[*JSRNC* 15.2 (2021) 275-277] JSRNC (print) ISSN 1749-4907
http://doi.org/10.1558/jsrnc.40159 JSRNC (online) ISSN 1749-4915

Book Review

Emma Frances Bloomfield, *Communication Strategies for Engaging Climate Skeptics: Religion and the Environment* (London and New York: Routledge, 2019), 182 pp., $140 (hbk), ISBN: 978-1-138-58593-5.

In this welcome addition to the scholarship on climate communication, the author examines rhetorical features associated with three different ways Christians approach climate change and recommends strategies for productive dialogue. The analysis is based on a close reading of primary texts produced by three 'exemplar' organizations, one representing each approach. Supplementing these data are survey responses and telephone and online conversations with subjects recruited through social media.

Bloomfield proposes a typology of 'separators', 'bargainers', and 'harmonizers'. The three labels refer to how people handle the relationship between faith and environmental science or environmentalism. Separators—perhaps better called 'warriors'—construct a holy war between Christianity and environmentalism. Bargainers don't necessarily bargain with anybody; the label, rather, is an extension of the idea that they 'negotiate' an uneasy accommodation between faith and environmental science, selectively adopting elements of science to fit with faith. Harmonizers integrate environmentalism into their Christian identity, accepting science as fully compatible with faith. While harmonizers are not climate skeptics, the book gives them equal attention, focusing on strategies to move them to higher levels of climate action.

The core of the book consists of two paired chapters for each group, the first delineating the group's defining features and the second discussing dialogue strategies and pitfalls. Separators, exemplified by the Cornwall Alliance (CA), view themselves as defenders of true Christianity against environmentalists and phony scientists. They depict these as purveyors of pagan earth worship who refuse humans' proper, biblically based dominion over creation. Rhetorically, separators insist on their own definitions of key terms like 'stewardship', 'Christian', and 'scientist', reject information that is unproven in their eyes, and appeal to biblical authority. Separators' war frame makes fruitful conversation with them very challenging. Bloomfield advises a kind of rhetorical jujitsu, in which one accepts the separators' premises and asks questions that might lead to new conclusions based on their own values. Quotations from a conversation with an interview subject give a sense of how this might work.

Bargainers, like separators, are climate skeptics. Rather than positioning themselves as holy warriors, however, they view themselves as scientific dissenters correcting mistakes and advancing a coming scientific revolution. Bargainers also insist that environmental policy must be rooted in biblical principles, including stewardship—

interpreted as a warrant for a utilitarian, free-market economics approach. The exemplar bargainer organization is the Acton Institute (AI). Because bargainers present themselves as scientists engaged in dispassionate debate, they are easier than separators to engage, but they, too, set rhetorical traps. Bloomfield rehearses familiar critiques of how climate skeptics evade the weight of the evidence. She recommends working within bargainers' own frames. With respect to the primacy of economics, this might mean pointing to the economic benefits of renewable energy. With respect to science, it means accepting the possibility of scientific revolutions but raising questions about how they occur and whether climate skepticism qualifies. Bloomfield argues that productive conversation requires tactful restraint, avoiding words like 'unscientific' or 'cherry-picking'. Instead, genuine listening, displays of respect, and careful questions can prompt openness to different views.

Harmonizers, exemplified by the Evangelical Environmental Network (EEN), integrate the Bible with science, humans with the rest of creation, and faith with environmentalism. While the EEN advocates for public policies, most of the harmonizers Bloomfield spoke with focused on private consumption practices. This individual-level environmentalism avoids the sins of gluttony and greed without alienating anti-environmentalist fellow Christians. Harmonizers' environmentalism, however, would be more powerful if they shared their views with others in their personal networks and if they embraced the urgent need for policy responses. Bloomfield presents several interesting examples showing ways to encourage such shifts.

Climate activists engaging with religious Christians will find some useful tools in this book. Bloomfield's general recommendations—elicit the other person's views, listen and respond respectfully, seek common rhetorical ground—echo some of the most important points made in previous climate communication literature. Her more specific advice for each of the three groups and examples of her own mistakes and successes are more novel and sometimes illuminating.

Activists and scholars alike should be aware of some of the limitations of Bloomfield's approach. Most significant, though Bloomfield claims that her focus on Christianity fills a gap in the scholarship, the book is not grounded in a deep examination of Christianity and its distinctive varieties. Symptomatic of this is the phrase, 'the Christian identity' (p. 2). In practice, Bloomfield's cases primarily involve evangelicals and other theological conservatives. While making a fair point about separators' characteristic suspicions of others' claims to be Christian, she suggests that separators are distinctive in believing that 'one is not born a Christian, but becomes one' (p. 35), seemingly unaware that this is a fundamental tenet of Christian doctrine generally.

The book's application of Burkean ideas about 'melodramatic' and 'tragicomic' frames to separators and bargainers, respectively, is thought-provoking. Her analysis of the three approaches offers at least a good starting point for further refinement. For bargainers, I wondered if Bloomfield's emphasis on 'revolution(ary)' as a central frame and motivating identity rather than perhaps 'whistle-blower' was not misplaced, given that science-focused climate skeptics often show more interest in casting doubt than in advancing a specific alternative to the consensus position.

Bloomfield's distinction between separators and bargainers raises interesting questions. While allowing that the categories lack hard boundaries, she claims that they represent groups with 'fundamentally different worldviews' (p. 71). However,

many of the central beliefs and rhetorical features that Bloomfield attributes to one reappear in her discussion of the other, albeit differently elaborated, and some leading personnel likewise reappear. Indeed, the AI created the CA (Veldman 2019: 206). Rather than distinct groups, might these categories be better thought of as distinct frames or emphases that people shift between? A separator might be a bargainer in an angry mood, or one who is trying to rally the conservative Christian troops rather than addressing more secular audiences.

To the extent separators and bargainers are distinct groups, how do particular Christian traditions and identities influence affiliation with one or the other? The scholarship on white evangelicals' 'embattled' identity and climate change (Veldman 2019) suggests that they would be especially attracted to the separator frame. On the other hand, perhaps the 'culture wars' have spread this embattled mentality to other conservative Christians. It is to be hoped that Bloomfield and other scholars will build on her analysis in taking up such questions, while activists will apply her recommendations for engaging with climate skeptics and encouraging climate advocacy.

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