

## Technology, worldviews, and behavior: the recent debate on climate change in the US and EU

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### Introduction

February 2006, a group of 86 of evangelical leaders, under the auspices of the Evangelical Climate Initiative, challenged the Bush administration on global warming with their “Evangelical Call to Action”. The US evangelical community seems to have a considerable influence on the views and policy of (Republican) national leaders. One could wonder whether these new initiatives will mark a change of direction in the Bush administration’s climate change policy, and what role religion and worldviews play in the debate on the issue.

### Approach

The main question we would like to pose in this case study is: What is the influence of religion in the recent debate on climate change in the US and EU, including views on the role of technology, and how these views relate to the worldviews that MNP uses in its sustainability outlooks? These worldviews (global market, global solidarity, safe region, caring region) are a combination of values and views of an ideal world, and preferred policy strategies to deal with policy problems. The worldviews are placed on the axis of globalization-regionalization and efficiency-solidarity (see figure).

We will perform an argumentative discourse analysis of expressed opinions from religious sources/organizations or with religious arguments and connotations. The analysis will be based on documents available on the internet, such as official statements and other documents from religious groups, news articles, and blogs. The Bush administration’s Climate Change Initiative will be taken into account as well, as the policy strategy expressed in this document and possible reactions from the evangelical community may be interesting. Furthermore, some information on the influence of religion on politics, especially in the US, would provide an interesting background. Suggestions from the STT working group ‘world’ for relevant scientific literature would be most welcome.



Figure 1. MNP's world views

## Early results

The initial initiative does not seem to be a standalone call. Similar initiatives can be found in Australia, the EU, and on a global level. Other Christian communities have released statements as well, and other religions (e.g. native American, Jewish) have expressed their views. With respect to the other religions, few sources have been found at the moment. More direct searches will hopefully provide more information. Possible differences between various religions in their perspectives on climate change would be interesting.

However, in the case of the evangelical community, greatly different views have been put forward. E.g. the Evangelical Climate Initiative statement was opposed by other evangelical leaders in a statement from the Interfaith Stewardship Alliance. Statements express different problem frames (“this is what we see or expect will happen due to action/inaction, and it is bad”) and preferred policy strategies, and underpin these with religious arguments (e.g. human dominion, stewardship, care for one’s neighbors, etc.). These different frames of the issue of climate change within one religion are quite interesting, though not surprising. At first glance, many aspects of the problem frames and values expressed in the opinions are similar to MNP’s worldviews, although aspects of multiple worldviews play a role in the statements.

*We need to end the subsidies for, and increase the taxes on, fossil fuels so that their price will rise and alternative clean technologies will become competitive. And we need to spread those clean technologies abroad, with a giant program of international aid and cooperation, so that the developing nations do not follow our energy path.*

*Indigenous people have warned all along that European-style industrialization is devastating the natural balance. The dominant culture has scoffed at these "New Age" prophesies, but they turn out to have been based on solid "scientific" experience.*

*"So we here in America probably can do many things to exempt ourselves from the immediate consequences, but the front edge of disaster is most going to affect those who have the least."*

*Land says the Bible makes clear that God expects human beings to take care of the earth. But "human beings come first in God's created order," he adds. "And that primacy must be given to human beings and for human betterment. If that means that other parts of nature take a back seat, well, then they take a back seat,*

*Technological innovation and entrepreneurship can help make possible options that can lead us to a more environmentally benign energy path. Changes in lifestyle can ease the way to a sustainable and equitable economy in which sacrifice will no longer be an unpopular concept. We need to ask about ways we can conserve energy, prevent pollution, and life more simply.*

*However, concerns about climate change are frequently cited to justify policies that prevent poor countries from building fossil fuel power plants. And yet, even the Kyoto Protocol would result in Earth's temperature being only 0.2 degrees F less by 2050 than they would be without the treaty. A better approach would be to develop technologies that generate more energy, at lower cost and with fewer emissions – and export that technology to poor countries.*

*Reducing greenhouse gas emissions also addresses another crucial issue important to America's religious community – energy dependence. America needs to reduce its reliance on oil through the rapid adoption and encouragement of clean and renewable energy sources and new technologies.*

**Figure 2. Examples of opinions on religion, technology and climate change**

### **Example of relevant scholarly analysis of this debate:**

Nisbet, M.C.: “Evangelicals: Moral Urgency of Climate Change”

<http://framing-science.blogspot.com/2006/02/evangelicals-moral-urgency-of-climate.html>