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The 'GREEN DRAGON' SLAYERS: How the Religious Right and the Corporate Right are Joining Forces to Fight Environmental Protection



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Introduction

As Republican officials accelerate their efforts to weaken environmental regulations and attack climate scientists, energy corporations are reaping the benefits of a decades-long effort to put a more benevolent, humanitarian, and even religious spin to their anti-environmental activism. Among their most valuable allies are the Religious Right organizations and leaders who have emerged as ready apologists for polluters and critics of efforts to protect the environment. The Religious Right's attacks are intended to lend credence to the efforts of corporations and the GOP to quash the Environmental Protection Agency and chip away at state and federal environmental safeguards. And increasingly, Republican leaders themselves are echoing the same misleading arguments and themes of the Religious Right's corporate apologists.

Buoyed by corporate finances and a radical 'dominion theology,' the Religious Right has become more aggressive and fanatical in its defense of corporations and denial of climate science. Trying to combat the increasing number of evangelical Christians who are part of the "creation care" movement that is calling for a greater commitment to combat climate change, the Religious Right is working to misrepresent the environmental movement as dangerously deceitful, harmful to the poor and destructive to Christianity.

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Corporate America's Religious Right Power Play

In the last decade, as evangelical Christian leaders increasingly became involved in conservation, "creation care" and taking action against global climate change, the alarms went up in corporate America that many traditional members of the conservative coalition were becoming advocates for environmental protection. To counter the rise of the faith-based environmentalist Evangelical Climate Initiative, the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance emerged. The ISA, propped

up by business interests including Exxon Mobil, has peddled misleading and false claims to make the case that climate



Cornwall Alliance
For The Stewardship Of Creation

THE CORNWALL ALLIANCE BELIEVES THAT SINCE GOD GRANTED HUMANS "DOMINION" OVER THE EARTH, HUMANS HAVE A RIGHT TO EXPLOIT ALL NATURAL RESOURCES.

change is a myth. In 2007, the ISA was renamed the Cornwall Alliance for the Stewardship of Creation and became more belligerent and zealous in its anti-environmental activities.

The Cornwall Alliance is led by E. Calvin Beisner, who believes that since God granted humans "dominion" over the earth, humans have a right to exploit all natural resources. As Randall Balmer writes in *Thy Kingdom Come*, Beisner "asserts that God has placed all of nature at the disposal of humanity." Balmer quotes Beisner's own summary of his

dominion theology: "All of our acquisitive activities should be undertaken with the purpose of extending godly rule, or dominion." As Balmer notes, "the combination of dominion theology from the Religious Right and the wise use ideology of corporate and business interests has created a powerful coalition to oppose environmental protection."

According to a report by *Think Progress*, the Cornwall Alliance is a front group for the shadowy James Partnership. Both the James Partnership and the Cornwall Alliance are closely linked to the Committee for a Constructive Tomorrow (CFACT), an anti-environmental group that is "funded by at least \$542,000 from ExxonMobil, \$60,500 from Chevron, and \$1,280,000 from Scaife family foundations, which are rooted in wealth

from Gulf Oil and steel interests.” CFACT is also part of a climate change denialist network funded by the ExxonMobil-financed Competitive Enterprise Institute.

“THERE IS NO CONVINCING SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE THAT HUMAN CONTRIBUTION TO GREENHOUSE GASES IS CAUSING DANGEROUS GLOBAL WARMING.”

-EVANGELICAL DECLARATION ON GLOBAL WARMING

Beisner is a CFACT board member and an “adjunct fellow” of the Acton Institute, which is primarily funded by groups like ExxonMobil, the Scaife foundations and the Koch brothers. Beisner is also an adviser to the Atlas Economic Research Foundation, which is financed by the oil-backed Earthart Foundation, the Koch brothers, and ExxonMobil.

In fact, Beisner is not a scientist and has no scientific credentials. Despite claiming to be an authority on energy and environmental issues, he received his Ph.D. in Scottish History.

In 2009, Beisner’s Cornwall Alliance cosponsored a climate change denial conference led by the Heartland Institute, a pro-corporate group funded by Exxon Mobil, the Koch Family Foundations, and the Scaife foundations. Other organizations funded by energy corporations that cosponsored the conference include the Competitive Enterprise Institute, the Heritage Foundation, Americans for Tax Reform, and Americans for Prosperity.

The Cornwall Alliance has been enormously successful in recruiting Religious Right leaders to promote its anti-environmental cause. In 1999, the group started recruiting prominent Religious Right figures to sign the “Cornwall Declaration,” a document that attacks environmentalists, saying they “deify nature or oppose human dominion over creation” and promote “erroneous theological and anthropological

positions.” Among its signatories were Focus on the Family founder James Dobson, Chuck Colson of the Colson Center, D. James Kennedy of Coral Ridge Ministries, Donald Wildmon of the American Family Association, Janice Shaw Crouse of Concerned Women for America, Daniel Lapin of Towards Tradition, and Frank Pavone of Priests for Life. The president of CFACT called himself “a driving force” behind the declaration.

Recently, the group started collecting signatures for an updated “Evangelical Declaration on Global Warming,” which states that “there is no convincing scientific evidence that human contribution to greenhouse gases is causing dangerous global warming” and maintains that “reducing greenhouse gases cannot achieve significant reductions in future global temperatures.”

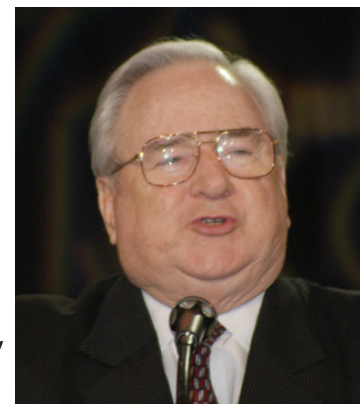
The Cornwall Alliance’s board includes Religious Right notables David Barton of WallBuilders, Lou Sheldon of the Traditional Values Center, Jerry Newcombe of Coral Ridge Ministries and Joel Belz of *WORLD Magazine*.

Painting Environmental Protection as Anti-Christian

In 2007, Jerry Falwell warned that environmental action was “Satan’s attempt to redirect the church’s primary focus” away from evangelism and religious faith, and a year later James Dobson and Gary Bauer slammed Rev. Richard Cizik, a principal evangelical supporter of environmental protection, and his allies for “using the global warming controversy to shift the emphasis away from the great moral issues of our time.”

The Cornwall Alliance has coordinated with Religious Right leaders to accuse Christians who believe in environmental protection not only of attempting to divide the faith community, but of promoting a dangerous anti-religious and anti-Christian agenda. The group calls the environmentalist movement “The Green Dragon” and earlier this year produced a star-studded documentary to help slay it.

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The Cornwall Alliance's documentary, *Resisting the Green Dragon*, includes appearances by a who's who of Religious Right leaders: Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council; Tom Minnery of Focus on the Family; Richard Land of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission; Bryan Fischer of the American Family Association; Wendy Wright of Concerned Women for America; David Barton of WallBuilders; Michael Farris of the Home School Legal Defense Association and Patrick Henry College; radio show host Janet Parshall; and anti-gay activist Bishop Harry Jackson.

In heartfelt interviews for the documentary, these activists claim that the environmental movement (The Green Dragon) is promoting an anti-religious agenda: Parshall derides the Green Dragon's "lust for political power" and "spiritual deception," and calls the environmental movement "deadly to the Gospel of Jesus Christ"; Fischer labels it a "threat to the Christian



IN "RESISTING THE GREEN DRAGON," ACTIVISTS CLAIM THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT IS PROMOTING AN ANTI-RELIGIOUS AGENDA.

faith"; Perkins claims that environmentalists are "pointing people away from God and into humanism" and support "an unbiblical view"; Beisner says "the green movement threatens liberty"; and Farris warns that environmentalists are "scaring little children to achieve [their] political ends." Barton adds a summary of the dominion theology: "Mankind is the apex of creation; He placed it over the planet, over the environment."

The Cornwall Alliance's companion book, *Resisting the Green Dragon: Dominion, Not Death*, warns of "The Church Complicit: How Environmentalism Has Penetrated the Church with Anti-Human and Anti-Christian Ideas."

Along with Barton, Beisner appeared on Glenn Beck's

television show to claim that environmental protection is an attack against religion and humanity. Beck accused environmentalists of holding "anti-human" beliefs and "worshiping the ancient god of Babylon, the god of weather," warning that "the progressive left is coming for the kill on religion."

Beisner now boasts that approximately half of all Protestant pastors are skeptical of climate change, and charges that "the root of belief in catastrophic, man-made global warming is anti-biblical" and "blasphemous."

Blending Fundamentalism with Climate Change Denialism

As the 2010 Republican takeover of the House of Representatives and major gains in Senate and the states have hardened the GOP's anti-environment stance, the Religious Right's enthusiastic embrace of climate change denial has seeped even further into GOP discourse about the environment.

Conservative religious leaders have lent credence and a veneer of righteousness to the rapidly growing climate change denialism in the GOP, and in turn GOP leaders have begun to pick up their talking points. Land of the Southern Baptist Convention argued that environmentalists' "exaggerated or baseless fears lead to unreasonable policies that can do a lot more harm than the things feared," Fischer of the American Family Association said that "exaggerations, myths, and outright

lies are commonplace in the environmental movement" and Focus on the Family's Minnery lamented, "when we think about science, we think about the truth; yet in so-called global warming science, we've gotten a lot less than the truth many times."

Increasingly, Republicans are using the ideological rhetoric

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of groups like the Cornwall Alliance as they launch attacks against the Environmental Protection Agency, climate scientists, and efforts in both Congress and state legislatures to regulate polluters. In fact, both Religious Right leaders and some Republican officials are suggesting that the very notion that humans are harming the planet is somehow a repudiation of the biblical story that God promised Noah after the flood that He would never again destroy the earth.



JIM INHOFE IS THE LEADING CLIMATE CHANGE DENIALIST IN THE SENATE, SAYING, "THE SCIENCE REALLY ISN'T THERE."

Congressman John Shimkus (R-IL), who is now chairman of the Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy, during a 2009 hearing said:

"I want to start with Genesis 8, verse 21 and 22, 'Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood, and never again will I destroy all living creatures as I have done. As long as the earth endures, sea time and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.' I believe that's the infallible word of God and that's the way it's going to be for His creation. The second verse comes from Matthew 24, "And He will send his Angels with a loud trumpet call and they will gather His elect from the Four Winds, from one end of the Heavens to the other." The earth will end only when God declares it's time to be over. Man will not destroy the earth. This earth will not be destroyed by a flood.

Congresswoman and likely presidential candidate Michele Bachmann (R-MN) derided House Democratic leader Nancy Pelosi's environmental policies, telling the American Family Association's OneNewsNow, "[Pelosi] is committed to her global warming fanaticism to the point where she has said that she's just trying to save the planet. We all know that someone did that over 2,000 years ago, they saved the planet -- we didn't need Nancy Pelosi to do that."

The leading climate change denialist in the Senate, Jim Inhofe (R-OK), who is the ranking member of the Environment and Public Works Committee, agreed with a caller on a radio show who claimed that "the world is just changing like it usually does," replying: "I think what he's saying is God's still up there. We're going through these cycles.... I really believe that a lot of people are in denial who want to hang their hat on the fact, that they believe is a fact, that man-made gases, anthropogenic gases, are causing global warming. The science really isn't there."

In Praise of CO₂

Part of the climate change denial movement centers on the case that escalating emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) are good for the environment. As PolitiFact notes, while CO₂ is "naturally occurring," it "is also emitted when we burn fossil fuels." As a greenhouse gas, CO₂ "traps energy from the sun in the atmosphere," which leads to warming temperatures. The level of CO₂ in the atmosphere is rapidly growing, and the International Panel on

Climate Change confirmed unequivocally "that the marked increase in atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄) and nitrous oxide (N₂O) since 1750 is the result of human activities."

Even a recent UC Berkeley study that attempted to "challenge the scientific consensus on global warming is finding that its data-crunching effort is producing results nearly identical to those underlying the prevailing view" that human activities have led to a sharp increase in emissions of greenhouse gases

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like CO₂ that is increasing temperatures.

But the Religious Right's anti-environmental movement has a different view. Beisner told Bryan Fischer on his radio show that "higher CO₂" is a "win-win situation, it's a very good thing to see CO₂ rising."



SPEAKER JOHN BOEHNER CLAIMED THAT "THE IDEA THAT CARBON DIOXIDE IS A CARCINOGEN THAT IS HARMFUL TO OUR ENVIRONMENT IS ALMOST COMICAL."

Similarly, Bachmann stated on the House floor, "Carbon dioxide, Mister Speaker, is a natural byproduct of nature. Carbon dioxide is natural. It occurs in Earth." She went on to argue that "there isn't even one study that can be produced that shows carbon dioxide is a harmful gas. There isn't one such study because carbon dioxide is not a harmful gas, it is a harmless gas."

But Bachmann isn't alone in her ignorance of the problem of CO₂. Speaker John Boehner (R-OH) claimed that "the idea that carbon dioxide is a carcinogen that is harmful to our environment is almost comical."

A Republican state senator in Montana went even further, introducing a resolution that would declare that "global warming is beneficial to the welfare and business climate of Montana; reasonable amounts of carbon dioxide released into the atmosphere have no verifiable impacts on the environment; and global warming is a natural occurrence and human activity has not accelerated it."

Republicans in Congress even tried to pass a bill that would repeal the "scientific determination by the EPA that carbon dioxide and other greenhouse-gas pollutants are a threat to human health and welfare," legislation which received praise from Beisner and Focus on the Family's political arm Citizen Link. The GOP's push to overturn the scientific finding that CO₂ causes pollution detrimental to humans led one congressman to wonder if the Republicans would next try to "excommunicate the finding that the Earth revolves around the sun."

Crocodile Tears for the Poor

America's broken immigration system requires serious, One of the most disturbing arguments made by Religious Right in its defense of corporations and big polluters is the claim that environmental protections are intended to hurt the poor.

In *Resisting The Green Dragon*, Bishop Harry Jackson accuses the environmental movement of leading "the war on the poor," Jackson founded a group with Niger Innis of CORE and Samuel Rodriguez of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference which derided clean-energy policies as "dangerous and immoral." His Affordable Power Alliance relied heavily on research from a corporate front-group that received funding from ExxonMobil,

Peabody Energy and other energy corporations.

Concerned Women for America's Wright lamented that "the policies that environmental groups and even these evangelical groups got behind were ones that would consign the poorest of people around the world to grinding poverty, to disease, to premature death," adding that environmentalists "don't see humans as the Bible, as God sees them." Beisner argues that "climate change is the totalitarian's dream come true" and efforts to fight climate change would "make millions jobless" and "hurt the poor worst of all."

"THE GLOBAL WARMING HOAX IS IMPERIALISM ALLOWING A VEHICLE FOR ENVIRONMENTALISTS TO DICTATE THE WAY OF LIFE FOR US ALL."

**-PEGGY VENABLE,
AMERICANS FOR PROSPERITY**

Corporations and their front groups are increasingly using this rhetoric as well. For example, the pro-corporate American Action Network ran campaign ads featuring a senior citizen suffering through cold winter nights, claiming that the American Clean Energy and Security Act would make energy unaffordable and devastate the economy. Peggy Venable,

the Texas state director of the Koch-financed Americans for Prosperity, claimed that “the Global Warming hoax is imperialism allowing a vehicle for environmentalists to dictate the way of life for us all - and is most harmful for third world countries where children often don’t see their fifth birthday.”

infused the GOP with an anti-environmental and anti-science ideology, the Religious Right is more than eager to provide cover for politicians and their corporate backers by claiming God’s blessing for their dishonest assertions and destructive policies. ■

The argument that environmental protection will hurt the poor is at best misleading. Polluters disproportionately target low-income areas, particularly communities of color. The degradation of the environment in the most economically depressed places, a fact that launched the environmental justice movement.

With climate change contributing to rising sea levels, desertification, extreme weather, water scarcity and drought, studies predict that displacement due to climate change will disproportionately impact poorer people and developing nations. As the BBC notes, experts believe that “people living in poverty would be worst affected by the effects of climate change.”

JUST AS CORPORATE AMERICA HAS INFUSED THE GOP WITH AN ANTI-ENVIRONMENTAL AND ANTI-SCIENCE IDEOLOGY, THE RELIGIOUS RIGHT IS MORE THAN EAGER TO PROVIDE COVER FOR POLITICIANS AND THEIR CORPORATE BACKERS BY CLAIMING GOD’S BLESSING FOR THEIR DISHONEST ASSERTIONS AND DESTRUCTIVE POLICIES.

Conclusion

The Religious Right’s intensifying hostility to the environmental movement and embrace of climate change denialism conveniently couples with the GOP’s mounting assaults on climate science and environmental regulations on polluters. Energy companies stand to benefit immensely from the plans of Republicans in Congress and state legislatures to weaken attempts to limit pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, and their opposition to building a more sustainable economy and adding ‘green-collar’ jobs. The Religious Right’s vicious attacks on environment-minded Christians and false assertions in the debate over environmental protection not only bolster the GOP’s war on science, but also suggest that it is a duty of faith to combat environmental protection, fight environmentalists, and deny global climate change. Just as corporate America has

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