the speaker's prompts, like laughing, explicit vocal agreement, and disapproval. The video begins with discussing the EEN and their pledge to protect the environment, then discusses the speaker's views on global warming and environmentalism. John MacArthur maintains a steady and jocular mocking tone when discussing the EEN and Global warming; however, he shifts to a serious and steadfast tone when shifting toward what Christians and Evangelicals should be doing.

In discussing the EEN and their declaration on global warming, MacArthur begins by reading a few of their pledges, focusing on their pledge to protect God's good creation from human degradation. After mockingly reciting the EEN's pledges, MacArthur immediately discusses the curse and how it refutes the EEN's claim that the Earth is good. While bringing up the curse and its implications for the Earth's goodness, MacArthur draws from the Stewardship rhetoric used by the Cornwall Alliance. MacArthur asserts that the Earth is cursed; however, the only thing that can restore its goodness is human progress and dominion. In his view, dominion is extracting the pre-curse riches from the Earth, thus making it habitable and "Good." With this discussion of dominion, MacArthur draws from the legitimacy that the EEN also harnesses, that of Eco-Justice; he draws a parallel by asserting that climate action will kill millions of people because it will halt the progress of making the Earth habitable for those people. After discussing the curse, MacArthur follows with an eerie assertion that the curse is simply the beginning. This

is an apparent reference to the Rapture or the second coming and God's inevitable destruction of the Earth itself.

After beginning the lecture with a discussion of the EEN and counterclaims to their dedication to climate change, the Earth's goodness, and its impacts, MacArthur discusses the scientific foundations of climate change. This direction is unexpected in some ways because MacArthur maintains such a steadfast anti-evolution perspective. However, he dives in, citing a Cal Tech scientist's discussion of climate science as a science of "consensus" rather than actual method. In his view, the root of the scientific method is skepticism; it is working to prove something wrong rather than right. Climate Science is counterproductive because it seeks to prove that global human-induced climate change real, thus by MacArthur's definition it is not legitimate. This secondary use of mock scientific method is extremely productive as a counterclaim against the highly pro-science arguments made by the EEN and other Creation Care groups.

MacArthur then takes the argument in an Eco-Justice direction that mirrors the assertions of the Cornwall Alliance. Even if the globe is warming because of human progress, that is good for the poor, underdeveloped countries, and it is God's plan for what MacArthur calls "the disposable planet." The most meaningful assertion in this section of MacArthur's argument is his steadfast statement that "good Christians would use up this disposable planet to help the poor." This source draws from the same Eco-Justice legitimacy that Creation Care scholars use. However, there is an apparent disagreement over the actual value of Eco-Justice. In MacArthur's view, the planet is impermanent, and thus, Christians must ensure that it is used and dominated to further human progress and help the poor. This is further illustrated by his moral evidentiary anchor, Genesis 8 verse 22: God created it, and he will destroy it. This foundational

biblical support is followed with "while the earth remains, we must harvest, till..." illustrating that the planet should be used up before it is destroyed for the good of humankind.

John MacArthur's 2009 talk on global warming was one of the most informative sources regarding the divergence of Stewardship rhetoric in American Evangelical communities. This is because MacArthur's conception of Stewardship remarkably mimicked that of the one held by the Cornwall Alliance in their declaration on Environmental Stewardship in addition to his discussion of the Rapture. In MacArthur and other Climate Denialist Evangelicals' views, Biblical teachings tell them that the Earth is cursed and thus not inherently good, as well as that it is impermanent and will inevitably be destroyed.

Source 4

Resisting the Great Green Dragon is a multi-part series produced by the Cornwall Alliance discussing environmentalism. Its rhetoric continues the reliance upon Stewardship maintained by most Climate Denialist sources in this project. The first episode, "The False World View of the Green Movement," is a talk by Dr Calvin E Beisner, the national spokesman for the Cornwall Alliance. It begins with around five speakers discussing why "Resisting the Green Dragon is Necessary" in a documentary fashion. After short and quippy anecdotes from a few people, most of whom are affiliated with the Cornwall Alliance, the structure of the lecture series becomes much more formal. The series shifts to a single lecturer, Dr. Calvin E Beisner, the national spokesman of the Cornwall Alliance, and it documents an oration that he gives to a live audience. The speech begins with a personal appeal and a discussion of Beisner's first memories and how they motivated him to study economics and the environment. The structure then shifts to discourse about the contrasts between biblical values and the values of environmentalism. This

structure is impactful because first, the audience is primed by Beisner's appeal, and he establishes legitimacy, then he follows with the moral argument.

Beisner's appeal is a discussion of his first two memories from when he lived in Calcutta, India, as an infant after being born in Alabama. The first of those memories was a recollection of a beautiful red flower tree that grew in the garden of his home in Calcutta, illustrating the beauty of the Earth. The second was a recount of the walk with his nanny from his home to daycare each morning and the daily bodies of people who had died from starvation but had yet to be taken away. This second memory established the suffering that coexists with beauty on Earth. He discussed how these memories are relevant in illustrating that good Christians need to be stewards of the beauty on Earth and combat suffering. This claim draws from the moral high ground of both Eco-Justice and Stewardship rhetoric; however, it uses them very differently from that of Creation Care Evangelicals. In Beisner's view, environmental action to combat climate change directly harms both Stewardship and Eco-Justice because faithful Stewardship involves human development and benefits those less fortunate. Beisner goes so far as to say that Environmental protection harms the lives of the less fortunate and thus is against biblical teaching.

After his exordium, Beisner delves into the primary section of the lecture, the contrasting values of environmentalism and biblical teaching. He begins this with an impactful comparison, first defining Atheism, as when people believe in no god and nothing is holy, then defining pantheism, in which everything is God. This is crucial because by using semantics, Beisner describes that if everything is sacred like Creation Care Evangelicals believe, then nothing is sacred, which is the equivalent of Atheism. By creating such a cyclical relationship between what Beisner illustrates as the central values of Environmentalism to Atheism and

secularism, it directly draws on the anti-secular implicit bias built into Evangelicalism (Bjork-James), thus establishing him as the more reliable source. After establishing that looking at all things as holy is the same as seeing nothing as sacred, Beisner begins to contrast that view with biblical teaching. Here, he shows that the Earth and its creatures were made from nothing, and only humanity was made in God's image. Thus, everything is not God.

In Beisner's view, the primary issue with environmentalism stems from pantheism because it causes people to put the Earth and non-human beings above humans. Beisner illustrates this by reading aloud a few principles held by environmental leaders. These mostly surrounded the placement of Earth over human development and the necessity for stopping global climate change. He contrasted these priorities as symbolic of how Eve listened to the serpent over God and thus committed the ultimate sin. In Beisner's view, by listening and prioritizing the Earth over humanity, environmentalists were directly contradicting the word of God. Here, he quoted the Genesis passage calling for humans, who were made in the image of God, to reproduce and span the Earth, exercising their dominion over it.

Stewardship, in Beisner's view, is equivalent to dominion. In the Climate Denialist view, Stewardship, according to God, puts God first, humans second, and Earth last. Beisner holds that this perspective is best for God, the less fortunate, and the Earth.

Beisner's view of Stewardship and Eco-Justice in *Resisting the Great Green Dragon* directly mimics that of other Climate Denialist sources. Each is focused on the impermanence and the diminished quality of the Earth either in comparison to humanity or because of the curse, which directly contradicts the Stewardship narrative held by Creation Care Evangelicals. This source ranked a three out of four in the Rhetorical Analysis primarily because of its emphasis on anti-secularism. While anti-secularism undoubtedly played a role, the driving force of Eco-

Justice and Stewardship is apparent. Beisner lays out the Climate Denialist Conception of Stewardship and its divergence from that of Creation Care Evangelicals. He skillfully uses Eco-Justice Rhetoric as evidence of Stewardship, in the dominion sense's necessity in fulfilling Christian's duty to their neighbors and the less fortunate. These two conceptions act as a foundation for climate denial, based upon an understanding of the Earth as both not inherently good nor permanent.

Other Significant Rhetorical Narratives

Other rhetorical narratives emerged in each source, particularly in source 2 of the Climate Denialist sources, composed of two articles from the Cornwall Alliances web page. These sources primarily utilized anti-secular and anti-science rhetoric to mobilize people against climate change action. "Your Tax Dollars at Work - Stealing your Child's Mind" by Calvin Beisner was specifically anti-secular in form and content. This source resisted academic structure entirely, with no paragraph spacing or organization and no references. The primary content surrounds the author and the Cornwall Alliance's dismay with integrating climate science and evolutionary teaching in public schools (Beisner). While this article contains elements related to Stewardship, its primary driving force was anti-secularism and anti-science based. Anti-secularism undeniably played a role in each Climate Denialist source, as it is congruent with what Gall-Maynard predicted. Gall-Maynard discusses claims that climate apathy stems from the Evangelical secular divide rather than a rhetorical difference (Gall-Maynard 129). However, this perspective is entirely ignorant of the divide among Evangelicals themselves between Creation Care and Climate Denialist Evangelicals. If anti-secularism were the primary driving rhetorical force behind climate apathy, then we would see pro-secularism appear in competing Creation Care rhetoric; however, this pattern does not emerge. On the other hand, we see entirely mirrored

rhetoric surrounding Stewardship (the quality and permanence of the planet) emerging from both groups, showcasing an acknowledgment and manipulation of its impact by both sides.

Science, the scientific method, and its place in Christianity was another rhetorical narrative that emerged within many of these sources. Within the Climate Denialist sources, it was typically a rejection of science as a whole or of, specifically, climate science, excluding one fascinating source. In "Newly Released Survey Revealing Evangelicals Most Skeptical About "Climate Change" is Evidence of Cornwall Alliances Impact," also written by Beisner, the scientific method is used to semantically discredit the findings of a Pew survey and simultaneously requisition it as supportive of the Cornwall Alliance's methods. In this essay, Beisner uses the scientific method to explain that Pew mistakenly underestimates the scope of climate denial and politics as the most impactful cause of climate denial (Beisner). In Beisner's view, Pew needed to adequately divulge all the elements of belief in human-induced climate change with its question, and if it had, there would be more climate deniers (Beisner).

Along with this assertion, in his argument, Pew confuses causation with correlation in its estimation of politics as the most impactful factor regarding climate denial (Beisner). If Pew had correctly conducted their study, they would have found that it was the rhetorical work of the Cornwall Alliance fueling climate denial (Beisner). This weaponization of science and the scientific method in this source is like the rhetorical uses that Creation Care sources employ. Each Creation Care source used science in a very tactical way. However, it was never the central moral driving force behind the action. Science was a secondary trigger and source of legitimacy on top of a permanence and quality moral foundation. Despite science being an integral argumentative building block in many sources, it is by no means the rhetorical legitimacy source

that Stewardship and quality and permanence rhetoric serve as, thus showcasing its importance and position as an interesting paring element but not a decisive factor.

Conclusions

The relationship between Evangelical rhetoric and climate change is incredibly complex, and more research needs to be done to illuminate it further. The history of Evangelical evolution surrounding climate change makes it especially clear that Climate Denialism and Creation Care co-evolved in the 2000s (Veldman et al.). Not only did the two evolve around similar times, but the two movements seemed to provoke and escalate each other, pushing each other more into the public eye and towards more extensive action. This history made it clear that I needed to study them comparatively to understand Evangelical rhetoric and its divergences. In many ways, I was limited by this decision as there is little research that studies both Creation Care and Climate Denialist Evangelical rhetoric. However, these limitations in secondary source material made my primary source investigation even more fruitful and exciting. Instead of seeing the rhetoric emerging from the two groups as entirely opposed, when I could investigate them comparatively, it was clear that they were similar.

The most staggering takeaway for me as a researcher was how compelling these narratives can be, even as someone who does not identify as an Evangelical and is working to be objective. When watching these videos and reading these sources I was so enthralled by just how convincing and tactical rhetoric from both sides of the Evangelical climate change debate could be. Specifically, Dr. Douglas Moo's presentation to the Denver Seminary restructured the commonplace of Stewardship and the Rapture to suit Creation Care so tactfully and motivationally. In the Climate Denialist sphere, John MacArthur's use of the curse and its impact on his interpretation of Stewardship was equally mobilizing in the opposite direction. Finally,

Calvin E. Beisner's semantic equation of Pantheism with Atheism was incredibly fascinating and impactful. The other sources were undoubtedly informative to my exploration; however, I found the rhetoric in these three sources particularly strong, and each was drawing from a commonplace, Stewardship. Stewardship for me as a researcher, viewer, and reader was an incredibly strong commonplace with clear textual bible verses to highlight its importance. While each group channeled its power toward mutually exclusive goals through rhetorical interpretation, neither dampened its specific impact.

While this thesis does not prove nor explain the divergence between American Evangelicals on climate change, it does explore it through a new lens. In my research, rhetoric surrounding the quality and permanence of the planet is derived from three primary commonplaces of understanding: Eco-Justice, Stewardship, and the Rapture. These can be denoted as commonplaces of understanding because each uses foundational biblical principles of Evangelical understanding as evidence of its importance and rapport. The Rapture is associated with New Testament passages surrounding the second coming of Christ. Eco-Justice is derived from Matthew 22:37 -29: "...Love thy neighbor as thy self". Finally, the Book of Genesis is the textual foundation for Stewardship.

The passages from which these commonplaces are derived are well-known and integrated into everyday Evangelical and Christian understanding. However, Creation Care and Climate Denialist Evangelical climate change interest groups can channel the energy from these central biblical pillars to suit their mutually opposed climate goals. For Creation Care Evangelicals Eco-Justice and Stewardship are testaments to the earth's goodness and the necessity to protect it. For Climate Denialists, the same passages and commonplaces are used to legitimize Climate Denial because of the earth's diminished quality without human activity.

The heterogeneity within Evangelical belief is a testament to how unexpected factors impact politics. It would be easy, and other scholars have assumed that the presence of the Rapture as central in Evangelical belief automatically primes them for Climate Denial. However, while more research is needed, this thesis helps humanize its subjects while illuminating unexpected complexities within the realm of politics, climate change, and religion.

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