

## **Informed Perspectives: *God \$ Green: An Unholy Alliance***

[00:00:00] **Evan Sandmark** Welcome, everyone, I'm Evan Sandmark, a Ph.D. candidate in religious studies at the University of Virginia and a member of the Religion, Race and Democracy Lab, which is hosting today's film screening and discussion. The event is part of the Informed Perspectives series, which brings journalists, documentarians and documentarians and humanities scholars into conversation about issues concerning religion, race and politics. I'd like to thank the Luce/ACLS Program in Religion, Journalism and International Affairs for so generously sponsoring this event.

[00:00:34] **Evan Sandmark** In a few moments, we will begin the screening of *God \$ Green: An Unholy Alliance*. This will be followed by a conversation with our two featured guests, Olufemi Taiwo and Katherine Stewart. So a word on them first. Olufemi Taiwo is an assistant professor of philosophy at Georgetown University. His work draws liberally from the black radical tradition, contemporary philosophy of language and social science, as well as from histories of activism and activist thinkers. He is currently writing a book entitled "Reconsidering Reparations" that considers a novel philosophical argument for reparations and explores links with environmental justice.

[00:01:14] **Evan Sandmark** Katherine Stewart is an investigative reporter and author who has covered education, religious liberty, politics and policy for over a decade. Her latest book, "The Power Worshippers Inside Inside the Dangerous Rise of Religious Nationalism," is a rare look inside the machinery of the movement that brought Donald Trump to power. Stewart's journalism appears in The New York Times and ABC, The Washington Post and The New York Review of Books, and as you'll see shortly, she is also a cast member of today's film.

[00:01:45] **Evan Sandmark** So welcome, Femi and Katherine. I had a chance to read both of your books, which I highly recommend to the audience, "The Power Worshippers" is currently on sale and "Reconsidering Reparations" will be available in fall 2021, or thereabout.

[00:02:01] **Evan Sandmark** So one final note, I want to encourage the audience to raise questions throughout today's event. To do so, please use the Q&A function located at the bottom of your screen, will field some of these questions toward the end of our program. And now it is my pleasure to introduce today's film. *God \$ Green: An Unholy Alliance* tells the story of how potent forces came together to mount an army of climate change skeptics in the name of God, country, and capitalism. The film is directed by Jeanine Isabel Butler and produced by Catherine Butler, who are the co-founders of Butlerfilms, an award-winning documentary production studio whose work has appeared on PBS, The Discovery Channel and the BBC. Butlerfilms produced the film for and in collaboration with the Religion, Race and Democracy Lab at the University of Virginia. It's worth noting that the film was made entirely during the pandemic and in a mere six months. It was made possible by the generous support of the University of Virginia's Democracy Initiative and the College of Arts and Sciences. You can learn more about the film and access transcripts on our website [religionlab.virginia.edu/godgreen/](https://religionlab.virginia.edu/godgreen/). So don't worry about noting that we'll give you a link in a follow up email so you can look to that if you're interested in more resources. And with that, I want to say, I want to introduce the film and we hope you enjoy it very much. Thank you.

[00:03:30] **Narrator** This is a story about today. That started yesterday. And impacts tomorrow.

[00:03:38] **(archive video)** Hi, I'm Nancy Pelosi. And I'm Newt Gingrich. We don't always see eye to eye, but we do agree our country must take action to address climate change. Together, we can do this.

[00:03:56] **(archive video-Rev. Al Sharpton and Rev. Pat Buchanan)** We couldn't be further apart. I'm on the left and I'm usually right. And we strongly disagree except on one issue. Tell him what it is, Reverend Pat. That would be our planet. Taking care of it is extremely important. We all need to work together, liberals and conservatives.

[00:04:23] **Narrator** Mark Twain was reported to have said history doesn't repeat itself, but it often rhymes. In the 1960s, auto and industry pollution got so bad that Republican President Richard Nixon established the Environmental Protection Agency and signed the Clean Air Act. And then, a lot of things happened. Energy wars, culture wars, policy wars. And then came the scientists with proof that the planet is warming. And yet...

[00:05:00] **(archive video-Republican Senate Debate)** Is climate change a fact? No. No, God controls the climate. No.

[00:05:09] **Narrator** So the Religion, Race and Democracy Lab at the University of Virginia ask the question, when did climate change go from a scientific metric to a political hot potato? And what does God have to do with it? Here's what a few people had to say.

[00:05:28] **Bob Inglis** Imagine you're a conservative member of Congress. For some of you here in Boston, Massachusetts, that's going to take a powerful imagination. All right. But imagine with me that I said that climate change was nonsense. I didn't know anything about it except that Al Gore was for it. And in as much as I represented a very conservative district in South Carolina that was the end of the inquiry, for me.

[00:05:49] **Rev. Mariama White-Hammond** We have gotten such a toxic point where we don't even stop to listen to what somebody is saying once we know what team they're on, it's like oh-psh can't listen to you.

[00:06:00] **Joel Salatin** When a conservative says the phrase "property rights," what the environmentalist hears is "destruction." And when an environmentalist says "protect the Earth," the conservative Christian hears "bureaucracy, regulations." That's why when I when I embrace creation stewardship as a Christian, people say, "Well, what happened to you? You know, have you been drinking lefty Kool-Aid?"

[00:06:31] **Richard Cizik** I earned my spurs for many years as a conservative, a faithful conservative. I came to work for the National Association of Evangelicals at the start of the religious right's rise in American politics. It was 1980. Ronald Reagan was president. I worked there for a total of twenty-eight years. And so I saw the shift from evangelicals and fundamentalists being not involved in politics, not engaged, to being hyper engaged.

[00:07:01] **Richard Cizik** When I was invited to the climate change conference in Oxford in 2002, I accepted. But I said, don't expect me to change my mind. Don't expect me to sign any statement.

[00:07:12] **Narrator** But then he came back and he bought a Prius.

[00:07:16] **Richard Cizik** The point is, I had a conversion. There's no other way to describe it.

[00:07:23] **Narrator** He took the position that the Bible says "man must care for the Earth." But even worse, he went on NPR and said:

[00:07:32] **Richard Cizik** I would willingly say I believe in civil unions.

[00:07:35] **Narrator** Ten days later, he was fired.

[00:07:40] **(archive video-Ted Cruz)** Climate change is not science, it's religion.

[00:07:45] **Richard Cizik** We hear from Christian evangelists even today that, well, we don't need to listen to scientists on climate. You meld that with a biblical fundamentalism that is a bit rigid and you have together a noxious brew.

[00:08:04] **Bob Inglis** I think that there is an unholy alliance that formed between the leaders of what passed as the Moral Majority, let's say. And some people with some very specific economic interests when it comes to climate change. When you allow your faith to be used by people with economic interests, how does it get corrupted pretty quickly.

[00:08:33] **Rev. Mariama White-Hammond** For me, one of the starting places has got to be, how did we get ourselves into this mess? We've got to look at our history and understand how we've gotten here, the racism that has caused some people to be hurt so much more than others.

[00:08:55] **Ashish Jha** African-Americans in this country breathe air that's 50 percent more polluted than non African-Americans.

[00:09:00] **Rev. Mariama White-Hammond** We don't tackle that. We'll just be putting bandaids on top of a pustulent and ugly wound.

[00:09:12] **Narrator** Right at the beginning of environmentalism, let's say the 1960s, evangelicals were okay with it. Even Francis Schaefer, famous for his anti-abortion crusade, was onboard.

[00:09:26] **Darren Dochuk** One of his first texts is on pollution. Francis Schaffer comes along and writes this book and says, "We are as evangelicals concerned about pollution, but we never must lose sight of the Christian roots of our environmental concern that man needed to be privileged over nature." At this early stage, there was enough synchronicity for evangelicals to support the movement. This changes by the end of the 70s.

[00:09:54] **Anthea Butler** The story about how evangelicals came into power is about taxes, actually. Taxes and race. Evangelicals masked behind Bob Jones University when it was pressed to integrate the school and allow interracial dating in the 1970s. When the IRS came after Bob Jones, Evangelicals got very upset about this.

[00:10:20] **Narrator** Bob Jones University hired lawyers. They took their case to the Supreme Court and said:

[00:10:26] **William B. Ball** All of the policies followed by the University are obligatory upon the University as dictated by scripture.

[00:10:32] **Narrator** The Supreme Court did not agree.

[00:10:35] **Anthea Butler** When they had their tax exemption stripped, Evangelicals began to write in. They were upset, you know, started to come into this space of anti-abortion activism and also the ERA, the Equal Rights Amendment.

[00:10:49] **Narrator** And gay rights. And before long, the planet's rights.

[00:10:56] **Kyle Schaap** The environment and environmentalism as an "ism" was understood to be a world view devoid of God and his creative purposes and his eminence in creation. The solutions put forward by environmentalism were perceived to be a threat or contrary to Christian values.

[00:11:19] **Darren Dochuk** But there are other issues as well. In 1970s, and I argue that we need to remember them as well.

[00:11:24] **Narrator** The energy crisis.

[00:11:26] **Darren Dochuk** As far as oilmen in the Southwest are concerned, the reason why America is going to suffer in those energy crises is because they have ceded power, ceded control of oil to foreign powers such as Saudi Arabia, such as OPEC countries.

[00:11:43] **Narrator** And so, they seized on the phrase America first. Sound familiar?

[00:11:48] **President Donald Trump** America first.

[00:11:51] **Darren Dochuk** And these independent oilmen of the Southwest wrap these all these issues altogether and bundle them in. By 1979, an anti-Jimmy Carter pro-Reagan movement.

[00:12:02] **Narrator** Reagan goes on to champion domestic fuel and family values - and wins.

[00:12:09] **Darren Dochuk** Reagan is defending the rights and the freedoms of independent oilmen across the Southwest to drill, drill, drill.

[00:12:19] **Narrator** The fact is, the oil industry has been in an epic battle with itself to control America's political and ideological landscape since oil was first discovered.

[00:12:31] **Narrator** On one side, Big Oil pushing their brand of American Protestantism.

[00:12:36] **Darren Dochuk** Which I call kind of a civil religion of crude that is the opposite of wildcat Christianity. The religious, political, economic culture of these small oil producers.

[00:12:47] **Narrator** Pushing their brand of evangelical Christianity.

[00:12:52] **Darren Dochuk** Well, on the civil religion of crude side, we have, of course, one family that absolutely dominates and it's multiple generations for generations.

[00:13:02] **Narrator** The Rockefeller's. The oil empire begins with John Senior in the late eighteen hundreds.

[00:13:09] **Darren Dochuk** By the 1890's, Standard Oil controls upwards of 90 percent of oil refining around the globe.

[00:13:16] **Narrator** By John Junior's time, the family is loaded, so he becomes a philanthropist.

[00:13:22] **Darren Dochuk** Perhaps the leading philanthropist in America at that time.

[00:13:26] **Narrator** But a philanthropist pouring profits into the Rockefeller Foundation.

[00:13:31] **Darren Dochuk** Supporting missionaries supporting liberal Protestant causes around the globe, extending kind of the Rockefeller vision of ecumenical religion and internationalist, democratic, progressive politics.

[00:13:45] **Darren Dochuk** By the 1970s and 80s, are the fourth generation of the Rockefeller has in fact begun to use the Rockefeller money to support environmental and other progressive causes around the world. On the other side, this kind of wildcat Christianity rooted again also in the early stages of oil in Pennsylvania, families such as the Stewarts.

[00:14:09] **Narrator** The Stewarts of Union Oil poured and their profits into evangelizing America.

[00:14:15] **Darren Dochuk** All the way to his death in the early 1920s, Lyman Stewart will be really the most important, most powerful funder of fundamentalist Christianity, of wildcat Christianity.

[00:14:26] **Narrator** Lyman starts a church, funds missionaries and builds a conservative Christian college.

[00:14:34] **Darren Dochuk** The notion, too deeply rooted in the oil patch and in the churches of the oil patch, that oil is God given. This is a good thing. The divine blessing on America.

[00:14:45] **Narrator** The next wildcat oil family to fuel the cause was the Pugh's.

[00:14:50] **Darren Dochuk** J. Howard Pugh will have his own charitable trust that will be absolutely essential to the rise of evangelical and political conservatism in the 1940s and beyond. Oil is always in motion. You're always chasing the next frontier, be it the untapped soil or unsaved souls. When J. Howard Pugh passes away, the mantle is passed to the Hunt family, especially Bunker Hunt, who uses his family's oil money in the late 70s and 1980s to help support several religious right causes.

[00:15:34] **Anthea Butler** Evangelicals are very effective in changing the dial politically because they were very media savvy. They knew how to grab a headline. They had networks. There was also oil money being put into some of these organizations.

[00:15:47] **Narrator** Including the Cornwall Alliance, a group of Christian right theologians and scholars who said environmentalism is one of the greatest threats to society and the Church today.

[00:16:00] **Katherine Stewart** They tell us that the environmentalist movement is actually unbiblical. And they produced that DVD series, "Resisting the Green Dragon," a biblical response to one of the greatest deceptions of our day.

[00:16:12] **Kyle Schaap** Resisting the Green Dragon cast environmentalism as this threat to the Christian worldview as an idolatrous worldview that was infiltrating churches and had to be resisted.

[00:16:26] **Katherine Stewart** The idea is for pastors to create teams of congregants that will, as they describe it, advance kingdom values in the public arena. And then they give them tools to create messaging materials to vote their so-called biblical values.

[00:16:39] **Rev. Mariama White-Hammond** A lot of folks look at this term "dominion" that's in Genesis. And basically, people have interpreted it that some people have a right to be on top, the right to be on top of everything. That's what white supremacy is. The belief you have a God given often right to be on top. They don't necessarily think about if we're coal mining, that's stripping out the Earth, that is making things horrible for people. It's making the environment terrible. They believe God will come down and have this great battle with his angels, renew the earth, beat the devil, and then there will be a new heavens and a new earth.

[00:17:20] **Kyle Schaap** There's been this tension for centuries between science and religion.

[00:17:25] **Rev. Mariama White-Hammond** You could go back to the 19th century and begin to talk about how Darwin's theory of evolution really confronted evangelicals

[00:17:33] **Kyle Schaap** There were these two major camps within the US Church, the modernists, who believed that the teaching of evolution could be consistent with the teachings of the Bible; and the fundamentalists, who said this is a bridge too far. And that kind of culminated in the early 20th century with the Scopes monkey trial. A teacher in Tennessee was taken to trial for teaching evolution.

[00:17:56] **Narrator** During this very public trial, William Jennings Bryant famously won the case for the fundamentalists and the teacher was told to knock it off.

[00:18:06] **Kyle Schapp** But in the court of public opinion, the fundamentalists were kind of laughed into oblivion, but they didn't disappear. They invested in institutions and have come back in later years in the form of a resurging modern evangelical movement.

[00:18:24] **Joel Salatin** Just imagine if the Moral Majority had said, you know what, we think God created the Earth and it's his and we're gonna dedicate keep to ourselves a fresh and a new to taking care of it, which means we're going to start pushing for compost instead of chemicals. And the fact is that factory farming, it pollutes the ground, it disrespects the chicken. It stinks up the neighborhood. Everything about it is terrible, is against being a good neighbor. So we're going to start buying from local farmers. We want to have it be connected to our food. We want it - you know, you can see the narrative.

[00:19:11] **Anthea Butler** You would think that evangelicals would be involved with environmentalism. After all, this is part of God's creation. But for evangelicals, there was a sense in which this whole push for environmentalism was about liberalism.

[00:19:25] **Bob Inglis** It just became a tribally marked thing that, you know, liberals are for action on climate. We conservatives, we don't talk about that. I mean, from our first six years in Congress, I said that climate change was nonsense and I had the opportunity run for the same seat again. And my son came to me. He said to me, "Dad, I'll vote for you, but you're going to clean up your act on the environment."

[00:19:52] **Narrator** He went to Antarctica in search of evidence. He found it, and then he went to Australia and witnessed the Great Barrier Reef turning white. Denial was no longer an option.

[00:20:07] **Bob Inglis** So I came home and introduce the Raise Wages Cut Carbon Act of 2009. It didn't go well at all. After twelve years in Congress, I got 29 percent of the vote in a Republican runoff. And the other guy got the other 71 percent of the vote, a rather spectacular faceplant in politics.

[00:20:27] **Kyle Schaap** I believe Bob was a pioneer and a visionary and a trailblazer. I think his story may have been a cautionary tale when it happened in 2010. I don't think it is anymore.

[00:20:40] **Richard Cizik** A lot of those religious right leaders that took exception to my advocacy are gone, gone to meet their creator. And yet there is a whole new generation of young evangelicals for climate action.

[00:20:55] **Kyle Schaap** Millennials and Generation Z behind them kind of recognized the danger of marrying their religious commitments with a particular political agenda. They're thinking more deeply about how does my faith inform my politics rather than how does my politics and form my faith.

[00:21:07] **Rev. Mariama White-Hammond** Young people are rising up and speaking truth and naming what's happening. I think the same thing may happen in greater proportion within the Church. I think young people are going to rise up calling for something different. I think the original sin was both a violation of the environmental creation, but also a violation of some of the other members of our same species who we did not treat with dignity. We want to shift. I don't think we can choose either emissions and environmental shift or social justice and relief for the poor. That's one of the things I love about Pope Francis, is he says these two things. They come from the same root. They must be addressed together.

[00:22:19] **(archive video-John Lewis)** Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, for holding today's hearing. Each and every one of us must cherish this planet. Well, it is likely the only home we may ever know. Combating climate change is not a Democratic or Republican issue. It is the question of preserving this piece of real estate that we call Earth for generations yet unborn.

[00:23:30] **Evan Sandmark** OK, great. I think that wraps up the screening so well as everybody rejoins us. Looks like they're there already so good. So I'll pass it over to Femi first with just a few remarks, prepared remarks, and then we'll we'll move to Katherine. But, Femi, why don't you go ahead and take it away, please.

[00:23:50] **Olufemi Taiwo** Yeah, thanks, Evan, and thanks, everyone, for coming, thanks to the Center for hosting this. I just want to say a few things to put the US version of the political convergences between religion, ecological crisis and power in a little bit of a longer historical perspective, just that we have it ready at hand to talk about. So the version of world history that we are living in is markedly, markedly different from the vast majority of human history, and the story of how it became so different starts, in my view, around the end of the 15th century. So for much of this millennium or of that millennium, I suppose I should say, the period of the part of land that's now Spain and Portugal would have been referred to as Al-Andalus. It was under control of Muslim powers, and it was reconquered by Christian powers, and it was actually around the same time that Christopher Columbus went sailing for what we now think of as Spain. This kicked off this voyage and the voyages that followed, it kicked off the period of colonialism that created European presence in the Western Hemisphere.

[00:25:31] **Olufemi Taiwo** That was the basis for what is now the United States and the Caribbean nation states and South American nation states. It was Spain and Portugal doing the colonial conquering. And from the very first the church was involved.

[00:25:48] **Olufemi Taiwo** In fact, it was the Vatican that negotiated a treaty, the Treaty of Tordesillas, between Spain and Portugal to divide the western hemisphere of the planet in between those powers. As their colonial projects and their neighbors, as their European neighbors, colonial projects developed and other nation states got more powerful, there was a shift in politics towards nation states as the kind of most important political entities they began to outstrip the power of the Vatican.

[00:26:27] **Olufemi Taiwo** But that wasn't written into the world in 1492. That's something that developed over centuries, decades and decades of time. And it is actually this first century of European colonial imprint in the world, in the Western Hemisphere that was negotiated by the Vatican. Is actually the first instance of anthropogenic climate change. So many people died in the first century of European colonialism in this hemisphere, mainly from disease, but also from war, conflict and other forms of death-dealing political practices. So many people died that it actually cooled the earth, and that's that's something scientists have more or less recently established but is worth noting as we now confront a climate crisis that is threatens to warm, threatens to change the world's temperature to an even greater degree.

[00:27:44] **Olufemi Taiwo** This was corporate, you know, I've said that the Vatican was involved this whole time, but we should also note that corporate entities were involved the whole time. It was the Virginia Company of London, a joint stock company that founded Jamestown, and what became the United States of America as England got involved in North America. And so all of these entities, corporations seeking profit, nation states seeking dominion, and religious entities also seeking their own form of control, have been working in concert over the last five centuries or so. And there have been shifts in terms of which of these are more dominant. But where we end up in the 20th century is a situation where Reverend Martin Luther King describes 11:00 a.m. on the Sunday as the most segregated hour in America. Because the forms of control over these colonies that were established by the Virginia colony and the Vatican and Spain and Portugal and England, whatever their other differences, were strongly racially organized. And that was how justice, or I suppose injustice, was built into the structure of colonialism and in the structure of power over economies, power over land, and power over people.



[00:29:19] **Olufemi Taiwo** So from that really long historical perspective, it's really interesting to me and helpful to me that the story of climate crisis in the United States in the way that's been politicized in this documentary starts off with this discussion of, you know, now I'm quoting from the movie of climate crisis as a "tribally marked thing." I think the idea about how we judge information based on who it comes from and how it fits into cultural battles and who we think the information supports, I think is a very deep, basic political problem that we're confronted with in today's day and age. And that is in powerful ways in the film discussed as one of the root problems of climate crisis. And I think religion and economy and race are all big parts of how we stitch together the kinds of tribes that evaluate this information and succeed or fail to respond in positive ways to it.

[00:30:32] **Olufemi Taiwo** And all of these things, race, religion, corporation, corporate power, are powerfully shaped by the actions and impulses and strategies of elites. So the aspect of the film, talking about the Rockefellers, and the Pews, and the Stewarts is, I think, very important to sit next to that thought. In the days of old it was religion that got, that was the tool elites used to get regular people to fight crusades, the outcome of which primarily benefited the Ferdinand, Ferdinands and Isabellas, the kings and queens of the age, as opposed to regular folks. Nowadays we have people and corporations like Exxon and organizations like the American Legislative Exchange Council, which writes model legislation that's criminalizing climate protest across the country. But in either case, you have a sort of dedicated strategy by elites to use, whether it's religion or to use, whether it's religion in this more direct way running through the Vatican or whether to run a kind of pro-corporate politics through the through a similar veneer of religion, to just to get people to oppose, to support criminalizing climate protest and to oppose progressive climate policy. So we have a climate crisis that's much different from the era of the Crusades and the Reconquista, but is not quite as different as it might seem on first blush.

[00:32:26] **Olufemi Taiwo** And so that's a really long story about the problems and the ways they're similar and different from five centuries ago. If there's a lesson in the kind of thing that the film is talking about, I think it's that we should try to develop a politics where we're primarily focused on outcomes, not sides. Where we're thinking, what is the world going to be like, how does this different political proposal fit into that or failed to fit into that, as opposed to whether or not a piece of information supports our side, our tribe, our political perspective. And I think we've seen the danger of that antagonistic way of framing politics and the COVID epidemic. The recent study by Northeastern showed that egalitarian global distribution of vaccines would cut death rates by more than twice as much as the unequal, rich country-centered rollout of vaccine distribution that we've actually gotten. So this way of engaging in politics where we view other people as enemies and try to make everything about winning, a sort of antagonistic competition, as opposed to finding more collaborative ways to pursue our own interests alongside and with other people, I think is a kind of chilling version in miniature of the climate crisis. There are attempts to try to fit climate crisis into national security approaches to politics or pro-business approaches to politics, but we need pro-planet, pro-humanity approaches to politics, a much larger and much more collaborative, much more cooperative way of thinking about addressing these kinds of crises. And unless we can resist the waves that at least try to use religion and charitable trusts and foundations to get us into fighting each other, we're going to be stuck in a bad place. So I'll leave it there. Looking forward to Q & A.

[00:35:00] **Evan Sandmark** Great, thank you very much, Femi, why don't you go ahead and take it away, Katherine, whenever you're ready.

[00:35:06] **Katherine Stewart** Thank you so much, Femi, for your really thought provoking commentary. And I want to thank Butlerfilms and the filmmakers, Ashley Duffalo, Evans Sandsmark everyone else at the University of Virginia's Religion, Race and Democracy Lab. I'm really honored to join with all of you this afternoon. So I want to make a few points about the history and the alliance between religious fundamentalism and free market fundamentalism, which is so deftly explored in the film. And I also want to briefly summarize how echoes of that science denial affect us in today's climate crisis.

[00:35:45] **Katherine Stewart** So by the 19th century in America, there were already some serious tensions between religion and science. And an early source was actually geology and growing evidence that the Earth is really actually quite old. And although the division is really messy, there was a distinct tendency on the part of, I would say most orthodox or let's say dogmatic of the conservative religious clerics to side, both against modern science and also to side with slavery, the institution of slavery at the same time. So you find major religious figures like a proslavery theologian James Henley Thornwell complaining about, he called it infidel science. And you have the proslavery theologian Robert Lewis Dabney, who is also with the Southern Presbyterian Church, a Confederate leader. He attacked the physical sciences as so-called theories of unbelief. So whatever their argument, I think it all boils down to fear, fear that if people don't accept their reading of scripture as the one true reading, they might start to question the need for submission to their doctrines, for obedience to their clerical representatives. They might start to question the legitimacy of the hierarchies that these ultra orthodox theologians were promoting, including racial hierarchies which they said were ordained by God and gender hierarchies as well. And they thought that if people start to question those hierarchies, then clearly they will be harder to control and capital will have a very different arrangement. Uh, what makes this rather messy, the sort of alliance between sort of antiscience forces and voices were who were in support of racism and slavery was that in subsequent years you also had scientists like Louis Agassiz at Harvard who was profoundly racist and claimed to find support for his racism in science, too. And then you had a small but significant number of proslavery, fearless theorists who believe that science would somehow support them in there as justification for their viewpoint. So the picture is messy. But regardless, hostility to climate action became not just a question of denying the science, but a theological opposition.

[00:38:13] **Katherine Stewart** I would say that most of the sort of science denialist hyperconservative theologians of today who also endorse biblical literalism, the idea of hierarchies as ordained by the Bible, you know, they don't see themselves as opposing science, per say. Many of them insist that theirs is the scientific view. So today, when it comes to environmentalism, they believe what passes for science is now deeply infused with a value judgment and scientific rhetoric is being deployed to advance the view that humans should subordinate ourselves to nature. They believe this is wrong and specifically unbiblical. In fact, they think it's devil talk. Hence, the Cornwall Alliance, which we saw in the film there. And they produce Cornwall Alliance as a sort of a creationist group that produced a TV series called "Resisting the Green Dragon," a biblical response to one of the greatest deceptions of our day. And we saw this featured in the film. So they think basically that environmentalism is merely a false moral claim masquerading as science. So as we saw in the film, again, the Cornwall Alliance has issued declarations saying that as a matter of theology, there's no convincing scientific evidence that human contribution to greenhouse gases is causing dangerous global warming. But here's an interesting thing that goes back to that alliance between the theological opposition and the alliance with sort of a free market fundamentalism. The Cornwall Alliance also says that policies that are intended to slow the pace of climate change represent a, quote,

dangerous expansion of government. Control over private life, so, you know, this isn't the theology of every strand of Christianity, not by a long shot. I mean, most American Christians, including many of the voices that we saw, represented the film, accept climate science and believe in protecting the environment and being good stewards of the environment. But unfortunately, theirs is not the theology that is holding sway in the upper reaches of one of our political parties today. So it is an alliance between a sort of religious hyper orthodox view and free market fundamentalism.

[00:40:45] **Katherine Stewart** And we want to look at where does the money come from today? Well, if we're talking specifically about the Cornwall Alliance was supported early on by the Acton Institute, which is a right wing free market policy group. The Acton's Institute has received a large portion of its funding from the family of former president of the former president's education secretary, Betsy Devos. And other sort of funders are often from that sort of representing members of the conservative wings of of of religious of religious folks. On their website, by the way, Acton takes credit for laying the foundations for gatherings that were later memorialized as the Cornwall Declaration.

[00:41:37] **Katherine Stewart** So this alliance, again, between right wing religion and climate denial is everywhere. And I want to tell you a little bit about how Christian nationalist leaders spread this alliance. Those leaders know that pastors drive votes, and so they work really hard to organize a conservative leaning or right wing pastors into networks, and they communicate to them the issues that should matter in election cycles, cycles. Climate is one of those issues. It's not the main issue. But if you look at the tools that they are given, you understand why it is one of the tools. And if you look at how so many of these sort of right wing pastors come to see environmentalism as a false theology, I just want to give you an example. So here's one of the messaging tools. It's a manual produced in association with the Family Research Council, a leading religious right policy group, and they give this manual to pastors as a tool for turning out their congregations to vote their so-called biblical values. It's got about one hundred and fifty pages of material. It's actually a very sophisticated document. So they're not just telling pastors and church goers to get out and motivate other congregants to vote in these really sophisticated tools to do that. So here's what they say about environmentalism and climate science on page 15 and 16 there. So they have all these resources listed for like pro-life groups, origins. They've got like three creationists or so intelligent design sources for answering issues around the origins of life. There's only one resource listed for environmental issues, and that is the Cornwall Alliance. So if you look at the work of some of the most powerful right wing pastors today, you can see the effect of these types of initiatives in action.

[00:43:36] **Katherine Stewart** I want to just give you another brief example. Let's take Ralph Drollinger. He's founder of Capital Ministries. It's an organization targeting political leaders at the very highest levels of power. Drollinger established Bible Study Group in Trump's White House. And he also has Bible study groups targeting, targeting the Senate, the House of Representatives. And he also has established Bible study groups in a number of state houses, so state capitals. So he's really quite a powerful dude. So every week he produces Bible studies on a different theme. He's not hiding them. You can look at many of them on his website, which is capmin.org. And in February, 2018, he had a Bible study that was all about the so-called false religion of radical environmentalism. So referencing the Book of Genesis, he said it was unbiblical to think that people can change the environment. The very idea is unbiblical. He called it an ultra hubristic, secular worldview. In Drollinger's ministry, throughout his teachings, you can see the alliance again with right wing sort of far right libertarian economic positions. A number of his Bible

studies on various points of economic policy where he says the Bible endorses minimal regulation of business, low taxation for the rich, and he is against government funding social services directly. He actually says it's up to the family and the church to meet the needs of the poor, not government or the private sector. So they're following this commitment to an extreme vision of the free market as identical to true Christianity. And these ideas are frankly widespread among sort of throughout right wing religion today.

[00:45:32] **Katherine Stewart** So I've probably talked long enough, and I really look forward to engaging in discussion and also to hearing from all of you. Thank you so much.

[00:45:46] **Evan Sandmark** Thank you very much, Katherine. That was that was great. I particularly like the the show-and-tell of the of the voter guide. As I was reading your book, I kept trying to envision what exactly these things look like, but that was very helpful. OK, good. So we'll go through a little discussion ourselves. We do have some good comments coming in. So comments and questions. I'll try to get to some of those as the discussion goes on. Looks like Femi had to drop off for one second. So we can start with you, Katherine. I guess the basic thing I'm thinking about are institutions, the media, universities, courts, churches and the role they play in the current crisis and the responsibility they bear for it. You've alluded to some of this a little bit in your in your own talk. So, I mean, it's fair to say that you don't regard Christian nationalism as positive as a positive development. And I'm just wondering if you could maybe precisely identify who and what is behind it and if there are any ways that we can try to curb their influence, recognizing it is basically a poisonous influence in a lot of respects.

[00:46:55] **Katherine Stewart** Sure. I think when you're looking at the movement overall, it's really helpful to distinguish between the leaders and the rank and file. Regarding the rank and file, you're talking about a very wide range of people with very different interests and backgrounds and ideas. So the first thing to bear in mind is that a very substantial number of them do not explicitly support anything like a theocracy. Frankly, a lot of them would be unhappy to learn all of the details about what their leaders are proposing. Much of this group votes identity and not just policy. And several of the speakers in the film spoke about this, spoke to this fact very directly. So when they vote for candidates who promised to end abortion, say, reunite church and state and insist that America is a Christian nation, they're not really aiming explicitly for major fundamental ways in which the American government is organized. They're kind of making a statement about themselves and what they value in themselves. And their identity, I should say, is really only Christian nationalist in a very loose way. Some of them are concerned about climate issues, but some of them have come to fold in those attitudes toward climate science in with other aspects of that identity. But I think that really it's about the leaders, the movement, the heads of the religious right policy groups, the networking groups, the media and legislative initiatives, the legal and data organizations and the like. And their vision really involves a lot more power for themselves and their networks, the political leaders that they support. And so, you know, that's really where if you look at sort of where this is coming from, this is not a movement that is a bottom-up movement. It's not it's really a top-down movement. Those issues are created not from the sort of rank and file. I mean, you didn't have people all over the country saying, gosh, you know, we're you know, we're going to deny climate science. Those sort of issues are sort of crafted at the top and then disseminated through their networks. And I also think that, you know, we can't overlook the fact that there is now this sort of a sort of far right propaganda network. We can't overlook the effect of that propaganda-sphere in creating a movement that has separated the rank and file from some of the facts. And they do so in these really kind of crude ways. I mean, propaganda outfits don't do subtle. They do black versus white, right versus wrong, impure

versus you're like an insider or you're an outsider. And religion and politics increasingly plays that dividing role, in sort of determining who is one of us and who is one of them.

[00:49:56] **Evan Sandmark** OK, great and Femi, I see rejoined, but I just want to follow up real quick with Katherine as you're as you're getting your bearings in the discussion again. So given that there's this distinction between the religious leaders, the ones who are actually driving the movement and just sort of everyday people who may not be really even aware of some of the dimensions of the movement, I mean, how do you assess the sincerity of these leaders' religious convictions? I mean, when they line up against environmentalism during the Reagan administration, it seems clearly to be for economic and political reasons as opposed to like trying to view this as the theologically correct thing, and even something that they seem so utterly convinced of, like restricting abortion, is itself something that they did to gain political power, which is something that you detail quite nicely in your book. So I guess to put it sharply, are these leaders cynical or is that too harsh of a way of reading it? What is your assessment based on your reporting?

[00:50:59] **Katherine Stewart** Oh, are you asking me or Femi?

[00:51:01] **Evan Sandmark** Yeah, sorry, Katherine. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Sorry, I'm asking about the leaders.

[00:51:04] **Katherine Stewart** Yeah, yeah, yeah, of course. I'm so sorry. Yeah. I mean, if you're asking whether they're just cynical opportunists or true believers, you know, I would say it's really hard to speculate about the interior states of mind of a fairly large group of individuals. We can't really know what all of them are thinking, but I don't see those two categories as mutually exclusive. Really. I'm inclined to believe that for many leaders of the religious right, it is all of the above. I think many of them truly think they have a direct line to God. And I also think that many movement leaders identify their power and money about access to money as evidence of divine favor. And as you mentioned, there are huge amounts of money involved. Many of these leaders can raise significant sums from their audiences and also from sympathetic wealthy donors. So I leave it to others to judge the extent whether the availability of this kind of money is going to coexist with perfect purity of motive, we should say.

[00:52:06] **Evan Sandmark** OK, yeah, that's that that's fair. Very diplomatic answer. OK, Femi. I want to I want to loop you back in. So when when you cut out, I think I was asking about institutions. So things media, churches, courts, things of that nature. And I was curious for your take on this, because one point you make in your book in which you discussed in your opening remarks is that the problems we face have deep histories and tangled genealogies. And these problems took shape over centuries and advantages and disadvantages accrued over time. So I guess I'm interested in how this complicates culpability, like who's responsible for this? And if it changes who directly we ask to reform?

[00:52:57] **Olufemi Taiwo** Yeah, it's an interesting question, and I think Katherine's answer actually really nicely sets up to the previous question really nicely, sets up the way that I think about this sort of thing. Right. Where what's really at issue, you know, we sometimes talk about racism and you know, forms of bigotry, as though they are kinds of defects of character or psychological dispositions that some people have. And there's certainly some truth to that, right? There are bigoted people and there are bigoted attitudes, so on and so forth. But, you know, when you're trying to explain, you know, something deeper than the use of a slur and when you're trying to explain, the location of a

trash collection service, for example, or trash incineration service, then you're getting into things like zoning and you're getting into the extent to which, um, a, you know, how is this how a congressional district, for example, has been formed over time and you're getting into issues of disproportionate access to lobbyists, and to favor from regulators and so on, so forth, and it's it's difficult to tell that much larger, more networked, multi-institutional story in a way that even resembles the way that we talk about individual psychological attitudes, right? Does the comptroller of New York hate Black people? I don't know. But, you know, does the way that the institution, the institutions that locate trash incineration service respond systematically in ways that are more likely to locate that, and other forms of waste near Black communities? And less likely to do so to wealthy white communities? That's something I actually do know. There's quite a bit of social science to suggest that sort of thing.

[00:55:08] **Olufemi Taiwo** And so that massively complicates the story about attribution of blame and responsibility in ways that I think push us up levels of scale. So so, you know, the accountability story is less about finding an individual person who was exerting bias and more about finding networks of institutional design that work in ways that systematically make some people worse off and other people better off. And you know, that conversation, as I say in the book, looks a lot more like the way that corporate liability gets discussed than the ways that then it resembles the way the individual moral responsibility gets discussed.

[00:56:03] **Evan Sandmark** Yeah, OK, excellent. So this ties into something else I wanted to ask about, to you Femi again. So recognizing this degree of complexity and this is a question about priorities, about the problems that we should address first. So in a lot of cases, multiple problems will intersect. So if Black Americans breathe 50 percent worse air than white Americans on average, something mentioned in the film, then a Clean Air Initiative becomes a racial justice initiative. Likewise, if combating climate change is a way to help those in the global south, then climate justice is a type of social justice. But the problem is that objectives don't always so neatly align. And I'm wondering how we should think about prioritization. So should we think about maybe some sort of utilitarian principle, greatest good, greatest number of people? Maybe even thinking about future people, people who don't even yet exist? Or should we try to direct all our energies towards what we identify as the most morally urgent problems, however we define those? So I basically just a question about priorities and how we how we think about them, the hierarchy. For your Femi, please.

[00:57:12] **Olufemi Taiwo** Yeah, I think incentives don't naturally align. And so the question is, you know, rather than a kind of, you know, discovery way of thinking about these things, right, finding finding the answer to the principal question of what the justice system really should accomplish or what our laws really should really should accomplish. I think maybe a different way to think of it is as a design problem.

[00:57:46] **Olufemi Taiwo** So how do we create modes of climate politics that does, in fact tie these disparate different interests together? So that's the thing that I like about the kind of scale and ambition of things like what people talk about under a Green New Deal, right? They recognize that there's a variety of things that need to happen to make our economy better. And work for more people and prey on fewer people. That's going to involve making sure more people who want them have access to jobs. That's making sure that people have access to housing and making sure that people have access to health care and that people retain access to those things in the face of ongoing, incoming climate crisis. Those things aren't necessarily the things that you would do to solve any one of those problems

aren't necessarily aligned if you took them separately, but if you bundle them and you say what we're going to do is the Green New Deal. And by the way, what that means is public housing, retrofitting of existing housing stock to have higher levels of energy efficiency. If it means doing the green goals by doing the social goals, then you have you know, then you have stitched together these otherwise different interests by a kind of future oriented plan rather than by some moral excavation of like what housing justice really means. Right. We're designing a project.

[00:59:34] **Olufemi Taiwo** And to me, the way to do that right, with respect to these deep questions of inequality like racial justice and gender justice and disability justice, is takes the same principle. Like how do we design a Green New Deal in a way that addresses the accumulated injustices faced by African-American descendants of those who are enslaved, for example. And I think there are good principles that are people are trying out good design principles. For example, identifying census tracts that are disproportionately inhabited by marginalized communities and designating proportions of various kinds of funding associated with environmental justice legislation to go to those tracks as opposed to other ones. I think those kinds of design principles and other ones are, you know, these distribute, these distributional questions of who takes on the burdens of these transitions and who receives the benefits of these transitions is the right way to think about these deeper questions of justice next to this kind of history.

[01:00:55] **Evan Sandmark** OK, great, yeah, thank you, that's that's I think that's a very helpful way of thinking about it with some good concrete examples that we're contemplating, like the Green New Deal as a society. So, Katherine, I'm going to ask you one more question which is informed by an audience question, but also one that I have somewhat prepared. And then after that, I will try to transition to looking more at the audience questions. But so specifically for you, in the Christian nationalist circles you've studied, I'm just curious to hear broadly and again, you've touched on this to some extent, how theology intersects with specific policy preferences. So there's this great line in your book that you capture where you quote an evangelical activist who says, "the Bible tells us all we need to know about anything." That's a quote. And then early in the film at the Republican Senate.

[01:01:52] **Katherine Stewart** I'm so sorry, Evan, I think you've frozen.

[01:01:56] **Evan Sandmark** Oh, can you hear me again?

[01:02:00] **Katherine Stewart** That's better, yeah.

[01:02:00] **Evan Sandmark** OK, what's up? Yeah, yeah, sorry. Is it OK now?

[01:02:05] **Katherine Stewart** Yes, absolutely. OK.

[01:02:08] **Evan Sandmark** No, no. No worries. Thanks for letting me know. So just I guess to sum it up and the question for the audience was related is: how, how do you see the connection between religion and politics, and which way do you think the causality runs? Do you think it's theology driving politics or do you think it's the other way around in general?

[01:02:29] **Katherine Stewart** Oh, well, that's a great question and a pretty broad one too. I think that in general, it's just sort of look, people interpret the Bible so many different ways. There were proslavery theologians and there were abolitionist theologians. I wrote

about a dozen of them in my book, "Power Worshipers" and the sort of tension between the two. And you can see that religion, the same text can be interpreted in so many different ways. There has to be something besides just the religion determining these a vastly different and opposite positions. But, you know, it's interesting when you talk about how embedded is theology in some of these positions specifically related to climate. Now, let's look at the Cornwall Alliance again. It's founded by a key founder is a fellow named E. Calvin Beisner. And he before he founded Cornwall, he was a co-founder of something called the Coalition on Revival. It's a very large network of right wing and evangelical Christian leaders and theologians. And they gather every few years in a different local and Coalition on Revival members espouse a variety of theologies, but all of them incredibly hyper conservative. I would say radical, actually. They've adopted explicitly dominionist and reconstructionist ideological positions, the idea that Christians of a certain kind, not not not progressive Christians or moderates, but people who sort of agree with their interpretation of the faith should dominate all aspects of government and society. And Beisner was actually an early coauthor of those position papers. So when you go back and look, a lot of the organizations that now form part of the infrastructure of today's Christian right, you can see the radical roots in them among a number of the leaders. A lot of times they'll talk about something and it sort of becomes adopted as like, you know, they say things like, you know, the First Amendment was supposed to keep the interference of government out of religion rather than separation of church and state. Well, this is a sort of idea that was articulated by one of the founders of modern Christian reconstructionism, a fellow named Rousas John Rushdoony. So but then you hear little bits and pieces of his very extremist theology everywhere. The historian Julie Ingersoll has written a wonderful book about that. And Anthea Butler has also, who is also in the film has written about that. So when you when you hear some of the leaders of the religious right speaking today, you can hear echoes of the past. And if you dig a little bit deeper, you see the radicalism at the core of their ideas. I hope that's helpful.

[01:05:49] **Evan Sandmark** Absolutely, yeah, thank you very much. So, yeah, lots of questions from the audience. Let me try to get to a couple of those. Some of them are a little lengthy, but maybe this one. So this is the top voted one from Manuel Lerda. I'm not sure if I'm saying that correctly. An ecologist in the Environmental Science Department is teaching agroecology this semester. And so several of the people in the film linked fighting for the environment with fighting against racism. So Joel Salatin, I'm not sure that he was the man in the film. I'm not sure if I'm saying his name right is seen in the movie decrying anti environmentalism, also denies the existence of systematic racism in America and has come out with some straight up racist comments himself. What should we do? What should we who care about racial justice? What should we do when we care about racial justice, when we are wearing our environmentalist hats do with the Salatins of our movement? So basically he's good in one area, bad in another. How should we assess those characters? Femi, do you want to take that question?

[01:06:57] **Olufemi Taiwo** Yeah, I'm happy to say a couple of things. Yeah, I mean, that's that's a tough I'm not quite sure what to make of those characters other than just to lean on the kind of thing I was saying earlier, I mean, ultimately what matters from my perspective and kind of a, you know, I'm kind of laser focused on the sort of material outcomes. So where are the trash compactors and the trash incinerators, right? Where are the solar panels? Are the buildings retrofitted? I think. One strength of the right, as the film explains and as Katherine's book very strongly explains, is their willingness and ability to organize around, you know, what people might call practical, you have practical unity to agree on what to do and to be able to kind of let ideological disagreements kind of lie. Right.



[01:08:13] **Olufemi Taiwo** A lot of these people have, you know, a lot of these coalitions on the right are not politically coherent. If it's ideological, if it's ideology you're looking at. Right. But they realize that, you know, what's important is for them, dominion, right. And they can get it without agreement on these deep ideological questions. And I think for us, you know, for people on the other side of that battle, I think what needs to be important for us is justice. And in this kind of real material, concrete, practical sense, we need to be a little more ruthless and a little less moralistic about what kinds of disagreements we countenance in the service of that. So, yeah, that's what I would say.

[01:09:09] **Evan Sandmark** Yeah, I mean, as you put it earlier, outcomes, not sides, so ruthlessly trained on those the effects. So, Katherine, did you did you want to weigh in on that at all? If not, I can dip into the question pool, but it's up to you that.

[01:09:21] **Katherine Stewart** Absolutely. Look, I think the challenges we face are political. And I think a lot of the solutions are going to be political, too. We can't get any policy pushed forward unless we have political consensus and the ability to do that. And I think, you know, whatever people's personal opinions, the fact is a lot of the movement that the religious right is, the racism is really very structural because it pushes support for a political party that has made race based gerrymandering and voter suppression a strategic imperative. And I think another problem that we're facing, one of the consequences of that are race based gerrymandering is that in a lot of Republican districts, they're not running in state races, they're not running against Democrats, they're running against fellow Republicans. And so the way they tend to win is to run to the right of other Republicans and say, well, that person says you're a conservative, but I'm a true conservative. They say they're against you know, they're not a pure conservative. I'm the best, most conservative. And so then you end up with a really distorted, frankly, distorted political party. And I think as we saw in the beginning of the film, in an earlier era, you had Democrats and Republicans who might take different positions on a lot of issues, but there was more likelihood of creating climate consensus because it was just it was just more moderation. That was just a sort of, you know, the the the party hadn't been sort of taken off into this sort of, frankly, radical direction.

[01:11:04] **Katherine Stewart** So I think that, frankly, protecting voting rights, which now there's this massive assault on voting rights, which is very race targeted and very racist. Protecting voting rights, which this is something that all Americans should embrace. It's the most patriotic thing we can do is to protect the right to vote and the right of political representation.

[01:11:27] **Evan Sandmark** Yeah, amen. OK, so I think we were virtually out of time, I was going to possibly try to get to the audience questions, but I think they might just be slightly more complex. So what I want to do instead is perhaps ask very briefly, starting with with you Femi and then with you, Katherine, if you're hopeful about the future and do you think we can actually address these challenges? Maybe just a minute for you, Femi, a minute for you, Katherine, and then I'll I'll wrap this up.

[01:11:56] **Olufemi Taiwo** Hopeful is not the word that I would use. But there are two things I would say. The first is that. There's a perspective that avoids despair that is achieved when you've decided to do something, right, when you when you've decided to to fight what you've decided to struggle. It just rules out a kind of hopelessness. That doesn't mean that you're sure you're going to win or that everything is going to go OK. But to put it, you know, you no longer feel helpless or passive. And so I think in making this something

that I do, I've avoided a kind of despair. And I'm encouraged at least by, I think, a serious reckoning historically with the intellectual and political tradition that I identify with the Black political tradition. For much of recent human history, things have been. Worse for us than they are now. And we're still here, and so I think that also helped stave off a certain kind of hopelessness. And so, you know, I think. That's the best I can do on that question.

[01:13:22] **Evan Sandmark** I'll take it. That's good. Katherine, how about you?

[01:13:27] **Katherine Stewart** Femi, that's great. And I've got nothing original to say. So I will paraphrase Stacey Abrams: "I am neither hopeful nor pessimistic. I'm determined."

[01:13:41] **Evan Sandmark** Wonderful. That's that's that's a good line to end on. So with that, let me close this out. So thank you so much to both Olufemi Taiwo and Katherine Stewart for their reflections on the film, for engaging in dialog, and for answering my questions and audience questions. So as a reminder, a recording of today's event will be published on [religionlab.virginia.edu](http://religionlab.virginia.edu). And we'll notify all attendees when that's available. We also invite you to attend the next Informed Perspectives webinar on March 18 at 6 p.m. Eastern Time about race and religion in China. So thank you, everyone, for being here today. We hope many of you will join us again for future events. Thank you.