

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga

UTC Scholar

---

Honors Theses

Student Research, Creative Works, and  
Publications

---

5-2016

## Redemption of man and nature: environmentalism through the lens of mainline Protestants and conservative evangelicals

Scottie Glen Hill

University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, mhq385@mocs.utc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.utc.edu/honors-theses>



Part of the [History Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Hill, Scottie Glen, "Redemption of man and nature: environmentalism through the lens of mainline Protestants and conservative evangelicals" (2016). *Honors Theses*.

This Theses is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research, Creative Works, and Publications at UTC Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of UTC Scholar. For more information, please contact [scholar@utc.edu](mailto:scholar@utc.edu).

Redemption of Man and Nature:  
Environmentalism Through the Lens of Mainline Protestants and Conservative Evangelicals

Scottie Hill

Departmental Honors Thesis  
The University of Tennessee-Chattanooga  
History Department

Project Director: Dr. Thompson

Examination Date: April 4, 2016

Examining Committee: Dr. Michael Thompson, Dr. Sybil Baker, Dr. Jonathan Yeager,  
Dr. Duke Richey

## ABSTRACT

This thesis addressed the relationship between the environmental movement in America and Protestant Christianity. Currently, there is an assumption that Christians tend to have attitudes that are adverse to environmentalism. This study investigated the origins of the current narratives while analyzing the various factors that have contributed to changes in this dynamic over time. This was done through an analysis of various primary sources from the late 1960s and 1970s, a critical period of time in which environmentalism and Protestant Christianity became inextricably connected.

In 1967, amidst a growing environmental movement, Lynn White Jr. released an essay that criticized the role of Christian theology in leading to ecological destruction. This historical piece was incredibly influential and in many ways helped shape the general perception that Christian theology is not concerned with environmental protection. It was also significant in that it elicited a response from leading Christian theologians and scholars of the time. In the years to follow, significant names and entities within Protestantism such as Francis Schaeffer, *Christianity Today* and *The Christian Century* engaged with White's thesis, presenting various stances on the matter.

The numerous articles written in response to Lynn White Jr. provided useful, relevant sources for analysis. An examination of these sources, contextualized within broader political and theological movements of the time, revealed that the Christian response to environmentalism was far more complex and nuanced than commonly assumed. Additionally, the sources analyzed in this thesis were indicative of the divided nature of Protestantism during this era. Despite theological differences, both conservative and liberal Christians were surprisingly receptive and sympathetic to the environmental movement. These revelations imply that a division between Christianity and environmentalism, whether perceived or actual, historical or contemporary, is not the result of theological differences, but is instead shaped by cultural, social, and political factors.

## Redemption of Man and Nature

In the summer of 2015, Pope Francis released an encyclical titled *Laudato Si*, or “Praised Be.” The encyclical (a letter to people of the Roman Catholic faith) was centered on issues of ecology, environmentalism, and climate change. The Pope, speaking for the Catholic Church, made some rather bold claims. He acknowledged the existence of human caused climate change and global warming, recognized the shortcomings of the church in protecting the environment, and encouraged immediate and significant actions towards more sustainable and beneficial ecological practices. In addition, he pointed out that international efforts and world summits on the environment had not done enough to encourage widespread protection of the planet due to political and ideological divisions.<sup>1</sup> The Pope’s encyclical is a telling example of the current state of environmentalism in public affairs. It is also an indication that some religious groups (the Catholic Church being an especially prominent one) are starting to take more notice of the environmental issue.

The Pope, as one of the most prominent religious figures in the world, speaks to a broad international audience. His pronouncement received various levels of praise and criticism from readers, whether religious or secular,, Catholic or Protestant.. But *Laudato Si* received especially interesting feedback from Christians in America. Although most Protestant Christians in America do not attribute any special authority to the Pope, they at least recognize his influence. His recent claims, therefore, were a catalyst for Christians in America to reevaluate their current stance on ecological concern, while taking into account their historical understanding of the subject. If the encyclical was not effective in garnering widespread support for environmental

---

<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si, Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home* (Vatican City, Italy, May 24, 2015) sec. 2, 13, 14.

care among Protestant Christians, it was certainly useful for illuminating the current range of Christian perspectives on the issue.

For example, one American Christian supported Pope Francis's actions and pointed out that the Pope was not the first religious leader to advocate for better care of the environment. John Murdock, a contributing author to the magazine *Christianity Today*, drew a parallel between Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical and the work of Protestant Christian leader Francis Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, published in 1970. Murdock argued that Pope Francis, the world leader of the Catholic Church, and Francis Schaeffer, one of Protestant evangelicalism's historic authorities, shared a perspective that implored Christians to reconsider their relationship with the environment. The author stated, "I close by saying to both of them, 'Amen, Francis!'"<sup>2</sup> Murdock represents an example of a Protestant Christian in America who supported the Pope's call for increased environmental concern.

Another Protestant who addressed *Laudato Si* was Albert Mohler, the President of Southern Baptist Theological Seminary and a leading voice for evangelical Christians in America. On June 18, 2015, less than a month after the encyclical was published, Mohler released a statement assessing Pope Francis's points. He argued that, while the Pope was correct to assign theological significance to mankind's care for creation, he was off base in some of his claims about the reality of climate change (Mohler personally questions the validity of human caused climate change). He concluded that the Pope's perspective had more to do with the current scientific consensus than with issues of theology. Mohler also reminded readers that "Evangelical Christians reject the very idea of the papacy," while recognizing that the encyclical

---

<sup>2</sup> John Murdock, "Pope's Creation Teachings Nothing New for Francis Schaeffer Fans," *Christianity Today*, August 6, 2015, <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/2015/august-web-only/pope-creation-teaching-nothing-new-schaeffer-fans.html>.

would hold some weight in secular, political, and religious discussions about the environment.<sup>3</sup> Murdock and Mohler represent just two of many Christian points of view on questions of the environment, creation care, and ecology. While each of these articles is significant on its own, their authors are part of a much larger conversation.

Recent developments like the Pope's important affirmation of climate change have brought to mind the central question, what is the Christian response to environmentalism? One commonly accepted answer to this question is found in the idea that Protestants in America are typically Republicans who don't believe in evolution, abortion, or climate change. Although this is an exaggerated generalization, a recent study published in *Social Science Quarterly* supported this characterization, while also adding nuance to the complex matter. The 2015 study upheld the idea that "members of Judeo-Christian traditions" are less supportive of environmentalism than non-religious individuals.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, it found that there was an even greater negative association between evangelicals<sup>5</sup> and concern for the environment (the authors pointed to biblical literalism as the reason for this trend). Additionally, this research reported that the stronger a person's affiliation (consistent church attendance/activity as opposed to minimal involvement) to Protestant faith, the more likely they were to be unsupportive of environmentalism. This study supports the idea that Christians are less concerned with environmental issues, while also acknowledging the variance of perspectives among denominations and subsections of Christianity.<sup>6</sup> This intriguing report implies that the preceding

---

<sup>3</sup>-Albert Mohler Jr., "Mohler Responds to Pope Francis's 'Laudato Si,'" *Southern News*, June 18, 2015, <http://news.sbts.edu/2015/06/18/mohler-responds-to-pope-francis-laudato-si/>.

<sup>4</sup> Matthew B. Arbuckle and David M. Konisky, "The Role of Religion in Environmental Attitudes," *Social Science Quarterly*, 96, no. 5 (November 2015): 1259.

<sup>5</sup> Evangelicals in this particular study were defined using a commonly used "RELTRAD" (religious traditions) taxonomy. This is a systematic approach for categorizing religious subgroups, often used in the social sciences. Most of the characteristics used to define evangelicals on the RELTRAD taxonomy were similar to the characteristics referenced later in this study.

<sup>6</sup> Arbuckle and Konisky, "Role of Religion," 1259.

narrative is far more convoluted than one might assume. Furthermore, it brings up a number of interesting historic and historiographical questions: How have evangelicals and other Protestant groups' perspectives of environmentalism<sup>7</sup> changed over time? What historical events and ideologies might have contributed to present-day attitudes about environmental care? How does a historical analysis disrupt the frequently accepted paradigm regarding Christianity and environmentalism?

This honors thesis answers the aforementioned questions by first exploring the origins of the narrative. After examining one of the primary works that suggested Christian theology was adverse to environmental care, this essay will assess numerous responses to this claim, with sources coming from a wide range of theological backgrounds and perspectives. Specifically, it will compare conservative evangelical and liberal Protestant viewpoints that were published in the years following the accusatory piece. A historical approach to these questions reveals that the idea of conservative evangelicals being anti-environment is an oversimplification. Furthermore, if any divide among conservative and liberal evangelicals did exist, it has been greatly exaggerated as environmentalism has become increasingly politicized. This thesis reveals those complexities while also demonstrating that, despite differences in Biblical interpretations and theological tenets, both conservative evangelicals and liberal Protestants were, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, sympathetic to the environmental movement. Before analyzing the informative primary sources that led to these conclusions, however, it is necessary to understand the broader social and political context of the pivotal decade that serves as the backdrop for this project/investigation.

---

<sup>7</sup> The term "environmentalism" is used in a broad sense throughout this thesis. Most often, it refers to the social and political movement that gained momentum during the 1960s and 1970s. However, it also refers to increased concern for the environment, and the belief that humans needed to take actions towards protecting the earth.

## A Tumultuous Decade in America

The 1960s were marked by an emerging counterculture, movements for social and racial justice, and questions over American war policies in Vietnam. At the beginning of the 1960s, the Civil Rights Movement made monumental strides through the actions of leaders like Martin Luther King Jr. and the historic March on Washington. John F. Kennedy was assassinated in 1963, and his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, signed the Civil Rights Act in 1964, followed by the Voting Rights Act in 1965. These victories did not mark the end of the Civil Rights Movement, but rather a step forward towards equality. They also sparked a decade that would be marked by numerous other movements, including women's and gay rights. Each of these factors contributed to a social climate that was accustomed to grassroots movements for change as well as a general rethinking of traditional values.

In foreign affairs, the United States experienced an extremely volatile decade, marked by the Cold War and the Vietnam conflict. The Cold War with the Soviet Union led to increased tensions and anxiety, as American citizens lived most of the decade with at least some level of fear of imminent destruction. The Vietnam conflict, coupled with the already existing counterculture movement, led to growing anti-war, anti-establishment attitudes, particularly among college students. America's frequent and consistent involvement in foreign conflicts led to an increased distrust of government.

Another crucial development of this era that is particularly relevant to this essay was the rise of the environmental movement. Aside from the shifting mindsets, values, and ideas of the decade, a number of historic events in this period caused individuals to give more thought to the ways in which man should live in and interact with the environment. In 1962, Rachel Carson, a marine biologist and environmentalist, wrote a book titled *Silent Spring*, which brought attention



to the destructive and indiscriminate use of pesticides. This text had a controversial reception, as she accused the chemical industry of purposefully misinforming the public and not being conscience of the negative effects of these chemicals.<sup>8</sup> Her work eventually led to a national ban on DDT and helped establish the importance of the environmental movement in America. A year later Stewart Udall, the Secretary of the Interior, published *The Quiet Crisis*, a book about the potential dangers of pollution and an early call to action for environmental care.<sup>9</sup> Later that year, Congress passed The Clean Air Act, intended to reduce and limit air pollution. In 1964, the Wilderness Act was passed followed by the Water Quality Act in 1965.<sup>10</sup> In 1972, NASA showcased an iconic picture of earth from space; a photograph entitled *The Blue Marble*, a groundbreaking image that instilled a sense of awe in people across the world. The picture was released during the early stages of the environmental movement, and was quickly embraced by environmental activists for its portrayal of earth as fragile and precious. Each of these events seemed to highlight the fact that resources were limited, human actions were having a dramatic effect on the earth, and that humans must reevaluate their relationship with the world around them. It is within this context that Christianity and environmentalism became heavily intertwined, due in large part to a critical essay titled, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis."

---

<sup>8</sup> Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002), 9-13.

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Gershtenson, Brian W. Smith, and William R. Mangun, "Friends of the Earth? Partisanship, Party Control of Congress, and Environmental Legislation in Congress," *Politics and Policy*, 34, no.1 (March 2006): 67-68.

<sup>10</sup> The Wilderness Act defined wilderness as an area that is not influenced by man and where man is only a visitor, and set aside 9.1 million acres of land to be protected as "wilderness areas." The Water Quality Act established standards for water purity that states were required to maintain. The Wilderness Act acknowledged the intrinsic value of "wild places" while the Water Quality Act legally recognized the necessity of limiting pollution and maintaining a certain level of environmental cleanliness. Each of these acts helped the environmental movement gain momentum during this vital decade.

### Lynn White Jr.'s Criticisms of Christianity

Lynn White Jr. was a medieval historian who, in 1967, authored a work entitled “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis.” This essay blamed Christian theology for being the primary cause of environmental degradation in our modern world. White argued that before Christianity, people had a mostly harmonious relationship with the land in which they ascribed to it inherent value, took only what they needed, and were conscious of their effects on it. Christian theology, in his opinion, does not necessarily give value to the planet or the living things within it, but rather provides a strictly anthropocentric, or human centered, worldview. Since people of Judeo-Christian faith did not see the earth and the creatures in it as something to be cherished and honored, there was nothing to keep them from abusing the land and using it as they pleased. White cited the verses in Genesis in which God gave his people dominion over the earth.<sup>11</sup> White believed that Christians, and humans in general, took this idea to extremes and allowed it to guide their land management practices. While the command for dominion has existed for over 2000 years, White believed that it became especially destructive with the rise of technology, particularly in the West. White highlighted the fact that Western/European civilizations were some of the first to harness the power of wind, water, and even combustion to increase industrial output.<sup>12</sup> Their advances in technology led them to more pronounced uses of natural resources. Without a belief system that limited human authority over the earth, individuals were free to use the land however they saw fit without any fear of negative repercussion or any religiously inspired desire to preserve the it. White believed that the combination of advances in technology and the growing acceptance of Christian theology were especially destructive for the land, and that this abuse has continued through the years. He closed his argument with the suggestion of an

---

<sup>11</sup> Lynn White Jr., “Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,” *Science*, 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1205.

<sup>12</sup> White, “Historical Roots,” 1204.

almost pantheistic Christianity in which humans saw God in all parts of creation. In addition, he praised St. Francis of Assisi, who was famous for preaching to animals and valuing nature as much as he did human life. White believed that ecologists would be wise to embrace St. Francis as their patron saint.<sup>13</sup> As an author in 1967, writing in the midst of a growing environmental movement (Five years after Rachel Carson's *Silent Springs* in 1962 and 3 years before the first Earth Day in 1970), Lynn White Jr. was one of the earliest scholars to draw attention to the relationship between Christians and the earth.<sup>14</sup> His critical perspective and challenge to the Christian faith made his work a remarkable piece in the history of Christianity and environmentalism in America.

Lynn White Jr.'s thesis was highly influential during the years following its release, and it has continued to be widely read and cited. Even as recently as August 2015, Elspeth Whitney, a historian at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas, published an article in the journal *History Compass* entitled, "Lynn White Jr.'s 'Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis' After 50 Years." In this article, Whitney highlighted the significance of Lynn White Jr.'s work, arguing, "After 1967, no work of theology dealing with nature overlooked the role of religion in shaping our dealings with the natural world."<sup>15</sup> Whitney not only explained the importance of Lynn White Jr.'s essay, along with some of the lasting effects from his work, but she also went on to analyze and summarize various responses to his thesis over the last 50 years.

Many of the criticisms that Whitney covered were scholars who questioned the quality of Lynn White Jr.'s work as a historian. He was criticized for making sweeping generalizations and

---

<sup>13</sup> White, "Historical Roots," 1206-1207.

<sup>14</sup> *Silent Spring*, authored by Rachel Carson in 1962, was one of the first popular ecological books. In it, Carson highlighted problems with the frequent and unmonitored use of DDT. This text was extremely influential for its role in leading to the ban of DDT, but also as one of the first prominent books to bring issues of conservation to the attention of the general public. Some have argued that her book sparked the modern environmental movement.

<sup>15</sup> Elspeth Whitney, "Lynn White Jr.'s 'Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis' After 50 Years," *History Compass*, 13, no. 8 (2015): 396.

assumptions.<sup>16</sup> However, Whitney suggested that although “Roots” was technically a medieval history paper, it encompassed a broad range of topics and involved theologians, social scientists, historians, and many other professionals in the discussion. Whitney defended White’s work as an influential piece of scholarship, due to its influence on such a wide range of subjects. Whitney plainly stated that “‘Roots’ has helped shape the disciplines, the history of religion, ecotheology, environmental ethics, eco-philosophy, environmental history as well as American environmentalism as a social and intellectual movement.” She effectively validated this point with the sheer quantity of literature available that references White. In a more qualitative analysis of the responses, Whitney summarized, “Current assessments of ‘Roots’ recognize both the power of its influence and its vulnerability to criticism.”<sup>17</sup> Whitney did not necessarily argue for or against White’s ideas, but rather demonstrated his importance as a historian.

Whitney dedicated a section of her analysis to critiques of White from a "hermeneutical" perspective.<sup>18</sup> These cases dealt less with White from a historical perspective, and alternatively addressed his critical interpretation of scripture. Some have praised White for bringing this issue to the forefront of Christian thought, and additionally for suggesting what some believed to be an improved Christian approach to ecology. This perspective, as would be expected, was by no means unanimous. One critic, Bruce Shelvey, a professor at Trinity Western University, went so far as to say that “‘Roots’ ‘fundamentally undermined’ the Christian church’s future role in either reforming science or restoring the environment by promoting the assumption that Christianity had nothing to offer environmental thought and encouraging the search for

---

<sup>16</sup> Whitney, “Historical Roots After 50 Years,” 400.

<sup>17</sup> Whitney, “Historical Roots After 50 Years.,” 396.

<sup>18</sup> Hermeneutics generally refers to the study of and interpretation of texts. It often is associated with biblical studies, but not exclusively. In this instance, hermeneutics is used in reference to understanding interpretations of the Bible.

environmental values in Asian, Native American, and other non-Christian spiritual traditions.”<sup>19</sup>

Whitney emphasized that the significance of the contrasting theological responses do not indicate a weakness of White, but simply speak to his wide reaching influence. His thesis even served as an impetus for a new field of study known as ecotheology, largely made up of Christians seeking to show that Christian doctrine does not encourage dominance over the land but actually encourages responsible stewardship of resources.<sup>20</sup> There are other factors that have contributed to this development, but White’s work was a driving force.

Whitney’s assessment falls short in a few key ways. First off, she referred to Judeo-Christian beliefs as one, united belief system, which is an oversimplified understanding of Christianity in America. Christianity is made up of many denominations and theological subcategories, each of which has a unique set of viewpoints on social issues like environmentalism. For example, a person from a Southern Baptist background may view the issue very differently than someone coming from the Presbyterian Church of the U.S.A. These denominational differences are important and are worthy of note. Whitney herself recognized that “A full examination of the interplay between environmental ideas, specific religious denominations, and political attitudes is beyond the scope of this article.”<sup>21</sup> This of course opens a clear avenue for further research, which this thesis expands upon. The second point in which Whitney’s work could have gone further would be to assess how these responses have changed over time and identify the factors behind these changes. Her research implied that there may be some commonalities among people across different backgrounds that cause them to hold one perspective over another, outside of strictly theological beliefs (e.g., political biases, social pressures, and demographics). This leads to the third issue: Whitney mostly dealt with sources

---

<sup>19</sup> Whitney, "Historical Roots After 50 Years," 400.

<sup>20</sup> Whitney, "Historical Roots After 50 Years," 401.

<sup>21</sup> Whitney, "Historical Roots After 50 Years," 402.

that were retrospectively analyzing White's thesis. Whitney's assessment lacks an analysis of sources from people who were writing in the same era as White and more directly responding to the critical "Roots" article. This essay aims to reconcile this oversight through the examination of responses from key Christian leaders in the late 1960s and 1970s, as well as leading Christian publications like *Christianity Today* and *The Christian Century*.

### A Leading Conservative Christian's Approach to Environmentalism

One of the most prominent Christian leaders at the time of Lynn White Jr.'s critical thesis was Francis Schaeffer. Schaeffer was an influential theologian known for his establishment of the L'Abri community (a community that Francis Schaeffer and his wife founded in Switzerland as a place for travelers, philosophers, and theologians to gather and discuss religious issues), his political activism, and his prodigious writing. Some of his most well known books are *The God Who is There*, *A Christian Manifesto*, and *How Should We Then Live? The Rise of Western Thought and Culture*. One of his priorities was deciphering how Christians should engage with an increasingly secular American culture, which is articulated in his most popular book, *How Should We Then Live?* One of his lesser-known works is a book titled, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, written in 1970, just three years after the Lynn White thesis and the same year as the first Earth Day. In terms of his personal timeline, 1970 marked the beginning of a decade in which Schaeffer became closely associated with the Religious Right and the anti-abortion movement.<sup>22</sup> With this context in mind, it is perhaps surprising that *Pollution and the Death of Man* represented a remarkably progressive Christian stance on environmental challenges.

---

<sup>22</sup> Barry Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 175-77; Ruth Murraby Brown, *For a "Christian America": A History of the Religious Right* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2002), 205-06, 215.

*Pollution and the Death of Man* was, at its core, a reply to the criticisms of Lynn White Jr. His first chapter included an assessment of “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis” and the critiques that White made about the Christian faith. Schaeffer provided a balanced response to White, recognizing that Christians have been somewhat irresponsible in their management of resources. He also applauded White’s assertion that what humans think has a direct impact on what they do. This was an important statement because it recognized how a person’s religious faith affected the way people treated the planet.<sup>23</sup> Generally speaking, Schaeffer spoke positively of White’s intentions to shed light on this issue of Christian abuse of the environment.

For White, ecological destruction was a result of Christian theology devaluing all of the non-human parts of the planet. Christian theology, according to him, gave Christians unrestricted and unthoughtful use of the environment. Schaeffer agreed that some Christians had interpreted scripture in this manner, but he did not see this as the correct intentions of the Christian faith. Schaeffer was careful not to entirely disagree with White on areas that were at least somewhat agreeable. For Schaeffer, it appears that there was some room to agree with aspects of White’s thesis without compromising his Christian faith. This was significant because it represented a conservative evangelical who appeared far from hostile towards environmentalism.

There were other parts of White’s argument, however, which Schaeffer decided to oppose. The main point on which Schaeffer specifically disagreed with White was on his suggested solution. White believed that humans, Christians included, needed to embrace a worldview that held a higher regard for the rest of the planet, as exists in many Eastern religions. In addition, he had encouraged people to embrace St. Francis of Assisi as the patron saint for

---

<sup>23</sup> Francis Schaeffer and Udo Middlemann, *Pollution and the Death of Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1970), 11-14.

ecologists.<sup>24</sup> Schaeffer was extremely uneasy with these suggestions, as they neared pantheism, the belief that there was no difference between the universe and divinity, or that all aspects of creation are divine. It should be noted that White might not have considered his suggestions pantheistic, and he believed his ideas were feasible within the Judeo-Christian framework. Schaeffer, as a consistently conservative evangelical was therefore imposing his theological beliefs on his understanding of White's thesis.

Schaeffer was an ardent defender of the infallibility of scripture and a proponent of a literal reading of scripture, and was unsurprisingly concerned with some of these ideas that White put forward. To begin with, Schaeffer opposed the idea that humans should view all forms of life and creation as equal to themselves. He also disputed White's claim that Christian theology does not naturally prescribe any value to non-human parts of the earth. Schaeffer instead argued that Christians should seek to value everything in its God-ordained place in life. His understanding of biblical commands about the environment was that we must recognize human existence as being distinct from all other forms of life, while respecting other aspects of creation and treating them "with integrity" because they were created by God.<sup>25</sup>

Overall, he recognized that many Christians had failed ecologically. Instead of there being an intrinsic problem with Christian theology, Schaeffer argued that it was because mankind, in its fallen state, had failed to live up to the standard that God has set for them.<sup>26</sup> Given Schaeffer's conservative theological worldview and his defense of traditional Christian beliefs, it is not surprising that Schaeffer would take this stance. According to Schaeffer, if there was a practical issue resulting from Christian faith, it must have been a result of disobedience or improper applications of proper theology. Schaeffer was optimistic that Christian theology did

---

<sup>24</sup> White, "Historical Roots," 1207.

<sup>25</sup> Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, 48-54.

<sup>26</sup> Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, 59.



not necessarily imply that humans should dominate the earth, devalue it, or even view it apathetically.

Of course, that implies the question; what is the proper theological understanding of how Christians should deal with environmental issues and interact with nature? Schaeffer clearly understood that Christian theology, interpreted incorrectly, could certainly have a destructive impact on the environment.<sup>27</sup> It was this issue of “proper” interpretation that Schaeffer, White, and other scholars/theologians of the time disagreed on. As a conservative evangelical who advocated for a literal interpretation of scripture (i.e., the creation story in Genesis referring to a literal seven days), Schaeffer could not simply overlook the passage of scripture that grants man dominion over the earth. He recognized a distinction between dominion and sovereignty, however. His understanding was that God has full sovereignty over creation, whereas man simply has dominion. In his perspective, dominion did not imply that humans could do whatever they please to the planet. Instead, they are charged with being good stewards of it and using it responsibly, which must be discerned through God’s sovereign guidance.

The perspectives advocated for by Schaeffer were much different than the conclusions that White made about Christian attitudes toward the environment. Based on Schaeffer's important work, it can be assumed that, although Christians should resist pantheism, they could maintain a deep respect for the environment; they could understand that man should not trample over the earth, and they could understand the importance of treating the earth well. However, to assume this about all Christians would be to make a similar mistake as that in Elspeth Whitney’s work (Whitney broadly referred to the "Judeo-Christian" faith as a collective unit). Christian beliefs, unfortunately, are not quite this unified. Schaeffer was a popular theologian, but there were certainly a significant number of Christians who would have disagreed with his theological

---

<sup>27</sup> Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, 42.

interpretation of environmental issues. Although it would be convenient to accept Schaeffer's ideas as *the* Christian perspective, it would also be inaccurate. No, Christianity during the time of Francis Schaeffer was far from unified. He was one of many Christians addressing this particular subject, with other theologians and scholars taking either more liberal or conservative approaches. An overview of a few alternative Christian responses published in the same year as *Pollution and the Death of Man* is valuable for understanding the range of perspectives.

### Liberal Theologians Introduce New Perspectives

Francis Schaeffer's text is an example of a stance from a conservative evangelical. Ian G. Barbour, on the other hand, represents an individual whose ideas reached more to the "left" or liberal side of Christianity. Barbour was a graduate of Yale Divinity School and a professor at Carleton College who specialized in the relationship between science and religion. In an article titled "An Ecological Ethic," written for *The Christian Century* in 1970, Barbour also recognized that Christians, and all other humans, had irresponsibly managed their land, resources, and technology. Barbour argued that America in the 1960s was a thing-oriented culture (consumerism) that needed to evolve into a "people-oriented culture" and eventually a life-oriented culture. In general, he stood with Schaeffer, and White, as to what the problems were that human life was facing (overpopulation, limited resources and irresponsible ecological behavior as a result of man's beliefs about his role in nature).<sup>28</sup> In terms of his solution, however, Barbour's ideas were much more congruent with those of White. To begin with, Barbour noted the value of Eastern religions like Taoism and Buddhism for the way they emphasized the need

---

<sup>28</sup> Ian J. Barbour, "An Ecological Ethic," *The Christian Century*, 87, no. 40 (October 7, 1970): 1180.

to respect nature. He argued that Christians may be wise to adopt some of these Eastern religious values.<sup>29</sup> This is certainly not something that Schaeffer would have advocated for.

For Schaeffer, reforming an issue within Christianity did not involve looking to outside sources such as Eastern religions. In his opinion, everything that needed to be understood about proper Christian living and theology could be found within scriptures.<sup>30</sup> Barbour was not afraid to look to outside sources for wisdom and knowledge, but he also recognized that a passion for social justice, including causes like environmentalism, could be found within the Bible. The fundamental difference between the perspectives of Schaeffer and Barbour was not so much about an adherence to or rejection of the general Christian religion. Barbour identified problems in society (overconsumption, excessive pollution, etc.) and attempted to restructure Christian theology in a way that would help solve these problems. Schaeffer, on the other hand, saw the environmental issues of the day as an indication that people had been disobedient to the commands of scripture and only meant to reorient people to a proper (and traditional) theological view of the issue. These divergent perspectives were both written by Christians, but were driven by different theological and methodological perspectives.<sup>31</sup>

Another useful source is the writing of David Engel. In 1970, David Engel wrote an article entitled “Elements in a Theology of Environment.” It was originally presented as a speech at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary, where he was a professor. He noted that the impact of religion in regards to the environmental movement was yet to be determined, but that if religious people were to have an impact in this realm, they would have to “act decisively in the years

---

<sup>29</sup> Barbour, “An Ecological Ethic,” 1180.

<sup>30</sup> Hankins, *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America*, 138-47.

<sup>31</sup> The word methodological here is intended to describe the practical application of theological ideas. It implies less concern with biblical interpretation and instead an emphasis on the way that those who believe in Christian theology should live.

immediately ahead,” given the fact that, in his words “Time is limited. But action is possible.”<sup>32</sup> From his introduction onwards, it was clear that Engel thought religious people, and Christians specifically, had a responsibility to the environment.

Engel introduced another critical voice towards Christian theology named Ian McHarg. McHarg was perhaps even more critical than Lynn White Jr., arguing that the early chapters of Genesis naturally gave humans the right to exploit the earth. While White was perhaps more critical of the way that Christian theology had typically interpreted Genesis, McHarg took issue with the text itself, contending that it is inherently exploitative. Engel opposed Mcharg, arguing, “Western man, profoundly influenced by some form of Christianity, has acted as if he has been given some right to utilize his environment in whatever way he pleases.”<sup>33</sup> Engel, like Schaeffer and Barbour, maintained the perspective that some Christians had been irresponsible in their use of the planet, but that it was an issue with that particular form of Christianity, not an issue with the general Christian faith. Engel saw the problem with Christianity and the environment as an issue of theological interpretations. His solution, therefore, was to develop moral guidelines, driven by biblical thought, for the use of our natural resources.<sup>34</sup>

Although Engel and Schaeffer were in many ways alike, there are a number of details that illuminate their distinctions. For example, when Engel referenced the creation account from Genesis, Engel referred to each of the days in the Genesis story with quotation marks (i.e., the “sixth day”). This was indicative of a more liberal theology. Many theologians of the time were starting to adopt a loose interpretation of the creation account, assuming that the text did not necessarily imply seven literal days. This was a stance that Schaeffer and many other conservative evangelicals would have taken issue with. In addition, Engel approached the

---

<sup>32</sup> David E. Engel, “Elements in a Theology of Environment,” *Zygon*, 5, no. 3 (September 1970): 216.

<sup>33</sup> Engel, “Theology of Environment,” 217.

<sup>34</sup> Engel, “Theology of Environment,” 217.

creation story in terms of the purpose or moral of the story. For Engel, the details of the story were not quite as important as the lessons it teaches or for what it reveals about the nature of man. This was also a common trend among liberal theology, and another point on which he would have interpreted scripture differently than Francis Schaeffer.

With these differences in mind, what conclusions did Engel reach about the role of Christian theology as it relates to the environment? Engel, as did Schaeffer, accepted the idea that God does indeed give man dominion over nature. That dominion, however, does not necessarily imply destruction, as McHarg and White both argued. Engel cited curriculum created by the Melton Research Center at the Jewish Theological Seminary in America (it was also characteristic of liberal theology to borrow and sometimes validate teachings from other faiths such as Judaism), which sought to answer the question: "How is man to master the earth?" He summarized that the findings of the center demonstrated that man was to care for the world because it is God's creation and because man is also the creation of God. He used this study as an example of a non-exploitative biblical interpretation of the creation.<sup>35</sup>

Further in Engel's argument, he referenced a passage of scripture in Romans Chapter 8 in which Paul speaks of the "redemption of man." This passage also alludes to the "redemption<sup>36</sup> of nature." Engel concluded from this text that God intended for creation to be redeemed, and therefore had a desire to see it cared for. Francis Schaeffer also used this scripture in his argument that that man should treat the planet in light of its coming "redemption." The fact that both Schaeffer and Engel cited the same scripture is not entirely significant. It is compelling, however, that Schaeffer and Engel came to similar conclusions and interpretations, despite their

---

<sup>35</sup> Engel, "Theology of Environment," 219.

<sup>36</sup> Redemption, in Christian theology, generally refers to a recovery of creation from its fallen or sinful nature. It often involves a forgiveness or absolution of sins. For creation to be redeemed implies that damages done to the earth would be restored.

seemingly different theological understandings. Engel continued his discussion with an analysis of the creation stories in Genesis Chapters 1 and 2. He concluded that if man wanted to exploit and destroy nature, these passages of the Bible did not provide a foundation for those actions. In his interpretation, man was then left with a moral choice of how to treat nature.<sup>37</sup>

The concluding pages of Engel's work argued that ecology, rather than politics or any other lens, should be man's guide as he interprets theology and develops a moral philosophy. Just as Ian Barbour had done, Engel argued that adopting a theology in light of ecological issues served a valuable utility. Engel, influenced by recent talks of impending environmental destruction, some of which predicted humans to be eating plankton or each other by 2005, determined that adopting a theology that was driven by ecology was of the utmost importance. To do this, Engel argued that the theological idea of not sinning against each other should be expanded to include not sinning against nature. He took this so far as to say that it may be necessary to "identify deference towards life-support systems as a mark of salvation." Schaeffer would have found issue with this idea because it seemed to be an adjustment of traditional Christian theology in order to account for current needs. Engel also argued the practical value of maintaining the environment as a means of reducing the violence that results from competition for resources. Lastly, he argued that preserving nature would require humility and charity, two characteristics typically key to Christian faith that could be emphasized through a theology of nature.<sup>38</sup>

Based on the four historical and theological works covered thus far- Lynn White Jr. (1967), Francis Schaeffer (1970), Ian Barbour (1970), and David Engel (1970)- it is clear that there were a number of different ideas about this complex issue. It is also apparent that each of

---

<sup>37</sup> Engel, "Theology of Environment," 220-22.

<sup>38</sup> Engel, "Theology of Environment," 226-27.

these authors interpreted scripture and perceived social issues differently, resulting in an assortment of unique (and yet in many ways similar) stances on the relationship between Christians and the environment. These viewpoints can be more thoroughly understood through a synopsis of the larger theological trends that manifested themselves in the aforementioned works.

### The Emergence of Mainline Protestants and Conservative Evangelicals

The 1960s represented a unique time for American Protestantism. Christianity in America was far from a unified religious body. Protestantism in this period was marked primarily by two terms: "mainline" and "evangelical."<sup>39</sup> These phrases were often synonymous with liberal and conservative theology, respectively, and were, in many ways, a resurgence of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy of the 1920s.<sup>40</sup> By the late 1960s, some pretty clear lines had been drawn between these two differing viewpoints. There was a liberal and conservative theological perspective on most important social and political issues of the time. These different approaches to Christian theology were often at odds with each other, and eventually led to the formation of two distinct subgroups: mainline Protestants and conservative evangelicals.<sup>41</sup> Each of these group's origins, trends, and characteristics are useful for understanding their respective environmental perspectives

---

<sup>39</sup> Both of these words have been used to demonstrate various meanings throughout the history of Christianity. However, during this decade there were specific values attributed to these terms. These values will be outlined and defined in the following pages.

<sup>40</sup> This refers to a dispute that was sparked within the Presbyterian Church U.S.A about the proper approach to scripture. A key point within the controversy was whether the Bible should be understood as literal truth (fundamental stance) or interpreted through a critical lens (modernist stance). Modernist theology did not necessarily imply a rejection of traditional doctrines, but rather the freedom not to affirm ideas like a literal creation story, the virgin birth or the second coming of Christ. These issues came to a head in the infamous Scopes Trial of 1925, which featured fundamentalists as the leading group against Darwinism.

<sup>41</sup> Mainline Protestantism sometimes is referred to as "the Protestant Mainline." The group also will be interchangeably referred to as "liberal Christians" or "liberal theologians."

Mainline Protestantism<sup>42</sup> was an extensive movement within American Christianity that was rooted in liberal theology. Broadly, liberal theology is a Christian school of thought that is hundreds of years old and has taken many various shapes throughout history. It experienced a time of growth in the 18th century, heavily influenced by enlightenment thinking and an embrace of higher criticism. It manifested itself in various forms throughout the years (e.g., the “social gospel” of Henry Ward Beecher in mid-19th century America), but consistently maintained a loose interpretation of scripture and emphasis on social justice.<sup>43</sup> During the 1960s and 1970s, liberal Christian theology took the shape of a broader group known as “mainline Protestantism.”

There are a few defining characteristics of the Protestant mainline. Theologians within this group typically had a more liberal interpretation of scripture, and they did not necessarily advocate for the inerrancy or infallibility of scripture. They were known for taking a more liberal stance when it comes to social issues such as the ordination of women or the acceptance of gay marriage, and they were more willing to align themselves with organizations that fall outside of their belief system. They were known for being relatively ecumenical and supporting a broad spectrum of Christian beliefs. Beyond their theology, mainline Protestants were also set apart in their attitudes about the church and its role within society. Many mainline Protestants believed that the Christian faith was compatible with the contemporary American way of life, and could therefore be a uniting force.<sup>44</sup> The peak of the Protestant mainline's influence was during the 1950s and has slowly declined since the 1960s. However, it was certainly still an influential segment of Christianity during the pinnacle year of 1967 (the year Lynn White's thesis was published). The mainline's efforts to place themselves at the center of Protestant Christianity in

---

<sup>42</sup> Mainline Protestantism is addressed first because the conservative evangelical group emerged largely as a response to the growth of this liberal theological faction.

<sup>43</sup> David W. Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove, IL:InterVarsity Press, 2005), 118-27, 164-65, 246-51.

<sup>44</sup> Ted G. Jelen, "Protestant Clergy as Political Leaders: Theological Limitations," *Review of Religious Research*, 36, no. 1 (September 1994): 32-33.



many ways pitted them up against the conservative evangelical Christians. Of the sources already covered, both David E. Engel and Ian Barbour would have been considered mainline Protestants.

It is worth mentioning that even within mainline Protestantism, there are numerous smaller groups. Specifically, mainline Protestants include a few key denominations: the United Methodist Church, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., the Episcopal Church, the American Baptist Churches, the United Church of Christ, the Disciples of Christ, and the Reformed Church in America.<sup>45</sup> Each of these denominations has similar viewpoints on many issues, but they do not represent one homogenous train of thought. Within each denomination there are a number of unique factors including class, culture, race, and gender, which certainly affect the ideology of these groups. In general, however, most mainline Protestants are white, upper class, and highly educated individuals. This is important to keep in mind, as individuals with higher incomes and levels of education are more likely to adopt environmentally friendly attitudes. Since most sources covered fit this description, we must assume that there may be a slight variance from the trends uncovered in this thesis based on economic status and education levels. Although this particular group is biased towards a certain demographic, the group known as the “mainline Protestants” must serve as one of the key groups of focus.

In contrast to the Protestant mainline was the conservative evangelical subgroup. Conservative evangelicalism was not a new concept during the 1960s. Just as liberal theology had been around for centuries, there had also been conservative Christians who maintained the beliefs that liberal theologians moved away from. Truthfully, the term “evangelical” is a difficult word to use and define, as it has carried different connotations with it throughout the history of

---

<sup>45</sup> Elesha J. Coffman, *Christian Century and Rise of the Protestant Mainline* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4; Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism*, 151.

Christianity.<sup>46</sup> For the purpose of this essay, evangelicalism is used to specifically reference the conservative movement within Protestant theology that arose during the 1950s and 1960s as a response to the advances of mainline Protestantism. Conservative evangelicalism (or, evangelicalism, as it will sometimes be referred to for the sake of efficiency) mirrored the mainline Protestant movement in that during these crucial decades it became more sharply defined and developed into its own subgroup within Christianity. Scholars and theologians who fell into this camp typically upheld traditional Christian doctrine, rejected the higher criticism of scripture, and adopted conservative attitudes towards social issues. (Francis Schaeffer serves as an example of a conservative evangelical leader.)

Although evangelicalism (as a broad term) encompasses a wide range of beliefs and carries different connotations during different times, there are a few key components of their theology that have remained consistent. David Bebbington, a prominent religious historian, outlined four key descriptors that can be used to define evangelicalism. First, he classified evangelicals by their adherence to the Bible as the source of all spiritual truth. Second, evangelicals were known for their necessary emphasis on the saving power of the cross. Third, evangelicals believe that there was a process of conversion necessary for someone to be saved. Last, a key principle for evangelicals is their emphasis on Biblical activism, or in other words, their efforts to spread the gospel. This definition provides an effective framework for historical studies.<sup>47</sup> In addition to these four theological characteristics, evangelicalism during the 1960s (and in the decades to follow) was unique in that it also implied a conservative preference on most social issues (e.g., abortion, gay marriage) Demographically, conservative evangelicals are

---

<sup>46</sup> Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys*, (Downers Grove, IL:InterVarsity Press, 2003), 13-25; The introduction to this text provides a very helpful overview of the word "evangelical" and its various uses and connotations over time. This extensive history, while interesting, falls outside the scope of this thesis.

<sup>47</sup> Bebbington, *The Dominance of Evangelicalism*, 22-37.

much more diverse than mainline Protestants. However, the sources used for this essay were drawn from two magazines that were heavily biased towards white, upper class, highly educated individuals. As a result, similar demographics are represented in both the conservative evangelical and mainline Protestant sources.

It is important to understand that the conservative evangelical movement existed largely as a result of the rise of mainline Protestantism. As mainline Protestants broke away from many aspects of traditional Christianity (e.g. the inerrancy and infallibility of scripture), conservative evangelicals worked to affirm and maintain those traditional beliefs. While many denominations and groups of believers had not necessarily taken a hard and fast stance on these issues before, they now felt the need to make bold claims about these traditional doctrines. Foundational differences in theology led the two Christian subgroups to be in opposition of each other. It seemed that a group drifting one way theologically seemed to generate an opposite reaction. As liberal theology grew, so too did conservative theology.

As a result, these two movements are often juxtaposed against each other in historical studies. They represent seemingly contradictory ideas and schools of thoughts, giving a clear opportunity for analyzing contrasting opinions. Thus, conservative evangelicals and mainline Protestants provide a relatively simple framework for this rather complex study. Furthermore, the Christian rhetoric around environmentalism can be better understood with an adequate knowledge of the Protestant Christian landscape of the 1960s and 1970s. Schaeffer, Barbour, and Engel were all a part of this larger movement, and their responses to the environmental issue reflect these theological underpinnings. Schaeffer was a conservative evangelical who prioritized upholding the inerrancy and infallibility of scripture. Instead of using the ecological issues of the time to guide his theology, he used theology to guide his ecological ethic. Barbour and Engel on

the other hand, felt that Christian theology needed to be reshaped in light of the recent emphasis on environmental issues. In doing this, they were willing to borrow from other religious traditions, embrace scientific evidence and stray from traditional Christian doctrine. These are characteristics largely indicative of mainline Protestants.

The examples covered thus far clearly demonstrate how Christian environmental ethics were influenced by theological differences. Interestingly enough, despite their unique theological perspectives and different reasons and methods for approaching ecological ethics, we find many similarities between these viewpoints. Up to this point, each of the Christian perspectives on the issue of environmentalism has maintained a few key commonalities. First, they affirmed the idea that although God did give man dominion over the earth, it did not mean that man could exploit or destroy the earth. Second, each scholar and theologian believed that the Bible was a helpful source for determining man's right relationship to the earth. Third, they acknowledged that a man's thoughts and values certainly had an effect on their relationship with the land, which implied the importance for Christians to address the issue. Fourth, they recognized that man has a "God given" duty to interact with nature responsibly and with respect. Fifth, there is an implication that nature has inherent value as a creation of God. The scholars and theologians may not have agreed with each other on scripture interpretation, the role of Christianity in relation to the modern world, or the proper Christian stance on social issues like abortion and gay marriage; but they still managed to arrive at some similar conclusions regarding the proper Christian relationship between man and nature.

These are only a few examples, however. Already, it has been demonstrated that each subgroup had unique theological lenses that influenced the way they saw contemporary issues like environmentalism. In light of this information, how consistent was the Christian response to

environmentalism? Were these perspectives influenced by cultural, social, and political circumstances of the time, or were they strictly theological? With the broad range of Christian beliefs, comparing responses from conservative evangelicals and mainline Protestants (while still taking into account smaller, minute theological differences) is the best methodological approach. The aforementioned comparisons can be expanded upon by the introduction of more viewpoints.

Lynn White Jr. first engaged Christians in the environmental issue in 1967 with his now famous “Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis.” In 1970, Francis Schaeffer (along with the lesser known David Engel and Ian Barbour) further solidified the bond between environmentalism and Christianity. In the years to follow, leading journals/magazines like *Christianity Today* and *The Christian Century* followed suit by publishing a number of articles pertaining to the newly established debate. Articles from these sources are extremely helpful for analyzing the changing Christian response to environmentalism.

#### *The Christian Century and Christianity Today*

Additional sources needed for the extended analysis of Christian environmental perspectives during the years following Lynn White Jr.'s consequential thesis are found within the publications of *The Christian Century* and *Christianity Today*. *The Christian Century* represents the mainline Protestant viewpoint whereas *Christianity Today* personifies the conservative evangelical perspective. These prominent Christian publications provide a plethora of sources and are extremely useful for further comparing the contrasting perspectives on environmentalism held by both evangelical and mainline Christians in America. *The Christian Century*, in its contemporary form, was established in 1900 (it previously existed as *The Christian Oracle*, which was created in 1884). The vision behind the name change was a desire for the 20th century

to be a time in which Protestant Christianity existed harmoniously with modern-day technology and society. The magazine, as a result of its mainline Protestant founders, consistently took a more liberal stance on many issues. The leadership of the magazine was not afraid to publish articles that strayed from traditional Christian beliefs. They supported higher criticism of the scriptures, and they advocated for the social gospel.<sup>4849</sup> The liberal perspective of *The Christian Century* consistently put it at odds with traditional Protestant Christians, and made it a consistent target of criticism from more conservative Christian perspectives. *The Christian Century* was, and still is, the prominent publication for mainline Protestants and liberal theology.<sup>50</sup> Their current motto is "Thinking critically, living faithfully." This emphasis on critical thinking as well as the desire for a harmonious relationship among Christianity, technology, and society is incredibly significant for the particular issue of environmentalism. As the Protestant mainline - with the help of *The Christian Century*- developed into a more clearly defined entity, it became increasingly clear that there was a large number of Christians who did not agree with their beliefs or fit their standards. Many of these Christians were concerned with the ideas being embraced by mainline Protestants. Congruously, they were concerned with some of the ideas being published by *The Christian Century*. It was not surprising then, that a challenger to the publication was created in 1956, known as *Christianity Today*.

*Christianity Today* was unique in that it was not the product of a particular church, denomination, or school of thought. *Christianity Today* was the creation of Billy Graham, the leading evangelical of the time, and Carl F.H. Henry. Henry was a leader within the National Evangelical Association and one of the founders of Fuller Theological Seminary, a flagship

---

<sup>48</sup> Coffman, *The Christian Century and the Rise of the Protestant Mainline*, 12-17, 24-32.

<sup>49</sup> The social gospel was a movement within Protestant Christianity that rose to prominence during the early twentieth century. The movement emphasized the need to usher in the kingdom of God by eliminating evil and suffering on the earth. Most advocates for the social gospel were liberal in theology. The social gospel dwindled during the First World War, but regained popularity in conjunction with the Civil Rights Movement.

<sup>50</sup> Coffman, *The Christian Century*, 184-88.

evangelical seminary in Pasadena, California. He served as the first publisher and editor in chief of the magazine.<sup>51</sup> The magazine was intended to provide a balanced perspective on issues of theology, society, and culture, while affirming traditional Christian beliefs such as the inerrancy and infallibility of scripture (in stark contrast to the mainline Protestant's embrace of higher criticism of scriptures). In this regard, the two publications sought a similar purpose, but with different methodologies- primarily, their willingness, or unwillingness, to liberally interpret scriptures. Billy Graham, a leading evangelist and key founder of the magazine, remarked on his desire to "plant the evangelical flag in the middle of the road, taking the conservative theological position but a definite liberal approach to social problems."<sup>52</sup> At the time of its creation, Billy Graham was one of the most influential Christian leaders in the nation, and his support of the magazine made the leaders of *The Christian Century* very nervous.<sup>53</sup> The new magazine was not only spearheaded by a leader holding a significant amount of clout, but it also received generous financial support from J. Howard Pew, a wealthy oil executive, allowing the magazine to be competitive in its influence from the start. *Christianity Today* was a monumental response to the liberal theology of *The Christian Century*.

The formation of the more conservative *Christianity Today* naturally positioned itself against the more liberal *Christian Century*, and this was evident in their interactions. Graham and his cohorts perceived *The Christian Century* as being too liberal, whereas the leadership of *The Christian Century* saw *Christianity Today* as being too focused on individual faith while alienating Christian believers from important social justice issues.<sup>54</sup> Thus, each publication became not only an avenue through which to express the viewpoints of each respective group,

---

<sup>51</sup> George Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 54-55, 75-82; Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism*, 34-38.

<sup>52</sup> Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism*, 158.

<sup>53</sup> Coffman, *The Christian Century*, 182, 189.

<sup>54</sup> Coffman, *The Christian Century*, 190.

but also a theological arena in which arguments against opposing viewpoints could be made. Given the fact that the rivalry between the two magazines was at its height during the crucial decade of the 1960s, amidst the Cold War, the Civil Rights Movement, and the rising environmental movement, these publications provide a useful framework through which the Christian response to environmentalism can be further understood.

### Overview of an Earlier Scholar's Similar Approach

One historical study involving Christianity and environmentalism took a similar approach, using magazine articles as a means of determining the Christian approach to environmentalism. In 2013, Sabrina Danielson of the University of Pennsylvania published an article titled “Fracturing Over Creation Care? Shifting Environmental Beliefs Among Evangelicals, 1984-2010.” In this piece, she posed a couple of key questions: Are evangelicals shifting their attention to a more progressive view of the environment? Additionally, “are evangelicals fracturing over the issue of environmentalism?”<sup>55</sup> To answer these questions, she approached three key Christian publications: *Christianity Today*, *Sojourners*, and *World*, each of which vary in the bent of their theological beliefs, with *Sojourners* representing the most liberal, *Christianity Today* as the moderate, and *World* as the most conservative. It is unclear why *The Christian Century* was excluded from this study. Danielson’s approach differed from this historical analysis in that she dealt less with the specific rhetoric involved or the ideas being discussed, but instead focused on the number of articles written on the topic within each publication.

She concluded that, based on the number of available sources pertaining to the issue, evangelicals over time have paid more attention to environmental issues, with varying levels of

---

<sup>55</sup> Sabrina Danielson, “Fracturing Over Creation Care? Shifting Environmental Beliefs Among Evangelicals, 1984-2010,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 52, no. 1 (2013): 198-215.



support for urgent environmental action. In addition, she concluded that perspectives on these environmental issues had become increasingly polarized and politicized. She also made the argument that environmentalism was a divisive subject for Christians, an issue over which existing alignments to certain political or theological groups may "fracture." Danielson concluded that many evangelicals were naturally turned away from environmentalism simply because it was often lumped in with other liberal ideas.<sup>56</sup> Further still, she submitted the idea that *Christianity Today* only started embracing "creation care"<sup>57</sup> as an evangelical concern around the late 1980s, and did not formally acknowledge it as an important matter until 1992.<sup>58</sup> Danielson's work is helpful in that it exposes the highly political nature of the issue during the later decades of the 20th century, which must be taken into account when analyzing articles from the 1960s and 1970s. She also validated the aforementioned idea that liberal and conservative Christians approached the issue differently.

However, Danielson's study did not fully account for the diversity of beliefs within Christian thought. She used the term evangelicals too broadly and she did not make much of a clear delineation among various groups of evangelicals and how their theological differences may have had a changing role in affecting their understanding of environmental issues. Danielson furthermore did not acknowledge extensive dialogue concerning environmentalism, creation care, ecology, and the relationship between man and nature that occurred during the 1960s and 1970s, particularly following the introduction of Lynn White Jr.'s prolific thesis (although she does make mention of the White thesis). The perspectives on the issue during these

---

<sup>56</sup> Danielson, "Fracturing Over Creation Care?" 206, 210.

<sup>57</sup> Creation care is a loosely defined environmental principle that encourages Christians to care for the planet simply because it is God's creation. The term mostly is used by conservative evangelicals, as it is free from the political stigma of a term like "environmentalism."

<sup>58</sup> Based on my analysis of articles written during the late 1960s and early 1970s, this appears to be a misrepresentation of *Christianity Today's* stance on the issue. As will be demonstrated in the following pages, there were a plethora of articles written about the topic, many of which advocated for creation care.

crucial years were more progressive than Danielson might have assumed, and their influence is evident in the sources that she does mention. This can be seen through my assessment of numerous sources from both *Christianity Today* and *The Christian Century*. The articles selected are intended to cover a wide range of worldviews and theological leanings within each publication. They certainly do not speak for all *Christianity Today* or *Christian Century* readers/editors, but they are representative.

#### *Christianity Today's* Balanced Approach

*Christianity Today* was experiencing a great deal of newfound success at the time of Lynn White's thesis. The magazine was actively maintaining traditional Christian doctrines, while becoming engaged in pivotal social issues. The rising environmental movement did not go unnoticed by the leaders of *Christianity Today*, and a number of articles covering the topic were published during the years to follow. One key piece worth examining appeared in *Christianity Today* on April 23, 1971. The article featured an interview between a writer from the magazine and Dr. Carl Reidel, the assistant director at Williams College's Center for Environmental Studies. Reidel was also a member of the First Baptist Church of Williamstown, MA. Dr. Reidel was likely chosen as a subject for the article because he represented a unique blend of scientific academia and conservative Christianity. According to the self-reported history of the First Baptist Church of Williamstown, it was a conservative evangelical congregation, largely influenced by leaders such as Billy Graham. Reidel thus had the opportunity to serve as an example of science and religion being cohesively blended together. Reidel recognized that there

was an environmental crisis, and he acknowledged that humans had a significant hand in creating it.<sup>59</sup>

For Reidel, the main factor behind the environmental crisis was humankind's love of affluence and extensive consumerism. In addition, he made reference to Lynn White's thesis, arguing that Christians had been no better and no worse than other belief systems. He did, however, agree that the Christian understanding of dominion had gone astray, and that Christians needed to reassess their values pertaining to their use of resources. On this point, he was in agreement with White. He, along with Schaeffer and other conservative voices, did not agree with White's suggested solution that, in their opinion, neared pantheism or worship of the earth. He paid homage to the ideas of Francis Schaeffer, such as the command to "honor the ant"<sup>60</sup> and believed that "The Christian ideal holds the ultimate answer to the environmental crisis." Instead of approaching a change in technology or even a change in theology, Reidel advocated for a change in values, suggesting that tithing, giving up ten percent of one's income, was a small, practical step towards reducing consumerism.<sup>61</sup>

A few additional points should be noted about this intriguing article. It surely represented a conservative evangelical response. Reidel was, himself, a member of a conservative evangelical First Baptist church. It cannot, of course, be assumed that he maintained all of the beliefs put forward by his church. It does, however, imply that he leaned towards the conservative side as far as theology was concerned. He approached the issue in a similar fashion to Schaeffer in that he did not wish to rethink Christian theology, but simply to call attention to what scripture had to say about how humans should interact with the environment. He was

---

<sup>59</sup> Carl H. Reidel, "Christianity and the Environmental Crisis," *Christianity Today*, 15, no. 15 (April 23, 1971): 4-7.

<sup>60</sup> A principle idea discussed in Francis Schaeffer's *Pollution and the Death of Man* encouraged people to honor each organism or part of creation in its respected place. According to this idea, an ant did have value and should be honored, but its value was not the same as that of a human, or even a bear. Everything was to be respected according to its place in "God's natural order."; Schaeffer, *Pollution and the Death of Man*, 74-78.

<sup>61</sup> Reidel, "Christianity and the Environmental Crisis," 4-7.

defensive of the Christian faith, particularly in light of White's heavy criticisms. Reidel did not, by any means, believe that Christian theology was inherently ecologically destructive; but he did recognize that Christian theology, if misused, could lead to an irresponsible ecological ethic. Reidel's conservative worldview can be seen in this, as he upheld the authority of scripture and traditional Christian doctrine. For him, it was not about the doctrine itself, but rather about the misapplication of the doctrine, fueled by consumerism. He defended the conservative Christian faith while still addressing the issue. It is also worth noting that he acknowledged the human influence on the environment. (In the current era, conservatives are often associated with the denial of man-made climate change, as was seen in some of the vitriolic responses to Pope Francis's encyclical.) His acceptance of a human induced ecological crisis can be attributed to his scientific background and his involvement in Williams College's Center for Environmental Studies. It is unknown how White would have perceived someone like Reidel, but it is likely that he may have perceived a contradiction between his ecological ethic and his faith. Interestingly, for Reidel there was no contradiction. He simply developed an ecological ethic guided by theology.

A number of other articles also published in *Christianity Today* during the 1970s reveal that Reidel's voice was not alone. In addition, they imply that *Christianity Today* was at the very least cognizant of the environmental issues at hand. One of the key features of the magazine was a review of contemporary literature, a section titled "Books in Review." In the same issue that featured the interview with Dr. Reidel, the magazine included a review of a few books about environmentalism. The article, titled "Ecology and Apocalypse," notes the recent increase in publications about not just the environmental crisis but also the end times and impending "doomsdays." As can be expected, the anonymous author (likely one of the editors or staff

members of *Christianity Today*) first addressed the Lynn White thesis. This was a consistent theme in articles written in this era, with White at times almost serving as a straw man giving legitimacy to an author's work. This article not only acknowledged the rise in literature addressing the issue of environmentalism and ecological crisis, but also recognized that the earth was indeed in the midst of a crisis. The author summarized, praised, and criticized four different books. Significantly, one of the books reviewed and praised was Francis Schaeffer's *Pollution and the Death of Man*. The review especially commended the fact that Schaeffer, along with another writer named Paul Santmire<sup>62</sup> rejected the idea of pantheism while acknowledging the need to adhere to Christian teachings on environmental issues. The article furthermore emphasized the idea that the Bible values environmentalism.<sup>63</sup>

It should be noted that this source could safely represent the leadership of *Christianity Today*, as its author was not an outside contributor but a monthly columnist, editor, or staff person. As opposed to standalone pieces or letters to the editor, these book reviews were sanctioned by the magazine and can confidently be assumed to demonstrate the perspective of the magazine as a whole. As the "flagship evangelical magazine" their opinions are extremely important for understanding the conservative evangelical perspective. From this book review, it can be concluded that *Christianity Today* was willing to accept the reality of a climate crisis and deemed it important enough to take up valuable space within their magazine. The publication was willing to recognize the dire implications of an environmental crisis. It was also willing to

---

<sup>62</sup> Paul Santmire was the author of a 1970 book titled *Brother Earth: Nature, God, and Ecology in a Time of Crisis*. He is a self-proclaimed "ecological theologian" and has since written many works on the issue. *Brother Earth*, written in the same year as *Pollution and the Death of Man*, sparked his career and was one of the books reviewed in the aforementioned article.

<sup>63</sup> "Ecology and Apocalypse," *Christianity Today*, 15, no. 15 (April 23, 1971): 20-21; Another book review titled "Ecology Crisis" also was included in the April 23, 1971 edition of the magazine. The ideas and implications of the article were very similar to the ones already mentioned in "Ecology and Apocalypse," and it has therefore been omitted from this thesis.

acknowledge the role that Christians had played in this issue, and more significantly, the role that Christians ought to play in the future.

Although the magazine appeared progressive in its acknowledgment of the environmental crisis, it was not willing to compromise its conservative roots in search of a solution. For example, whether or not Lynn White Jr. actually advocated for pantheism, *Christianity Today*, and almost all of the articles included in it, made very clear that pantheism was not the correct way forward. Additionally, the magazine and its contributing authors (generally highly educated white men), similar to Schaeffer's conservative perspective, were not willing to adopt any type of Eastern tradition that gave equal value to all aspects of creation. These conservative evangelicals maintained an anthropocentric, or human centered, worldview. They also maintained the belief that God had given dominion over the earth to man, but that there was a God honoring (and ecologically friendly) way to exercise this dominion. Again, the magazine and its authors approached a seemingly progressive stance while also maintaining conservative Christian doctrine. When the current narrative of conservative evangelicals being anti-environmentalism is taken into account, these pieces of writing may seem surprising or contradictory. But, they appear to have been relatively common at the time.

It is important to be aware of the fact that the aforementioned sources were published on April 23, 1971. This was just four years after Lynn White's foundational thesis, and more significantly, just one day after the second Earth Day. With social concerns in mind, these articles were therefore very timely. *Christianity Today*, while striving to uphold conservative Christian faith, was also concerned with being culturally engaged and socially aware. Given the environmental movement's rise in popularity around this time, marked by the widespread celebration of the first Earth Day in 1970 and the establishment of the Environmental Protection

Agency later that year, it only made sense for the magazine to take special care to engage in the ongoing discourse. Also, the publishers of *Christianity Today* were surely aware that their direct competitors, *The Christian Century*, would quickly embrace the growing environmental movement. Although *Christianity Today* was hesitant to fall in line with the liberal views of *The Christian Century*, they would have known that failure to acknowledge something like Earth Day would have been alienating to their cause. This gives reason to speculate as to whether environmental issues were as important to *Christianity Today* as maintaining their image of a conservative but culturally engaged evangelical faith. Were these particular articles just part of what happened to be an edition that was especially dedicated to the environmental movement? Or, did *Christianity Today* continue to cover the important matter after these vital years?

An article from September 1972 supports the argument that the magazine continued to cover the issue and offer intriguing insight into a complicated topic. In the September issue of the magazine, James M. Houston, principal at Regent College in Vancouver, British Columbia, wrote an article titled "The Environmental Movement-Five Causes for Confusion." Only a year after writers for the magazine had affirmed the existence of an ecological crisis, Houston began his piece with the question, "Is there an environmental crisis?" He did not necessarily deny the existence of an environmental crisis, but he did invoke a number of questions worth consideration, warning of the dangers of being deceived by false teachings. His five warnings, and an example or explanation of each one, are as follows: First, "beware of panaceas and fads" (i.e., is this a real issue or a momentary trend?). Second, "beware of false emphases" (i.e., is the movement focused on the right things and driven by the right motives?). Third, "beware of false judgments" (i.e., cited Lynn White Jr. as making unfair accusations). Fourth, "beware of false analogies" (i.e., cited the example of the clock and the clock maker representing creation and

God, a false analogy in his opinion). Fifth, "beware of false solutions" (i.e., eliminating technology, reshaping religion, developing an ecological theology).<sup>64</sup> These warnings, and his specific examples, indicated that Houston was weary of environmentalism, although he did not necessarily deny the need for increased environmental concern.

Houston represented perhaps the most conservative, at least in terms of the environmental movement, of all the sources from *Christianity Today* discussed thus far. He was especially skeptical of the implications of environmentalism. He was concerned that it could cause people to turn away from or manipulate Christian theology in order to solve the ecological issue. At one point in his article, he very directly affirmed a conservative Christian belief, reminding his readers that, "The biblical God is the creator of nature and man. The heavens declare the glory of God, but the heavens are not God. Man will not find God in ecology, for God speaks directly to man."<sup>65</sup> Houston clearly was fearful of the possibility of ecology guiding theology, consistent with other conservative evangelical responses. This is not to say that he saw no value in the movement of environmentalism. He believed it was an opportunity for Christians to reevaluate their attitudes towards the environment and to fellow men. He implied that the ecological crisis was an urgent matter that required immediate thought and consideration. Further still, he suggested that the environmental movement, if approached correctly, could bring Christianity closer in line with the early church's Christianity (a very positive implication for conservative evangelicals).

A little over a year after Earth Day's first anniversary sparked a plethora of environmentally minded *Christianity Today* articles, the magazine was still carving out space within its pages to cover the important issue. Danielson's recent work analyzing the number of

---

<sup>64</sup> James M. Houston, "The Environmental Movement-Five Causes of Confusion," *Christianity Today*, 16, no. 24 (September 15, 1972): 8-10.

<sup>65</sup> Houston, "The Environmental Movement," 10.



articles written about the issue in prominent Christian publications implied that the magazine paid little attention to the matter until the late 1980s. Danielson may have been correct in that there was not a significant amount of articles being published on the matter. It was not entirely ignored by the publication however. The fact that a conservative evangelical publication chose to publicly celebrate Earth Day is important in itself. Furthermore, the magazine has included sporadic articles addressing environmentalism throughout the years. Even as recently as August 2015, *Christianity Today* remains engaged in the issue, as can be seen in John Murdock's aforementioned article which drew parallels between Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical and Francis Schaeffer's 1970 book. The magazine at no point appears to have abandoned its conservative evangelical roots; but on the issue of environmentalism it demonstrated that conservative theology does not necessarily have to contradict caring for the environment.

#### *The Christian Century's Embrace of "Green Theology"*

*Christianity Today* carefully guarded conservative Christian theology while attempting to engage in the rising environmental movement. *The Christian Century*, meanwhile, boldly allowed the ever-growing ecological crisis to guide their liberal theology. With this came a number of interesting implications, even leading to what some have called "green theology."<sup>66</sup> Yet surprisingly, the liberal theologians represented in the publication fell reasonably in line with the conservative theologians of *Christianity Today*. One perspective offered from *The Christian Century*, that of Ian Barbour, has already been addressed. His article, in comparison to Francis Schaeffer's book, helped shape the framework for the contrasting liberal and conservative

---

<sup>66</sup> "Green theology" is a term referencing Christian theology that is environmentally friendly, or was formulated with environmental concerns in mind. Most of the perspectives from *The Christian Century* would have been considered "green theology," as would Pope Francis's recent encyclical.

perspectives. However, the "liberal perspective" has numerous variations. These can be seen through the examination of a few key articles from the mainline Protestant magazine.

In 1972, Hwa Yol Jung, a political science professor at Moravian College, wrote an article titled "Ecology, Zen, and Western Religious Thought." This article represents many of the foundational issues that conservative evangelicals would have had with liberal theology and the Protestant mainline. In most of the conservative sources covered thus far, one of the aspects of Lynn White's thesis that they were most resistant to was his willingness to look outside of traditional Christian doctrines for a more environmentally pleasing framework (e.g. pantheism, embracing Eastern traditions, etc.). Conservative evangelicals, as has been demonstrated, were clearly willing to engage with the issue of environmentalism. Most of them who dealt with the subject in some respect acknowledged that there was a potential crisis on hand, and that man had acted irresponsibly in their relationship to nature. Conservative evangelicals were limited, however, in their acceptance of ideas of unorthodox ideas intended to solve the problem. Jung represented a contrast to their stance, advocating for a perspective that was largely outside the spectrum of conservative evangelical belief. As implied by the title of his article, Jung suggested that Zen, a Chinese style of Buddhism, may have some value for Christians in addressing this issue. More specifically, he felt that Western Christians had acted negligently by ignoring the possible benefits of embracing Eastern religious traditions such as Zen. Jung certainly did not refute the idea that Christians had failed in matters of ecology in the past, particularly in comparison to other religions. He affirmed writers like White, only criticizing that they did not go further in suggesting a solution in Eastern traditions. Jung was adamant that Zen was a useful

religious tradition for developing an ecological ethic. He concluded his piece with an affirmation of our need to "create an ecological ecumenism."<sup>67</sup>

Jung's beliefs and perspectives serve as one of the more drastic examples of liberal Christian thought of the time. A crucial aspect to his article is that, in order to bring about real change to the ecological crisis, it was necessary for Christians, particularly Western Christians, to expand their horizons. He mentioned the fact that Western thinkers had, for quite some time, been resistant to Eastern traditions like Zen because it was too "freaky" or "mystic." Surely the conservative evangelicals represented in this thesis would have maintained that belief. For Jung, that was closed minded, and more importantly, it would not enable a real, foundational change in the way people treated the planet. At the heart of this work lies the key difference between conservative evangelicals and mainline Protestants, at least as far as ecology went. Jung, and other liberal theologians, saw the environmental problem as a real crisis that needed to be solved. Their theology was then shaped by a desire to create an ecologically friendly system of belief. If it meant accepting or borrowing from some non-Christian traditions, or even accepting a less traditional view of Christian doctrine, that was acceptable. The example of Jung's work clearly demonstrates how creating a faith that was capable of solving the ecological crisis was a priority for many liberally leaning Christians. This is in opposition to most conservative evangelicals who, in light of the recently recognized ecological crisis, were willing to investigate what their Christian faith had to say about the way they should relate with the environment. Their unique purposes led them to distinct conclusions.

Donald E. Gowan, a professor at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary (a historically mainline Protestant institution), presented another less obviously liberal perspective. In 1970 he

---

<sup>67</sup> Hwa Yol Jung, "Ecology, Zen, and Western Religious Thought," *The Christian Century*, 89, no. 41 (November 15, 1972): 1153-56.

wrote an article named "Genesis and Ecology: Does 'Subdue' Mean Plunder?" that appeared just a few pages after Ian Barbour's previously mentioned article. In Gowan's first sentence he implicitly referenced Lynn White Jr. and other Biblical critics by lamenting that "Genesis is under fire again-this time from the ecologists." He recognized that it was a consistent theme for scholars to point to verses in Genesis where God gives "dominion" over the earth to people as a way to blame Christian theology for the environmental problem.<sup>68</sup> Gowan refuted this idea, as did most scholars and theologians who have been examined thus far, excluding Jung. They each took a somewhat fresh approach; but they all essentially argued that while the Bible is not incorrect in attributing the command for dominion to man, it simply has not been accurately interpreted and obeyed, leading to environmental degradation. Gowan took a similar approach. He additionally argued that many civilizations outside of Christian influence have caused equal damage to the planet in pretty substantial ways.<sup>69</sup> He also, in keeping with progressive thought, did not think humans should advocate for returning to the primitive state of things in which they did not manipulate the earth at all. He felt that people, with or without Biblical guidance, had done right by developing the land and improving quality of life. In an interesting attempt to uphold traditional Christian doctrines, Gowan emphasized that the Bible really is anthropocentric. Anthropocentrism, in the eyes of many progressive theologians and ecologists of the time, carried a very negative connotation; yet Gowan insisted on the anthropocentric nature of the Bible. He worried that a non-human centered perspective could lead to a number of highly unfavorable solutions for man (e.g., bigger government restrictions, bigger technology,

---

<sup>68</sup> Donald E. Gowan, "Genesis and Ecology: Does 'Subdue' Mean 'Plunder'?", *The Christian Century*, 87, no. 40 (October 7, 1970): 1188.

<sup>69</sup> Gowan even went so far as to cite the disappearance of some crops at the location of one of the earliest known civilizations of Mesopotamia.

etc.). Gowan firmly upheld that the Bible, with a "right understanding," could provide a solution that would not merely help keep man alive, but "fully and humanly alive."<sup>70</sup>

Gowan's article is interesting in that- while he represented a mainline Protestant, liberal perspective (based on his background, his vocation at a liberal seminary, and his involvement with *The Christian Century*)- he upheld many of the same doctrines that conservative evangelicals were striving to maintain. Gowan was optimistic about progress and technology, indicative of his liberal leanings; but overall he was an ardent defender of Genesis and its implications for mankind. What is more intriguing is that he defended the integrity of scripture without drawing from other traditions or philosophies. While many liberal theologians sought out the development of an ecological theology, Gowan seemed to believe that an adequate theology for caring for the environment already existed, so long as the Genesis text was not inaccurately interpreted. He therefore took a similar approach to Schaeffer, Houston, and Reidel in allowing scripture to guide his ecological ethic, rather than attempting to create an ecologically pleasing theology by searching scriptures. His work, written at a time in which leaders of *The Christian Century* and *Christianity Today* would not have seen eye to eye on many issues, possessed many elements that would have allowed it to be published in either magazine.

The range of perspectives in articles from *The Christian Century* can be reconciled by understanding the intended purpose of the magazine. The publication, with its acceptance of liberal theology and adherence to biblical criticism, allowed for such articles as Jung's advocating for people to embrace Zen as an acceptable solution to the problem. One of the key tenets of the Protestant mainline was their allowance of a wide range of doctrinal beliefs, in order to maintain a united Protestant group. This did not mean that all perspectives published in the

---

<sup>70</sup> Gowan, "Genesis and Ecology," 1191.

magazine were necessarily liberal, just that they were acceptable and relatively common. However, it was possible for seemingly more conservative articles like Gowan's to make it into the pages alongside these liberal perspectives. *The Christian Century* certainly represented liberal perspectives; but in respect to its accepting nature, it included a wide range of perspectives, whereas *Christianity Today* offered a consistently conservative point of view. The content in each of these articles generally fell in line with their respective publication's prominent beliefs. There did not appear to be any contradiction there. What was unique, however, was that all of these sources, both conservative and liberal, represented Christian environmental perspectives that were contrary to the commonly cited one that exists today.

### Conclusions

This thesis has dealt with a number of sources, both contemporary and historical, in an effort to answer a few key questions. How have evangelicals, and other Christian groups' perspective of environmentalism changed over time? What historical events and ideologies might have contributed to the present day divide? How did evangelicals come to be associated with negative attitudes towards the environmental movement? Additionally, how have historians approached this issue? It is clear that Lynn White Jr. played a pivotal role in developing the Christian stance to environmentalism. He was especially critical of the impact he believed that Christian theology had on the environment. White did not necessarily represent a Christian response to environmentalism, but his work was crucial for engaging Christians over time. There currently exists an interesting dynamic in which some Christians whole-heartedly embrace ideas like creation care, ecotheology, stewardship, and Christian environmentalism. Meanwhile, other Christians reject the idea of human caused climate change and question claims about global

warming. These current responses deal very little with issues of theology and more with politics. The environmental movement has largely been embraced by the liberal, Democratic side of the spectrum. According to the 2014 Religious Landscape Study by Pew Research Center, over 50% of Christians refer to themselves as Republicans, and the evangelical Christian cause is frequently associated with socially conservative values, namely anti-abortion and anti-gay marriage. Anti-environmentalism has often been included with these "Christian" causes.

The problem with this false dichotomy between Christianity and environmentalism is that, as has been demonstrated, it is very difficult to define a "Christian" stance on anything, as the Christian faith encompasses a wide range of theological beliefs. With these diverse theologies come a number of unique stances on various social issues such as environmentalism. The division of Protestant Christianity between conservative evangelicals and mainline Protestants has only grown in the years since the 1960s. The Protestant mainline has since declined in influence, and it has also become increasingly liberal. Denominations such as the Presbyterian Church U.S.A., a historically mainline denomination, have come to accept gay marriage within its leadership and are unhesitant to embrace liberal perspectives on matters like environmentalism. Thus, the roots for the presently divided Christian belief system can be seen in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, as demonstrated through Schaeffer, Engel, Barbour, and a number of other sources.

When it came to the environmental issue, these theological differences manifested themselves in the way each subgroup approached the ecological crisis. Conservative evangelicals, prioritizing adherence to traditional Christian doctrines such as the inerrancy and infallibility of scripture, viewed the ecological crisis as an impetus to evaluate their theology in order to better understand how they should interact with nature. In simple terms, they allowed

their traditional Christian theology to guide their development of an ecological ethic. Mainline Protestants, on the other hand, generally felt that the ecological crisis was so severe that Christian theology needed to be restructured in order to account for a healthy relationship with the environment. This allowed them to then mold a theology that was guided by ecological ethics. It is in this way that the separate groups of Christians approached the matter differently.

These distinct approaches led them to one similar affirmation: there was an ecological crisis, and the Bible offered a reasonable solution to the issue, if applied correctly. Their ideas of what a correct interpretation of scripture meant was of course a point of contention; but overall, each group advocated for Christians to further consider their role in the environment and to adopt more ecologically friendly practices. It appears that only in recent decades; as environmentalism has become increasingly polarized and politicized, have Christians become more deeply divided on the implications and validity of environmentalism. It is for this reason that Christian perspectives from the 1960s and early 1970s are so useful for determining the origins of the Christian ecological crisis. These roots reveal that at one point there was not, and perhaps does not need to be in the future, an assumed division between the conservative and liberal perspective of Christians and their role in the environment.



## Bibliography

- Arbuckle, Matthew B. and David M. Konisky. "The Role of Religion in Environmental Attitudes." *Social Science Quarterly* 96, no. 5 (November 2015): 1244-1263.
- Barbour, Ian J. "An Ecological Ethic." *The Christian Century*. 87, no. 40 (October 7, 1970): 1180-1185.
- Bebbington, David. W. *The Dominance of Evangelicalism: The Age of Spurgeon and Moody*. Downers Grove, IL:InterVarsity Press, 2005.
- Brown, Ruth Murray. *For a "Christian America": A History of the Religious Right*. Amherst: Prometheus Books, 2002.
- Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring*. 1962. Reprint, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002.
- Coffman, Elesha J. *Christian Century and Rise of the Protestant Mainline*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Danielson, Sabrina. "Fracturing Over Creation Care? Shifting Environmental Beliefs Among Evangelicals, 1984-2010." *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. 52, no. 1 (2013): 198-215.
- "Ecology and Apocalypse." *Christianity Today*. 15, no. 15 (April 23, 1971): 20-21.
- Engel, David E. "Elements in a Theology of Environment." *Zygon*. 5, no. 3 (September 1970): 216-228.
- Gershtenson, Joseph, Brian W. Smith, and William R. Mangun. "Friends of the Earth? Partisanship, Party Control of Congress, and Environmental Legislation in Congress." *Politics and Policy*. 34, no.1 (March 2006): 66-92.
- Gowan, Donald E. "Genesis and Ecology: Does 'Subdue' Mean 'Plunder'?" *The Christian Century*. 87, no. 40 (October 7, 1970): 1188-1193.

- Hankins, Barry. *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008.
- Houston, James M. "The Environmental Movement-Five Causes of Confusion," *Christianity Today*. 16, no. 24 (September 15, 1972): 8-10.
- Jelen, Ted G. "Protestant Clergy as Political Leaders: Theological Limitations." *Review of Religious Research*. 36, no. 1 (September, 1994): 23-42.
- Jung, Hwa Yol. "Ecology, Zen, and Western Religious Thought." *The Christian Century*. 89, vol. 41 (November 15, 1972): 1153-1156.
- Marsden, George. *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995.
- Mohler Jr., Albert. "Mohler Responds to Pope Francis's 'Laudato Si'." *Southern News*. June 18, 2015. <http://news.sbts.edu/2015/06/18/mohler-responds-to-pope-francis-laudato-si/>.
- Murdock, John. "Pope's Creation Teachings Nothing New for Francis Schaeffer Fans." *Christianity Today*. August 6, 2015. <http://www.ctlibrary.com/ct/2015/august-web-only/pope-creation-teaching-nothing-new-schaeffer-fans.html>.
- Noll, Mark. *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.
- Pope Francis. *Laudato Si, Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home*. Vatican City, Italy, May 24, 2015.
- Reidel, Carl H. "Christianity and the Environmental Crisis." *Christianity Today*. 15, no. 15 (April 23, 1971): 4-7.
- Schaeffer, Francis and Udo Middlemann. *Pollution and the Death of Man*. 1970. Reprint, Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1970.
- Stanley, Brian. *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism: The Age of Billy Graham and John Stott*. Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2013.

White Jr., Lynn. "Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis." *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 10, 1967): 1203-1207.

Whitney, Elspeth. "Lynn White Jr.'s 'Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis' After 50 Years." *History Compass*. 13, no. 8 (2015): 396-410.