

Evangelical Environmentalism and Environmental Mindfulness: The role  
of symbolism and beliefs within evangelical ideology and  
environmentalism.

By

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## ABSTRACT

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This thesis examines the relationship between symbols and their effects when regarding evangelical environmentalism. Being ethnography, this work took place over almost 6 months of attending evangelical church services at Westcoast Baptist Church. Interviews, conversations and observations were categorized and analyzed to come to the best conclusion possible pertaining to the environmentalism within this church. Ethnographic methods were used to approach study in a way in which individuals did not feel threatened or “watched” including only writing notes privately and working to understand the ideology of evangelical environmentalism through the eyes of those I observed. Images pertaining to this thesis are also inserted where it seems best. The findings of this research show that the church can be considered a liberal evangelical environmentalist church and that many of the influences of nature and the environment come from their senior pastor and his love of nature, potentially influencing his congregation even when that was not the intention

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## **Introduction**

“The trees bless the world. And that’s what we are supposed to be as a church too.”

--Senior Pastor Philip Miller, Westwood Baptist Church

Perhaps the last topic anyone expects to be caught up reading about in a thesis for a master’s program is evangelicalism. However, this thesis does just that. Evangelicalism, just like many religions, has in many ways fractured a bit, creating a somewhat progressive branch and a more traditional branch. A review of the literature will allow us to understand some of the complexities of evangelicalism.

Evangelicals aren’t known to be active environmentalists. Many have chosen instead to focus on social issues, as the gospel instructs. Still, there have been increasing numbers of evangelicals who care for the Earth and want to protect it. Unfortunately, people associated with the term “evangelical” have been stereotyped as having only conservative beliefs in all realms of thought. Non-evangelicals often make the mistake of thinking that evangelicals belong to a homogenous, conservative group, unwilling to accept science. They think that evangelicals’ ethical and political beliefs are similarly conservative. As such, it may seem there is no room for research into the link between evangelical thought and environmental ideas within the evangelical circle. Research and a literature

review opened my eyes and hopefully will yours, to the world of Creation Care and Evangelical Environmentalism.

Within the broad term “evangelicalism,” some evangelicals are Democrats, support pro-life, and also support environmental protection. Many are Republicans who vote for morally conservative bills at the state level but support various wildlife protection programs because they are also hikers or campers or hunters. The variations are endless. As a result, this research attempts to gain insight into evangelical beliefs about environmental issues, without categorizing anyone except to the extent that they are indeed evangelical.

Within evangelicalism, a movement has been gaining more and more momentum since the middle of last century: Evangelical Environmentalism (EE). Within this group two additional two branches have split off: Liberal EE’s (LEE) and Conservative EE’s (CEE), which will be looked at further in my literature review. Both groups believe in climate change, and other environmental issues like water shortages and pollution. Both read the same text usually the King James Version (KJV) bible, but also the English Standard Version (ESV), yet they can often have different takes on how to behave towards God’s creation. This is an open invitation for anyone to attempt to examine the use of symbols within evangelical environmentalism in order to understand the minds of evangelicals and their thoughts towards environmentalism. Additionally, to get a better grasp of why this movement is taking the world by storm (pun intended), we must try

and understand the foundation of how and why the beliefs might differ between LEEs and CEEs. In the end, we might be able to connect evangelical environmental thoughts to that of conventional scientists in a unified effort to conserve the Earth and combat anthropogenic climate change.

Interviews, research by attending services and a look into social anthropological theory regarding symbolism will shed more light on why the particular church I chose to research is attended by many EE's, even if the church could be identified as a CEE church because they have initially claimed to not having participated in environmental activism. Just because people volunteer in the neighborhood, have outdoor camps and recycle, doesn't mean they necessarily realize they are actually activists. In fact, I have happily pointed that out many times while speaking with evangelicals during the course of the research for this thesis.

In general LEEs choose to try and conserve the Earth by taking on an intentional activist role while CEEs choose to focus on poverty and economics and other social issues, as is expressed to them in the Gospel. A lot of the ideologies embraced by both groups have been passed down from spiritual leaders, teachers and grandparents. Interviews help determine who, if anyone, influences congregation members' beliefs about the environmental crises now occurring. There have, of course, always been evangelicals who believe in climate change or even just environmentalism, and argue in favor of supporting



the environment, but now that this concept has grown into a very large movement, more and more EEs continue to step out of the shadows and find their place in organizations like the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) and the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE).

The more evangelicals adopt environmentalist ideas in response to climate change and worldwide pollution, the more important it will be for secular scientists and evangelicals to work together to spread the knowledge of climate change and science that combats it, and to find ways to live in the changing world. I might even go so far as to say that we scientists are the ones who really must improve our tolerance levels in regards to other people's beliefs and religion. EEs are not going to stop believing in the gospel but scientists can stop letting it bother them that they do. It seems sometimes scientists are so upset that others believe without science, it keeps scientists and evangelicals from working together. What if we all just ignored the biblical account of creation and the big bang theory of how the Earth came into being for a minute and focused on the here and now? Right now our environment needs our help in many ways. The first step in making that happen will be to help academics and secular scientists come to a better understanding of evangelical environmentalism and of faith, which cannot be logically argued against. It must be understood and tolerated just as EEs will have to tolerate things liberals do like talk about evolution openly. We must understand each other. I began trying to do just that in this thesis by

submerging myself into the culture of an environmentally friendly evangelical church and using ethnographic field methods to obtain research data regarding EEs, their beliefs and the symbols forming substantial building blocks of their church. Thus, the question driving the research can be written as: Are symbols within evangelicalism affecting individuals' relationships with and beliefs about environmental affairs and climate change, allowing them to support the safety of the environment?

### **Historical significance**

“I don't think God is going to ask us how he created the earth, but he will ask us what we did with what he created.”  
--Reverend Rich Cizik, vice president of the National Association of Evangelicals, New York Times, March 10, 2005

Evangelicalism has been around since the days of the Greek empire. “The term ‘evangelical’ comes from the Greek word *euangelion*, meaning ‘the good news’ or the ‘gospel’. First Protestants brought the evangelical movement to the United States; the Baptists and other smaller churches then adopted evangelicalism in later years. It is important to understand that evangelicals are often considered to be some of the most conservative people in our nation. Most evangelicals are pro-life and in supportive of traditional marriage between a man and a woman. Evangelicals may also be pro-environment and can take a less conservative stand on other political issues. This demographic of evangelicals

cannot be grouped into one lump. Evangelicals started adopting environmental concerns more publicly in the late 1980's and the 1990's—the movement has moved slowly since that time. Certainly there were EEs before this, but this is when the movement really came to light.

It is important to note that evangelicals do not want to be considered to be worshipping nature or to be considered pagan. They will care for, love, enjoy and preserve God's creation though, as expressed in the ESV, imagery, weekly sermons and in theory. As every year goes by showing scientists more and more data concerning climate change, the frequency of studies similar to this thesis will increase.

## **Background, Definitions and Concepts**

“...and shouldest destroy them which destroy the Earth” (Rev 11:18, KJV).

There is an incredibly extensive list of verses from the bible related to environmentalism which people have been known to interpret differently from other people, based on their backgrounds, the time in history, their view of how modern people should treat the words contained in the bible. This thesis will not delve deeply into that debate, but will draw on examples in the pages that follow.

As just indicated, the modern use of the term “evangelicalism” began with evangelical Protestants and has since become trans-denominational as Baptists, the Reformed, Pentecostals, Lutherans and Wesleyans have adopted the evangelical faith and recently evangelical environmental beliefs. The generally accepted definition of evangelical is that evangelical Christians believe in the gospel of the King James Version Bible (KJV) or the English Standard Version (ESV, same interpretations as the KJV but written as a story with translations of hard to understand words) as instructions by which to navigate through life, as inspiration for their lives, and as literal guidance from the Lord Jesus Christ. Evangelicals want to find Jesus and want to help others do so as well. This belief is derived from the KJV. Smaller sects have been known to occasionally use other versions of the Bible, but because the church I chose for this research uses the ESV I will from now forward refer to that one only.

The key component to being evangelical is to believe the words of the ESV as being the words of God, written through man. It is the Gospel they should follow. Words that are believed to be directly from Jesus in the New Testament are written in red and the rest is in black. This allows for studying the interpretation and symbols contained in the Bible, which in turn influence an individual’s concern for or understanding of environmentalism. This type of belief system inevitably requires a huge amount of trust in the particular teacher

or pastor. The teacher or pastor serves as the connection between Earth and God. The way the pastor translates scripture can mean the world to anyone who may have learned a different translation from another pastor. A good pastor can inspire and move a congregation. Most pastors in a given area may have come from similar seminary schools, probably have similar relationships with the community and the teaching of the gospel. Still, background also does not seem to matter as the interviewee for this thesis Senior Pastor Philip was born in the Midwest, attended seminary in Texas, then lived in Illinois before coming the Olympia, WA.

### **Evangelical Environmentalism (EE)**

“Evangelical environmentalism”, a growing environmental movement in the United States, puts emphasis on particular biblical directives regarding humanity's role as stewards of God's creation, afterward making it their responsibility for the care taking of Creation (<http://nae.net>). This thesis research will explore these ideas and how they came to be. Did their church leader influence them? Television? Is climate change awareness making these individuals more environmentally aware? Have evangelical groups adopted rituals and ideology based on a series of symbols which support the care of that which was created by God.

## **Creation Care (CC)**

Creation Care is a term that has been used by several evangelical leaders over the last few decades to establish a knowledge base concerning the support and care of God's creation; Earth and its animals. According to Sabrina Danielsen, in her article "Fracturing Over Creation Care? Shifting Environmental Beliefs among Evangelicals, 1984-2010", the Creation Care movement gained momentum in 1988 (Danielsen, pp. 9). She explains that that small movement then grew rapidly with "discussions of nuclear winter, ozone holes, and the drought of 1988" (Danielsen, pp. 9). Apparently this is when "global warming" was introduced and according to Danielsen it seemed to be on the same playing field as these previously mentioned disasters, according to people and the limited data available at the time.

The actual term "Creation Care" (CC) has been adopted by the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN) and it seems to enhance the understanding of their goals. Creation care, caring for creation, is simply what they are aiming for because they support the idea that they should care for everything God created. It is reflected in scripture as well and it is public knowledge that the EENs web address is [Creationcare.org](http://Creationcare.org). Since the origin of EEN in 1988, the idea of creation care has grown within groups of evangelicals.

Senior Pastor Philip of the Westwood Baptist Church in Olympia, WA, suggested a search for CC to me for research and was excited about this movement.

### **Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN)**

The Evangelical Environmental Network has people and groups involved in placing “creation care”, or the stewardship of God’s creation, at the center of their work; whereas CEEs not in this network place poverty and spreading the gospel as their main focus, making environmentalism fall behind in priority. The EEN has over 100 partners and exists to facilitate activities, outreach and education about environmentalism, especially climate change awareness. The website ‘CreationCare.org’ contains all the information one needs to become active in environmental protection through creation care.

Specifically, under the “declaration” link the EEN website why the organization believes God’s environment should be preserved. Some of these reasons under the EEN declaration include:

--“We and our children face a growing crisis in the health of the creation in which we are embedded, and through which, by God's grace, we are sustained. Yet we continue to degrade that creation.”

--“These degradations of creation can be summed up as 1) land degradation; 2) deforestation; 3) species extinction; 4) water

degradation; 5) global toxification; 6) the alteration of atmosphere; 7) human and cultural degradation.”

--“Many of these degradations are signs that we are pressing against the finite limits God has set for creation. With continued population growth, these degradations will become more severe. Our responsibility is not only to bear and nurture children, but to nurture their home on earth. We respect the institution of marriage as the way God has given to insure thoughtful procreation of children and their nurture to the glory of God”  
([creationcare.org/evangelical declaration on the care for creation](http://creationcare.org/evangelical-declaration-on-the-care-for-creation)).

There is evidence that these same types of beliefs are increasing among the general population of evangelicals (Danielson, p 212); additionally there are many more websites for churches claiming to support CC today than there were ten years ago, as discovered by my own research, when the topic was just gaining speed. This implies that more and more are joining the movement and perhaps reaching a more informed understanding of the meaning of the words of the ESV in regards to environmentalism. More and more conservative, republican and anti-liberal evangelicals have found the desire to join the environmental movement can be buttressed by Christianity, and that their Christianity can be better practiced and more appropriate to God’s intended behavior if they protect His creation.



In sum, evangelical environmentalism seems to be increasing. The cause for general environmentalism can be explained in part by the increasing flow of information about the environmental crises, but there are still those who doubt those facts. The cause for boosts in evangelical environmentalism is much deeper than facts; it goes deep into their ideology and belief system containing the entire world, which makes the facts important but not the motivating factor for action. Otherwise, they would have joined the cause long ago. Now, with scientists such as Dr. DeWitt relating scientific issues to Christianity in an ideological manner related to values and faith, LEEs are able to work towards a common goal: to slow the destruction of our environment by caring for creation.

### **Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI), by the EEN**

The Evangelical Climate Initiative (ECI), a movement started by evangelical church leaders and organizations in the United States promotes economically sound responses to alleviate global warming (ECI, p. 1). The ECI has four “claims” which support its existence and guide evangelicals are looking for answers to the climate change phenomenon.

According to the actual ECI document itself,

For most of us, until recently this has not been treated as a pressing issue or major priority. Indeed, many of us have required considerable convincing before becoming persuaded that climate change is a real problem and that it ought to matter to Christians. But now we have seen and heard enough to offer the following moral argument related to the matter of human-induced climate change (ECI, p.1).

These claims are listed as such:

1. Human-Induced Climate Change is Real.
2. The Consequences of Climate Change Will Be Significant, and Will Hit the Poor the Hardest.
3. Christian Moral Convictions Demand Our Response to the Climate Change Problem.
4. The Need to Act Now is Urgent. Governments, Businesses, Churches and Individuals all Have a Role to Play in Addressing Climate Change-- starting now.  
([www.christiansandclimate.org/statement/](http://www.christiansandclimate.org/statement/))

Within the ECI, the four claims are used to press forward very important facts related to the ‘claims’ so that those interested in becoming active may do so independently through volunteerism and prayer or in groups which reach out to those all over the world affected by climate change. As is seen in this thesis’ synthesis, many CEEs care about the environment but do not wish to promote their church actively or to actively participate in environmental activities for fear of being grouped in with those who support other liberal, moral views. Having such a large organization with an initiative might help CEEs warm up to the idea

of environmentalism because it would be coming from other evangelicals instead of scientists

The fact that the first claim acknowledges humans are causing climate change is very progressive and important in understanding what the ECI stands for. Many CEE churches admit climate change exists but claim it is caused by nature or by God and not humans. This belief can prevent activism and curtail climate changing behaviors. With ECI, evangelicals have a legitimate place to go and seek out information about climate change, and the first claim they see is that climate change is in fact human-induced. This is something that even some scientists find difficult to swallow because of an anthropocentric view or “humans are the center of the world” mentality towards humanity.

The second claim describes climate change as hitting the poor the hardest. This claim strikes at the hearts of evangelicals. Traditionally, evangelicals have been concerned with spreading the gospel, and when it comes to reach out or activism they prefer to work with poverty- in our country and other more social issues. This claim appeals to those who care a lot about impoverished peoples and participate in outreach to them.

The third claim supports Christian moral with three very moving excerpts from the ESV which support the concept of helping others and protecting God’s creations. At the end of the third claim it reads, “Love of God, love of neighbor,

and the demands of stewardship are more than enough reason for evangelical Christians to respond to the climate change problem with moral passion and concrete action” (ECI, p. 1).

Finally, the fourth claim explains the urgency with which climate change mitigation must happen. It describes certain actions or behaviors in which anyone can partake, it explains the ocean levels rising and why, and it explains that we must make long term goals and realize that “much of the climate change to which we are already committed will not be realized for several decades” (ECI, p. 1). We have to work to even if we may never see the results of that work and despite the fact that climate change has progressed to the point that we won’t know all the effects until decades from now. The only way for us, as a society, to succeed and for our future generations to succeed is to make long term decisions that affect every bit of life.

### **Interfaith Stewardship Alliance**

An extremely conservative evangelical group which does admit to the reality of climate change is the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance (ISA). According to the ISA’s website:

1. Foreseeable global warming will have moderate and mixed (not only harmful but also helpful), not catastrophic, consequences for humanity—including the poor—and other species.

2. Natural causes may account for a large part, perhaps the majority, of the global warming in both the last thirty and the last one hundred fifty years, which together constitute an episode in the natural rising and falling cycles of global average temperature. Human emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are probably a minor and possibly an insignificant contributor to its causes.
3. Reducing carbon dioxide emissions would have at most an insignificant impact on the quantity and duration of global warming and would not significantly reduce alleged harmful effects.
4. Government-mandated carbon dioxide emissions reductions not only would not significantly curtail global warming or reduce its harmful effects but also would cause greater harm than good to humanity—especially the poor—while offering virtually no benefit to other species.
5. The most prudent response is not to try to prevent or reduce whatever slight warming might occur. It is instead to prepare to adapt by fostering means that will effectively protect humanity—especially the poor—not only from whatever harms might be anticipated from global warming but also from harms that might be fostered by other types of catastrophes, natural or manmade.

(<http://www.archive.cornwallalliance.org/2006/08/02/global-warming-mainly-natural-and-not-catastrophic-says-new-study-from-interfaith-stewardship-alliance/>)

These points indicate that a major factor for the ISA is linking climate change to human actions. The ISA stresses that climate change is happening but that it will not be catastrophic or even very harmful. The followers of the ISA would be categorized as CEEs because they understand and believe the science of

climate change, but they do not think they should become climate change activists. They seem to feel they should focus on the more critical social issues like eradicating poverty, under the false conception that climate change isn't going to cause very much harm. They are not environmentalists really except that they admit climate change is real and do want to be stewards in their own way. The ISA is calling their plan a "call to truth" in response to the ECI's "call to action", indicating that this continues to be a subject about which religious groups are torn and to which scientific groups cannot connect because they aren't even unified as religious groups when it comes to a position about climate change (Cornwall Alliance, 8/2/06).

### **National Association of Evangelicals**

The National Association of Evangelicals represents all EEs--their logo is seen to the right. The Association is] very conservative, but the leaders and the website lead you to



environmentalist activities, insight and links to research. Interestingly, they do believe that climate change is anthropogenic. Is this a sign that the tides are changing? Only more research into these and other EE's will inform us.

Hopefully, this movement can gain momentum with a snowball affect... because we already know that climate change is doing exactly that.

### **Earth Ministry**



I classify Earth Ministry as an LEE organization. Their logo is quite symbolic of their mission and their goals. With some long grass, supporting a white bird and the entire logo colored like the Earth, these folks portray themselves in a liberal manner in their expressions about the environment.

Earth Ministry seems to be all about environmentalism from their website and flyers and welcomes anyone of faith to join in the work. They accept Christians, Jews, Muslims and all other religions who wish to care for the earth which they believe God created for us to do so. The website is packed with tools to protect creation without going against their other conservative principles. There are articles, games, links, events and much more on their site.

Additionally, this group is very politically active. I learned about Earth Ministry by running into one of the leaders at a lobbying event for carbon tax policy at the Washington State Capitol. You can find an Earth Ministry contact in nearly every state. Locations are listed on the website. The group also posts all relevant policies and legislature they support on their website and dates on which you can lobby with them. The main issues they support and advocate towards include “Climate and Energy, Environmental Health, Food and Farming, Green

Building and Grounds, Habitat Restoration, Recycling and Composting, Simplicity, Transportation and Water” (earthministry.org).

The imagery on the Earth Ministry website speaks to their environmental attitudes, also seen in the image in the logo and ads. The most appealing aspect of Earth Ministries is the way it functions. They accept people of all faiths and this assortment of folks with different faiths all come together to protect the planet that God gave man. They work together because of the underlying belief that they all worship the same God and they all want to be stewards of the Earth instead of ravagers of it. I have concluded from mingling and chatting with evangelicals in Earth Ministry and other evangelicals that members of Earth Ministry may feel like they can't join other groups because their religion doesn't support environmentalism. For example perhaps a conservative Muslim woman wants to contribute to something environmental but those in her close network and religion don't agree. She could join Earth Ministry and be active while retaining her familiar status with her faith at home. Earth Ministry welcomes any faith and focuses on building their group and being activists in the environment. Below is another image that was printed on a leaflet.

### **Primary Research Questions**

Christians from an assortment of denominations possess a common set of basic symbols. According to the theory of Clifford Geertz (Geertz, pp. 87-90),



symbols create a chain of thoughts and initiate processes in end with a particular worldview. The question then becomes, how do people with similar original fundamental beliefs, such as God, Jesus and the concept of divine creation, end up with two different environmental worldviews?

Varying translations and interpretations of biblical works can provide the path to answering this question. So too can making contact with those who understand the Bible best...the Pastors and church members. How do they interpret various passages in the Bible that refer to the environment? Do they choose environmental stewardship or dominion over it? Why?

In this research I examine how LEEs at Westwood Baptist Church (WBC) have been able to combine their religious ideology with environmental ideology in order to obtain agency in their society while establishing identity as a group. How does the ideology of LEEs or CEEs place them in a position to best serve their environmental habitat? How are they now able to work with secular environmentalists?

## **Theory**

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz explains his theory of religion as a cultural system in his book "The Interpretation of Culture." With tactful criticism which allows us to separate ideas and build the basic concept of religion, Geertz writes:

A religion is a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (Geertz, p 9).

Geertz's theoretical framework implies that Christianity, as with any religion, also has a system of symbols that establish moods and motivations within society. The moods and motivations of members or small groups form the basis of an ideology. Members come to see this ideology as fact, because of their participation in framing it. The ideology also creates a path leading to their worldview.

Examining Geertz' work more in depth reveals his theory of religion as a cultural system as having five components. In the context of this research, Geertz's framework can be applied to see if the EEs who I interact with, have a system of symbols that establish moods and motivations that shine light on them being CEEs or LEEs and why. As seen above, Geertz elaborates on five main points when discussing the foundations of what religion actually does for people.

According to Geertz, a religion is:

1. A system of symbols which acts to...
2. Establish powerful moods and motivations in individuals...
3. Formulate a general order of existence...
4. Make concepts and ideas appear as fact and...
5. Make moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic (Geertz, p. 90).

I think that if everyone closed their eyes and thought about it, they would realize that whatever their particular culture, they can name several symbols in their lives. From a crucifix to the millions of logos with which we are bombarded daily by advertising, to the necklace your grandmother gave you as a symbol of eternal and unconditional love, Geertz asserts that there are systems of symbols that form a religion. These symbols emerge from the human mind and we can start to be more aware of these “hidden in plain sight” symbols which affect us and our moods and motivations.

This is not a negative thing. In fact, it will help us understand religions and religious practices better. In Geertz’ essay, chapter three particularly, he states that,

The number 6, written, imagined, laid out as a row of stones, or even punched into the program tapes of a computer, is a symbol. But so also is the Cross, talked about, visualized, shaped worriedly in air or fondly fingered at the neck, the expanse of painted canvas called "Guernica" or the bit of painted stone called a churinga, the word "reality," or even the morpheme "-ing." They are all symbols, or at least symbolic elements, because they are tangible formulations of notions, abstractions from experience fixed in perceptible forms, concrete embodiments of ideas, attitudes, judgments, longings, or beliefs (Geertz, p 91).

Evangelicalism does have the power to influence moods and motivations through song and emotional displays of prayer as well as the way a pastor projects him/her self and the gospel. Over the last 4 months that I have been attending service at WBC. I was moved by particular sermons which involved nature.

Secondly, within this research, I have witnessed the pastor explain the human's place on this earth just by simply saying "humans have a little thing inside them that God put there. Animals don't have it and it causes us to be aware" (Pastor Philip, Convo, 3/5/17). Pastor Philip also places human existence in relativity to others and to God in many sermons; leaving me feeling like this congregation has a notion of what their place is in the world, based on the gospel. This is exactly what Geertz meant.

Geertz' third point about formulating a general order of existence compares to the pastor's proclamation that the words of the bible are "true" or "real". Sometimes the most powerful way to influence others is to present your words as if what you know to be true is true without argument. Certainly I witnessed this on more than one occasion, and it all seems to have to do with trust and confidence. A relationship gets built between the pastor and the members of the congregation that strengthens the trust between them. In this way, when the pastor preaches on Sunday, the members trust that he understands the gospel and is able to interpret it for them. They don't need to then check that he has done this correctly, that he has not led them astray. When I first started this research I was looking for blatant occasions when the pastor might make concepts and ideas appear as fact when they are not, then I realized that the spiritual leaders in a church like WBC already have authority and influence over people. Not in some negative way but in a moral leadership way. It isn't about making a falsehood

seem true, it's about knowing that their pastor is honestly speaking from his/her truth and understanding of the gospel. Even when Pastor Philip speaks nonchalantly, he makes the concepts appear factual by attaching them to the written word of a book that millions connect to spiritually as well. It's a brilliant web of sharing a specific set of knowledge; the gospel. In this way, what the pastor and evangelical environmentalists do/does each week parallels Geertz' interpretation of religion as a cultural system.

Evangelical environmentalists move from the original religious symbols into moods and motivations which involve environmentalism and what I referred to earlier as Creation Care. In doing so, new symbols get created reflecting creation care. Since many, such as Calvin DeWitt, read the same verse in Genesis the as do the CEEs:

God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground  
(Gen 1:28, KJV).

They interpret the term "dominion" to actually mean stewardship of God's creations, including the domain he made for man, rather than the domination of them, it becomes obvious that this is still a point of difference between LEEs and CEEs. In a similar way, the different EE groups endow Christian symbols with a different environmental interpretations enabling them to participate in the

environmentalist movement based on their own faith and religious beliefs. Basically, leaders and members who believe in “dominion” and understand that to be their “domain” of which you would care for and keep clean and nice, without polluting your water or breaking your things (Pastor Philip, convo, 3/5/17). As he mentioned, you would keep animals safe in your home, domain, this Earth is everyone’s domain. LEE’s see this as a call to clean up our domain, being the Earth which God provided for them.

Anthropologist Mary Douglas evaluates the importance of symbols and rituals, as well as anti-ritualism in her book *Natural Symbols*. After examining the idea of anti-ritualism, Douglas finds that certain symbolic acts relay information concerning intentions. She asserts, however, that this is a one-sided view which leaves out the realm of expression and deep meaning.

Ultimately, Douglas explains the importance of being able to look at symbols and rituals as meaningful to the actor in order to understand the many layers of motivation for their actions. Most importantly, though, it is possible to apprehend that people do in fact feel motivated to participate in ritual and believe in symbols. In addition, people tend to follow others; we walk on the beaten path. Even so, people can adapt and develop new, unique rituals and symbols based on existing beliefs and newly forming ideological perspectives. This means that, for the last ten years, more and more followers have gone down the EE path. This

doesn't mean the ESV was "wrong" or they were misunderstanding the Gospel. It simply means that as the world changes, and people have to adapt to those changes, scriptures that may have always been meant to portray stewardship are now coming more to the forefront.

As we change our world, and our world changes around us, evangelicals are looking to see what parts of the ESV can help guide them through it. They are continuing to follow the Gospel, continuing to spread the gospel, and all the while developing an understanding of these environmental issues. Essentially, people may be learning that believing in God and taking care of your domain are not mutually exclusive.

The assumption, is, that evangelical environmentalism will continue to grow as environmental issues increase. Already, there are countless ways which EE's can become active in their local communities, or even ways in which to influence your congregation through images and symbols.

Douglas uses the example of abstinence (not eating meat) in the Catholic Church to make this point. She describes that Friday abstinence in the Roman Catholic hierarchy is generally taken seriously, but that it is not highly regarded by the actual clergy because it has become an empty ritual (Douglas, p. 4). Applying this to the evangelical environmentalism movement we see that although there has been a long tradition of ritual and symbols within

evangelicalism that urges actors to participate in “moral” issues (including the resistance to homosexuality, abortion and other social controversies) and even things like communion can become empty. But that LEE’s are Christians who find environmental rituals to be necessarily placed in the forefront of their campaigns and they do not continue to fight for causes which they do not see as a priority just for the sake of conformity.

LEEs still hold similar beliefs, such as pro-life and anti-gay marriage, but it is believed by the evangelicals I have spoken with that these cannot be sufficiently addressed until the environment is in healthy working order to support life. Douglas writes that “if a people takes a symbol that originally meant one thing (dominion for example in this research) and twists it to mean something else (stewardship rather than domination), and energetically holds on to that subverted symbol, its meanings for their personal life must be very profound” (Douglas, p. 40). This also works in the reverse order. According to Douglas’ theory, people could have taken the idea of dominion and twisted it to mean something else (domination) and energetically held onto that. A similar twisting of meaning can explain the way in which misunderstandings of lessons about caring for creation can be found throughout history. Although EEs may take some offense to being told they are “twisting” a symbol, that is not the intent or meaning of this thesis and there is definitely an interpretation which allows for more liberal thoughts. To fully understand Douglas’ point requires understanding that the reason we



hold on to the symbols we have “twisted” or, differently, “energetically” is because we hold on tightest to what we were raised with and taught growing up and surrounded by as an adult. These become part of our social environment and we decide to hold them in our hearts, and to fight fiercely to protect their truth.

For example, Reverend Leroy Hedman, from the Georgetown Gospel Chapel, in Seattle, WA, stated in an article written by Blaine Harden, for the Washington Post in 2005 that “Such ‘creation care’ should be at the heart of evangelical life, along with condemning abortion, protecting family and loving Jesus” (Harden, p. 1). Hedman also uses the term "creation care" when speaking to other evangelicals that may be interested in EE because he says, it does not annoy conservative Christians for whom the word "environmentalism" connotes liberals, secularists and Democrats” (Harden, p. 6). This portrayal of evangelical environmentalism shows the firm belief that this interpretation is defining a way of life, not just “twisting” scripture for personal use. There is a sense of obedience and devotion to previously learned symbols which instill fear in those who revolt against them. Therefore, any group or individual who dares to oppose and change these symbols must be deeply involved with the ideology behind them.

Douglas also points out that symbols and ritual can be transformed and adapted according to changes in beliefs and ideas (Douglas, pp. 3-5). When looking at LEE’s, the previously expected rituals and symbols attributed to

evangelicalism have been changing and adapting to suit the desires of the participants rather than vice versa. Currently and throughout history, animals have often been viewed solely as products for human use by the general population as well as within evangelicals reading the gospel. LEEs also viewed land as property to do with as humans pleased, regardless of pollution, displacement of animals from their homes or the invasive species and illnesses that resulted. Now, LEE's are adopting symbols which include stewardship and CC; going directly against what they most likely were raised to believe about the environment, and deriving a deep sense of duty to their interpreted religious beliefs (Douglas, p. 9). Groups of people are not blindly following prescribed rituals but instead adopting ones in which they are able to communicate their beliefs and desires to engage in the stewardship of God's earth. They are bringing science and evangelicalism another step closer together.

A profound sense or connection with the natural world could be what draws LEE's to environmentalism. Using Douglas' interpretation of the necessity of symbols and rituals allows us to see that humans are not robotic shells obeying the ritual behavior imposed on them by society. In fact, their ritual behavior and religious symbols help them to express their worldviews in a meaningful and particular way. The research for this thesis will show the strong associations with anthropological theory and symbols within WBC.

## **Literature review**

“And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (Gen 2:15, KJV).

We could list pages and pages of quotes from KJV that support or refute environmental stewardship. Instead, I am only inserting verses which are spoken to me via conversation or interview. These two quotes are the most often used from the King James Version Bible (KJV) to support both sides of an evangelical environmentalist argument. Each group takes them to mean something different. But first, how do we identify exactly who falls into which category of evangelicalism? According to Brian McCammack, in his article “Hot Damned America: Evangelicalism and the Climate Change Policy Debate”, there are two types of evangelical environmentalists; liberal and conservative (McCammack, p.647).

As mentioned earlier, LEEs “generally accept the scientific claim that climate change is occurring in part due to anthropogenic effects and interprets biblical mandates to mean that action should be taken to reduce manmade carbon emissions and mitigate environmental impacts” (McCammack, p. 647). Conservative evangelical environmentalists (CEE’s) differ because they “remain skeptical of scientific evidence supporting anthropogenic climate change theory and interprets biblical mandates to mean that no action should be taken to reduce

emissions, even if climate change is occurring” (McCammack, p. 647). CEE’s may not want to be active in the environmental movement is described by Leith Anderson, the president of the NAE: “Evangelicals emphasize evangelism, and pastors often avoid controversies that might take priority over the gospel message. Most pastors I know don’t want to endorse politicians. They want to focus on teaching the Bible” (Anderson, [www.nae.net](http://www.nae.net)). From these two descriptions, it is clear that the key word is interpretation and the concept which must be sought to overcome these differences is stewardship. However, both groups still place God and the gospel first on their list of importance and what is to be addressed first.

Many environmental activists have appeared in public media in the last few decades, such as Al Gore, who is specifically named by McCammack. Being a prominent evangelical environmentalist in the US government and now as a private citizen, McCammack values his work as he states, “Gore and the news media have largely failed to acknowledge that a brewing sea change in the traditional political engagement among an unlikely group—evangelical Christians—Perhaps represents America’s greatest hope for instituting climate change legislation” (McCammack, pp. 645). McCammack is arguing for the joining of evangelicals of all categories, as well as everyone else, together to protect our environment. As a side note, I might go too far as to say that after having read all of Al Gore’s books, I would disagree with McCammack about Gore’s failures. McCammack’s notion of liberal and conservative is not relative

to politics, though, because evangelical political views vary greatly. Instead it affects their ethics and values (McCammack, p. 646).

The Bible itself is the central truth of evangelicalism and has been called “the bedrock” (McCammack, p. 647). E. Calvin Beisner is a CEE that McCammack describes as an Interfaith Stewardship Alliance (ISA) spokesperson as well as a professor of theology and social ethics at Knox Theological Seminary (McCammack, p. 647). According to Beisner, “Linking these two commissions (Genesis 1:28 and Genesis 2:15) together—cultivate and guard the garden, and fill, subdue and rule the Earth—implies that God intended, and still intends, mankind to transform the Earth from wilderness into garden” (McCammack, p. 648). This interpretation allows for humans to develop every square foot of Earth. However, this is not what most evangelicals in pursuing the research for this thesis I have encountered believe. Instead, many feel these verses express God’s wish for man to keep and tend to the rest of nature. In this case the LEEs hold to the belief that God wants them to care for the Earth and be stewards of it, while the CEEs accept that God wants them to develop it, make it a garden and spread economic wealth by using the resources. He has given them. Why such a different interpretation of the same text? Is it possible that individuals are ‘converting’ their beliefs and understanding a more environmentally aware way of living? What symbolism can be found to support CEE thoughts about the environment?

According to McCammack, Beisner has alluded that “because of Christianity’s reverence of God as Creator, any attempt to worship anything other than God--in this case the Earth—is antithetical to scriptural teachings” (McCammack, p. 649). In essence those who consider themselves conservative evangelical environmentalists are acting against their own interest. Honestly though, anyone who isn’t actively trying to slow or halt climate change is acting against their own interest, because human beings are not well-adapted for a transformed environment. Interestingly, Beisner assumes that because a person wants to protect the rainforests and animals or other parts of the natural environment, it means they “worship” it. This sort of rhetoric gives EEs anxiety. As indicated earlier, EEs do not want to be labeled as nature worshippers.. Appreciation and love are different from worship and more communication and understanding between CEEs, LEEs. Scientists and the broader public can help clear this up.

A common theme throughout the literature regarding evangelical environmentalism is the notion that CEEs have more of an interest in economic growth and poverty than conservation or preservation of the environment. According to McCammack, the beliefs CEEs have that “Rather than attempt to mitigate environmental impacts, a prohibitively costly proposition, they argue—conservative evangelical environmentalists believe the more sensible approach is to promote economic development aiding adaptation to environmental changes”

(McCammack, p. 647). These types of sentiments are not only expressed through the works of McCammack. CEEs tend to support addressing the issue of poverty over environmental affairs because these are the issues they feel the Gospel tells them to worry about. The concern that we have possibly gone past the point of no return regarding global warming creates a sentiment for some CEE's that they should promote economic development and provide aid to those in need immediately rather than fight global warming. Two descriptions fully support these ideas.

Noah J. Toly wrote in an article entitled, "Are Evangelicals Warming to Global Environmentalism?" that there are two belief systems related to the two groups of evangelical environmentalists discussed by McCammack (Toly, p. 55). According to Toly, some [LEEs] believe that regulating of greenhouse gas emissions—whether through the establishment of market-based mechanisms or other means—will serve both the planet and the poor. Others [CEE's] believe that regulating greenhouse gas emissions is an inefficient interference with economic activity that would otherwise result in the gently rising tide of economic growth, floating yachts and lifeboats alike (Toly, p. 55).

Furthermore, Toly explains, CEEs argue that economic growth will provide the financial means for adaptation to any ill effects of climate change, should such change prove to be as burdensome as many predict" (Toly, p. 55) To

reiterate, LEEs believe that protecting nature and God’s creation absolutely will lead to positive results for poverty and the poor. Toly expresses that CEEs believe that it isn’t their place to judge what to do with the environment or its inhabitants, so they interpret Genesis to mean that they have basically free rein to do as they please with land, plants and animals—a concept also known as “dominion” (Toly, p. 57).

Some CEEs suggest that the use of renewable, clean energy “fundamentally undermines economic growth”—a claim unsupported by Toly (p. 55). In fact he calls this a “plain overstatement” and suggests that these types of changes and developments have the “potential to stimulate economic growth, support local labor markets and boost struggling sectors, such as agriculture, through the production of biofuels and the siting of renewable electricity generation” (Toly, p. 55). Transitioning to clean energy could supply more jobs in new fields, adding to economic growth. For example, I would argue, rather than spending manpower on clearcutting a large forest, the government could instead provide jobs in forest conservation and environmental justice issues. Those loggers know more than anyone about the forest, the trees and the sometimes endangered species which struggle to hold on there. This is simply to accentuate the need for more environmentalists in all forms and religions, especially evangelicals.



Roger S. Gottlieb, a professor of Philosophy at the Worcester Polytechnic Institute and the author of, describes the “five faces of religious environmentalism”. One of the faces is Calvin DeWitt. Gottlieb explains that although LEEs, such as himself, have many differences, there are basic similarities among them which should be noted. He claims that a “wide-ranging commitment to care for the human and non-human alike, a faith in the possibility of deep change, and a refusal to despair” are commonalities among LEEs (Gottlieb, p. 193). He explains ideas which coincide with those of DeWitt: religion and environmentalism must form a marriage in order for any EEs to form a functioning relationship (Gottlieb, p. 39). Gottlieb, through his book, and DeWitt, through his work as a biologist and evangelical have expressed publicly and representatively the ability and necessity for religion and environmentalism to work together for the benefit of the environment.

Calvin Dewitt has become one of the top names in evangelical environmentalism. Much of the newer research on LEE’s refers back to Dewitt. His work forms a solid foundation of the origins of evangelical environmentalism. Dewitt explains that when the Bible states, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” (KJV, Gen 1:32) the context of the word dominion has been misinterpreted for centuries (DeWitt, p. 5). Dewitt, one of the founders of the EEN and an evangelical environmentalist

activist, wrote in his book, *Caring for Creation* that throughout the Bible the term dominion as *domination* is false. Of the two extreme definitions of dominion, one being domination and the other being stewardship, DeWitt and his supporters indicate that the verse intends the latter (DeWitt, p. 5). In comparison with this interpretation of dominion, LEEs look to Gen 2, which describes God as creating humans first and then giving them all the plants and animals as companions along with a garden to tend. Gen 2 states, “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (KJV, Gen2:18). In this passage the word dominion should be interpreted as meaning DOMAIN not “to dominate”. Additionally, although the verse states to till the earth, according to DeWitt. Tilling does not mean mankind will exploit and destroy the Earth; rather, they will use it while caring for it (DeWitt, pp. 32-47).

Throughout DeWitt’s writings there is a sense of understanding that in order for humans to flourish, they must maintain an environment healthily. This is crucial to evangelicalism because making the gospel available to everyone is the number one mission. To continue carrying out that mission, EEs must be alive, so there must be an environment fit to support human life. Those living in nice apartment in a city in America with access to pretty much anything they want may forget that resources of the world are finite. Consuming them will leave less and less for others. The CEE viewpoint emerges where they understand environmental destruction is happening but they don’t feel their place is to fix it, instead trusting

God and Jesus will either come and cleanse the Earth, or the rapture will occur and they will be saved.

Laurel Kearns' research on LEE's touches on the connection between religion and environmental concern in her essay "Noah's Ark Goes to Washington: A Profile of Evangelical Environmentalism" (Kerns, p. 359). Kearns explains that many evangelicals were involved in secular environmentalism prior to the EE movement, but that they felt that they had no way to express their moral and religious beliefs on the topic (Kerns, p 359). Part of the struggle for evangelicals who want to be environmentalists, to be sure, stems from the belief that religion and science must always contradict each other. Evangelical environmentalists can help change that.

Kearns also states that Evangelical environmentalism "provides the minor retooling of a conservative religious worldview that enables some [CEEs] to respond to the ecological crisis" (Kearns, p. 360). By adopting symbols and beliefs which include the ecological crisis within the evangelical beliefs, more Christians are able to combine religion and environmentalism in harmony. In turn, by becoming a part of the environmentalism movement, LEEs bring a "needed moral voice" to the movement (Kerns, p. 360). Kearns also found that people who participate in the secular environmentalist movement have a desire to combine it with their religious, spiritual or moral beliefs. In this way, as Kearns

elaborates, environmentalists are more often listened to and understood by religious society than their secular counterparts (Kerns, p. 361). This movement appears to have some very serious value to the entire community any given church is in.

As with DeWitt, Cizik, the founder of EEN, uses biblical interpretations to support his ideas of religious ecology. He also refers to the “dominion” argument when explaining the re-interpretation of the bible (Cizik, p. 44). When asked about the term dominion and its alleged meaning of domination he explains:

That is a deeply flawed interpretation. Dominion does not mean domination. It implies responsibility -- to cultivate and care for the earth, not to sully it with bad environmental practices... The Bible also teaches us that Jesus Christ is not only redeeming his people, but also restoring God's creation. Obviously, since the fall of man and entrance of sin into the world, all of creation has yearned for its redemption from sin and death and destruction. That will occur with the Second Coming of Christ. But in the meantime we show our love for Jesus Christ by reaching out to and healing the spiritually lost and by conserving and renewing creation. Christ's call to love nature is as simple as his call to love our neighbors as ourselves (Cizik, p. 44).

Once more, the common thread that emerges between LEE representatives that the interpretation of these scriptures means that we should partake in stewardship rather than domination over the Earth. Having such a pronounced

figure representing evangelical environmentalists can help persuade people and potentially spread the mentality that we all must preserve the environment.

Another public figure in the LEE movement has been previously discussed, and the former Vice President, Nobel Peace Prize winning author, business man, philanthropist and evangelical environmentalist Al Gore. Although Gore was accused by McCammack of not doing enough to help earlier in this paper, he has been a true champion for the Earth and an evangelical as since before he was in the public sphere. In his book, *Earth in the Balance: Ecology and the Human Spirit*, he gives a very personal account of his understanding of nature and God and the gospel. He explains that he is a Baptist who in his own religious experiences has learned his “duty” to care for the earth; an idea “rooted in the fundamental relationship between God, creation, and humankind” (Gore, p. 244). As we will see later, this connection to God in nature will resurface in the pastor’s interview. Gore, too, goes on to explain that dominion, from an LEE perspective, does not mean to dominate but rather to take care of what “belongs to God” and not humankind (Gore, p. 244). Gore also describes that the failure of Evangelical leaders to react to the ecological crisis is disturbing because “the Christian Scriptures carry such a strong activist message” (Gore, p. 246). It soon becomes apparent, when reading his book and other articles, that there are some distinct symbols which public representatives of the LEE movement share, such as stewardship and responsibility.

A very thorough description of some of the shared beliefs of EEs can be found within the EEN website. In their mission statement the EEN identifies as “a non-profit organization that seeks to educate, inspire, and mobilize Christians in their effort to care for God’s creation, to be faithful stewards of God’s provision, and to advocate for actions and policies that honor God and protect the environment.” It goes on to describe the importance of caring for creation and supporting the interpretations of the Bible which lead to stewardship rather than dominion, in the same nature portrayed by DeWitt, Cizik and Gore.

### **The Field Site**

Westwood Baptist Church was chosen as the field site for this exploration of the nature and the beliefs a congregation and church leader have towards environmentalism. I selected the site after first testing the waters by attending service in August. After service I spoke to the Senior Pastor. His name is Phillip Miller and after I explained my research, he gave me a very brief description of how he teaches his congregation to view the Earth. We had such a short amount of time I quickly wrote down his words then, finding them completely enthralling, I knew I would be returning to learn more at this church. His responses led me to believe that I had in fact found an LEE church because he stated that dominion means domain and that we should be steward of the Earth, and I knew we would speak more in an interview. (Explained within the “Conversations” and “Interviews” section of Data).

There were also two types of evidence of physical symbols at WBC influencing individuals to be more nature loving: the building itself is surrounded by tall fir trees, the inside of the structure has been decorated with wooden framed pictures of different plants and flowers, with the church's saying, "Jesus is Renewing You to Renew the World" over them. The hallways are decorated with trees, plants and birds which lead the children to Sunday school in a forest-like classroom painted with trees. Pictures and a more developed analysis will occur further in this research.

In addition to the Senior Pastor, Phillip Miller, other pastors work at WBC as well and have different specialties like missions or the musical aspect. Everyone works together to keep the church functioning and expanding internationally. This unifies and strengthens the message being sent by the church. In attending services at WBC I have found the same message revealed in the sermons, conversations with attendees and within the music and imagery on the big screen. Also, with a busy schedule of events and classes, I knew I would have plenty of opportunities to learn about the environmental values being advocated by the church leaders and congregation and talk to as many people as I choose if I needed to work around any scheduling.

## **The Fieldwork Experience**

Being accepted into the community evangelicals at WBC is not a difficult task. Everyone is friendly and courteous, I get asked all the time if I am new and if I need anything. I've been offered a free coffee cup five times and it seems the church almost always has a delicious giveaway or a coupon for free espresso. In addition, the people I met at WBC have the general mindset that to follow the Gospel, and therefore God, you must help as many people as possible learn about Jesus and the Gospel. Perhaps if I had walked in wearing an Evergreen shirt and started telling people I was there to teach them science and about climate change, and want to know why the Christians aren't helping fight climate change, people may have been thrown off. Instead, I utilized my training in anthropology to caringly and deliberately getting to know the others and become a part of what I am studying. This approach is actually very enjoyable.

I have respect and admiration for the leaders who do their best to interpret the Gospel and the members who have devotion and faith in a world where that is less and less common. I started attending WCB's 10am services on a regular basis. Everyone really made me feel welcome which makes it much easier to strike up conversations and take notes. I completed many conversations and learned much from the many sermons. My final interview with Senior Pastor Philip Miller tied the notes I scribbled and the pictures I had taken all together.



Pastor Philip makes himself available in the lobby after every service. I had seen him a few times but it took a while for me to speak to him one-on-one. Initially I spent time grabbing short bursts of time he had, just speaking to him about one question or so at a time; always too deep to finish fully in time. The first time we met, he asked me about my story and I told him everything about my thesis, plans afterwards, why I chose evangelicalism and what sort of project I wanted to do with his church, and I expressed what my personal interests are. In a nutshell, there is always more than one journey happening at a time.

Pastor Philip was thrilled. From then on I felt very comfortable every Sunday talking to him and other members of the congregation in a true interest of getting to know them; taking pictures of painted nature and other symbols, and just investigating being a part of everything. One thing I did try to do was to take part in the things they ask you to do in service. Singing, praying, and communion were the three symbolic behaviors which I truly tried to focus on and feel and be a part of. I only took communion once.

## **Methods**

### ***Introduction***

I conducted the qualitative, ethnographic research for this thesis in six major categories: (1) An historical look at evangelical environmentalism and its movement over several decades; (2) Observations of people, behaviors, symbols, environmentalism and activism within the Westwood Baptist Church (WBC); (3)

Conversations with members of the WBC occurring naturally and randomly: (4) Interviews with Pastor Phillip at the WBC and with Jessica Zimmerle from Earth Ministries (EM): (5) A synthesis of data collected from these previously mentioned research methods: and finally (6) Social Theory by Clifford Geertz to aid in analyzing and understanding the motivations behind the symbolism and belief systems of WBC and EM.

### ***Observations***

Observations are entries based on services I have attended, time spent within WBC and my observations of the settings and connections that may or may not exist there. I spent time observing symbols including signage, literature and décor. I observed the demographics of the setting including race, gender and age. I also noted clothing worn because outdoorsy people generally have particular brands of clothing--for example REI brand, Columbia, The North Face and so on. These were the individuals with whom I wanted to spark up conversation. I also took my notes as “a fly on the wall” to see if any environmentalism poked through the hustle and bustle of the church (i.e. watching some folks drinking coffee, noticed they threw the paper cups away and there didn’t seem to be a recycling bin anywhere).

### ***Conversations***

Conversations, in the context of this work, are any instances I have had to chat or otherwise communicate with individuals at the church and any of the

pastors. During these brief conversations I strove to get a sense of overall environmental stewardship support. Some of these conversations began by me saying “Hi! I’m new here and I’m a student at Evergreen State College. I’m in the graduate program there and I am trying to find a church where the people are nature fans! I really want to talk to people about stewardship versus dominion.” Most conversations began by me sitting alone in the large, always filled, lobby. I would be sitting and someone would see me and ask if I needed anything. They were really nice. I would say, “No I’m okay, I am new here though and any info you can give me about this church would really help me decide if I will be returning.” After I had had many little “hello and go” conversations, I started coming earlier and staying later to talk to folks. It was very difficult because of the nature of church and its seriousness. It is really important to have conversations as part of my research because based on my training (B.A. Anthropology); I have learned that being friendly and honest is the best and most ethical way to understand others who you may be observing. I know that this method allowed me to understand the overall beliefs about environmentalism at WBC and why members of the congregation feel as they do.

### ***Interviews***

I had the opportunity to engage in two distinct interviews. My first interview was with Jennifer Welch, an MES student at Evergreen State College, who identifies as evangelical while also identifying as a scientist who supports

climate change action and environmentalism. This interview was casual but also crucial to this research. In this interview, I learned how none person follows the Gospel wholeheartedly also conducts research to finish a degree in Environmental Studies. She shared her thoughts and feelings freely, making it very easy to piece together her ideas and to help see what other evangelicals might be struggling with.

My second interview was with Pastor Philip Miller from WBC. I prepared a formal list of questions to ask, but kept the tone light to encourage him to add to anything he felt comfortable discussing. Pastor Philip's teachings and interpretations of the Gospel have set the tone for environmentalism within WBC. This interview also focused around the various symbols I found around the church, the point being that symbolism surrounding a group of people may have a strong influence on their environmental beliefs.

**Data entry from Observations, Conversations and Interviews:**

**Date:** 2/12/17

**Filename:** Westwood Baptist Church

**Title:** Observation 1

**Description of activity:**

I have begun my research and am attending with a different outlook than I have been doing for the past several weeks. Today I am on a mission to discover images and symbols which reinforce environmental ideas within this congregation. Walking in to the Westwood Baptist Church, I had no expectations. No day was the same in the lobby there, making it a lovely and exciting place to meet people and get to know them a little. I slowly entered the main lobby; I was instantly surrounded by people of all ages and appearances. Most of the people were Caucasian but there was no real group I could classify everyone into; especially when you have income class, age and gender to consider too. Overall, the members are mostly white older families. Yet, it is a fact that the population was diverse. People were mingling and seemed to say hello to passerby every couple of minutes. I could tell that most of the folks knew each other already, and weren't shocked to see a newbie wandering around. And I'm sure I did look like a

newbie wandering aimlessly, as I had no idea what to go or what to do except to just take notes and sort it out later.

As I walked through the building, different individuals handed me things related to their positions within the church. First I approached the “I’m New!” sign hanging by the café and entry to the church. There I was given a little book with a story of triumph from the bible, a free bag with snowflakes all over it, free literature about the church, a free “English Standard Version” bible, coupons for free lattes and a free coffee mug with the Westwood Church Logo on it; which is a group of Douglas Firs encompassing the logo. Immediately I noticed the natural symbols peeking out through the churches welcoming of a guest or new member.

It was almost time for the contemporary service (11:00am-12:30pm, the end time is flexible) to begin so I headed in and was guided politely to a seat. The lights were low and the stage was lit in a bright neon blue design. The website informed me before I came that this service played more guitar and soft rock sounding songs than the earlier “traditional” service which only played hymns and the organ. As I looked up from setting all my swag down, I saw a full band setup including a drum set, mics for 3 singers, a guitarist, bassist and pianist/keyboarder. As I sat and more people came in, the band began singing a Christian rock song. I asked someone sitting next to me what the topic of the day was and they informed me that this would not be a normal service because they

are spending today discussing missionaries, how to help them and how to sign up to be one. So during this service they had a panel of volunteers who have traveled to “bring Jesus to those who have not found him yet”. I was given prayer postcards with families on the front who were missionaries and asked us to use the card to focus our prayers towards them. The way it was described was quite interesting as they spoke of sending intent and good energy with their prayers, where they described prayer being when you sit and focus on the intent and pray to Jesus for those who need Jesus’ love. The pastor’s use of concentrated intent is remarkably similar to meditation, which is interesting because eastern thought is somewhat more nature centered than western philosophy.

Additionally, there is a lesson here about the success of the church to insert missionaries all over Asia and Arab countries as well. If they can spread their work this successfully, perhaps they can spread the idea of stewardship as well; with the take away being that if we don’t save our environment, we won’t be able to spread any words, gospel or otherwise, because we won’t be able to survive.

During the service the director of outreach, spoke about reaching out to small populations of Asia which have no single God or place to worship. He explained that they build churches and they teach the bible in these places. They want to reach “Unreached People Groups”, which are described by Pastor Philip

as populations of people who have not been introduced to Jesus and are usually Muslim or Buddhist. Pastor Philip stated that many Muslims have weak spiritual backgrounds and should be focused on as a major group to convert. The outreach director explained how sometimes they will get a regular job in the country they are visiting, and then use that time to create missionaries. Overall, missionaries seem to be this church's main agenda as I document on day one. This is not unusual; anyone who follows the bible knows Jesus wants people to share the bible with everyone. I began to wonder...If evangelicals can recruit people all over the world to support their beliefs, they are in all corners of the Earth spreading the word of salvation, and if they support the belief that we should care for creation, they could stand to make a great impact on the environmentalism in these areas of the world. If they integrated the stewardship of this earth as an important message in their teachings, then environmental awareness could spread like wildfire everywhere.



**Date:** 2/19/17

**Filename:** Westwood Baptist Church

**Title:** Observation 2

**Description of activity:**

This day was devoted to observing the “traditional” service at 8am. Immediately I could see a difference in who was attending this service, versus the later “contemporary” service. I noticed that the majority of attendees were much older than the contemporary service attendees. Not only much older but probably 70+ would be a good age range for most of the attendees. They were dressed up much more and the folks I happened to speak to were a little less inviting as were those I encountered in my previous experience. For example, when I went to sit down I noticed a program sitting on the bench I wanted to sit on. Not knowing that this meant that space was reserved, I moved the program and sat there. Now, during the contemporary service, everyone squeezes together to fill up the benches. But when I sat down I heard the woman behind me state, “I’ve sat there for years! I reserved it like usual and this girl with the purple hair just sits there anyway”. Not wanting any conflicts or negative interactions with anyone there, I decided to turn around and speak to her. I told her I was new and I was sorry; I did not mean to take her seat. I told her I would move. But her friends interrupted

and told me if I was new I could sit anywhere I wanted! All the women involved were over 60. So I stayed so I could speak to them after service, as this was now my foot in the door.

While studying this first set of information I have begun to establish a very important difference between the two services. That is, the traditional service is mostly made up of elderly or much older individuals than the contemporary one, the individuals at the traditional service are less flexible than the contemporary service where the younger more “progressive” population allows for a more open mind. That is to say, it is possible that if the contemporary service is more easily going and flexible, it might be that they are more progressive with environmentalism too.

When the service was over I turned to the women behind me and apologized again. I took this opportunity to tell them I was a graduate student at Evergreen and I was hoping to learn how people here felt about the environment. Immediately the three women chimed altogether that they loved the outdoors, they believed that God created plants and animals for us to enjoy and care for, not to destroy or abuse, and that they believed what Pastor Phil has mentioned, which is that “animals weren’t given the gift which people were. We were given a gift of awareness, a gift of responsibility and it is our responsibility to care for our

domain” (Convo, 2/19/17, ladies). All three ladies preferred to remain anonymous but told me I could come ask those questions any time.

**Date:** 2/19/17

**Filename:** Westwood Baptist Church

**Title:** Conversation 1

**Description of activity:**

When the service was over I turned to the women behind me and apologized again (Because earlier I had accidentally taken her seat). I took this opportunity to tell all three of them that I was a graduate student at Evergreen and I was hoping to learn how people here felt about the environment and our role in it. Immediately the three women chimed altogether that they loved the outdoors, they believed that God created plants and animals for us to enjoy and care for, not to destroy or abuse, and that they believed what Pastor Phil (would soon be mentioning to me that day in another conversation), which is that we were given something special inside by God which makes us special and worthy of attaining Earth's fruits, and we are responsible for the care of Earth. There was a long pause before the lady whose seat I accidentally stole said, "But we still don't like gay marriage or abortions". All three ladies preferred to remain anonymous but told me I could come and ask them questions any time.

It didn't seem as though environmentalism is very high on these women's list of priorities, yet they definitely were pro environmentalism. Because they

made sure to inform me that they do not support pro-choice or gay marriage, I got the idea that these issues were much higher on their radar than environmentalism. These women did not imply or hint in any way whatsoever that they make extra efforts in environmentalism or that they intend to participate actively in the climate change issue or other environmental issues; but they did imply that they don't want climate change to happen. I began to theorize that these individuals were basically saying that they do understand and acknowledge climate change and its repercussions, but they aren't afraid of it. Salvation is an incredibly enticing feat, even as a contradicting solution to the woes of climate change (which many believe is God's doing anyway so we should roll with it).

I would like to find the same three women and ask them my emerging questions. It will be very beneficial to understand when and how they became environmentally supportive. They may have changed in their later years or maybe in their early years. What is affecting environmentalism in evangelical churches?

**Date:** 2/19/17

**Filename:** Westwood Baptist Church

**Title:** Conversation 2

**Description of activity:**

After the traditional service, I waited in line to speak to Pastor Philip about whether or not this church supported environmentalism and whether or not they considered themselves evangelical. I approached Pastor Phil and introduced myself to him and his wife Krista. Then I took the opportunity to ask him a somewhat heavy question before my turn was up in line. I asked him, “How do you feel about environmentalism, and how have you decided to interpret the somewhat conflicting entries in the Bible that speak about dominion vs. stewardship?” Then I quickly presented two passages that seemed to conflict and which I had been focusing on and studying for the last several weeks or more. (I showed him the two passages from Gen1 and Gen2)

I told Pastor Philip, In Genesis 1:28 the Bible reads, “And God Blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the Earth and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth” (KJV, Gen1, 1:28).But then in Genesis 2:15 it reads, “And the Lord God took the man, and put him into

the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it”(KJV, Gen, 2:15). I asked, “How do you reconcile these two very opposing ideas within the gospel? Which is correct? Pastor Philip’s response was very unexpected.

He replied, “They aren’t opposing actually. Here’s why...” From there he explained his beliefs to me. HE said that the words dominion and domain are being interpreted incorrectly. He said to me, “Think about your home. It is your ‘domain’. So what do you do? Do you trash it, abuse the animals there and pollute the air so you can’t even breathe easy in your own home? No, you CARE for your domain. Your dominion is your responsibility to care for the space that is yours. To care for God’s creation”. So, according to this evangelical pastor, the bible is not contradicting but rather supporting stewardship and others have interpreted domain and dominion to mean something very different.

As I pondered, Pastor Philip said, “Just look at our mission statement on those pictures”. I looked and I saw two beautiful pictures one stating, “Jesus is renewing us” then another next to it that stated, “To renew the world”. Both pictures were in black print over a background of a forest with many trees, plants and the sun shining through over the lettering. I commented that they were amazing and before I stepped aside for the next person in line to speak to him. He told me I could contact him any time for questions. I thanked him and moved on to look around, searching for symbols that represent nature. The pastor knows the

bible and its modern interpretations inside and out. He was going to quote scripture but I was not going to be able to keep up so he said to save it for a different day. I think going and speaking to him informally is a good way to start building rapport. It is a good idea to do this at every service, even if it is to say hi. I am enjoying meeting people and learning their thoughts about the bible.



**Date:** 3/5/17

**Filename:** Westwood Baptist Church

**Title:** Observation 3

**Description of activity:**

It may have been the experience from last week that affected my senses this week, or it may have just been luck, but today, as I strolled around the lobby, I noticed a lot of teens and twenty somethings. This week I was attending the contemporary service again, and the previous week I had attended the traditional service; and I bet you not a single one of the attendees had their cell phones out in the church itself. This week was a stark contrast to last week. There were definitely cliques of younger individuals and then couples here and there of their parents socializing and watching their children socialize.

When I sat down I was able to get a full view of the amount of people, of all ages, that had their heads down and their face lit with low level cell phone lighting. It was quite amazing. I sat stage right in the front row so when I looked to my right, I could see down the entire aisle and if I looked back I could see people's faces and details. Most everyone was Caucasian. There was one Latino family and no other minority races as far as I could see. There were also a few individuals near me who had the Bible out on their iPad or iPhone. So, I reasoned,

I am dealing with a group of people who are somewhat progressive with technology at least, and are possibly more liberal, or accepting of environmentalism because they are playing or texting during service which is traditionally very disrespectful and now seemed commonplace. This is just a supposition. This would have been a great survey to take if that were the research we were doing right now. But overall, it shows a more laid back group who probably support recycling at the very least.

Notably, this was the second time that Pastor Philip noted something from the gospel that resonated with Buddhism or other eastern philosophies. He spoke about “spiritual intent”, “dense wisdom”, “civil disobedience”, “non-retaliation”, and how these things lead to a good life. These powerful words provoked powerful images within my mind of Gandhi and of Buddha because of the similar non retaliation mindsets. He spoke with passion and reason and if this is the way he teaches his congregation, I am beginning to understand why they are environmentalists. I can imagine a person of any age approaching Pastor Philip and asking “should we protect the environment?” and Pastor Philip immediately replying with vigor, “YES!”

Most everyone who walks by Pastor Phil between services greets him or says good morning. Couples at all times come up and say hi and exchange pleasantries about their children. Teenagers who walk by make sure to say hi as

they pass him. It definitely alludes to the idea that Pastor Philip is an authority figure or at least an elder to be respected and looked up to. This has appeared in all observations thus far. If this is the case, it would be another mechanism for environmentalism to seep down into the community from the Pastor's pro-environment beliefs.

This week the program announces the "Summer Hummer", an event where members go to a week long day camp. I would like to find out more about the activities they partake in at this camp and how much nature they are educated about. I would like to ask all the attendees if they supported environmental protection.

**Date:** 3/5/17

**Filename:** Westwood Baptist Church

**Title:** Conversation 3

**Description of activity:**

I approached the coffee stand and said hi to the gentleman working (volunteering) there. He was polite and he asked me if I needed a Westwood reusable mug. I showed him that I brought the one I was given and I ordered a coffee. While he was making it I asked him, "What kind of coffee do you use?" He replied, "Um, I'm not sure the name, but I know it's organic and its fair trade". Ooh this is off to a good start.... "Cool, so, do you guys recycle here?" I asked as he finished steaming my soymilk (soymilk, another green choice). "We used to but then the city started charging the church as if it were a business instead of a not for profit and we couldn't afford the costs, it's just cheaper to throw it all away...unfortunately". I saw his disappointment and I definitely understood from what he said that it's probably a popular opinion among the rest of the church too that recycling is important. (I would find out later from Pastor Philip that they have tons of paper and really should be recycling and that he would work on that).

**Date:** 3/26/17

**Filename:** Westwood Baptist Church

**Title:** Observation 4

**Description of activity:**

Today I came thirty minutes early so I could walk around and look for imagery or symbolism anywhere. I remembered to bring my reusable coffee mug they gave me on my first day (a green choice indeed), so I headed first to the coffee stand. Here I had a great conversation which is documented above. After gaining some substantial insight and some facts from the gentleman at the coffee stand, I walked up and down the two main halls.

I found that the halls in the building leading to the kids rooms was decorated with pictures that had faith based words (renew, pray, hope etc.) laid over ferns or other types of trees and leaves. Some of these pictures will be presented in the synthesis of this research. Additionally I noted this day that the parking lot is surrounded by very large fir trees and the entire place feels removed and in nature even though it's just on Kaiser and Harrison. All the colors are earth tones and all the décor is earthy themed.

After service I approached Pastor Philip and had a brief conversation as is presented below. During this conversation he agreed to email me some

information and discuss any potential for interviews. I think I have realized during this observation, that our surroundings, our environment and everything that happens in our lives affects us in ways that nobody understands yet. It seems that when people are exposed to a common theme or color or title every day, it becomes important to them. They start to care and tend for it. This relates to Douglas. It may be that the surroundings at Westwood influence people to care for nature and to believe that God wants them to tend to the Earth and not destroy or dominate it.

**Date:** 4/2/17

**Filename:** Westwood Baptist Church

**Title:** Observation 5

**Description of activity:**

Today's service did not present much data; Although, I did learn about "summer hummer"; a summer camp for the church. When the pastor brought up Summer Hummer everyone, even the teenagers on their iPhones, cheered. This is a summer camp with all activities and content focused on Jesus and the gospel, but to my understanding the children go outdoors. This is another presentation of the WBC involving its members in nature and supporting the environment, as a secondary effect of wanting to do church camp. Some churches I have investigated do slumber parties with families and things that can take place in the church or a rented space. This church actually going camping and being in nature, even if it is just for the day for some, is not common. This is another factor at WBC that shows how environmentalism can be engrained within the congregation, even if the first goal is to always know Jesus, and allows them to support their conservative political views as well as supporting environmentally healthy policies.

**Date:** Palm Sunday 4/9/17

**Filename:** Westwood Baptist Church

**Title:** Observation 6

**Description of activity:**

Today's service was centered on Palm Sunday. There were children who put on a recital about Palm Sunday and the sermon was very short so I didn't have much to observe. After the service, I used this day to walk around and down the hallways that I had not seen yet. There I found a library, a bottom floor in the basement with many classrooms and prayer rooms, and a hallway leading to the daycare and children's classes that was entirely painted with trees, birds and other nature oriented themes. These images will be presented in the synthesis of these observations.



**Date:** Easter 4/16/17

**Filename:** Westwood Baptist Church

**Title:** Observation 7

**Description of activity:**

This week I observed the sermon and traditions that WBC provides. I attended the second service, which is titled, "Contemporary Service". I think the main takeaway I have with this day is that it was much more serious, quiet and less rock and roll. Additionally I thought the way Pastor Philip presented Easter and the bible's description not by referring to Christ's crucifixion in Luke 23:32, and resurrection but instead referring to a woman who was sick and died and was resurrected. I did not catch the name or number of the scripture but Pastor Phil spoke of a girl who was saved similarly to Jesus, only she wasn't a holy spirit or daughter of God.

This service was pretty solemn and did not really portray any of the nature and environmental aspects which I am looking for. I will continue to attend though, as I know there are environmentalist undertones and I find the service to be soothing and educational.

Additionally I was approached by a woman and her daughter with CP today when I was sitting at a table waiting for service and just watching the scene.

I explained that I was just hanging out and looking around for my thesis and they were very interested. We had a great conversation just based on getting to know each other and discussing environmentalism. I explained I used to work with folks who were developmentally disabled and the daughter started to open up to me. Then explained that they had been to several services at churches around here but this is the only one they enjoyed. She said that Pastor Philip was in a pool of 30,000 and was asked to explain one particular piece of scripture. (In my interview with Pastor Philip he explained the true tale) She said that was how he was chosen to lead this congregation. I will definitely ask Phil about this when we interview. I expected the theme to be more about resurrection and the blossoming of life and the rise of spring but they were very traditional when it came to Easter Sunday.

**Date:** 4/30/17

**Filename:** Westwood Baptist Church

**Title:** Observation

**Description of activity:**

Today Pastor Philip gave a sermon that was very connected to earth and the other symbols which I have witnessed over time while attending WBC.

Within his theme “Multiply” he said to us,

“The goal is making a difference and mobilizing locally then globally...Look at this piece of wheat (he held up a golden, large piece of wheat and kept it in his hand while he spoke), there are three things you can choose to do with it”. From there he explained that we can “Hold it...Eat it...Or let it fall” to the ground to be buried and able to multiply when the seeds grow. He spoke about the wheat “dying” and then coming back to life which was very ecologically symbolic. He spoke of basically living a modest, humble life. He said, “If you’re rich, give it away, if your happy make others happy” and that to live like Jesus you “Don’t need a huge church just to get followers in the seats”.

Takeaway: Renew Oly should be a lifestyle and think of the grain and how you can consume it right away, you can keep it close and not use it, you can eat it and then it’s gone, or you can let it fall and allow it to multiply from the Earth.

This was a very LEE sermon and very connected to nature. It is apparent that the Pastor is very close to nature and supportive of the environment.

**Date:** 4/11/17

**Filename:** Jennifer Welch

**Title:** Interview

**Description of activity:**

Female, Lutheran, 29, attends Reality church which is a non-denominational church. In an email discussion we clarified that Jenny is an evangelical, meaning she believes the bible is the word of God and that she should live according to the gospel. Grew up hanging out with the pastor's kids and they were always outdoors and very green, they had land and a play area. She grew up hiking and being outdoors.

When I met with Jenny, a self-proclaimed evangelical, I began our interview by explaining what sort of symbols I was looking for at WBC. I explained the "Renew Oly" program and how it is about beautifying our community and helping those who need help, even if it through gardening, landscaping and power washing... and how the flyer for the volunteer program had butterflies and grass on it (this way she will know that when I say 'symbols' I mean the imagery and behaviors which are present throughout the church.) I went on to explain the way in which WBC is decorated and how I'm exploring how consciously or subconsciously these images being placed are.

I began by asking Jenny to please express her thoughts on what her religion is. Jenny explained, “I guess I was raised Lutheran, but if someone asks me what my religion is, I just say Christian and that... encompasses my core belief. But when people ask if I’m religious, I usually don’t consider myself ‘religious’ but I have a strong faith. This is because I kind of gather that ‘religious’ usually comes with some tags of the institution and that can have negative connotations”. I said to Jenny, it must be hard being on both sides and she replied,

“I understand why people kind of have that thought around religion, my mom grew up catholic with rules and laws and you got to do this etc.”

I said that I really think that Evergreen State College is full of people who are all so environmentalist or so atheist. Then I asked, do you ever feel like you maybe don’t want to say things or talk about your beliefs because it IS so secular here? Jenny replied,

“I do feel like that, I’m definitely not outspoken, but if someone asks I do just say Christian”.

I clarified and established that ‘religious’ is more representative of actions, behaviors and attendance ...

I asked, “What made you want to go to somewhere so liberal (Evergreen) and what are your thoughts on climate change and environmentalism?” Jenny replied that she “wanted to do a master’s program and I was doing work here.” Then she explained that she really just learned so much in the MES program, so she’s glad she took it, but it sort of presented itself as an opportunity that wasn’t planned...so she took it.

I asked, “Can you tell me how you felt while earning your biology degree, when it contradicts your religion?”

Jenny said sure... “I took an evolution class for my biology degree and my had a professor who was really nice about like, coming out and saying if you have beliefs and stuff that’s fine, and he really believed in evolution and all the facts about it and he really believed in it, but he was just really, he taught it really well, so during that class it was sometimes a struggle for me because we had to write this paper... almost proving that evolution was right. And so, I knew he was just looking for us to take everything he’s shown us and just put it on paper to kind of thing to show we understood the evidence. He didn’t want us to come out and say what we believe.” I understand this statement to mean that the professor wants you to understand the mechanics of a scientific theory, not proclaim your belief in it. That is a great way to teach.

*At this point the recorder malfunctioned and the rest of the interview is on paper, and transcribed below.*

I wanted to understand Jenny's background a little bit and her ideas about climate change and religious beliefs. Some of her replies include,

She definitely believes that climate change is anthropogenic, but she believes that God has a bigger plan, which is similar to another interviewee I've spoken with. Jenny explained that she feels like "positive things that happen are given from God, and all bad things that happen are from Satan."

Jenny explained that "my parents are democrats and I grew up with animals and pets and we had a very caring attitude towards the environment. So yeah, I guess we had a stewardship mentality".

I asked Jenny to close her eyes and think of her faith, then tell me what images come to her mind. She closed her eyes and after a brief pause, she said, "The holy spirit, Noah's Ark and the dove with the olive branch, the flood, animals on the Earth and the green world after it. Rivers and streams, flowers and plants, water for baptism". I told her that she definitely seems to be an evangelical environmentalist and that the symbols she expressed to me show that her faith is directly connected to nature. Jenny agreed. She explained that there are things she is still grappling like how evolution can be real when she believes in creation.



We spoke about “teleological evolution” which is the idea that God created everything then let it go to evolve on its own. I don’t think this became Jenny’s philosophy but at least we had a great conversation about it.

Finally, is it our place to fix our mistakes or will God care for us?

Jenny replied that because climate change is “anthropogenic, it is our place to remedy that”. This idea is common, that we should remedy our own mistakes. Other evangelicals feel that Jesus or God will remedy these mistakes. Even more think we need to do our part so Jesus can do his part. I think this shows that Jenny is an LEE. I think the interview made the solid point that her upbringing influenced her environmentalism as well as a church whose leaders liked nature as well.

**Filename:** Westwood Baptist Church

**Title:** Interview follow up answers

**Date:** 4/1/17

**Description of activity: Questions for Interview**

- How do you identify religiously?  
Evangelical (from email interactions), Lutheran, Christian (often just says Christian so she doesn't have to explain the details of her thoughts or explain her actions or non-actions that may be expected by a judgmental individual).
- Age, Gender, background  
29, Female, white, Lutheran background, mother was catholic, parents are democrats.
- What is your scientific viewpoint regarding the environment?  
She cares about it and feels we should not damage it or allow the damage to go on uncorrected.
- Thoughts on anthropogenic climate change?  
She believes in anthropogenic climate change and that it is against the gospel and should be corrected.

- Before your knowledge of climate change did you think of the world as something to be a steward for or something to dominate?

Jenny expressed that she had a fairly nature supporting mindset from a young age and this was mentioned as being influenced by her parents.

She stated, “My parents were democratic, we had pets and were around animals...I grew up caring about nature and animals...”

- Close your eyes and think of your faith...tell me the first symbols you see.

Jenny closed her eyes and thought for a second or two then said she first thinks of the holy spirit, Noah’s ark and the dove and the olive branch, the flood, animals on earth, flowers and plants...then water for baptism” (such as rivers or streams we added later). When looking at this response it is clear that Jenny being brought up in a household that cared about nature and taught her to care about animals and plants etc. has now as an adult reflected to me her first images...and they were all about animals and water and the earth PLUS her faith when she spoke of baptism and the Holy Spirit.

- What do you feel your pastor’s role in shaping your opinions is?

Jenny expressed that she “hung out with the pastor’s kids a lot and we were friends...we...were always outdoors, very green, they had land and places that were play areas”. This tells me there is a high chance

that her pastor probably did have an environmentally positive impression on her. Jenny and I spoke about this for a while and we seemed to agree that her pastor and her parents had a big part on influencing her environmentalism.

- Thoughts on climate change?

Jenny listed off some of her thoughts as they came to her which included: Anthropogenic, negative, no solutions. Then she expressed how dolphins adapt and learn so we should too, it is our place to remedy that. Even her analogies had to do with animals and nature. I might go so far as to call Jenny an evangelical environmentalist

- Do you think evangelicals are becoming greener because of the dire circumstances which the environment is in?

Yes Jenny replied but it is “not a priority (to evangelicals) because it’s like, you do all you can and if you have faith in God...” She went on to say if you have faith in God you trust he will be there basically to save us. This was very similar to what Pastor Philip expressed when he said that he does all he can and there is a point where you just know that it’s in God’s hands to take care of the rest.

- How do you see evangelicals and science working together?

Jenny said yes, this would be a great thing and that she felt more Christians need to be exposed (to science and environmentalism).

- Gen1 vs Gen1?

Jenny did not feel that the two scriptures contradicted each other, she felt that domain meant to care for your domain, not dominion, again similarly to Pastor Philip.

- How do you support the environment as God's creation without being a nature worshipper or pagan? Is this an issue for you?

This did not seem to be an issue for Jenny, she doesn't think that environmentalism goes against the bible nor is pagan. We did not go in depth into this.

**Date:** 4/12/17, 4/14/17

**Filename:** Email with Jenny

**Title:** conversation

**Description of activity:**

After Jenny and I met and had our casual interview, she graciously emailed me with follow up thoughts and beliefs relating to the questions we discussed previously. The emails are as follows:

“I did a brief search for "stewards" of the Earth in the Bible and didn't find these exact words, so you're right, it must have come from over-arching themes I have been exposed to about preserving the environment in the Bible. I did, however, recall the verses speaking about using the activities of nature as examples for daily living. For instance, the birds of the air don't worry about where their food will come from, but live day to day "trusting" God will provide these things (Matthew 6). Personally, a part of this means (to me) using nature's resources as they are provided and not stripping the land for extra gain. (Environmentalist attitudes and motivations)”

Also, in Job 12, God speaks of viewing nature as an example of how to live: “But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the

sea inform you." I think about how the things we create to help our species function are basically trying to do what nature already does best. For example, I remember learning during my undergrad about how giant redwoods get huge amounts of water to their leaves without the help of pumps, but rather a process called 'transpiration'. Also, that spider webs are stronger than steel, but are "manufactured" in the tiny bodies of spiders! Humans try to emulate these processes using our intelligence and I think God is aware. He created these organisms with these innate capabilities from which we need to observe and use as examples, not dismiss as inferior."

First, I believe it is because of sin that some people are not supplied with resources necessary to sustain biological life because we (humans) see the pain and suffering in those who do not have food and water etc. In other words, I think most people would view starvation and homelessness, for example, as a negative thing that others go through.

Second, I think our logic is different than God's "logic" (if one could call it that). So we can contemplate and interpret natural, earthly processes one way - the human way. This makes sense because it's the only way we know. However, as a Christian, I have accepted that God has a different "logic/way/understanding" of his own creation that we cannot fully understand. (Supporting the idea that we can only do so much before the rest is in God's hands.)

Third, I believe nothing on earth occurs apart from the will of God. So, since Satan and sin are present in the world, humans would say God "allows bad things to happen". This makes sense to humans in our definition of what is bad based on our own experiences (ex: pain is bad, death is bad, disease is bad, and starvation is bad - because they are tied to our human emotions and well-being). This makes perfect sense! Yet, when one holds the Word of God (Bible) to be true, that person believes that all we actually need is God's love - something we all have, but all do not recognize or believe in. If someone does not recognize that they are loved by God, the "bad" things of this world may seem more of a burden than what they truly may be.

I am only human and a sinner like every other individual in the world. I can't know exactly how God is working in the world, but to help directly answer your question (does God have His hand in natural extinctions or natural population controls?) - I would say yes.



**Date:** 5/10/17

**Filename:** Westwood Baptist Church

**Title:** Interview with Senior Pastor Philip Miller

**Description of activity:** Today I interviewed Senior Pastor Phillip in his office at WBC. When I went into his office I was instantly impressed. There was an assortment of great books on gorgeous shelves built in a corner/wrap around design on the walls. There was a very large print from the Teton Mountains and wooden décor in several places. It felt cozy and Earthy. We sat down to talk on soft leather chairs and I told myself, “Remember this office, this is the kind of office you want!” We sat down and I wanted to first inform him what my goal was and what common ties I was looking for. I let him know that I think the environmentalism his congregation seems to have, comes largely from him. I said I wanted to understand where the symbolism comes from. I said it was a positive place that I love to come to. Then I asked my first question, “did you decorate all of this office or was it like this when you got here? Pastor Philip explained he had to have it built to accommodate his height. So right there was a confirmation of his influence on environmentalism in the church. He said he chose the décor and decorated it so again, this shows that some symbols in his office were evidence of a sort of creation care.

So I asked Pastor Philip if he had some beginning thoughts about environmentalism and he replied that “One of the best places that I connect with God is in nature. There’s nothing better than a mountain range with snow on it, or the beach, especially Ruby Beach.” We chatted about Ruby beach for a bit. Pastor Philip is really familiar with the Hoh and the entire coast, as well as the Olympics it seemed. These implications endorse an outdoorsy attitude and fondness of nature. Then Phil explained that for him, “connecting with God has always been connected with nature.” This was a great platform to jump off of. So, then we talked about when he came to WBC. Phil came to work here 4 years ago and explained that there are three groups he works with 1. Top level leadership (also referred to as elders 2. Staff and 3. Sermons. He humbly stated, “That’s really all I do” and “we’ve modernized”; so when I asked if it was he who was responsible for the environmental symbolism around the church, Pastor Philip humbly stated that he did a lot of it but he consults or at least takes into consideration the elders, staff and even the congregation’s opinions. But then Phil did go further to explain that they he wasn’t fully responsible for everything, but he chose the fir trees in the logo and based them off of the amazing Douglas Fir trees that are so special to us Pacific North westerners. As I was sitting and chatting I was also noticing so many different earthy symbols which I planned to bring up at the chance.

I expressed to Pastor Philip that I agreed with him that there is this trickledown effect and even though he hasn’t come forward loudly as an activist,

his nature and environmentalism is showing through in the beliefs of his congregation and as we carry on our conversation. This sparked a great expression of his feelings about beauty in nature. He stated, “The bible is very transcendent but also very Earthy...So it’s about God and his glory ...but there’s also a great sense of which there’s a great beauty and delight in what God has made. It’s his creation. It reflects his glory. So, Psalm 19 talks about the heavens are declaring the glory of God...”

“This is one of the things that blow my mind” Pastor Philip explained, “The beauty that is in excess of function”. This led us to an intriguing conversation about how many plants and animals have intrinsic beauty and lavish beauty which probed the question by Philip, “why is there such lavish beauty in these things? Why are there neon fish in the bowels of the ocean? Painted neon colors and there’s no light that gets down that far...Why are they there?” Phil went on to explain the feeling of smallness and spirituality when in beautiful natural places. I had to agree that universally people agree that certain types of natural beauty are unarguable as beautiful.

Philip said, “The Christian understanding of that is that Nature is not just functional, but it’s a gift, it’s beautiful, it’s made by God, he’s put his creative work into creation and therefore it is to be prized and taken care of. It has that intrinsic dignity and beauty and value. Right? It does! And I think people have

always observed that, that's why even people who don't believe in God ,or whatever, (open-mindedly "whatever" not flippantly) they still love the mountains and that sense of the sublime, and that feeling of smallness when I stand on that precipice and I'm just overwhelmed...there's something spiritual there. So my thinking is that its God has embedded elements of his being into the Earth as a reflection of Him. God and his glory are revealed in all of these sorts of places". To summarize, Pastor Philip expressed that "When I'm in these spaces, it's the easiest way for me to connect. It's not in a building or a chapel it's on a beach, on a mountainside, looking at a flower. I find incredible transcendent beauty and glory in those things that feed my soul. So it's pretty deep." Deep indeed, I could definitely connect to that mindset...I think this deep connection with God and nature has allowed him to lead his congregation and live his life in an environmentally sound manner. This led me to ask about the beautiful picture hanging behind him. It was a picture of the Teton Mountains which he professed is his favorite mountain range. We discussed how even atheists see the beauty in Nature and it is intrinsic everywhere. It's quite peculiar that every person sees certain things as beauty and nature and we done even all have to discuss it. I think this is when Pastor Philip started to understand my search for symbolism.

As we spoke Pastor Philip explained that all the things in nature that he finds beautiful help him to connect with God. He explains, "Everything was created for God's children and...everything, the mountains, the air, the rain, it all

is a gift.” Here I interrupt and state that, “this is such a positive way of thinking”.

Pastor Philip agreed.

Then out of nowhere Pastor Philip pulled out a handful of polished rocks and tossed them on the table. He said the staff has a set of core values and when he sees them accomplishing them, he gives them a polished rock. If this is not a symbol of connecting God and environmentalism, I don’t know what is! Luckily, I was offered a stone! I will use it for stress fidgeting. I asked Philip, “Do you polish them yourself?” Phil replied yes, “this is me finding delight in these things...nature”. As soon as I chose a rock Phil continued expressing his feelings on stress and Jesus and worry... (This was more in depth but not necessary for thesis as much as for my own knowledge.)

After having a fascinating discussion about the marks the reincarnated Lord still carries and an explanation that those who will return to Earth will be recognizable, better than he is now, but there is a connection, I moved on to the environment. Pastor Philip proclaimed, “No matter what you do for Jesus, it is an eternal act and that the recreation of all things... is to totally redeem. Restore, renew, what is. So what I’m saying is theologically this gives you all kinds of reasons to work for the renewal for this planet right now...

“I think that everything we do for Jesus, whether that’s digging in your garden, planting a garden, or feeding the poor, I believe everything we do for

Jesus is ultimately an eternal act, and that the re-creation of all things will come and God will bring Earth back to its former beauty, and make it even better. As well as our human bodies...restore and renew..." "This means that everything God wants to do is my marching orders now". This mentality and understanding of the gospel is all about renewal and life and taking action to care for creation. ,

Philip explained that some of my questions were similar to, "Can we save the earth" and that he did not think that we necessarily can, in fact he stated, "I think ultimately only Jesus can save the Earth. BUT...having said that, I think everything that Jesus loves and wants to see happen are my marching orders right now. "

"So I'm going to do right now, something I know I can't finish. But I will do it knowing it's his heart and one day he will complete the task. , and that's a different theology you see what I'm saying? Because that means I do plant trees, and that means I do pick up litter that means we shouldn't be dumping oil and we should recycle and I should work for the sustainability...it's a beautiful gift that God has given us, we should do everything we can to lovingly care for it and to bring out its best, and we are part of the ecosystem so we are going to consume resources but we try to do so responsibly...and knowing even that there are broken things in the world that we should try to interrupt".

I decided to bring up the degradation that has been going on in the world. I explained that Hanford just had a major collapse in their underground, depleted uranium storage. Pastor Philip added there that, “hindsight is 20/20. People just use this and sell that and don’t realize a half a century later how harmful these things are”.

We began talking about symbols and renewal. Pastor Philip reminded me that nature is in his heart, which includes all of his creation. Pastor Philip explained how he acts as he thinks Jesus would. Then we went off on a tangent about animals and their treatment (an easy thing to do when two nature/animal lovers get talking)... So then I turned the conversation another direction by asking about the KJV vs. ESV.

Wonderfully, Pastor Philip was very educated about the history of the bible and the fact that it was written in Latin and Greek and Aramaic by different interpretations. He explained how the scripture so interpreting it into English is simply to make it easy for everyone to read and understand and he also explained that English translations keep being translated. I think Pastor Philip feels the ESV, which was there when he arrived, is a good translation for his church. I then brought up that I learned in anthropology the books are relative to culture and that some of the issues we have today are hard to apply because they didn’t exist when

it was written, such as transgender issues. Pastor Philip explained how he addresses issues like this including environmentalism:

“My understanding of the bible is that it was written in a specific time, place, culture...so the task in understanding the bible is kind of ...(if you think of) two shores, this shoreline is the original audience, so 1<sup>st</sup> Century Imperialistic Rome, overshadowing a small minority of Jewish people who are oppressed...that’s the context. Over here we have the 21<sup>st</sup> century with all of our questions...and the question is...if I can get back over here and try to understand what God is saying in this context, there are principles, right? Transferable principles... which become the bridge, and that’s the theology piece”. Then this other piece over here is what they call Exegesis in academia:

“Exegesis or getting back to the original culture, theology is the task of what are the universal principals and truths that are transcendent above cultural expressions. And then how to I apply that right here right now.” He went on to explain that a lot time it’s more of an art than a science, which is why you find disagreement within Christianity as how to exactly how to apply those principles. And we’ll probably never get rid of those disagreements about how to do it, but that’s the task. This was a great depiction to explain how we can look at extremely old texts to understand ideas and responsibilities we have with nature. They may not have spoken about climate change when the bible was written but



there are basic concepts in which to follow a good life which also apply to problems like climate change. It seems to me at this point of the interview I began presenting more and more symbols that Pastor Philip didn't really think of as environmental.

I asked Pastor Philip if it is okay to express in my work that I felt this place, WBC, is special and unique. He said he was honored and that I had probably sensed that, because it is in his heart...but he hasn't really done too much proactive fighting for it. He said he was responsible for the Douglas Fir tree emblem and the entire renew theme..."I think when we picked the imagery for the trees, even the word 'renew' which is in our mission statement: Jesus is renewing us...to Renew the World, which is both world of humanity and I think there's a whole theology of wherever we go we go as Christ representatives to love what he loves which includes ALL of his creation."

Pastor Philip began to explain that he has a robin's nest in his back yard and he had to tell his children to stay away and be careful with it. I cut him off but will continue this story in a little while...

"I think...let me just list some biblical issues: the bible holds a more traditional understanding of marriage, prolife you know we believe just how you don't step on a baby turtle egg or a robin egg you don't step on a little baby in a womb". He discussed the hypocrisy in prolife issues and that you can be fined for

hurting animals but not abortions. This was a full and interesting conversation, even if it does not address environmental issues.

“Racism is a sin. Black lives matter. Poverty, education, special needs, I’m just listing things here on purpose because all of these the bible has very clear directives for, how to treat and love people, I think... WWJD? If there is a way, even if it costs you so much money, to ensure that every human being had access to quality healthcare... what would you do? And what I’m suggesting here is that single voter issues, and that’s my party, is not the way of Jesus. I think the more Jesus centered you are, the more you actually can see the blind spots in your own political party, and it makes you less polarized.”

Pastor Phil explained that Christianity can help depolarize these issues better than most because of the cross. He stated, “He’s there for JUSTICE and he’s there for MERCY. And the cross brings these two together. And the problem is that the RIGHT seeks justice (they came here illegally, kick them out) and the LEFT seeks mercy (but they mean well... let them in!) and so you have these two parties and I’m telling you the cross brings them together.” This allows us to not just tow the party line. Capitalism has evils in it and education needs help... but it’s all... the cross that can bring them to the middle. This was very interesting coming from the Senior Pastor at a very large evangelical church. Officially, stereotypes have been dropped. Importantly, at this point I realized we truly can

work together. Because if he believes the cross can bring the right and the left together, that ideology will certainly be passed down as his environmentalism has been.

We continued to have a fascinating and fun conversation about Christianity, politics, forgiveness, and Jesus.

Once we were back on track I asked about the WBC logo. Pastor Philip explained that they created the tree logo, the previous one before he got there, was a large sweeping W. I then began to show him which flyers I wanted to use to show the images of nature and how much more environmental this church was from others I looked into. I showed him the activism he didn't really think of as activism at first which was first of all, a flyer advertising "Renew Oly" (a program they do to help out the community) with grass and butterflies on it. Then I explained that they weren't just doing yardwork, they were beautifying the environment. Phil included, "There's a park up here and one time we went out and planted a butterfly garden". I almost shouted with excitement, "Oh really?! Did you bring in butterflies too or just the plants?"

He said, "We planted the bushes, but someone brought in the butterflies. It was a lady trying to just beautify a little corner of her neighborhood. And you know, it's funny that you're picking up on all of that because I (I interrupt, because it was natural right?) I think it just flowed out of our being, rather than

being completely intentional, but when I created the renewing language that was intentional. And the renewing trees were very intentional. We used Coastal Douglas Firs and they are a unique species (knowledge of trees impressive). They don't form a taproot, they create a root mat and so we talked about how in our faith we root in the ground but we root together and we need each other and we are interdependent and then we grow together...little ones need more shade, so they grow in the nursery of the forest like how we grow together in society. We flourish and there are all these interdependencies and our name is West Wood and so we are a forest and we are meant to root into the gospel and Christ and be mutually supporting growing together sheltering the young ones then we are meant to then bring renewal to the world.”

“The trees bless the world. And that’s what we are supposed to be as a church too.”

How about the kid’s wing with the paintings on the wall? Pastor Philip said, “Someone from before we got here painted them but I decided to keep them, the puppy sticking his head out is so cute”. I asked next if he feels these images influence the members and he replied, “I don’t want to take all the credit, but I do think that it’s helped to help leadership sort of thinking that way”.

“And there was a time when we had composting and recycling and then the city made it really difficult. It became so difficult; it all had to be perfect. And

if it wasn't they would just dump all the recycling into the trash, but we are going to try again, because it's silly, we generate enough paper we should be recycling."

"We have nature to appreciate so we appreciate nature. So maybe it's less pressing for people in the Midwest because they don't have the same nature"

Pastor Philip proclaimed.

We finally came to a point when Pastor Philip said, "You're giving me perspective on stuff I wouldn't know but its subconscious to me and your anthropology skills are pulling these out and its great"

This part is great. I begin to ask Pastor Philip about his missions and if he thought it was appropriate to add some sort of environmental component. The first obvious answer was that in the places they go, people are so poor or have such other daunting issues, it is difficult to conceive that they would care about environmental issues such as climate change (even though it is certain that the poorest people on the globe will be affected the most by climate change). He really seemed to not think he or his missionaries were spreading environmentalism. Then he began to recall several things they have done on missions related to environmentalism!

I asked Pastor Philip if he would ever consider adding an environmental component to missions and he replied, "I think it comes down to your own sense

of what's the most pressing thing. So you walk into a culture and obviously we believe all human beings are created for eternity and that we are meant to be with God. And we want people to know that story. Right? So that's right on the front burner."

"The other thing is you globally assess, do they even have clean water? For example, we have a team going to a rural part of China next month. And we raised \$20,000 for new water filters to the villages. (At this point I'm freaking out and tell him this is environmentalism and it's activism!)" So we continued to discuss the social and health issues at these sites in addition to his environmental contributions. He has basically made it perfectly clear that his heart (which must be quite sizeable) is wrapped around God, Jesus, all people, animals and the environment and that they help while on missions wherever it is needed first. He said, "I think we are trying to make a difference in small sort of ordinary ways and we think that matters so..."

My next question asked was whether or not he believed that climate change is Anthropogenic. He replied, "I'm not a scientist so I really don't know much, I hear the news and banter and I think it's grossly over politicized the whole thing. So I don't weigh into that too much. What I would say is that I find it hard to believe that the entire industrial revolution and the technical revolution could be accomplished without side effects. So I think we certainly have created

part of the problem at least. I don't know how much is us and how much is natural I'm not a scientist I don't know, but when I look at the stats it becomes fairly evident to me that something is changing and I think it's very likely that the exploitation of all the resources that have been utilized and released in the last 150 years will have some affect." I let him know that's really good to know. We discussed gasses and carbon and common sense.

Pastor Philip continued, "I think the big difference between a pure environmentalist and where I come from is, I don't put all of my chips of hope if you will, in humanity to save our future". For example, "Stephen Hawking stated just the other day that if we don't colonize another planet in the next 100 years we will face extinction, just this week. So, okay he might be right I don't know. But the rhetoric that's like only humanity can save itself...sort of like the Elon Musk Gospel, just that humanity has the power to destroy itself or save itself, what are we going to do? That's the sort of gospel that says its 'all on us' its 'all on our shoulders' and I think the bible gives us hope that there's a savior from outside the world, not just us, but who will come and make this place our true home again, and that's Jesus. In the mean time I work for everything that Jesus loves. Which means I work for humanity, health, wholeness, holistically spirit, mind body soul, everything that we are, including our environment, where we live, the creation that God's given to us is a good gift for us to steward and take care of and watch over. We are here to cultivate and make it good".

And I do all of that, not believing that it is all on my shoulders to fix it. I do it knowing Jesus will one day come to make all of that right, including all humanity has done to mess this place up. Including murder and moral sins and the abuses towards ecology, so Jesus will set it all right. That doesn't make me passive like Oh Jesus will do it so I won't" That's lousy, that's like abandonment. It's like well, okay, so Jesus will take care of it so I will treat it like crap. Well listen, if God loves it why are you treating it like crap? You know what I mean? Like if he loves it enough to want to make it all new and shiny and beautiful again, don't you want to do what he wants to do? So the call, I think, I can't take responsibility for finally fully fixing it. I can't do it; it's too big for me. Jesus can do that. He will one day make the world right. What I can do is not step on the eggs in the back yard; I can beautify my little corner of this earth knowing that is in the heart of God that his heart is to redeem not just humanity for humanity's sake but humanity for a renewed creation."

We spoke some more about evangelicalism and our place here on Earth, and letting God protect the robin eggs, but he is still going to do his part. We spoke some more about the return of Christ and the idea that we need to do our part but not to feel fully responsible for the Earth because Jesus is the savior not us.



We spoke about Pastor Philip's fish tank. This was another clue into his mind. He explained his fish tank as a metaphor for everything we were discussing. He described the ecosystem and how he can renew them and clean and flourish them, because it's an extension of God's working in me that is then cascading out." Reflecting this was such a wonderful metaphor because of the complexities that come with a fish tank and the mirroring of those components to society for humans.

Filename: Westwood Baptist Church

Title: Questions for official interview

Date: 5/10/17

Description of activity: Questions for Pastor Philip Miller

- Is the ESV the version you have always used?

This is the version that was here when he got here so he kept it. He explained thoroughly that basically no matter what translation you use, there is a deep and eternal meaning in the bible itself. He explained the languages it has been translated from.

- From your understanding of the ESV bible, which is used in your services, is environmentalism something people should care about?

What about your personal knowledge and intuition about environmentalism?

He discussed a polarization politically which spreads to polarization culturally or religiously. He explained that we can do what we can to care for creation, and at some point its God's decision what happens beyond our own actions.

- There are a lot of images in your church which display nature and the

environment. (Walls painted down the hallways with trees and birds and such, prints framed with statement “renewing us to renew the world” with ferns and plants in the background, the list goes on and it really is beautiful... Were these chosen by you? Random?

Pastor Philip chose the Douglas fir trees for the Westwood logo, he created the whole idea of RENEW. The reason he chose the Douglas fir was because of the way it grows. He said there is no tap root but there is a branching out mat of roots that all function together, like us. He said that the painting on the walls in the children’s areas were already here when he arrived too and he wanted to leave them.

- From speaking to new friends here at Westwood, I get the idea that everyone is very pro Earth and feels that we should respect the planet which God gave to us to tend, after the gospel. Do you feel that you help them to reach that mindset?

Philip expressed that he felt partially responsible but that he couldn’t take all the credit. This means that the others he works with most likely have the same ideas and expressions of nature or the environment as well.

- Do you believe it is possible or appropriate for churches like yours to spread the idea of protecting God’s Earth while on missions? I know that spreading the gospel is the number one mission. Could

evangelical environmentalism be a side mission that we spread?

(Because if we don't have air or water, we will die?)

This brought up a great discussion where we talked about missions and Philip told me they don't do environmental activism. Yet, he then told me how they raised a great amount of money to buy water filtration devices in China. I told him "that's environmentalist!" and he said, yeah I didn't think of it like that I just thought of it as what we do.

(Very humble and committed).

- Do you believe that if we can come to a mutual agreement about what to do with the environmental issues that are happening, scientists and religious leaders can work together to save creation ?

Pastor Philip explained that evangelicals have certain basic beliefs when it comes to society and politics, and they are what are stated in the bible. He stated them as: pro-life, traditional marriage between a man and a woman, and issues to concern with are poverty, racism, education and mental health. These are social issues, less environmental ones. But, as is clear from his interview, there is plenty of room for environmentalism in evangelicalism.

## **SYNTHESIS OF ALL DATA BEFORE CONCLUSION**

### **Addressing Research questions**

How do people with similar original symbols end up with two different environmental worldviews? Simply put, it really depends on how one is raised in addition to gaining environmental insight from your pastor. Those who find beauty in nature or God in nature often support nature no matter if they are atheist or evangelical.

Do my subjects for this research choose stewardship over dominion? To ask it more openly, how do they view the environment and the passages in the Gospel that address how you should treat it? Both Jenny and Pastor Philip believe that we should do what we can for creation and the environment but in the end the fate of the Earth and all of humanity really in God's hands. They both understand 'dominion' to mean actually stating to care for your surroundings, your domain, rather than domination which is of the same root word but not the same meaning.

In this research I have questioned how LEEs have been able to combine their religious ideology with environmentalist ideology in order to obtain agency in their society while also establishing identity as a group. This combination is apparent in the décor at WBC and behaviors exhibited by Pastor Philip. There are images of nature in almost every artistic medium in the building. These demonstrate that WBC has been enacting environmentalist roles without really trying to do so. In fact, in our interview, Pastor Philip began to tell me about \$20,000 worth of water filtration devices they raised money for and helped

implement in China, at one of their missions. The focus was on helping the people of rural China and yet the project also demonstrated environmental activism!

How does the religious ideology of LEEs or CEEs place them in a position to best serve their environmental habitat? There are two very clear mindsets within evangelicalism which created the LEEs and CEEs. CEEs believe that climate change is happening, maybe even believe it is anthropogenic, but they don't think we are responsible for cleaning up the Earth or 'fixing' it. They often state that job creation and the economy are more important than climate change, which they don't believe to be something that will harm us. Additionally, CEEs tend to think that a warming trend should actually help humans grow more food and raise more animals, creating better economies. This is based on the Gospel, not based on science. Some believe that God has caused climate change: others blame Satan. At the end of the day, what matters is the divide between CEEs and LEEs. Cees must continue to work with LEEs and scientists must learn to be tolerant and not condescending to either group of evangelicals. (I believe that happens a lot out in the world because scientists get frustrated with those who rely on faith, not scientific evidence).

How are they now able to work with secular environmentalists? From this research that the truth is mixed groups like the Earth Ministry or entire congregations that have LEE pastors are accepting the science that is obvious,

such as the idea that if you release all this carbon from the ground and release it into the atmosphere, it will change the atmospheric conditions. However, evangelicals are much more comfortable among other evangelicals, so finding non-denominational groups that support creation is important, and a group like Earth Ministry would be perfect. In addition, going to a church like WBC is exactly what an environmentalist who follows the Gospel would want.

Does the evangelical environmentalism movement sustain and support Christianity for these groups? Based on this research, the answer would be yes. Even the most liberal of the individuals I spoke with still believe that social issues and their relationship with Jesus is first and foremost on their list of things that need action taken from them.

Are symbols found within evangelicalism affecting individuals' relationships with and beliefs about environmental affairs and climate change, allowing them to support the safety of the environment? While focusing on this one church, I was able to ascertain that there were symbols of environmentalism that adorned the lobby and programs, and that Pastor Philip used in his sermons.

If we look at Geertz' theory we can see how many of the symbols I found in this church, probably do establish powerful moods and motivations, as well as influence the members in an environmentally caring way. First, though, let's look at Jenny's reflections. All in all, she had some very insightful data to contribute. We both agreed that her upbringing had the biggest impact on her life and

spirituality. For her, living an outdoorsy life and being taught to respect animals and the environment, were probably symbols which she associated the most with nature and her faith throughout her childhood. Additionally, her pastor encouraged outdoor play and she really got the idea that she should respect creation.

Since Jenny was so influenced by the symbols she saw growing up and she expressed a stream of consciousness for me describing “symbols” she thought of in her faith (The Holy Spirit, Noah’s Ark and the dove with the olive branch, the flood, animals on the Earth and the green world after it. Rivers and streams, flowers and plants, water for baptism), it was clear at the end of our interview that her childhood influences made a big impact on her current environmentalism. If this was true for Jenny, imagine the influence a young adult might get if their parents are outdoorsy folks like Jenny’s parents, in addition to also being influenced while at church. Church is the place we learn to trust most besides our own parents. This can make for quite a stewardship filled congregation.

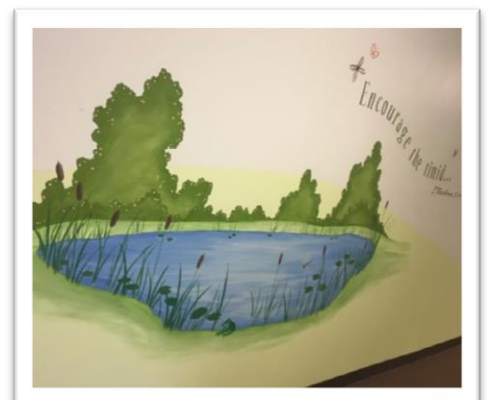
Mary Douglas explained how rituals and symbols are meaningful, how self-motivated and people develop new symbols all the time, but that doesn’t mean evangelicals’ beliefs are wrong, only that humans are adapting to changing times and changing conditions. I think that this can be directly applied to the WBC. Four years ago, when Senior Pastor Philip Miller came to work at Westwood, he did what he described as “modernized” the building and décor.



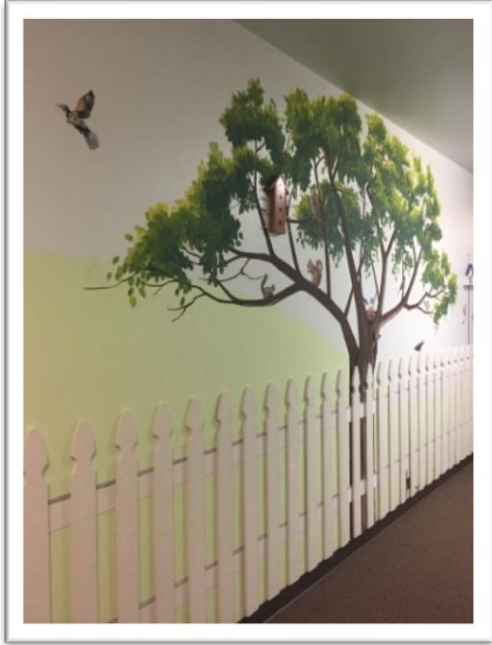
This is what you see when you first approach the entrance to WBC. You see trees surrounding a sign in Earth tones. From there you drive in and can see that the church has a huge rolling lawn, many trees on the property and everything is in earthy hues.



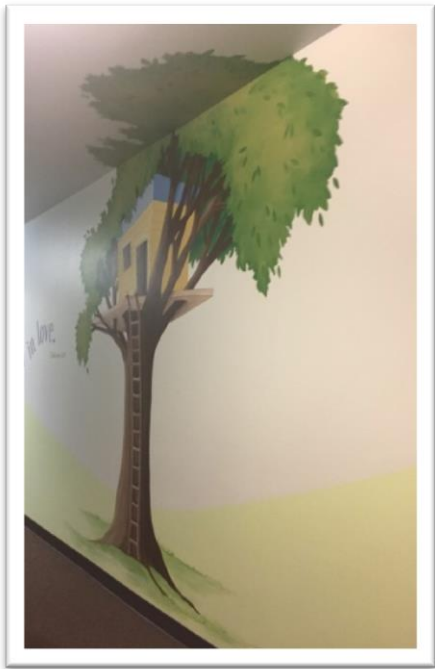
The first thing they did was to *keep* hallways full of beautiful nature-centered art. As Pastor Philip



explained in his interview, when he arrived at WBC the hallways were already painted with all kinds of nature scenes. He said a woman who attended previously painted them all. He really liked the quality and the content so there are many rooms and halls decorated like this. These are just some of the wall



paintings.



Reinforcing the importance of trees, birds and water through painted imagery is surely effective in influencing the minds of everyone who walks those halls. They did not create these pieces when they took over four years ago, Pastor Philip's desire to keep them and also speak so highly of them shows his environmentalism and the potential for others to care more about nature. The next thing Pastor Philip worked on with his elders and staff was the logo. They changed the logo from a large swooping W that just read Westwood, into a beautiful logo with meaning and love behind it. He stated,



The renewing trees were very intentional. We used Coastal Douglas Firs and they are a unique species. They don't form a taproot, they create a root mat and so we talked about how in our faith we root in the ground but we root together and we need each other and we are interdependent and then we grow together... little ones need more shade, so they grow in the nursery of the forest like how we grow together in society. We flourish and there's all these interdependencies... and our name is Westwood and so we are like a forest and we are meant to root into the Gospel and Christ and be mutually supporting growing together sheltering the young ones... then we are meant to bring renewal to the world (Pastor Interview 5/10/17).

Making this logo was not done in any sort of rush or absent minded fugue: it was meant to represent the congregation as the trees in the forest, which is the church. This second picture more easily displays the Douglas Firs. This fascinating story

and explanation will surely be having people wonder about the logo for years to come. But what about inside the church? I was given permission and I made sure to document the most beautiful and probably influential symbols in the building. First, I brought up the framed wall art that states, “Jesus is renewing us” “To renew the world”.



Pictures were created from Pastor Philip’s mind where he had nature and renewal on his mind while forming these images. The un-offensive text and soft lettering against a warm sunrise in a familiar forest not only makes one think of nature, but it makes one think of regrowth, life, energy and peacefulness. These

types of things that were probably the desired effect.



Pastor Philip proclaimed,

“No matter what you do for Jesus, it is an eternal act and that the recreation of all things... is to totally redeem. Restore, renew, what is. So what I’m saying is theologically this gives you all kinds of reasons to work for the renewal for this planet right now...I think that everything we do for Jesus, whether that’s digging in your garden, planting a garden, or feeding the poor, I believe everything we do for Jesus is ultimately an eternal act, and that the re-creation of all things will come and God will bring Earth back to its former beauty, and make it even better as well as our human bodies...”restore and renew”...This means that everything God wants to do is my marching orders now” (Pastor Interview 5/10/17)

These words speak to renewal and life and taking action to care for creation.

From here we were able to discuss renewal and his concept of renewing ourselves to renew the world. At this point we have come full circle regarding these specific symbols. But there are many more which represent and environmental adoration by Pastor Philip.

To continue building theory with symbols, and to connect it to Geertz' theory that religions make certain ideas appear as fact, it is important to display the physical literature and symbols that were passed out each week I attended service during this study. Just to clarify, the imagery has been chosen based on my interviews and research as presenting symbols which do affect the moods and motivations of the members because the ideas are stated as fact. That is not a judgement on to what is fact. It is simply an explanation that the pastor's role is to present scripture and interpret it to you in order to understand the religion, the gospel, and it is not presented as a question or a demand, but merely true scripture which members should think about.

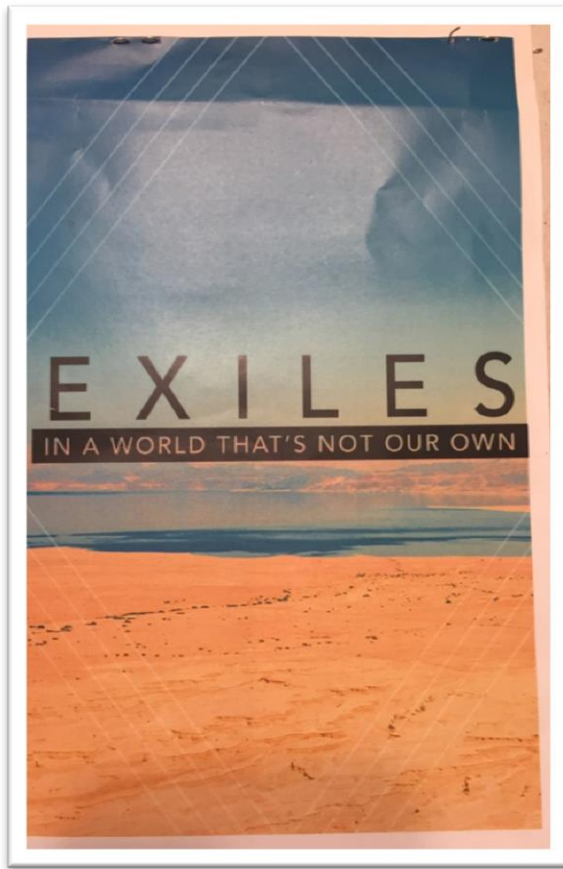
When I first attended for research, as was stated previously, I arrived on a day that the director of outreach was speaking about the missions and the folks out there who need support as well as opportunities for others to serve. This is a huge part of evangelicalism because it states in the Bible that they must do so, and it is the first and for most goal from what I understand. The program from this day shows social support and multiple ethnicities, clearly





supporting the phrase on the front, “Renew the World.” Now that we know how Pastor Philip feels about “renewal” it isn’t difficult to understand why this would be on the literature. Additionally, it is an earthy blue that summons ideas of oceans and seas...across the planet.

After this service a new series of sermons began that was called “Exiles:



In a World That’s Not Our Own”. The cover of this was a vast desert that meets up with a cool, teal blue lake with land behind it and a crystal clear dark blue sky.

“In a world that’s not our own” means in the world that the creator made, we are here, but it is the creator’s planet. That is the LEE way to interpret it and Creation Care supporters would agree. Then they would agree

that being the Creator’s planet is exactly why we should love and value it. Pastor Philip explained in his interview that to him, “One of the best places that I



connect with God is in nature. There's nothing better than a mountain range with snow on it, or the beach, especially Ruby Beach." (Pastor Interview, 5/10/17).

Also supportive of my understanding, he stated, "The Bible is very transcendent but also very Earthy...So it's about God and his glory ...but there's also a great sense of which there's a great beauty and delight in what God has made. It's his creation. Glory." Finally, Pastor Philip stated that "The Christian understanding of that (why everyone sees beauty in things like sunsets and mountains etc.) is that Nature is not just functional, but it's a gift, it's beautiful, it's made by God, he's put his creative work into creation and therefore it is to be prized and taken care of. It has that intrinsic dignity and beauty and value. Right? It does! And I think people have always observed that, that's why even people who don't believe in God can see" (the beauty He has put for us in nature).

I did speak to Pastor Philip about the Renew Oly program. When I signed up to possibly help, I was told that the program goes and helps people in all sorts of ways, including outdoor work. (I remember telling the Pastor SEE? You're an environmentalist!). Just looking

**Renew Oly**  
season of service

**Who:** Everyone at Westwood  
**What:** Church Wide Service and Fellowship Event  
**When:** Saturday, April 29, 9am to 1pm  
**Where:** Westwood Family Center

Projects include:

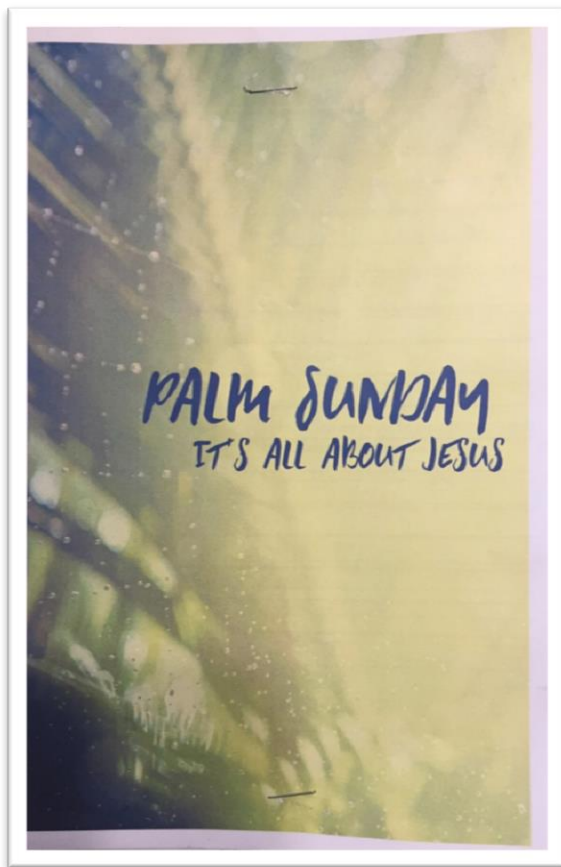
- Visitation and prayer team
- Gutter cleaning
- Wood cutting and delivery
- Yard work and pressure washing
- Making dump runs
- House cleaning

Sign up online at [westwoodbaptist.com](http://westwoodbaptist.com) or at the lobby booth. Deadline to sign up is Apr. 23.

For more information, contact Becky Pitts at [care@westwoodbaptist.com](mailto:care@westwoodbaptist.com)

Renew program

at the flyer indicated there were natural symbols seeping in from everywhere in this church.



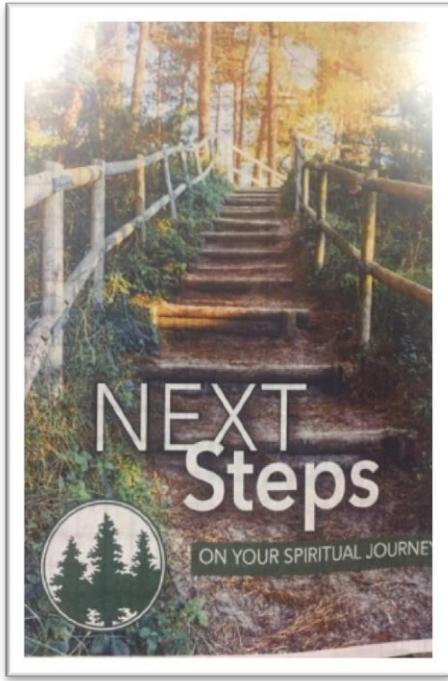
Palm Sunday and Easter were the last two scheduled research days and the programs didn't let me down. On Palm Sunday they passed out a beautiful program with palm fronds, a spider web with dew drops all shining in the sun.

The Easter the program cover did not portray the stereotypical Easter images like the crucifixion or the crown of thorns. Instead it was splashed with watercolors, looking vibrant and fresh for spring rather than held back by more traditional and conservative services. The interesting thing, then, about this literature is almost the lack of any symbols.



There were also some images which I was able to capture and show here. The beauty of nature comes through. Just as the Pastor's words have been resonating throughout this paper.

Below are additional examples of environmental imagery at WBC.



## **Discussion**

“The nations raged, but your wrath came, and the time for the dead to be judged...for destroying the destroyers of the Earth” (ESV, Rev, 11:18)

Since evangelical environmentalism is a fairly recent movement, the preliminary studies can only be added to in the future. Studying the progression in this movement will not only reveal the success or failure of its goals, but it will also give future researchers insight as to how U.S. residents identify themselves in relation to environmental crises and religion. Perhaps LEE groups will converge with secular environmentalists in some way. Or maybe they will somehow convert CEEs and enlist their numbers to help achieve their goals. It seems unlikely that LEE groups will combine with other groups that currently exist but perhaps other groups will join with them instead.

Just because EEs aren't scientists, doesn't mean they don't understand the impacts of climate change. People catch on. Even if they surround themselves with a particular point of view, like conservatism or evangelicalism, they still see the science and are making up their own minds. If they are going to continue spreading the gospel and living the life they believe God wanted for us all, they, like scientists, must be involved with doing what we can to include this major global factor, climate change, and to make connections with environmentalism and the bible. Because the Bible preaches lessons we can and should learn depending on your beliefs, often this includes environmentalist ideas. Around 100

groups like the EEN have sprung up over the last few years and representing at least a small part in nearly every state

([http://fore.yale.edu/religion/christianity/projects/evangelical\\_envt/](http://fore.yale.edu/religion/christianity/projects/evangelical_envt/)).

It has been taking time gaining momentum but it is clear that evangelicals are becoming more open to environmentalism. To have an impact on protecting the Earth and reducing their impact on the changing climate; they must play stewardship role rather than the dominating way people have been justifying environmental destruction for hundreds of years. So you can see, there are players of every type in this task of addressing serious policy changes to support environmentalism and slow or reduce climate change.

This research is not attempting to state that religion or religious evangelical beliefs are pushing people to make up scripture that supports environmentalism. In fact I would say that this research supports environmental scripture that has always been present, but was not addressed for a very long time, and now that the Earth's climate is in jeopardy, a lot of religious groups are looking to the bible for an understanding of what is happening and what, if anything, they should do about it. So at LEE churches, members are being shown that the meaning of these texts is to care for everyone AND the Earth. It's that these themes were always in the Bible, but climate change wasn't a threat so they were not emphasized. The most important thing was spreading the gospel, but

maybe that meant the work to remain as stewards of the earth as well so that we would survive global warming.

Using Geertz and Douglas' theory to apply to the WBC made it very clear to me that there will always be symbols and rituals which influence us. My work at the WBC applies as well because the church fits into Geertz' theory, it has new, modernized symbols and equipment, which create new rituals according to Douglas, and we can clearly see evidence of environmentalist or even nature lover passed through into the programs, art, sermons and community outreach. WBC is an LEE church because (even if Pastor Philip didn't realize it because he was so invested and concentrating on the event) they do in fact participate in activism from building a butterfly garden in town to supplying 2000 water filters to poor Chinese people near one of their missions. This research is important because we need larger numbers of people who agree on climate change in order to fight those who would press on, selling coal and oil, so they can continue to be billionaires, while we fail to have clean water. Evangelicals want to care for God's creation, even if they don't feel it is their place to try and "fix" it. Pastor Philip made that clear, that they are not trying to save the world; only Jesus can do that...Jesus saves. However, we can try to keep the world from dying. We can beautify our world and we can certainly work for causes that protect nature. This is for evangelicals, atheists or orangutans for that matter. We all want to live on this planet and we all have the end goal sight. Environmentalists need to work on

understanding evangelicals so we can ignore our differences and protect the water and earth and animals and other people together for the same reason...because it's right and we are in this together. WWJD? "Jesus is Renewing us...To Renew the World". It seems this church, the WBC, has gotten a lot of things right that secular environmentalists can respect. You don't have to be evangelical to understand what Jesus would do, even as a fictional character, we all know what Jesus would do. And the idea that we should feel renewed and go out and renew the world perfectly summarizes the ideology which is trickling down from Pastor Philip's sermons and into the hearts and souls of his congregation. As we will see an increase of studies it is important because we can look all across time and watch environmentalism seep into various, previously unconcerned, groups such as evangelicals.



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