

RELIGION AND THE ROOTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE DENIAL

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION BY **ERIK OWENS**

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MCGUINN HALL 121, BOSTON COLLEGE

[For photos, video, presentation slides and more, visit <http://bit.ly/15koZVx>]

Welcome

Good evening. My name is Erik Owens, and I am associate director of the Boisi Center for Religion and American Public Life. We are delighted to have this terrific audience join us to hear our two distinguished speakers this evening.

Our event this evening is co-sponsored by the Environmental Studies Program, The Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences, and the Institute for the Liberal Arts, and I want to thank Professors Noah Snyder, John Ebel and Mary Crane for their support, along with the Boisi Center staff who have put so much effort into planning and publicizing this event.

A special welcome to those watching this event live on the internet. Thank you to our friends at Front Row for making this happen; a video recording will be available at frontrow.bc.edu immediately after the event.

Please silence your cell phones and other devices during the event this evening. But you don't have to put them away, because we are tweeting this event at #ClimateDenial, and we encourage you to do the same. (Follow us @Boisi_Center.)

As is our custom, we will leave substantial time for questions from the audience at the end of the session. Here in the room, you can remain in your seat and raise your hand to be recognized; if you are watching online you can submit questions for the panel via Twitter, by including #ClimateDenial in your tweet.

Introduction

In the face of a robust scientific consensus that the Earth's climate is slowly changing, and that humans are at least partly responsible for this change, a persistent and vocal minority of skeptics, and some outright deniers, has gained traction in American public discourse.

Some of the climate change skeptics focus their criticism on scientific findings about global warming trends; many others deny human responsibility for the trends.

But in both cases, religious beliefs about God's sovereignty often undergird the skepticism and influence the larger debates about how societies can mitigate climate change or adapt our way of life to adjust to the new realities.

I need to add that it is another matter altogether to disagree, whether on religious or non-religious grounds, about what we ought to do, and for whom, in the face of climate change. This is not skepticism or denial about science, but a crucial discussion of ethics and outcomes.

The climate change denial movement, if we can call it that, fascinates me, and over the past year I've tried to understand its religious claims in order that we might find a path forward in our civic discourse that both respects religious believers and allows a serious conversation about the scope of the problem and the range of possible responses.

Among the most vocal climate change deniers is the Cornwall Alliance, an evangelical group that has developed a web site and curriculum called "Resisting the Green Dragon" (in which the dragon is, of course, environmentalism run amok) that claims to serve as "a Biblical response to one of the greatest deceptions of our day."

But there are others, and they all tap into a broader sense among many religious believers in this country that there is a fundamental conflict between religion and science as such.

A recent poll from the Public Religion Research Institute found that 54% of Americans believe that science and religion are often in conflict, and they connect this conflict across a wide range of issues from human evolution to the origins of the universe to human responsibility for climate change.

National Geographic recently had a cover story called "The Age of Disbelief," arguing that skepticism about science has hit a new peak, and has polarized our national conversations about public policy.

This summer a very large new front in the religion and science conversation will open up when Pope Francis releases his much-discussed encyclical on creation, the environment, and climate change. We will hear much about it his fall when he visits the United States and addresses a joint session of Congress as well as the General Assembly of the United Nations.

To help us make sense of it all, we have invited two exceptional scholars, one an evangelical Protestant and the other Catholic, to talk about the relationship between Christianity and climate change denial. Our lead speaker is atmospheric scientist Katharine Hayhoe, who will present for about 35 minutes, followed by a 10-minute response from theologian Steve Pope.

Keynote speaker: Katharine Hayhoe

Katherine Hayhoe is an associate professor in the department of Political Science at Texas Tech University and director of the university's Climate Science Center. Her research focuses on establishing a scientific basis for assessing the regional to local-scale impacts of climate change on human systems and the natural environment. She is the Founder and CEO of ATMOS Research, which seeks to provide relevant information on climate change's effects to a broad range of non-profit, industry and government clients. She also serves as a scientific advisor to many environmental groups.

Her work has been featured in over 100 peer-reviewed papers, abstracts, and other publications, and she has presented her findings on climate impact assessments before Congress, as well as state and federal agencies, to influence future planning by communities across the country.

With her husband Andrew Farley, she is the author of *A Climate for Change: Global Warming Facts for Faith-Based Decisions*, and her work as a climate change evangelist was recently featured on the documentary series *Years of Living Dangerously*, first broadcast on Showtime last year. (Her work on that program with actor and environmentalist Don Cheadle accounts, I think, for the fact that Cheadle retweeted her post about this event to his nearly 300,000 followers.)

In 2014 Prof. Hayhoe was named by Time Magazine as one of the 100 most influential people in the world, and by Foreign Policy Magazine as one of the 100 Leading Global Thinkers.

She received a B.Sc. in physics and astronomy from the University of Toronto and an M.S. and a Ph.D. in atmospheric science from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Respondent: Stephen Pope

Stephen Pope is Professor of Theology at Boston College, where his very popular courses range across social and theological ethics, with particular focus on science and ethics, on St. Thomas Aquinas, and on virtue.

He is the author of the books *The Evolution of Altruism and the Ordering of Love* (GUPO 1994) and *Human Evolution and Christian Ethics* (CUP 2007), and the editor of scholarly books on St. Thomas Aquinas and on Jesuit liberation theologian Jon Sobrino.

He received a B.A. from Gonzaga University and an M.A. and Ph.D. in theological ethics from the University of Chicago Divinity School.