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Book Review

Katharine K. Wilkinson, *Between God and Green: How Evangelicals Are Cultivating a Middle Ground on Climate Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 234 pp., $23.93 (hbk), ISBN: 978-0-19-989589-2.

In terms of research on religions and climate change, US-based evangelicals have already attracted a great deal of attention. However, *Between God and Green* is the first book-length social-scientific assessment of this emerging movement, which Wilkinson dubs 'climate care'. As such, it is a must-read for those interested in the greening of evangelicalism, and will also interest those following the broader greening-of-religions phenomenon. Though it does not focus specifically on advancing theory on the greening of religions, its in-depth account of a religious sphere where greening is especially contentious is of intrinsic theoretical interest. Based on interviews with key figures in the climate care movement, focus groups with lay evangelicals, and analysis of key documents, Wilkinson outlines the movement's origins, development, and accomplishments, while also examining challenges and fissures. Adopting a 'critically empathetic' approach, she aims to 'allow participants to speak for themselves' and to understand them on their own terms (pp. xiv-xv). By thus conveying their story 'with the utmost fairness and consideration', she hopes to help bring evangelicals 'into conversation and perhaps collaboration' (p. xv) with environmentalists.

In a familiar argument, Wilkinson begins by suggesting that in the face of an international stalemate on climate change policymaking, religions may provide a critical alternative voice. Evangelicals are of added interest in the US context because of their political clout. Interest in taking action on climate change began to heat up at the century's turn, culminating in the Evangelical Climate Initiative's release of 'Climate Change: An Evangelical Call to Action' in 2006. Burnished with prominent signatories such as Rick Warren, a megachurch pastor and best-selling author, and Joel Hunter, another prominent pastor and almost-president of the Christian Coalition, the 'Call to Action' garnered significant media attention. But would it actually make a difference? Wilkinson shows how the leaders of the ECI used their connections to attract key opinion makers as signatories, which in turn created a safe environment for those who would otherwise have felt vulnerable signing on (p. 47). Still, to the frustration of ECI leadership, many did little beyond signing on, becoming 'part of the shimmering penumbra of signatures', as one interviewee explained, but little more (p. 51).

The book makes its more novel and interesting contributions in its use of interviews with ECI leaders to draw back the curtain on their goals and strategies. We learn, for example, that the 'Call to Action' avoided mentioning the United Nations (even referring to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, or the UNFCCC, as the FCCC), probably in order to avoid inflaming fundamentalists' fear of a 'one-world' government and staunch conservatives' concern over any infringement upon American sovereignty. Similarly, in order to draft a statement that could be

widely embraced by evangelical leaders, the 'Call to Action' took care to avoid 'the extreme egalitarian approach where the frog is as important as the person', as Hunter put it. Understanding the pitfalls they had to avoid within the evangelical community helps explain the movement's public face.

We also learn that, as it turns out, such pitfalls have influenced the movement significantly. Organizations such as the Cornwall Alliance and the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission have been particularly formidable opponents of the climate care movement. Although we see no evidence in Wilkinson's focus groups that their efforts have affected the laity, they have certainly given evangelical skeptics a public face and voice. In turn, many climate care leaders have expressed a desire to retreat from party politics. Others are relinquishing the issue of climate change altogether, in favor of building support for the less controversial issue of creation care. This has created a strategic fissure between 'issues-based' advocacy—exemplified by the ECI, which seeks structural solutions and is grass tops—and 'ethics-based' advocacy—exemplified by Flourish, a new group that focuses on creation care (instead of climate) and seeks to reach people at the grassroots level (p. 121).

As for the question of to what degree the climate care movement's goals resonated with laypeople, the short answer is very little. Ultimately, Wilkinson concludes that while the 'Call to Action' resonated with those who were already inclined to believe climate change was a problem, it was 'not a silver bullet' (p. 108). The problem, as she astutely notes, is that it 'attempts to resonate with lay evangelicals' existing values and beliefs while simultaneously trying to change them' (p. 109).

Given the difficulty of fomenting concern about the climate among the evangelical laity and emerging strategic differences, the movement faces an uncertain future. Wilkinson notes that there may be grounds for consensus in focusing on adaptation, which fits with evangelicalism's longstanding commitment to relief and development work. Others are committed to continuing to work on climate issues but with a less aggressive, non-confrontational tone (p. 129). Still, she observes that the growing fissures 'demonstrate the limitations of religion to create a unified environmental vision and course of action. As with all conversations about climate change, those rooted in religion tend to become more and more complex and fractured in the process of exchange and debate' (p. 131). With Mike Hulme, she is one of just a few voices who are beginning to conclude that religions may be a bit overrated when it comes to their potential to spur a response to the climate crisis (see also Taylor 2011 and Veldman, Szasz, and Haluza-Delay 2012). Evangelical climate advocacy certainly 'challenges existing binaries in thought and action related to environmental concerns' (p. 138), but unfortunately it has so far not overcome them.

Between God and Green is pleasantly concise, but this becomes problematic when it comes to Wilkinson's research methods, which are described only briefly. While she notes that her focus group sample may not be fully representative, she argues that its correspondence with polling data and evangelical leaders suggests it is more broadly applicable (p. 195 n. 7). Still, I was surprised that concerns about earth worship or eschatology never came up, given both topics came up in my own as-yet unpublished research, conducted in the same region of the country, as well as in that of Carr et al. (2012), who conducted a study in Texas. Along similar lines, the book should have included a list of those she interviewed, along with some mention of whether others were contacted (i.e., any in the climate skeptic camp?). Finally, Wilkinson's sensitivity

to the impact her research might have on the movement she studies has clearly shaped her analysis. Sanguine statements such as 'bringing religion into conversation with science, economics, and policy may morph gridlocked debate into productive dialogue and effective action' (p. 137)—this one appears in the conclusion—require readers to read between the lines, because the fact is, she shows that they did not. Overall, however, the book is both useful and thorough, an important contribution to the literature on evangelicals and climate change.

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