

THE LOST ENVIRONMENTALISTS: THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN
CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIANITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT
IN THE 1970S

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty
of the
North Dakota State University
of Agriculture and Applied Science

By

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS

Major Department:
History, Philosophy and Religious Studies

March 2010

Fargo, North Dakota

North Dakota State University
Graduate School

Title

"The Lost Environmentalists: The Struggle Between Conservative Christianity and the Environment in the 1970s"

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MASTER OF ARTS

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ABSTRACT

Pogue, Neall, M.A., Department of History, Philosophy and Religious Studies, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, North Dakota State University, March 2010. *The Lost Environmentalists: The Struggle Between Conservative Christianity and the Environment in the 1970s*. Major Professor: Dr. Mark Harvey.

This study examined the history of the relationship between conservative Christians and environmentalism during the 1970s. It illuminated how conservative Christians met environmental concerns in response to the Earth Day observance of 1970 and how their relationship with environmentalism evolved throughout the decade. This thesis is an aid in explaining present day conservative Christian perceptions of environmentalism on a national scale. Suggestions for future research were also offered.

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INTRODUCTION

While studying environmental history as a student at North Dakota State University, I became particularly interested in the relationship between conservative Christians and the environment. I feel this subject is important as well as intriguing since the presence of conservative Christians have been particularly felt in elections on the local and national level since 1980, and as such have had a direct influence on United States environmental policy. Some of the topics of my research include Earth Day, the energy crisis, American counterculture, and the emergence of the alliance between Christians and the Republican Party in the late 1970's.

Mark Stoll, historian of religious and environmental history, correctly observes in the introduction of his book *Protestantism, Capitalism, and Nature in America*, that religion's impact on the environment has largely gone unacknowledged within environmental history. At the same time, he expresses the importance of the subject as being the defining motive for arguments for and against U.S. environmental protection.¹ For example, in recent times nothing has reminded America of the consequences of religion more than the success of outspoken Protestant George W. Bush, whose presidential campaign victories have been, in part, attributed to Christian Evangelicals.² Therefore, groups including Evangelicals, who are defined by conservative Christian beliefs, have

¹ Mark Stoll, *Protestantism, Capitalism, and Nature In America* (University of New Mexico Press, Albuquerque, 1997), ix.

² David E. Campbell, ed., *A Matter of Faith: Religion in the 2004 Presidential Election*. (Washington D.C. Brookings Institution Press, 2007), 5.

Karl Rove is quoted saying that 14 million evangelicals turned out to vote for Bush. This book cites this group did so based primarily on their shared interest in fundamentalist Christianity which largely promotes conservative politics including those dealing with, among other issues, the environment.

been an important element in the making of national environmental policy over the last eight years. It is not any secret that the administration of George W. Bush, or the Republican platform of free enterprise for that matter, has been regarded as unfriendly to environmentalist initiatives. Likewise, orthodox Christians have traditionally not supported policies held by the modern environmental movement.

One article that describes a contemporary conservative Christian perception of environmentalism is a 1995 study titled, "Faith and the Environment," which appeared in the *American Journal of Political Science*. The authors employed quantitative evidence by way of conducting surveys to research their topic. The main purpose of their study was to investigate conservative Christian attitudes towards environmental initiatives.

The study's final analysis supports the research's initial hypothesis that conservative Christians generally hold the environmental movement in disdain. The authors found that the increase of negative feelings toward environmentalism correlated with rising fervor of conservative Christians. For example, the more conservative denominations of Pentecostals, Premillennialists, and Evangelicals held a higher percentage of negative perceptions of environmentalism than did more mainstream denominations. In addition, within conservative Christian groups, the religious leaders felt more strongly against the subject than did their parishioners. Thus, the more involved one is with conservative Christianity, the more likely one is to reject environmentalism.

Mark Stoll is one of the very few environmental historians who has examined this convoluted relationship between conservative Christians and the environment. In his book, *Protestantism, Capitalism, and Nature in America*, Stoll offers an excellent overview of the different perceptions of the environment held by Christians over the past several hundred

years. A few other historians like Roderick Nash have also touched on the theme of religion and the environment, but in similar fashion to Stoll's book. Still, neither Stoll or Nash provided a focused history of how conservative Christians dealt with the rise of modern environmentalism as a social and political issue. This topic has since become the focus of my thesis paper.

The beginning of this study centers on Earth Day 1970. Although the modern environmental movement can be traced back to watershed moments such as Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring*, the Earth Day observance launched the issue into a national movement, making its way into the world of conservative Christians. My thesis largely spans from 1970 to the end of President Reagan's first administration in 1984.

Although this thesis deals exclusively with conservative Christians primarily throughout the 1970s, it is important to maintain the perspective that this group makes up only one part of Protestants in the United States. After the publication of *Silent Spring* in 1962, many mainstream denominations such as Methodists, Congregationalists, Catholics and Episcopalians adopted environmentalism as a moral cause.³ However, environmental historian, Thomas Dunlap comments that churches did not take the environmental movement seriously until the 1980s.⁴ Roger Gottlieb's book, *A Greener Faith*, complements Dunlap's statement, providing numerous examples of contemporary

³ Robert Booth Fowler, *The Greening of Protestant Thought* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 13-16. Fowler recognizes gives a variety of examples illuminating the actions taken by mainline Christian churches in support for the environment since 1970. For example, he cites the 183rd General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church who made efforts toward "environmental renewal" in 1971. He also highlights the World Council of Churches. However, like Dunlap he finds the most work by eco-friendly religious groups has been in the last twenty to thirty years.

⁴ Thomas Dunlap, *Faith and Nature: Environmentalism as Religious Quest* (Seattle and London, University of Washington Press, 2004), 165.

international religious support for the environment. Conservative Christians, on the other hand, continued to struggle with the question of how much they should help in worldly affairs, fearing that expanding their earthly duties would compromise their basic spiritual beliefs. This latter theme is explained in greater description throughout this thesis.

To understand conservative Christians thinking on the national level, the primary sources utilized were publications designed specifically for this religious group. Two magazines in particular have been examined, *Christianity Today* and *Eternity*. Both represent mainstream discourse among conservative Christians. The writers try their best to be unbiased realizing they are dealing with issues their readers are passionate about. They adhere to conservative Christian culture and virtually all use the scriptures as the literal word of God to validate their thoughts on a variety of topics. Furthermore, *Christianity Today* and *Eternity* are excellent sources as they would have garnered the largest swath of conservative Christian readers. Some of the other publications used were the *Christian Beacon*, the *Moral Majority Report* and *Faith for the Family*. These newspapers and magazines represent the discussion among fundamentalists or the extreme right of conservative Christians and therefore are only used when reflecting this particular group.

Other primary sources employed were books written during the time period by environmental advocates or Christian leaders, which function the same as magazine articles displaying public discourse. Also utilized have been a variety of Christian educational material, speeches, interviews, and Sunday school guides.

Chapter one of this thesis deals with the fledgling relationship between the modern environmental movement and the conservative Christian community around the time of

Earth Day 1970. Chapter two examines the effect of the energy crisis and Christian stewardship during the mid-1970s. The final chapter centers on the political rise of orthodox Christianity in the late 1970s and the role such Christians felt environmentalism should play in their quest to strengthen the country.

This thesis deals with the secular and spiritual views of millions of people who are identifiable as a group while having no exact boundaries except that of the basic belief that the Bible is the literal or inspired word of God. It is common that conservative Christians disagree with one another on a great variety of issues. The publications utilized in this thesis as primary sources are plausible examples of the struggle believers had among themselves and the secular world in the pursuit of living Christian lives in the twentieth century. Therefore, the deductions made in this thesis are a broad reading of the leaders and the people within the conservative Christian community as a whole. There are exceptions to conclusions or assertions as not all congregations or individuals fit precisely under the larger labels used like that of conservative Christians or Fundamentalists.

Explanation of Terms

Today about 78 percent of citizens in the United States consider themselves “Christians.”⁵ Within this group are Catholics and different denominations of Protestants. This thesis focuses on a large category of Protestants identified as Evangelicals and Fundamentalists. As with any religion, there are varying terms and aspects of particular faiths that require some clarification in order for an outsider to more fully understand them. Therefore, it is important to explain some foundational terms before proceeding.

⁵ Frank Newport, “This Christmas, 78% of Americans Identify as Christians,” The Gallup Poll. <http://www.gallup.com/poll/124793/This-Christmas-78-Americans-Identify-Christian.aspx> (accessed Feb 14, 2010)

The terms conservative Christians and believers will be used interchangeably to identify both Evangelicals and Fundamentalists. These terms stand for those within the Protestant denomination of Christianity who are defined by the singular element that they regard the Bible as the inerrant word of God. This means they believe that the Old and New Testaments are the literal or inspired word of God.⁶ For example, they understand the universe, including the earth, to have been created by God in six twenty-four hour days as described in Genesis chapter one.

Evangelicals and Fundamentalists are extremely similar in their religious doctrine. The people who usually adhere to the Evangelical label are more comfortable communicating and dealing with those who might not necessarily subscribe to Evangelical doctrine. This group is the largest among conservative Christians today, ranging around 70 million in the U.S.⁷ Conversely, Fundamentalists are a smaller, stricter group who, unlike Evangelicals, regard themselves as separatists and disassociate themselves spiritually from those who do not share similar religious beliefs. The reasoning behind this philosophy is to keep their personal faith unimpeded and strong. They may have a difference of opinion with Evangelicals over issues such as what musical instruments are acceptable to use during church services or what bible version is preferable to use, the standard King James version or the Modern English Bible. Nevertheless, both Evangelicals and fundamentalists

⁶ Conservative Christians understand the Bible as written by the hand of men. However, they believe God directly told them what to say. The mission statement of conservative Christian churches will either state that members believe the Bible as being the literal or the inspired word of God. They usually mean the same thing, as God wrote through the authors, or God “inspired” them to write what they did. At the same time, the term “inspired” does allow some leeway for stretching interpretation.

⁷ Rebecca Leung, “The Rise of the Religious Army,” 60 Minutes, CBS News, <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/02/05/60minutes/main598218.shtml> (accessed Feb 16, 2010).

share the belief that the Bible is the literal or inspired word of God, and that for persons to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, they must be “born again.”

Being born again derives from the well-known verse John 3:16 which states: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish but have everlasting life.”⁸ This verse has been taken to mean that all humans are born into a world of sin as sinners and therefore are disconnected from God and Heaven.⁹ To become worthy enough to enter Heaven, one must believe that God sent his son, Jesus to die on the cross for the sins of humanity, and therefore this sacrifice provided humans the option to believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and that he died to wash away mankind’s sinful nature. As soon as that decision is made, the individual is then a “believer” and has been born again into God’s family. After making this choice, he or she has been “saved” as in saved from Hell, where all souls go who have not accepted Jesus as their personal savior. The ceremony of baptism is the subsequent public act symbolizing one’s choice to be born again – thus the believer is submerged underwater and lifted back out showing that the soul was once dead but now has everlasting life as promised by God.

The term of stewardship became widely used among conservative Christians to describe their relationship with the environment after Earth Day of 1970. Believers continue today to describe their caring relationship with nature as stewardship. Instead of seeing themselves on the same level with nature, conservative Christians looked to the book of Genesis that commanded believers to dominate and subdue the earth. These

⁸ John 3:16 (King James Version).

⁹ Other verses that back up this philosophy are Romans 3:23 and John 3:3 (King James Version)

commandments lent themselves to a variety of interpretations, one of which is the notion of stewardship. This term basically means, that although humans were made in God's image and are of greater importance than anything else in the world, mankind must take care of the earth because it was made by God for the long term use of humanity.

What are the demographics of conservative Christians? Conservative Christians are highly concentrated in the Southeastern region of the United States. In this area, one out of every three persons consider themselves an Evangelical. This is contrasted to one out of every ten outside the region.¹⁰ More specifically, these conservative Christians are overwhelmingly white. Some orthodox Christian churches do have interracial congregations, but it is common to have churches that cater to mostly either whites or African Americans. When it comes to voting, this is an important point to keep in mind as this thesis deals with elections in the third chapter. Evangelical African Americans have and still do steadfastly vote Democratic versus white Evangelicals who have changed political parties since the late-1970s and typically vote Republican.

¹⁰ Michael Cromartie, ed., *No Longer Exiles: The Religious New Right In American Politics* (Washington, D.C., Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1993), 92.

CHAPTER 1. EARTH DAY 1970

Lynn White's Essay

After the publication of Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* in 1962, America's ecological crisis became a popular national issue. Conservative Christians no doubt heard about this problem from the media, but it was something new and foreign that had not been part of their daily lives. For many, the declining state of the environment was something they could not physically see and sermons on Sundays did not touch upon such topics. If pastors did confront social issues, ecology, which was also referred to by its new term "the environment," was a matter that was absent from the morning service. Then in 1967, biologist and self proclaimed Christian, Lynn White Jr., published a revolutionary article titled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," which forced Christians to face the issue, since it accused them of being the culprits who had made the earth an unfit place in which to live.

White's central argument was that Christianity supported and promulgated the Western world's imagined perception of being separate from nature and having dominion over it. He employed numerous examples to back up this argument, including Judeo-Christian logic derived from Biblical scripture. He cited verses from the book of Genesis, where the first man, Adam, named all the animals, thus showing ownership of them. White continued in this vein of thought, asserting that humans were made in God's image, and thus are "gods" of the earth. He claimed that monotheistic Christianity also conflicted strongly with traditional European pagan beliefs in nature gods - each tree and body of

water was to be respected and revered as each held spirits. Therefore, cutting down trees and making nature work for humans destroyed paganism.¹¹

White contended that this disconnection between nature and humanity also explained why many Christians rejected Darwin's theory of evolution, which promoted the idea that human origins are to be found in nature – as descendants of lesser animals. White believed that although modern America might be in a post-Christian era, society continued to hold onto this Judeo-Christian mindset that mankind is separate from nature and owing to Biblical support, humans have dominion over the earth. White's article placed total blame for western ecological degradation on the shoulders of Christianity, sending religious leaders at the time scrambling for counter arguments. Responses to White were plentiful in Christian and secular science journals, whereas in mainstream conservative Christian magazines debate was visible but limited.

Editor Carl Henry of *Christianity Today* responded to White's article within the year. In his editorial column, Henry argued that a destructive attitude toward nature did not stem from the Bible. If churchgoers held that attitude, he reasoned, they must have absorbed it from secular society. Henry promoted a bifurcated biblical view of the relationship between humans and the environment; while man must respect creation, he is the apex of nature and should conform it into his service. In an attempt to exhibit an eco-friendly Christian attitude of nature, Henry cited a Thanksgiving editorial column from *Christianity Today* in 1966 that denounced pollution and waste. Henry also quoted University of Minnesota professor, Elving Anderson who acknowledged that although

¹¹ Lynn White Jr., "The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis," *Science, New Series* 155, no. 3767, (Mar. 10, 1967): 1205.

Christians may have ignored the issue of ecology, White had misunderstood the Bible and a return to nature worship might ultimately be detrimental to science.¹²

The controversy seemed to quiet down after 1967 within the wider orthodox Christian community, thus giving validity to Anderson's claim regarding Christian complacency. Besides the initial reviews of White's article, the popular Christian magazines, *Eternity* and *Christianity Today* mostly stayed silent on the issue until Earth Day 1970.

Earth Day

Earth Day was far too significant for conservative Christians to ignore the ecological crisis any longer. Over twenty million Americans joined in to observe the event on April 22, 1970. Fifth Avenue in New York City was closed to traffic as concerned activists promoted reform in hopes of one day living in a society free of pollution and waste.¹³ Even Congress recessed and "teach-ins" were held all across the United States to inform citizens what was happening to nature and what could be done about it. Christians also embraced the movement but with certain reservations.

To educate believers on the ecological crisis, three Christian books were published in 1970, *This Little Planet* edited by Michael Hamilton, *The Doomsday Book* by Gordon Rattray Taylor and *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* by Francis A. Schaeffer. The first two listed and explained the different ways humans had ruined the planet since the mid-twentieth century. *The Doomsday Book* in particular went

¹² Carl Henry, "Scientific Exploitation of Nature," *Christianity Today* XI, No 8, (Jan 20, 1967): 28.

¹³ Ronald Bailey, "Earth Day, Then and Now," *Reason* (May 2000), <http://reason.com/archives/2000/05/01/earth-day-then-and-now> (accessed Nov. 10, 2009).

into detail, describing the forms of destruction such as overpopulation, the world food problem, and the use of pollutants like DDT. In *This Little Planet*, Lynn White's conclusions were partly disputed, but some contributors such as William Pollard suggested that Christians needed to recover the element of enshrining nature the way pagans once did. In another chapter, Conrad Bonifazi, largely undermined the Christian faith treating it as a type of mythology. *This Little Planet* might have been read by orthodox Christians for its historical content but they would have likely dismissed its conclusions as the authors occasionally broke with traditional Christian teachings.

Author Francis Schaeffer, on the other hand, was a new but trusted intellectual within the most discriminating conservative Christian circles. He wrote the philosophical book *Escape and Reason* in 1968, and would go on to author groundbreaking publications throughout the 1970s, including the still widely read and watched documentary/book *How Then Should We Live*.¹⁴ In *Pollution and the Death of Man*, Schaeffer began by warning Christians about the advice from secular environmentalists that society should adopt a pagan reverence for nature or pantheism. He commented on this increasingly popular attitude by quoting Richard L. Means, professor of sociology at the College of Kalamazoo who asked: "Why not begin to find a solution to this (the ecological crisis) in the direction of Pantheism?"¹⁵ Means also referred to the adoption of eastern religions such as Zen Buddhism, which put other creatures on the same level as humans. Schaeffer, however, methodically broke down this proposal, reasoning that if man equates himself with nature,

¹⁴ As will be discussed in later chapters, Schaeffer published well received books by orthodox Christians titled, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* and *How Then Should We Live?*

¹⁵ Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man: The Christian View of Ecology* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1970), 14.

then he devalues himself into becoming “no more than the grass,”¹⁶ thus destroying the Biblically supported view that mankind is unique.

Schaeffer separated humans from nature by pointing to the same verses in Genesis that White used to condemn Christians. Man, he stated, is indeed the master of the natural world, reasoning that within God’s creation only humans were made in His image. However, Schaeffer softened this theme of domination to fit within the environmental movement. He wrote that like nature, we were created by God; therefore, in a certain sense, humans are on the same level with the rest of earth’s living things.

Schaeffer continued to point to scripture that further equated man with creation. He stated that upon the Fall of man in the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve first sinned, they separated themselves and nature from God, but God would one day redeem them both.

“And then man is divided from nature, and nature is divided from nature. So there are these multiple divisions, and in one day, when Christ comes back, there is going to be a complete healing of all of them, on the basis of the ‘blood of the Lamb.’”¹⁷

In his conclusion, Schaeffer passionately stated that Christians have had indeed lost their way along with the secular world in their relationship to the earth. He felt that man was right in ridding his house of ants, but must let them exist in the fields where they belong. Upon meeting an ant on the sidewalk, a conscientious Christian should step over it.¹⁸ He felt people could indeed cut down a tree to build a house, but it is shameful to clear-cut land to build mass housing developments without factoring in the landscape.¹⁹

¹⁶ Ibid., 32.

¹⁷ Ibid., 67.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 76.

Nature, he argued, had rights. Schaeffer even trod on shaky ground with fundamentalist readers when he nearly validated ideals of the counterculture.

We treat it (nature) with respect because God made it. When an orthodox evangelical Christian mistreats or is insensible to nature, at that point, he is more wrong than the hippie who has no real basis for his feeling for nature and yet senses that man and nature should have a relationship beyond that of spoiler and spoiled.²⁰

Schaeffer asked Christians to be what he called the “pilot plant” or a shining model for society, which practiced balanced environmental responsibility. He described this pilot plant as something that exists both on the community and individual level. He felt that Christians needed to become the ideal citizens they pride themselves as being and show the world how environmentalism ought to be practiced. He went on to warn that by ignoring the ecological crisis, Christians were not only hurting the earth, but were also missing out on an evangelistic opportunity because the younger generation had realized something must be done to save the environment, and by the church being silent, the youth were going elsewhere. Because conservative Christians had dismissed the issue, their faith had become antiquated in the twentieth century.²¹

Schaeffer hit upon a critical theme when he argued that Christians must remain relevant in the modern world and could make a great stride in this effort by adopting a unique type of environmentalism. Initially in 1970, there existed an urgency and awareness among conservative Christians who wished to do their part to tune in, albeit in a different key, to the environmental movement. This Christian method of environmentalism became increasingly referred to under the term “stewardship,” representing humanity’s

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 86.

higher status as caretakers of the earth. Schaeffer may have omitted this term in his publication, but he described it, as his book title suggests, as the Christian view of ecology.

In the spirit of Earth Day, *Eternity* magazine even devoted an entire issue to ecological awareness in its May 1970 edition with a cover photo depicting a pristine mountain lake with discarded beer cans in the forefront and a caption asking: "WHAT ARE WE DOING TO GOD'S EARTH?" The feature story in this issue was titled "When You've Seen One Beer Can you've Seen Them All," by Ron Widman who began by describing his disappointment upon seeing littered beer cans during a trip to the Yosemite Valley. Widman inquired of the reader "Does the elimination of the brown pelican from our shores through the indiscriminate use of the 'miracle insecticide' DDT reflect God's love?... Does the bite of a chain-saw into the flesh of a towering 2000-year-old redwood prove His majesty?"²² He went on to list man's sins against nature such as producing carbon monoxide, the recent fire on the Cuyahoga River, the over-use of Minnesota's Superior National Forest, and the somewhat comical occurrence of the Royal Air Force having to parachute cats into Malaysia in hopes of controlling disease carrying rodents who had gotten out of control because the indigenous cats had died due to eating DDT ridden cockroaches.²³

Widman asked Christian churches why they had not already adopted policies of ecological responsibility. He explained how the Bible supported environmental efforts and listed actions that Christians could take on the individual level such as teaching children how to be conscientious stewards by conserving resources and not polluting. He also

²² Ron Widman, "When You've Seen One Beer Can You've Seen Them All," *Eternity* 21, no. 5 (May 1970): 16.

²³ *Ibid.*

raised the issue of how economics plays a key role in environmentalism. Widman admitted in his conclusion that being ecologically responsible might cost more money, but added, "After all, we are the ones who stand to gain the most: clean air, clean water, open spaces. Why shouldn't we pay?"²⁴

Widman's article and Schaeffer's book represented a few examples of a small but increasingly positive theme expressed by the conservative Christian community due to the observance of Earth Day. The May issue of *Eternity* boasted four main articles and one editorial centering on the topic of the environment. It should be noted, however, that not all publications were so supportive of environmentalism. Like Schaeffer, many backed eco-friendly initiatives, but were skeptically cautious of the secular environmental movement mostly over the existing question of pantheism. This problem may not have been an insurmountable obstacle initially, but secular environmental activists made it so by aggravating it along with other controversial issues.

Gilbert Zicklin in his 1983 book, *Countercultural Communes: A Sociological Perspective*, emphasized, among other counterculture elements that were developing in the late 1960s, the rise in popularity of eastern religions. These faiths promoted the quality of oneness (relating to pantheism), equality among communities, and the minimizing of materialism and capitalism.²⁵ Many of the same people who began practicing these faiths were also advocates of the environmental movement. Therefore, in the eyes of conservative Christians these two became dangerously synonymous. The event that greatly heightened this dilemma for Christians and made pantheism and the environmental

²⁴ Ibid., 29.

²⁵ Gilbert Zicklin, *Countercultural Communes: A Sociological Perspective* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), 11.

movement inseparable was the publication of *The Environmental Handbook: Prepared for The first National Environmental Teach-In*. *The Environmental Handbook* was published just months before Earth Day in order to be, as the title states, the guidebook for those leading and participating in educating America on the ecological crisis. It almost served as the first official manifesto of the environmental movement.

The handbook promoted several ideas considered radical at the time to fight the problem of overpopulation. Garrett Hardin, author of the chapter titled, "The Tragedy of the Commons," condemned the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights for supporting the freedom of couples to decide the number of children they wish to have. Instead, he urged concerned citizens to support Planned Parenthood to pressure the burgeoning world population into seeing the error of their ways.²⁶ Hardin suggested that reproductive freedoms should be curbed because overpopulation was a major cause of environmental degradation.²⁷ This issue was a reoccurring theme throughout the book and was picked up again by the book's editor, Garrett De Bell who offered a number of solutions for looming environmental problems in his chapter on political action. De Bell proposed that government should offer "massive" federal aid for contraceptives as well as sex education for all levels.²⁸ This latter issue would rub conservative Christians the wrong way once it was offered in public schools and it quickly became a contested issue.

²⁶ Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," in Garrett De Bell ed. *The Environmental Handbook: Prepared for the First National Environmental Teach-In*, ed. Garrett De Bell (New York: Ballantine Books, Inc., 1970), 42. The pressure of zero population growth angered some conservative Christians who believed that it was a right to choose how many children people want.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

²⁸ Garrett De Bell ed., *The Environmental Handbook: Prepared for the First National Environmental Teach-In* (New York: Ballantine Books, Inc. 1970), 318.

Equally bothersome to believers was seeing Lynn White's 1967 essay in the handbook. Its appearance resulted in forcing the issue of Christian culpability back into popular debate while endorsing pantheism as the environmentalists' religion. The second chapter of the handbook, "The History of Our Ecological Crisis," acted as a full history of environmental destruction, which was relayed to the wider public by activists who utilized this book on Earth Day observed by 20 million Americans.

The *Environmental Handbook* as a whole presented many uncontroversial solutions and raised awareness of real ecological problems. For example, the authors urged Americans to take it upon themselves to clean up trash other irresponsible people left behind. Still, despite many mostly non-contentious suggestions, the handbook proved to be a keystone that forced conservative Christians away from the environmental movement. Perhaps De Bell was looking for a scapegoat or straw man on which Americans could place guilt for their ecological woes, or maybe he just lacked the tender social skills to promote unity. In any case, the addition of the controversial elements in the *Environmental Handbook* proved to be a defining moment when the environmental movement officially approved the rejection of the cautious but willing conservative Christian community.

The editor Harold Lindsell in the April 10 issue of *Christianity Today* became aware of this alienation of conservative Christians and directly cited the *Environmental Handbook* in his article, "Ecologism: A New Paganism." The editor was disgusted by the push to make ecology into a religion:

"Unfortunately, at least a few persons appear to have gone beyond legitimate concern for our environment to pervert the science of ecology into what might be called ecologism. These people are uninhibited in their opposition to orthodox

Christianity (as well as to such derivatives as humanism and Communism), and to replace it they urge what is essentially old-fashioned paganism.²⁹

The editor continued with his diatribe by quoting what many Christians regarded as a blasphemous passage from *The Environmental Handbook*, in which author Keith Murray of the Berkeley Ecology Center wrote:

It seems evident that there are throughout the world certain social and religious forces which have worked through history toward an ecologically and culturally enlightened state of affairs. Let these be encouraged: Gnostics, hip Marxists, Teilhard de Chardin Catholics, Druids, Taoists, Biologists, Zens, Shamans, Bushmen, American Indians, Polynesians, Anarchists, Alchemists...the list is long. All primitive cultures, all communal and ashram movements.³⁰

In the May 8, 1970 issue of *Christianity Today*, editor Lindsell once again felt compelled to address the faith controversies within environmentalism. In his article, "De-Polluting Ecology Theology," he concisely demonstrated that Christians indeed supported the environment, claiming that "Churches, schools, and seminaries played leading roles in Earth Day observances."³¹ However, throughout most of the article he contradicted pantheism while warning Christians they must not get involved with the political side of ecology as it could divide people within their faith. His unease with the secular environmental movement was evident in the introduction. "Non-biblical theologizers have thrust before us a new view of man that makes him a part, rather than lord, of the created order. Those who urge less human assertiveness over nature fail to understand (or apply)

²⁹ Harold Lindsell, "Ecologism: A New Paganism," *Christianity Today* XIV, no. 14, (April 10, 1970): 33.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

³¹ Harold Lindsell, "De-Polluting Ecology Theology," *Christianity Today* XIV, no. 16 (May 8, 1970): 25-26.

Genesis.”³² Editor Russel T. Hitt upheld these same themes in the June issue of *Eternity* magazine with his article, “The New Pantheism.” Other authors from *Moody Monthly*, *Evangelical Action*, and *Soujourners* concentrated on similar subjects in their articles on ecology throughout the rest of the decade, although not specifically alluding to the *Environmental Handbook* by name.

Conservative Christians were willing to accept partial responsibility for causing the ecological crisis, yet, they viewed the championing of pantheism in White’s and Murray’s chapters as a blatant attack on Christian monotheism. The subsequent majority of conservative Christian articles on stewardship would have to invest a considerable amount of ink explaining and working out this debate, which resulted in the dilution of any real strides for Christian environmental activity. Nevertheless, some Christian writers attempted to downplay the acrid message of *The Environmental Handbook*. In the May 8, 1970 issue of *Christianity Today*, author Harold Kuhn, mentioned that secular youth were using “bizarre forms” to prod society into adopting an eco-friendly attitude.³³ Nonetheless, he felt compelled to argue against Lynn White’s accusation that biblical scripture had traditionally called for the destruction of nature by using the terms “subdue” and “dominate.”

Separatism and Culture Crisis

Although *The Environmental Handbook* functioned as an official viewpoint of the secular environmental movement, it was the product of a much larger social chasm that existed between generations and cultures in America society. The 1960s counterculture

³² *Ibid.*, 26.

³³ Harold B. Kuhn, “Environmental Stewardship,” *Christianity Today* XIV, no. 16 (May 8, 1970): 46.

movement was a part of this perplexity, but on a deeper level rested the fact that conservative Christians were and still are today viscerally separatists, unafraid to part company with those who challenge their beliefs.

This aspect of separatism is a central element for understanding conservative Christian culture, which remained unchanged throughout the twentieth century. Examples of this trend date back to the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925, which sent fundamentalist Christians underground socially and politically.³⁴ This event was also the beginning of conservative Christians distancing themselves from mainstream universities as they believed scholars who ran these institutions were becoming too liberal and compromised traditional doctrine. In response, Bob Jones University was founded in 1927, which strongly upheld orthodox Christian beliefs.³⁵

In a similar vein, orthodox Christian churches are known for being fiercely independent. Some churches may belong to organizations like the Southern Baptist Association, but congregations can pull out of such alliances if they believe members are compromising doctrine and not living up to how the Bible directs believers to worship and

³⁴ Most publications point to the Scopes Monkey Trial as the defining moment which sent fundamentalists “underground.” However, David Beale in his book, *In Pursuit of Purity: American Fundamentalism Since 1850*, argues the separation occurred in steps. For example, he writes that the reason for fundamentalist separation in northern states was due to their failure in maintaining power in the Northern Baptist Convention (now the American Baptist Churches) during the years 1919-1922.

³⁵ The school’s history website page explains the reasoning for its existence: “Throughout his travels, Dr. Bob Jones Sr. saw students whose faith was shaken during college, and he recognized the need for a thoroughly Christian school to train America’s youth. His vision was to establish a training center for Christians from around the world that would be distinguished by its academic excellence, refined standards of behavior and opportunities to appreciate the performing and visual arts. At the same time, Dr. Jones’s intent was to make a place where Christ would be the center of all thought and conduct.”

Bob Jones University, “BJU History,” <http://www.bju.edu/welcome/who-we-are/history/> (accessed November 12, 2009).

live their lives. For example, even though the World Council of Churches (WCC) is a Protestant organization known for its humanitarian work, conservative Christian churches stoutly refuse to be associated with it because they think the WCC surrendered key elements of faith to accommodate nonbelievers. It was this strong element of separatism that encouraged Christian support of the environment to falter instead of permitting Christians to join secular world ecological efforts.

Schaeffer and others were well aware of this separatist quality and therefore had to create "stewardship," a Christian version of how believers could participate in eco-friendly initiatives. However, these arguments could not paint over what conservative Christians witnessed in all aspects of late 1960s counterculture. Leaders within the counterculture movement who strongly rejected the status quo had already taken up the mantle of environmentalism in the 1960s. Christians had a hard time fathoming how they could partake in a cause with those who, in their eyes, represented everything that was wrong with America.

Due to the rise of the counterculture, orthodox Christians began to believe that the United States and its way of life was in dire jeopardy. This sense of crisis became a major staple in conservative Christian rhetoric as pastors and writers warned of America's inevitable descent into destruction. In response, as the 1970s progressed, new conservative Christian colleges and universities were founded. In 1971, fundamentalist Jerry Falwell was instrumental in founding Liberty University, Pensacola Christian College opened its doors in 1974, and Pat Robertson took a leading role in creating Regent University in 1978. In addition, the number of independent conservative Christian elementary and secondary schools skyrocketed throughout the decade.

The May 1970 issue of *Eternity* might have been dedicated to environmentalism but it also touched on this larger issue of a generation gap in a feature story by history professor Ronald Wells. In "Where My Generation Parts Company," Wells made a similar appeal as Schaeffer for conservative Christians to close this cultural separation and become relevant in the modern day.

Wells began by outlining a brief church history praising older generations of evangelicals who were able to hold off the "onslaught" of liberal Protestants during the 1920s.³⁶ The church in the present day, he argued, had become stagnant and evangelicals were living lives steeped in hypocrisy. As a result, young believers had become disenchanted by their leaders who blindly followed the dictums of free enterprise while continuing to be insensitive towards racial inequality. "Where My Generation Parts Company" was an excellent representative of the generation gap and the opposition to the counterculture that plagued the conservative Christian community in the early 1970s.

Christianity simultaneously witnessed a severe decline in favorable public opinion. In 1957, when the *Gallup Poll* began, 69% of Americans felt that religion was increasing in influence and only 14% felt that it was declining. However, as the decade ended and the 1960s began, the two perceptions sharply switched positions. By 1970, they were almost opposing mirror images of what they once had been with 75% of Americans saying religion was losing influence and only 14% saying it was gaining.³⁷ The part religion

³⁶ Ronald Wells, "Where My Generation Parts Company," *Eternity* 21, no. 5 (May 1970): 23.

³⁷ Lydia Saad, "Americans Believe Religion is Losing Clout," *Gallup* (December 23, 2008). <http://www.gallup.com/poll/113533/Americans-Believe-Religion-Losing-Clout.aspx> (accessed October 12, 2009).

played in America had been severely altered, and both conservative Christians and greater society knew it.

During 1970, in the very conservative Christian magazine, *Evangelical Action*, writers resoundingly declared that the United States was in a culture crisis. In the winter issue, author Fred P. Thompson, Jr. waved the warning flag of this catastrophe by citing a recent essay by professor Michael Novak who listed major trouble spots in American society. Novak focused on problems such as the turmoil sparked by the Civil Rights movement, the New Left, and the counterculture, which represented a revolt against "our conventions and traditions."³⁸ Thompson continued with this diatribe placing additional guilt on regular congregation members who had lost their fervor by focusing on social problems and drifting from spiritual matters.³⁹ For Thompson, not only were the wrong type of people like liberals and hippies promoting environmental protection, but social action was less important than America's declining culture and Christian morals. Nevertheless, caring for nature was not something that was evil in itself. One of the most extreme of conservative Christian leaders, fundamentalist Pastor Carl McIntire, who headed the publication, the *Christian Beacon* acknowledged that polluted rivers needed to

³⁸ Fred P. Thompson, Jr., "Culture in Crisis," *Evangelical Action* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1970): 31.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 32. The question that lingered among conservative Christians was how much should they help in social matters. Advertisements asking to help the world's starving are peppered throughout numerous issues of *Christianity Today* and *Eternity*. The articles however, reflect the conundrum that concerned believers who did not want to compromise their spiritual fundamentals by getting tangled in earthly matters. The more conservative publicans were, the more probable they were to advocate a "back to basics" spiritual view. One excellent example is the 1975 book by Donald Bloesch titled, *The Invaded Church*, which takes on this very controversy. In his book, Bloesch's compiled a variety of new and reprinted Christian magazine articles by the author to persuade readers to focus on spiritual matters first.

be cleaned up. However, his 1971 article, "Ecology Anti-Christian," demonized pantheism and the role of large government in protecting nature.⁴⁰ Another writer of *Evangelical Action*, Harold Lindsell interestingly used environmental degradation as one example of how humans were destroying themselves. In his article fittingly titled, "Suicide Ahead?" Lindsell described a list of current crises including, Ecological Suicide, Scientific Suicide, Medical Suicide, Military Suicide, Moral Suicide, Sociological Suicide, Intellectual Suicide, and Theistic Suicide.⁴¹

In addition to this impending destruction pervasive in American society, rumors of the ecological crisis being a communist conspiracy had apparently been circulating in orthodox Christian circles. *Moody Monthly* writer James Hefley wished to put this thought to bed in his article "Christians and the Pollution Crisis." Ironically, Hefley somewhat hindered this quest by mentioning that Earth Day had been strangely held on the one-hundredth birthday observance of communist Vladimir Lenin.⁴²

Indeed, conservative Christians realized the America they knew was in a critical state and the issue of the environment played a confusing role. Although Christians never spoke out against the singular issue of protecting nature, they felt too much time was spent on social issues and they did not want to be associated with the New Left who were also environmental activists. With the increasing realization of an ailing traditional American culture, conservative Christians placed the health of the environment on the back burner and tried to make sense of a world that overwhelmed them. Therefore, Christian dialogue

⁴⁰ Carl McIntire, "Ecology Anti-Christian," *Christian Beacon* XXXV, no. 19 (June 17, 1971): 1-2

⁴¹ Harold Lindsell, "Suicide Ahead?," *Evangelical Action* 29, no. 1 (Spring 1970): 13-17.

⁴² James Hefley, "Christians and the pollution Crisis," *Moody Monthly* 71, no. 9, (September 1970): 21.

over ecology faded after 1971 as worry of new crises grew. *Evangelical Action* may have been one of the first to raise the alarm regarding cultural catastrophe, but even Billy Graham, the mainstream conservative Christian evangelist, acknowledged the declining state of affairs in America. In addition to facing cultural crises, Graham and many other Christians at the time, linked environmental problems as one sign among many of a possible impending Second Coming of Christ, otherwise known as the end of the world.⁴³

Apocalyptic Eschatology

The study of apocalyptic eschatology, also known as the Second Coming of Christ or more popularly known to secularists as the end of the world, became an especially popular topic among orthodox Christians in the 1970s. Apocalyptic eschatology was not a new cultural phenomenon among conservative Christians, but they invoked eschatological notions to bolster their stance on environmentalism.

In 1970, author Hal Lindsey increased Christian awareness of the impending end of the world with his book, *The Late Great Planet Earth*. One of the best selling nonfiction books of the decade, over 10,000,000 were in print by 1981.⁴⁴ In the introduction, Lindsey revealed how well he understood the culture and mindset of conservative Christians at the time. He first questioned readers' faith in mankind asking, "Has the academic community found the answers?"⁴⁵ He then continued to capture the attention of conservative Christian readers by highlighting the fallibility of academics and politicians. "Throughout history we have seen impressive strides taken by men who were stepping ahead of their time. We

⁴³ Billy Graham, "The Second Coming of Christ," *Eternity* 21, no. 12 (Dec 1970): 14.

⁴⁴ Hal Lindsey and C.C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), front cover of the 1981 eighty-seventh printing

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

have seen reforms advanced from ideas generated by men of vision. And yet governments change, men falter and fall,...In this book I am attempting to step aside and let the prophets speak.”⁴⁶

As was previously pointed out, conservative Christians in 1970 felt increasingly under attack by the secular world and saw the declining status of Christianity in society. In addition to the turmoil that was shaking the foundations of their religion, scientists since 1962 had been warning of increasing ecological disasters through toxic chemicals and overpopulation growth. Some Christians, confused with how to respond to these problems, were more than happy to go out and buy a copy of Lindsey’s book. To a certain degree this publication was not only educational, as it laid out a complicated outline of the future, but it also made sense of contemporary America. It set aside insecurities raised by the doomsday predictions of scientists. To conservative Christians, the Bible is the inerrant word of God, and therefore is infallible and cannot be debunked. For believers it is a constant source of comfort where sure answers can be found in any time of need, worry or confusion.

In *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Lindsey explained how current events were actually portents of the end of the world. He described how Europe would slowly become the world’s leading superpower, the United States would continue its self-destructive steady decline, and the militarily strong Soviet Union would trigger Jesus’ triumphant return when it attacked Israel. Perhaps the most important statement Lindsey made was

⁴⁶ Ibid. By using the term “prophets,” Lindsey was drawing upon the conservative Christian belief that the Bible is infallible. To these believers, the human authors of Bible were divinely inspired through the hand of God and therefore, the word of God (the Bible) trumps all conclusions and findings by mankind.

connecting Jesus' parable of the fig tree, symbolized by the new state of Israel.⁴⁷ By using this parable, Lindsey speculated, within the first generation of the foundation of Israel, Christ would return.⁴⁸

Throughout the remainder of the book, Lindsey's outlook was grim; the United States would fall like Rome due to moral decay, peace was impossible, and the United Nations would continue to be futile.⁴⁹ As Christians, he argued, we should live life to the fullest because time is short and the Lord will return soon.⁵⁰ Such predictions were welcomed by conservative Christians. The New Testament foretold they would be spared the "tribulation" or the seven years that would follow after the return of Christ who will take them to Heaven in "a twinkling of the eye."⁵¹ The people then left on earth would have to face the Anti-Christ for seven years until Christ comes a third time and restores mankind and the world back to a perfect balance where even the lamb will live side by side with the lion.⁵²

To the conservative Christian community, the Second Coming of Christ was a backup plan. Science had once dealt conservative Christians an embarrassing blow during

⁴⁷ Ibid., 53. "Now learn the parable from the fig tree: when its branch has already become tender, and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near; even so you too, when you see all these things, recognize that He is near, right at the door" Matthew 24:32,33. (New American Standard Bible).

⁴⁸ Hal Lindsey and C.C. Carlson, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1970), 53-54.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 93, 146-147, 169.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 188.

⁵¹ "In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." 1 Corinthians 16: 52 (King James Version).

⁵² "The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the Lord." Isaiah 65:25 (King James Version).

the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925. Science then again "attacked" them through Lynn White's article in 1967 and the counterculture magnified it on Earth Day in the *Environmental Handbook*. Nonetheless, conservative Christians could still rest easy knowing that man did not evolve from apes and that science had been wrong. Could science also be wrong about the ecological crisis? Could drug-ingesting hippies residing in communes be living a more beneficial lifestyle than the upright Christian who had the traditional house, car, and job? The answer might be unknown, but Christ's return was a sure thing and the possibility of it being imminent was deliciously attractive for it explained why American society had turned upside down and why the environment was dying.

Few, if any, conservative Christian pastors gave sermons regarding responsibility for the environment after 1970. Christian magazines did, for a time, sound the alarm of the ecological crisis and ask why Christians were not interested in the environmental movement. Once the initial push surrounding Earth Day died down, however, the pleas for Christian stewardship were muffled by concerns regarding spiritual renewal and moral decay.

In the January 29, 1971 issue of *Christianity Today*, writer L. Nelson Bell fed off the previous push of Christian environmentalism in his article "Ecology of the Spirit." He understood that Christians must take care of the natural world, but his argument switched focus by asking, "But what about the ecology of the spirit? What about those things that are polluting the minds, hearts and spirits of all people? The answers to these questions lie

with individual Christians and the Church.”⁵³ With this article, Bell swept the ecology of nature aside to give center stage to the shocking dissolution of morals that were infiltrating traditionally conservative Christian publications. He was in disbelief over the contributions of a guest editor of the magazine *Colloquy* who taught their daughter “Christian principles about sex but approved of the girl’s pre-marital sexual activities and drug-taking.”⁵⁴ He continued with this case by pointing to *Church and Society*, another magazine that condoned “retired persons to live together, unmarried, to provide ‘loving companionship and sexual enjoyment.’”

Bell concluded:

Today’s trend is increasingly brazen in portraying and exploiting immorality. Only the church is left to stand for purity. Only the church has the message to make men’s hearts and minds clean...If the church contributes to the spiritual pollution of our generation, “Ichabod” will be written across her portals.”⁵⁵

Another morality crisis, which would dominate Christian publications as well as church sermons, was that of homosexuality. The Christian perspectives of this issue could not only be read in their publications but also in *Time* magazine, which communicated the magnitude of concern regarding the emergence of homosexuality in greater society. In the August 23, 1971 issue of *Time*, the article titled, “Religion: The Gay Church” described how homosexuals were finding places of worship that accepted them.⁵⁶

⁵³ L. Nelson Bell, “Ecology of the Spirit,” *Christianity Today* XV, no. 9 (Jan. 29, 1971): 19.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ “Religion: The Gay Church,” *Time* (August 23, 1971)

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,877276,00.html> (accessed Oct. 15, 2009)

Before 1969, issues on ecology or the environment were largely missing from the indexes of *Christianity Today* except for the 1967 review of Lynn White's essay and a 1966 Thanksgiving editorial column. Articles having to do with the environment spiked in 1971 as a consequence of Earth Day and dwindled afterwards. It was again an important topic however, due to the first energy crisis of the 1970s. In contrast, the theme of homosexuality began slowly to increase in the early 1970s, but jumped in popularity after 1975. In the last two years of the decade, this topic surpassed even the well-worn abortion issue with 50 articles in total dedicated to the subject.

Abortion naturally became hotly contested especially after 1973 due to the monumental Supreme Court case of *Roe vs. Wade*. Abortion would rival homosexuality as the top "lighting rod" issue within Christianity throughout the decade and into the present day.⁵⁷ Thus, these controversial subjects totally eclipsed the fledgling topic of conservative Christian stewardship that arose in 1970.

Conclusion

The year of 1970 played an extremely important role in the courtship between environmentalism and conservative Christianity. Sadly, it was perhaps a romance that was doomed from the start. Followers of the rising counterculture in America had beaten Christians to the adoption of environmentalism and made it their own as a challenge to the older generation who had built the nation's post-war infrastructure and booming economy. By their visible advocacy, the counterculture was successful in equating the environmental movement with their own unique lifestyle. They underscored their ownership of the

⁵⁷ Other "lighting Rod" issues were the Equal Rights Amendment and prayer in public schools. More would be added to the list as the decade ended and Rev. Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority was formed taking on a long list of moral ills.

movement with the publication of the *Environmental Handbook*, in which they deliberately rejected conservative Christians who embodied the culture of traditional 1950s post-war America.

Conservative Christians were unabashed separatists and were accustomed to being rebuffed from society whether it was by choice or not. They would, however, still mull over what part in ecological activism they could play. It would have to be done their way under the method of stewardship, which fit them as separatists, but doing so proved too arduous and confusing. Christians were not to “worship” the environment but were told to respect it in a “dominant” way. It was not clear to them what lengths could be taken in their brand of activism. Believers did not want to be visibly confused with the secular environmental movement and they were being warned by some not to prioritize social action over spiritual renewal.

Unfortunately, almost simultaneously with the peak of Christian environmental awareness, the sirens of a cultural crisis began sounding within their community, alerting them of the approaching demise of Christian American culture. In consequence, conservative Christians would distance themselves further from secular society during the 1970s, founding separate schools and ultimately fighting back politically, investing all resources on the crucial topics including abortion and homosexuality. These issues were central in triggering the overwhelming cultural crisis for Christians in the early 1970s, ultimately leaving no room or energy for the uneasy question of what to do with environmentalism.

In addition to these setbacks, the very fact that the ecological crisis required a change in lifestyle further induced confusion on the part of believers. Besides the personal

decision of conversion, conservative Christians adhered to traditional teachings and were largely comfortable with ideas and a lifestyle that generations before had practiced. Throughout the early 1970s, Christian writers not only frequently asked why the issue of ecology was failing among believers but what was behind the refusal of adopting new eco-friendly ways of life. By the end of 1973, however, the energy crisis would ultimately force a change. This event proved to be the stimulant that resuscitated the fading subject of the environment in the lives of conservative Christians.

CHAPTER 2. ENERGY CRISIS

It was mid-October 1973, when Arab members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) protested U.S. support of Israel by cutting back on oil exports and soon halted all oil shipments to the United States. OPEC had found the Achilles heel of what was considered at the time to be the world's strongest country economically and militarily.

U.S. citizens were shocked when the energy that had always seemed plentiful and cheap became in short supply. On November 7, 1973, president Nixon addressed the populace informing them of his administration's plan to deal with the crisis. He stated that oil run power plants would be converting to use coal and the federal government and military would begin rationing fuel. Nixon assured his listeners that in the long run they would achieve energy independence from OPEC, but in the short term everyone must conserve. He called on states and officials on the local level to encourage carpooling and reduce speed limits.⁵⁸

The impact of the energy crisis left Americans feeling like they were being held hostage by the oil barons of the Middle East. Truckers however, blamed the government for mandating what they felt were unnecessary speed limits and deposed gas station rationing. In response, they organized to block traffic. As the price of gas rose and the amount allocated for each customer was set, it was common to see lines of cars at gas stations. One New York Citgo station owner had to shut down his pumps so he could get

⁵⁸ Richard Nixon "The Energy Emergency," in *The Oil Crisis of 1973-1974: A Brief History with Documents*, ed. Karen R. Merrill (Boston and New York, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007), 66-71.

mechanical work done.⁵⁹ Ohio state buildings were being kept at 68 degrees during daytime working hours.⁶⁰ The Los Angeles radio station KFWB signed up listeners for carpools and Oregon Governor Tom McCall warned if anyone violated his order prohibiting outdoor display lighting they would lose electric service.⁶¹ Almost no one in the United States was exempt from feeling the effects of the energy crisis. People naturally did not like the energy limitations, but at the same time many began to comprehend the reality of earth's finite resources while questioning American consumerism. President Nixon was one of millions including conservative Christians who began to reevaluate the latter quandary. During his November 7, 1973 speech Nixon said, "...the average American will consume as much energy in the next 7 days as most other people in the world will consume in an entire year. We have only 6 percent of the world's people in America, but we consume over 30 percent of all the energy in the world."⁶²

U.S. dependency on foreign oil had its roots in the Second World War. It was during this time that the ever-growing United States war machine became so large the East Texas oil wells could barely meet the nation's needs. In just one month of bombing runs on Japanese shipping lanes, the military used 150 million gallons of aviation fuel.⁶³ The Roosevelt administration had been aware of this shortage and looked to the Middle East to

⁵⁹ Karen R. Merrill, ed., *The Oil Crisis of 1973-1974: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston and New York, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007), 85.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 75.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁶² Richard Nixon, "The Energy Emergency," in *The Oil Crisis of 1973-1974: A Brief History with Documents*. ed. Karen R. Merrill, (Boston and New York, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007), 69.

⁶³ Karen R. Merrill, ed., *The Oil Crisis of 1973-1974: A Brief History with Documents*. (Boston and New York, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2007), 10.

fill the nation's post-war energy needs, which ultimately came to fruition providing the foundational support for the economic boom that followed World War II.

The necessity for oil increased drastically during the Eisenhower administration, when the largest interstate highway project in American history was initiated. This innovation supported massive growth in the production of the automobile and suburban housing development. This new infrastructure promoted a dependency on private cars, allowing millions of Americans to live in quiet residential neighborhoods while working in cities.

Conservative Christians, along with the rest of the American people, thoroughly embraced this new style of living. They took up residing in the suburbs, bought new cars and built new churches, some of which were so prosperous they had auditoriums constructed to hold thousands. During the 1950s and 1960s, the United States was a land of plenty in the eyes of many of its citizens. Gone were the desperate years of the Great Depression and World War II. Food and jobs were no longer in short supply. Shopping centers were built offering an endless supply of cheap packaged items and the gas for travel was only cents per gallon.⁶⁴ Although conservative Christians enjoyed this consumer lifestyle, they soon began to wonder if it was indeed "Christian" to live in this indulgent manner and the energy crisis underscored their concerns.

How Then Should We Live?

When second-guessing their American lifestyles, conservative Christians asked themselves how they could live so well when others in the world were struggling to find

⁶⁴ James Patterson, *Grand Expectations 1945-1974* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1996), 311-342.

the bare essentials. This hypocrisy troubled believers who began searching for answers. Besides consulting the Bible for solutions, they looked to early American history to provide a “back to basics model” on how real Americans should live.⁶⁵

Conservative Christians trace their history back to the Plymouth Colony founded by the Pilgrims in 1620 and the Massachusetts Bay Colony founded by Puritans in 1630. As new colonists, they could ill afford luxuries, leading them to live simplistic lives while trying to show the world the rewards of living a Godly lifestyle. They also worked to expand their foothold in North America in hopes of creating a secure and safe environment for their children who would continue the faith. It was this aspect of hard work, simple living, and the fundamental worshiping of God as instructed in the Scriptures that was venerated by conservative Christians in the 1970s.⁶⁶

In the eyes of conservative Christians, this Puritan lifestyle continued throughout American history in the moving frontier. They believed that the Puritans and later other frontier communities were up against daunting odds for survival, and therefore they worked to fulfill the Biblical commandments to “dominate,” “subdue,” and “be fruitful and multiply.” These views worked well with American capitalism and the nineteenth century vision of Manifest Destiny, but in the later twentieth century, conservative Christians began to assess the consequences of living in a post-industrial land of plenty where instead of

⁶⁵ An attitude of “back to basics” has been a major staple in orthodox Christian culture, especially among Fundamentalists. When problems arise, the Bible is consulted. The elements essential to a Christian’s faith and life are fortified in this manner, everything else is regarded as extraneous.

⁶⁶ David Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1985), 8-28.

struggling with nature they now had to conquer their own desires of taking too much from it.

The post-World War II economic boom had made the challenge to overcome the environment and a life of the bare essentials a thing of the past. With affluence in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Christians realized that capitalism had perhaps gone too far. The example of the Puritans provided an excellent illustration of how conservative Christians ought to live. The Christian schools, which were multiplying during this decade, taught students about the exemplary Puritan frontier lifestyle and frequently warned against the dangers of greed replacing the most important goal in the lives of Christians living for God.

One educational booklet titled *Our America* used by elementary Christian children in the late 1970s explained this history of the Pilgrims praising their lifestyle and morality. In a section titled "The People Who Built America," the first subheading reads "The Separatists," which described the trials and tribulations of the Pilgrims who fled persecution in Europe and ultimately colonized New England.⁶⁷ They were written to sound heroic, strong, and honest. When the narrative recounts land disputes with Native Americans, the story states that after the foundation of the colony, greedy white men came to North America who were not honest and thus it was they who cheated the Indians out of land. The question was asked, "These white men were not at all like the Pilgrims, were they?"⁶⁸

Booklets such as *Our America* gave Christians the type of education they wanted for their children, instilling the kinds of morals and life lessons they felt should be taught in

⁶⁷ Judy Hull Moore, *Our America* (Pensacola, Florida, A Beka Book Publications, 1978), 64-67.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 91.

American schools. The story of the Pilgrims expanded on this theme of greed in the 1976 publication for high school students, *The Light and the Glory: Did God have a plan for America?* by Peter Marshall and David Manuel.

One major theme of this book was to warn against greed. Christopher Columbus' shortfalls were blamed on his quest for gold instead of his original purpose which was spreading the word of God.⁶⁹ Other explorers were disgraced including Sir Walter Raleigh who, the authors state, was blinded by his craving for wealth which was the reason for the failure of the lost colony of Roanoke.⁷⁰ In contrast, the Pilgrim's Plymouth colony was successful because it was spurred on by religious freedom and the praising of God. The colonists felt their noble goal and subsequent lifestyle was rewarded by God who made the colony a bright example to the natives and the rest of the world. As the authors explain in a quote by Puritan Edward Winslow,

“...and all of them admired the goodness of our God towards us, that wrought so great a change in so short a time, showing the difference between their (the natives) conjuration and our invocation on the name of God for rain, theirs being mixed with such storms and tempests, as sometimes, instead of doing them good, it layeth the corn flat on the ground, to their prejudice, but ours in so gentle and seasonable a manner, as they never observed the like.”⁷¹

The Light and Glory described the New World as a “new Canaan,” a land where a “city upon a hill” could be built. The resources the land held were thought to have been divinely placed there for the usage of the Puritans, who were compared to the Children of

⁶⁹ Peter Marshall and David Manuel, *The Light and the Glory* (Old Tappan, New Jersey, Christian School Curriculum, 1977), 5.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

Israel in the Old Testament. Although the landscape was depicted as “savage and wild,”⁷² a land of darkness,⁷³ and a “new savage wilderness,”⁷⁴ through hard work, honest living, and the help of God, it could be tamed. The reason for this history book was not hidden. Its aim was to let contemporary conservative Christian youth know who their American ancestors were encouraging them in similar qualities of hard work, good citizenship, and Christ-like behavior. The authors commented, “It is astonishing how little we ‘Puritans’ have changed in 300 years.”⁷⁵ In the authors’ view, if one were to peel away the layers of United States society, the national core and strength still resided with the frugal and hardworking Puritans, which continued in the present day with their descendants the conservative Christians.

It is apparent conservative Christians nostalgically recalled their early American ancestors as the founders of the United States and admired them for overcoming an unforgiving environment while keeping their lives free from worldly vices including greed. A call back to simplicity was clearly heard among believers in the 1970s. As a group that is always trying to get back to the basics, many would even welcome the energy crisis as a blessing.⁷⁶

A few months before OPEC decreased imported oil, articles began to circulate throughout Christian magazines calling for a reduction in American gluttony and waste. In May of 1973, *Christianity Today* writer Addison H. Leitch wrote an article titled, “Without

⁷² Ibid., 121.

⁷³ Ibid., 146.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 191.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 151.

⁷⁶ David Shi, *The Simple Life: Plain Living and High Thinking in American Culture* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1985), 248-276.

Natural Affection.” Leitch warned Christians of the waning interest in the environment by stating that although teenagers might be in the local news for their recycling efforts, the addition of an annual 12 million cars to the roads, the endless production of plastics and the unseen consequences of food additives, overwhelmed eco-friendly efforts. Leitch called for Christians to remove themselves from this wasteful, earthly consumer culture loudly declaring, “The GNP is not God; it sounds more like the service of mammon.”⁷⁷

Another article written by a former missionary to Africa echoed Leitch’s comments in the November 1973 issue of *Eternity*. In this article, “Christ and Your Living Standard,” author John Crawford reflected upon the energy crisis. He urged Christians to re-evaluate how they spent their money. From his perspective, as someone who had lived in developing countries, he found that the international community regarded the United States as a land of waste, noting that what impressed a Chinese ambassador most about his visit to the country was the size of the garbage cans.⁷⁸ Crawford argued that cutting down on consumption was Christian and not, as some might think, “un-American.” After the energy crisis hit, this call for a cut back on wastefulness surged, bringing in tow a revitalized awareness of Christian stewardship.

In reaction to the energy crisis, the editorial, “Living Better With Less,” asked, “Was the Arab oil boycott a blessing in disguise?” The editor went on to comment, “Up until these last few months many young people in the West had never had the privilege of experiencing a shortage of anything!... Maybe the oil boycott showed us some difference

⁷⁷ Addison H. Leitch, “Without Natural Affection,” *Christianity Today* XVII, no. 16 (May 11, 1973): 50.

⁷⁸ John Crawford, “Christ and Your Living Standard,” *Eternity* 24, no. 11 (November 1973): 15.

between want and need... God often allows trouble and sorrow to come to our lives to bring us to our senses."⁷⁹ He added that the energy crisis had proved resources were indeed finite and by living with less we could live a higher quality of life. The editorial concluded by pushing Christians to take the lead in conserving resources, urging that it should be done "for the sake of an ecological turnaround and ultimately out of obedience to God the creator..."⁸⁰

Likewise, author Marvin Wilson saw the bright side of the energy crisis in his article "Smile When the Fuel Runs Low." Wilson's article is set in a black background with an illustration of a family bundled up sitting around a candle lit table smiling at one another. Wilson wrote, "But is the energy crisis just bad news? Could it also be an unexpected blessing?...families seem to be spending more time at home together with the result that highway fatalities appear to be down."⁸¹ Wilson, like many authors of the time, commented on American consumption stating that although the nation only made up one-sixth of the world's population, its citizens consumed one-third of the resources, contrasting it to thousands in Africa who "...have yet to add 'kilowatt-hour' to their vocabulary."⁸²

Other authors regarded the energy crisis as a sign of the impending apocalypse. In W. Glyn Evans article, "Are We Living in Post-America?" The United States was painted as a country, which had lost its way, living gluttonously due to a strong reliance on technology. Christians, Evans argued, needed to remove themselves from this wasteful

⁷⁹ Harold Lindsell, "Living Better With less," *Christianity Today* XVII, no. 15 (April 26, 1974): 28.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁸¹ Marvin Wilson, "Smile When the Fuel Runs Low," *Eternity* 25, no. 3 (March 1974): 15.

⁸² *Ibid.*

existence, stop squandering resources and live disciplined, frugal lives especially when thousands were dying of starvation in other parts of the world.⁸³

The conservative Christian intellectual authority Francis Schaeffer weighed in on this struggle between American conservative Christians and capitalism with his well-received 1976 book and documentary, *How Then Should We Live?* Schaeffer's primary message was that societies alienate God after adopting humanism because they have placed their faith in affluence and science. Societies which do this, he warned, faced disaster. To provide evidence for this thesis, *How Then Should We Live?* chronicled the evolution of societies since Rome, which Schaeffer used as the prime example for how perversion of logic, reason, and art was made possible by luxurious living, ultimately causing the destruction of the empire.

In *How Then Should We Live?* Schaeffer also examined the Scientific Revolution, feeling that it caused the unnatural merger of mankind and the working laws of the universe or, "the cosmic machine." As in his previous book, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, Schaeffer regarded humans as a higher life form, not beings of the temporal earth, but rather a people with immortal souls, the pinnacle of God's creation. Because scientists made humans just another part of earth, the uniqueness of man disappeared and survival of the fittest philosophies like those that produced the Holocaust could creep into the minds of men because life is cheap and expendable.⁸⁴ Schaeffer explained that by expelling God from a society, material wealth is subsequently made the idol of mankind. He wrote that in

⁸³ W. Glyn Evans, "Are We Living in Post-America?," *Eternity* 25. no. 12. (December 1974): 25.

⁸⁴ Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Should We Then Live: The Rise and Decline of Western Thought and Culture* (Old Tappan, New Jersey, Fleming H. Revell Company, 1976), 147.

the 1960s Americans asked, "Why be educated?" which was answered with, "So you can make more money a year." "Why make more money a year?" "So you can send your kids to college." If money was the only goal, he reasoned, then society had become trite and superficial like the god they created.⁸⁵ He concluded by citing the eighteenth century British historian Edward Gibbon, who found the fall of Rome was attributed to affluence, a widening gap between the rich and poor, obsession with sex, the freakishness of the arts, and an increased desire to live off the state. Schaeffer saw great parallels between Rome and contemporary America concluding, "We are back in Rome."⁸⁶

These warnings against affluence and greed by Schaeffer and others did not go unheeded, but it is understandable that many conservative Christians were confused as to how to implement change to their lifestyles. One interesting response of an *Eternity* February 1975 article described a stressed out, unhappy Christian who asked for help from editor Joe Bayly. The author of this call for assistance, Mike Yaconelli aptly titled his article, "Trapped! By Two Cars, Three Bedrooms and a Color TV." Yaconelli wrote he had attended a National Youth Workers Convention that centered on exposing the luxury ridden middle class life of Americans, leaving him to wonder how his family could lead a simpler existence. Yaconelli claimed he had tried implementing lifestyle changes but only really succeeded in hand-making some Christmas gifts and watching less television. Other than that, he said dematerializing efforts among other conservative Christians he knew had only been talked about.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 205, 206.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 227.

Additional issues he was concerned about had to do with the government which he believed used tax dollars to promote progress which displayed ungodly values.⁸⁷ He also complained about public schools and their apparent quest to secularize his children. Yoconelli asked Bayly, the editor of *Eternity*, how he should go about remedying the problems, who responded by saying they were too big for one person to do anything about. Basically, Bayly suggested one should dismiss these quandaries and as Americans we should not apologize for having wealth. He reasoned that even Jesus visited the homes of the rich, thus hinting that through association, Jesus endorsed wealthy lifestyles. Yoconelli was probably dismayed by this trivializing response, but other conservative Christians found solutions to questions like his and implemented them on both the communal and individual levels.

Taking Action

In the December 21, 1973 issue of *Christianity Today*, author Barrie Doyle gave perhaps the most telling reflection of how the energy crisis impacted conservative Christian lives through his article, "Energy Crisis: Bleakness or Blessing?" In the introduction he quoted several pastors who felt the energy crisis was resulting in more people coming to Church rather than taking the day off to participate in recreational activities. He stated that in response to President Nixon's recommendation, churches such as First Baptist Church of Van Nuys, California had formed an energy conservation committee and all the churches surveyed by *Christianity Today* reported they were doing likewise taking action by turning down thermostats below seventy degrees, imposing speed limits on church vehicles, and

⁸⁷ Mike Yaconelli, "Trapped! By Two Cars, Three Bedrooms and a Color TV," *Eternity* 26. no. 2 (February 1975): 15.

turning off unused lights.⁸⁸ The 13,000 member Thomas Road Baptist Church of Lynchburg Virginia, reported it cut gasoline consumption by 28% and thereby saved 6,000 gallons while predicting greater savings in the future.⁸⁹

Doyle continued to report that some pastors gave sermons on ethics in response to the shortages. The First Baptist Church in Dallas sent energy conservation guidelines to members and the Moody Church in Chicago issued a "manifesto" to the congregation asking for priorities in energy conservation. Pastor Robert Schuller of Garden Grove Community Church in Garden Grove, California was quoted saying, "I believe America is shot full of waste. We're an undisciplined and profligate people. We waste gas, money and time."⁹⁰

In the same issue, the magazine's editor offered ideas on how churches could reduce their consumption of the nation's depleted energy resources. He urged congregation members to walk to church and begin holding services in nearby homes instead of distant churches. Neighbors should organize carpools while kindly encouraging each other to shut off lights which might be annoying, but would be a better alternative than government mandated controls.

In addition to the actions described in the December 21st edition of *Christianity Today*, an organization named The Christian Stewardship Council was formed in 1975, which produced "A Code of Ethical Pursuit." The goal of this committee was to help conservative Christians sort out "worthy evangelical enterprises from those that were

⁸⁸ Barrie Doyle, "Energy Crisis Bleakness or Blessing?," *Christianity Today* XVIII, no. 6 (December 21, 1973): 33.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 34.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

“financially negligent and exploitative.”⁹¹ This group apparently was only short lived, but it does show a concerted effort to change lifestyles and cut down on waste. These communal efforts among conservative Christians seem to have been ephemeral or at least something that did not stay in the headlines for long. During most of the 1970s, the bulk of the efforts to cut back on energy consumption were really left up to individuals.

Eternity magazine's April 1979 issue featured an article examining how a cross section of their readers had been cutting back on uses of resources allowing them to save money as well as promoting the correct Christian lifestyle of simplicity. One of the seven contributors, Lois Ottaway, a news service manager wrote, “Realizing God's intense interest in justice and the poor makes me uneasy participating in the materialism which surrounds me...My goal is to develop an attitude of resistance, recycle and responsibility.”⁹² Ottaway's view is reflected by the other contributors and each explained what steps they had taken as suggestions for others to do the same. The tips were simple but effective. For example homemaker and writer Kathryn Lindskoog shared how, “Years ago we cut out barbers, beauty parlors, much refined foods and most deserts...I save used wrapping paper and ribbons and use them over and over.” Keith and Gladys Hunts state, “‘No waste’ is a family policy. Concerned about energy, we choose cars that give good gas mileage. Responsible for a major Inter-Varsity Training Center, we use solar heating and wood-burning stoves where feasible. The list could go on.”⁹³

⁹¹ Harold Lindsell, “Waste as a Wrong,” *Christianity Today* XIX, no. 14 (April 11, 1975): 26.

⁹² Suzi Crane, “Can You Live Simply in North America?: A Cross Section of Readers Tell How They Cut Back” *Eternity* 30, no. 4 (April 1979): 20.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 22.

Writer David Moberg used a *Christianity Today* Gallup poll to show the level of social awareness among conservative Christians. When it came to the energy crisis and stewardship, Moberg reported that besides expressing a greater desire to help the poor, Evangelicals also have "a higher level of consciousness about the energy crisis and are more aware of what they can do about it personally."⁹⁴

In the article "Saving Energy Dollars by Design," author Nancy Barcus explained how congregations should go about building a church in the 1980s by implementing energy saving innovations. "It costs money, of course," she wrote, "to get both the best design and energy efficiency - but it is an expenditure well worth it to those concerned with Christian stewardship. A building erected in 1980 can be three times as efficient as one constructed 10 years ago."⁹⁵ In the same issue, one church's unique energy saving invention was featured which saved them 40% of their annual fuel consumption. This was accomplished by constructing solar panels out of halved beer and soda cans. The article states that after others found out about this method, the church received 11,000 inquiries regarding their solar panels and the plans were being sold for \$1.00 to interested parties.⁹⁶ Similar actions and tips were explained in length in the 1979 book, *The Energy-efficient Church* by Douglas Hoffman.

Bible seminary professor, Loren Wilkinson followed this theme encouraging others in energy efficiency and ecology with his book published in 1980, *Earth Keeping:*

⁹⁴ David Moberg, "Do The Properly Pious Really Care?," *Christianity Today* XXIV, no. 16 (September 19, 1980): 26.

⁹⁵ Nancy Barcus, "Saving Energy Dollars by Design," *Christianity Today* XXIV, no 14 (August 8, 1980): 20.

⁹⁶ James Reapsome, "The Pastor's 'Beer Can Boiler,'" *Christianity Today* XXIV, no. 14 (August 8, 1980): 23.

Christian Stewardship of Natural Resources. Wilkinson recounted the history of Christianity's traditional view of nature, which he argued had mostly been one of domination, thus, validating Lynn White's 1967 article. He then explained how Christians must change this view and embrace a lifestyle of necessities instead of luxury. He strongly advocated the sharing of resources so that all may live reasonably without want. This last theme spawned accusations from critics who felt he was promoting a form of communism, an issue that quietly plagued the conservative Christian relationship with the environmental movement throughout the 1970s.⁹⁷

Communism

After the end of World War II, conservative Christians became increasingly fearful of Soviet communism. As Russia expanded and grew into the U.S.S.R, the domino theory became a terrifyingly possible reality in the minds of conservative Christians. They were not just concerned about national security, but the consequences that a possible Russian take over would force them to give up their first Amendment rights of freedom of religion. American conservative Christians regarded communist Russia as a tool of Satan as it exercised control over public political expression, enterprise, and worst of all, rejected religion trivializing it as the opium of the people. As the environmental movement gained steam throughout the 1970s, conservative Christians began to connect it with communism, feeling the two shared a few strikingly similar traits.

Communism, being a system of wealth distribution, sounded to conservatives dangerously close to the ideas advocated by the environmental movement, which had frequently condemned American capitalism as a primary cause for the destruction of

⁹⁷ Loren Wilkinson, telephone interview by author, (November 2, 2009).

nature. As mentioned in chapter one, a quiet rumor existed among conservative Christians surrounding Earth Day 1970, that accused the environmental movement as being a communist conspiracy.

The environmental movement's main strategy for protecting ecology fundamentally called for larger government involvement, leading conservative Christians to liken it with communism. Although Christians were indeed cutting back on their consumerism and trying to be good stewards of the earth, any initiative they took was by their own volition. In contrast to supporters of the environmental movement, orthodox Christians encouraged individual efforts to help the earth, whereas environmentalists lobbied for government involvement to solve ecological problems.

In response to Earth Day 1970, President Nixon signed a series of watershed environmental acts still unmatched by any other administration. During his presidency Nixon established the Environmental Protection Agency and signed off on the Clean Air and Water Act, Endangered Species Act, Fisheries Conservation and Management Act, and the Safe Drinking Water Act among others. Conservative Christians who did support stewardship never called for this increase in government control over the environment, making this method of change one that conservative Christians have steered away from with the exception of the abortion issue. In addition to these similarities, the singular threat of communism simply took precedence over ecology in the worldview of many conservative Christians.

The mainstream conservative Christian magazine, *Christianity Today* kept readers up to date and educated them regarding the dangers of communism throughout the 1970s, with twenty-six articles throughout the decade. The much more extreme conservative

Christian publication, *The Christian Beacon*, led by Rev. Carl McIntire, declared war on both communism and the American counterculture as he believed both were trying to undermine Christianity and United States strength.

Like other conservative Christians in the late 1960s and 1970s, he perceived American society in a state of crisis, and it was orthodox Christians, the descendents of the Puritans, who could save it from destruction. The examples of this viewpoint were pervasive throughout *The Christian Beacon*. The most colorful were political cartoons. One illustration for example, in the May 14, 1970 issue, portrayed how the peace symbol was related to the communist sickle and hammer and the counterculture's protesting gesture of the fist in the air was actually an import from the Soviet Union.⁹⁸

Through the use of *The Christian Beacon*, McIntire was instrumental in organizing Vietnam victory rallies in Washington D.C. and state capitols. One advertisement for a rally in *The Christian Beacon* declared, "Your presence is necessary. Call for the immediate release of the prisoners of war in North Vietnam. Join with patriots in support of our boys in Vietnam. Demand complete victory in Vietnam over the Communist enemy. AMERICA, AWAKE!"⁹⁹ McIntire would report on these rallies and remark that they had showings of thousands. One such rally on April 4, 1970 boasted 50,000 marchers although they had expected 100,000.¹⁰⁰ During this march, *Christianity Today* quoted McIntire as saying, "One of the reasons why I'm in this fight is to keep the doors of my church open.

⁹⁸ "Peace Symbol," cartoon reproduced from the *Manchester New Hampshire Union Leader*, Friday, November 14, 1969 and "Imported," cartoon photographically reproduced from the *Nashville Banner*. Both reproduced in the *Christian Beacon* XXXV, no. 14 (May 14, 1970): 7.

⁹⁹ Carl McIntire, "Victory Rally," *Christian Beacon* XXXV, no. 13 (May 7, 1970): 5.

¹⁰⁰ William Willoughby. "Carl McIntire's Victory: 'In This Sign Conquer.'" *Christianity Today* XIV, no. 15 (April 24, 1970): 35.

There's not a single church in Communist China open now... That's what will happen in this country if they take over."¹⁰¹ Mainstream or extreme conservative Christians never held any pro-environmental or stewardship rallies. It was something that was dealt with quietly by individuals. Communism on the other hand, seemed to believers, a much more critical issue that could energize them into public action.

It is interesting to note that conservative Christians paradoxically backed a powerful governmental controlled military while disagreeing with federally sponsored environmental protection. These two topics are easily differentiated by conservative Christians, since their basic goal as is described in depth in chapter three, was the strengthening of the United States. As mentioned, communism was a major threat along with the perceived cultural crisis of the late 1960s and therefore, secondary issues like environmentalism could be addressed at a later time. What was crucial was making sure communism would not over take the United States and to ensure this, a powerful defense was supported.¹⁰² In addition to this reasoning, environmental controls were usually sought by the environmental movement on the federal level, thus, restricting businesses and individuals from using natural resources. In the eyes of conservative Christians, this method limited their freedom as citizens. In contrast, a large military did not keep them from entrepreneurial ventures and instead provided protection for their way of life. The themes of small government with an increased military became greater as the decade came to a

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Robert Jewett, *Mission and Menace: Four Centuries of American Religious Zeal* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2008), 263.

close and were embraced by presidential candidate Ronald Reagan, who in consequence picked up conservative Christian supporters.

Conclusion

Until the twentieth century, conservative Christian doctrine and lifestyle could be considered prevalent in mainstream American culture. As the United States population began to grow in numbers and diversity, conservative Christians began to feel a change. Traditional Christian universities like Princeton began to distance themselves from established Christian doctrine due to an increase in different faiths and the acceptance of Darwinism by the scientific community. Along with this separation, a fear of communism and a crisis in American morality developed in the later 1960s and 1970s.

The energy crisis in 1973 rejuvenated the idea of stewardship within the conservative Christian community. It forced them to join the rest of the United States in conserving resources and to question their roles as American consumers. Believers began to push for a "back to basics" lifestyle that reflected a purified existence between themselves and nature, trying to return to subsistence living similar to early colonists. It should be remembered that this new awareness among conservative Christians was not triggered by love for the environment, but rather in response to the high costs of energy and not wanting to be seen as living lives of hypocrisy. Their new goals, however, were dulled by the perceived threat of communism that likewise argued against the personal accumulation of wealth. Even with this in mind, conservative Christians still tried to simplify their lives using the example of the Puritans who they likened to themselves— as a separate, chosen group trying to live a Christ-like lifestyle in a broken world.

The article "Trapped" by the confused Yoconelli deftly delineates problems conservative Christians had with their lifestyles and promoted their wish to be further separated from society. Orthodox Christians did not want their tax dollars being used to fund things they found immoral, and the sharp increase in Christian schools reflected their intense desire for an education that corresponded with their beliefs. Throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, conservative Christian articles consistently revealed a feeling that the government was trying to infringe on their lifestyles. One major dispute that arose in the later 1970s was over the belief that the IRS was trying to negate the tax-exempt status Christian schools enjoyed as religious institutions. Numerous articles vilified the United States government as controlled by liberals who were out to get them, which increased their solidified conviction that a suitable government should be very small. It was this mindset that further reduced any attractiveness of the environmental movement and only increased its similarities to communism.

It was the mainstream of conservative Christians who were doing most of the work in urging others to live basic lives and adopt stewardship of the earth. They were open to simplifying their lives and appeared not to have been too worried about living "un-American" lifestyles. Their efforts would however, be overshadowed in the later 1970s when the more extreme right American conservative Christians began to reattach to mainstream American life by breaking into politics in an attempt to "retake" or "take back" the United States. With this political move, those affiliated with the ideology promoted in publications like *The Christian Beacon*, *Evangelical Action*, and *Faith For the Family* became the face of conservative Christians to the rest of America. This jockeying for

political power, as a push mostly by fundamentalists, left Christian stewardship and their overall perception of the environmental movement in an interesting and unique situation.

CHAPTER 3. THE LAST BASTION OF REAL AMERICA

The string of cultural changes, movements, and causes that made up social upheaval of the 1960s did not fail to exacerbate the conservative Christian community, igniting a reaction particularly among the group's extreme right. Perhaps this subgroup had always had something to complain about, but the rapid changes during this period had them fuming. They attended victory rallies supporting the war in Vietnam wearing suits and ties and the young men sported unfashionably short hair. Christian colleges like Shelton, founded by Pastor Carl McIntire, advertised their schools as safe, patriotic institutions. One common advertisement for Shelton in 1970 read, "HAD ENOUGH? SO HAS ANDREA! (Andrea was the student in the ad) She's had enough of Communist propaganda at oldstate college. She's had enough of foul mouthed freakouts who sneer at Christian virtue. She's had enough of her college closing every time a dissident blows his nose."¹⁰³ When bellbottoms became so common that straight-legged trousers could not be found at retail stores, some churches organized sewing groups to taper the legs.

As society changed, the extreme right looked to the government for protection thinking they were fighting for political power with malignant interests. Carl McIntire's newspaper the *Christian Beacon* commonly cited how liberals, communists, and the counterculture were trying to dissolve family values on the local and national levels. Mainstream conservative Christians felt something needed to be done.

Evangelist Billy Graham was the first among conservative Christian leaders to seek change by supporting Christian friendly politicians. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s he endorsed two presidential candidates, none of which proved successful in fighting for the

¹⁰³ Advertisement, *Christian Beacon* XXXV, no. 14 (May 14, 1970): 8.

plight of believers including Barry Goldwater (1964) and Richard Nixon (1968). During the election of 1976, Graham stayed silent, but other conservative Christians backed Jimmy Carter.

Of these three candidates, Jimmy Carter had the greatest impact among conservative Christians. He helped legitimize this large but politically quiet religious group as a potent voting demographic that could effect later elections on a greater scale. After Carter told reporters he was "born again," secular America scrambled for a definition, but this label was something conservative Christians understood, resulting in many going to polling stations to vote for one of their own.¹⁰⁴ With the help of Christians, a devout believer was finally in the White House, but it was a relationship that was to be short lived. By not specifically defending traditional Christian morals, Carter's administration spurred the creation of a highly organized, right wing political advocate group who opposed liberal platforms including environmental protection.

President Carter wholeheartedly tried to present himself as a conservationist, aware of the nation's energy shortages. In accordance with other conservative Christians, Carter's faith played a central reason for his rejection of American affluence and consumption. He strove to be a role model exemplifying how a good patriotic American should live by embracing a simplistic lifestyle. In promoting this image, he sold the presidential yacht, *The Sequoia*, turned down the White House thermostats, wore sweaters

¹⁰⁴ William Martin, *With God On Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*, 2nd ed, (New York, Broadway Books, 1996), 153.

to keep warm, and walked back to the White House after his inauguration, refusing the provided limousine.¹⁰⁵

Environmentalists beyond orthodox Christians found Carter to be sympathetic to their cause. During his 1976 campaign he garnered their support in promising the protection of wetlands and wild rivers while criticizing government led dam-building efforts. Upon entering office in 1977, Carter signed the Department of Energy Organization Act and offered support to environmental proposals such as the Surface Mining Act and revisions on the Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act.¹⁰⁶ Carter also supported water front recreation developments in urban settings. However, by the end of his presidency, he had turned to make economics his primary devotion. By dividing his interests between environmentalism and the economy, many were unhappy with him on both issues. The only substantial environmental support Carter offered in the last year of his presidency was the protection of Alaskan wilderness.¹⁰⁷

Perhaps his largest failure which highlighted public disapproval of his presidency, was the reaction to his July 15, 1979 "Energy and National Policy" speech, which was unofficially titled by the public, "The Malaise of Society."

In the "Energy and National Policy" speech, Carter began by describing his attempt at including Americans in his decision making processes. He quoted a variety of citizens, all of whom expressed a feeling of helplessness and dissatisfaction with their personal

¹⁰⁵ Daniel Horowitz, *Jimmy Carter and the Energy Crisis of the 1970s: The "Crisis of Confidence" Speech of July 15, 1979* (Boston and New York, Bedford/St. Martin's 2005), 14.

¹⁰⁶ Samuel P. Hays, *A History of Environmental Politics Since 1945* (Pittsburgh, PA, The University of Pittsburg Press, 2000), 58.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

situation hoping Carter could alleviate problems. He proposed answers to energy shortages, which were not unlike Nixon's 1973 solutions. Within the plan, he promised energy independence by increasing coal production and nuclear energy. Carter also asked the American populace to take it upon themselves to use less energy.

To further conserve energy...I'm asking you for your good and your nation's security to take no unnecessary trips, to use carpools or public transportation whenever you can, to park your car one extra day per week, to obey the speed limit, and to set your thermostats to save fuel. Every act of energy conservation like this is more than just common sense – I tell you it is an act of patriotism.¹⁰⁸

Conservative Christians, along with the rest of the American people had been worrying about energy consumption since Earth Day in 1970 and Carter's "Malaise" speech hammered home a feeling of helplessness that citizens were tired of. By the end of his presidency, Carter's approval rating was at an all time low of 34%.¹⁰⁹ In addition, his actions towards family values eclipsed his Christian stewardship and environmentalist friendly efforts.

Conservative Christians supported his work in promoting a rejection of American affluence; his performance in this realm was directly in line with the theme of simplistic living that believers were concerned with throughout the 1970s. However, it was a secondary theme that was overshadowed by their disgust at Carter's toleration of alternative families and their perceived failure in him to protect traditional values.

¹⁰⁸ Daniel Horowitz, *Jimmy Carter and the Energy Crisis of the 1970s: The "Crisis of Confidence" Speech of July 15, 1979* (Boston and New York, Bedford/St. Martin's, 2005), 117.

¹⁰⁹ Lydia Saad, "Bush Presidency Closes With 34% Approval, 61% Disapproval," *The Gallup Poll* (Jan 14, 2009) <http://www.gallup.com/poll/113770/Bush-Presidency-Closes-34-Approval-61-Disapproval.aspx> (accessed February 10, 2010).

Perhaps to the outsider observing the history of the Carter administration, one might conclude that conservative Christians eventually turned on him, but from a Christian viewpoint, it was Carter who alienated them by not upholding traditional doctrine. His first error that set believers grumbling was his 1976 interview with *Playboy* magazine. From a Christian perspective, it was incomprehensible why someone who was born again would ever consent to an interview with a pornographic magazine, and what he said during the interview was most questionable. Carter opened up to *Playboy*, confessing he was guilty of committing adultery in his heart by lusting after other women.¹¹⁰

Perhaps the biggest dividing point between him and Christian supporters was his open acceptance of legalized abortion. Personally, he believed it was an immoral law, but he regarded it as a necessary evil and did not fight against it. Conservative Christian dislike for Carter continued into 1980 becoming increasingly aggravated by his "White House Conference on Families." Among the publications expressing dislike for the conference, the staunchly conservative *Faith for the Family* magazine provided a concise condemnation of the event without mincing words. The article began with the intention of frightening its readers. "Should incest be legalized? Should a homosexual or lesbian couple be recognized as a family? Should parents be licensed? These and other questions were discussed in meetings connected with the White House Conference on Families."¹¹¹ Conservative Christians, believing they were the core structure of America, were at the very least, disappointed at the attention given to the "alternative lifestyles" represented at

¹¹⁰ Robert Scheer, "The Playboy Interview: Jimmy Carter," *Playboy* 23, no. 11 (November 1976): 63-86.

¹¹¹ Bob Whitmore, "The Whitehouse Conference on Families: How it may affect your home," *Faith For the Family* 11, no. 16 (July/August 1980): 3.

the conference. Disagreements like this eroded any lingering support believers had for Carter. By the end of his presidency, conservative Christians were in keeping with a majority of the United States populace regarding Carter as weak and ineffectual, making his plans on energy and conservation an indirect casualty.

Christian Environmental Opposition:
Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority

With the surging rise of the environmental movement and a burst of environmental legislation in the 1970s, there emerged a rising and increasingly vocal chorus of opponents of environmental action. This opposition was composed of a coalition of interests, among them powerful commodity industries, especially oil and gas, ranchers in the western and southern states, conservative lawmakers ideologically opposed to government regulation of economic activity, and many other Americans who looked skeptically at a host of new laws that imposed greater burdens on business and consumer appetites. At the grassroots level, in 1976 the Sagebrush Rebellion was founded in Western states by cattle and sheep owners, mining interests and off-road vehicle users. This movement was sparked when the Bureau of Land Management enacted a program to develop new regulations in each state to protect from overgrazing. The Sagebrush Rebellion enjoyed increasing support in 1979, backing the deregulation of federal lands arguing they should be transferred to individual states. As a group, they would come to support Ronald Reagan's platform of smaller government and free enterprise.¹¹²

¹¹² Samuel P. Hays, *Beauty, Health, and Permanence: Environmental Politics in the United States, 1955-1985* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987), 104-105.

Another group within this coalition, were evangelical and fundamentalist Christians who played an especially crucial role. Their major spokesman was minister Jerry Falwell who spoke for the Moral Majority and regularly railed against abortion, homosexuality, premarital sex, and other behaviors they deemed as moral failings. While the Moral Majority provided a foundation for the New Right, it also underpinned an increasingly powerful anti-environmental movement, which helped sweep Reagan into the White House in 1980 and enabled his administration to take a series of steps to curtail environmental regulation and reduce the pace of environmental legislation.

Since the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925, fundamentalists were considered more or less as a fringe group in the American population. During the 1970s, however, they began to rise in strength, striking out in reaction to the perceived cultural crisis led by highly organized religious leaders. By utilizing fundamentalist radio and television programs, Christian leaders were able to reach believers across the nation. The best known was Thomas Road Baptist Church pastor, Jerry Falwell who hosted and operated the "Old Time Gospel Hour" and Pat Robertson of the "700 Club." By employing these mediums, Falwell and Robertson created vast mailing lists of believers, whom they could coordinate to fight for common goals.

As a fledgling pastor at Thomas Road Baptist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia, Falwell felt it was in a pastor's best interest to stay aloof from the political realm, but when Billy Graham began to back candidates, he started to realize the power of religion in affecting the direction of the country. By the late 1970s, Falwell could not remain a shepherd of the spiritual world any longer. He had become increasingly alarmed over the perceived critical moral state of the country. Falwell, like many other believers, thought

the American Christian way of life was under attack, and it was up to believers to band together and take back the nation. In 1979, he met with other pastors and conservative political strategists to discuss a possible organization to mobilize the conservative Christian vote. The term "the silent majority" had been circulating among the political sphere since the early 1970s to label religious Americans who had been silent in contrast to counterculture protesters. It was this group they wished to activate and named their group the "Moral Majority."¹¹³

Falwell wanted to maximize the number of followers beyond fellow fundamentalists and therefore opened the doors of the Moral Majority to all faiths who found common value in the group's beliefs. The goals of this political organization were basic in order to attract the masses and designed to fight for what they perceived to be the most critical moral problems of the United States - all of which he started to refine a year before founding his political organization.¹¹⁴

Beginning in 1978, to save America from the precipice of collapse, Falwell began publishing a flurry of books aimed at reaching his "silent majority." Of the list of problems he wanted to take on, the issue of the environment was initially absent. The conservative Christian view of man's heightened status, as God's highest and prized creation, most

¹¹³ William Martin, *With God On Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*, 2nd ed., (New York, Broadway Books, 1996), 200-201.

¹¹⁴ Their goals were listed but not limited to the following excerpt from the groups newspaper, the *Moral Majority Report*: We believe in the separation of church and state. We are pro-life. We are pro-traditional family. We oppose the illegal drug traffic in America. We oppose pornography. We support the state of Israel and Jewish people everywhere. We believe that a strong national defense is the best deterrent to war. We support equal rights for women. We believe the E.R.A. is the wrong vehicle with which to obtain equal rights for women. We encourage our Moral Majority state organizations to be autonomous and indigenous. Jerry Falwell, "Here is How Moral Majority Inc. Stands on Today's Vital Issues," *Moral Majority Report* 2, no 3 (March 16, 1981): 22-23.

likely played a central role in this omission. The accepted regard of man's status was also infused in the Christian belief of "stewardship," teaching that man should be the dominant caretaker of the earth.¹¹⁵ In Falwell's eyes, and knowing believers would most likely agree that when it came to survival, mankind was basically more valuable than nature. Therefore, stewardship was simply not important enough to be included with the other imperative, "key" issues of, abortion, homosexuality, and pornography as listed and discussed in his 1978 book, *How You Can Clean Up America*.¹¹⁶ This reasoning parallels why Carter, an advocate of simplistic Christian living, lost support among believers – as his behavior centering on the more crucial issues of family values did not meet expectations.

By 1979 Falwell began to somewhat reveal his position on ecology in his Sunday school student guide, *Jerry Falwell Teaches Bible Prophecy*. Agreeing with Hal Lindsey's, *The Late Great Planet Earth*, Falwell explained the signs one would see shortly before the Second Coming of Christ. He pointed out that present day problems like that of extreme materialism and overpopulation suggested the end of the world was near.¹¹⁷ The earth, in Falwell's understanding, was flawed and broken, but sometime soon God would redeem it. "In Genesis 3, God cursed nature because of Adam's sin. From that point on,

¹¹⁵ This perception of dominance transcends the relationship to the environment to touch others. One in particular would be a husband's domination over his wife. "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord." Ephesians 5: 22 (King James Version) This is a symbiotic relationship that puts leadership in the hands of husbands, but also commands them to treat their wives respectfully. The husband/wife relationship is similar to the problem eco-feminists have with Judeo-Christian beliefs that there is a hierarchy mentality that men are above women who are above children and then animals and then nature. The idea of stewardship treats nature as the submissive element on the earth, but when it comes down to survival, man takes precedence over the state of nature.

¹¹⁶ Jerry Falwell, *How You Can Help Clean Up America* (Lynchburg, Virginia, Liberty Publishing Company, 1978), 10, 43.

¹¹⁷ Dr. Jerry Falwell, *Dr. Jerry Falwell Teaches Bible Prophecy* (Lynchburg, Virginia, The Old-Time Gospel Hour, Inc., 1979), 9.

man's paradise became a wilderness. The roses suddenly contained thorns, and the docile tiger became a hungry meat eater! But during the millennium all this will change."¹¹⁸ Like the intimation received from *The Late Great Planet Earth*, the unstated theme resonated, why support environmental protection if God will restore nature soon anyway? Additionally, although Falwell did not touch directly on ecology, he rejected Christian support of worldly social issues like those upheld by the World Council of Churches. Instead Falwell argued, believers should be concerned with the spiritual realm and wait for Christ by, among other things, attending church services, loving believers and all men, living a separated life, and winning souls.¹¹⁹ This theological view can be seen as the foundation of Falwell's political philosophies that dealt with the building up of United States strength at all costs while ignoring the preservation of nature and even mankind.

In 1980, he published another book urging Christians to take a stand against immorality titled, *Listen America!* Along with the theme of morality, he advocated a strengthening of the United States. In the introduction, after stating America was on the brink of destruction, he warned that the country was sadly weaker than the Soviet Union militarily due to social institutions like welfare and economic controls enacted by the federal government. He believed that instead of rewarding hard work in a competitive market, large government gave away money and restricted private companies from using natural resources.¹²⁰ He supported a return to free enterprise, which would build the United States back into a strong nation, one that could stand up to communists.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 68.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 14-15.

¹²⁰ Jerry Falwell, *Listen, America!* (Garden City, New York, Doubleday & Company, INC. 1980), 13.

To destroy or to control a man's right to own and use property is to diminish him as an individual, for property rights are human rights. Freedom to own property is a basic tenet of this society... Years of incoherent intervention has a stranglehold on energy production"¹²¹

In *Listen America!*, Falwell had combined the ideas of a moral resurgence with strengthening the United States by loosening the restraints of a large government which he believed had led the nation to mediocrity and submissiveness in the face of communism and the energy crisis. To a great extent, his perspective was one of keeping the United States strong perhaps only for the short term, as he stated in his booklet on Bible prophecy that Christ would come again shortly ending the everyday functioning of the world. Until this event happened, Falwell was not afraid of nuclear war with the U.S.S.R., linking a robust unfettered economy, with a strong military in order to preserve the freedom of religion. This feeling was echoed in a previous book by Falwell titled, *America Can Be Saved*, in which he stated, "We need to do more than just cut down a few trees; we need to cut down a few communists."¹²² He chided those like Massachusetts senator Edward Kennedy who wished to dismantle the country's nuclear arms. Falwell stated, "The sad

¹²¹ Ibid., 73-74.

¹²² Jerry Falwell. *America Can Be Saved* (Murfreesboro, TN, Sword of the Lord Publishers, 1979), 34. He went on describing a long list of social woes: suicide, STDs, drugs, sex, crime, pornography, women in the workplace, child abuse, sex education in schools, the ERA, poor education, violence in schools, music, abortion, homosexuals, humanism, and the fractured family. Of everything he takes on, the environment is never one. He certainly makes references to issues that deal with the environment such as free enterprise, but he never touched on the issue supporting his former claim that mankind is the most important within God's universe.

fact is that today the Soviet Union would kill 135 million to 160 million Americans, and the United States would kill only 3% to 5% of the Soviets..."¹²³

These books were probably intended for the most conservative of American Christians to urge them into action, but when speaking to mainstream conservative Christians, Falwell lowered the intensity of his views regarding the earth while still maintaining his desire to use resources.

(Eternity interviewer)

Q: It seems, though, that there are some other issues which are sins of conservative Christians that not being addressed. The matter of acquisitiveness of materialism for example: wanting to get more and more which fuels inflation, which adds to our problems. These are respectable sins of conservative Christians. You don't seem to be addressing them as much.

(Falwell)

A: Well, I think they're going to address themselves now with the oil shortage and the economy. We've said often that in this oil vs. Israel thing now, that we are ready to get out of dependence on OPEC nations, to take the necessary conservation steps in order at the same time generate our own resources and begin to produce rather than to conserve as the long range answer. But we are fully willing to bite the bullet on conservation, telling the Arabs to hang their oil on the ear if it means we must sell our soul or sell Israel out.¹²⁴

In this interview, Falwell did not place any value on the basic philosophy of conservation or ethics of stewardship. He mentioned that he would support cutting down on energy consumption to back Israel but not to preserve resources. Environmentalism or stewardship never registered in Falwell's mind as having any bearing or place on the

¹²³ Jerry Falwell, *Listen America!* (Garden City, New York, Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1980), 98.

¹²⁴ William J. Petersen and Stephen Board. "Where is Jerry Falwell Going?" *Eternity* 31, no. 7 (August 1980): 18-19.

platform of issues that mattered on the world stage. One of the best examples of this attitude comes from the 1981 book, *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: The Resurgence of Conservative Christianity*, edited by Falwell with fellow fundamentalists leaders Ed Dobson and Ed Hinson. They wrote regarding abortion that, "only a perverted society would make laws protecting eagles' eggs and yet have no protection for precious unborn human life."¹²⁵

It is interesting to note the time frame when Falwell introduced his vision of strengthening the U.S. through the unrestricted use of resources. His book, *America Can Be Saved* was published in 1979 and before that, Falwell, for the most part, ignored references to conservation, energy, or natural resources. It is possible to conclude that as Falwell became more comfortable with presidential candidate Ronald Reagan in 1979, he began to see worth in Reagan's long held belief in private enterprise's unregulated use of nature. He might also have perhaps picked up on the larger national movement of environmental opposition like the Sagebrush Rebellion or large energy companies complaining that big government was keeping them from full economic potential.

The Moral Majority and Ronald Reagan

Like the growing numbers of those against government enacted environmental protection, the Moral Majority came to strongly support Ronald Reagan. In contrast to the incumbent president, Jimmy Carter, Reagan shared their concerns of the nation's cultural crisis, the need for a smaller government, and a resolution to fight communism while

¹²⁵ Jerry Falwell, Ed Dobson, and Ed Hindson ed., *The Fundamentalist Phenomenon: The Resurgence of Conservative Christianity* (Garden City New York, Doubleday & Company, Inc, 1981), 196.

communicating the hope of returning the country to a land of plenty – restoring America to the Puritan’s vision of “a city upon the hill.”

In August of 1980, the presidential candidates were invited to speak to thousands of orthodox Christians at an event hosted by the National Affairs Briefing in Dallas, Texas. Reagan was the only candidate who accepted the invitation. He was told behind closed doors that the religious leaders could not openly endorse him, so when Reagan spoke, he told the crowd, “I can’t endorse me, but I endorse you.”¹²⁶(With God on Our Side) This statement proved to be ingenious and was met with thunderous applause consequently making him the candidate for conservative Christians. During his speech, Reagan did not mention his views on the environment or energy, but he did accuse Carter’s administration of taking part in the country’s steady moral decline and for allowing the Internal Revenue Service to attack independent Christians schools by trying to take away their tax-exempt status. Reagan also rejected defeatist attitudes alluding to Carter’s “Energy and National Policy” speech declaring, “Against the despair and pessimism that tells us we must accept a condition of national ‘malaise,’ we must offer a positive and optimistic vision.”¹²⁷

Reagan’s “positive and optimistic vision” included a departure from energy conservation and environmental protection. He wanted more drilling and more mining. Before Reagan’s 1980 run for president, as governor of California, his view of how to deal with environmental problems followed conservative Christian beliefs of individual responsibility but not stewardship. At the Sacramento Host Breakfast on September 4,

¹²⁶ Martin, William, *With God On Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America*, 2nd ed., (New York, Broadway Books, 1996), 217.

¹²⁷ Reagan, Ronald, “Address By the Honorable Ronald Reagan The Roundtable National Affairs Briefing,” The National Affairs Briefing. Dallas, TX. 22, August 1980.

1970 he said, "We know that we cannot shut down our factories and our plants... But we can – and we do – expect that business and industry will do everything possible to produce the maximum of affluences with the minimum of effluence."¹²⁸ He went on to say that the nation must solve its pollution problems but trivialized them with the more pressing matter of the failing economy. By 1980 he blamed the weak financial system on energy conservation as highlighted in his presidential nomination address: *We Need A Rebirth In Leadership (Three Grave Threats to Our Way of Life)*. He warned, "Never before in our history have Americans been called upon to face three grave threats to our very existence, any of which could destroy us. We face a disintegrating economy, a weakened defense, and an energy policy based on the sharing of scarcity." He later added, "...conservation is desirable... but it is not the sole answer to our energy needs... economic prosperity of our people is a fundamental part of our environment."¹²⁹ To Reagan, the three threats were interconnected and the answer was free enterprise, which would restore the United States back into the economic and military powerhouse it had been after World War II.

As president, Reagan stayed true to his views on environmental issues. The state of the environment was secondary to what really mattered - the economy. In his first term as president, Reagan cut all federal funding except for defense. To deal with the nation's natural resources, he tapped James Watt for Secretary of the Interior.

Watt quintessentially represented Reagan's voting base and met the qualifications for the cabinet post. He was a born again Christian with an impressive background in academics and had strong ties to Republican politics. Most importantly he supported the

¹²⁸ Ronald Reagan, Alfred A. Balitzer, Gerald M. Bonetto, *A Time for Choosing: The Speeches of Ronald Reagan 1961-1982* (Chicago, Regnery Gateway), 219.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 223-224.

Sagebrush Rebellion and conservative Christians like Falwell who believed in using natural resources to energize the ailing United States economy. As Secretary of the Interior, Watt pursued a "good neighbor" policy with westerners, opening up public lands for development and offered federal land for private purchase. However, due to the immense backlash from environmentalists and his uncanny habit of public gaffs, he was forced to resign in 1983.

Watt's tumultuous tenure in this cabinet post may have been short lived but conservative Christians saw his nomination as a victory demonstrating that believers were running the country. Falwell's newspaper, *The Moral Majority Report* featured Watt on several occasions presenting him as a levelheaded, responsible servant of the people who was constantly under attack by liberals. In a 1983 issue, energy and resources were the focus of the feature, "Reagan's dynamic Interior Secretary Watt: U.S. Resources Plentiful." In the article, Watt was quoted as saying that his department had, "...done more to provide the recovery of endangered species- 60 percent more- than the Carter administration did in four years."¹³⁰ Claims like these were not supported by specifics and the accomplishments seemed to run counter with Watt's following thoughts concerning his methods for strengthening the U.S. military. "We must rearm America if we are going to live in peace. To rearm America, you've got to have energy. On the lands owned by the federal government, which are a third of America, we have enough energy to meet our needs for thousands of years..."¹³¹ He oddly concluded by discussing the future of Indian reservations, indirectly suggesting that the U.S. government should appropriate their lands

¹³⁰ Harry M. Covert Jr., "Reagan's Dynamic Interior Secretary Watt: U.S. Resources Plentiful," *Moral Majority Report* 5, no. 4 (April 1983): 4.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 5

for possible energy resources, because under the current situation, Native Americans were, "...forced to live under 'socialism at its extreme.'"¹³²

The Moral Majority Report dealt with the environment again in April of 1984 under the auspices of how educators were spreading false information about the condition of the earth. Population control activists were accused of influencing student textbook information presenting biased views of how overpopulation and pollution were destroying the planet. Janet Newitt, the director of demographic studies of "Visions of the Future," was featured for leading the charge in remedying this apparent travesty. She accused pro-environmental perceptions of not being founded upon any legitimate studies and could be "scientifically proved wrong..."¹³³ The author concluded by warning parents of the consequences if these fabrications were not rectified. "As a result, students develop an unpatriotic view of America. They get the impression American industries are polluting the skies and waters and American consumers are draining the world of its natural resources."¹³⁴

A Divisive Issue

Although Falwell openly promoted free-enterprise and the strengthening of the U.S. at any cost, it is important to note that he carefully maneuvered his rhetoric around the topic of the environment. When examining *The Moral Majority Report*, published from 1980-1985, only two articles dealt with ecology. Falwell likely stayed away from the topic of the environment, not just because to him it was unimportant, but he knew it could be

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Martin Mawyer, "Texts Mislead Students About Earth's Future," *Moral Majority Report* 5, no. 4 (April 1984): 11.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

divisive among conservative Christians. Falwell claimed to have only two million on his Moral Majority mailing list, a sizable number, but not one that could easily sway an election. Of that group it was impossible to tell if indeed all would vote the way Falwell told them to. He could not risk taking on an issue that could alienate potential members and so when it came to something possibly divisive as well as unimportant, it was wise to leave it alone.

The possibility for confusion was rather large regarding eco-friendly initiatives in the realm of conservative Christians, especially since the community had been working to adopt "good stewardship" policies from the early 1970s. Even Falwell's own church participated in energy conservation during the energy crisis of 1973. In the late 1970s, as Falwell and Reagan pushed for more energy and free enterprise, the other looming figure among the extreme right of conservative Christians, Pat Robertson, continued to speak out for stewardship of the earth.

It is surprising that at the National Affairs Briefing in Dallas, Texas, when Reagan was unofficially endorsed as the conservative Christian presidential candidate, Robertson, during his speech, reminded the crowd of its responsibility to the earth.

In the midst of the troubles of the world God says, be fruitful, multiply, take dominion. He says, my people have been called by my name to establish dominion over the earth. He says, subdue it in My name. Not to rape the environment, not to spoil the air and pollute the rivers, but to bring My world to the peace and the harmony and the love and the order that I intended for it. And He said, I have given this to those who know my name.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ Pat Robertson, "National Affairs Speech," National Affairs Briefing. Dallas, TX. 22, August 1980.

This message was not a passing thought for Robertson. Christian stewardship of the earth was echoed again, this time as a larger theme in his 1981 book *The Secret Kingdom*.

Robertson designed *The Secret Kingdom* basically as a self-help book serving as a guide to understanding man's relationship with God while offering a method for controlling one's place in the world. Robertson explained that there are two worlds, one physical with limited resources, and the other invisible with unlimited possibilities. He stated that through prayer, one could tap into this invisible world, controlled by God, and through Him, things of the infinite could materialize into the physical. Robertson used the energy crisis as an example, explaining that because people insisted on living in a world according to its ways, they were actually restricting themselves from the unlimited energy possible. Instead, he contended, this way of living was not necessary because the invisible offered "peace, plenty and freedom."¹³⁶ "Plant life, marine life, bird life, there is no end, almost as though God had sent abundance into the universe as testimony of his own infinitude."¹³⁷

The application of this invisible world or secret kingdom was not for one's personal gain but could be used as a device to meet health needs and other necessities. Robertson cautioned, that living life for material acquisition was not godly.¹³⁸ He decried extreme capitalism as evil, but asserted as well that free enterprise was the only economic system that met humanity's God-given needs. However, he warned that when greed displaced

¹³⁶ Pat Robertson and Bob Slosser, *The Secret Kingdom: A Promise of Hope and Freedom in a World of Turmoil* (Nashville, Tennessee, Thomas Nelson, Inc. 1982), 46.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 59.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

moral and spiritual values, capitalism broke down into ugliness.¹³⁹ Subduing and dominating the earth as commanded in Genesis, Robertson felt, required mankind to act responsibly. After Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of knowledge, Satan then perverted man's relationship to the earth and through greed, man began misusing resources. "He has, in effect raped creation rather than take care of it. He has lost the humility and discipline to exercise dominion as God intended...He has violated the law of responsibility."¹⁴⁰

Pat Robertson seems to have been the only conservative Christian leader on the extreme right to speak out for Christian stewardship around 1980. Nevertheless, the fact that such a well-known figure made stewardship a repeated theme in his theology suggests his followers were at the very least not opposed to this message. The mainstream conservative Christian magazines ran articles well into the 1980s calling for a cut back on consumption and supporting eco-friendly initiatives, while in the eyes of the Moral Majority, it was a secondary issue, an obstacle standing in the way of national strength and free enterprise.

Conclusion

The Moral Majority was not a large political movement and had only two million members on its mailing list. As its leader, Falwell worked tirelessly during the presidential campaign of 1980 taking his Liberty University choir with him to drum up support by singing patriotic songs during Moral Majority rallies all over the United States. His message of moral wrongs resonated well with those who shared his belief in the impending demise of the United States owing to a crisis in national culture.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 151.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 201.

The energy behind Falwell's message was anger, outrage, and nostalgia for the past. His supporters were tired of the counterculture, they were embarrassed over the U.S. defeat in Vietnam and the Watergate scandal, and they were shocked and dismayed that homosexuals had been invited to the White House intended to be a conference to help families. They knew the key for a strong America was the divinely supported American nuclear family made up of a man who worked, a woman who could be a respectable housewife, and children who were reared to be good patriotic American citizens. This was the proper American family in the eyes of conservative Christians. They felt the social changes that swept the U.S. in the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s had weakened this precious institution. Every page of *The Moral Majority Report* or the *Christian Beacon* warned Christians of how their way of life was being threatened. A theme of anger and militancy was the desired reaction from virtually every article. The magazine *Faith for the Family* promoted congruent feelings.

Like Jerry Falwell, *Faith For the Family* communicated the image that Christians were the last bastion of real America. They were urged to keep their heads down, defending traditional ways among the confusion and immorality of the secular world. As Falwell believed, the end of the world was at hand and in the mean time, believers should defend principal issues by building up spiritual and national power. These themes can be seen beyond Falwell's rhetoric in common *Faith For the Family* artistic cover illustrations, which included castle fortifications, cannons fixed on embattlements overlooking harbors, knights ready for warfare, Christians huddled in groups about to be attacked by lions in the Coliseum, and pioneers moving across a desolate landscape. Other covers depicted pleasant scenes from Victorian America or perhaps a quaint rural town. These cover

illustrations were usually a depiction for a story featured in the magazine relaying a message of courage, victory, strength and struggle.

These feelings among the right within conservative Christianity promoted action made possible by the organization activities of Jerry Falwell, who led The Moral Majority in supporting Ronald Reagan. After the election, the media made efforts to find out who this group was and how effective they actually were. Some attributed Reagan's victory to these Christians of whom Falwell had mobilized.

Falwell's platform of a strong America at any cost, produced the first "official" stance or movement to despise eco-friendly efforts from someone within the conservative Christian community. As a Christian issue, ecology had been formally discussed and supported by people of mainstream conservative Christianity as well as the extreme right. Falwell had attempted to turn the issue into a reason for America's economic woes and an obstacle standing in the way of American might. Due to its aggressive activity during Reagan's campaign, the Moral Majority became the stereotypical face of conservative Christians to many looking from the outside in on the religious group. During its life, The Moral Majority produced so much opposition that by 1989, Falwell all but disbanded the organization merging it with the larger movement of the Religious Right, which had a more favorable image among the public.

The year of 1976 was labeled the "year of the evangelical" by *Newsweek* magazine in response to Carter's popularity as a born again Christian.¹⁴¹ If Carter's administration had not appeared so inept to the voting populace, if he had taken stronger stands in support

¹⁴¹ Kenneth L. Woodward, John Barnes, and Laurie Lisle, "The Year of the Evangelical," *Newsweek* LXXXVIII, no. 17 (October 25, 1976): 68-78.

of primary conservative Christian issues, the secondary values of Christian stewardship and simple living, which Carter embodied, might not have not have been dismissed with him as the nation looked forward to an ambitious leader promising prosperity. Nevertheless, Falwell knew Christian stewardship of the environment was a tricky issue and hence it was something he chiefly ignored except in the case of arguing for free enterprise – which was seldom. To Falwell and his followers, the real battle that had to be fought was the barrage of immorality attacking the Christian family. He also knew that stewardship and finite resource awareness were friendly issues in the minds of conservative Christians, including fellow leader Pat Robertson. But even with these considerations, Falwell's opposition of state sponsored environmental controls and blaming the environmental movement for the weakening of the United States stuck as a pillar within the Conservative Christian Community, which continues unto the present day.

EPILOGUE

Conservative Christians and Republicans

It is difficult to trace through quantitative methods the evident changes among conservative Christian environmental perspectives since the early 1970s. One thing that is clear is that at least by the mid 1990s, as shown in the study "Faith and the Environment," cited in the introduction, there existed a positive correlation between increasing fervor among conservative Christians and their dislike for the issue of the environment. However, it is problematic to categorically attribute Jerry Falwell as the one who directly led believers to this trend in the 1990s. In the late 1980s, the Wise Use Movement attempted to increase support against environmentalism by courting conservative Christians, but their success in this endeavor is debatable. To clarify this quandary, further study dealing with the later 1980s and 1990s is warranted expanding this thesis' conclusions.

Evidence has shown that just after Earth Day of 1970, believers disassociated themselves with the modern environmental movement and devised their own method of caring for the earth, which was through stewardship. Then, during the 1980 presidential election, Jerry Falwell increased any existing Christian dislike for government mandated environmental protection by accusing such initiatives as a cause for national weakness. Another plausible way to analyze conservative Christian feelings towards environmentalism is through their increased association with political platforms as unveiled in chapter three. Through a conservative Christian alliance with the Republican Party, believers chose to ignore and reject nationally sponsored environmental mandates. By examining conservative Christian voting habits, it is possible to catch a glimpse of their feelings towards environmentalism as it became a partisan issue in the election of 1980.

It is debatable whether the Moral Majority played a leading role in Reagan's 1980 victory. What is widely agreed upon among scholars, is the long-term impact of conservative Christians in politics, which received its direction and identity from the efforts of those like Falwell in the late 1970s. In Corwin Smidt's chapter, "Evangelical Voting Patterns: 1976-1988," from the book *No Longer Exiles*, he shows that in 1980, 41% of Evangelicals classified themselves as Democrats versus 33% as Republicans. Whereas in the presidential election of 1980, many of these Evangelical Democrats voted for the Republican candidate.¹⁴² Additionally, Smidt exhibits the telling results from a survey spanning the years from 1976-1988. In 1976, 50% of Evangelicals surveyed voted Republican in the presidential election.¹⁴³ In 1980, 67% voted Republican and by 1988, 70% voted the same way. These figures are contrasted with non-Evangelical voters whose percentage rates varied only between 6 percentage points, reaching 62% in 1980, 61% in 1984, and 56% in 1988.¹⁴⁴ Smidt concludes that since 1976, Evangelicals appear to have grown in political importance by having increased in their voting cohesion to the enjoyment of the Republican Party, which has benefited by their mobilization in presidential and congressional elections.

Ruth Murray Brown, in her book, *For a Christian America* makes stronger statements connecting conservative Christians with the Republican Party. She deduces that "The Christian Right (which is mostly made of up Fundamentalists and Evangelicals) is now essential to the Republican coalition as segregationists were to the Democratic

¹⁴² Corwin Smidt, "Evangelical Voting Patterns: 1976-1988," in Cromartie, Michael ed. *No Longer Exiles: The Religious New Right In American Politics* (Washington, D.C., Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1993), 97.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

coalition in the 1940s and 1950s”¹⁴⁵ She describes the prominent political power of this group, which was rated as the seventh most influential lobby in 1997 and 1998 by the Fortune Poll of Washington insiders.¹⁴⁶ A host of other authors have made similar conclusions regarding the mobilization of conservative Christians as a voting group and their marriage to the Republican Party.

From the start of the Earth Day observance on April 22, 1970, conservative Christians expressed a love for nature, but as in many other things, not in the same way as the world.

Associate Pastor James Wright, of Dauphin Way Baptist Church in Mobile, Alabama explains this differentiation well in our present day as he feels his parishioners care about the environment, but are “not the type that chain themselves to trees.”¹⁴⁷ Many, he thinks, have been brought up in rural America and have a connection with it, enjoying hiking and hunting. Friendlier terms of conservative Christians, he feels, are conservation or stewardship, as humans have the right to use nature, but it is not to be abused.

Today the Southeast part of the United States is regarded as the stronghold of conservative Christians. One out of every three persons in this region considers themselves an Evangelical. This is in contrast to one out of ten outside the American South.¹⁴⁸ Because of the mobilization of conservative Christian voters and their partiality to the Republican Party, the Southern states electoral votes gone primarily to Republican

¹⁴⁵ Brown, Ruth Murray, *A History of the Religious Right: For a “Christian America”* (Amherst, New York, Prometheus Books, 2002), 275-276.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 176.

¹⁴⁷ James Wright. Telephone interview by author, (November 27, 2009).

¹⁴⁸ Cromartie, Michael ed., *No Longer Exiles: The Religious New Right In American Politics* (Washington, D.C., Ethics and Public Policy Center, 1993), 92.

presidential candidates since 1980. Although the Republican Party has come to represent free enterprise and protector of traditional Christian family values, the U.S. Southeast is predominantly rural America, and Christian friendly perspectives of nature such as those described by Pastor Wright are widespread throughout this area. Nevertheless, to rural conservative Christians, the environment is a secondary issue to free enterprise and family values, but most likely only as long as free enterprise does not change their rural surroundings.

Among conservative Christians, there is a certain romantic notion of where the country's strength lies. It is perhaps in the preservation of the struggle between man and nature like the frontier myth-history of the Puritans who attempted to carve "a shining city on a hill." The struggle itself plays a purifying role in the gauntlet of life – the environment forcing humans into adhering to the fundamentals of gender roles, hard work, and creating a *need* to seek help in God through literal Bible interpretation. In contrast, wilderness preservation values held by environmental groups like the Sierra Club would destroy the frontier qualities of rugged individualism and the aspiration to conquer nature. From the viewpoint of conservative Christians, with the disappearance of this struggle, people would then take up vice and luxury, something perhaps they feel urban dwellers have already succumbed to. Hence, residents of rural America struggle with and love nature at the same time, wanting it to remain without closing off the option of destroying it by development. The relationship of dominator and dominated lingers, as does the purifying frontier fight against nature continuing God's commandment to subdue the earth and be fruitful and multiply. Once protecting man from nature or developing it into cities is accomplished, the contest is over, so Christian stewardship, although seemingly

ineffective to outsiders, is the optimal answer when believers are faced with the question: “how should humans respond to nature in a post-industrial world?”

This understanding of the conservative Christian’s relationship with nature is further supported by the wide variety of their published material. Christian educational booklets such as *Our American Heritage* (1978), *Our America* (1978), *Language: Grammar Work-Text for Christian Schools* (1979), and booklets for the international AWANA youth organization, all promote this positive, purifying, albeit challenging vision of nature as explained above. Besides Bible stories, almost all the illustrations used throughout the booklets depict pastoral scenes, rural American activities, and small town life. The aforementioned magazine covers of *Faith for the Family*, likewise tap into bucolic feelings of times past and a close relationship with nature. Cities and heavy machinery or mostly anything having to do with man’s technological advantage over the environment is almost always ignored. Other examples of this conservative Christian connection with nature can be seen on the prominent stage in American culture.

During the 2008 presidential campaign, vice president nominee and conservative Christian Sarah Palin whipped up controversy after her remarks in North Carolina when she told supporters, “We believe that the best of America is in these small towns that we get to visit, and in these wonderful little pockets of what I call the real America, being here with all of you hard-working, very patriotic, very pro-America areas of this great nation.”¹⁴⁹ Despite the debate that followed, her statement was quite valid in connecting with the mindset of orthodox Christians. To many she concisely summed up where, who,

¹⁴⁹ “Palin Discusses Potential Plans for America” CNN, (October 22, 2008) <http://www.cnn.com/2008/POLITICS/10/21/palin.sitroom/index.html> (Accessed February 15, 2010).

and what makes up the core strength of the United States. As an indirect point, "small town America" is not a small town unless it is in or near the country.

Another example supporting this argument can be found in country music. In 1981, Hank Williams Jr. released his popular song "A Country Boy Can Survive," which hit on the very themes of environmental distress, utilizing nature, strength in country living, rural morals versus the metropolis, rugged individualism, and Christianity.

The preacher man says it's the end of time
And the Mississippi River she's a goin' dry
The interest is up and the Stock Markets down
And you only get mugged
If you go down town

I live back in the woods, you see
A woman and the kids, and the dogs and me
I got a shotgun rifle and a 4-wheel drive
And a country boy can survive
Country folks can survive

I can plow a field all day long
I can catch catfish from dusk till dawn
We make our own whiskey and our own smoke too
Ain't too many things these ole boys can't do
We grow good ole tomatoes and homemade wine
And a country boy can survive
Country folks can survive

Because you can't starve us out
And you cant makes us run
Cause one-of- 'em old boys raisin ole shotgun
And we say grace and we say Ma'am
And if you ain't into that we don't give a damn

We came from the West Virginia coalmines
And the Rocky Mountains and the western skies
And we can skin a buck; we can run a trot-line
And a country boy can survive
Country folks can survive

I had a good friend in New York City
He never called me by my name, just hillbilly
My grandpa taught me how to live off the land
And his taught him to be a businessman
He used to send me pictures of the Broadway nights
And I'd send him some homemade wine

But he was killed by a man with a switchblade knife
For 43 dollars my friend lost his life
I'd love to spit some beechnut in that dudes eyes
And shoot him with my old 45
Cause a country boy can survive
Country folks can survive

Cause you can't starve us out and you can't make us run
Cause one-of- 'em old boys raisin ole shotgun
And we say grace and we say Ma'am
And if you ain't into that we don't give a damn

We're from North California and south Alabam
And little towns all around this land
And we can skin a buck; we can run a trot-line
And a country boy can survive
Country folks can survive¹⁵⁰

Consequently, due to this perception of nature, contemporary environmental issues continue to be met with distaste by many conservative Christians. Global warming, for example, is commonly rejected by Christians who are skeptical that humans can alter the climate.¹⁵¹ The late Rev. Falwell's Thomas Road Baptist Church officially dismisses global warming as a fabrication of liberals.¹⁵² Perhaps the difficulty with this theory is

¹⁵⁰ James Mason, "Hank Williams Jr, Country Boy Can Survive Lyrics," *Cowboy Lyrics.Com*. <http://www.cowboylitics.com/lyrics/williams-hank-jr/country-boy-can-survive-10123.html> (Accessed Feb 15, 2010).

¹⁵¹ Leslie Kaufman, "Darwin Foes Add Warming to Targets," *The New York Times* (March 3, 2010) <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/04/science/earth/04climate.html?pagewanted=1> (Accessed March 4, 2010).

¹⁵² Thomas Road Baptist Church, "The Myth of Global Warming," http://trbc.org/new/sermons.php?url=20070225_11AM.html. (Accessed Feb 15, 2020).

similar to their rejection of Darwin's theory of evolution. Many conservative Christians understand the world as a place created by God in six days and has since stayed unchanged for the most part. Nevertheless, in the past few years, some conservative Christians have started to make concerted efforts to play stronger roles in showing their support for the environment.

In 2005 Evangelical leaders from around the nation met, representing 30 million members, and made a commitment to changing U.S. policy on global warming.¹⁵³ In 1993, the Evangelical Environmental Network was founded, led by Rev. Michell Hescoc. Staying in line with conservative Christian tradition, this group bases its cause solely on scriptures to uphold the idea of stewardship. There has also been the publication of two different environmental bibles for Christians, one published by Zondervan, the same company that released, *The Late Great Planet Earth* in 1970. This eco-friendly bible was titled, *The Stewardship Study Bible*, and was first printed in November of 2009. The other book was published on recycled paper by HarperCollins Publishers in 2008 and was titled, *The Green Bible*, which can be supplemented with *Green Bible* devotionals.

Present day scholars such as Calvin DeWitt and Roger Gottlieb, who study the contemporary relationship between religion and the environment, have optimistic visions for conservative Christian environmental participation as recent evidence suggests. Indeed, their projections may come to fruition as a new generation of believers begins to run church activities. These recent events are promising in spite of many rejecting the theory

¹⁵³ Roger Gottlieb, *A Greener Faith: Religious Environmentalism and Our Planet's Future* (Oxford, New York, University Press, 2006), 85.

of global warming. As is conventional among conservative Christians, it has taken a long time to become comfortable with something new.

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